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*The
Bible
Story*

VOL.
IV



NOT TO BE SOLD

The Bible Story

by BASIL WOLVERTON

Volume IV

PUBLISHED BY AMBASSADOR COLLEGE PRESS
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INTRODUCTION

by Herbert W. Armstrong

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The first volume contained thirteen chapters, as follows:

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

The second volume contained chapters fourteen through thirty:

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

The third volume carried the story of the Bible through the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

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



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The Bible Story

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

“MIDIAN IS GUILTY”

THIRTY-NINE years had passed since the millions of Israelites had fled from Egypt to escape their oppressors. (Numbers 1:1; Numbers 13:1-3, 26; Deuteronomy 2:14.) Because they usually chose the way of sin, thousands upon thousands had died of war and sickness. Only a few of the many adult men who had started from Egypt were still alive after wandering for so many years through the deserts and mountains. (Numbers 26:63-65.)

“Choose You This Day . . .”

But death and misery hadn't prevailed all the time. Whenever the people chose to repent of their wrong ways and had the good sense to live as God had instructed them to live, they enjoyed good health, a happy state of mind and God's protection. (Deuteronomy 12:29-32; Deuteronomy 30:15-20.) And through all the years God gave them nourishing manna and miraculously prevented their clothes and shoes from wearing out. (Deuteronomy 8:4.)

Knowing only the rigors of desert living, they greatly enjoyed a few months of camping on a verdant, spring-fed, tree-studded plain a few miles east of the Jordan river. (Numbers 22:1.)

The stay there would have continued pleasant if the Israelites hadn't become careless again. Many men became involved with the women and heathen religious customs of the nearby Moabites and Midianites. (Numbers 25:1-3.) God was so angered that He commanded that the tribal heads stone as many guilty leading men as they could find and hang their bodies on poles as warnings to others. After

about a thousand men had been slain, God caused a sudden, mysterious plague to strike others who tried to hide their guilt. (Numbers 25:4-9.) Twenty-three thousand men fell dead in one day. (I Corinthians 10:8.)

Shortly afterward God reminded Moses that he wouldn't be allowed to enter the land promised to Israel. (Numbers 27:12-14.) Moses had been disobedient at Kadesh, where he had failed to follow instructions in getting much-needed water out of a boulder. (Numbers 20:2-13.) Moses had to content himself with merely gazing across the Jordan river into the promised land. (Deuteronomy 34:1-8.)

God chose Joshua, an officer who had long been very helpful to Moses, as the man who would next lead Israel. (Numbers 27:15-23.) Joshua was soon to see much more blood spilled, inasmuch as it was God's plan for the Midianites to suffer great loss because of the way they had worked Balak's scheme to weaken Israel. Much of the misery of war could have been avoided by the Israelites if they had obeyed instructions to have nothing to do with foreign nations and their idols.

About this time Moses was called to the tabernacle to receive special instruction.

"Do The Impossible!"

"The time has come for my people to strike against the Midianites," the Creator said to Moses. "They must be punished because of their evil plan to influence Israelite men to go over to pagan ways through the wiles of the Midianite women. The Midianite leaders hoped that if enough Israelites fell in with worshipping their gods, I would be displeased and withdraw my protection from Israel. Then they intended to attack. I was indeed displeased, but I did not abandon Israel. Now follow my orders and avenge your God as well as yourselves because of the harm idolatrous Midian has brought to the people. Although the Midianites hoped to destroy all Israel, I will use one-fiftieth of the Israelite army to destroy the army of Midian. I will prove that mortal men cannot hinder my plans or destroy the nation I protect." (Numbers 25:16-18; Numbers 31:1-2.)

Moses spoke at once to his officers, instructing them to choose a thousand fighting men from each tribe. (Verses 3-5.) This total of twelve thousand trained and armed men was only a small part of the total Israelite army. Moses felt certain that the Midianites had many more soldiers than twelve thousand, but he knew better than to add to the number God had chosen.

The Israelites would have feared to go against the Midianite army with such a small force if God had not promised this new generation that they would live to cross over Jordan into the Promised Land. They had at last learned to trust God and they

knew that through His power this task would be possible.

Led by Joshua, the twelve thousand set out bravely across the plains to the south-east to do what they knew was humanly impossible. The high priest's son, Phinehas, was in charge of the few Levites who accompanied the army. These men were to preside at sacred services and to carry the two silver trumpets that were to be blown by the priests, at God's command, as battle alarms. (Numbers 10:1-3, 8-9; Numbers 31:6.)

The movement of Israelite troops didn't go unnoticed. When Midianite spies noted what direction was taken by the twelve thousand troops, swift-riding Midianite messengers carried the news to all five rulers of Midian. The five kings preferred to meet their attackers in the desert, what with the Midianites having specialized in desert fighting for centuries. They agreed that their full forces should go against the Israelite army, which, from the reports, was only a fraction as large as it was imagined to be.

The Midianites realized that more Israelite troops could follow, but their spies reported seeing no further preparation in the camps of the Israelites. This convinced the Midianites that their women had probably succeeded in demoralizing the Israelite men to such an extent that they were no longer a strongly united fighting force. They believed they could easily defeat Israel.

Almost two days after he had started out with the soldiers, Joshua received a discouraging report from a scout who had hurriedly returned from observation duty far ahead.

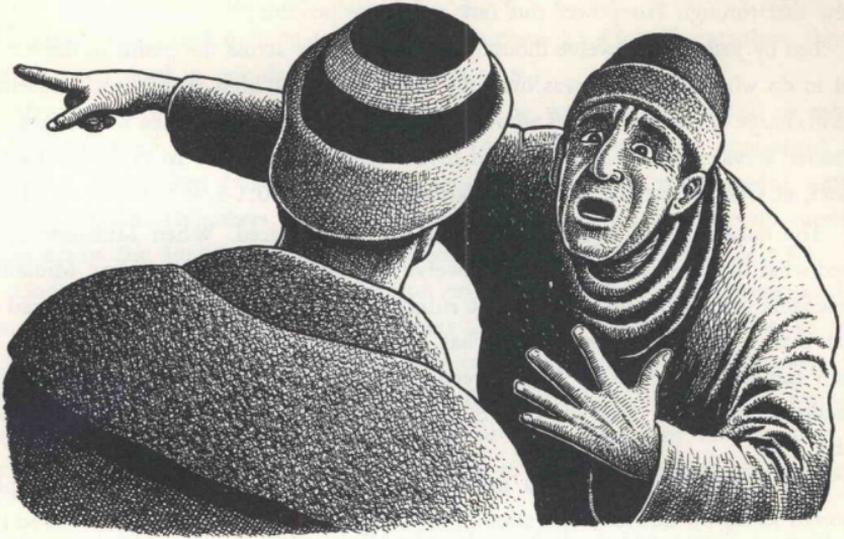
Numbers Meant Nothing to Joshua!

"The desert is dark with approaching thousands of soldiers!" the scout panted. "If we hold our present course, we will meet that army head-on! From what I could see, it's much larger than our army, and could surround us!"

Joshua had no intention of trying to evade the enemy, which then might march right on to the camps of the Israelites. He knew that since God had sent the Israelites on this mission as His executioners, He would supply them with enough skill and power to wipe out these idolaters. The troops continued their rather slow tramping across the sands and rocks, and it wasn't long before they were able to make out the Midianites in the distance.

When the miles between the two armies had shrunk to only a few hundred yards, it was plain to the Midianites that their numbers were indeed much superior to those of the Israelites.

Suddenly the Midianites split into three sections! The middle portion came directly at the Israelites!



An excited scout rushed up to Joshua to blurt out news of the approaching Midianites.

The other two parts swung out to right and left to surround the Israelite troops in a gigantic vise-like movement!

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

VICTORY EAST OF THE JORDAN

THE BATTLE was set in array.

When the twelve thousand soldiers of Israel realized that they were marching into the vast jaws of superior numbers of oncoming Midianites, many of them momentarily may have felt like wheeling about and fleeing in the opposite direction. In those first frightful moments they felt what it would mean never to return to their camps and families.

The Signal to Attack

Then came the shrill, piercing sounds of the silver trumpets of the Israelites. It was an instant and powerful reminder to the soldiers that their God was with them, and that He would protect and strengthen them—and take them all safely into Canaan as He had promised. (Numbers 14:29-31.)

Spurred to action and confidence, it was the Israelites' turn to make a surprise move. At a signal passed backward from Joshua, the rear flanks of the Israelites suddenly divided and curved out in opposite directions to swiftly get outside the flanking troops of the Midianites, even though many of them were mounted!

Thus the enemy soldiers, attempting to surround the Israelites, swiftly found themselves bottled up except for their rear troops. But even those, within minutes, were hemmed in by the nimble Israelites.

Then the fighting broke out in fierce, bloody fury. Considering the many thousands of soldiers involved, the battle could have been expected to last for hours. However, it went on only for a very short time, and then the awful sounds of slaughter



Not so much as one Israelite could be found among the thousands of bodies of the Midianites.

suddenly died down.

Weary men grouped together to stare in silence at the thousands of corpses strewn over the rocky ground. It was hard to believe at first, but the Israelites soon realized that they had slain every soldier who had come out to war against them, and that included all five kings of the Midianites! They also found Balaam, the prophet, who had taught the Midianites how to lead Israel astray, and killed him because of his evil deeds and unfaithfulness to God. (Numbers 31:1-8.) Because Balaam had set his affections on the gold Balak offered instead of eternal life which God offered, everything went wrong for him. He got neither gold nor eternal life, but was executed by God's servants.

What was even more amazing was that not even one dead or critically wounded Israelite could be found.

True to His word, God had protected all of them.

God Is Our Protector

Today many people worry about our enemies and their powerful forces. If, as a nation, we would submit to God's authority, there would be no reason to be concerned about such matters. We could overcome any and all enemy forces just as successfully as the ancient Israelites overpowered the Midianites, or we would find that God would

supernaturally destroy our enemies as He did on other occasions. (I Samuel 14:1-23; II Kings 19.)

Instead, our nations choose to ignore God (though at the same time lyingly branding ourselves as Christian nations) and try to keep safe and powerful without God's help. Ours is still a great, rich and powerful nation, but not because we are Christians. It is because of God's promise to Abraham and because God is using us for a purpose. When the present part of that purpose is accomplished—and that will be soon—our nation will begin to realize how poor and weak we can become without God's help.

As for the army of ancient Israel, its task was far from finished. Through Moses, God had instructed this force to proceed to the Midianite cities and capture everything of value. After stripping the dead Midianites of their possessions, the Israelites marched on to the nearby Midianite centers of civilization.

Having wiped out the Midianite army, the Israelite forces split into small groups and took over the Midianite towns and unprotected strongholds as soon as the soldiers could reach them. All Midianite men were slain, and the towns and strongholds burned. Women and children were captured. Flocks, herds and valuables were seized. (Numbers 31:9-12.)

Mounted messengers raced back to the Israelite camp to excitedly inform Moses of the overwhelming victory. Moses was not surprised, but he was pleased and thankful. He called the tribal heads together, and with them and Eleazar, rode out east of the camp to meet and welcome the returning victors. (Verse 13.)

Don't Give Idolatry a Foothold

After congratulating Joshua and other officers, Moses noticed that the prisoners consisted of many thousands of boys, girls and women.

"Why have you brought back these boys?" Moses asked Joshua. "And why have you spared these many thousands of women? Have you forgotten that these Midianite women recently drew our men into idolatry? God put a plague on us because of them, and also decreed that they should not live! Besides, they would have slain all our women and children had they won the battle."

"Our soldiers didn't have the heart to kill the youngsters," Joshua replied. "As for the women, we couldn't know which were the offenders. Therefore we brought back all except those who fell before us by accident."

"God sent us to destroy the Midianites," Moses told Joshua. "Tell your officers to instruct their men to slay all the male youngsters you have brought with you. Then determine as far as possible, which females have never had personal relations with men.

Set them aside to spare, and slay all the other women!" (Verses 14-18.)

Within a few hours thousands of Midianite women and male children lost their lives. The only Midianites who were spared were girl babies, young girls and any females who could prove to the Israelite officers that they had not taken part in the evil practices by which other Midianite women had led many Israelite men astray. These young Midianite women and girls could live among the Israelites as servants without any danger of their leading the Israelites into idolatry.

Some who read this account will wag their heads in doubt, believing that God would never allow such slaughter, regardless of what the inspired scriptures tell us. However, the slaying of the Midianite women and children was an act of mercy. The Israelites who carried out the task of executing these idolaters had no appetite for such grisly business. They acted under orders from God, who had good reasons for using the Israelites to wipe out an idolatrous nation. These people were so evil, warlike, and lewd that they and their children were better off dead. When they are resurrected in the judgment, along with other evil nations of past ages, they will be taught how to live in righteousness and happiness. (Matthew 12:41-42; 11:20-24; Isaiah 65:19-25.)

Is it sensible that people should consider God a harsh monster for what He ordered done to the Midianites, and at the same time believe the pagan lie (still voiced from so-called Christian pulpits all around the world) that God has allowed billions of souls to be dumped into everlasting, blistering torment in some fiery place—some suppose in the center of the Earth—just because they never heard of God?

Contrary to this unscriptural teaching, God justly gives every human being, at one time or another, the opportunity to learn right from wrong and choose to serve God. For most people, that opportunity doesn't come in this life. If it doesn't, it will come when all those Midianites and others who have died without an opportunity for salvation will be resurrected after the millennium. At that time people will live together in peace and prosperity while they are privileged to learn the way that leads to salvation. (Ezekiel 37:1-14; Isaiah 65:19-25.)

Quarantine Enforced

Because of being well outside the camps of the Israelites, it was an appropriate place for Moses to advise the soldiers who had any part in killing the Midianites or touching their bodies.

"All of you who have touched a dead body must stay outside of camp for seven days. On the third and the seventh days you and your captives must bathe yourselves, and wash your clothes and anything you have that has touched a corpse if those things

are made of skins, goats' hair or wood." (Numbers 31:19-20.)

Eleazar, the priest, added to these directions by telling the soldiers that while they were waiting out those seven days, they should purify all battle equipment and booty made of gold, silver, brass, iron, tin or lead. This meant that objects made of these metals were to pass through flames of a hot fire to kill vermin and germs, and in some cases even to be melted down. Also they were to be washed in a specially prepared purifying water. Nothing could be taken back to the camps of the Israelites unless it was purified. (Verses 21-24.) If all people today would obey such strict rules of sanitation and quarantine, contagious diseases would not spread as they do.

There was great celebration in the Israelite camps when at last the victorious soldiers were prepared to return to their homes and families. But now there was the problem of how to fairly distribute the captured property. Happily, it didn't remain a problem, because God spoke to Moses of this matter. The people did not use their own human reason.

Dividing the Spoils

"Divide what has been taken into two equal parts," God told Moses. "One part shall go to the soldiers who brought it back. The other half shall be distributed among the people. From the first part, for the soldiers, one part in five hundred shall go to Eleazar the high priest for offerings and to supply household needs. From the second half, for the people, one part in fifty shall go to the Levites."

Joshua and his officers made an immediate count of the captives and livestock that had come from the campaign against Midian. It turned out that the soldiers had brought in 32,000 female Midianites, 675,000 sheep and goats, 72,000 cattle and 61,000 donkeys.

Of the female Midianites, 32 (one out of every 500 of the soldiers' half) went to Eleazar and his assistants. They were to be used as household servants and helpers to the wives of Eleazar and of the priests. At the same time, 320 (one out of every 50 in the congregation's half) Midianites went to the Levites to be household servants for their families.

As for the sheep and goats, 675 of them went to the priests, and 6,750 went to the Levites. In the matter of cattle, 72 went to the priests, and 720 went to the Levites. Of the donkeys, 61 of them went to the priests, and 610 went to the Levites for service as beasts of burden. (Numbers 31:25-47.)

As soon as these matters were worked out, officers in charge of soldiers in the campaign against Midian came to Moses to remind him that a careful check of their

men had proved what seemed evident right after the battle—that not a one of them had been lost! God had proved that He was able to protect every individual of those whom He had promised to take over the Jordan into the Promised Land. (Verses 48-49.)

“We took much spoil that wasn’t included in the count of prisoners and livestock,” a spokesman explained. “Among the things was jewelry of all kinds fashioned from precious stones, gold and silver. To show our thanks to God for sparing us, we now bring you a part of these valuables.”

Moses and Eleazar gratefully accepted the offering—the gold alone of which was worth hundreds of thousands of our dollars or pounds—and they had it taken to the tabernacle as a memorial before God. (Verses 50-54.)

Having conquered the nations bordering Canaan on the east side of the Jordan river and the Dead Sea, the Israelites were well aware of the condition of all parts of that territory. Much of the land to the east was arid, but there were regions like Jazer and Gilead where the grass grew thick and green, and where there were many shade trees, especially oaks.

A Shocking Request!

The tribes of Reuben and Gad, having long specialized in raising sheep and cattle, were greatly impressed by these fine grazing lands. They felt that there couldn’t be greener and broader pastures on the west side of the Jordan. Therefore their chieftains came to Moses and Eleazar to ask if they could remain east of the Jordan to raise their flocks and herds. (Numbers 32:1-5.)

Moses was upset at this request. He believed that these two tribes could be using this as an excuse to get out of going with the other tribes to drive their enemies out of the land west of the Jordan. And he wondered if they weren’t showing a lack of gratitude to God for the land He promised them on the west side of the Jordan river.

“Your wanting to stay here reminds me of what your fathers said forty years ago,” Moses answered, “when they refused to go into Canaan because they feared that the inhabitants might slay them. Then God sent them into the desert to wander and die! This request of yours is a bad example to the other tribes and might make them fear to cross the Jordan. If they, too, should choose not to cross the river, God might again be so angered that He might destroy all of us!” (Verses 6-15.)

The leaders of Reuben and Gad recognized the wisdom of Moses’ statements, but since this was such fine pasture land, they had more to say before giving up. After a hasty meeting among themselves, they again approached Moses and Eleazar.

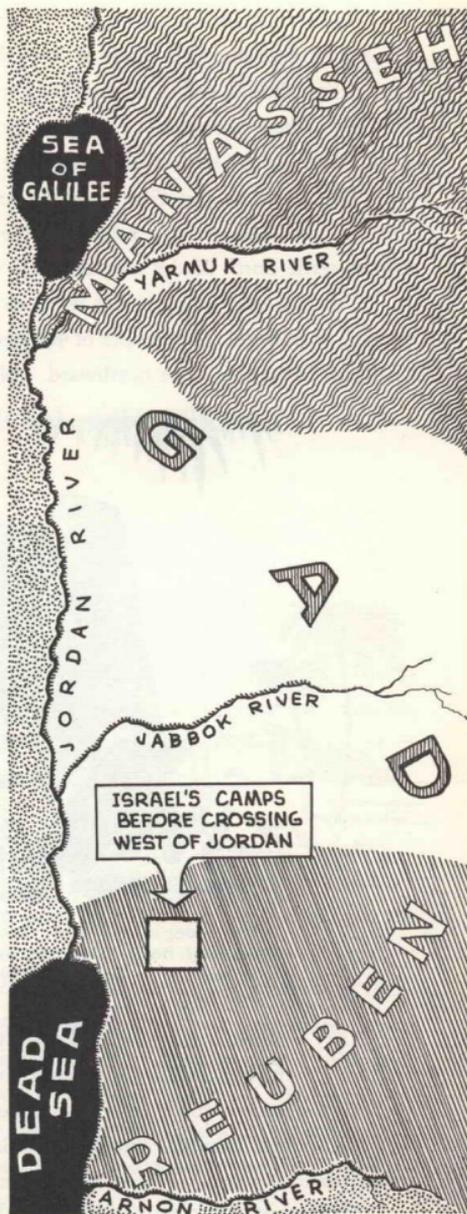
"We aren't being rebellious," they explained, "and we would not want to discourage our brethren or bring disunity to Israel. We can quickly take over the vacant cities from which we recently drove the Amorites, then build them into fortresses for our women and children, and build folds for our livestock. Knowing that our people and livestock would be safe, our soldiers could then return here and cross Jordan at the front of the other tribes to spearhead the attack and help overcome our enemies. We will not return to our homes until the other tribes are safely settled on the other side of Jordan. We will not ask for land on the other side, but will be satisfied with the grazing land here." (Verses 16-19.)

This explanation put a different light on the matter in Moses' thinking. After all, if these tribes preferred this land God had given to Israel, Moses could think of no good reason not to give it to them as long as the whole Israelite army went westward to take Canaan.

"If you will do as you say," Moses told them, "then these regions you desire shall become your inheritances. But be warned that if you fail to go with the rest of the people and fight until the inhabitants of Canaan are entirely driven out, then you will have to pay for such a great sin!" (Num. 32:20-24; Deut. 3:18-20.)

"We will not fail to go," the chieftains promised Moses. "Do we have your permission to leave for Jazer and Gilead?"

"Whenever you wish," Moses replied.

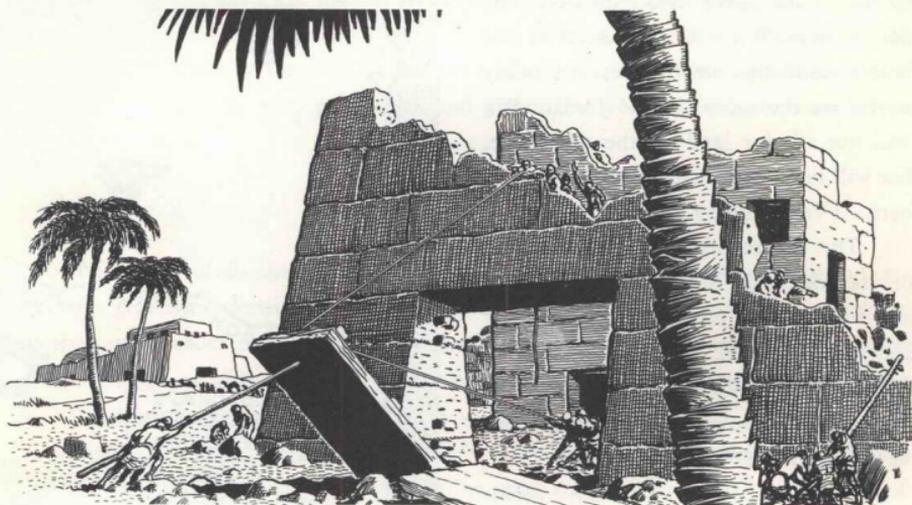


Part of the general area given to Israel east of the Jordan River.

Because he realized that he wouldn't live to cross the Jordan, Moses instructed Eleazar, Joshua and the chiefs of the other tribes to make certain that when the time came, they should see to it that these tribes who had taken eastern territory should live up to their promises. Otherwise, they were to give up the land they desired, and would have to get their inheritance west of the Jordan. (Numbers 32:25-30.)

Thus Reuben and Gad were the first families of Israel to be allotted their possession from God, though half the tribe of Manasseh also promptly received permission to settle north of the area taken by Gad.

The two and a half tribes were so anxious to get to their lands that they set out as soon as possible. The people of Reuben turned to the east and south. The people of Gad and Manasseh went northward. (Numbers 32:31-33; Deuteronomy 3:1-17.)



The people of Gad, Reuben and half of Manasseh worked hard to repair the towns and fortresses damaged in the struggle with the Canaanites east of the Jordan.

They worked hard to rebuild swiftly the broken buildings of the ravaged towns and turn them back into walled strongholds. And as they had promised, they set up shelters and corrals for their vast numbers of stock. (Numbers 32:34-42.)

With their families and livestock in secure strongholds, the two and one-half tribes would not need to leave many men behind to care for them.

Meanwhile, back on the plains of Moab, God was in the process of giving more instructions to Israel through Moses, whose life was soon to be taken. (Numbers 33:50-56.)

CHAPTER FIFTY

THE CONSTITUTION OF ISRAEL

THE Israelites continued to camp on the plains east of the Jordan river for many days. Water was plentiful. There was an abundance of grass for the animals. Living was also a little more pleasant for the people because of the shade trees in that area.

Meanwhile, the people didn't sit around doing nothing. Besides their regular duties, it was somewhat of a task to adjust to the thousands of Midianite captives, take care of the added livestock, purify the booty of war and re-fashion much of it, sharpen and repair the worn or broken tools of war.

Laws Are Needed

Time was required to do all this, but God's main purpose in allowing the people to stay so long in that place was to give them many instructions, through Moses, for their guidance and benefit. It was made known to them that when they crossed over the Jordan into Canaan on the west, it was their duty to execute the inhabitants there and to destroy all their idols, pagan altars, towers and groves where they burned some of their children in the fire and otherwise worshiped their heathen gods. (Numbers 33:50-53, Leviticus 18:21, 24-29; Deuteronomy 7:1-5; 9:4; 12:29-32; 18:9-14.)

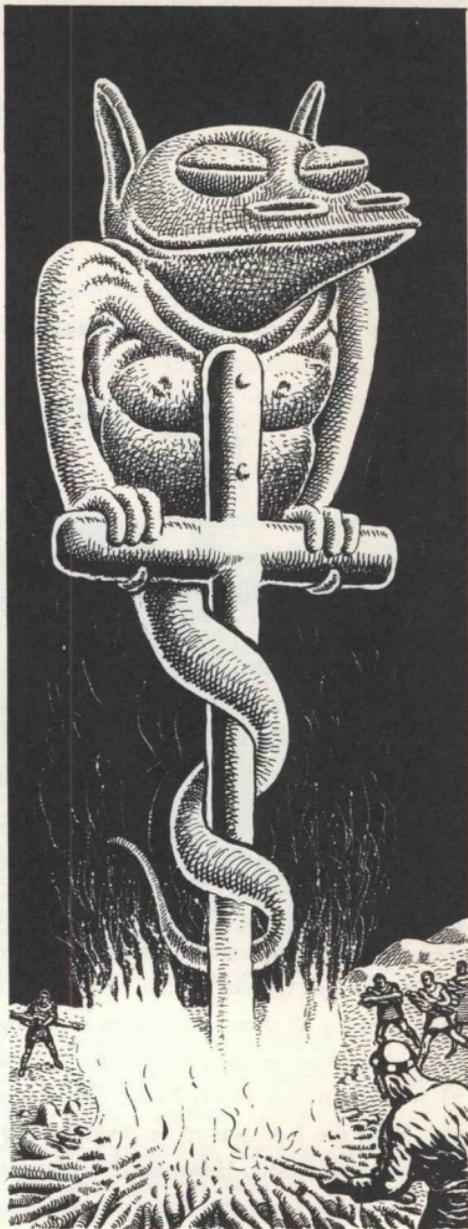
Then the land was to be divided fairly among the nine and a half tribes according to their numbers. However, if the Israelites failed to overcome the inhabitants of Canaan, God warned that Israel would suffer.

"If you spare any Canaanites," God said, "they will give you much trouble as long as they remain. Furthermore, I shall deal with you as I plan to deal with them.

That means that you could lose your lives as well as the land!" (Numbers 33:54-56.)

God then defined the boundaries of the Promised Land and appointed a committee to supervise the distribution of the land. (Numbers 34.) God also instructed Moses to tell the people that they should give 48 towns to the Levites, who were not to receive any land by inheritance. These were not necessarily to be large towns, but each one was to be surrounded by an area over a mile across, reaching out 1000 cubits (about 2000 feet) from the wall in all directions. In these suburbs the Levites could plant gardens, orchards and vineyards and have room to keep their flocks and herds. (Numbers 35:1-5.)

Six of these towns—three on each side of the Jordan—were soon to be appointed as "cities of refuge." As well as being centers of Levite habitation, these six towns were to be for the protection of anyone who accidentally killed a person. This was necessary because angered relatives or close friends of the dead man might try to kill the man who caused his death. For example, if two men were building a shed, and one man unexpectedly moved a heavy beam so that it fell and killed the other man, the man who moved the beam was to flee at once to the closest of the six towns, where he would be protected



The Israelites were to destroy all idols found in Canaan.

from anyone who might seek his life as a matter of vengeance.

On the other hand, if the man maliciously moved the beam with the purpose of killing his working partner, he was still entitled to the temporary protection of any of the six towns so that he could be assured a fair trial.

Violence Condemned

Whatever the case, the man would be tried by authorities. If he were found guilty, he was either slain or allowed to fall into the hands of those who had set out to avenge the dead person. If he were found innocent, he still was to stay in the town for his own protection, until the death of the high priest. Meanwhile, if he ventured out of his protective town, and was found by any avenger, that was the end of his protection. There were to be no jails in Israel.

Moses now assigned three towns for refuge purposes east of the Jordan river. They included Bezer in the plain country of the Reubenites. Then there was the town of Ramoth for the Gadites and Golan for the Manassites. The other three cities of refuge were to be set aside later by Joshua. (Numbers 35:6-34; Deuteronomy 4:41-43; Deuteronomy 19: 1-13; Joshua 20.)

At this time Moses received many instructions and rules and reminders from God. He faithfully passed them on to the people as they came to him. So that they would better understand matters, Moses gave them a detailed account of what had happened since they had left Mt. Sinai four decades previously. The book of Deuteronomy is a record of these proceedings.

During the lengthy account, Moses revealed to the people that God wouldn't allow him to go over into Canaan with them because of Moses' wrong conduct when he had struck the rock to obtain water.

"Later," Moses told them, "I asked God to forgive me and let me go into Canaan. He refused to allow me to go, but told me I could view much of the land from a high mountain, and that there I would die!" (Deuteronomy 3:23-28.)

The people were saddened to hear this. At the same time, they felt a greater fear of God. Many of them reasoned that if God would take the life of their leader, then their lives could be taken at any time because of their disobedience.

Sabbaths Must Be Observed

Moses added to their serious thinking by warning them that God would never tolerate law-breaking without punishment. He reminded them also that God was more merciful than they could imagine, and that He would never forsake them or destroy them as long as they kept their agreement to observe His laws. (Deuteronomy 4:30-31.)

Among the matters mentioned through Moses for Israel's benefit was the strict reminder to observe the yearly Sabbaths. These holy days began in Egypt with the Passover. They were later more fully explained to the people at Mt. Sinai. The keeping of these holy days was to be a perpetual sign between God and Israel, just as the observance of the weekly Sabbath was to be an everlasting agreement. (Deuteronomy 12:1-14; 16:1-17; Exodus 31:17.)

The understanding of the Sabbaths revealed God's wonderful plan of salvation, without which understanding no church could rightfully claim God as its Head.

Today there are more than 700 church denominations that claim to be Christian, but almost all of them refuse to have anything to do with God's Sabbaths. Many weak excuses are given for not observing them, including the old, standard, groundless line that the days instituted by God were only Jewish days, and that they were done away with at Christ's death. The fact that most churches fail to observe them simply proves that most churches are not God's churches. This can be a shocking and perhaps unbelievable statement to many people, but it is a true one, completely backed up by the Bible. Scoffing at this Bible truth is the same as scoffing at God, the author of it. The Apostle Paul taught Christians to keep the weekly Sabbaths and yearly feasts many years after Christ ascended to heaven. (Acts 16:13; 17:2; 18:21; 20:16; 24:14.)

God made it clear that besides the first tithe (that tenth of one's increase that is to pay the expense of the work of God) the Israelites should save a second tithe to be used in observing the holy days. This was mostly for the Festival of Tabernacles, which was to be held apart from the usual habitations of the people at a place chosen by God. (Deuteronomy 12:17-19; 14:22-27.)

Today, as then, the people of God's church use this second tenth of their income for observing the holy days—especially the fall festival—at the place or places God indicates. Jerusalem was the main place in ancient Israel, and will be again when Christ returns not very many years from now. (Zechariah 14:16-19.)

God ordained the Festival of Tabernacles as a time when His people should worship Him with special joy, reverence, mirth and thankfulness. It was not to be a noisy "camp meeting" or what is so often referred to as a "revival" at some date set by man. Instead, it was and still is a time of joyfully worshipping God while taking in spiritual food (preaching) that is corrective, inspiring and character-building. It was and still is a time of dining, visiting, dancing, and enjoying sports that stimulate the body and knit the people of God together in spiritual harmony. (Jeremiah 31:12-13.)

Faithful saving of the second tithe makes it possible for God's people to enjoy this autumn vacation and return to their homes and to their work better prepared to live happier and closer to their Creator.

At this same time God also commanded that the people should rest their crop land every seventh year so the physical laws in nature can improve the soil's health-giving natural balance. (Leviticus 25:1-7, 20-22; Leviticus 26:14-16, 32-35.)

Then God commanded that a third tenth should be saved for a very special use. This was to be taken out only every third and sixth year in a seven-year cycle. It was to go to the poor among the Levites, widows, fatherless children and poor strangers. (Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 26:12.)

In these days the obedient Christian puts aside his tithes plus what is required in taxes and such. God makes it possible. Many are the families that have enjoyed better incomes and other financial benefits since beginning to tithe.

Good Civil Government

Many other matters were brought to the people at that time, among which were these:

When the seventh-year land rest came, any debt should be canceled unless the debtor happened to be a foreigner. (Deuteronomy 15:1-11.)

A servant should be freed after seven years of service. (Deuteronomy 15:12-15.)

Israel was to make no agreements of any kind with the nations that were to be driven out. (Deuteronomy 7:1-5; 20:16-18.)

No more than forty lashes of a whip were to be applied in punishment. (Deuteronomy 25:1-3.)

No fruit trees were to be cut down in times of war in the land Israel invaded. (Deuteronomy 20:19-20.) The food they produced was worth more than timber.

The Israelites should consider themselves a holy nation, not because of their righteousness, but because God chose them as His people. (Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:1-2.)

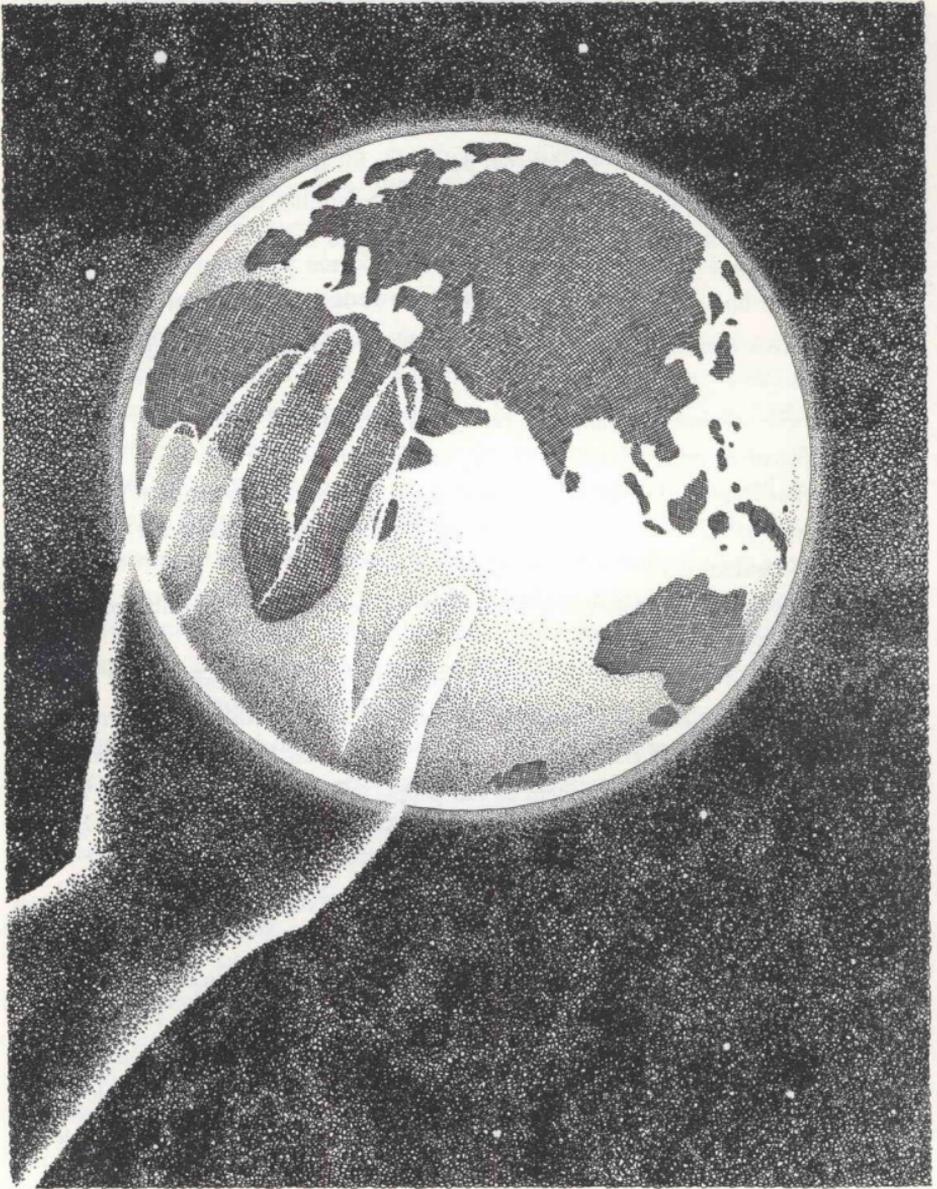
Any prophet or priest who falsely led the people into any wrong kind of worship was to be put to death. (Deuteronomy 18:20-22.)

Toward the end of the period of instruction, Moses repeated these solemn words from God:

"You, Israel, must choose between blessings and cursings from your Creator. Obedience to my laws shall bring wonderful blessings of prosperity, freedom from diseases, success in all you undertake, an abundance of healthy children and livestock, plenty of rain and water, good crops without blemish or pestilence, comfortable homes and protection from accident and from your enemies. I shall make you the head of all nations, and they shall fear and respect you. You shall lead long, happy lives, and so shall your offspring also be happy, healthy and prosperous into the far future!

"On the other hand, if you refuse to live according to the laws I have made plain

to you, I shall heap grievous curses on you. You shall cease to prosper. All kinds of diseases shall come on you, and you shall fail in all you set out to do. Your children



The mighty hand of God was set to give the Israelites everything they could desire if they would obey—or to crush them out as a nation if they disobeyed!

shall be sickly, but famine shall drive you to eat them. Your livestock shall sicken and die of disease or for lack of water and grass. The soil shall turn hard, and your crops shall be consumed by blight and pestilence. You shall be sick, frightened and miserable wherever you go. You shall become as depraved as animals and lunatics, and fatal accidents shall overtake you wherever you are. Your homes shall become filthy, miserable hovels. You shall become the least and weakest of all nations, and cruel enemies shall slay you. Those of you who aren't slain shall be taken captive and scattered among the nations as wretched slaves!" (Deuteronomy 28; Deuteronomy 30:15-20.)

God's Laws Must Be Preserved

All the laws God had recently given to Moses to pass on to the people were written down at another time by Moses and presented to the priests to place beside the Ark of the Covenant. Copies also were given to the elders. Moses commanded them to read the whole book of the law to the people every seven years when Israel assembled at the Festival of Tabernacles during the year of release. (Deuteronomy 31:9-13, 24-29.) The priests and Levites were also commanded to teach the people portions of the law yearly at the festivals and throughout the year in all their cities. (Deuteronomy 33:8-10; II Chronicles 17:7-9; 35:1-3; Nehemiah 8:1-8; Acts 15:21.)

God then called Moses and Joshua to the tabernacle. As soon as they entered, the Creator descended to the tabernacle inside a glorious, radiant cloud. (Deuteronomy 31:14-15.)

"Before your life ends," God told Moses, "there are more things for you to do. One is to write a song to teach to the people. I know they shall go after other gods and shall forget my laws. They shall break my covenant. Then evil days shall fall on them, and though they shall seek my help, I shall let them suffer. The verses I give you must become a national song to be taught from generation to generation. The people shall remember it, and it shall become a witness against them because of their sins." (Verses 16-21.)

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

JOSHUA NOW LEADS ISRAEL

AS SOON as Moses and Joshua left the tabernacle, where God had instructed them concerning things to come, Moses hurried to his tent. He was to write down the matters that were to be made into a song to teach to Israel. (Deuteronomy 31:22.)

The Way to Happiness

Later, Moses went before the people to give them the verses that were to become a sort of national anthem to remind the Israelites of their faults, their obligations and the matters that would come up in the future. The verses mentioned God's perfect justice, mercy and great works, and showed how sinful Israel had become in spite of God's wonderful ways. The people were reminded of how patiently God had dealt with them during their travels in the desert, and of the terrible warnings that had repeatedly been given them. The verses pointed out that if Israel were wise enough to obey, all enemies would be overcome, but that lack of wisdom would result in great calamity for Israel. It was shown that Israel would have great reason to rejoice in the far future, but only after the people would have undergone a time of terrible tribulation and finally would have repented. (Deuteronomy 32:1-43.)

"Don't do what is right in your own eyes," Moses told the people. "Your conscience will deceive you. Let it be your ambition, above all things, to observe God's laws and teach your children to do the same. If you fail in this, your lives will become miserable and come to an untimely end. On the other hand, obedience will mean long, happy lives with prosperity, and wonderful futures for your children!" (Deuteronomy 12:8; 6:1-12; 4:30-31; 11:8-9; 31:6.)

Moses then pronounced a lengthy blessing on the various tribes of Israel, at the same time telling some of the things they would accomplish in the far future. (Deuteronomy 33.)

Moses' Departure

Moses ruefully ended talking to the people. He realized that the time had come for him to go to Mt. Pisgah to look across the Jordan and view the land of Canaan, which he would never enter. Accompanied probably by Eleazar, Joshua, the elders of Israel and some aides, Moses started out for the mountain, which was not far distant. When the congregation became aware that he was leaving forever, the people gradually broke into tearful moans and wailing. Moses was greatly moved by the loud demonstration, but there was nothing for him to do but go on.

A little later he noted that the great mass of people, still wailing, was following him toward the mountain. Moses knew that if the people weren't stopped, many of them would follow him right up the mountain. He hastily took advantage of a small rise, from which he could more easily be seen and heard, to firmly tell as many as could hear him that they should not follow any farther.

The wailing people obeyed. Moses and those who accompanied him continued on toward Mt. Pisgah, a point from which Balak, king of Moab, had asked the since-dead prophet Balaam to pronounce a curse on Israel.

Silently the group progressed up the mountain, while the sad wailing of the people drifted up strongly from the plains below. It was a strange fact that while the people were feeling sorry for Moses, Moses was feeling sorry for the people. The people were sorry to see Moses depart from them, and at the same time Moses felt concern for Israel because his close contact with God had resulted in his knowing Israel's fate even into the far future. He knew the people still had many bitter lessons to learn.

When at last Moses and the elders and officers arrived close to the peak of Mt. Pisgah, Moses turned to the people who had come with him and said a few last words of farewell. There were no dry eyes, even among those who were hardened soldiers and officers who had long served Moses. Moses said goodbye to them, and then walked alone up to the highest point of the mountain. From there, through the clear atmosphere of that high mountain country, Moses looked across the Jordan and into nearby territory to clearly view the land where most of the tribes of Israel would settle.

Moses Views the Promised Land

From that elevation of several thousand feet, one of the highest points in the land, Moses carefully drank in the magnificent sight. He looked southwest and west

across the area where the tribes of Simeon, Judah, Dan and Benjamin were to settle from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean. To the northwest he could see the region that was to be occupied by Ephraim, Issachar and half of Manasseh. To the north he viewed the lands to be taken over by Zebulon, Asher and Naphtali. Swinging his gaze to the east side of the Jordan, Moses saw the land already allotted to the other half of Manasseh, to Gad and Reuben.

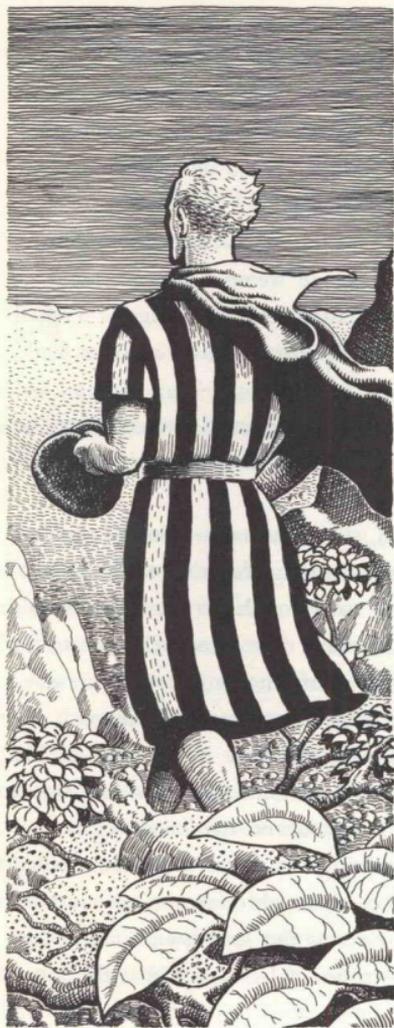
Below him, stretching from the Dead Sea far to the north, was the beautiful Jordan valley with its lush bottom lands filled from east to west with fields, vineyards, groves of palm trees and other fruit.

"This is the land," the voice of God came to Moses, "that I promised to give to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Here it is for you to see, but it is not for you to enter. However, you will enter a better land in the resurrection to come. Now walk down the side of the mountain opposite the way you came up!" (Deut. 34:1-4; Heb. 11:1-15, 24-29, 39-40.)

A Final Farewell

Having feasted his eyes on the scene around him, Moses switched his gaze back on the mourning elders and officers who sadly gazed up at him. He waved, then turned and strode slowly out of their sight.

This was the last that was seen of Moses by human beings. He started down the other side of the mountain, but just how far he went, no one knows. Possibly God caused him to fall into a deep sleep, and then took his life. God then buried him in a nearby mountain valley in Moab. (Deuteronomy 34:5-6.) Satan attempted to obtain possession of Moses' body (Jude 9), probably with the purpose of bringing it to the



After a final wave of goodbye, Moses walked away and disappeared over the shoulder of the mountain.

attention of the Israelites so that they would make it an object of worship. However, God carefully hid the burial place from man, so that no one would ever be tempted to regard the body as something sacred that should be worshipped.

Some readers might think that it would be a very extreme thing to worship a dead body. But even today, when we are supposed to be enlightened and intelligent, millions of people in the professing Christian world regard the relics—dried bones and shriveled flesh—of certain long-dead individuals as something to be revered, worshipped and considered holy.

Thus Moses' death ended, at one hundred and twenty years, the life of one of God's most outstanding servants of all time. Just before he died, Moses was as healthy and strong as when he was eighty years of age. Even his eyes were as keen as they had been in his youth. (Deuteronomy 34:7.)

No other leader of Israel accomplished such great deeds as did Moses. (Verses 10-12.) Because he was so close to God, he enjoyed the great privilege of leading millions of his people out of slavery, bringing God's wonderful laws to them, and leading them to the entrance of a bountiful garden spot that was to be their home.

Although there were too many times when they ignored God by ignoring Moses, all Israel was very sad to lose such a wonderful leader. For the next thirty days matters came almost to a standstill in the camps while the people mourned Moses' death. (Verse 8.)

In these days many people, including a host of outstanding religious leaders, consider the vitally important times and events of ancient Israel only as an old tale having to do with the Jews. They think of Moses simply as one who, not too successfully, may have led a few Jews out of Egypt and into Canaan, and who started the present Jewish religion.

Such shallow beliefs are spawned by the refusal to completely believe Jesus and the Old Testament, and the inability to understand who Israel is today. Moses didn't start the Jewish religion. The word "Jews" is not even mentioned in the Bible until long after Moses' time. Then the Jews were referred to (II Kings 16:6) as being at war with Israel! Those who assume that the words "Jew" and "Israelite" always mean the same thing find it impossible to understand some of the most important parts of the Bible—especially prophecy.

It is tragic that innumerable people who earnestly want to learn how best to live are taught by such blinded or stubborn leaders that the sacred, living laws of God, brought to Israel through Moses, were only "Jewish" rules blotted out by Christ's death so that we are now "freed" to do as our conscience pleases.

Happily, according to prophecy for these last days, God is gradually opening the

understanding of more and more people to the startling fact that those who defiantly teach that God's laws are no longer in force are as guilty in God's sight as the most villainous men mentioned throughout the scriptures. Unless they repent, the fate of such people, referred to as false shepherds, will be most horrible—because of their deceitful posing as true ministers of God. (Ezekiel 34:2, 7-10; II Peter 2:12.)

God Speaks to Joshua

After Moses' death, God contacted Joshua to remind him that now that he was Israel's leader he should direct himself and the nation to live by all the book of the law of God. He was reminded that trust in the Eternal and obedience and courage, would mean success in battle over Israel's enemies and in taking over the land from the Great Sea (Mediterranean) east to the Euphrates river, and from the desert south of the Dead Sea to Mt. Lebanon on the north. (Deuteronomy 34:9; Joshua 1:1-4.)

"I will not fail you nor forsake you as long as you carry on in accord with the laws that came to you through my servant Moses," God instructed Joshua. (Deuteronomy 4:30-31; Joshua 1:5-7.) "Meditate on those laws so that they will become so familiar to you that you can't forget them. Be strong in this office that has been given to you. Be of great courage. Don't be afraid. Don't be dismayed. Remember that your God is with you wherever you go." (Verses 8-9; Deuteronomy 31:6.)

This was one of the greatest "pep" talks ever given to one of the most responsible leaders in all history. If Joshua hadn't previously realized how much he should rely on God, he surely was completely reminded at that time.

As soon as the mourning period of thirty days for Moses was over, Joshua gave orders to his officers to make a quick announcement to the people.

"Prepare to Break Camp!"

"Be prepared on notice to break camp within three days," the officers told the surprised people. "Prepare extra food and supplies for a sudden trip over the Jordan and into the land promised to us by God." (Verses 10-11.)

Although manna was still the main food of the Israelites, it wasn't something that could be gathered during a sudden movement of the people or a food that could be kept overnight except over the Sabbath. At this time when Israel was going to be on the move for a few days, it was necessary to prepare meat, fruit and grains, taken in their conquests, that could be carried and consumed at any time.

Joshua then spoke to the heads of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasse—who had by this time returned from settling their families east of the Jordan—to remind them of their obligation to their brethren in the other tribes.

"I want to remind you of your promise to send the best soldiers of your tribes to help take over all of Canaan," Joshua told them. "We'll be moving across the Jordan very soon, and your picked soldiers should lead the way, since they will not have their families with them. After we've taken the land, your warriors shall be free to return to their towns and families on this side of the river." (Joshua 1:12-15.)

"We are sending the best of our soldiers to fight in God's battles," the leaders replied. "We shall carry out our promise. Our soldiers will go wherever you send them and obey every command. Every soldier that we send will know that if he fails to obey you, he will be put to death!" (Verses 16-18.)

Just west of Israel's camp was the Jordan river. It was exceedingly deep, as the flood season had begun. Only about six miles farther to the west was a walled and fortified city called Jericho. Joshua knew that it would be necessary to attack that city before progressing further into Canaan, because it was situated by the pass that led through the mountains. It was also one of the Canaanite cities God had commanded Israel to destroy because of its extremely evil practices.

Scouts Sent to Jericho!

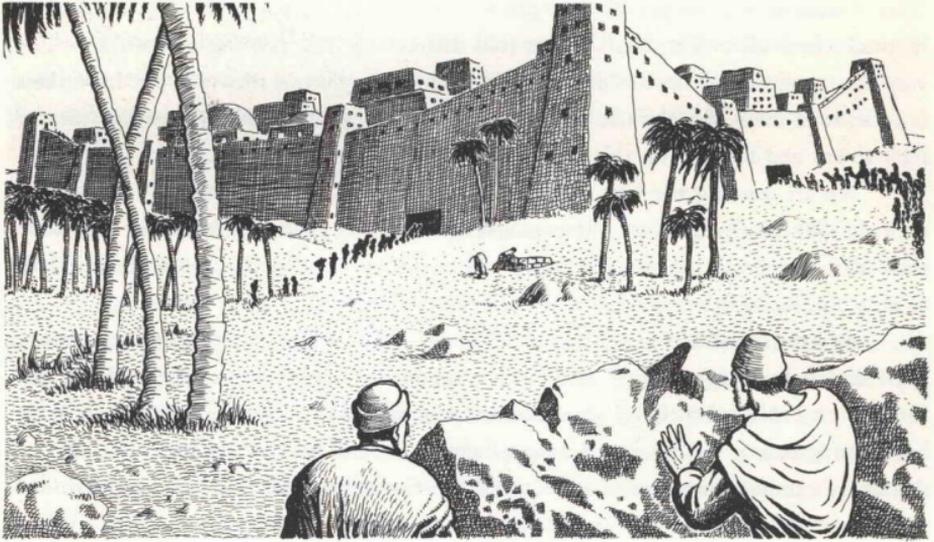
Joshua realized that God wasn't necessarily going to protect Israel if any foolish moves were made. He knew that he was to use sound judgment and strategy. Because of this, he had already sent two men to Jericho to try to find out how well the city was armed, the condition of the walls and the gates, what forces were close to Jericho and the morale of the people within the city.

These two men quickly found how difficult it was to cross the Jordan at that time of year. It was spring, and showers had swollen the stream into a muddy torrent. Very few swimmers could cross a raging, turbulent river in flood stage. But these men had been chosen for their many outstanding abilities, including great skill in swimming, and they managed to struggle across the violent current to the west bank.

After drying their clothes, which were chosen to appear as those of roving Canaanites, they trudged the several miles from the river to the city. Jericho was surrounded by groves of palm trees, and well-traveled roads led to its several gates. The Israelites met several people on the first road they came to. No one seemed particularly friendly; some were even a little suspicious of their identity.

There was no problem in getting into Jericho. Its huge gates were open to traffic till sunset. The Israelites mixed in with a caravan that was entering the nearest gate, and boldly walked about to view the life and activity of this habitation of their enemies.

Jericho wasn't a tremendous city; it covered only about seven acres. But it was compact and had room for thousands of people. Within its four strong walls were many



After trudging several miles west of the Jordan River, the two Israelite scouts arrived at the walled city of Jericho.

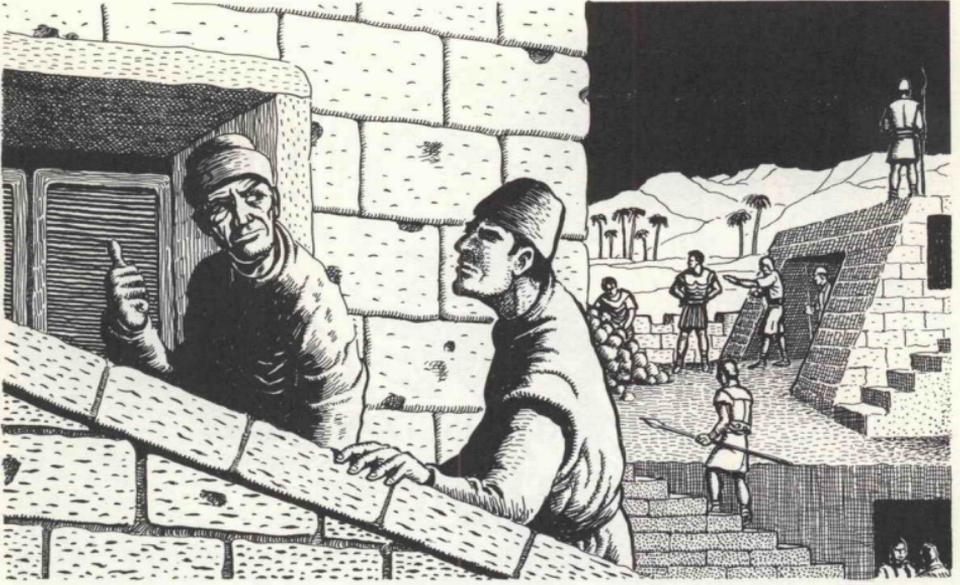
busy streets crammed with stables, shops, public buildings, homes and inns. Many shops, homes and inns were built on top of the double walls. People milled about everywhere. From their expressions and actions, it wasn't difficult to see that most of them were in a state of excited anxiety.

A few soldiers huddled in groups in the streets, but most of them were on the walls. The Israelite scouts noted that they were gazing mostly to the east toward the camp of Israel.

Trapped!

Hoping to get on the wall, the Israelites walked up a long flight of steps to one of the inns built there. The proprietress greeted them cordially and saw to it that they were well fed. While eating, they were startled by a loud clanging. The proprietress—her name was Rahab—explained that it was sundown, and that the huge gates of the city were being closed for the night to keep anyone from going out or coming in. The two Israelites suddenly realized that they were trapped—at least until sunrise.

A little later officers sent by the king arrived at the inn and demanded of the servant to speak with the proprietress. The Israelites were just finishing their meal in another room, and didn't see the officers. However, they could hear all that was said. So could Rahab, the proprietress. (Joshua 2:1-3.)



The scouts entered the inn operated by Rahab.

"We have been sent here by the ruler of Jericho," the officers announced to a servant at the door. "He has received information that two Israelite spies were seen entering this inn. We are here to arrest them!"

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

THE PROMISED LAND

THE TWO Israelite scouts sent to the city of Jericho were eating at Rahab's inn when officers banged loudly on the door.

"Two officers have come from the king of Jericho to arrest you!" Rahab whispered to them. "They're impatient and I must go to the door at once. I know who you are, and I have my reasons to help you. Hurry up this back stairway and hide yourselves under the flax you'll find drying on the roof!" (Joshua 2:1-4.)

The Israelites didn't waste time asking questions or waiting for more explanation. They dashed for the stairway, and Rahab turned to go to the officers.

Rahab Outwits the Soldiers

"If you're stalling us, woman, we'll have to take you along, too!" one of them snapped.

"I hurried back there to the dining booth to find out if any of my lodgers noticed which way the two men went," Rahab explained. "They were here, but they left just before the wall gates of the city were closed for the night. If they are Israelites, probably they're on their way back to their camp, and the soldiers could overtake them before they reach the river."

Rahab lied about these things, but God makes use of all kinds of people to bring about His purposes. In this matter He was using a Canaanite woman, who had never been taught God's Commandments.

The king's officers didn't spend any more time talking. They strode out of the inn and barked orders to nearby soldiers. Within a very few minutes, the gates swung



Before leaving the room where the two Israelites were eating, Rahab quickly informed them that Canaanite officers had come to arrest them!

open, and a searching party of soldiers scurried off into the darkness in the direction of the river. (Verses 5-7.)

As soon as the soldiers had left, Rahab went up to the flat roof of the inn to talk to the Israelites. She expected to find them well hidden under the flax on the roof. Instead, she found they were not yet fully covered.

"You're safe for now," Rahab whispered. "They won't be back for awhile. We Canaanites are well aware of your intention of taking over our country. I know that your powerful God will give you this land. Our whole city is frightened because you have so swiftly overcome nations to the east and southeast. We have been dreading the day when your soldiers come over the Jordan. Our terror is so great that no one has any courage left."

"If you believe that Israel is going to take over your land, why are you trying to protect us?" one of the Israelites asked.

Rahab Trusts in God

"Because I believe your God is the true God. Long ago we heard of the great miracles He performed, especially in causing the Red Sea to part so that your people could pass through it. (Verses 8-11.)

"I want to be spared by your soldiers," Rahab continued. "I have showed you kindness. Now promise me that your people will spare me and my close relatives—the households of my father and all my brothers and sisters—when this city is attacked."

"We promise to do as you ask," the Israelites told her, "if you will agree not to mention to anyone what has taken place here tonight."

Rahab solemnly assured them that she would keep the matter to herself. The Israelites then instructed her that she should tie a red cord, which one of the men gave her, in the window of her establishment, and that all her relatives should take refuge there when the soldiers of Israel would reach Jericho.

"Our soldiers will be told to spare the place where the red cord is," Rahab was told, "but if any of your family is outside your doors when we attack, we won't be responsible for them. On the other hand, if any of your family within your inn is harmed, we shall be responsible before God for that harm."

"So be it," the other Israelite muttered, "but these promises can't mean much if we don't get out of here tonight. We don't dare wait until daylight, and the gates will be barred all night."

For answer, Rahab motioned for them to follow her. They went downstairs to an open window facing outward from the wall. Rahab gave the men a bag of food and a long rope, and the scouts knew what to do. They tied one end of the rope to a ceiling beam and let the rest of it drop out the window.

"Don't try to return to your camp now," Rahab warned. "The area between here and the river will be swarming with our soldiers for many hours. Hurry to the hills west of here and hide there for three days. By that time it should be much safer for you to go back."

One at a time the Israelites slid down the rope, which more than reached all the way down the high wall. Rahab pulled the rope back up and waved to the men as they melted into the darkness. (Verses 12-21.)

It wasn't easy to travel over strange terrain at night, but the darkness wasn't intense enough to prevent the scouts from keeping on the move. The two fleeing men shortly reached the white limestone hills, where they found a number of caves. They chose one next to a small water spring, and for the next three days it was their hideout home.

The Scouts Report to Joshua

At the end of three days the two men set out eastward during darkness to successfully reach the Jordan. There they waited for daylight, and again managed to swim the river. From there it was only a short distance to the Israelite camp and safety.

Joshua was pleased at the report of the scouts, especially because it showed the shattered morale of the Canaanites. As for Rahab and her family, Joshua readily agreed to the promise that this one Canaanite family would be spared. (Verses 22-24.) Joshua knew that God's death sentence upon Canaanites did not apply to those who willingly forsook their heathen gods and put their faith in God. After all, the reason God had condemned the Canaanites was because they were the worst sort of idolaters. (Deuteronomy 9:4; 12:29-32.) Those few who repented, as Rahab did, were to be shown mercy. (Genesis 12:3.)

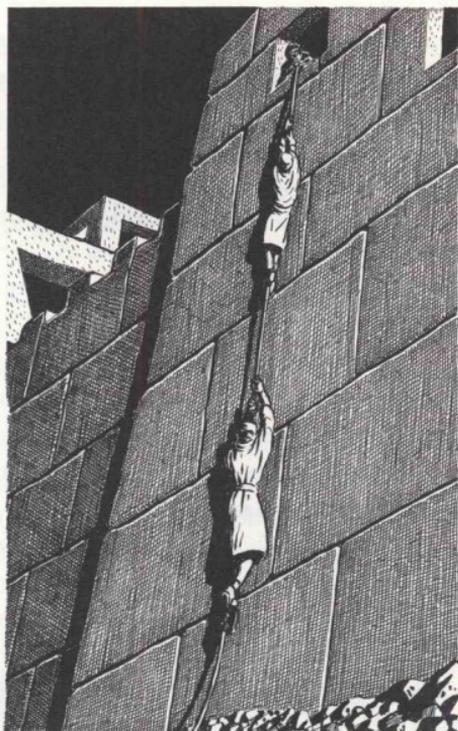
As soon as Joshua had finished hearing the report, he told his officers to take word to the people that they should prepare to break camp next day.

Great activity followed. Flocks and herds grazing outside the camp had to be rounded up. Families packed their possessions except what was needed for meals and a night's rest.

Early next morning the Israelites finished breaking camp. The tabernacle tent, fence and all that went with the tabernacle were packed for moving, and the Israelites set out on a march toward the river. The trip took almost all day, and took them away from the acacia groves near Mt. Nebo, but into more groves of palm trees. They stopped just before arriving at the river, and set up camp again on the east slopes leading down to the Jordan.

Although the Jordan wasn't a large river such as the Nile, those Israelites who were curious enough to go on down to it were greatly impressed by it because it was the largest river the new generation had ever seen. At that time of year, due to spring rains and the melting of the snow in the high mountains to the north, the Jordan was swift and swollen to overflowing by the silty waters.

Those who saw the river returned to tell their neighbors what it was like. Only the very strong swimmers could hope to make it across the Jordan, and building rafts



At the risk of losing her life, Rahab provided a rope which the Israelite scouts used to escape from Jericho.

or a bridge would require so much time that all the armies of Canaan could concentrate at the spot and easily ruin such a project! However, this was to be no problem for Israel, because God had already given private instructions to Joshua so the people would realize God was with Joshua as He had been with Moses.

A Miracle Needed!

Next morning Joshua told the priests they should personally take up the ark of the covenant and bear it to the river ahead of the Israelites. (Joshua 3:1-7.) Ordinarily the ark was carried in the center of the mass of people, and was borne by Levites who were the sons of Kohath. (Numbers 2:1-31; Numbers 4:15.)

As God commanded, Joshua then told the priests that they should wade into the edge of the overflow water only a foot or so with the ark, and then stand still while God intervened in the flow of the river.

Meanwhile, the evening before, Joshua asked the people to gather together to listen to what he had to say.

"All of you should make yourselves and your garments clean for what will happen tomorrow," he told them. "Before us there is a swift and swollen river to cross. I have already heard that some of you may not think that it's possible to cross it. Have some of you lost faith in your God, who brought you out of many situations far worse than this one? Now be assured that God will again prove to us His power by taking us safely over the river. The ark of the covenant will be carried to the river before you by almost a mile. When those who carry the ark walk into the Jordan, the stream shall cease to flow past the ark! That part of the water to the south shall drain away, leaving a waterless river bed over which we shall cross to the west bank! This should show you that God possesses all the strength and means to get us safely over the river, to drive out our enemies before us and deliver Canaan into our hands!" God made sure that no one entered the promised land with doubts and misgivings.

Joshua then instructed the twelve tribal leaders that each should select a husky man from his tribe and send him to Joshua for a special task. Every man selected, when he passed over the river bed, was to pick up a good-sized stone from the rocky river bottom and carry it to the west bank for building a monument. (Joshua 3:8-13.)

The Jordan Flows Backward!

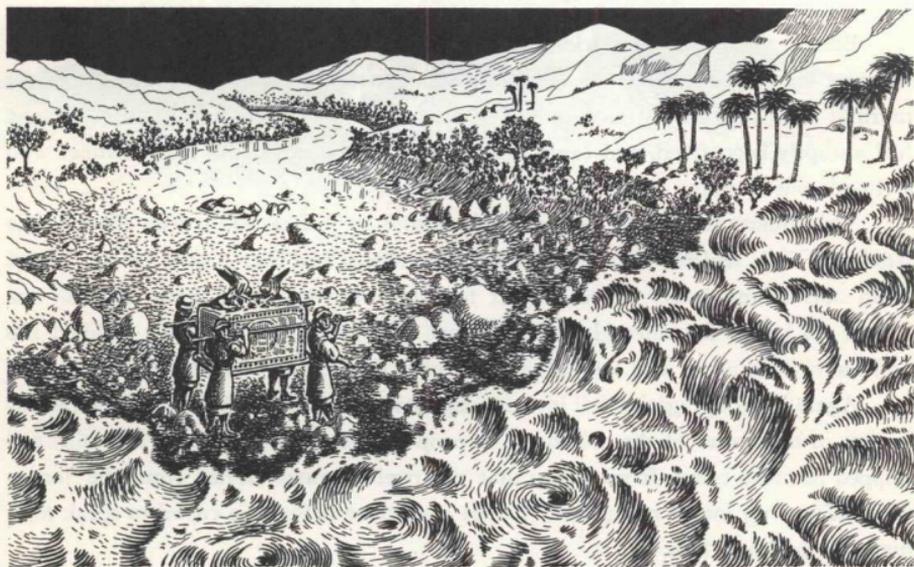
Early that morning the priests started out with the ark. None of the Israelites followed until the priests were almost a mile away, which put them at the edge of the river. They probably hesitated for a minute or so on the east bank, then walked boldly into the swift, muddy water. Every man realized that unless God acted within seconds, men and ark would be swept away downstream.

Before they could wade in up to their knees, the water flowed away to their left. At the same time the water to their right abruptly ceased flowing. In fact, its direction of movement was actually reversed! As the priests continued to march into the midst of the Jordan, it gradually grew higher and spread farther out on its flooded banks to the north.

Thus, with water receding in both directions, a growing expanse of empty river bed was exposed to the view of the marveling priests and those of the waiting Israelites who could see the miracle from a distance.

The bearers of the ark went in to the middle of the river bed and then obediently stood where they were. They felt deep gratitude for being allowed to have a part in such a great miracle. When Joshua had made certain that all was ready, he signaled the Israelites to move on to the river.

It required a long time for close to two million people and their tremendous flocks to pass any given point, the specific number of hours depending on how wide their ranks were. In this event, even though the river bed was emptied for such a great distance, and gave the people plenty of room to spread out, probably the people were pouring over the Jordan for several hours. (Verses 14-17.)



While the priests bearing the ark stood in the bed of the river, the water to their left drained away to the south and the water to their right heaped up and flowed backward to the north!

Whatever the time needed, the priests, who were rugged outdoor men, patiently remained standing where they had walked into the water. They didn't move out of the river bed until the last of the Israelites had passed over, including the lead group of 40,000 soldiers sent by the two and a half tribes already settled east of the Jordan to help take Canaan.

One probably would wonder how men could remain standing so long, especially while holding the ark. Perhaps God gave them special strength to stand for such a long period while bearing a weight.

Except for the priests, the last to pass over the river bed were Joshua, his aides and the twelve men who had been picked to obtain stones from the middle of the river bed for a monument on the west side of the river. Before they picked the stones for that purpose, Joshua had them erect a twelve-stone memorial in the Jordan where the priests had stood so long with the ark. To make this possible, the priests naturally had to move forward a short distance while the men worked.

After the monument in the river was finished (it was still visible in the river many years later when the Bible account was written), each of the twelve men took up from the river bed a stone as large as he could carry and walked out to the west bank.

Promise Miraculously Fulfilled

Behind them came the priests, and as soon as they had carried the ark well up on the west bank, a peculiar murmuring sound came from the north. Within seconds the murmur grew into an alarming roar. The waters that had been held back for so long had abruptly been freed, and came rushing and boiling down the river channel with a thunderous swishing noise! (Joshua 4:1-18.)

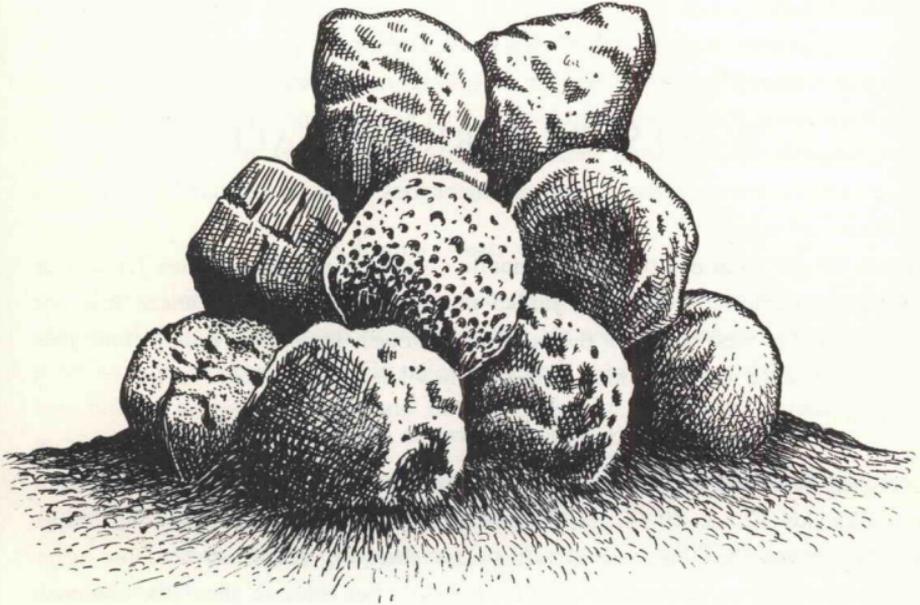
This mighty miracle of God, plainly foretold by Joshua, had a deep effect on the Israelites. They realized now that Joshua, like Moses, had been chosen by the Creator as an outstanding leader. Their respect for him was very great from that day on. (Verse 14.) The Israelites also realized that God had now completely fulfilled His promise to take all of this new generation over the Jordan into the promised land.

Again the congregation fell into moving order, this time with the ark carried by Levites in the center of the column. The people traveled straight west a few miles and stopped to make camp. It was there that the twelve stones carried from the Jordan were stacked up into a monument. Joshua then came before the crowd to speak to as many as could hear him.

"This heap of stones is to be a reminder of God's great miracle in bringing us across the river," he announced. "Tell your children in time to come what it means. Remind them that God also brought Israel across a much greater body of water—the

Red Sea. This monument is also to remind all peoples who see it or learn of it that our God is to be greatly feared and respected.”

Regardless of Joshua’s reference to God’s strength, there were some people who stared fearfully toward the west as night came on. They felt uneasy because the west edge of Israel’s camp was only a little over a mile away from the forbidding walls of the strongly fortified city of Jericho!



CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

WALLS OF JERICHO FALL

IT was on the tenth day of the first month (Nisan in the spring—not January in the winter) that Israel crossed the Jordan river and made camp in Canaan at a spot called Gilgal. The west border of the camp wasn't much more than a mile from Jericho, a thick-walled city swarming with enemy soldiers. (Joshua 4:19-24.)

Israel's First Passover in Canaan

It had been just forty years before—minus five days—that Israel had fled from Egypt. (Exodus 12:18, 29-34, 51; Numbers 14:26-35; Deuteronomy 1:3; Joshua 5:6.) The exodus had been started after their observing the Passover. Now again it was almost time to prepare for another Passover, but before it should be observed, God told Joshua that most of the males of Israel should undergo a physical rite that had been required as a sign and seal of the covenant between the Creator and Israel.

After the Passover the people observed the Days of Unleavened Bread by eating no bread with leavening in it. One of their main dishes was roasted corn that had been taken from the fields of their enemies. This was only one item of food that had been acquired since entering the region of the Jordan. In fact, so many edible things had been taken in recent days that Israel's food supply was sufficient to keep them without gathering manna. As a result, manna, which had been the main food for forty years, ceased to appear on the day after the Passover. (Joshua 5:2-12.)

Meanwhile, there was no sign of Canaanite soldiers except those who could be seen in the distance on the walls of Jericho. Nevertheless, enemy spies kept a close watch on Israel. Their reports on the parting of the river spread quickly to every ruler in that

section of the world. These leaders were greatly concerned by this amazing event. They had felt temporarily secure from Israel because they had considered the Jordan practically impossible to cross during its swollen condition.

The king of Jericho was especially worried. Even though his fighting force was composed of many fierce men skilled in battle, the very numbers of Israelites camped so close to his city were enough to make his nights sleepless. (Joshua 5:1.)

To make certain that no more Israelite spies could get into Jericho, he gave orders that the gates of the city should close and remain closed twenty-four hours a day. No one was to be allowed in or out—except, if necessary, a few special spies of his, and they were let down the walls on rope ladders and brought up the same way.

This was a costly precaution, because it meant turning away caravans arriving from other lands with valuables and food. The king reasoned that it was wiser to remain bottled up with what food was on hand rather than take the slightest risk of allowing any Israelites to enter Jericho in disguise. (Joshua 6:1.)

Joshua Meets the Lord

A few days after Israel had arrived in Gilgal, Joshua went alone, despite the protests of some of his officers, toward Jericho. He wished to see for himself what the place was like at closer range. He suddenly found himself face to face with a sturdy man holding a gleaming sword and gazing intently at him. Joshua strode boldly up to him.

"Are you a friend of Israel or an enemy?" Joshua bluntly inquired of the stranger. (Joshua 5:13.)

"I am not an enemy," the man replied in a firm voice. "I am here as the commander of the army of God!"

It required several seconds for Joshua to realize that he was actually gazing at the Lord, the very One who later also came to this world in human form to be known as Jesus Christ, and who also appeared to Abraham as Melchizedek, king of Salem!

This was Joshua's closest contact with God. He fearfully fell forward and placed his forehead on the ground.

"What would you ask of me, my Lord?" Joshua humbly inquired. We know this man was the Lord—a member of the Godhead—because he allowed Joshua to worship Him. Angels never allow God's servants to worship them. (Revelation 22:8-9.)

"Your feet are on holy ground," was the answer. "Remove your shoes and I shall tell you how to take Jericho."

Joshua lost no time in obeying. Then he carefully listened to the instructions from God. (Joshua 5:14-15.)

"Return to your camp and carry out the orders I have given you," he was told. "If you do just as I have told you to do, it won't be necessary for you to storm the walls or gates of Jericho in order to conquer it, even though many fierce fighting men are garrisoned within that fortress."

Inspired and encouraged in what he should do, Joshua returned to camp. Once he turned to gaze back to where he had been encountered, but there was no one there!

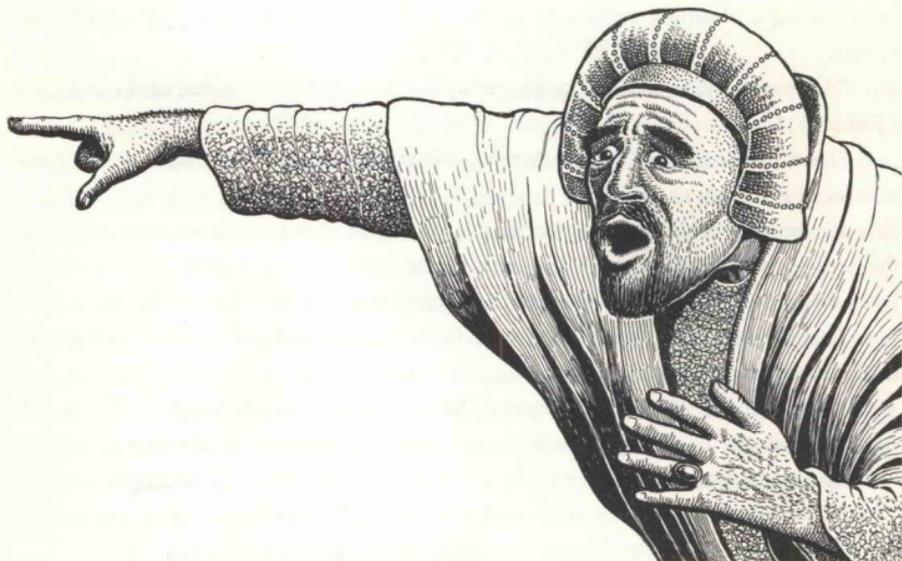
As soon as he arrived back in camp, to the relief of his officers, Joshua told them and the priests of his unusual experience and of God's plan to take Jericho. (Joshua 6:2-7.)

Siege of Jericho Begins

Next day the king of that city was startled by the dreadful news he had been expecting.

"Sentries have just reported seeing many persons on foot approaching from the Israelite camp!" an officer announced.

Surrounded by anxious aides and officers, the king hurried to the east wall. When he saw the growing columns of people marching toward his city, he nervously barked out orders for all soldiers to take their battle stations, and for all civilians to get off



The worried king of Jericho ordered all his soldiers to their battle stations on the walls.

the walls and streets and out of the shops and into their homes or shelters.

As the Canaanites continued watching, they became discouraged, confused and relieved in turns. The foremost of their approaching enemies marched just close enough for discerning that they were soldiers. Then they veered to the left and moved along to the south of the city.

"Why should they give us such a wide berth if they intend to attack?" one officer asked.

"Perhaps they don't intend to attack," another observed. "Possibly they're just moving on to the west."

"That hardly seems possible," the king muttered. "They've taken every city from the Arnon river to Mt. Hermon!"

Rising hope that Israel was moving out and by-passing Jericho was abruptly downed when the foremost Israelite soldiers turned north to parallel the west wall of the city. A little later they turned back eastward to distantly flank Jericho's north wall.

The city was being surrounded by thousands upon thousands of Israelites!

Why they remained at such a distance baffled the Canaanites. Another mystery was the presence of seven long-robed horn blowers marching behind the first large segment of the moving column. As they marched, they held up curved trumpets called shophar, which were made of rams' horns, and emitted shrill blasts that echoed from the hills to the west. Behind the horn blowers marched four more robed men carrying what appeared to be a large box. The Canaanites had no way of knowing that this object was the ark of the covenant, and that the other seven robed men were priests who had been instructed to blow special horns. This was the only sound that came from the Israelites. It was frightfully puzzling to their watchers, because it was the usual habit of soldiers on the march to shout or sing. In this case, the Israelites had been told not to utter a word during the marching around Jericho.

For well over an hour the Canaanites uneasily watched the enemy parade. It required somewhat more than that for any part of the marchers to pass around Jericho and return to the Israelite camp. Jericho's ruler remained on the wall, gravely puzzled as to the meaning of such a weird demonstration. (Joshua 6:8-11.)

"Didn't anyone here think to try counting them?" he impatiently asked.

Canaanites Fear Mounts

"We have estimated that about one hundred thousand passed around the city, sir," an officer spoke out. "As you know, our spies have reported that Israel has at least five or six times that many soldiers."

"Spies are not always right," the king murmured. "This performance today seems to me to be only an effort to display manpower that isn't necessarily there. How do we know that all of them were men? Most of them could have been women and children dressed as soldiers. Why did they parade at such a distance unless they fear our spears, arrows and catapults? If they don't come closer, they can't harm us. Even as besiegers, they would have to hold out many days before our supplies are exhausted, and that isn't the pattern of their operation."

These weakly optimistic remarks from the king did little to generate hope or enthusiasm in those about him. The next day, however, brought a little relief to the Canaanites from their fears when dawn showed no evidence of further siege preparations.

Before long, however, it was observed that Israelites were again approaching Jericho. Renewed excitement and fear reigned in the city for awhile. Then, as they had done the day before, the Israelites swerved southward, later continuing westward to march at a distance from the south wall, swinging north around the west wall, going eastward past the north wall and back to their camp. Meanwhile, there was no chant, shout or song from the Israelites. The only sound was that from the seven horns, whose continuous piercing tones carried loudly to the Canaanites in an irritating, suspenseful and nerve-wracking manner.

"This is obviously some kind of enchantment by which Israel is trying to overcome us without attacking us," the king of Jericho proclaimed to his people after the Israelites had finished their second day of marching around the city. "Why should we allow enchantments from these foreigners to bother us? I have heard that they have only one God. We have many gods to protect us."

Next day the Israelites appeared for the third time to march around Jericho in the same manner and at the same distance. As usual there was the strange box-like object and the seven men going before it while blowing their horns.

On the fourth day the same thing happened. By now many of the Canaanites were becoming increasingly fearful because they didn't know just what to expect. Some believed that a great, consuming fire might fall from the sky. Others were afraid of all kinds of calamities. Some, in an effort to hide their growing fears, began to joke about the Israelites.

Next day the Israelites came around again. This time, although the ruler of Jericho wasn't completely in favor of it, the soldiers lining the tops of the walls lifted their voices in loud taunts to the Israelites to come closer. The ruler didn't wish to do anything to rouse the ire of the enemy, but at the same time he felt that his soldiers' morale could be sparked up if they were allowed to deride Israel. The marchers could

plainly hear the challenges, but they remained silent except for the blaring of their seven horns.

For six days the Israelites marched once around the city in the early morning of each day. (Joshua 6:12-14.) On the sixth day the Canaanites shouted even louder at the Israelites as they passed around the city, though they actually believed that if the whole Israelite fighting force should accept their dares and attack, losses by the Canaanites would be much greater than any harm they could inflict upon Israel.

"This is a silly, time-consuming, childish game these people are playing," Jericho's ruler announced to the people and soldiers in an effort to boost morale. "Their intended enchantment failed to work the first time, and now they are merely repeating it again and again in the hope that it will finally take effect. It should be plain by now that these people cannot harm us by such means." The city's king just couldn't understand God's plan of battle.

Israelite Tactics Change

Inasmuch as the Israelites had been encircling Jericho a little after sunrise each day, Canaanite sentries were surprised when they saw the marching column approaching at early dawn on the seventh day. High officers feared that this might indicate some drastic change in Israel's plans, and the king was immediately notified of what was happening outside the wall.

The Israelites went around the city in the same manner as usual, but the more interesting fact was that instead of returning to camp, they began to encircle the city again. In fact, they spent almost the whole day marching around Jericho. By mid-afternoon they had made six rounds and were starting on the seventh. (Joshua 6:15.)

At this point another unusual thing happened. Hundreds of thousands more soldiers had strode out from Israel's camp and now joined the marchers. The bright, palm-studded plains around Jericho gradually grew dark with the growing immensity of armed forces.

The challenging hoots and shouts that had been coming from the Canaanites gradually died away when Israel's military strength was displayed. Many people within the city fell into a state of panic when they realized how many fighting men were confronting them. This fear and panic spread like a contagious disease, only much more rapidly. Even the ruler and his officers were grim-faced and nervously silent. No jeering taunts or attempts to belittle Israel's might could boost the Canaanites' morale now that they were faced by the stark cold fact of Israel's true strength. The people in Jericho felt doomed.

It was late afternoon when the Israelites finally finished marching around the city

for the seventh time. At this juncture the ark and the trumpet blowers were just east of Jericho. There they stopped, and all the other marchers came to a halt.

Greater tension gripped the Canaanites. Jericho's ruler, who had been squirming in anxiety in a chair inside one of the wall towers, came slowly to his feet. He stared unblinkingly out at Israel's silently threatening throng.

At that moment the seven horn blowers, who had not sounded for several minutes, blew an unusually long, high blast. This was followed by a chilling surge of shouts from the people surrounding Jericho, those in Israel's camp and the many who were spread out between, as Joshua had commanded them to do. (Joshua 6:16-19.)

The noise that resulted from the millions of throats was like the thunder and hiss of a tidal wave crashing against a rocky cliff.

Divine Overthrow

Within seconds, however, the vast din of voices was drowned in another noise—an ominous, deep rumble approaching like the growing reverberation of the hoofs of millions of swiftly approaching horses!

Those on the walls felt a sickening sway. Those inside the city were aghast to see widening cracks appear in the cobbled and bricked streets. Screaming people began to pour out of the buildings. Those on the walls began to race down steps and ladders to a firmer footing.

But it was too late to find safety. The walls, as well as the streets, were already cleaving.

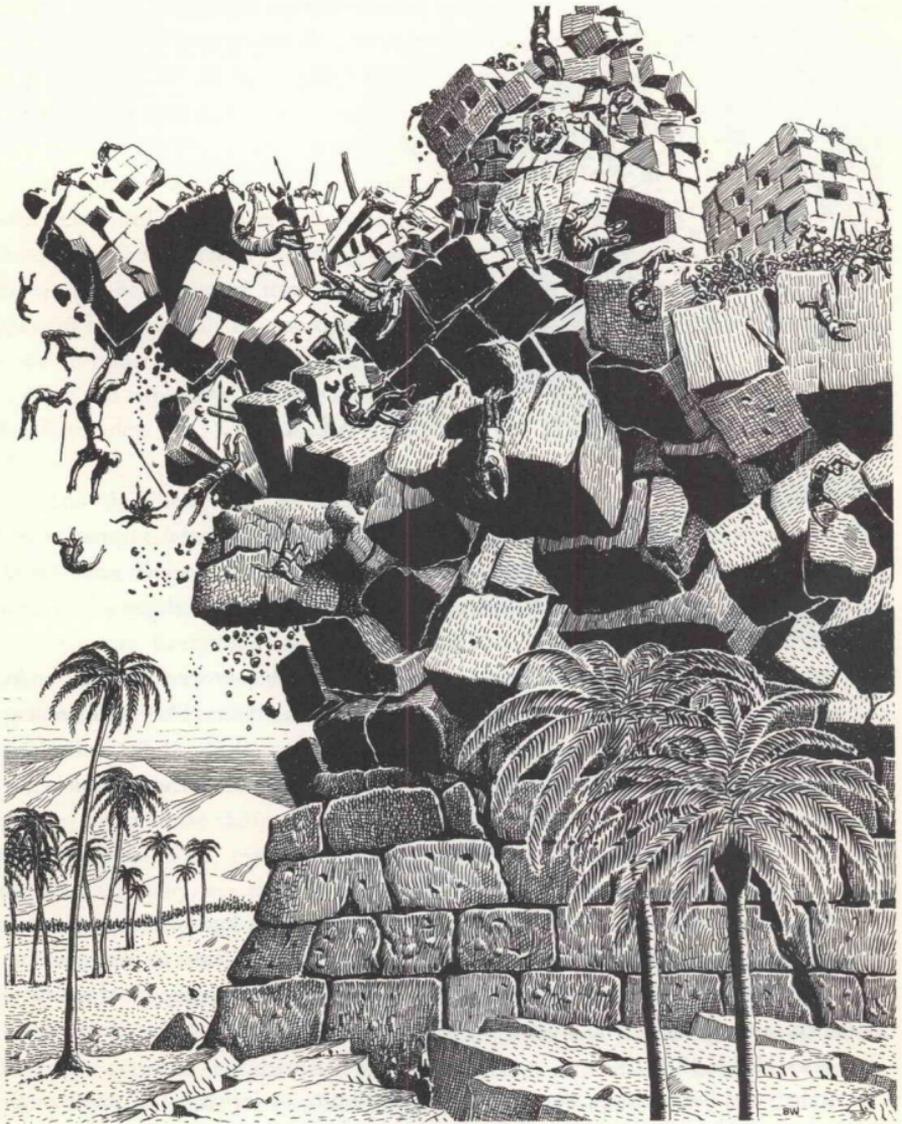
In the midst of the ear-splitting clatter, the king and his officers were among the first to realize, in their last moments of life, that the mighty God of Israel didn't even recognize the puny, powerless gods and idols of this world. (Deuteronomy 4:39; Isaiah 45:5; I Corinthians 8:5-6; Isaiah 2:20-21.)

Then the walls of Jericho reeled violently outward and crashed down with a deafening roar. (Joshua 6:20.)

Skeptics used to ridicule this miracle. But the skeptics were wrong. Jericho's wall did fall down flat.

Archaeologists have found the ruins of Jericho just where God said the city was. And after carefully excavating the site for several years, world-famous archaeologists found that the earth had preserved an amazing record of God's miraculous destruction of Jericho.

The walls of the city that fell in Joshua's day could clearly be seen to have fallen *outward* and *flat*, as the Bible stated in Joshua 6:20. This record has been described in many books dealing with Jericho. In only one place was the wall left standing. That must



The walls of Jericho swayed crazily, then split apart and crashed down with a thundering roar!

have been where Rahab's house was built, because God had promised to protect her and her family because of her faith. (Hebrews 11:30-31.)

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

ONE MAN'S SIN—

THE THUNDERING collapse of the walls of Jericho was no great surprise to the Israelites. They had been told by God, through Joshua, what to do and what would happen. Even so, it was a chilling experience to witness the death of thousands as they tumbled with the walls. (Joshua 6:16-20.)

The Israelite soldiers knew what to do at that point. They broke from their ranks and rushed into the spreading clouds of dust, scrambling over the rubble in a tightening circle to hem in all the Canaanites who hadn't died in the collapse of the walls. The Israelites swiftly obeyed the strict order to slay every human being and animal in the city.

Only One Family Spared

The only people spared were Rahab, the inn proprietress, and her close relatives. Because Rahab had determined to quit serving pagan gods and learn to obey the true God, and had acted on her new faith, God listed her in the faith chapter of the New Testament among those who trusted in God and are promised a better resurrection. (Hebrews 11:31, 35.)

Rahab and her relatives were in the inn at the time of Jericho's fall, and though the inn was built on the wall, that particular portion of the wall was miraculously spared. A group of soldiers, led by the two scouts who had promised protection to Rahab, went up the inside of the piece of wall and brought Rahab, those related to her and their possessions to a safe place outside Israel's camp. (Verses 20-23.)

The account of the perishing of the idolatrous inhabitants of Jericho by God's

command is an episode, among many others, that various religious leaders in high offices declare should be removed from the Bible. They feel that God used poor judgment in allowing such accounts to be written into the scriptures. But in reality, when God had these wretched idolaters destroyed, He was actually showing them mercy. In the judgment they and other ignorant idolaters will be resurrected and given an opportunity to learn God's way to peace and happiness. (Matthew 12:41, 42; Revelation 20:11-12; Isaiah 65:19-25.)

The Israelites had already been warned not to take any booty of any kind from Jericho except articles of gold, silver, brass and iron, which were to go into God's treasury. Everything else and everyone in Jericho was accursed, but items made of these metals could later be purified by fire. These things were carefully sought out and set aside to later go into the treasury of God's sanctuary. No one was to keep any of these things for himself, nor was anyone to take for himself things such as clothes, food, precious stones, animals and so forth. Any person who took any personal booty was to become accursed by God, and would bring such a curse on Israel that all would suffer. (Joshua 6:17-19.)

After the metals had been removed, the Israelites set fire to Jericho. Although most of the walls and many of the buildings had been built of stone and bricks, a great part of the city was made up of heavy beams, poles, planks and boards. There were other flammable materials, but the wood alone was enough to produce a tremendous fire in which dead Canaanites were at least partly cremated. (Verses 24-25.)

As for that standing portion of the wall on which Rahab's inn was located, it came crashing down when the wooden beams supporting her house were burned.

By now darkness had come on. Carrying their booty, the Israelites turned from the blazing ruins and returned to camp.

Next morning Joshua called a meeting of the elders and officers.



The only part of the Jericho wall that did not fall was that in which Rahab and her family stayed.

Jericho's Desolation a Memorial

"Pass on the word to all the people," Joshua informed them, "that no man should ever rebuild Jericho. It could present a strong temptation, what with the great wall stones and wells remaining there. Anyone who reconstructs the city will fall under a curse from the Creator, and he shall become childless. His oldest child shall die when he lays the foundation and his youngest shall die when he sets up the city gates. Let the ashes and stones of Jericho be a monument to the destruction that will come to all idol-worshippers." This prophecy was fulfilled about 500 years later when a very foolish Israelite rebuilt Jericho. (I Kings 16:34.)

News of the fall of Jericho spread swiftly over the land, and Joshua became famous in that part of the world because of his leading Israel to take the city. Consequently, fear of Israel mounted in the surrounding nations. (Joshua 6:27.)

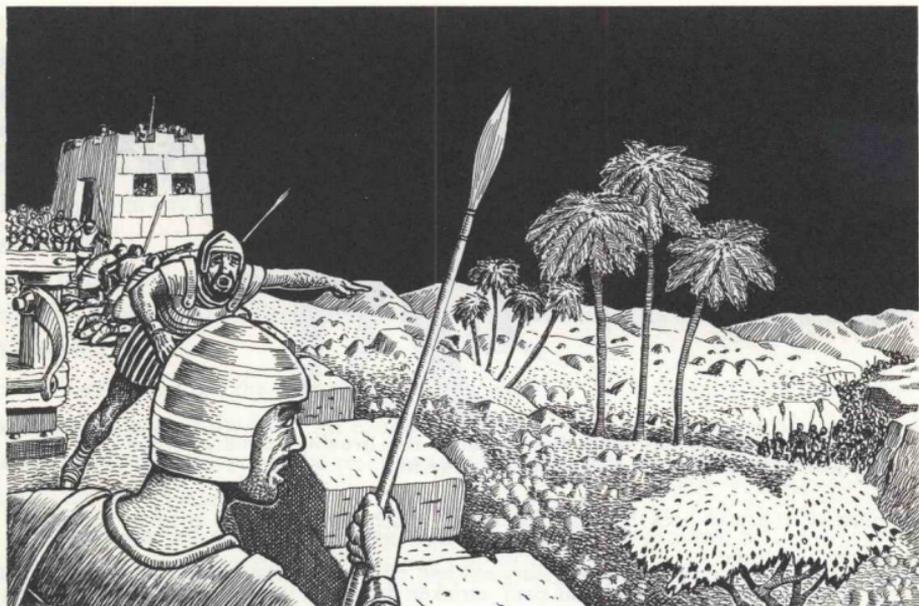
The next city Joshua intended to conquer was called Ai. It was about twelve miles from Jericho in a westerly direction, and though it was considerably smaller than the destroyed city, Joshua had no intention to by-pass any fortress that might later prove a source of trouble.

Again scouts were used to obtain information. When they returned from Ai, they reported that this Amorite fortress wasn't very large or strong, and that it would be no great problem for Israel to attack and destroy it.

"It won't be necessary for all or even a great part of our army to attack this place," the scouts told Joshua. "The walls aren't very high, and it is too small to contain very many fighting men. Two or three thousand of our soldiers should be able to conquer it." (Joshua 7:2-3.)

At first it seemed to Joshua that it would be risky to send such a small number of soldiers, but then he began to wonder if he would be showing a lack of faith in what God could do for Israel by sending ten or twenty times as many men as the scouts suggested. After all, the scouts he sent were chosen from among his best officers and were men of good judgment. Joshua concluded that it wouldn't be necessary to send more than three thousand men.

A few hours later the Israelite soldiers emerged from the caravan road leading up from the Jordan valley, and saw the city of Ai atop a ridge. It was evident that they could be plainly seen by the Amorites, and that a surprise attack would be impossible. Nevertheless, the Israelite soldiers were confident because of what God had done for them at Jericho, and they marched boldly up to Ai. Their leader was certain that the Amorites would surrender when they were told to give up without a fight or be set upon by the whole Israelite army.



Although the Israelite soldiers realized that they could plainly be seen by enemy soldiers, they boldly approached the city of Ai.

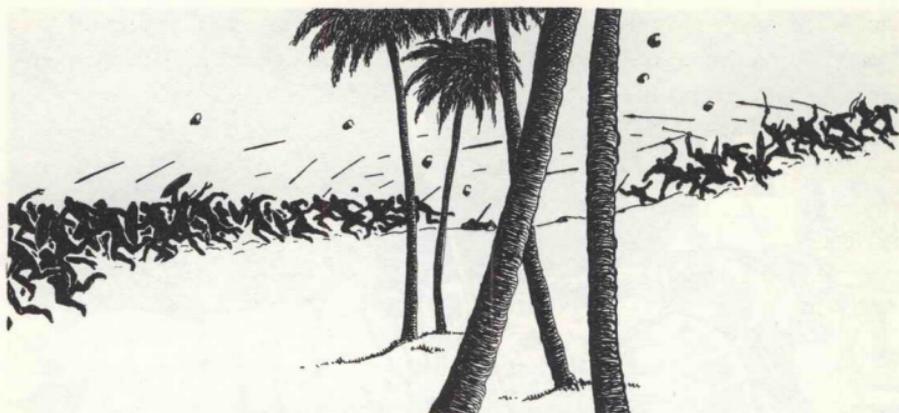
Tragedy at Ai

Suddenly the gate of Ai swung open, and thousands of screaming Amorite soldiers rushed out at their would-be attackers!

The Israelites had supposed that the inhabitants of Ai would be quaking with fear, and this abrupt turn of events so surprised them that they momentarily froze in their tracks. By the time they got into action, spears and arrows from the onrushing Amorites were raining into the ranks of the Israelites, and some of these weapons were finding fatal marks. On top of that, rock catapults atop the south wall had gone into operation, and huge stones were thudding among the Israelites.

"Where is the help and defense God promised us?" was the question that crossed the minds of most of the Israelite soldiers. It was being made shamefully obvious to the Israelites that God's protection, since the crossing of the Jordan, hinged upon their obedience.

Faith in their Creator swiftly fled, and so did the Israelites. Instead of fighting back, they turned and raced away through a hail of stones, arrows and spears. This cowardly move spurred the screaming Amorites to greater boldness, and they pursued their



Instead of standing their ground, the Israelite soldiers turned and fled before the attacking Amorites.

enemies all the way back through the defile which contained the road by which the Israelites had come.

When at last the routed and panic-stricken Israelites were clear of their pursuers and could group safely together, they found that the Amorites had slain thirty-six of their number and had wounded many more.

It was a dejected and disgraced piece of army that returned to camp. When the people heard what had happened, their confidence in God tumbled to a new low. They couldn't understand why God would promise them swift victory over all their enemies, and then allow about three thousand of their soldiers to be disorganized, chased and crippled by the idol-worshipping Amorites. (Joshua 7:4-5.)

In those days it was the custom to show regret, self-reproach or humiliation by tearing one's clothes and tossing dust upon his head. That was what Joshua did when he heard what had happened. He was so upset and discouraged that he called the elders together before the tabernacle to join him until sundown in prostration and an attitude of repentance.

"Why have you brought us over Jordan to let us fall into the hands of the Amorites?" Joshua inquired of God as he lay with his face to the ground inside the tabernacle. "It would have been better for us to stay on the east side of the river than try to attack our enemies here and end up fleeing in terror from them. When all the Canaanites and other nations hear of this, they shall decide we are really weak, and shall come with their combined forces to surround us. We shall be destroyed, and the great name of our God shall be disgraced!" (Verses 6-9.)

"These things haven't happened because of any unfaithfulness on my part," God

replied. "My orders were that no booty should be taken from Jericho for personal gain. I warned Israel that anyone who did so would become as accursed as Jericho's people, and that a curse would fall on all Israel as a result. Someone has gone against my will in this matter, and a curse has fallen on this nation. That is why the attempt to conquer Ai was a failure. My help and strength was not with the soldiers, nor will my help be with Israel again in any attempt to overcome your enemies until you remove and destroy the guilty one."

Joshua was surprised and shocked when he heard this. It hadn't occurred to him that the defeat of his soldiers could be due to someone obtaining booty from Jericho and hiding it.

"Get up and tell the people what has happened," God continued. "Tell them that they cannot successfully face their enemies until the guilty one is removed, and that they should wash themselves and be ready to appear before you tomorrow while the guilty one is found." (Verses 10-15.)

Joshua obeyed, and next morning the heads of the tribes gathered before the tabernacle and drew lots to learn what tribe had the guilty person. The tribe of Judah drew the telling lot. Then it was up to the heads of the families of Judah to draw lots. The head of the family of the Zarhites drew the unwanted lot, and next it was the turn of the household heads of the Zarhites to draw lots. According to the manner in which God caused the lots to be drawn, the household turned out to be that of Zabdi.

The men of the household of Zabdi solemnly gathered together to do their part. The vast crowd of silent onlookers knew that one of these men was responsible for the death of thirty-six men, the injury of many others and the swift and humiliating retreat of the Israelites from Ai. (Verses 16-18.)

The Guilty Man Found

The lot indicating guilt was drawn by a man by the name of Achan, referred to in other scriptures as Achar. (I Chronicles 2:7.) Long before the lot was drawn, it was evident to many bystanders that this man was the one being sought. His face grew more drawn and his expression more frightened as matters proceeded.

The pale and shaking Achan was brought before Joshua.

"Don't try to hide your evil deed," Joshua advised him. "Honor your God by confessing what you have done."

"I—I didn't realize at the time how much I was sinning against the God of Israel!" Achan tearfully burst out as he fell to his knees and bowed his head. "I was tramping through the rubble of Jericho with other soldiers when I stumbled by myself into the remains of what surely had been the dwelling quarters of a wealthy Canaanite family.

When I looked around and saw many valuable things that could increase my family's living standard, I didn't think it would greatly matter to take some of them, especially because most of them would be burned and wasted. One of the things that caught my eye was a beautiful Babylonian robe that shone as though it were woven of golden threads from a rainbow. I stuffed the robe under my jacket, scooped up a handful of silver coins from a chest, grabbed some small object that looked as though it were solid gold, jammed these things into my pouch and then climbed out of the place to join the other soldiers." (Joshua 7:19-21.)



When Achan saw that he was alone, he quickly snatched up some of the valuables out of the rubble and hid them inside his clothing.

obedient as to bring so much trouble on his people.

"I didn't mean to bring on what happened," Achan murmured. "I just didn't take God's warning seriously concerning how much one person's sin can affect others!"

Those were Achan's last words. He was led away to be stoned to death in the sight of his family and thousands of others.

Then he and all his possessions were burned and a great heap of stones was piled over his body. Since he had tried to enrich his family by rebellion, his family had to stand by and watch all their livestock and other property destroyed as a warning to all. (Joshua 7:22-26.)

Joshua returned to the tabernacle to humbly ask God to be merciful to the Israelites and strengthen them against their enemies.

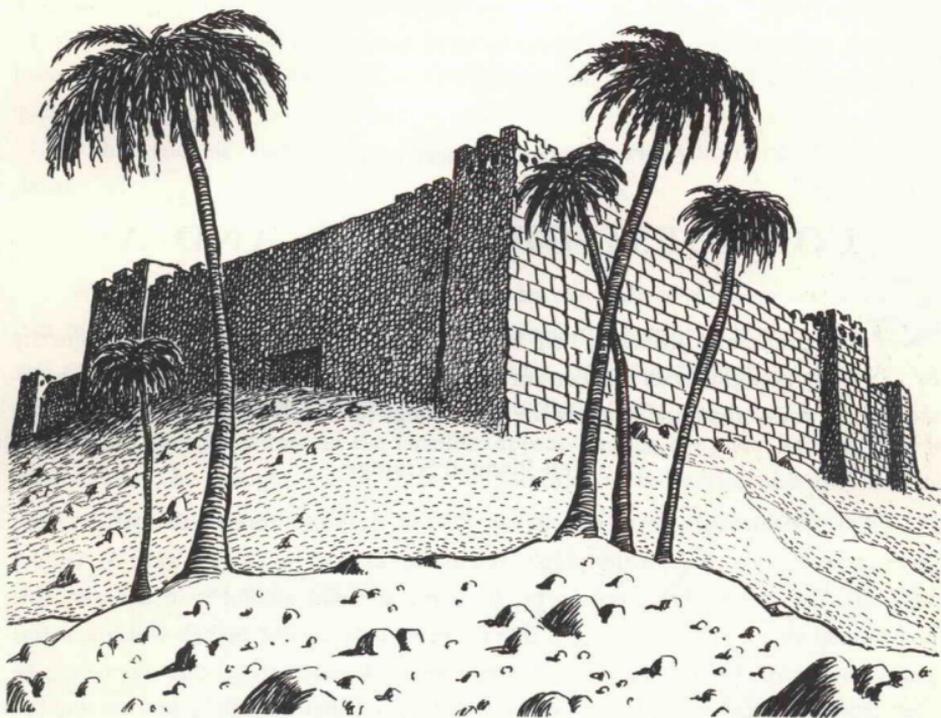
"Where are these things now?" Joshua queried.

"I buried them in the ground inside my tent," was the painful reply.

Joshua immediately rushed officers to Achan's tent. They returned within a few minutes to show Joshua a costly Babylonish type garment, a number of silver coins and a small, wedge shaped bar of gold.

Joshua was aware of the unpleasant event that had to follow. According to God's orders, Achan and his family, his livestock and his possessions—including the things he had stolen—were taken to a spot well outside the camp of Israel. There Joshua again confronted Achan to ask him why he had been so thoughtless and dis-

"Don't be discouraged," God told him. "Now that the accursed man has been removed, I have removed my curse and my anger. Now take the army and go to the city of Ai. Use some of your men to bait the Amorites into coming out. Hide the greater part of the army so that they can surprise the enemy. Then you will see how I shall deliver Ai and all its people to you!" (Joshua 8:1-2.)



CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

CONQUEST OF BETHEL AND AI

GOD's promise to Joshua to help in a second attempt to conquer the Canaanite city of Ai swiftly brought Israel's leader out of his state of discouragement. Joshua immediately chose thirty thousand soldiers for the strategy he had in mind.

Well-Planned Strategy

"I'm not sending you to directly attack Ai," Joshua informed the officers who were to be in command. "Late tonight you are to take your soldiers toward Ai. Guides will show you the way. Do not go far from the city. Go around it to the west side and conceal yourselves in the rugged country behind Ai toward Bethel, which is a few miles west of Ai. I shall send others before dawn. Be very careful that no one can be seen from Ai or from the city of Bethel to the west. I shall go with a few thousand to be in the valley just north of Ai when the sun comes up. When the people of Ai discover us, they will rush out to attack and we will flee from them. When you who are hiding west of Ai see me waving a bright banner from the end of my spear, you will know that it is time to rush into Ai and set the city on fire. The huge fire will attract the attention of our pursuers. The 5,000 soldiers on the west and the troops on the north side of the valley are then to move swiftly in on the confused enemy." (Josh. 8:1-13.)

It was well after dark when the thirty thousand fully equipped foot soldiers set out to the northwest. Guides led them to a safe hiding place just west of Ai. Every effort was made to muffle the stomp, clank and jingle of marching men as they moved into the heights between Ai and the adjoining city of Bethel.

When at last the soldiers reached an area where they could hide, they rested for the remainder of the night. The only fires allowed were small ones hidden under

overhanging rocks that would eclipse any show of light.

Joshua remained at the Israelite camp at Gilgal until after midnight. Then he set out with the elders of Israel and officers and the remainder of the soldiers. In the early morning hours they arrived on the north side of Ai. By the time he arrived, it was not far from dawn. There wasn't any time to be lost in preparing for what had to be done.

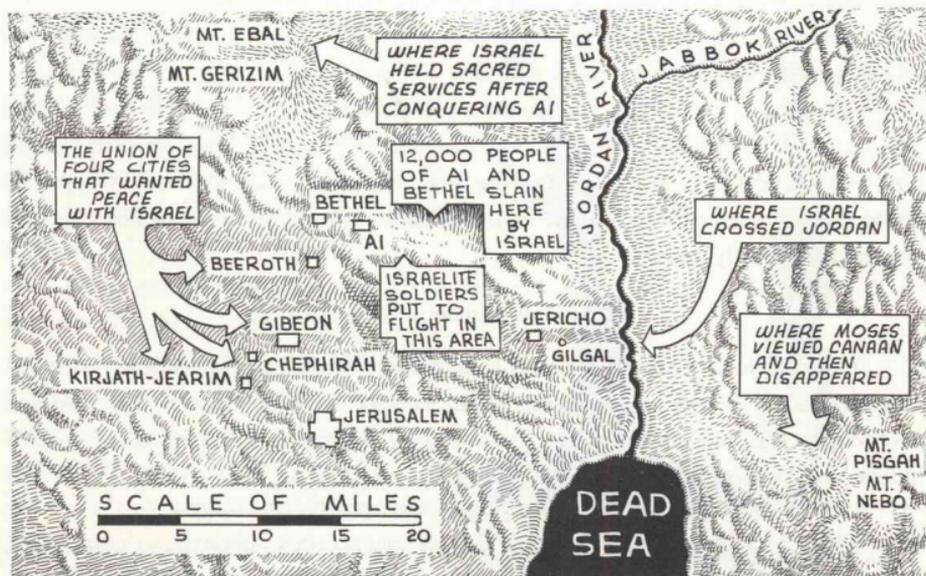
"Take five thousand soldiers and move in between Ai and Bethel before sun-up," Joshua instructed some of his officers. "Make sure no one from Bethel hinders our conquest of Ai."

Joshua and his "bait" forces moved down into the valley north of Ai just before dawn.

Ai Caught Off Guard

When light came over the area, guards on the wall of Ai were startled to see that military forces were approaching the city from the north side of the valley. Word was sent to the king of Ai who was still feeling victorious because his soldiers had previously routed what was considered an invincible army.

When the king witnessed the Israelites approaching on the plain, he became very excited. Here, he thought, was a golden opportunity to twice vanquish the dreaded enemy that had invaded Canaan. Any city or nation that could put Israel on the run



two times would be regarded as gloriously heroic and powerful. Flushed with the thought of a second victory, the king lost no time in ordering most of his men out to clash with the Israelites before they could reach Ai.

The north gate of the city swung open, and out rushed the howling troops of Ai to head swiftly down into the valley and directly toward the Israelites. Intending to make a great name for himself as the leader of the forces that would overcome the feared Israelites, the king of the city rode out with his men. When the two forces were only a few hundred feet apart, the king noticed that the Israelites suddenly came to a halt. It seemed that they were getting ready to make a stand, but when they turned and ran off eastward in the direction of the Jordan river, the ruler of Ai could scarcely believe his eyes.

"We've got them on the run already!" one of the king's officers shouted.

"Send a man back to the city!" the king shouted back excitedly. "Tell him that I order every man there, and also the soldiers from Bethel, to join us at once and wipe out the Israelites even if we have to drive them all the way to the Jordan!"

Still at a safe distance away in the valley, Joshua and the soldiers with him continued to move away in feigned flight. When Joshua saw a second regiment pouring out of Ai, he was certain that there couldn't be many more men, if any, remaining in the city. (Joshua 8:14-17.)

The time had come for Joshua to wave a bright banner attached to his spear. The signal was seen by sharp-eyed lookouts west of Ai. They motioned to the 30,000 men hiding about and below them. Within minutes the thirty thousand Israelite soldiers were racing into the unmanned city.

Already the men of Ai and Bethel were too far away to hear the loud screams of the women and children whom they had left undefended. They were shortening the distance between themselves and the Israelites, and contact and victory appeared to be only minutes away when one of the officers moved close to the excited king and gestured frantically toward the rear.

Idolatrous Canaanites Trapped

The king looked around, and his expression of almost gleeful anticipation faded from his face. He gave a signal to halt. The bewildered soldiers came to a stop and looked about to see why they had been ordered to stop. Then all of them saw the smoke and flames belching up from inside the walls of Ai!

"We've been tricked!" the king roared. "Get back to the city!"

When Joshua saw the Canaanite soldiers stop and set off in the opposite direction, and saw smoke billowing up from Ai, he again waved the banner he had been

holding. The men with him suddenly turned on the Canaanites. The thousands of Israelite soldiers hiding at the north rim of the valley opposite Ai leaped out of hiding and stormed down the slopes at a right angle to the path of the enemy troops racing back toward the cities of Ai and Bethel. The 5,000 in hiding on the west plunged toward Bethel.



The King of Ai was horrified when he turned to look back on his city.

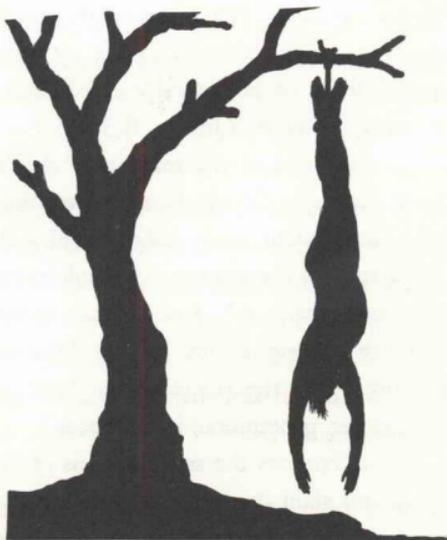
Those who tried to flee up the south slope of the valley were overtaken and slaughtered. The only man to be captured alive was the king. (Joshua 8:18-23.)

Leaving thousands of dead bodies littering the valley, the Israelites converged on Ai and destroyed the rest of the pagans who remained there. Not until then did Joshua lower the banner that waved from his spear.

Things of value were removed from the city, and then it was burned. As for the king of Ai, he was hanged on a tree as a punishment for his gross idolatry. At sunset his body was cut down, tossed on the ground before one of the gates of Ai and covered with a large heap of stones. News of the king's disgraceful end was certain to swiftly reach other rulers of nearby

Then out of Ai rushed the thirty thousand Israelites who had set the fires in the streets of the city to lure the enemy soldiers back. Joining the other troops they set off directly toward the oncoming troops of Ai and Bethel. At the same time Joshua and the men with him began pursuing the Canaanites westward.

Boxed in on three sides by rapidly approaching troops, the Canaanites had to stand and fight or race madly about trying to find a way of escape to the south. Those who tried to fight were quickly wiped out.



The would-be defender of Ai was slain and suspended from a tree outside the city he had ruled.

cities, communities and nations, and thus add to the fear and terror growing in that region of paganism.

What was more likely to impress the other nations, however, was that twelve thousand Canaanite men and women perished that day. (Verses 24-29.)

A Blessing and a Curse

After the victors had returned to Gilgal with their booty and had rested a few days, Joshua declared that a special ceremony would be held in an area several miles north of Ai. All Israel made the journey over rough country, the ark being carried along as usual. The only ones who didn't go along were a few soldiers to watch over the camp and take care of the animals.

The people congregated on the slopes of two neighboring high points, Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim, as Moses had commanded them (Deuteronomy 11:29-30). They watched and listened as the sacred ceremonies took place. An altar was erected on Mt. Ebal, of unhewn stones as God had commanded. (Exodus 20:25.) Burnt offerings and peace offerings were made there. Joshua read to the people the many blessings that would come to them through obedience, and the cursings that would come to them through disobedience. These things were written on the stones of the altar.

The laws from God, given through Moses, were also read to the people in this solemn assembly. The voices of the readers on the mountains rang out with miraculous, far-reaching volume to the more than two million scattered over the area, to remind them of how God wanted them to live, and of the tremendous importance of being obedient. (Joshua 8:30-35.)

At the end of the reading of the laws, six tribes on Mt. Gerizim summarized God's blessings for obedience. Then the other six tribes on Mt. Ebal echoed the curses that would surely befall Israel if they broke the law. (Deuteronomy 27:1-19.)

After the ceremonies the people camped and then started the return trip to Gilgal.

Israel made this journey into enemy territory and back without encountering so much as one enemy soldier. However, the movements of the people weren't unnoticed, and the rulers of the land became more distressed when they heard of this greater penetration into Canaan.

For centuries the small nations of the region of Canaan had warred among themselves and slain one another. Now that a foreign enemy had entered the land, the rulers put aside their differences and decided to pool their fighting forces and put up a united front against Israel. Israel had no knowledge of these particular plans, though Joshua and his officers were aware that such a thing could happen. (Joshua 9:1-2.)

While this threat to Israel was being organized, several dusty travelers one day approached Gilgal with their burros. Alert Israelite guards went out to stop them, but brought them into the camp to meet Joshua after they requested to visit with the leader of the Israelites.

"We are ambassadors from a distant nation," a spokesman for the strangers declared. "We have heard how your people have come up from the south to conquer the nations in this part of the world. We have come a long way to meet you and to ask you to promise our nation, because we are peaceful people, that you will not carry on war with us if ever you reach our borders." (Verses 3-6.)

"You men could be from any of the enemy nations close around us," Joshua told them. "We need proof that you are from this distant nation you have mentioned. Otherwise, it would be foolish to make a promise to you that we would refrain from attacking your nation."

"We assure you, sir," the spokesman replied, "that we are not from any enemy nation. We will be your servants. We have been sent here by the leaders and people of our country—a distant one—to tell you that they have heard of the fame of your great God. They are aware of how He dealt with the ruler of Egypt, and how He helped you become victorious over the Amorites and the kings of Heshbon and Bashan. When our people realized how your God helped you in these battles, they knew that it would be foolish to try to stand against you, so they sent us to ask you to promise not to attack a country so respectful of your power and your God."

"It could be as you say," Joshua said, "but as genuine ambassadors you should have some credentials or proof of whom you are."

Logical Sounding Lies

"We were purposely not given any," was the reply. "Our superiors knew that if we were stopped by soldiers of any of our neighboring nations, and if it were found that we were ambassadors on a secret peaceful mission to Israel, the neighboring nations would then consider our nation as an enemy. In fact, for the sake of our country's safety, we were told not to even mention the name of our people. Our superiors hope that this matter can be worked out with our remaining completely nameless for the sake of safety, extreme as it seems. Then, if ever Israel arrives at our borders, we shall make ourselves known."

"I've never heard of anything like this," Joshua murmured to his officers as he shook his head. "I think it's time to end this conversation and send these men away."

"Something occurs to me, sir," the spokesman for the strangers suddenly remarked. "Perhaps we can at least prove that we are from a distant nation if you will examine our



The strangers refused to reveal the name of their nation, but they claimed that it was at a great distance from Canaan.

clothes and the few things we have with us!"

"Here is something worth considering," an officer whispered to Joshua. "A careful examination of these men's possessions might give us some valuable clues as to how far they have come."

After a minute of thought Joshua nodded his approval. The strangers were taken out to where their burros were tied, and all that these men had was carefully examined by competent officers. A few minutes later the officers reported to Joshua.

"Obviously they actually have come a long way," Joshua was told. "Their clothes are dusty and stained with days of travel. Their shoes are well worn as from many miles of walking. Even the sacks on their burros are old-looking as from many hours of exposure to wind, sun and dew. Their empty leather wine bottles are dried out and cracked. They brought out what food they had left. It was hard, moldy bread they claimed was freshly baked the day they started out for here." (Joshua 9:7-13.)

To Joshua and his officers this seemed fair evidence that these men had come a great distance from a foreign land.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

“AND THE SUN STOOD STILL”

JOSHUA and the elders had just received men who claimed to be ambassadors from a far away land. They came to seek peace. If so, reasoned the elders, then there would be no particular harm in promising not to attack a nation that wasn't included among the enemy nations of Canaan. Although these men looked like swarthy Canaanites, Joshua knew that some similar tribes had gone to other lands, especially north Africa, to live.

The elders of Israel were told of these things, and it was decided that it would be well to do what the strangers asked, and promise no harm to their nation. This was carried out in a solemn ceremony with Joshua, the strangers, priests and elders present. However, though there was an element of doubt present in this matter, God wasn't consulted. (Joshua 9:3-15.) God's warning against making peace with Canaanites was temporarily neglected, and Israel's leaders paid more attention to these strangers than to God.

New clothes and provisions were supplied the strange ambassadors. After they were given food and overnight lodging with the Israelites, they thankfully and smilingly set off to the north to their mysterious nation.

“Send several armed scouts to follow them without being seen,” Joshua ordered. “I am curious to know just where they came from.”

It wasn't expected that the scouts would return for many days, and it was a surprise when they returned early on the third day.

“It wasn't necessary to be gone any longer,” they reported. “The men we followed went north for a few miles, then turned west and went directly to the Hivite city of

Gibeon about twenty miles to the west. If that is their home, then Israel has promised to spare a city or nation well within the promised land!" (Verse 16.)

"We have been tricked!" Joshua muttered. "Get fifty thousand troops ready to move, and we'll go straighten this matter out!"

Treachery Discovered

Having been informed that the strange men claiming to have come from a distant nation had gone to a city only about twenty miles from Gilgal, Joshua was quite perturbed. These men had exacted a promise from Joshua that Israel would not attack their country. Now it was quite evident that their "country" was an area well within the bounds of Canaan, and God had instructed Israel to destroy all nations, cities and people within those bounds. Obviously these men had tricked Israel into a sacred promise to spare their people, which was against God's will.

The many thousands of Israel's soldiers quickly assembled at Joshua's command. Led by scouts who had followed the men responsible for tricking Israel into a peace pact, Joshua and his soldiers spent three days in arriving at their destination. It was the walled city of Gibeon, the capital of a district of dark-skinned people called Hivites. Four Hivite cities, including Gibeon, had joined in this strategy in seeking peace with Israel. (Joshua 9:16-17.)

The Israelite soldiers moved boldly within the shadows of the walls of Gibeon, but there was no sign of soldiers on the walls to protect the city.

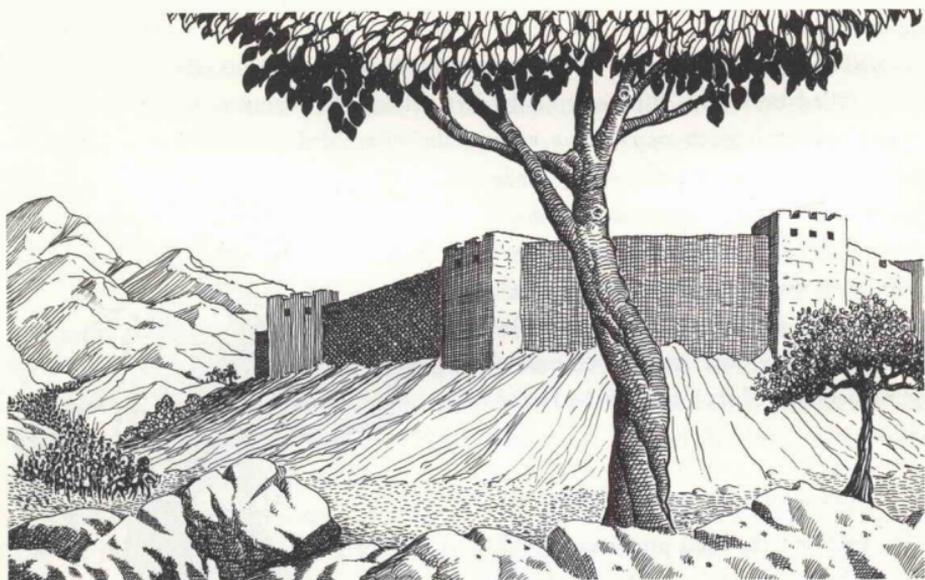
"Send men to the gate with this message," Joshua told his officers. "Have our men tell them that those men who came to see us in Gilgal must be sent out to speak with us right away."

A group of soldiers went to the nearest gate and loudly repeated Joshua's request. There was a response only a few minutes later. The gate swung open, and out walked the men who had come to Gilgal posing as strangers from a distant nation. A few Hivites of high rank accompanied them. Behind them was a crowd of Hivites silently watching to see what would happen. The "ambassadors" sheepishly walked up to Joshua and his officers.

"Why did you go to all the trouble of trying to fool us into believing that your native land was quite distant instead of within our land only a few miles from our camp?" Joshua asked them. (Verse 22.)

The Hivites' Excuse

"We have heard about how you have wiped out your enemies," a Gibeonite officer explained. "We didn't want to be counted among them. The city of Gibeon



The Israelite army moved close to the thick-walled city of Gibeon, but there were no soldiers in sight to protect it.

here, and three other Hivite cities to the south—Chephirah, Beeroth and Kirjath-jearim—formed a secret alliance to seek a promise from Israel's leaders that you would not attack us. We heard that you are a fair and honest people, and would keep any vow you might make.

"We became aware that your God commanded you to destroy all the people of this region, and we were so alarmed that we tried to carry out the only plan we thought might save us. But we aren't begging for freedom now. You have us in your power to deal with as you wish." (Verses 24-25.)

Joshua was in no hurry to make any decision. Yet he knew if he wiped out their cities, he would be breaking the pledge that the leaders of Israel had made before God as a witness. There was no other choice. Israel had made a binding agreement and would have to pay the price of letting these Hivites remain in their land.

Joshua dismissed the Gibeonites, set up camp near Gibeon and held a conference with the princes of Israel.

When the main body of Israel heard the decision of the elders and Joshua, many of them were disappointed. Some were even angered, and sent spokesmen to the elders to voice their feelings. (Joshua 9:18.)

"It is not right to allow these pagan Hivites any mercy!" shouted one of the

spokesmen. "God has commanded us to destroy them!"

"God will punish us if we fail to attack those four Hivite cities at once!" another yelled heatedly. "Why are our leaders defying the Creator in this matter?"

There was much murmuring among the assembled thousands after these remarks, which were not necessarily made because the speakers desired obedience. So much wealth had already been taken from their enemies that a part of Israel had become greedy, and those were the ones whose ire was roused because of being deprived of the booty of the Hivite cities.

Hivites Made Perpetual Laborers

Ignoring the loud protests, the elders told the people that Israel should stick to the agreement not to attack the Hivites, but that Israel should make the inhabitants of the four cities bond-servants of Israel to serve in the physical needs of the Levites. This would keep them in close contact with God so that they would never return to idolatry. Today, the descendants of those ancient dark-skinned Hivites are called Falashas—meaning migrants—because they journeyed out of Palestine to Ethiopia to escape captivity when Israel was driven out of Palestine centuries later. (Verses 19-21.)

When the troops who had accompanied him heard what Joshua was about to do, even some of them muttered in disappointment at being deprived of the excitingly profitable opportunity of plundering the Hivite cities.

Joshua called the rulers and chief officers of the Hivites before him and made this proclamation:

"Though you have sought peace and have recognized our God as great, you tricked us. Therefore you are cursed. No longer shall your mighty men of war bear arms. Instead, they shall become wood choppers and water bearers for us. When our



One by one the self-appointed Israelite spokesmen came before the elders to angrily declare that Israel's army should attack the Hivite cities.

people take over this area, your people shall join us and work as bond servants. Your tasks will be especially for those in service for our God wherever He shall have us build His altar. You have no choice but to accept these conditions." (Verses 22-27.)

"These are bitter terms for our warriors and the people of all four cities," the leader of Gibeon spoke out. "However, we feel it is better than being destroyed because of our sins. We know your greater forces and your great God are too powerful for us to face, and we must humbly bow to your will." (Verse 25.)

The Hivites should have considered themselves quite fortunate to remain alive under the circumstances, but it is generally human nature to hope for more than is received, and there was a tone of bitterness in the voice of the Gibeonite leader.

Having ended these matters with the Hivites for the time being, Joshua and his many soldiers headed back toward Gilgal. They little guessed that they would very soon be racing back toward Gibeon.

For many centuries there had been a city in the land of Canaan known as Salem. During the days of Abraham a King was there whose name was Melchizedek, Who visited Abraham and blessed him after he rescued Lot and other captives from a group of marauding kings. (Genesis 14:17-20.) Melchizedek—Who was later to become Jesus Christ in human form—ruled from Salem as long as the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—dwelt in Palestine. Later He ceased to rule from there when the children of Israel were in Egypt: In the days of David, Melchizedek again chose Jerusalem (another name for Salem) as the city from which to rule His people.

The name Melchizedek means King of Righteousness. (Hebrews 7:1-3.) At the time the Israelites entered Canaan, the ruler of Salem—then called Jerusalem—was a Canaanite, Adoni-zedek, a sinful king who pretended to be "Lord of Righteousness"—a king who put himself in place of the true King of Righteousness—Jesus Christ or Melchizedek.

Jerusalem had been such a powerful and wealthy city for so long that it was famous throughout the civilized world. In fact, it was considered a sacred city, even though heathen Canaanites, such as Adoni-zedek, had long since taken it over.

A Plot Against the Hivites

News of the fall of Jericho and Ai brought fear to the ruler of Jerusalem, especially when he learned of the pact between Israel and the four Hivite cities just a few miles from Jerusalem, because Gibeon was one of the stronger cities of the area—even stronger than Ai. (Joshua 10:1-2.) Adoni-zedek realized that other cities of Canaan must immediately band together to stand against the Israelites, or be defeated.

The proud king of Jerusalem sent messengers to the rulers of four neighbor-

ing Amorite cities. These were Hebron (where the Israelite scouts went on their return trip through Canaan about forty years before), Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon, and were located in an area only a few miles southwest of Jerusalem. Adoni-zedek suggested they all join forces and invade the Hivite cities to punish them for making peace with the Israelites. (Verses 3-4.)

When the kings of these cities received Adoni-zedek's plea for their armies to join his in an attack on Gibeon, they agreed at once to send all their soldiers northward. Their forces were united on the way to Jerusalem, where Adoni-zedek's troops were added. Together these thousands of well-trained warriors marched onward to a spot just south of Gibeon, where they camped and readied their equipment for an attack on Gibeon, because the Hivites were now their enemies along with Israel.

When the Gibeonites saw these combined armies streaming up from the south, they sent swift messengers to race to Gilgal to ask for help from Israel.

While the messengers sped toward the Israelite camp, the armies from the south set up powerful catapults and ramming devices with which to assault Gibeon, and prepared long ladders and ropes for scaling the walls. Night was not far away, however, and the Gibeonites felt certain that no attack would be made until dawn.

The messengers from Gibeon arrived at Gilgal before nightfall, and were given an immediate audience with Joshua.

"Thousands upon thousands of Canaanite troops of the Amorite tribe were approaching Gibeon when we left!" they excitedly told Joshua. "Perhaps by now they have already attacked our city. As your servants, we beg you to send up at least a part of your great army to save us!" (Joshua 10:5-6.)

Joshua Had Learned His Lesson

Joshua wasn't inclined to give the messengers a quick answer. He wondered if the presence of so many fighting men could mean that Israel might run into deep trouble as punishment for not consulting God in the matter of making an agreement with the Gibeonites, or if God had forgiven him and the elders when they repented.

Not wishing another unpleasant situation, Joshua this time went into the tabernacle and prayed to God to give him a clear picture of what should be done.

"Don't be concerned about that army preparing to attack Gibeon," came God's answer. "Not one man of those many thousands will come out alive after I punish them!" (Verse 8.) Now Joshua knew God had forgiven him and the elders.

Thus encouraged, he was convinced that he should go at once to the aid of the Gibeonites. He gave orders to his officers to assemble the army of Israel for immediate action. By nightfall the troops were assembled and ready to march.

Gibeon was about twenty miles west of Gilgal, and though they had a rough, uphill road between the two places, the Israelite army picked its way to the hill country through the night, and arrived within sight of Gibeon at dawn. (Verses 7, 9.)

Coming over a rise at the head of Israel's troops, Joshua and his officers saw that the Canaanite troops from the south were just starting to move closer to Gibeon for their assault on the walls. Catapults were being pushed forward, scores of men were carrying metal-nosed logs with which to batter the gates, and thousands of archers, swordsmen and spear-bearers were marching within striking range of the walls.

"Draw up our troops to attack the invaders of Gibeon at once!" Joshua told his officers. "Keep the troops out of sight behind this rise, move north of Gibeon so that we can't be seen, and then divide up and swing around the east and west walls to surprise them!"

Minutes later hordes of Israelite soldiers raced around the walls of Gibeon to rush in among the troops moving against the Hivite city. The attackers were so surprised by this sudden onslaught by the Israelites that they halted in their tracks, then turned and fled in the opposite direction. The Israelites pressed in against them. So great was the slaughter that bodies were strewn for miles along paths that led northwestward, southward and southwestward from Gibeon.

All this didn't happen in just a short while. Many of the enemy soldiers tried to hide in ravines and among the rocks, and time was required in searching them out. The Israelites had orders to let no enemy fighters escape, regardless of how far they had to be pursued.

In fact, the main part of the enemy troops to escape the first attack had to be pursued as much as thirty miles to the southwest. (Joshua 10:10-11.) Part of the way was through a long, deep ravine. Then there was a steep ridge to go over, and next a rocky, rugged road so precipitous in places that steps had already been cut in the rocks.

By the time the enemy had been pursued even part of that distance, however, the morning was half spent. Joshua became concerned about being successful in destroying all the enemy troops before dark, after which any who were left would surely succeed in escaping. Already exceptionally heavy clouds were moving over the sky, which meant that darkness would come on even sooner than usual.

A Mighty Miracle

"Cause the sun and moon to stand still so that the day here will be made long enough for us to overcome our enemies," Joshua prayed to God. (Verse 12.)

The battle continued. It was no small matter to flush out enemy troops from their hiding places as the area of fighting moved steadily southward. Meanwhile, the sky be-

came darker, and it appeared that an unusually strong storm was likely to break in the region just south of Gibeon. Between thick, scudding clouds the pale sun showed through at times. There was nothing unusual about that, but two or three hours after Joshua's unusual request of God the Israelites began to be aware that the sun was still in a morning position!

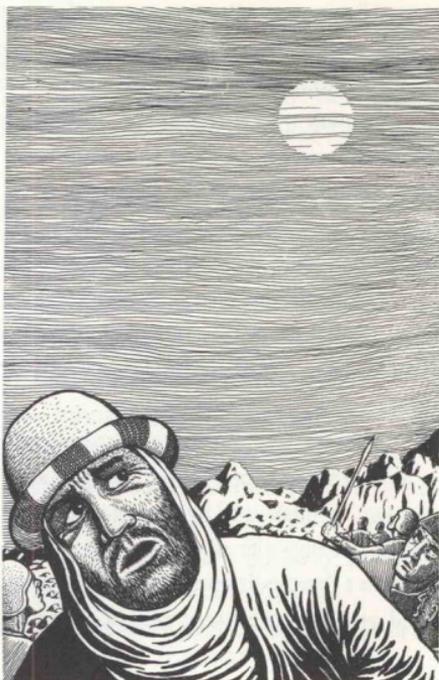
As the afternoon wore on while Israel kept up the bloody pursuit, it was noted with increasing awe that the sun still had not moved. In fact, it stayed in the midst of the sky for so long that daylight was extended by about twelve hours! (Verse 13.)

Did God actually stop the Earth from rotating for twelve hours? We are not told. With God all things are possible. If this planet suddenly ceased turning, God must have performed a whole series of tremendous miracles to keep everything in place on the surface of the Earth (which is turning at a speed of one thousand miles an hour at the equator) from being destroyed. There was never another day like this one. Many religious leaders have argued that time was lost back at the battle near Gibeon, and that as a result the Sabbath was moved from Saturday to Sunday. Not so. *That* day did not become another day. It was merely an extra-long day of 36 hours.

The lengthened day was a reason for wonderment and fear among both Israelites and Canaanites. Even Joshua was awed by what happened. God honored an outstanding prayer in an outstanding way because He was fighting Israel's battles. (Verse 14.)

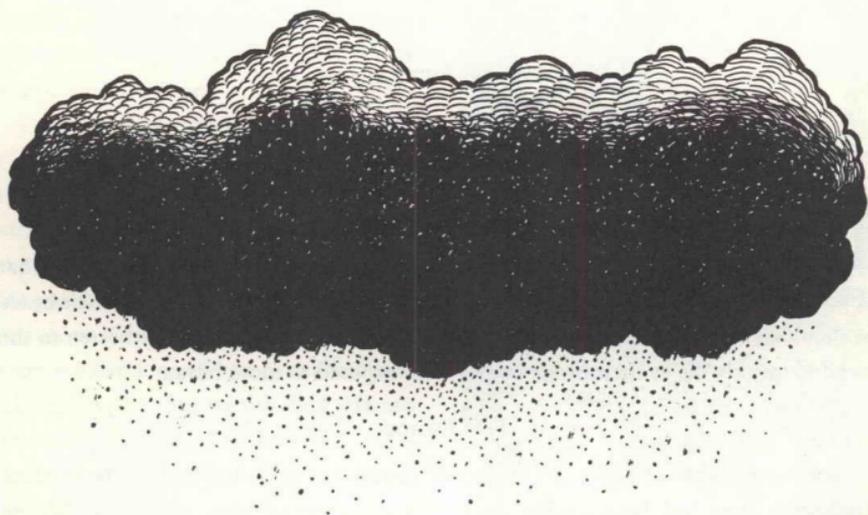
Even so, Joshua was concerned about conquering all the enemy troops, many thousands of whom were well ahead of the Israelites. It appeared that they would escape while Israel was being delayed in sending out small groups in every direction to overtake enemy soldiers who had fled to the sides of the retreat paths to the south.

Then came another miracle from God. The sky grew increasingly darker. Lightning flashed above the Canaanite retreaters. Ear-splitting thunder reverberated between



Men grew increasingly fearful the longer the sun stayed in the sky.

the mountains and through the deep ravines. From the black clouds came a strange, hissing sound. The fleeing Canaanites looked up in inquisitive terror, and it was then that the power of God descended from the sky on them with deadly force!



CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

CONQUEST TO THE NORTH

THE hissing sound from the sky was short warning to the Canaanites as to what was about to happen. Suddenly there was stinging pain from sharp blows on their heads and shoulders. Many were killed outright by falling objects. Others were beaten to the ground to quickly die as their prone bodies were exposed to more blows.

Few Escape

Some were able to reach the shelter of protruding rock ledges, and from there witness that they had been caught in a terrible shower of giant hailstones! Within minutes almost all the Canaanite soldiers and their animals were battered to death. Then the tremendous shower of heavy hailstones miraculously stopped as suddenly as it had begun. Some of those who had been spared managed to escape and take refuge in nearby cities, but most of them either died of their wounds or were later caught and slain by Israelite soldiers. (Joshua 10:8-11.)

Shortly before this event produced by God, the five kings of the five Canaanite cities, fleeing southward near Makkedah with their troops, held a hasty conference.

"There is no hope of holding out against the Israelites," the king of Jerusalem remarked fearfully. "Our men have no more desire to fight. They're frightened because it is still daylight, whereas the sun should have gone down hours ago. Israel's God has something to do with this awesome thing. I propose that the five of us hide in one of the caves in this area, and let Israel pursue our troops. Then perhaps we can return later to safety."

The other four leaders quickly agreed. They gave orders to their officers to proceed without them. Taking scant provisions, they hurried away from their men and

sought out a cave some distance up the side of the ravine through which they had been moving. (Verses 16-17.)

They had been in hiding only a short while when the storm of giant hailstones struck. They realized that their remaining troops would hardly survive such an onslaught from the sky, but they were more concerned about themselves than about their men.

What they didn't realize was that God had no intention of allowing them to escape. When the pursuing Israelites arrived to find dead Canaanites scattered throughout the ravine, a search was made for possible survivors in the rocks, defiles and caves. One soldier was as startled as were the five kings when he walked into the cave where they were hiding. He ran to notify Joshua at once, who gave orders to deal with them immediately. (Verse 18.)

Trapped!

A short while later, as the occupants of the cave peered out at the main body of Israelite soldiers moving on to the south, they were surprised by large stones rumbling down from above and thudding in a growing heap on the ledge at the mouth of the cave. Almost before they realized that many men must be rolling the rocks from overhead, they found themselves trapped by a solid bank of stones much too great to be removed from the inside!

Meanwhile, at Joshua's command, the Israelites moved southward to seek out and slay most of the few enemy troops not killed by the storm of gigantic hailstones. They pursued them as far south as the city of Makkedah, where they temporarily camped.



Thousands of tons of huge hailstones crashed down on the fleeing Canaanites!

Then Joshua sent men to the cave where the five kings were trapped. The men removed the stones piled there, seized the prisoners and took them to a spot part way between the cave and the city of Makkedah. There were a number of trees there, and five of them were chosen for a grisly purpose. The five kings were killed and their bodies hanged on the trees till sundown. Then they were cut down and taken back into the cave where they had tried to conceal themselves. For the second time great stones were piled against the mouth of the cave, this time to form an infamous burial crypt for the five men who had tried to lead their armies against Israel. (Verses 19-27.)

While the five kings were still hanging on the five trees, Joshua and his troops rushed into Makkedah and slew all the people and disposed of the king of that city in the same manner accorded to the ruler of Jericho. (Verse 28; Joshua 6:21.)

In the days that followed, Joshua and his troops stormed over the southern region of Canaan to attack and overthrow a number of cities. The idol-worshipping inhabitants were slain and the leaders killed and hanged—all according to God's instructions. God wanted idolatry and child-sacrifice completely eliminated throughout Israel's land. Included in these cities was Hebron, the place Israelite scouts had passed through four decades previously.

The campaign that had started out as a move to defend the Gibeonites turned into a tremendous victory for Israel. Successful because of God's help, the soldiers returned to Gilgal with a great wealth of the spoils of war—household goods, tools, implements, livestock and farm produce. (Joshua 10:29-43; Joshua 11:14,16.)

The defeat of the armies of these cities didn't mean that all of the southern part of Canaan was conquered. There were still more cities and tribes to take over in that region. Even after many more military operations by Israel's army during the next year or two there were still a few fortresses and armed areas to subdue.

Meanwhile, the most powerful ruler in the northern part of Canaan had been increasingly concerned about the Israelites. He was Jabin, king of Hazor, the foremost city of the upper region of Canaan, situated about nineteen miles west of where the Jordan river widens out to form Lake Huleh, in those days known as the Waters of Merom.

King Jabin's Grand Strategy

Regular reports of the Israelites' success had been brought to Jabin, who felt that his city was safe as long as the Israelites stayed to the south. He knew that they would one day come north after they had conquered most of the southern territory, and that while Israel was still fighting in the south, no time should be lost in developing a fighting force that would more than match that of the invaders.

To accomplish this, Jabin told the kings of the various tribes and cities in that general region that all rulers should build up their armies and then combine to move against Israel.

By the time Israel had almost completely conquered southern Canaan, the kings of the north were ready to make their move. They began to assemble their forces together and head toward the level area by the Waters of Merom, not far from Hazor, which was not many miles north of the Sea of Chinnereth, the body of water now known as the Sea of Galilee. The total of these armies was very great. The Bible refers to their numbers as being like the number of grains of sand on a seashore. (Joshua 11:1-5.) One ancient historian claimed that there were 300,000 foot soldiers, 10,000 cavalry men and 20,000 chariots.

It was about ninety miles from Gilgal to the place where the enemy congregated. That was about a three-day march for hurrying foot soldiers, but it didn't require three days for Joshua to learn about the powerful threat. He had kept lookouts and scouts constantly moving through all parts of Canaan for a long time, and his knowledge of what was going on in the land was generally rather thorough.

It was even hoped by the enemy that Israel would quickly learn that this mighty mass of fighting power was gathering in preparation to attack. It was part of King Jabin's strategy that Israel would come up to meet the Canaanite armies so that they could engage in battle on level ground where his chariots and cavalry would have an advantage.

To learn if and when Israel would arrive, Jabin sent spies to the south. If they spotted the Israelites arriving by day, they were to race back to camp on fast horses with the word. If the Israelites were to reach the enemy camp by night, the spies were to signal by fire from a distant ridge.

Scouts Report to Joshua

From the moment he received news of the enemy war preparations to the north, Joshua lost no time getting his army into action. He wanted to meet his enemies long before they could reach Gilgal and threaten the women and children. For three days the greater part of the army marched hastily northward, resting during the night hours. Late the third afternoon officers brought excited Israelite scouts before Joshua.

"We have come to report that the enemy has just today assembled at the Waters of Merom, where the various armies have ample room to gather together," the scouts told Joshua. "On our way down we happened across Canaanite spies who were waiting to report your progress to the north. We slew these men. Unless there are others lying in wait on the way for the same purpose, the enemy does not know we are very close to

them and they will fail to learn when you will arrive.”

“We can’t take a chance on running into other enemy spies who would report our approach,” Joshua told his officers. “We’re probably much farther north than the enemy realizes because we have been marching so fast. By moving on within the next hour or so, we can get off the direct, natural route and swing around to approach the enemy from another direction!”

“Whatever your plans are, sir,” the spokesman of the scouts concernedly remarked, “we have one more vital thing to tell you. We have learned that the enemy hopes that you will come to do battle on the level ground where he is now camped. That is mostly because of his thousands of chariots equipped with huge blades that protrude from the sides of each vehicle. If those 20,000 chariots manage to charge in among our foot soldiers, one can easily imagine the horrible results! Our men would be cut down by the thousands—like a scythe reaping grain—in just a matter of minutes!”

When Joshua and his officers learned this, they became depressed and fearful. Joshua went at once to his tent to ask God for help.



When Joshua heard of the fearful weapons of the Canaanites, he immediately asked God for help.

God Encourages Joshua

“Don’t be afraid of your enemies,” was the answer from God. “Take your troops onward tonight and surprise them before dawn. Use careful strategy, and by this time tomorrow there won’t be any more of their horses and chariots to fight against.” (Joshua 11:6.)

Because the Israelites had covered so many miles in their hurried march from Gilgal, they were already only a few miles from the enemy, and there was plenty of time to arrive at the enemy camp well before the night was over. Joshua decided that the extra time should be used by moving northwestward into the foothills and then northward into the ravines skirting the enemy’s position to the west.

Using scouts who knew just where to go, Joshua led his army up from the level valley area and into the hills. The closer the Israelites came to the area of the enemy, the more careful they were not to make any unnecessary noise. When they finally arrived at a point due west of where the Canaanites were camped, the hundreds of thousands of Israelite troops were spread out to poise behind ridges to the west of the slumbering enemy camp. Obviously no enemy spies had spotted the Israelites’ approach. Otherwise the Canaanites would have been ready.

Every Israelite soldier was instructed in what his specific duty would be. It was still night, but the low, flickering fires of the enemy gave just enough light to faintly point out the objects to be attacked. At a signal from Joshua, line after line of soldiers rushed down the slopes toward the enemy camp. Those to the north and to the south started first, so that they could swing in to envelop the Canaanites from the north and the south along with those Israelite troops who set out just a bit later to push in from the west.

God Grants Victory

Once they had started to attack, the Israelites could no longer conceal their presence. The thump of thousands of feet alerted the enemy sentries, and the shrill blasts of alarm horns pierced the early morning air.

By the time the Israelites closed in on the enemy camp, the Canaanites were on their feet, but only a part of them were armed and ready to fight. While they were struggling to organize and equip themselves, the Israelites fell upon them in line after line, quickly downing them with a furious onslaught by swords, spears, arrows, slingstones and knives. (Joshua 11:7.)

As for the chariots with their gigantic blades protruding to right and left, they were quickly hitched with horses and manned with archers and drivers. But before those deadly vehicles could get rolling, Israelites surged in to cut down the drivers, slash the harnesses, and hough the horses. That is the severing of leg arteries and tendons just above the hocks of the horses so that they were unable to run, while they painlessly bled to death.

The Canaanite cavalymen weren't any more successful than the charioteers. Israelite soldiers swarmed in on them in such numbers that they couldn't even begin a charge. Bridles were seized and riders were yanked to the ground, while the horses were houghed as the chariot horses were.

Jabin had counted on a swift disorganization of the Israelites by his bladed chariots and his cavalry, with his footmen to mop up whoever was left, but the quick destruction of his chariot forces and his cavalry reversed the picture entirely. Thus the main part of the battle didn't last long, even though close to a million men were involved. Hemmed in by a lake and the Jordan river on the east and faced by Israelites from the other three directions, there was not much opportunity for the Canaanites to escape.

Nevertheless, in the heat of battle and in the semi-darkness of dawn, some of the Canaanites escaped to the west and to the east through the thinning lines of Israelites. Meanwhile, Israelite soldiers completely mopped up the camp of the enemy. All their horses were mercifully disposed of by bleeding and the chariots were hauled into

a vast pile and burned. (Verses 8-9.)

Some may wonder why valuable horses and chariots were destroyed. It wasn't God's will that the Israelites should acquire horses at that time, because that could have caused the more adventurous Israelites to move faster and farther than God intended. Keeping the main part of them on foot meant keeping them together. And the Israelites did not need horses as farm work animals. They generally used bulls—which are proportionately stronger—for draft animals, and they used a few camels and donkeys.

As for the chariots, they were, of course, useless without horses, but in the first place God didn't want Israel to possess such an aggressive type of battle equipment at that time. He wanted Israel to learn that victory was based more on obedience to His laws than on heavy war equipment. These same chariots, if kept, might have made Israel as proud and vain as they had made Jabin.

No Safety in Flight

Realizing that some Canaanites were fleeing to the east, north and west, Joshua sent troops in all directions in pursuit of the fleeing enemy soldiers. Some of the enemy almost reached safety in cities to the east, but were overtaken and slain. Some of those who went through the mountains to the west managed to get as far as cities close to the Great Sea, but still fell before the pursuing Israelites.

Among those who fled were the kings and high officers of the cities whose combined armies had started to move against Israel. Chief of these was Jabin, king of Hazor and the supreme commander of the combined forces. He had carefully arranged that the kings would camp at a considerable distance to the north of where the armies were camped. This was done to allow the Canaanite leaders the opportunity of escape in case of the remote possibility that Israel's soldiers would overcome the Canaanites.

When the Israelites rushed in to suddenly overcome the Canaanites, Jabin was shocked to realize that his army was no longer in existence.

"Saddle horses for all!" Jabin shouted to his aides. "We must leave at once!"

Within only a few minutes the men who had come to lead their armies against Israel were headed westward back to Hazor and their other cities, leaving their troops to make out the best they could. The sad plight of these idol-worshipping kings mounted rapidly and the tragic penalty of their barbaric living became increasingly more obvious as each new move utterly failed. God was proving that there is absolutely no way of escaping His punishment. (Amos 9:3; Galatians 6:7.)

Jabin's Desperation Increases

The kings' return in defeat created great fear among their people. They realized

that it would probably be only a matter of days before the Israelite army moved farther west.

In fact, as soon as Joshua's soldiers had returned from pursuing the Canaanites and had enjoyed a well-earned rest of several hours, they received the order to move to the west. The army marched directly to Hazor, the ancient capital of upper Canaan. (Joshua 11:10.)

When Jabin was informed that Israel's army was approaching, he became frantic with fear. He considered fleeing to some other country or at least to some hiding place in nearby mountains, but he was now in such disfavor with his own people because of his defeat that he was afraid to flee lest someone should assassinate him for cowardice. There was nothing to do but order the gates

locked and hope that his few remaining soldiers could hold off the Israelites.



The king of Hazor was shocked to learn that his massive army had been wiped out!

CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

PROMISED LAND OCCUPIED

THE end came for Jabin, king of Hazor, only minutes after he ordered the gates closed. The thousands upon thousands of Israelites swarmed up to the walls with their triple-hook ropes, hurled the heavy hooks over the walls and surged up and into the city in such numbers and force that the relatively few would-be defenders fell back in helpless fright.

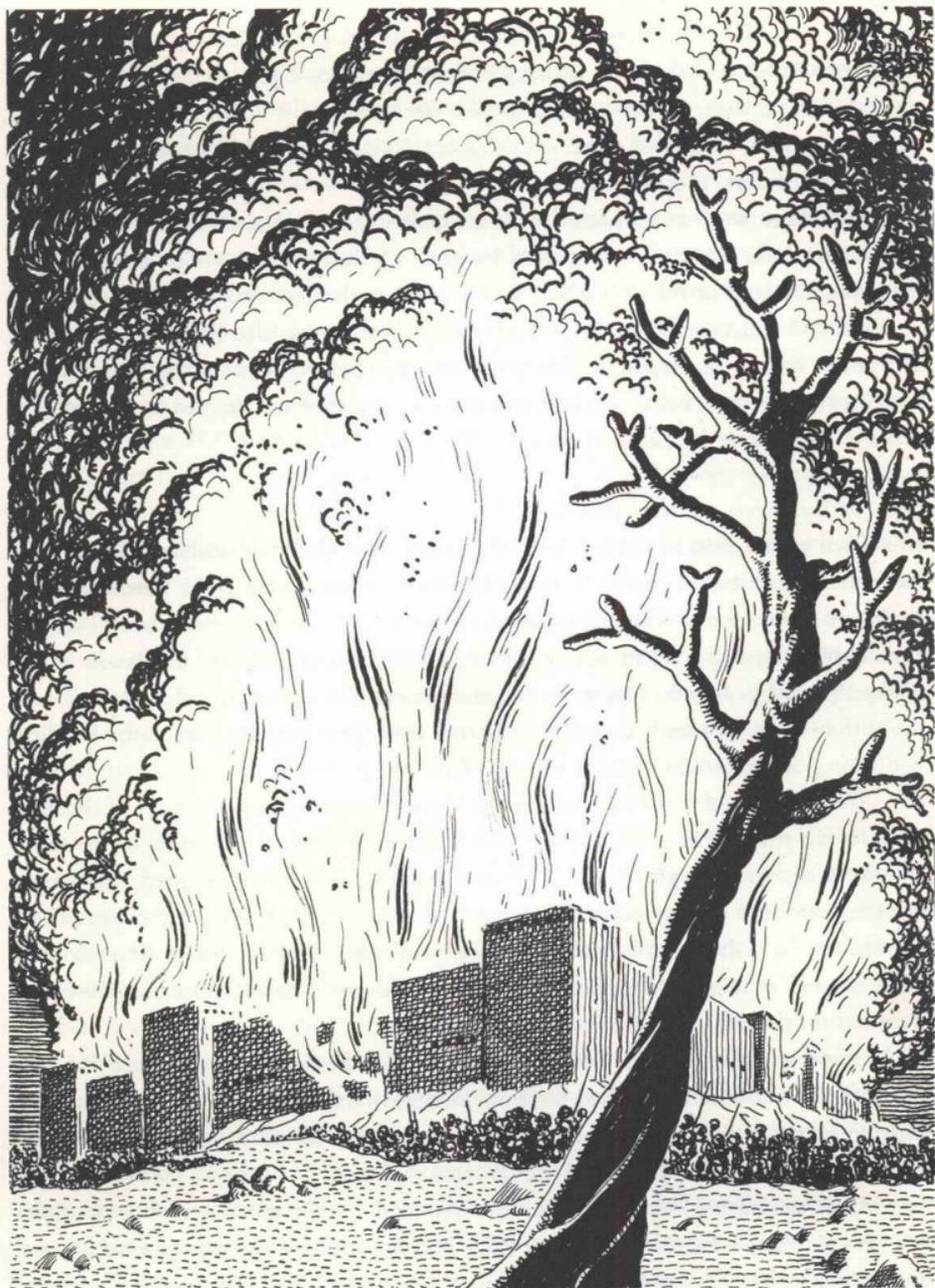
No Protection in Walls and Gates

The gates were stripped of their bars by the wall-scalers, and Israelite soldiers thronged into Hazor to promptly slay every Canaanite. The king was found hiding in remote quarters. No mercy was given to this idolatrous man who had plotted the destruction of the Israelite army.

According to directions from Joshua, the Israelite soldiers set fire to Hazor as soon as their grisly task of slaying was done. It wasn't God's will that this capital city of idol-worshippers, long the home of pagan rulers, should continue to exist as a temptation in the land where God's chosen people were to dwell. (Joshua 11:1-11.) God knew idolators would soon corrupt the morals of the Israelites. (Numbers 25:1-3; Numbers 31:14-16.)

From Hazor, Joshua's forces swept to the west, north and south to conquer the cities of the kings who had joined Jabin against Israel. They slew these kings and all their subjects and took for booty everything they could use except those things used in the worship of heathen gods. (Joshua 11:12-14.)

Although Canaan wasn't a vast land, it took much time to conquer enough of it that the twelve tribes of Israel could move into the respective areas they were to take



The Israelites slew the inhabitants of Hazor, then moved away to watch everything burnable go up in roaring flames.

over. The army moved slowly because it was on foot. Careful planning often took days and weeks. Scouts were sent out to bring back information. They often didn't return for weeks. It was a long, drawn-out task to take over Canaan. (Verses 15-23.) After six years had passed, Israel had taken over the small kingdoms and cities of about thirty-three enemy rulers. (Joshua 12.)

Still there were more places to be conquered, and God made it known to Joshua just where those areas and cities were located. (Joshua 13:1-6.) For one example, there was the land of the Philistines, which was on the coast of the Great Sea, and southwest of Canaan. When Israel had set out from Egypt, God had purposely caused His people to give this region a wide berth because the people were war-like, and the Israelites at that time, being newly freed from slavery, were not trained or prepared to resist a large army by physical means. (Exodus 13:17-18.)

Land Given to the People

By the time most of Canaan had been conquered, God told Joshua that the time had come to partition the land to the various tribes, even though there were still many people to drive out of Canaan. (Joshua 13:7.)

A meeting was held in which Joshua, Eleazar the priest, and the heads of the tribes of Israel gathered to learn by lot which areas of Canaan should be occupied by the various tribes. Moses had already indicated how these matters were to be handled. A drawing of lots would make plain what God had planned.

The drawing of lots could be done in various ways, but in this matter of choosing areas for the tribes of Israel, it probably was a matter of writing the names of the tribes on pieces of wood or stone and shaking them together in a container. The names or numbers of the various sections of Canaan would be written on other pieces. Then, if Joshua were to draw a tribe name from one container, and if Eleazar were to draw from another container a number to indicate a section of Canaan, and so on, the future locations for the tribes could thus be determined.

However it was done, God caused the lots to be drawn according to the way in which He had already decided matters. Two and a half tribes had already been given their areas east of the Jordan, so nine tribes and a half were yet to receive their inheritance. (Joshua 13:7-33; Joshua 14:1-5.)

As it turned out, the determining what land should go to which tribe didn't progress very far. (Joshua 14; 15; 16; 17.) For one thing, there was murmuring and dissatisfaction by the people of the tribes of Joseph—Ephraim and the half tribe of Manasseh. Their elders claimed that because they were two large and powerful tribes, they should be given two tribal allotments of land. Joshua then gave them an addi-

tional allotment in a timbered mountainous region. (Joshua 17:14-15.)

"Why have we, two leading tribes, been given a wooded mountain range in the north right next to a valley where the enemy Canaanites are armed with terrible iron chariots equipped with huge, protruding knives?" the elders of these tribes asked Joshua. "We will still be crowded for space."

"Since you are a great people, then you should be able to create a wealthy lumber industry in those mountains while you are clearing land for agricultural use," was Joshua's reply. "Also, since you are leading tribes, you will have the power to overcome the Canaanites who have chariots. By the time you clear your mountain land of much of its timber and drive the Canaanites out of the valley, your two allotments will be enough land. It is a fair and just God who has decided where every tribe shall dwell." (Verses 16-18.)

At that time lots were drawn only for two and a half tribes—Ephraim, Judah and the half tribe of Manasseh. Various time-consuming matters continued to come up. One of many had to do with the request of a man who had been one of the twelve Israelite scouts who had been sent to look Canaan over forty-five years previously. This man was Caleb, who had been Joshua's right-hand man on that excursion. When ten of the scouts had told lies about the strength and size of the people of Canaan, it was Joshua and Caleb who had insisted on the truth and encouraged the people to boldly go in and conquer Canaan, trusting God for the outcome (Numbers 13; Numbers 14:1-10.)

Caleb Rewarded for Faithfulness

Caleb had been promised by God through Moses, because of his honesty and loyalty, a choice inheritance in Canaan. It wasn't too forward of him, therefore, to remind Joshua that he and his family should be given the land God had promised in the mountainous Hebron area. (Numbers 13:22; Numbers 14:24; Deuteronomy 1:35-36.)

Although Caleb was then eighty-five years old, he was still vigorous and healthy, and promised that he and his relatives who would share his inheritance would conquer the giant men who still remained in the region of Hebron. (Joshua 14:6-12.) Joshua honored Caleb's request and gave him what he desired in the territory given to the tribe of Judah. (Verses 13-15.) Later, when Caleb and his family moved into the area of his inheritance, he promised one of his daughters to any man who would lead a successful attack against the enemies remaining there. One of Caleb's nephews carried out an assault that overcame the local Canaanites, and he was given Caleb's daughter to become his wife. (Judges 1:12-15.) However, their marriage was not a loveless ar-

rangement. They were so much in love that she inspired her husband to accomplish great things. Many years later he became the first hero to deliver Israel from foreign oppression. (Judges 3:7-11.)

Other Israelite tribes later taking up residence in their respective domains were not all as courageous and enthusiastic as Caleb's nephew and his soldiers, and shamefully allowed some of the Canaanites to share their lands. This was not pleasing to God, who wanted them to gradually drive out all the Canaanites, and had repeatedly and plainly instructed Israel to completely rid the land of the heathen idol-worshipping enemy. (Numbers 33:50-56; Deuteronomy 7:1-6.) The only possible exception God would allow was that of the Gibeonites. They had asked for peace, and had at least mentioned God as being the Supreme Ruler, and had shown some willingness to live under His laws. (Joshua 9:24-25.)

Israelites Move Into Heart of Promised Land

On inspiration from God, Joshua told the people that the time had come to break camp and move on to a point more centrally located in Canaan. That place was Shiloh, about twenty miles north of Jerusalem. (Joshua 18:1.) There were mountains in that area, but there were also a valley and adjoining flat regions in which Israel would have plenty of room to set up their vast camps and flock-feeding areas.

There were mixed emotions among the Israelites when they learned that they were to travel on. Some had tired of living at Gilgal, and welcomed the opportunity to move. Others regarded Gilgal as a comfortable area they disliked leaving.

In six years the main body of Israel had almost forgotten what it meant to be on the move. It was considerably more difficult for the millions of people to get going with their millions of animals than it had been when they were more accustomed to be constantly on the go. Nevertheless, they managed to be ready to leave for Shiloh at the time Joshua had already indicated to them well in advance.

When the people arrived at the Shiloh region, most of them were content with their surroundings. The tabernacle was pitched at once in the middle area of the camp. There it remained for many, many years while the tribes went their respective ways and fell into all manner of trouble because of their disobedience.

A few days after the people were settled and camp life in the new site had become easier, Joshua summoned the elders for a meeting.

"I'm beginning to wonder just how anxious our people are to receive their inheritances," Joshua told them. "It's true that seven tribes haven't yet been shown what lands to take over. But few seem interested in doing anything except camping together as we've been doing for so many years. Is it that you are afraid that if you divide

into tribes your enemies will overcome you?" (Joshua 18:2-3.)

"We would like to know more about the areas we are to go to," some of the elders remarked. "The four tribes and two half-tribes that have already been given their lands have had a fair idea of where they were going, but little is known about the land that is yet to be divided among the remaining seven tribes."

Surveyors Map the Land

"I still think that most of us would rather stay together than separate as God wishes," Joshua replied. "But your point is one not to be neglected. It would be well to appoint capable men to survey the land to determine how it can best be divided."

Quick plans were made to look over the little-known areas of Canaan to find out just what the land was like and how it could most wisely be apportioned. Three leading men from each tribe were chosen for their ability in surveying and in simple geometry. A relatively small military force was sent along with these men to protect them from any stragglers Canaanite soldiers who might attack them.

Weeks later the surveying Israelites returned to Shiloh with a book of maps and information about the part of Canaan yet to be divided among the Israelites (Joshua 18:4-9.)

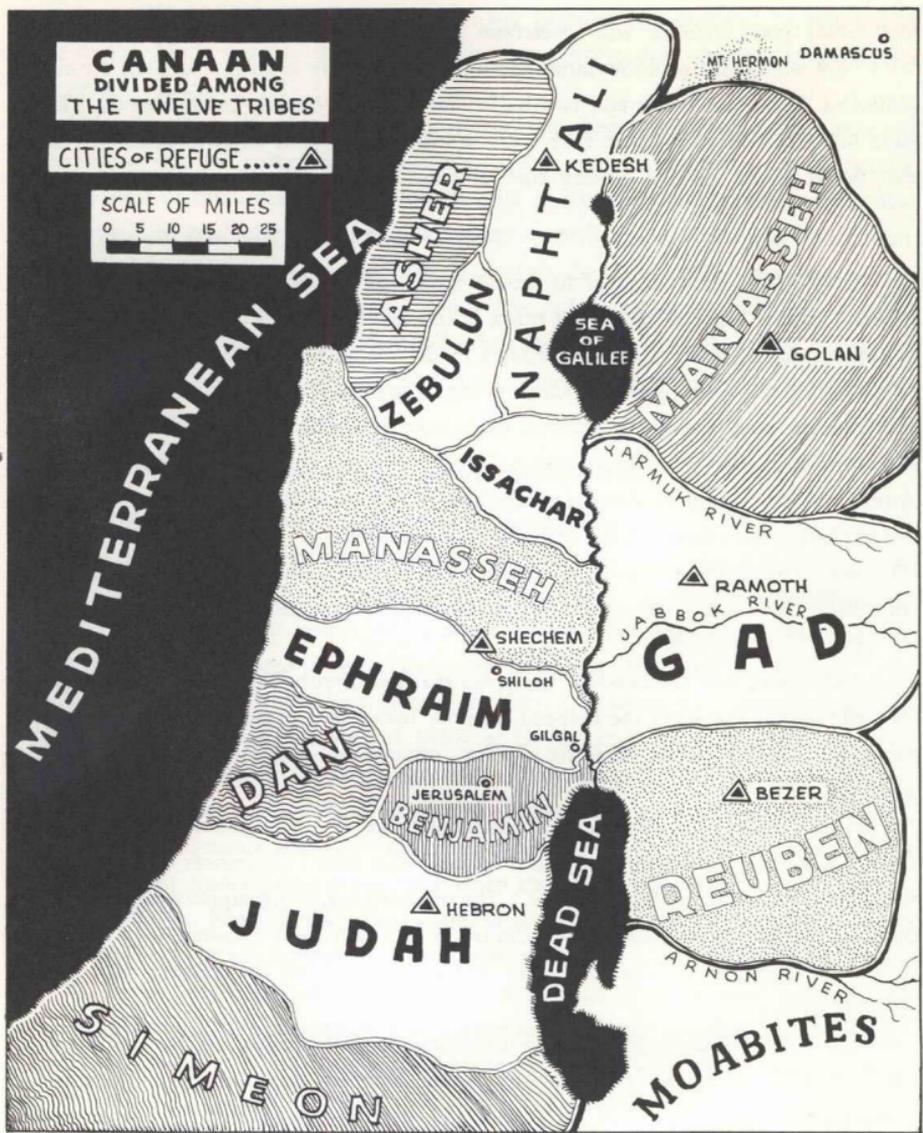
Joshua met with the heads of the seven tribes and with Eleazar the priest to study the information and mark the mapped territory into seven parts. There was no guesswork. The borders, cities, streams, valleys, mountains, plains and elevations were plainly marked.

Again, before the tabernacle in God's presence, lots were cast for the seven portions of land, and the seven tribes at last learned what their inheritances were and where they would go. (Joshua 18; Joshua 19.) The tribe of Levi, being supported by the tithes, offerings and sacrifices of the people, did not receive any land (Joshua 18:7), though they were later given cities to live in and adjoining fields for grazing their flocks. (Joshua 21.)

The last thing to be given for an inheritance went to Joshua and his family. This wasn't a result of any demand made by Joshua, but was according to an unrecorded promise from God such as had been made to Caleb. Joshua had his choice of an area. He chose Timnath-serah, a small city in the land of Ephraim only a short distance west of Shiloh. There Joshua later planned and superintended the reconstruction of his city. (Joshua 19:49-51.)

Justice for the Helpless

God had already spoken to Moses concerning six cities of refuge that were to be



chosen when Israel had taken over Canaan. These cities were to be places of safety for anyone who killed another accidentally or without plan or malice, though it was possible for a guilty killer to also obtain temporary safety in these places.

In those times it was lawful for relatives to avenge the willful killing of any of their kin by slaying the one obviously responsible. Some, of course, would like to take

vengeance even when the killing was accidental. To escape such an avenger, one could flee to the nearest city of refuge, where he could plead his case with the elders at the gates and be admitted to stay at least until there could be a complete hearing by the city's magistrates. If a man were found guilty, he was to be expelled from the city or turned over to the avenger. If he were found to be innocent, he was to have the protection of the city as long as he remained within it.

Three of the cities of refuge were picked from the east side of the Jordan. They were Bezer, Ramoth and Golan. The other three were chosen from the land west of the Jordan. They were Kedesh, Shechem and Hebron. (Joshua 20.)

According to plans revealed to Moses, the Levites were to receive various cities in which to live, and closely surrounding areas in which to keep their livestock. This matter was next taken up by Joshua, Eleazar and the tribal heads. Lots were drawn having to do with the areas of all twelve tribes. The drawing determined which cities and how many should be given from the various tribes. From all the tribes the cities for the Levites totalled forty-eight, and included the six cities of refuge. The Levites received these cities as centers of living, along with the pasture lands surrounding the cities to the extent of less than a mile. (Numbers 35:1-5.)

During the six years since Israel had crossed the Jordan, the soldiers from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh had faithfully fulfilled their duty. (Numbers 32:1-22; Joshua 4:12-13; Joshua 22:1-3.) There were still about 40,000 of them because not one of Israel's enemies were able to stand against them. (Joshua 21:43-45.) Now that the main wars were over, Joshua had a pleasant surprise for these men.

CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDANGERS ISRAEL

NOW THAT Canaan was subdued, Joshua announced a pleasant surprise for the soldiers of the tribe of Reuben, the tribe of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh: "You have been faithful in remaining to work and fight with the rest of the Israelite army these six years, even though your families have been only a few miles east of Jordan.

"Now that Canaan is ours, you are dismissed from service with the army of Israel." (Joshua 22:1-7.) "You have obtained great wealth from the enemy, and now you should return to share these flocks, gold, silver, brass, iron and clothing with your brethren who stayed behind to care for your families. May the blessings of our God go with you and to your families, and may you serve God diligently by keeping all His commandments." (Verse 8.)

War-Wearry Soldiers Head Homeward

The happy thousands of warriors moved eastward from Shiloh with the cheers of their fellow Israelites ringing in their ears. (Verse 9.) They couldn't march as an army, however, because their share of the flocks, herds and loaded pack-animals taken from their enemies had to be herded along in a very long caravan. In fact, their soldier friends remaining at Shiloh good-naturedly made fun of them by loudly addressing them as shepherders and cattle rustlers.

At Joshua's suggestion, some Israelite officers accompanied the soldiers as far as the Jordan river. At that time the river was not as deep and swollen as it had been when the Israelites had passed over westward six years before. It was no great problem, therefore, to ford the river at a shallow point where the pack-animals could wade

across. As for the smaller animals, it was as easy for them to cross the river as it was for the soldiers, what with animals being natural swimmers and generally not too afraid of water.

On their second or third night after leaving Shiloh, the soldiers of Reuben, Manasseh and Gad camped on the east side of the Jordan. The Israelites who had accompanied them camped on the west side of the river before starting their return to Shiloh the next day.

At dawn the Israelites on the west side of the river prepared to leave for Shiloh after a planned last salute to their brothers. Then someone noticed a peculiar thing. The soldiers across the river were working hard to haul stones and earth to form a swiftly growing box-like stack of stones which they were filling with earth. Instead of setting out for Shiloh, the Israelites on the west side of the river stayed to see what was going on. They were increasingly perplexed to note that the heap, in the course of the day, was developed into a large altar that was made after the pattern of God's altar in Shiloh. (Joshua 22:10, 28.)

"This is very strange," said one of Joshua's officers to the others. "It appears to me that our brothers are building a huge altar." Then these men began to draw hasty conclusions.

"Our God hasn't told us to build such an altar," another officer spoke out. "Perhaps our brothers are building this altar with the intention of sacrificing to idols!"

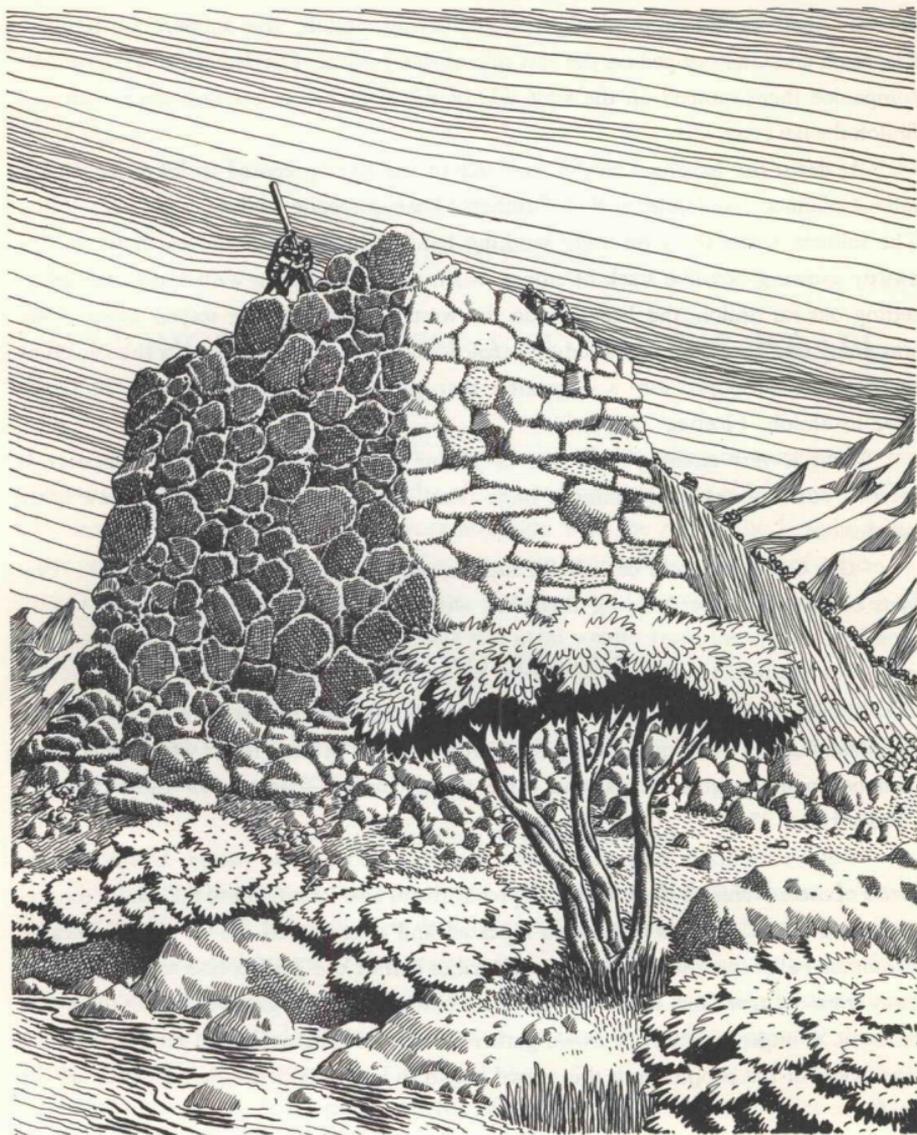
Is This REALLY Idolatry?

"If that's even a possibility, then we should report to Joshua at once," one of the men said. Rather than immediately find out what their brother tribes were doing, these men began to imagine things, and came to conclusions that *seemed* right to them. (Proverbs 16:25.)

It was only hours later that Joshua was told about these things. Unfortunately, word of these events, as these men interpreted them, also leaked out to the whole congregation of Israel. Reports became so repeated and exaggerated that it quickly became a common belief that the soldiers from the tribes east of the Jordan had suddenly fallen away from the true God, and were starting a new system of pagan worship in their own territory. A huge, murmuring crowd gathered near the tabernacle and around Joshua's tent. Some of the people from this crowd began to loudly criticize the tribes east of the Jordan.

"We should at once send troops across the Jordan to forcefully remind our idol-worshipping brothers that they must stop this terrible idolatry immediately!" one man yelled.

Great cheers followed his remark. For a people who had been disobedient in so many ways for so many years, it seemed somewhat extreme to demonstrate such a



The main body of Israelites camping at Shiloh were shocked to learn that their brothers east of the Jordan were building what appeared to be a huge altar!

spirit of supposedly spiritual criticism, that seemed to indicate a great love for God.

"We must clear up this matter now, even if it takes all the soldiers we have here at Shiloh!" another bellowed. "If we don't do this, our brothers to the east may all become pagans and turn against us!" (Joshua 22:11-12.)

Joshua Acts Wisely

Joshua was dismayed at the conduct of some of the people almost as much as he was at the unhappy report. After all, it had not been proved just what this altar was for, though it was something that required looking into immediately.

"No troops should go now and risk starting a civil war in Israel," Joshua told the people. "If the tribes to the east are doing something contrary to God's will, then someone should be sent to point out their sins. Instead of soldiers, I am sending Phinehas, the priest, the son of Eleazar, and the heads of the ten tribes west of the Jordan. These men can determine what is happening and how to deal with any who are possibly falling into idolatry." (Verses 13-14.)

Hours later Phinehas, the heads of the ten tribes and their aides arrived at the west side of the Jordan at a spot opposite the altar. The soldiers of Gad, Manasseh and Reuben were surprised to see such a distinguished group, and hastily helped them across the river.

"Why are we honored with your presence?" smiling officers inquired of them.

Phinehas, spokesman for the group, pointed gravely to the huge altar of rocks filled with earth.

"The people of Israel at Shiloh have heard of this great altar you have built," Phinehas declared in a loud voice that could be heard by all the assembled officers of the armies of the three tribes east of the Jordan. "They feel that you have erected this thing as a sudden move to depart from God and become idol-worshippers. If this is true, can you do such a thing and still recall how close our God came to destroying all of Israel for such a sin in the Baal-Peor idolatry and in Achan's curse?" (Joshua 22:15-17, 20; Numbers 25:1-9; Deuteronomy 4:1-6; Joshua 7:1-5.) "Do you realize that all of Israel suffers tomorrow for the sins of a few committed today?" (Joshua 22:18.) "If you feel that this land east of the Jordan is not right for you or that the pagan influences here are too great for you, don't rebel against God by building a pagan altar, but come over west of the Jordan and we'll make room for you and your people closer to the tabernacle where God's altar is located." (Verse 19.)

The Simple Truth

The officers of the armies of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh lost their happy smiles

before Phinehas finished speaking. They appeared troubled, but not guilty. Their spokesman came out at once with an answer.

"There has been a misunderstanding," he explained. "Our God knows that rebelling against Him by building an altar to any other god is something that hasn't even entered our minds. We know that God wants sacrifices made only on the altar He has directed to be made in front of His Tabernacle, and we didn't build this altar for offering sacrifice. If this is not true, may God destroy us today. We didn't build the altar for any religious functions, but rather as a duplicate of God's altar, to serve as a monument to the fact that our people east of the Jordan and your people west of the Jordan are one people bound together by the sacred laws of God. This altar, being patterned after God's altar, will be a constant reminder that we serve the same God you serve. We hope that it will remain a monument for a long time so that we may point it out for what it means for many generations to come." (Joshua 22:21-29.)

There were moments of silence before anyone spoke. This truthful explanation from the soldiers of Gad, Manasseh and Reuben was as surprising as it was pleasing to Phinehas and the ten tribal heads.

"You have shown us just now that God is with all of us," Phinehas finally spoke out. "We at first feared that you were falling into idolatry and that God would deal harshly with all of Israel because of what we thought you had done. Now we know what you were intending to do, that you are loyal to God and that your righteous actions have spared us from any punishment God otherwise would have put on us."

After delaying farewells, Phinehas, the heads of the ten tribes and their aides set out for Shiloh. When they arrived there with news of what had happened, those who had been most concerned about their east-of-Jordan brothers going astray were happy to learn that matters were not as they had imagined. Many of the people felt so relieved that they held a celebration in which God was loudly praised for keeping Israel together. (Verses 30-34.)

Although there were some among the Israelites who were too hastily inclined to point to their brothers east of the Jordan as being sinners, the real concern among most of the Israelites was that a part of them might break away and fall into idolatry.

Joshua was well aware of the kind of people who were always quick to point to the shortcomings of others so that they might seem more righteous by comparison—which is really *self*-righteousness. Those were the ones he didn't like having any part in the somewhat feverish proposal that one part of Israel should take up arms against another part. In trying to make themselves look more righteous, those people can do great harm.

People who feel that they are next to perfect are often as evil in God's sight as those

who feel just the opposite. Such people are generally unable to recognize their own shortcomings. Otherwise they wouldn't have a feeling of self-righteousness and near-perfection.

There is an interesting true story in the Bible about such a man, and at this point it might be well to temporarily leave the Israelites in Canaan and flash back a few hundred years to the time just after the famine in Egypt.

The main character of this story of the ancient past wrote the eighteenth book of the Old Testament. It was titled *The Book of Job*, because Job was the man's name. (Job 1:1.)

Who Was Job?

Regardless of what some historians have written about him, Job wasn't an Arabian who ruled a domain close to the Euphrates river. He has often been referred to as "The Wizard of Oz," the title of a well-known children's book written a few decades ago. This land called "Oz" is called Uz in the Bible. It was the region of Seir, a western part of Arabia, south and southeast of the Dead Sea. The Israelites passed through this territory twice on their long trip from Egypt to Canaan. In those days the ruler of Seir had dominion as far westward as Goshen, the area of lower Egypt, near the Mediterranean, given to the Israelite shepherds in Joseph's time.

As for being a wizard, Job wasn't exactly that. Probably he earned that title because he was a very wise man and a skilled engineer. During Joseph's governorship in Egypt, Job, though not an Egyptian, was one of the several kings who ruled parts of lower Egypt. (Job 3:11-15; Job 29:21-25.) Being king, Job was the greatest man in that eastern land. (Job 1:3.)

The outstanding thing about Job was that he followed God's laws and used his power to protect the helpless. (Job 29:7-17.) While he was a ruler in Egypt he exerted his influence in favor of the one true God, at the same time working to destroy belief in the pagan gods of the Egyptians. (Job 29:20-22, 25.)

Job's active career during and after Joseph's time in office in Egypt was marked by a very outstanding accomplishment. Job planned, designed and superintended the building of the Great Pyramid of Cheops at Gizeh, Egypt. In fact, Job *was* Cheops. The Great Pyramid is still the most massive man-made structure in the world, though there are buildings that are much taller. Its huge mass isn't the only quality that makes it outstanding.

King Job's Greatness

The precision workmanship in the massive stones is a marvel. These segments

of the pyramid were so accurately fitted together that present-day engineers wonder how it could have been done. However it was accomplished, it required the skill and effort of thousands of laborers, working three months a year during which the Nile river overflowed and kept them from their regular work. It took them twenty years to build such an outstanding structure. As the planner and builder, Job naturally received great honor and prestige in the nations in all directions.

The part of Job's life related in Scripture had to do with the time after his great engineering feat in Egypt. He had become a more famous and respected man than he had been before. He was wealthier than ever, what with owning seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, a thousand oxen and five hundred donkeys. Job owned many buildings, and much land for his animals' grazing. He also had a very fine home, and buildings and tents in which his servants, hired hands and shepherds lived. (Job 1:3.)

Job's greatest treasure, however, was his ten grown children—seven sons and three daughters. They had comfortable homes of their own in which they often gathered to hold dinner parties and birthday banquets. Job noted that they indulged so much in this pastime that he felt they might be sinning. Therefore he often made sacrifices in their behalf. His constant prayers to God were that the Creator would be merciful to his family. (Job 1:4-5.)

People have long been erroneously taught that there is a constant desperate, frenzied battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, with God as the champion of good and Satan as the champion of evil. Thus it would seem to be a long war between God and Satan, with each one taking turns at reeling under powerful blows from the other, and this process repeated century after century until God finally strikes a final, victorious blow that causes everything to turn out right.

God Limits Satan's Power

That isn't the situation. God is Ruler of the universe and everything in it. (Daniel 4:17, 25, 32; Job 38:1-19.) Satan is the god or prince of this world. (Ephesians 2:2.) He is under God's power and authority. He can do only what God allows him to do. In other words, God can and does allow evil to occur by giving Satan permission to tempt people who need to learn lessons, but God lets Satan go only so far in doing certain things.

God keeps an eye on all the angels, including the fallen ones, or demons. If He calls them before Him to report, they must obey, including Satan.

At a time during Job's life after he built the Great Pyramid, Satan came with other angels to report to God, and was asked what he had been doing. His answer was that he had been roaming the Earth. He couldn't successfully lie to God. Roaming was

what he had been doing for a long time with his demons, looking for opportunities to separate men from God. (Job 1:6-7.)

"If you have been everywhere on Earth, then you must have noticed that a man by the name of Job is one of my most obedient servants," God said to Satan. "What do you think of him?"

"I know the man," Satan replied. "I am aware that you have given him great ability, power and wealth. At the same time you have protected him and his family from trouble, disease and death. He knows that these blessings have come from you, so he works at being faithful to you. But take this prosperity and comfort away from him, and he will turn away from you. In fact, he will curse you!" (Job 1:8-11.) Notice how Satan admitted God is all-powerful and fully able to protect Job from him.

"You would like to destroy this man's faith," God remarked. "I'm going to give you the opportunity to test him. Deal with him as you choose, but don't do him any bodily harm." (Verse 12.) Notice how God set a limit on Satan's evil, and let him go only so far in tempting Job. What Satan didn't know was that God was using him to teach Job a much-needed lesson. But Satan thought he was getting a chance to



Bolts of lightning wiped out all of Job's seven thousand sheep and all of his shepherds except one.

destroy one of God's servants. Satan departed, anxious to bring trouble to one of God's most faithful followers. It wasn't much later that Job, examining a part of his orchard, was startled by the noisy approach of one of his plowmen.

Sudden Destruction Came

"We were plowing your fields on the east border," the man panted excitedly, "when suddenly a band of mounted Sabeans rushed at us! They killed all the men except me, took all the oxen and all the donkeys that were grazing nearby!"

Before the shocked Job could express himself, another of his men wearily ran up to blurt out that a series of tremendous lightning bolts had struck where all the sheep and shepherders had been gathered, that all the sheep had been killed and that he was the only man to escape.

This second man hadn't finished giving his discouraging news when a third man staggered toward Job, waving his arms and shouting.

"Three bands of Chaldeans attacked the camel grazing grounds!" the man panted. "They killed your men, then took all three thousand camels! I managed to escape to report to you!" (Job 1:13-17.)

These three reports left Job in stunned silence. He could scarcely believe that such a great loss could come so suddenly. Slowly and dazedly he sat down with his back to a tree trunk. Abruptly he was aware that a fourth man was standing over him, talking and gesturing wildly.

Job shuddered at the thought that shot into his mind. With all his livestock gone, any other evil report would have to concern his family!

CHAPTER SIXTY

WHY MANY SUFFER

“I KNOW who you are,” Job told the man. “You are one of the servants from the household of my oldest son. What unhappy news have you to give me?”

A Grievous Tragedy

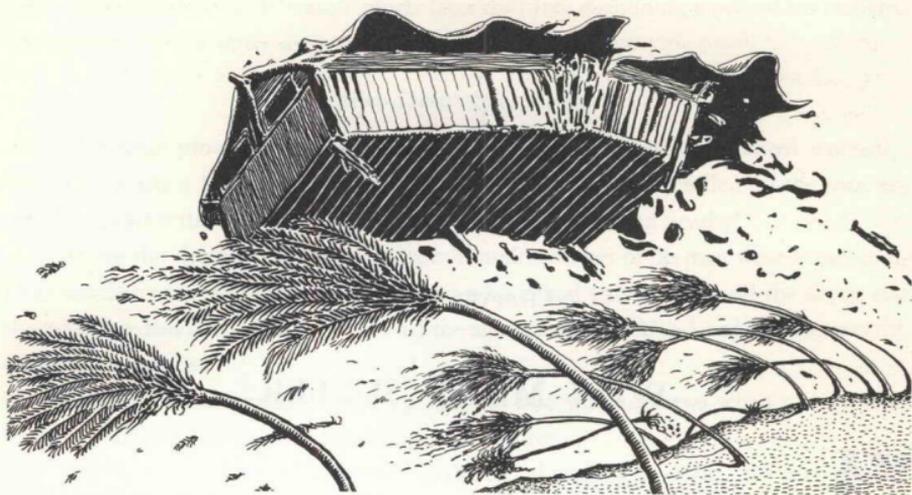
“You must not have heard what I just said, sir,” the woeful-faced servant observed. “It grieves me to repeat that all your sons and daughters have just been crushed to death in the collapse of your oldest son’s home!” (Job 1:18-19.)

This was the supreme blow to Job, though by this time he wasn’t too surprised at the terrible news. Painfully he raised his gaze to meet the eyes of the trembling servant.

“How did it happen?” Job asked.

“All your sons and daughters were gathered for a dinner party at your oldest son’s home,” the servant explained. “All of them were inside, happily eating and drinking. Suddenly a whirlwind descended on the house, snatched it up from its foundation, then dashed it with such force that it was smashed flat. I was only a short distance from the house, bringing in some fresh fruit for the diners, and I was knocked to the ground. I struggled up, rushed to the wrecked home and tore away enough debris, with the help of neighbors, to find that your seven sons and three daughters were all dead!”

Job rose shakily to his feet and walked slowly toward his home. On the way he ripped his coat open. At that moment his wife looked out of the house to view this act, which in the ancient East was a sign of great grief.



The house in which Job's seven sons and three daughters were dining was snatched up by a powerful whirlwind!

"What's happened?" Job's wife called out as she ran to meet him.

When Job told her, she sobbingly accompanied him to the house. Job tried to comfort her, but he wasn't very successful. He left her by herself, shaved his head, went outdoors and prostrated himself on the ground. The headshaving was also an ancient sign of grief, though no more peculiar, perhaps, than our dwindling present-day custom of wearing black clothes and black armbands during and after funerals.

Job Refused to Grumble

"I came into this world naked and without possessions," Job murmured. "It's only fair that I should go out of it without possessions. While I have been here, God has allowed me many good things, and I thank Him and bless Him for all of them!"

Job had a good attitude toward God, even though God had allowed Satan to snuff out his wealth, his children and his happiness. Satan had not been able to make Job commit the sin of complaining. (Job 1:20-22.)

Some time later, when the angels again came before God to report their activities, God questioned Satan as He had before.

"I am well aware of what you have done to my servant Job," God reminded Satan. "No doubt you have noticed that his grief at the loss you have caused him has not resulted in his cursing me, as you said it would."

"He has remained faithful only because you haven't allowed me to afflict his body," was Satan's reply. "If a man is suffering great physical pain, insomuch that he thinks that death might result, he will do anything to save himself. Allow me to bring sickness on Job and he will quickly give up his obedient ways and turn to cursing you."

"We shall see if you are wrong again," God said. "You may do what you choose with Job, except that you may not bring him to his death." (Job 2:1-6.)

Dismissed, Satan returned to Earth, pleased because he once more had been given an opportunity to see if he could turn Job against his Creator. He now had permission to take away Job's health and his last remaining source of income.

One morning when Job awakened he was alarmed to find that he was extremely sore all over his body. At first neither he nor his wife had any idea why he felt so lame, but within a few hours his skin was lumpy with swelling boils!

Agony Added to Grief

This was how Satan had chosen to strike at Job, though Job had no knowledge of why or how the terrible agonizingly painful sores had so suddenly developed from the top of his head to the soles of his feet.

The mere sight of the skin eruptions was so offensive that Job was embarrassed even in the company of his wife. And he was in such pain he could not even think of fulfilling the duties of a king. And while another man ran the king's business, Job could not collect the revenues due the king. Thus Job became completely destitute. He didn't want to sit or lie around his home and see his wife's expressions of disgust. He decided to leave his home and go to an ash dump not far away. Sitting in ashes in those days was a sign of humility, and Job had no intention of lacking for ashes. (Job 2:7-8.)

Job and his wife now had a very bitter life, what with no children and no income—and with Job's health gone. Whereas Job had previously been a very prominent man, he now found himself not only destitute and without a kingdom, but also almost completely without friends. Even his relatives had nothing more to do with him. He had suddenly become a social outcast because his friends thought God had put him under a curse, and his acquaintances could no longer regard him as wealthy. True to his promise, God had allowed Satan to take *everything* away from Job. (Job 2:6.)

In spite of his wife's arguments that he was being silly, Job continued to stay at the ash heap. Even on that soft mound he was miserable, because whether he sat or sprawled, the boils were intensely painful with the slightest pressure on them.

Late one night Job's wife went out to the ash heap. She was ashamed to go

during daylight because Job had been such a prominent man and had suffered such great loss that it seemed to some that he might have lost his mind. Job's wife would have been distressed to know that neighbors were watching her. Instead of comforting her husband, she started railing at him.

And Now—A Nagging Wife!

"Why do you insist on squatting there in the filth of this dump while I am at my wits' end wondering how to make ends meet?" she scolded. "Why must you embarrass me this way? If you think that you are about to die, why do it in a place like this?"

Job continued to sit in silence, which was soon broken again.

"I should think you would have more consideration for me, the woman who gave you ten children," Job's wife went on. "What would you have done without me in those days when you were a king, and when you became famous as the builder of that great pyramid? Is this any place for such a man, even though a lot of people have forgotten you by now?"

Job said nothing.

"You're hopeless!" cried his wife. "Go on with your prayers! You're only adding to your misery by being out here. And no matter how many days you sit here blessing God, you'll die! Why don't you curse God so He will destroy you and put you out of your misery?" (Job 2:9.) Job not only had lost his wealth, children, health, power, influence, honor, dignity and friends, but had now lost the respect of his wife.

Job's wife sobbingly turned to leave, but Job straightened up and spoke sharply.

"You talk foolishly," Job told her sternly. "You sound as shallow as a young woman who has grievously sinned while still in her father's house. Why should we complain when troubles come? God has done many wonderful things for us. Should we expect to go all through our lives without any troubles? Do we believe that God should shower us with nothing but the pleasant things? Should we shake our fists at our Creator whenever He temporarily takes back some of the many good things that belong to Him in the first place? No! We should be thankful and uncomplaining, no matter what happens!" (Verse 10.)

Job's wife realized that it would be a waste of any more effort to argue with a man with such a good attitude toward God, and she walked away into the darkness.

A Few Friends Remain

Because of his high office in life, Job had many acquaintances who were prominent, wealthy and well-educated. When word went around the land about Job's con-

dition, most of these acquaintances of Job wondered why a man who was so obedient to his God should fall into such misfortune and misery. Almost all of them had felt obligated to desert him.

However, of the many who knew him well, three men from other lands, who were close friends of Job, planned to meet and visit him together. (Verse 11.) The names of these men were Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, and they came from territories not far distant.

The combined caravans of the three arrived at Job's rather neglected home to find that only his wife was there.

"You'll find my husband sitting or lying out in the city ash heap not far from here," she stiffly instructed the visitors.

The three friends of Job instructed their servants to encamp not far from the ash dump. Then they set out afoot toward the lone figure they could see in the distance. They were accompanied by a younger man named Elihu who was also well-educated and intelligent, and who, because of his great admiration for Job's well-known accomplishments, had asked to join the three friends. (Job 32:2.)

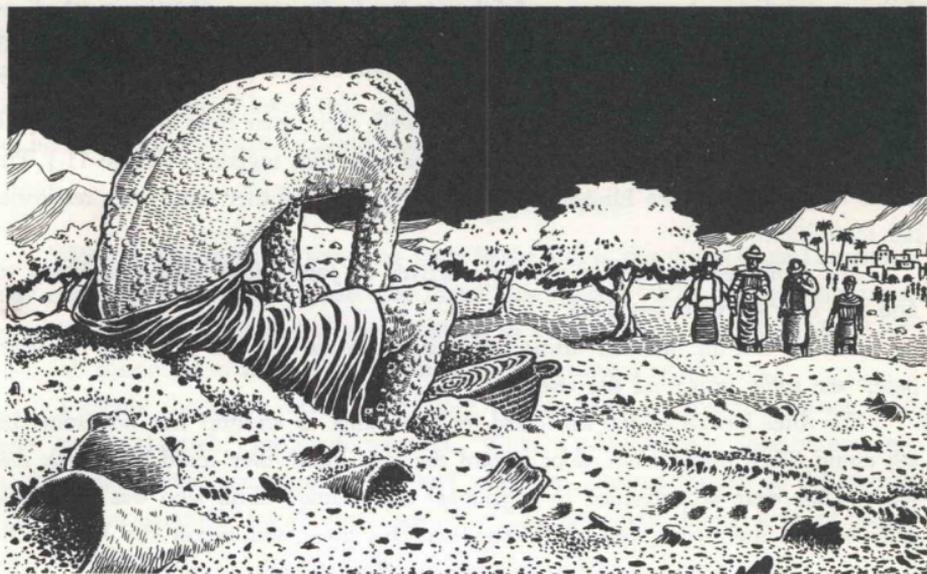
Even when the visitors were only a few yards from Job, they couldn't recognize him because of the boils on his face and the amount of weight he had lost. His condition was so much worse than they had imagined that they couldn't help but conclude that he was very close to death. They wept with grief at the sight of him. Now they could understand that there was more than one reason why Job had chosen to spend his time on an ash heap. His hundreds of very sore running boils made it almost necessary.

According to the customs of the times, the three men ripped their tunics and tossed dust on their heads. (Job 2:12.)

Elihu respectfully stood close by while Eliphaz, Zophar and Bildad—who were older men—stepped close to Job. Job peered up through swollen eyelids at his friends. He could not touch them in welcome, and it was too painful for him to show his appreciation for their presence by trying to leap up. He was touched that they had come to comfort him, but all he did was lift his hands and nod to each. Then he lowered his head and sat in silence. Job's friends were so stunned to see how horrifyingly miserable he was that they sat down with him in shocked silence to share his agony.

That silence lasted a whole week, during which the men sat with Job both day and night. (Verse 13.) At the end of seven days and seven nights of no conversation, Job painfully straightened up and suddenly spoke from swollen lips.

"Let the day perish and be forgotten when I was born!" he cried out. "Let that day be cursed! Let not God include it in the days of the month or year!" (Job 3.)



Job's miserable condition had so changed his appearance that his friends could not at first recognize him.

Controversy Over the Cause of Suffering

Job's friends were surprised at this sudden outburst, but they were also relieved to know that Job had at long last chosen to speak. Job continued to talk for several minutes, eloquently describing how death would be more pleasant than the bitter grief of his condition. Some of his remarks caused his friends to suspect him of some hidden sin, and as soon as Job had finished, Eliphaz spoke out.

"I must say what I think," he started out. "You have instructed my people in living and in building character, but now that trouble has come to you, you faint. If you are being punished because of some kind of trouble you have run into, turn to God. If God is correcting you, don't be unhappy about it. He will see you through adversity, and you shall be full of years before you die." (Job 4 and 5.)

Eliphaz had much more to say, some of which, in turn, roused Job to more speech.

"I thought you came here to comfort me," he declared, "but now you are reproaching me and charging me with being a wicked man!" (Job 6 and 7.)

Job continued for a time, and when he had temporarily finished, Bildad had much to say in reproving Job. As soon as Job had answered him, Zophar spoke out. He, too, reproved Job, who promptly defended himself. This ended the first of three series of

unusual controversies. During the next two of these debate-type discussions there was more reproof from Job's friends and more defense from Job. These three friends insisted God was punishing Job for being sinful. Job insisted God was punishing him without a reason.

Job was about like many deceived people today who say they don't need God's commandments—that they are so good they always do what is right just because they love God. The Bible says this is not true. (Jeremiah 17:9; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 12:15; Psalm 39:5; I John 2:4; John 14:15.) Throughout these controversies between Job and his three friends, which were written in the Bible in a splendid poetic form, Job steadfastly contended that he was without sin and had no reason for repentance. (Job, chapters 8 through 31.)

At last the three older friends all gave up trying to answer Job because of his self-righteous attitude. (Job 32:1.) This gave young Elihu an opportunity to say what he thought.

"You have tried to justify yourself instead of God," he courteously and respectfully but bluntly told Job. "As for you three friends, you have condemned Job without being able to answer his self-justification." (Job 32:2-22.)

Elihu went on to disclose much wisdom for one so relatively young, reminding these older men that the Spirit of God, not human reason, gives us the true answers to problems. He continued to reprove all four men for being in error in some of the things they had said. Yet he did not deal harshly with Job. (Job 33:7.) His marvelous remarks, as written in chapters 33, 34, 35, 36 and 37 of the Book of Job make up some of the most profound sayings in the Bible. He showed these men that Job's error was not in some secret sin he was hiding—as they supposed—but in giving credit to himself, instead of God, for the righteous deeds God had inspired him to do, and in thinking he could *earn* salvation by good works. Elihu knew that man's righteousness is no better than filthy rags. (Isaiah 64:6.) The three older friends had spoken of God's right to punish men for sins. Elihu spoke of God's willingness to be merciful and give salvation to those who repent. (See also Psalm 103:10-14.) There seemed no more to say or do, so the four men wearily prepared to leave.

Although it was daytime, the sky had been turning dark for some time. It was evident that some kind of rough weather was about to occur. Overhead the clouds began to whirl and boil. Then they dipped earthward with great speed. The mounting moan of whirling winds broke suddenly on the ears of the little group on the ash heap. Job looked up, and he didn't move. Realizing the futility of running, the other four men stood rooted, though not without fear. Curious onlookers who had gathered near the ash heap ran for their lives, however.

God Convicts Job

Somehow the winds seemed to envelop the five men—not to harm them, but to gently cut them off from their surroundings. There was turbulence all around, but not on the ash heap. (Job 38:1.)

Then a great voice clearly came out of the encircling wind. (Verse 2.) Startled, Job started to get up, but tremblingly fell with his face down when he realized that he was being addressed. The other four men also fearfully prostrated themselves.

"Who is it who pretends to speak about the most profound matters of God, but who lacks knowledge of such things?" the mighty voice asked. (Job 38; 39; 40:1-2.)

Job cringed under stinging words as the Creator of the universe went on to compare the puny learning and undertakings of man with the all-knowing wisdom and tremendous creative power of God. He reminded Job that only God is a great Creator. When God at last stopped speaking, Job cried out:

"I admit I am evil and defiled, God, and I don't have the wisdom to answer you!" (Job 40:3-5.)

God then reminded Job that he could not save himself—that only God has salvation to give—and that all of man's power comes from God, and man amounts to nothing. (Job 40:6-14.)

God continued to point out how much man has yet to learn, even about the creatures that exist on this planet, and that no one except the Creator has any real conception of what is required to create and control such creatures. (Job 40:15-24; Job 41.) When God ceased speaking, Job finally saw himself as a very worthless sinner, who needed God's mercy just as much as anyone else did. Job then took the opportunity to express himself again, at the same time continuing to prostrate himself on the ash heap.

Job Finally Repents

"I repent that I spoke as I did, God," he said. "I realize now that you know everything and can do everything and that I said things I did not understand. I abhor myself for considering myself too wise, too creative and too righteous, when I am really nothing more than dust and ashes!" (Job 42:1-6.)

God then spoke to Eliphaz, who was the oldest of Job's three friends.

"I am very displeased with you three," He said. "Job has made some wrong remarks and he has had a self-righteous attitude, but he has finally spoken more correctly of Me than you three did. You used false arguments to try to prove that he had committed great sins and that his suffering meant he was more evil than other men. Job accused Me of punishing him without a cause. Job saw his error and repented. You

didn't. Now get seven bullocks and seven rams and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering. My servant Job will then pray for you. If you fail to do this, I shall deal harshly with you!" (Verses 7-8.)

The three men obeyed. The burnt offering was made, Job prayed for his friends and God accepted all that was done. (Verse 9.) As for Elihu, he had neither falsely accused Job nor misrepresented God's justice. He had spoken well, and God didn't require an offering from him.

Job's miserable condition left him as suddenly as it had come on. Immediately after he prayed for his three friends, the sore, itching, running boils dwindled away and were healed without scars. Job once more was comfortable and healthy. From then on, as though by a miracle, everything came his way. His brothers, sisters and friends who had left him turned back to him to visit and comfort him and brought gifts of money and jewelry. He bought livestock, and they increased so well that in time he was twice as wealthy as he had ever been before! (Verses 10-12.) Besides doubling the number of animals he had owned, an even greater physical blessing came upon him.

It was a new family.

God gave Job and his wife seven more sons and three more daughters, and his daughters were known as the fairest in the land. (Verses 13-15.)

Job had grown children when this great trouble happened to him, but after that he lived many more years to see his children's children to the fourth generation. (Verses 16-17.)

Down through the centuries Job has become known as the most patient man who ever lived. It would be more fitting, however, to recognize him for what the Bible points him out to be—perhaps the most self-righteous man who ever lived. Being self-righteous doesn't always mean being pompously pious and looking down on others as being miserably low sinners. In Job's case, it meant that he was so conscious and proud of being obedient that he felt he was without sin, and that his great suffering came without a reason.

The happy ending to this story was that after much trial he was able to see in himself this hard-to-recognize sin and be willing to repent. It was his repentance that brought an end to his great trial.

This important human experience might have been totally lost to us today. But God instructed Moses, during the wilderness wandering, that Job's account of his suffering should become *Holy* Scripture—a vital part of the Bible's "Old Testament," for our use today.

CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE

INTEGRATION IN ISRAEL

WE NOW MOVE FORWARD over two hundred years from Job's time. It is a few years after the Israelites' conquest of most of Canaan. Joshua has become more than a hundred years old, and is aware that his life is nearing an end. (Joshua 23:1.)

Realizing that it would be wise to again remind the Israelites what their attitude toward God should be, Joshua requests that the elders, princes, judges and officers of all the tribes assemble at the main camp of the Israelites.

God Keeps His Promises

"Consider all the wonderful things God has done for you in the conquest of this land," Joshua addressed them. "God has proved that He does as He promises. If you will continue to be of strong courage and obey God, He will surely help you drive out the inhabitants who yet remain in the regions of Canaan to which you are yet to move. In fact, God has said that if you are obedient, only one of you will be required to chase out a thousand of the enemy! (Joshua 23:2-10.)

"As one who is about to depart from this life, I warn you in the strongest terms that unless you faithfully keep the covenant made with God, Israel can look forward only to defeat and death!" (Verses 11-16.)

At another time Joshua again summoned the elders, princes, judges and officers of all the tribes to Shechem, the place where Joseph's remains were buried. It is a few miles north of Shiloh. (Joshua 24:1,32; John 4:5.) There Joshua spoke to the representatives of all Israel, briefly reviewing the history of the people since before the time of Abraham, and showing how God had dealt with them.

"There are those in Israel who regard sin lightly—who still have regard for some

of the false gods our forefathers fell to worshipping," Joshua told them. "There are others among us who secretly tend to revere the pagan gods of this land. No one can serve both the true God and pagan gods. (Mat. 6:24.) My God—the God of Moses, the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—is a jealous God who will utterly consume all who fail or refuse to be faithful to Him. Today every Israelite should decide whom he will serve! As for my family and I, we will serve the true God." (Joshua 24:2-15.)

"God forbid that we should forsake Him to serve idols or false gods!" the crowd chorused with enthusiasm. "We shall indeed serve and obey the one true God! Because His great miracles brought us out of Egyptian slavery, protected us from more powerful nations around us, and drove the idol-worshipping nations out of our land." (Verses 16-18.)

"Then you are indeed witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve our Creator!" Joshua called out.

Thus Joshua guided the thousands of leading Israelites and all that generation to renew the national covenant with God. He was pleased. The lessons of forty years wandering as children and young men and women had not been learned in vain. They responded in such a willing and sincere manner, that Joshua felt, as he dismissed them to return to their various tribes, the meeting had been well worthwhile, a fitting climax to his life. (Verses 19-28.)

Not long afterward Joshua died at the age of one hundred and ten years. He was buried at Mt. Ephraim in the property that had been granted him. The Bible honors Joshua by stating that Israel served God during Joshua's time of leadership and for a score of years afterward, until the deaths of all those leaders who had served under Joshua and were influenced by his good example and by seeing God's great miracles. (Verses 29-31.)

Eleazar the priest, Aaron's son, died shortly after Joshua's death. He, too, was buried at Mt. Ephraim. (Verse 33.)

Israel's rest from the labor of the conquest of Canaan developed into a period of several years. In the growing prosperity there was also a marked increase in population.

Canaanites Return!

During that time many of the Canaanites who had fled to neighboring lands were gradually moving back into some of the cities and sites from which God had removed them. There were also some cities and areas, especially west of the Jordan, that hadn't been reached by the Israelites. (Joshua 13:1-6.) All this meant that

Israel's wars of conquest weren't yet over. If Israel had been fully obedient and faithful, Canaan could have been cleared of all the enemy in only a short time.

When at last Israel decided to again take up arms to continue to route the Canaanites, there was the question of which tribe should move first. Phinehas, who had become high priest after Eleazar's death, consulted God at the tabernacle, and God made it known that the tribe of Judah should go first, and that He, God, would help the soldiers of Judah overcome their enemies.

Because the allotted land of the tribe of Simeon bordered on the south of that of Judah, the leaders of Judah suggested that Simeon accompany them. This idea was welcomed by Simeon. It meant a stronger and larger armed force to be used in both their territories. (Judges 1:1-3.)

The soldiers of Judah and Simeon didn't go far before running into action. Only a few miles southwest of Shiloh was a city called Bezek. It was bristling with thousands of rearmed Canaanites. Many of these Canaanites served their new king out of fear. He was a cruel tyrant who cut off the thumbs and big toes of any of his people who refused to submit to him. The Israelites were a little surprised to find enemy troops in such numbers so close to Shiloh. But they remembered God's promise to them, and lost no time in attacking.

In that one battle ten thousand of the enemy fell before Judah and Simeon. During the excitement the king of Bezek, Adoni-bezek, managed to escape and flee southward with a few aides. Having heard that he was a cruel warrior who would try to live to fight another day, the Israelites made a special effort to capture Adoni-bezek. Mounted Israelites managed to catch up with him in the mountains. Instead of killing him, they taught him a lesson he never forgot. They followed his custom of cutting off his enemies' thumbs and great toes. Deprived of these digits, he was taken to Jerusalem—which Judah and Simeon had already conquered, but later deserted. (Verses 8-9). Here Adoni-bezek was displayed as a disgraceful example of what would happen to the enemies of Israel.

Adoni-bezek took his punishment bravely, however, and admitted that the God of Israel was dealing with him as he justly deserved. He claimed that one time or another his prisoners had included a total of seventy rulers, and that he had cut the thumbs and great toes off all of them!

Day after day the men of Judah and Simeon moved southward to mop up all opposing forces. They spread westward to the city of Gaza on the Great Sea and eastward almost to the southern tip of the Dead Sea. God helped them to be almost completely successful in their campaign. However, some Canaanites managed to escape and refortify some of the conquered cities, such as Jerusalem. (Verse 21.) These few



His army wiped out, the ruler of Bezek decided to try to escape from the Israelites.

exceptions were only because the Israelites weren't all entirely obedient or didn't have sufficient faith in God. (Judges 1:4-20.)

About that time the tribe of Ephraim, sometimes called the house of Joseph, set out over its territory, especially to the southwest, which included Shiloh and the area around it. Ephraim found that the city of Bethel obviously had been remanned into a strong fortress, even though Joshua and his troops had slain many of Bethel's soldiers during the capture of the nearby city of Ai.

Knowing nothing of what Bethel was like now inside or how many soldiers were within the walls, the officers of Ephraim sent out a few scouts to try to discover these things. These men hid at night at a safe distance away, but close enough to keep a careful watch to try to determine where the city entrances were and how they might be used to get inside Bethel.

Unexpected Help

Opportunity came in an unexpected way one evening. Some figures emerged from the shadow of Bethel's walls and moved toward the general area where the spies were concealed. Moving silently, the men of Ephraim swiftly surrounded and trapped the oncoming figures. They proved to be a man and his family who claimed they were Hittites who had sneaked out through a small, poorly guarded, side entrance and were

hoping to escape from Bethel and their Canaanite overlords.

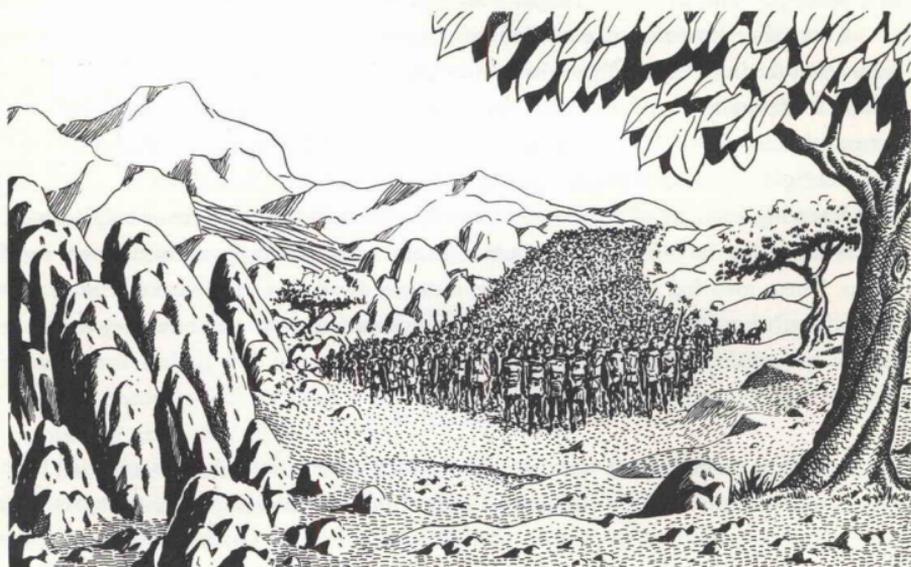
The spies hustled the Hittites back to where Ephraim was camped, and officers questioned them further.

"We are Israelites, and you are too late to escape from Canaan unless you show us where we can get into Bethel and tell us all you know about the layout of Bethel and how well it is armed," the officers told the Hittite.

This man they had captured had lived in Bethel for some time, and he knew its defenses. As he foresaw that Israel would soon take over Bethel anyway, he disclosed its defenses to the Ephraimites. For the sake of his family he pointed out a small side entrance that could easily be forced and gave the Israelites the information they required. For this he was freed and sent on his way. (Later, when he reached the ancient land of the Hittites, where modern Turkey is today, he founded a city and called it Luz, which had been the ancient name of Bethel.) (Judges 1:21-26.)

Perhaps God had purposely sent the Hittite to inform the Israelites. In any event, the information was used to good advantage, and the soldiers of Ephraim successfully forced their way into Bethel to overcome all within its walls.

What the tribes of Judah, Simeon and Ephraim did as their part of taking over Canaan was a fairly good example to the other tribes. But even though all the Israelites had God's unfailing promise to exert His tremendous power in helping them, some



The victorious men of Judah and Simeon spread southward across central Canaan.

of the tribes failed to dislodge or overcome their enemies in various areas.

Instead of routing the Canaanites from some of the regions, Israel allowed the Canaanites to stay on certain conditions. Often it was with the understanding that their enemies would regularly give gifts or make some kind of payments to Israel in exchange for their being free from attack. (Verses 27-33.)

Integration Leads to Inter-marriage

In other areas some of the Israelites tired of fighting against their enemies. They decided to integrate with them. (Verse 34-36.) Over the years this meant that many Israelites intermarried with the Canaanites. This is always the result of integration. So Israel fell to worshipping the pagan gods and idols of Canaan. God had repeatedly warned them not to integrate. (Exodus 20:3-7; Exodus 23:31-33; Deuteronomy 12:29-32; Deuteronomy 6:4-7, 14; Deuteronomy 7:1-11; Joshua 23:6-8; Judges 3:1-7.)

By the time another generation had developed since Joshua's death, much of Israel had taken integration lightly and had fallen into sin! The proposed last stages of the conquest of Canaan had bogged down to a stop. Prosperity was declining little by little as the Israelites began to live more and more like the Canaanites around them. Sex crimes increased. It was becoming unsafe to go out at night. The tribes lacked the pioneer spirit to move on and establish homes, farms, towns and cities in land that already was theirs. Israel had reached that disobedient state that comes just before God steps in to bring on painful chastisement.

The greatest number of Israelites in one area was still in and around the Shiloh-Mt. Ephraim area. Regardless of the crumbling condition of the tribes as a whole, there were people who still came to the tabernacle to offer sacrifices and consult with the high priest and his assistants. Shiloh was still the nerve center of the nation, and it was there that a peculiar and awesome thing took place.

A Surprise Visitor

One day a strange man was seen walking toward Shiloh from the direction of Gilgal. There was nothing unusual about seeing a lone man approaching the Israelite camp, but there was something about this man that caused people to stare and wonder who he was.

He appeared as an ordinary-looking man, but the manner in which he strode along seemed to indicate one of great authority and confidence. His soldier-type attire was different only in that it was made of what appeared to be the very best quality of cloth and leather. The man's only weapon was an especially well-shaped sword that gleamed and glinted with unusual brilliance as it swung from his belt.

Before he reached the edge of the camp, armed guards stepped out to block his way. They were puzzled as to how he had managed to get past the sentinels stationed farther away.

"You can go no farther until you give your identity and state why you are here," one of the soldiers barked.

The stranger merely gazed at the soldier, who suddenly lost his feeling of authority, and stepped backward in a gesture of respect.

Undetained, the man strode on. By the time he reached the center of the camp, Phinehas the high priest, elders and officers had been told of his coming, and they were on hand. Phinehas possibly realized who the man was. At least he bowed low in an attitude of deep respect. Others followed his example as the stranger paused before the swiftly growing crowd to hold up his arms and silence the increasing murmur from the throng.

"Listen Israel, and remember my words!" the stranger cried out in a voice so strong it startled the listeners. "I brought you up from Egypt and into this land I promised to your fathers. I made a covenant with you that I would help you conquer the land if you would do your part by obeying me. (Exodus 23:23-28.) You were to destroy all the pagan altars. You were forbidden to make any agreement of any kind with your enemies or to integrate with them. But you have not obeyed me! Why? Remember, I also said that if you were to fail in driving out the Canaanites, they would become as thorns in your sides and their gods would be as deadly traps! (Judges 2:1-3; Exodus 23:31-33; Deuteronomy 7:16; Psalm 106:34-40; Joshua 23:12-13.) Now, because you have broken my covenant, and intermarried with them, don't expect any more help from me in driving out the Canaanites! On the contrary, I shall allow them to prevail against you!" (Judges 2:1-3.)

When the stranger finished speaking, there was not a sound from the onlookers. All eyes followed the man as he turned aside and walked away. He spoke to no one, and no one tried to speak to him. Then somehow he was lost to the viewers.

Probably very few people realized that they had just seen and heard the same one whom Joshua had met alone just before the fall of Jericho. Whatever they realized, all experienced an awesome feeling in the presence of this stranger. After he had so abruptly vanished, they began to murmur and mill about with a growing sense of foreboding and fear. Some wept and moaned. Others fell to their knees to pray.

Pressed by an awareness of guilt, many obtained the proper animals and flocked around the tabernacle, anxious to make sacrifices to acknowledge their sins. Word of the event quickly spread to Israelites everywhere in the land, and with a growing fear of terrible things that might come on Israel at any hour. (Judges 2:4-5.)

The expressions of repentance didn't last long. When days passed and nothing awesome occurred, many people began returning to their wrong ways. In fact, they slipped still further into the idolatrous practices of the Canaanites with whom they continued to intermarry. Many were the gods they foolishly and futilely worshipped along with their pagan enemies. (Verses 11-13.) Included were idols of a vile nature which down to this day are represented on the roofs of thousands of church buildings in our land!

The woes of the Israelites began in a small way. The unfriendly Canaanites in various areas started to plague them with public demonstrations and with little attacks by small bands of soldiers. Marauders increasingly beset the Israelites at all hours, and they always succeeded in leaving much damage and death. Here and there the Israelites began to be pushed back, and in some instances even had to withdraw from cities they had captured, often at the cost of many lives. It was more and more evident that God had forsaken Israel, at least as far as protection in war was concerned. The tide of conquest had at last reversed in favor of the enemy. (Judges 2:11-15; 2:20-23; 3:1-7.)

A Foreign Invader!

The gradual, painful push-back by the Canaanites was only the beginning of troubles for Israel. One day an excited messenger rode into the camp at Shiloh with the shocking news that the Assyrian king of Mesopotamia—a land to the northeast—was pushing southward with thousands of troops, and had already conquered the half-tribe of Manasseh east of the Jordan!

Feverish activity followed, but the Israelites didn't seem to be able to rightly organize for battle. Many of them were so excited and fearful that all they could do was moan with fear. Others fell to their knees and shouted to God to save them from Chushan-rishathaim, the approaching Assyrian ruler who was rumored to be unusually powerful, ruthless and cruel.

CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO

WORSHIPPING GOD IN VAIN

IN THE face of danger from their enemies, the Israelites began to pray. But it was too late. The land was so full of sin that their prayers were in vain. God had no intention of answering them until they prayed in the spirit of repentance. Their many idols made their worship sinful. It was all in vain, because God does not hear the prayers of idolaters.

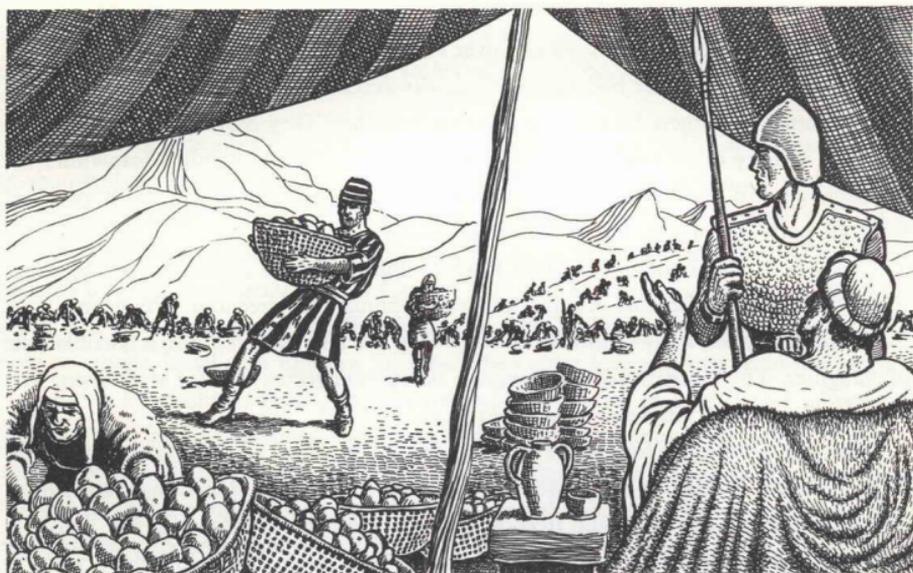
Equally useless were the frantically constructed barricades and other military preparations.

Assyria Invades Israel

Three days later wave upon wave of invaders from the north pushed over and past Shiloh, leaving thousands of dead and wounded in and about the camp!

Within days the Assyrians of Mesopotamia moved over all Canaan. They bottled up Canaanites and Israelites alike in a state of destruction and helplessness. It seemed to powerless Israel that God was helping the invaders more than He had previously helped Israel, though actually God had simply withdrawn His helpful power from the Israelites.

Wherever the Mesopotamians conquered large numbers of people, they left strong garrisons of soldiers to keep the vanquished people under their power. Valuables were stripped from the Israelites. A system of semi-slavery was developed by which Israel was forced to raise animals and crops for the conquerors. No tribes or areas were overlooked by the Assyrians in this matter of constant contribution. The easy life of Israel was transformed in just a few weeks into one of misery and servitude. It was all carried out with "German efficiency" because, as we shall see later, the descendants of those ancient As-



Within a short time the free and easy life of the Israelites was turned to one of miserable servitude by their Assyrian conquerors.

syrians later migrated to Germany and are known as Germans today! There was no outlook for anything but this unhappy condition in the long years to come. (Judges 3:5-8.)

After a time, when they could see no way out of their trouble, the Israelites fell into a state of sincere repentance. For many, life became a round of tears, forced labor and prayers. Still the years of servitude wore on.

Meanwhile a man by the name of Othniel felt quite strongly that something should be added to those prayers and tears. He was of the tribe of Judah, a nephew and son-in-law of Caleb. He had years before distinguished himself in leading troops to vanquish many Canaanites. (Judges 1:12-13; Judges 3:9.)

In their disorganized state the Israelites had little military strength to resist their conquerors. But Othniel secretly managed to establish an underground movement that grew with each passing month. When he decided the time was right for an uprising, secretly armed Israelites made a strong surprise attack on the Mesopotamian garrison at Shiloh. It was so sudden—and successful—that not one enemy soldier escaped to alert troops stationed elsewhere.

Repentance Brings Deliverance

Othniel distributed the captured arms to equip more Israelites for hasty assaults

on other enemy barracks in other parts of Canaan. The result was that within a few days Israel enjoyed a surprising victory over all the enemy soldiers stationed in Canaan.

When news of what had happened finally reached the wicked Assyrian ruler of Mesopotamia, he gathered thousands of troops together. They moved swiftly southward from the vicinity of Damascus to attack the Israelite camp at Shiloh. Meanwhile, the Israelites were so encouraged by their victory that Israelites of fighting ability swarmed from all parts of Canaan to swell Othniel's army.

Before the Mesopotamians could reach Shiloh they were ambushed by thousands upon thousands of Israelite troops desperately hungry for freedom. The enemy from the north slowly fell away—until with God's help the Assyrians fell into a horrible state of slaughter. The remnants of the Assyrian occupation forces fled for their lives. Victory for Israel was complete. (Judges 3:10.)

At last, after eight long years as a captive nation, Israel abruptly emerged to freedom. God had listened to the prayers of the repentant. He had chosen the man Othniel to lead the people to victory and freedom. In fact, God chose Othniel as the first of a line of righteous men who were inspired to lead and guide Israel for many years to come.

The attitude of the people had changed so much during their eight years of servitude that they were quite willing to obey God now. They cooperated with Othniel in the reform he required to be carried out for the good of the nation. Intermarriage with the Canaanites and worship of strange gods were forbidden. Those who indulged in these things were harshly punished. There was a return to the ways of living according to God's laws. The result was an Israel much happier and more prosperous than the nation had been for a long time.

Under the leadership of Othniel, God's chosen servant, Israel enjoyed forty years of peace. During those forty years Othniel was the first of the leaders—since the time of Joshua—known as *judges*. They weren't the kind of judges who were instituted only as men who decided on cases of justice. They were more like rulers, and they headed Israel from Joshua's time until the time of Samuel. (Judges 3:11.)

Lessons Soon Forgotten

Othniel maintained law and order in Israel. But soon after his death the people had no strong leader and again began to lapse back into their sinful ways. God's anger again was roused against them. Once more they were bound to fall under a curse, though they had no idea how God planned to punish them.

The nation of Moab, east of the Dead Sea, was then ruled by a man by the name of Eglon. Much of the territory occupied by Israel east of the Jordan had at one time

been part of Moab, and Eglon was determined to recover it. He didn't realize that his strong desire had been planted firmly in his mind by God, who planned to use him to chasten Israel.

Besides building his own army into a strong fighting force, Eglon enlisted the aid of thousands of troops from the Ammonites and Amalekites, two small nations that hated Israel because of that nation's previous victories over them. (Judges 3:12-13.)

Eglon's forces pushed westward across the Jordan with such strength that the main body of Israel in the central area of Canaan fell captive almost immediately to the Moabites and their allies. Not many Israelites were slain by Eglon, because it was his purpose to cripple Israel as a fighting force and then exact heavy tribute from the people.

Eglon established strong garrisons west of the Jordan to keep Israel powerless. To show that he had extended the ancient borders of his nation west of the river, he set up north-south rows of images in the area of Gilgal. Here he also built a palace for himself so that he might more closely exert control over the captured Israelites. For eighteen years the Israelites were in bondage to Eglon. (Verse 14.)

Again, as might be expected, the Israelites went into their state of repentance. They regretted, as usual, falling into such a sinful condition. Their tears, sufferings and prayers touched the ever-merciful heart of the Creator, who this time chose a sturdy, left-handed Benjamite named Ehud to help change the course of events.

Outwitting a Heathen King

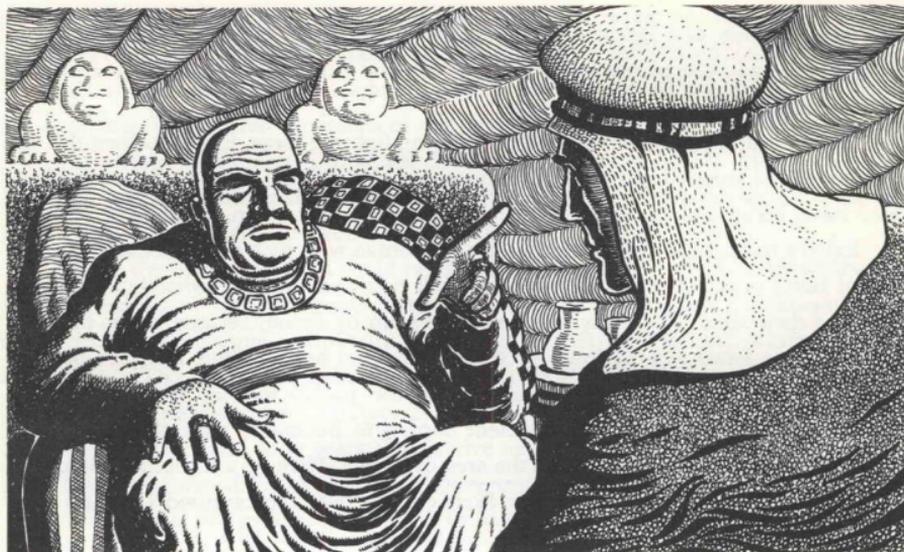
Ehud's part started when he was chosen to head a group of messengers to bear a valuable tribute to the king of Moab. Irksome as it was to the Israelites, wicked Eglon required that the gifts of gold, silver, jewels and produce be brought to him with the pomp and ceremony only a king could demand. On this occasion, Ehud, who had great strength and skill in the use of his left hand, hid a sharp dagger beneath his clothes on his right hip. After the tribute had been presented to Eglon, Ehud and his bearers left and headed back toward Shiloh. Ehud went only as far as the nearby border that had been marked by the stone images. There he told the others to return to Shiloh without him. He quickly returned to the king's palace with the excuse that he had a secret message for Eglon. When guards told the king, he asked Ehud into his private quarters and dismissed his servants. (Judges 3:15-20.)

"Now what is this secret message you claim you have for me?" the king asked.

"Would it surprise you to know that it is from God?" queried Ehud.

"What do you mean—from God?" Eglon demanded, lifting his weighty body from his chair and moving excitedly toward Ehud.

"I mean *this!*" Ehud exclaimed.



"Now what is this secret message you claim you have for me?"
King Eglon demanded of Ehud.

His left hand slipped under his cloak and whipped out his dagger with such speed that the Moabite ruler didn't have time to shout for help. Ehud quickly thrust the dagger into Eglon's body, then hastily left the room and noiselessly locked the doors behind him. Justice had been done. He slipped out the private entrance leading outside, locked the door, took the key and set out for the area of Mt. Ephraim.

Later, when servants came to wait on their king and found the doors locked, they believed that Eglon didn't want to be disturbed. They left, but when they returned to find the doors still locked, they became concerned. At the risk of facing the king's wrath, they obtained a key and cautiously opened the doors. To their horror they found their ruler dead from a dagger that had been thrust past the hilt into the obese body. (Judges 3:21-26.)

God Is Wise and Just

At this point, as at other instances in past episodes of the Bible Story, a few readers will be inclined to shudder a bit. They will wonder why God would allow one of His chosen people to execute someone, and why the story should be included in a version written especially for younger people.

The Bible should be read by young and old alike. It is a frank description of the

history of Israel, in part, describing the many woes brought on by human nature. In that telling there is no allowance for the delicate feelings of individuals. The Bible Story is less stark in many respects. Any who shudder at this more imaginative but infinitely lesser account of the scriptures obviously could read parts of the Bible only with shocking difficulty.

God specifically chose Israel for a certain purpose, and a part of that purpose included ridding Canaan of the heathen peoples who lived there. In a later judgment these once-heathen people who have not had an opportunity for salvation will be given that opportunity by God. (Matthew 12:41-42; Revelation 20:11-12; Isaiah 65:19-25.) As far as God was concerned, it was no different for an Israelite to execute an idolatrous heathen king than it was for an Israelite soldier to slay an enemy soldier in battle. Israel, remember, was a fleshly nation, and unconverted—except for a very few like the prophets and judges. Only God has the authority to tell anyone to kill. It is the responsibility of God, only, to decide when a wicked person should be excuted for his own good and the good of those around him. Nevertheless, today it is not a Christian's duty to execute this kind of justice. God leaves that to the unconverted who run this world. Jesus said His kingdom is *not* of this world (John 18:36), otherwise his servants would fight. Israel was of this world. But the Kingdom of God is of the world tomorrow. And Christ will fight to establish it when He comes again.

Ehud lost no time in reaching Mt. Ephraim, a few miles to the northwest, where he summoned many Israelite men to tell them what had happened.

"These Moabite soldiers stationed here to keep us captive are the choicest warriors of their nation," Ehud told them. "But when they hear that their leader is dead, they will lose their desire to keep guarding us, and will want to flee across Jordan to their country. It is according to God's will that you take up your hidden arms now and follow me!" (Judges 3:27.)

By the time news of their ruler's death reached the Moabite soldiers massed near Jericho, Ehud and the Israelite soldiers had come charging out of the Mt. Ephraim area and were well on their way toward the Jordan river.

As Ehud predicted, having been inspired by God, leaders of the Moabite troops in Canaan quickly decided to move their soldiers back to Moab when they learned that their king had been mysteriously slain. They had a feeling that the God of Israel had something to do with the matter, and they feared it was an omen that Moabite troops might also meet death if they were to remain in Canaan.

Ten thousand Moabite soldiers of the Jericho region set off on the shortest route toward the Jordan—a road that ran almost directly eastward. Ehud's inspired foreknowledge of how the enemy would retreat made it possible for the Israelites to know

they should station themselves at the Jordan river to prevent the escape of the Moabite army.

Long before the Moabites could reach the river, the Israelites were ready and waiting in ambush. When the Moabites arrived, the Israelites closed in on them with such surprising fury that when the fray was over, every Moabite of the ten thousand was dead.

When the remaining Moabites at Eglon's palace and those stationed elsewhere in Canaan heard about what happened to the ten thousand picked troops, all fled eastward inside the true borders of their nation. Israel was free from the oppression of Moab.

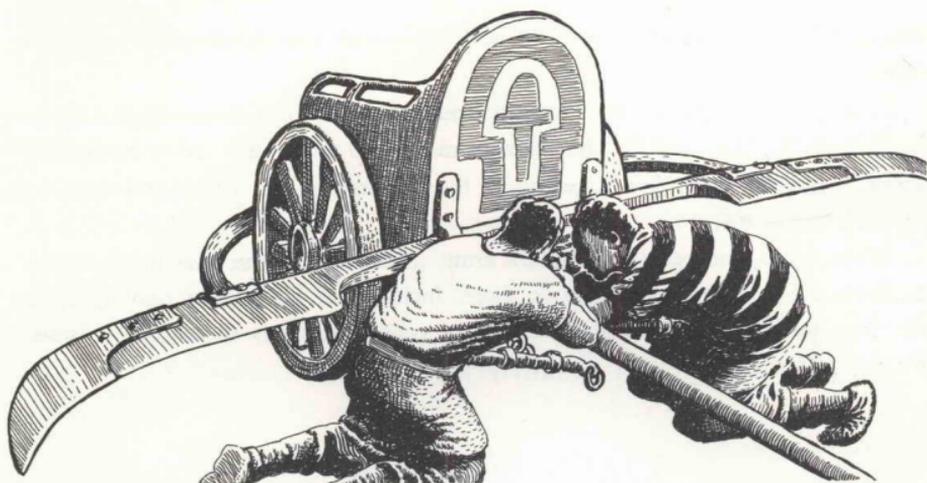
Because of his ability in leadership, Ehud became the second Israelite ruler known as a judge. He remained in power for many years of peace and prosperity in Israel, which meant that during that time the people were obedient, for the most part, to God's laws. (Judges 3:28-30.)

A short verse at the end of the third chapter of the book of Judges names a man by the name of Shamgar as another man of leadership who was possibly a lesser judge in western Canaan during Ehud's time. The Philistines, a nation of city-states on the shores of the Great Sea, had joined with Moab in attacking the Israelites in that region and had kept them in servitude for many years as farmers. The servitude was abruptly ended when the husky crop producers turned on their conquerors with their soil-tilling implements. An unusual accomplishment of this encounter was Shamgar's wielding an ox-goat (a sharpened, metal-tipped hardwood pole) so swiftly and expertly that he killed six hundred Philistines, though possibly part of that number was included in the efforts of Shamgar's fellow farmers. (Verse 31.)

And Now a Northern Foe

It might seem discouragingly repetitious to report that after Ehud died, Israel again lapsed into a state of rebellion against God. But it happened! Once more God used a pagan king to punish the people. This time it was Jabin, a strong ruler in north Canaan. He was a descendant of that Jabin who had many years previously tried to attack the army of Israel with iron chariots. He had been overcome by Joshua and had lost his city in flames. This next Jabin had rebuilt the city of Hazor, and had become so powerful that he overcame the Israelites in the northern part of Canaan. Ironically, this later Jabin used nine hundred iron chariots as a means of victory. The general of his army was the dreaded Sisera.

For twenty drawn-out, unhappy years Israel suffered under the terrible domination of Jabin. (Judges 4:1-3.) Again, as usual, Israel cried out to God for mercy. The people showed proof of their repentance by departing from the evil ways they knew were forbidden by God.



Many of the chariots of the enemy forces were possibly fitted with huge, sharp blades intended to literally mow down the Israelite soldiers.

As a means of rescuing Israel, God used a woman by the name of Deborah. She lived in Mt. Ephraim, and was one of such good judgment and fair thinking that many Israelites came to her for advice. This woman was not a judge in the sense that she was a ruler with authority, though God chose her to help Israel in several ways. (Verses 4-5.)

For one thing, God gave Deborah knowledge of what could happen in Israel's favor, but it was necessary for a man who was a military leader to carry out the plan. Deborah knew of such a man. His name was Barak. He came from his home in the north when she sent for him.

"God has disclosed to me that if a capable man such as you can succeed in gathering ten thousand armed Israelites on Mt. Tabor, then He will give them victory over the Canaanites who seek them out there for battle," Deborah told Barak. "With a promise such as this from God, is there any good reason why you should refuse to be the one who can be of such great service by gathering and leading those men against the Canaanites?" (Judges 4:6-7.)

Not Enough Manhood in Israel's Men

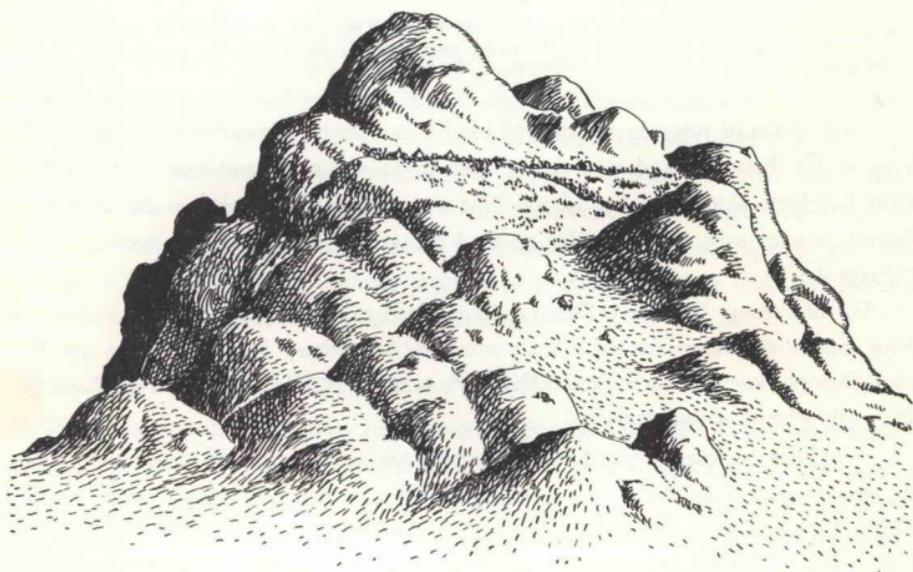
"I can manage to organize the army," Barak replied, "but I would want to know more about what God has revealed to you. I'll go to Mt. Tabor with the men, but only if you will accompany me to advise me in the crucial moments."

Deborah agreed, but told Barak that since he was depending too much on a

woman and was not showing enough manly leadership, God would allow a woman to destroy General Sisera.

Barak secretly organized the necessary troops. Most of them came from the northern tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun, though many men from other tribes swelled the number. The army succeeded in getting to the flat area of Mt. Tabor, and there encamped. (Verses 8-10.)

When Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, learned about the Israelites being on Mt. Tabor, he gathered his men to go there. Included in his mighty fighting force were nine hundred chariots and thousands of trained warriors so feared by Israel. (Verses 12-13.)



CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE

THE WAY TO PEACE

ON MT. TABOR the Israelite soldiers were able to see the Canaanite forces gathering on a plain several miles away to the southwest. An excessive amount of dust, such as would be raised by horses and vehicles, proved to the Israelites that the enemy's dreaded chariots were being brought up. (Judges 4:10-13.) Only God's supernatural help could save Israel now!

God Suddenly Acts

The Canaanites moved to a part of the valley close to Mt. Tabor, then set up camp for the night. Sisera, the Canaanite general, wasn't concerned with the possibility of the Israelites attacking, even though they had some advantage by being on higher ground. He knew they had no desire to tangle with his chariots and his large army. His plan was to capture the lesser-equipped Israelites in their smaller numbers when they were forced to come down off the mountain for necessities. Sisera had no doubt that the small Israelite army would be easy to wipe out under any condition.

Meanwhile, in the camp of Israel, Barak worriedly muttered: "If we go down the mountain we'll be wiped out by that huge number of men and chariots!"

"The time hasn't come yet to leave the mountain," Deborah said. "But the soldiers should be ready when that time comes."

The time came early the next morning, a while before dawn. Inspired by God, Deborah informed Barak that the Israelites should charge down the slope at once to attack, and that they would have God's supernatural help. (Verse 14.) Barak was inspired by Deborah's example and faith. He ordered the men to follow him down

the mountain. Many of them, as they poured down off Mt. Tabor, were filled with dismay at the prospect of facing what was obviously a superior enemy. They approached the camp of the Canaanites quietly, but it wasn't possible to get beyond the enemy sentries without causing shouts of alarm. When the sentries sounded the alarm, the Israelites attacked with all the courage they could muster.

Bedlam reigned among Sisera's troops as their attackers caught them napping. Shouts, screams, the neighing of startled horses, the clash of metal against metal and the general confusion made it impossible for Canaanite officers to get their men organized. The chariot drivers, stationed at some distance from the infantry, managed to get their horses hooked to many of the chariots and to get moving. However, with men tumbling and scrambling and struggling in all directions, the chariots ran down many more Canaanites than Israelites. God was beginning to fight Israel's battle as He had promised. (Verse 15.)

After making a half-hearted initial attempt to fight off the oncoming Israelites, the whole Canaanite army turned and fled northwestward down the Kishon river valley toward the hoped-for refuge of their fort at Harosheth. By now it was dawn, and in their fright the Canaanites—especially those in chariots—might have outrun their Israelite pursuers had it not been that God had decreed otherwise.

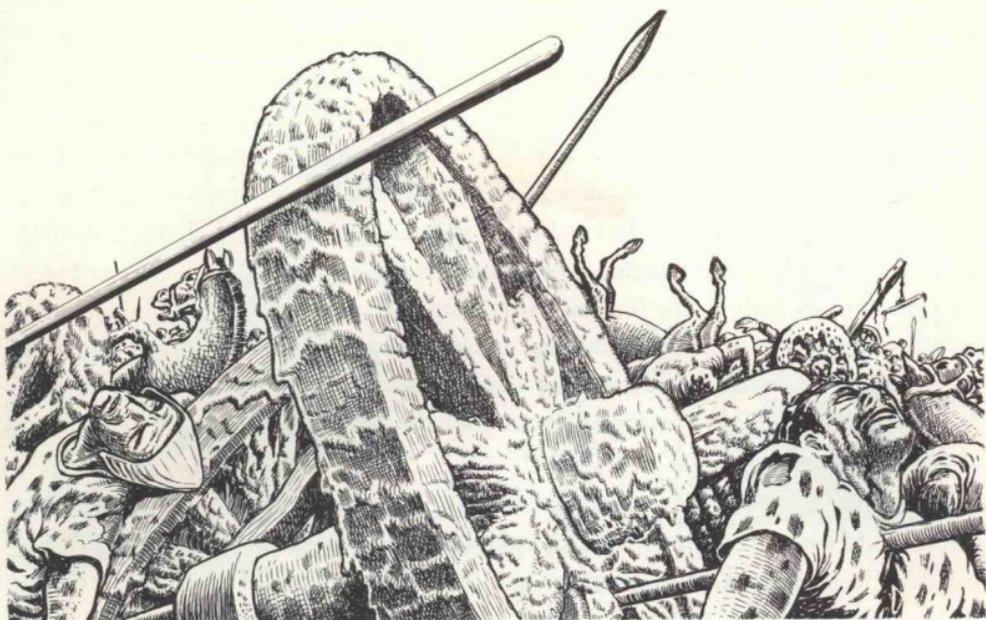
Suddenly heavy rains fell in the region of the Kishon valley. The river rose rapidly. The closer the Canaanites moved to the stream, the softer and muddier the ground became. When the chariots ran into these spots they bogged down and came to a sudden stop. Chariots racing up from the rear smashed into them, resulting in a muddy mass of vehicles and struggling horses and men.

The men and horses that managed to get past the soft spots in the ground only plunged on to end up in the swollen waters of the Kishon as it broke over its banks into a flash flood which swept away many of Sisera's troops. (Judges 5:21.) The Israelites swept in close behind to cut off any attempted back-tracking and cut down the enemy with swords, slings, knives and spears.

God had again stepped in to rescue Israel by bringing Jabin's army to a swift end in a welter of mud, water and blood.

As for Sisera, he was among those who raced away in chariots. When his chariot became bogged in mud, he managed in the confusion to leap to safety and run north-eastward across the plain toward the hills. He had no way of knowing whether or not he had been observed, but he felt certain that the Israelites would make every effort to find him.

On the other side of Mt. Tabor, on a branch of the plain, was the dwelling of a Kenite named Heber, who Sisera believed was friendly to the northern Canaanites.



The pursued Canaanites died by the thousands in the mud of the Kishon valley.

After running a few hours, Sisera neared Heber's tent. The Kenite's wife, whose name was Jael, happened to see the fatigued Canaanite general staggering toward her tent. She knew who he was, and went out to meet him.

Sisera's Prophesied Doom

"Come rest in my tent," she told him as she helped him along. (Judges 4:15-18.)

Inside the tent, he wearily lay down, exhausted by his race for freedom. When Sisera asked for water, Jael gave him clabbered milk to quench his thirst and make him sleep more soundly, and then covered him with a blanket. (Judges 5:25.)

"If anyone comes to ask about me, don't mention that you have seen me," Sisera warned Jael. "You will be well rewarded to protect me from any of those fanatical, God-fearing Israelites!"

Those were the last words uttered by the pagan Canaanite general. He was so weary that he fell asleep almost immediately, though he wouldn't have done so if he could have realized even to the smallest extent what was about to befall him.

In another compartment of her tent Jael listened intently until she could be certain, by Sisera's slow, loud breathing, that he was deep in slumber. Then she noiselessly moved outside, pulled up a sharp tent stake and reached for a mallet. Very

careful not to make a sound, she entered the room where Sisera slept on his side. With a quick, strong blow of the tent stake mallet, she drove the stake through Sisera's temples, then into the ground, killing the general almost instantly. (Judges 4:19-21; Judges 5:26.)

God allowed Jael to take Sisera's life in this grisly, cold-blooded manner as a warning to us all. Those Canaanites were better off dead. They sacrificed many of their babies in the temples of Baal and filled adjoining graveyards with jars containing these tiny corpses. When building a new house, a Canaanite family would sacrifice a baby and put its body in the foundation to bring good luck to the rest of the family. Archaeologists who have found the many tiny skeletons of these sacrificed babes have wondered why God did not destroy the Canaanites sooner. He would have done so if Israel had obeyed His command to execute all the idolatrous Canaanites when they first conquered the land. (Deuteronomy 7:1-6.)

Because Sisera was an idolatrous Canaanite, he was one more to be purged from the land after he had been used for the purpose of punishing the Israelites and bringing them to repentance. As one who sought to destroy the army of Israel, he was denied the so-called honor of dying in action, as a high-ranking soldier would ordinarily prefer.

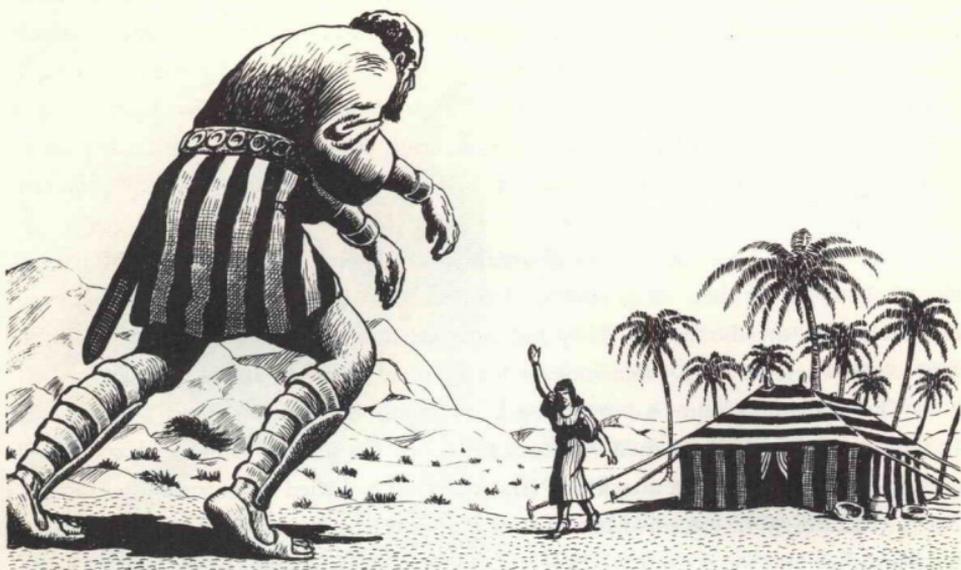
Only a little while after this unsavory incident, Jael looked out to see the victorious Israelites trotting across the plain. She ran out toward the men, waving frantically to attract their attention. When they reached her she told them that she had an important message for their leader, and Barak approached her to hear what she had to say.

"If you are seeking Jabin's general, Sisera, I can take you to him at once," Jael told Barak.

"Show us," Barak commanded.

Jael led Barak and a few of his men to her tent and into her private compartment, where she drew back a curtain to reveal the nailed-down Canaanite to the startled Israelites. Then Barak remembered Deborah's prophecy that a woman would destroy Sisera because Barak had at first depended too much on Deborah's faith. In humiliation, Barak realized his lack of faith was a sin against God. He fully repented and was forgiven by God in whom he now fully trusted. (Hebrews 11:13, 32, 39.)

Although Israel was victorious that day in becoming free, the one who had planned to defeat Israel was still safe in his quarters to the north. That was Jabin, king of the northern Canaanites. On hearing of the defeat of his army, he quickly sought refuge, but within a few days he fell into the hands of his enemies and lost his life. (Judges 4:22-24.)



Jael went out from her tent to welcome the weary general of Jabin's defeated army.

Deliverance from the Canaanites was considered such a happy accomplishment that a great celebration was held by Israel. Songs were composed, and Deborah and Barak led the people in praising God with loud, hearty enthusiasm. (Judges 5:1-31.) Most of them realized that their Creator was the source of their strength and power, though at times they forgot that important fact because every man insisted on doing what he thought best. (Judges 17:6.) God had specifically commanded His people not to do what they thought best (Deuteronomy 12:8) because that way is often wrong and leads to death. (Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25.) Most of the Israelites had not yet learned that man's conscience is not a reliable guide for conduct—that man needs God's law to tell him how to live. (Deuteronomy 12:32.)

For forty more years after Jabin's overthrow Israel was free from enemies. (Judges 5:31.) But before that many years passed, another generation came into being, and a large part of Israel again fell into living in a disorderly and lawless manner, each man following his own conscience—doing what *he* thought best—letting his own opinion, instead of God's law, tell him how to live.

The Midianites Again

About two hundred years previously, when Moses was the leader, Israel had almost wiped out the idolatrous nation of Midian on their border east of the Dead

Sea. Since that time the Midianites had greatly increased in numbers and, though several generations had passed since the fateful war with Israel, a fierce hatred of their victors still existed with the Midianites.

At this point God stepped in to cause Midianite leaders to fan that hatred so that Midian would be used to punish Israel. The result was that the vengeance-seeking Midianites swarmed up out of their land to end Israel's forty years of freedom, pleasure and sin!

The Israelites had become so disorganized and weak that the fierce Midianites chased them out of their cities and off their farms. By the thousands the Israelites ran for safety into the mountains. They hid in caves and even in the narrow, secluded canyons—wherever they could hide or fortify themselves. (Judges 6:1-2.)

The Midianites kept on moving back and forth through all areas to route the Israelites and rob them of their livestock and crops. On their return to each conquered area, the Midianites would attack any Israelites who had tried to return to their homes. Many Israelites were forced to flee outside Palestine to the western shores of the Mediterranean Sea and the sparsely settled coastland of northwestern Europe.

In some regions the attacks by the Midianites were so frequent that the remaining Israelites moved into the wooded mountains to establish permanent residence. Their only homes were many caverns and canyons in the rugged Palestinian hills.

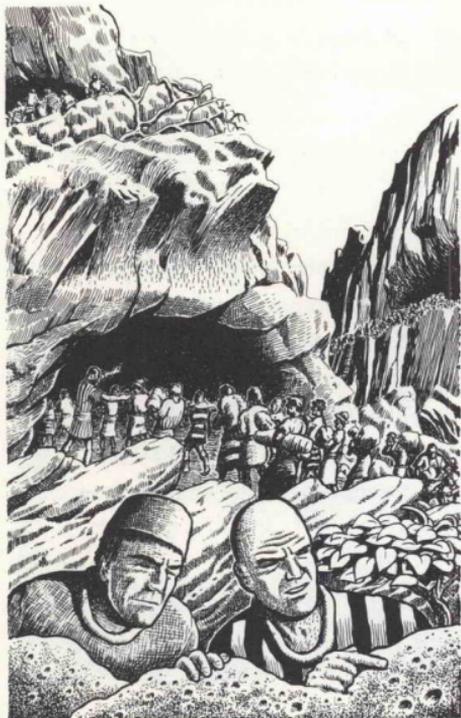
Living Like Animals

Between forays by the enemy a part of the Israelites secretly went back to their farms and grazing areas to try to continue raising crops and stock. Sometimes they were successful for a while. The Midianites couldn't be everywhere at the same time. When they did come, look-outs generally reported their arrival in time for the Israelites to move from the valleys to safety in the mountain hide-aways and strongholds.

Despite all this, the Israelites stubbornly continued to live their own way, though they had to live in caves like animals, rather than repent and obey God and have His divine protection.

For two or three harvest seasons Israel managed fairly well on what food could be raised in the more secluded valleys. Then the Midianite soldiers began bringing their families and their herds. Furthermore, the Amalekites and other Arabian tribes began pouring into Canaan, and just at a time of harvest.

Cities were taken over, farms were stripped of their produce and herds and flocks grazing in the valleys were seized by the invaders before the Israelites could hide them in the mountains. The numbers of the enemy were this time so great and so spread out that the Israelites had little or no opportunity to go after food. They were



The Israelites were forced to take refuge in caves in the mountains.

forced to remain in their mountain refuges on the verge of starvation. (Judges 6:3-6.)

Being cooped up without a regular source of food became an increasingly more serious problem for Israel. Well-organized groups sneaked down at night to seize vegetables or fruit or meat wherever it could be found, but this pursuit became increasingly more dangerous as the enemy became more watchful, and whole bands of Israelites lost their lives trying to get something to eat.

By the time seven years had passed, Israel was in a desperate, half-starved condition. Life in caves and hollowed-out places had reduced a large part of the people to an unkempt state verging on barbarism.

At this time a man whose name isn't mentioned in the scriptures was chosen by God to remind the Israelites that they had brought this one more calamity on themselves by their disobedience to God. Some of the people had already been begging God for forgiveness and help, and now thousands joined them. (Verses 6-10.)

Repentance Brings Divine Help

The Creator's mercy again was extended to Israel, though as usual the people were required to act in helping themselves. It began in the mountain town of Ophrah, about midway between the site of Jericho and Mt. Ephraim in the territory of the half-tribe of Manasseh. A relatively young man named Gideon was one day threshing wheat in an out-of-the-way place near his father's old winepress, long unused because the Israelites no longer had grapes with which to make wine.

Although hidden from passers-by, Gideon commanded a clear view down the mountain so that he could watch for approaching Midianites. He was certain that he was alone as he hand-threshed the few small but precious bundles of wheat he and a few servants had courageously gleaned the night before in a field below.

Abruptly he was aware that a man was sitting in the shade of an oak tree only a few yards away. Gideon was startled by the strangely sudden presence of this man, who might well have been a Midianite spy. He started to quietly gather up his wheat and scamper for safety, but before he could sack it up and leave, the man got up and sauntered toward Gideon, who was relieved to note that he obviously wasn't a Midianite.

"I see that you are very careful not to let your enemies know what you are doing," the stranger remarked. "Why do you, a strong, courageous young man, seem to fear the Midianites so much? Don't you know that your God is ready and willing to help you?"

"I don't know who you are, sir," Gideon replied, "but if God is willing to help us, why hasn't He rescued us from these terrible conditions?" (Verses 11-13.)

"Because Israel has ignored My laws and our agreement," the stranger answered. "*Your* laws?" Gideon queried, staring.

"*My* laws," the stranger replied firmly and calmly.

Gideon was a bit shaken by this answer. He met the gaze of the stranger, and realized that the brilliant eyes were those of one far greater than a human being! He respectfully waited for the stranger to continue.

Gideon's Divine Commission

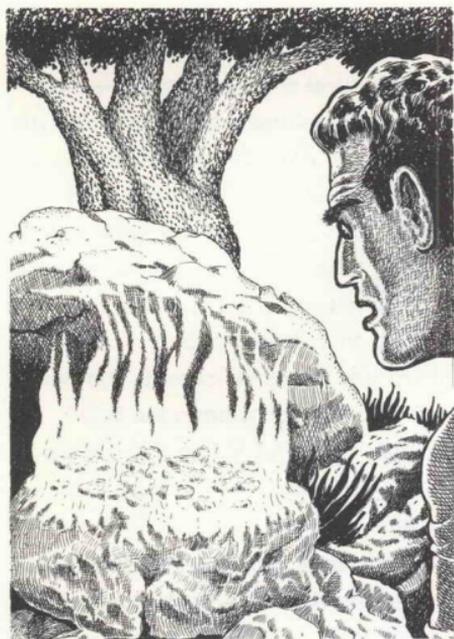
"If you will act with faith in your Creator, you can help rescue Israel from the Midianites, Gideon," the stranger told him.

Gideon could scarcely believe what he heard. Although he had always refused to take part in the idolatrous practice of other Israelites, he couldn't at the moment realize why he should be chosen to help liberate Israel. He had never considered himself an outstanding leader, though he had some reputation among the Israelites of his area as being quite active in the welfare of his people, even at the risk of his own life.

"How is it possible for me to help rescue Israel, my Lord?" asked Gideon. "I am not wealthy and I am the youngest of my father's sons. I do not command any fighting force. Why should I be chosen to do something that many other men are more qualified and better equipped to do?"

"Don't be concerned about such things," the stranger said. "Your God will be your strength, and you shall strike down the Midianites as easily as though their army consisted of only one man!" (Judges 6:14-16.)

Gideon hardly knew what to do. He didn't feel that he could accept such responsibility without knowing for certain that this man was really divinity in human form. On the other hand, he couldn't risk refusing a commission from God.



He asked the stranger to continue resting under the oak tree, excused himself and hurried to his abode not far away to quickly prepare a sacrificial offering of food. When he returned he presented unleavened cakes, broth and a boiled young goat to the stranger, who looked pleased at sight of the food.

"Place the meat and cakes on this flat rock and pour the broth over them," Gideon was told, and he did so.

The stranger then touched the offering with the end of his staff. Abruptly fire shot up out of the rock, rapidly consuming the food! When Gideon turned his startled gaze up from the spectacle, the stranger had vanished! (Verses 17-21.)

CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR

GOD'S FANTASTIC ARMY!

WHEN Gideon saw fire spitting up out of the rock on which he had placed food for his strange guest, the young Israelite was quite startled. He stared in awe as the food was swiftly burned to cinders after his guest had merely touched the rock with his staff.

When he looked up he was even more startled to find that the stranger had miraculously faded from view! (Judges 6:20-21.)

Idolatry Must Go!

Gideon realized then that God, and not some man, had commanded him to lead Israel to freedom from the Midianites. (Judges 6:11-16.) He fell face down by the flaming rock, fearful that he might be struck dead because he had come so close to God.

"Do not be afraid," he heard the voice of God say. "You shall not die because of this close contact with your Creator. Go about your business, and tonight I shall speak to you again."

Gideon was so thankful and impressed that he built an altar there and dedicated it to God. (Verses 22-24.) That night Gideon slept by that spot to protect his wheat from the Midianites and to await God. Before dawn God spoke to him.

"Gideon, you know now that it is indeed your Creator who has chosen you to lead Israel," God said. "Do as I instruct you. The people must cease their worshipping of idols before I free them. Go out tomorrow night and tear down the altar near your father's home dedicated to the sun-god called Baal. Close by it, as you know, is a grove of trees in which is a wooden image of the sun-goddess known as Easter. Cut down

the grove, break the image and hack them to pieces for firewood. Then build an altar to your Creator on the flat top of this rock. Take your father's good young bull—the second one, which is seven years old—and use it for a burnt offering on the altar. For fuel, use the firewood you will make from the grove of trees and the image of the goddess Easter."

Before the Midianites had forced the Israelites into the mountains, Gideon had been a fairly wealthy young man who had hired several men to work for him. When he had fled from the valley, most of these men had come with him to remain loyal and live close to his makeshift home in the mountains. Next day Gideon called ten of the most valiant and trustworthy of these men together—men who were not idolaters—and told them of his recent experience.

"God has commanded me to do this thing," he told them, "but I can't do it alone as quickly as it should be done. I'm asking you to believe me and help me."

All ten men were quite willing to help. Late that night they quietly went with Gideon to the altar of Baal and noiselessly as possible tore it apart. Just as noiselessly they hastily erected a new altar. They chopped down the grove of trees in which was the wooden image of Easter, split up the wood and placed the pieces on the altar.



Late that night Gideon and his ten men tore apart the altar on which the Israelites had sacrificed to the pagan god Baal. They also cut down the wooden image of Astarte, or Easter, the sut-goddess who was believed to have emerged from a huge egg dropped from the sky.

Gideon had already taken from his father's corral the second young bull, as God commanded. Slain and dressed, it was put on the wood that was arranged on the new altar to God. It was seared in flames from the wood of the grove and the broken image of the goddess Easter. (Judges 6:25-27.)

By this time it was nearly dawn. Gideon and his ten men stole away to their various makeshift homes. But the light from the fire attracted the attention of some early risers. They hurried to the altar to find out the reason for the big blaze so early in the morning.

When they found that the altar to Baal had been torn down and a new one erected, on which the remains of the bull and the pagan image was burning, there was great excitement and anger in the growing crowd of Israelites who had become idol-worshippers.

In spite of all precautions by Gideon, someone had seen him coming from the direction of the altar before dawn. When the angry crowd heard of this, it moved to surround the home of his father, Joash.

"Bring out your son or tell us where he is!" the people shouted. "He is guilty of tearing down our altar and destroying the image of Easter! We must kill Gideon to avenge the sun goddess!"

Joash scowled at the crowd. He was irked at what Gideon presumably had done, but he didn't want to see his son fall into the hands of these wrathful people.

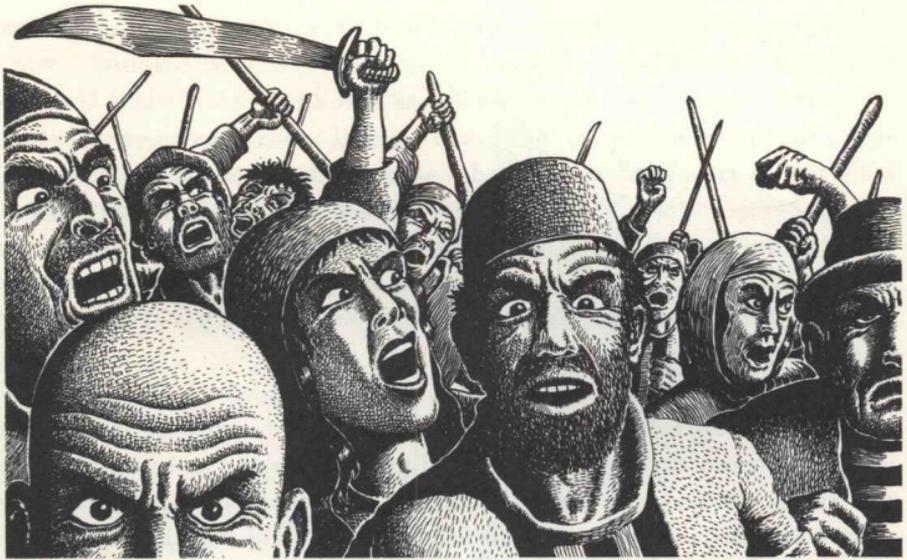
"Why must you demand anything for avenging Baal and Easter?" Joash asked the crowd. "If Baal is a strong god, surely he will avenge himself before another day has passed. If my son is the guilty one, Baal will not let him live!" That is why Gideon was renamed "Jerubbaal"—which means "let Baal do his own pleading." (Judges 6:28-32.)

This advice quieted the mob. None of the worshippers of Baal wanted to say that their pagan god lacked the ability to deal with his enemies by himself. Gradually the crowd dispersed.

Heathen in Fear

Gideon went into hiding. Meanwhile word had leaked out to the enemy that a champion was about to lead Israel to battle against Midian. The Midianites perceived that some strong underground movement was being organized, and they asked the Amalekites and other Arab tribes to come and stand with them against Israel.

Soon thousands upon thousands of soldiers mounted on camels moved into the valley of Jezreel, the place where king Jabin's forces had met miserable defeat several years previously.



An angry mob of Israelites who worshipped Baal and Easter set out to kill Gideon because of what had happened to their idols.

Gideon blew a trumpet to assemble the people of Abiezer and sent messengers to the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali to ask for men to come and fight against the Midianites. By night thousands of men from these tribes quietly moved into the mountain strongholds close to where Gideon was hiding. (Judges 6:33-35.)

When Gideon realized how many men were subject to his command, he began to wonder if he could successfully fulfill the tremendous task he had been given. Troubled and uncertain, he went to a private place to pray to God.

"I need assurance from you," Gideon prayed. "Please show me again that I am the one you have chosen to lead Israel against Midian. Tonight I shall spread a fleece of wool on the ground at the threshing floor. Tomorrow morning, if the wool is wet with dew and the ground and grass all around are dry, then I shall know for certain that you have picked me to help save Israel."

Early next morning Gideon hurried out to examine the fleece. It was heavy with dew. In fact, Gideon took it up and squeezed out enough water to fill a good-sized bowl. At the same time he could find no sign of moisture on the ground or grass nearby.

He was encouraged by this sign. But the more he thought about it, the more he reasoned that it was possible that the wool had naturally attracted more moisture than the grass would, and he decided to ask God for one more sign. Probably he didn't realize how much he was testing God's patience by this continuing doubt. That he was

aware that he was carrying matters a bit too far, however, was evidenced in the manner in which he made his next request.

"I trust you won't be angry if I ask for one more sign," Gideon said to God. "Tonight I shall place the fleece on the ground again. If in the morning only the fleece is dry and the ground and grass around it are wet with dew, then I shall know without a doubt that you have chosen me to lead the Israelite soldiers against our enemies."

Next morning Gideon found that there was an exceptionally heavy dew on the grass and shrubs all around. Even the ground was soft with moisture. But when he picked the fleece up off the wet ground he discovered that it was completely dry! (Judges 6:36-40.)

Gideon no longer had any room for doubt. His confidence lifted. Next morning he ordered all the Israelite soldiers to proceed into the valley of Jezreel. They were poorly armed, and many of them feared to enter the valley in the daytime, what with all the Midianites and their allies camped at the north side of the valley! They went nevertheless, and camped that night on the south side of the valley at the slopes of Mt. Gilboa. When they were numbered and organized into military units, it was found that there were thirty-two thousand of them.

God was ready to teach Gideon a much-needed lesson in faith.

Too Many Israelite Soldiers!

That many men would seem to have constituted a fair fighting force for those days. But when a report came by spies that the Midianite soldiers and their allies numbered over a hundred thousand, a great part of the Israelites feared it would be suicide to pit themselves against such overwhelming numbers.

God had a quite different opinion. He pointed out to Gideon that there were *too many* Israelite soldiers! He could better show His deliverance with fewer men in His way!

"If Israel should conquer the enemy with all the men who are gathered here now," God explained to Gideon, "then the people will brag of winning by greater strength, though with lesser numbers. If a much smaller number of Israelites is involved in a victory, then the people will have to admit, as will their enemies, that Israel's God alone made victory possible. Therefore reduce the number of your men by proclaiming to them that any who fear to battle the Midianites are free to leave this place. Thus you will also get rid of men who are fearful of failure."

Gideon sent officers to all his men to tell them that they could leave if they wished. To his great surprise and disappointment twenty-two thousand of them withdrew from the army. This left Gideon with only ten thousand men. That meant one

under-trained Israelite soldier for at least thirteen battle-trained enemy soldiers. (Judges 7:1-3.)

At the very time Gideon was feeling dismayed because his army had been so reduced, God told him that it was still too large!

"You must trim your men down to the very best soldiers," God said to him. "Take them all to the nearest stream to drink. The manner in which they drink will determine how many men you shall take to overcome the Midianites and their confederates. I will tell you later which to choose."

Gideon led his ten thousand men to the spring and pool at the foot of Mt. Gilboa. When they reached the stream flowing from the pool, he gave orders for them to stop and drink. Although the men believed that they were going to meet the enemy, most of them dropped their weapons, got down on their hands and knees and put their lips to the water.

Those who tried to be alert in the event of a surprise attack by the enemy from a nearby ridge retained their weapons, quickly stooped down to scoop up the water with their free hands and to lap it up from their cupped palms. Then God told Gideon to place those who kneeled down on one side and those who drank from their hands on the other. The result was surprising!

Most of his ten thousand men had fallen down on their hands and knees to drink. Only three hundred scooped up water with their hands! (Judges 7:4-6.)

God's Shocking Promise

After all had returned to camp, God informed Gideon that by those three hundred men He would deliver the enemy to Israel! All the other soldiers—nearly ten



When Gideon got up at dawn, he found that the grass, shrubs and ground were exceptionally dry, but that the fleece was heavily weighed with dew.

thousand—should be dismissed! God knew that it was difficult for Gideon to understand how a mere three hundred men could overcome such a great multitude. It was a matter of one Israelite soldier against at least 450 enemy soldiers. But God wanted Israel to re-learn the valuable lesson that mere numbers do not bring victory. (Judges 7:7-8; Zechariah 4:6.)

"I want you to know that the Midianites, in spite of their numbers, are afraid of Me," God told Gideon. "Go over to their camp after dark and hear for yourself what the average Midianite soldier thinks. I will protect you, but if you are too big a coward to go alone, take your right-hand man, Phurah. When you learn of the state of mind of the enemy, you will be encouraged." So that night Gideon went with Phurah, his servant, across the plain of Jezreel to the camp of the Midianites. (Judges 7:9-11.)

It was so late that most of the guards were within their tents on the borders of the camp, and in the moonless darkness it wasn't difficult for the two Israelites to silently creep past the outer tents. Once within the camp, they appeared in the faint light of the low fires like any other pair of Arabs. No one challenged them.

In passing one of the tents, their attention was attracted to a conversation within by two Midianite soldiers.

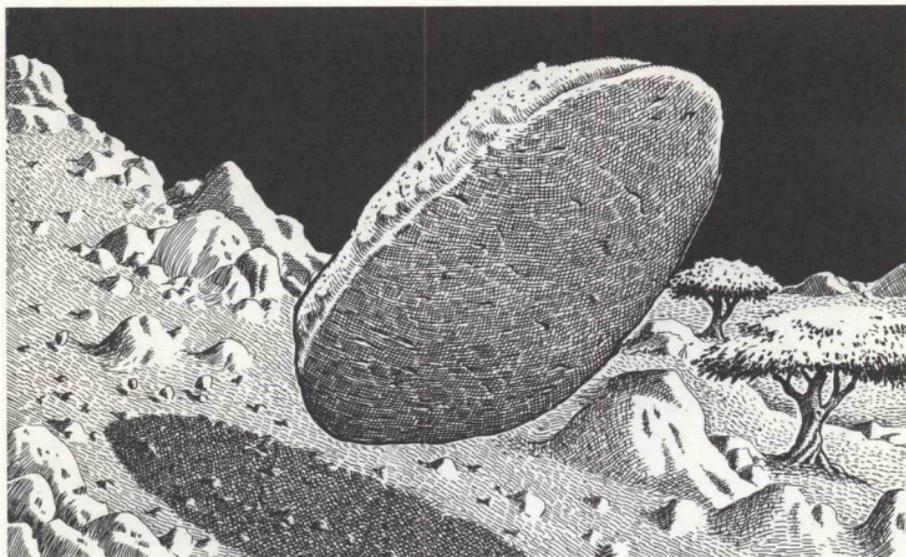
"I had a strange dream last night," they overheard one of the men remark. "I dreamed that a huge loaf of barley bread came tumbling down off that mountain across the valley. It rolled all the way over the plain and crashed into one of our tents with such force that it tore the tent to shreds and scattered it in all directions! Could such a dream have any meaning for us?"

God Speaks Through Pagan Fear

"Your dream was an evil omen!" the other soldier exclaimed fearfully. "It meant that Gideon, the Israelite who is rumored to be a magically strong leader through the power of the God of Israel, will attack us with his men and wipe us out. If you ask me, we would be wise to get out of here right away, and I know most of our men feel the same way about it." (Judges 7:12-14.)

Gideon didn't stay to hear more. Now he was thoroughly convinced that God would keep His promise to destroy the invaders. He returned with his servant to Mt. Gilboa, very ashamed of having doubted, and thanked God for the assurance he had received. Now that Gideon had repented of his weak faith, God could use him. God told him what he should do next.

The men rested next day. Well after dark the tiny band set out with Gideon to cross the valley to where the Midianites were camped. They arrived in the early



Gideon overheard the tale of the great loaf of barley bread that came rolling down Mt. Gilboa.

hours of the morning, long before dawn. According to God's instructions, Gideon divided the men into three groups. They silently spread out around the camp, but instead of carrying weapons in their hands, each man carried a trumpet and a long pitcher! (Verses 15-16.)

CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

GOD FIGHTS ISRAEL'S BATTLES!

IN THE deep darkness before dawn Gideon's three hundred men divided into three groups. Silently they spread themselves around the sprawling camp of the Midianites. Instead of weapons, the men had trumpets of rams' horns in their right hands and, in their left, earthen pitchers. Each man had a torch hidden in his pitcher.

Who Determines Outcome of Wars?

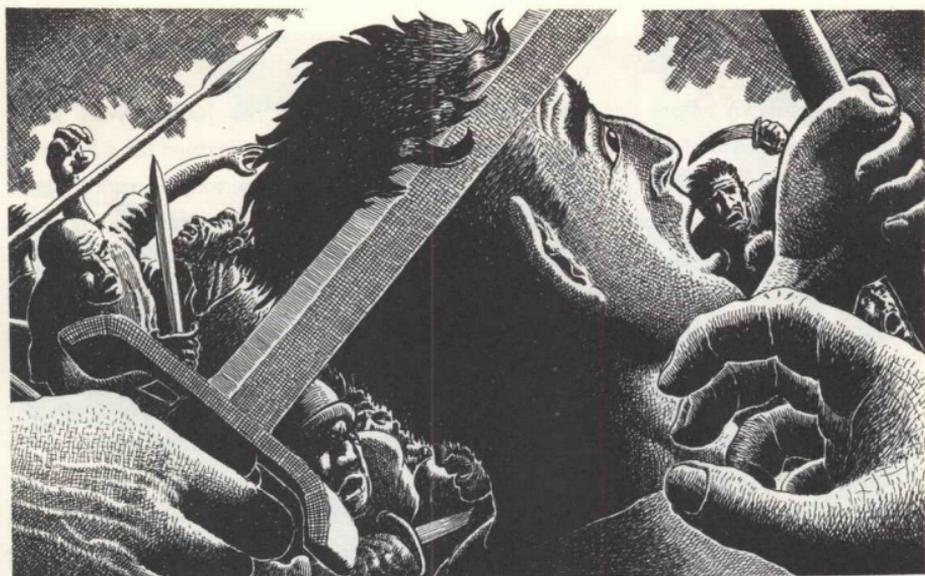
As soon as his men were in place, Gideon blew lustily on his trumpet made from a ram's horn. That was the signal for all the men to do likewise on their horns. Then Gideon broke his pitcher and held his torch aloft for all to see. Quickly the three hundred men also broke their earthen pitchers. Light was suddenly revealed from three hundred blazing torches! (Judges 7:16-20.)

The abrupt light and noise from all directions were confusingly startling to the Midianites. Even the guards were caught by surprise. In the darkness it seemed that a vast army was completely surrounding them. To add to their alarm, a multitude of shouting voices came from all around.

"*The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!*" were the loud words that rang over the plain from Gideon's men.

Bedlam resulted.

Believing that incredible numbers of armed Israelites were closing in all about them, the Midianites rushed excitedly out of their tents. Campfires were out or were very low. It was so dark that in their frenzy the men collided with each other. Thinking that Israelites had rushed in among them, they attacked one another. Within the



Alarmed by the shouts of Gideon's men, the confused Midianites imagined that the Hebrews had attacked. They rushed out from their tents to slay each other by the thousands in the dim lights of their dying campfires.

next few minutes thousands of Midianites died by the hands of their own brothers. God had intervened for Israel!

Gideon and his men stood by, not knowing at first what was going on. But the continued shouting, the clash of arms, the shrieks of pain and the sounds of frightened animals proved that disorganization and death reigned in the camp. (Verses 21-22.)

A little later, when it was evident that the Midianites, in their panic, were racing eastward in the direction of their homeland, Gideon thought of a way to make matters much worse for the enemy. Abandoned camels were wandering about. Some of them were caught. Gideon sent messengers on these mounts to various parts of the land occupied by the Ephraimites to tell the men of that tribe what had happened, and that the Midianites could possibly be cut off from escaping over the Jordan if the Ephraimites would move up quickly to meet them.

At the same time Gideon sent a messenger to the thousands of men he had dismissed from battle duty only a few hours before, informing them that the enemy was fleeing to the east, and that the Israelites could be of great service by pursuing them. (Verses 23-24.)

The messengers were instructed to rejoin Gideon as soon as their missions were accomplished.

It was dawn before the routed Midianites could reach the Jordan river. When finally it was possible for them to clearly see at a distance, they learned for a fact what they had only imagined at first—that thousands of Israelites were pursuing them. They pressed on at increased speed along the west bank of the river, hoping for a shallow spot where they could quickly cross to the other side.

By then Gideon's messengers had reached the Ephraimites, who responded by hastily assembling many armed men and sending them off to the east to meet the oncoming enemy.

Later, as the weary Midianites plodded fearfully along the Jordan, still anxiously seeking a place to ford it, they were shocked to see a horde of men guarding every possible fording place. Behind them the thousands of other Israelites pursued very closely. The idol-worshipping Midianites were cut off from their homeland and safety!

The result was more like a vast slaughter than a battle. The morale of the Midianites had been so weakened earlier by fear that the element of courage had almost vanished. Thousands of them fell because of having little or no will to defend themselves. Many plunged into the Jordan, only to drown or to be the targets of well-aimed spears or slung rocks. Nevertheless, they kept pouring into the water by the thousands, and about fifteen thousand managed to reach the safety of the eastern bank.

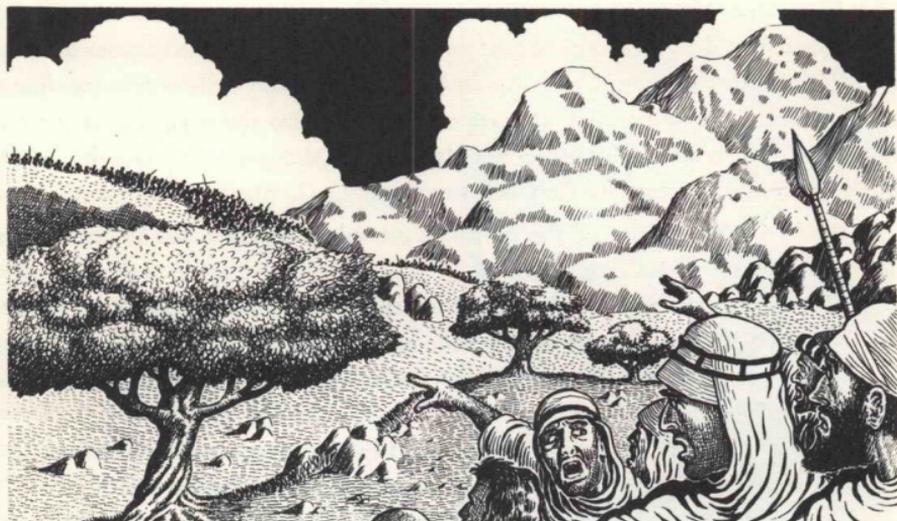
One hundred and twenty thousand of them, however, forever failed to cross the river. (Judges 8:10.)

It was at this point that Gideon and his men, having long since exchanged their trumpets and torches for swords, knives and spears, arrived in time to chase the Midianites into the river. In this fray two high-ranking Midianite generals had already been slain. Their heads were later—on the other side of the Jordan—brought to Gideon as tokens of victory. (Judges 7:25.)

Temporary Escape for a Few

"We haven't completely won the battle yet!" Gideon shouted to the Israelites. "A great part of the enemy has eluded us. We can't let them go free. I'm not asking all of you men to go after them, because we don't have the food to sustain you. But my three hundred chosen men and I will cross the Jordan to pursue the fleeing enemy troops."

It wasn't long before Gideon and his picked soldiers were on the east bank of the river and in pursuit of the Midianites, who were fleeing down the Jordan valley. The enemy's trail wasn't difficult to find in the sands and soft soil. But sand made



The Midianites thought that they were being pursued only from the north. It was a fearful shock to them to discover that more Israelites, from the southwest, had taken possession of the fords of the Jordan River.

travel more difficult, and Gideon's men had walked and trotted many miles, and they were becoming weary from lack of food and rest. (Judges 8:4.)

They were still in Israelite territory, the region east of the Jordan that had been given to the tribe of Gad. When, several miles southward, they sighted the town of Succoth to the right of their route of travel, Gideon was greatly relieved.

"Don't be discouraged, men!" Gideon called out. "Our Israelite brothers in the town ahead should be able to give us enough food to restore our strength!"

When they reached the town, people scurried into their homes as though afraid of them. Hoping to allay their fears, Gideon stood on the main street and loudly announced the identity of his men and himself. He told the townspeople what had happened, why they were passing through and that they were in desperate need of food. (Verse 5.)

One by one doors opened and the chief men of the city slowly sauntered out to confront them.

Rebellion Against God

"About two hours ago thousands of Midianites passed to the north of us on their way eastward," one of the leaders of Succoth spoke up. "Obviously you have only two

of three hundred men. Do you expect us to believe you have wiped out most of the Midianite army as you claim, and that those thousands who passed by are actually fleeing from you? Do you take us for fools, that we should believe that your puny little group is actually pursuing an army of thousands? Do you expect us to risk our lives by giving food to reckless hot-heads while the Midianites are still in control of the country?" What contempt for God's sure promise! (Leviticus 26:3, 8.)

The grim expressions of the onlookers turned to sneers. Some of the people laughed and made taunting remarks.

"We don't expect you to have faith in us," Gideon answered. "But you should trust the God who has promised to deliver us from oppression! We're just asking you, as brother Israelites, to give us enough food so that we'll be able to gain strength to move on."

"Indeed you will move on!" another one of the leading citizens shouted angrily. "For all we know, you are only a band of beggars trying to wheedle food! Get out!"

After the splendid cooperation he had received from the other tribes, Gideon was shocked by this lack of brotherly concern and faith in God.

"You refuse to help the people of your own nation who are risking their lives struggling for your freedom. This is defiance of God—and all because you fear what the Midianites might do to you instead of fearing God!" Gideon retorted. "Your greater fear should be of the punishment you'll receive from God at our hands because of your selfishness, when we return victorious!" (Judges 8:6-7.)

There were smirks and scowls on the faces of onlookers as Gideon's little army wearily moved on to the northeast up the Jabbok river valley to pick up the trail of the enemy. A few miles farther brought them to the town of Penuel, where there was a somewhat unusual stone tower that had long ago been built by the Moabites as a place for observation and as a fortress. The Gadites who lived there were quite proud that theirs was the only town in that territory with such a tower.

Gideon summoned the leaders of the town, related his situation to them and made a desperate plea for food for his men.

Another Town Rebels

"Don't ask us to believe that you intend to attack and defeat thousands of fierce desert soldiers with your miserably small group," the head man of the town sneered at Gideon. "We have enough trouble finding food for ourselves without foolishly passing it out to any heedless band of would-be deliverers who come this way with wild schemes!"

"You mean you refuse to give us any help—even any stale bread or scraps you

may have?" Gideon asked.

Their answer was only a cold, emotionless stare.

"We'll be back this way after we have taken care of the Midianites," Gideon angrily told the Gadites gathered about him. "Then you will lose that tower you are so proud of. What's more, you are very likely to lose your lives!" (Judges 8:8-9.)

As at Succoth, Gideon and his men wearily departed amid hostile expressions and unfriendly murmurs from brother Israelites who showed nothing but derision as they viewed this small band in pursuit of an enemy fifty times as great in numbers.

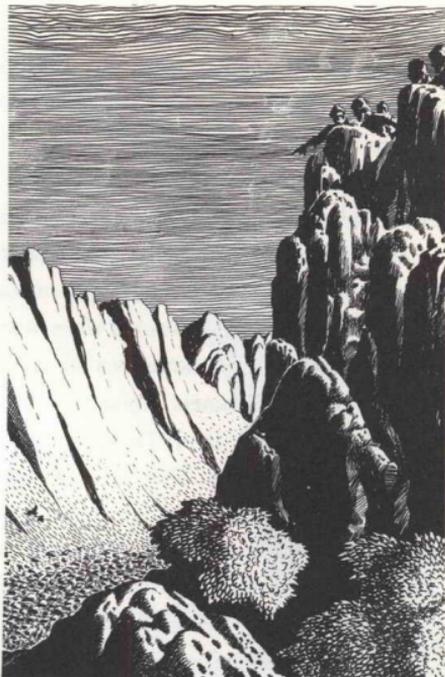
Gideon and his men were exceedingly tired when they reached a refreshing mountain stream flowing southward into the Jabbok river. There they could have concentrated their efforts and their remaining strength on hunting birds and animals for desperately needed food. But precious time would have been consumed in searching and cooking, and Gideon preferred to keep moving.

It was dusk when the band exhaustedly topped a rise to look down into a ravine. What the men saw caused all of them to almost forget hunger and weariness. Below them, camped for the night in supposed safety among their own people, were the fifteen thousand Midianites they were seeking! Was the ninety-mile chase over?

"Keep out of sight!" Gideon commanded his three hundred weary, hungry, but determined men. "We'll stay here till dark, then attack!"

God Fights Another Battle

There was still enough light for the Israelites to spot the positions of the Midianite sentries. Later, when Gideon and his men silently moved down into the ravine from all directions, the sentries fell noiseless prey. God had again intervened on behalf of the greatly outnumbered Israelites. Most of the rest of the Midianites



Just when he thought he would have to cease pursuing the Midianites because of approaching darkness, Gideon came with his men to a deep valley, there to discover that the enemy troops were encamped close below.

were already deep in slumber after their exhausting day. Suddenly they were caught completely by surprise when the Israelites fell upon them. Hundreds died as they slept. The others, unnerved by the fearful events of the past hours, were in no condition to defend themselves.

Strengthened by God, Gideon and his men rushed in to slay most of the Midianites while they darted around in a state of fear and confusion. Some of the enemy escaped for the third time in recent hours. Among them were two Midianite kings whom Gideon had especially hoped to capture. Their names were Zebah and Zalmunna. The reason Gideon wanted them was that for the past seven years they had led very destructive and murderous forays against Israel.

Mounted on camels, these two men rode off in the dark to the east in the direction of their native land. They didn't get too far, however. The east side of the ravine was steep and sandy. They were so long getting toward the top that the Israelites overtook them and seized them alive. Gideon felt elated in being able to bring them back westward as prisoners, though he was more thankful that God had miraculously helped his weary men conquer the fifteen thousand fleeing Midianites. (Judges 8:11-12.)

The destruction of the Midianites having been accomplished, Gideon and his men were hungrier and wearier than ever. Happily, small amounts of dried dates, dried figs and dried meat were found in many Midianite knapsacks and saddlebags. It all added up to more than enough food to satisfy the Israelites for the time being and to sustain them on their return journey.

Besides food, Gideon's men found many valuables belonging to the enemy. Desert men of that time often wore golden earrings, and thousands of earrings were taken from the corpses. There were other costly metal trinkets among their possessions, as well as valuable weapons, leather, blankets and robes. These things were loaded on camels for the return to the Mt. Ephraim area.

The refreshed Israelites then set out during the early night toward the west. (Judges 8:13.) The two Midianite kings were strapped to their own richly bedecked camels.

Rebels Refuse to Repent

When they arrived back at the town of Penuel, the people came out to jeer. Gideon had given them the impression that he and his men would return after being victorious over the Midianites, but the fact that they returned so soon, and with only a few camels and two prisoners, indicated to the Gadites that Gideon had far from accomplished what he had said he would do. The Gadites refused to believe that, by

a miracle from God, three hundred men had slain so great a number of the enemy, as Gideon claimed, though the women and children of Penuel were later to find out that it was true.

"The enemy must have said something to offend you that you should return so soon!" one man yelled at them.

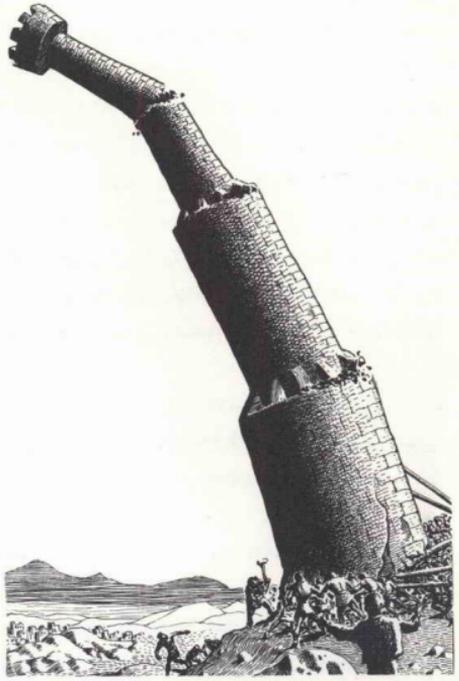
"They were pretty hungry when they last went through here!" another one shouted. "Maybe they ate all those Midianites!"

"They still look hungry!" someone else quipped. "Now we know how they're going to wreck our tower! They're going to eat it!"

There were many more insults heaped on Gideon and his men. Gideon was filled with disgust. He might have passed through Penuel without chastising these rebellious people who had refused to aid a chosen servant of God in the carrying out of a very important mission. But not now! Rebellion is as bad as witchcraft. (I Samuel 15:23.)

Knowing these Gadites had not repented of their rebellion, Gideon signalled his men to action. By now they were very near the tower Gideon had said he would destroy. About two hundred of Gideon's men swarmed toward it. Within minutes, using swords to hack beams, and beams to pry loose the wall stones, they leveled the tower the Gadites looked on with such pride.

At first the men of the town could scarcely believe what was happening. Then they rushed to arm themselves for attack, but by this time it was too late. These wicked Israelites were no different from Midianites. Gideon's men fell on them, and the men of Penuel, according to God's will, lost their lives all because of their willful rebellion against the government God had established for their good. (Judges 8:17.)



Gideon's men swarmed around the tower at Penuel. They loosened the inside supports of the tower, then pried it over and battered it to pieces.

CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX

GIDEON'S TROUBLED PEACE

FROM the town of Penuel, Gideon and his men moved homeward with the spoils from the Midianites, including the two Midianite kings as prisoners. On the outskirts of the town of Succoth they captured a young man from whom they learned the names of seventy-seven of Succoth's leading men, the ones who had refused food to Gideon and his men when they were trailing the Midianites. (Judges 8:11-14.)

"Seek out from the town all the men whose names this fellow has written down and bring them to the main street," Gideon told his soldiers.

Some Were Repentant

Although the adult males of the town were considerable in number, they were cowed by the quick and decisive action of Gideon's men. The leaders were quickly rounded up and brought to the town center.

"You refused us food because you were so faithless you were more afraid of what the Midianites might do to you than what God might do to you for rebelling against Him," Gideon reminded the sullen Gadites. "You refused to believe that God would make it possible for a small number of us to overcome a much greater number of heathens. You will remember that I told you that you should respect and help us, as God's servants, rather than fear the enemy. Now look upon the two kings of the Midianites who were actually fleeing before us with their thousands of troops when we wearily passed through here. We slew all their men, but spared these two men to bring back as evidence we had defeated their army." (Judges 8:15.)

The Gadites stared in amazement at Zebah and Zalmunna. It was plain that they

didn't wish to believe what they could plainly see to be true.

Gideon continued: "You are going to suffer, according to God's will, for your miserable attitude toward your Israelite brothers!"

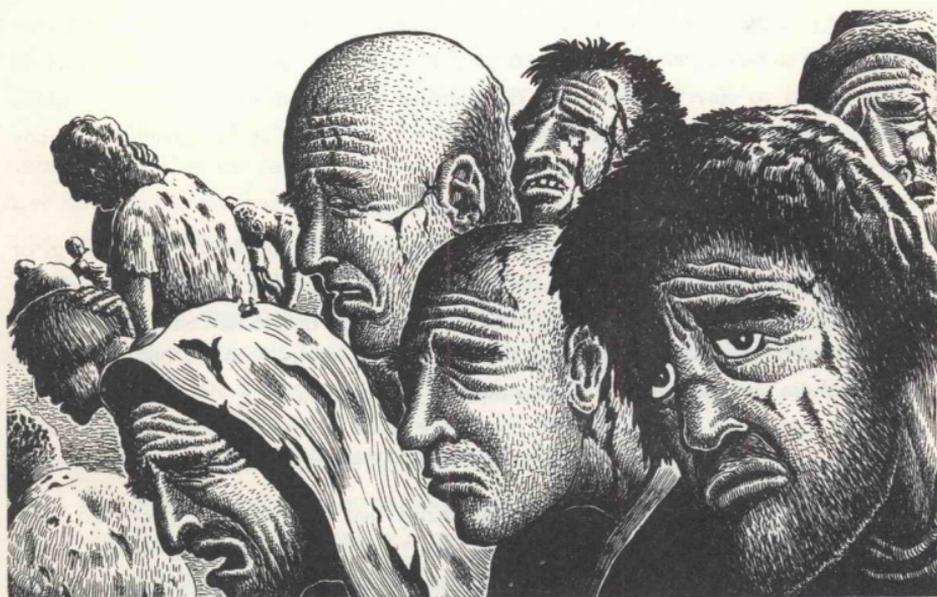
A few of Gideon's men cut limbs from thorny bushes and briars nearby. Then the seventy-seven Gadites, struggling and loudly and angrily protesting, were bound and forced to the ground, face down. They were then chastised with those thorny bush limbs and briars as Gideon had promised. (Verses 7, 16.)

The rest of the people of Succoth, gathered not far away, watched in fear and trembling, regretful that their city had so stubbornly and hatefully refused food to their Israelite brothers, and thankful to God that only the leaders had to be punished for their city's shameful misconduct.

When the punishment was finished, it was a repentant, remorseful and silent group that got up from the ground as soon as their bonds were cut. They limped away to their homes, thankful that they had come to their senses and that their punishment wasn't as severe as that of the men of Penuel.

God's Swift Justice

Gideon and his group moved on to the west, crossed the Jordan river and



Bleeding and sore, the punished elders of Succoth limped repentantly back to their homes.

entered the central part of their country. There Zebah and Zalmunna were brought to trial as the two chief leaders of the Midianite oppression of Israel in recent years.

In the course of the questioning, Zebah and Zalmunna admitted they had murdered several of Gideon's brothers.

"If you had spared my brothers then, I would spare you now," Gideon told them. "Since you unmercifully put to death many Israelites, including my blood brothers, you can hardly expect to escape the death penalty for murder." (Verses 18-19.)

There was a rule among the Israelites that the first-born male of a family should be the one to execute anyone who murdered any of his kin. Gideon was the youngest son of his parents (Judges 6:15), and therefore he felt that it wasn't his place to personally execute the two Midianite kings, although their fate was more than a family matter.

Gideon's oldest son, Jether, was only a lad in his teens, but according to Israelite procedure, he was the proper one to avenge the deaths of his uncles. Jether was present at the trial, and like all young Israelite men of that time, he was armed to protect himself from attack by the enemy.

"Come here, my son," Gideon said to Jether. "It is your duty and honor to draw your sword and do away with these two pagan murderers."

Young Jether was startled by his father's decree. He understood why his father spoke to him as he did, and he had been taught that God had commanded Israel to use the sword to slay or drive out all enemies from Canaan. But he had never executed a man. His boyish sensitivity in such a situation was far greater than any desire to try to be a national hero.

"I—I can't kill these men!" Jether finally spoke out.

Gideon wasn't disappointed in his son's reaction. He understood the feelings of a friendly young man who had no desire to execute criminals. Gideon knew that it was up to him to do what his son couldn't do, but even before he could step forward to perform the wretched task, Zebah and Zalmunna fearfully called out for him to deal with them and put them to instant death. (Judges 8:20-21.)

"A Soft Answer Turneth Away Wrath"

After the bodies of the two Midianite kings had been hauled away and their camels stripped of their valuable trappings, the Israelites felt that the struggle with their ancient eastern enemy was officially over. Gideon realized, however, that the struggle to keep the people from idolatry was never over, and he continued his efforts against pagan worship.



"You are responsible for the murder of my relatives!" Gideon accused Zebah and Zalmunna. "If you had spared them, I would spare you now!"

Just when he was feeling thankful that matters were going especially well, elders of the tribe of Ephraim came to him to angrily ask why Ephraimite soldiers hadn't been asked to join in the first encounter with the Midianites.

Gideon could have answered in his defense that all the people were aware of the situation, and that the soldiers of Ephraim could have volunteered. He also could have reminded them that he was carrying out explicit orders from God. Instead, he chose to soothe their offended feelings with a soft answer as God commands His servants to do. (Proverbs 15:1.)

"If you feel that your tribe didn't have the opportunity to do enough in this campaign," he told them, "then I must remind you that your soldiers were the ones who showed up just in time to defeat most of the fleeing Midianites at the Jordan river. Without your men there, what would we have done? It was there that God delivered into the hands of your soldiers the two mighty Midianite princes, Oreb and Zeeb. This alone was a great accomplishment compared to what my men and I did!"

Before Gideon had finished talking, the attitude of the elders of Ephraim went through a great change. Obviously they wanted most of the credit for victory to go to their tribe. When they heard Gideon praising their soldiers, they were quite pleased, and departed in a very friendly mood. (Judges 8:1-3.)

A Stumblingblock Looks Innocent

Not long after that, a great crowd of Israelites gathered before Gideon's home. When Gideon went out to learn why so many were there, there were loud cheers.

"Because you have saved us from the Midianites," a spokesman for the crowd shouted, "we have come to ask you to be our king! We think you should rule Israel, and that the kingship should remain in your family down through the generations!"

Loud cheering broke forth again, finally to subside after Gideon held up his hands for silence.

"I am not the one to rule over you!" Gideon exclaimed to the crowd. "Neither is my son nor his son. If I am chosen by God to be your leader, so be it. But your *ruler* is God!" (Judges 8:22-23.)

There was another burst of cheers. Gideon continued speaking.

"I have a request. Many golden earrings were recently taken from slain Midianites. Unless those who possess them prefer to keep them, I ask that they be contributed for making ornaments by which we will be reminded of God's delivering us from the Midianites."

"We will willingly give them!" several Israelite soldiers shouted.

Someone spread out a coat on the ground, and hundreds of men filed by, in the next few hours, to drop their booty on it. By the time the last trinket had been given, there were thousands of dollars worth of gold on the coat.

Later, Gideon hired men to melt the gold down and re-shape it into a costly vestment to be used and displayed by him and future leaders of Israel as a symbol of their office as judge. Unfortunately, this thing came to be revered so highly by the people that it eventually became an object of idolatrous worship. (Judges 8:24-27.)

Only Forty Years . . .

For the next forty years, as long as Gideon was their leader and law-enforcer, referred to in the scriptures as a judge, most of the Israelites enjoyed the blessings of peace and prosperity. (Verses 28-29.) Since most people don't know how to wisely use peace and prosperity, such a period can be dangerous. During that time Gideon had several wives. The practice of having more than one wife was tolerated in those times, especially by men who could afford to feed many children. But God punished those who practiced polygamy, though sometimes that punishment befell the children. The Bible doesn't state how many children Gideon had, though it speaks of his having at least seventy-two sons. (Judges 9:5.)

As soon as Gideon died, many Israelites began to abuse their prosperity and turn

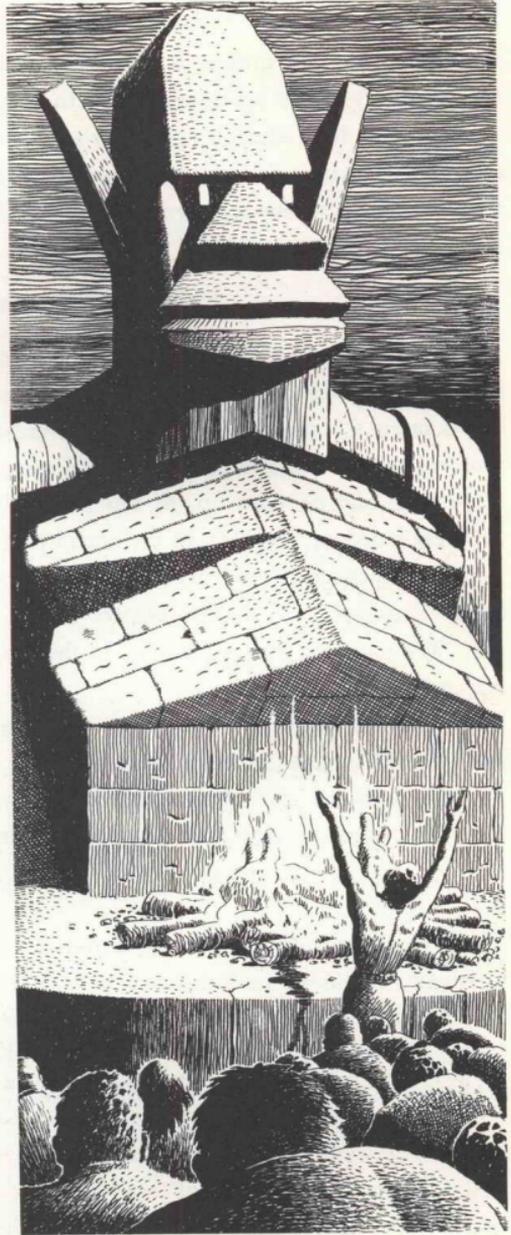
to idleness and ease. They immediately began to fall away from worshipping God and turn again toward the worship of Baal and Easter, the pagans' chief god and goddess. That false religion had been developed into different names and forms among various nations since the ancient times of Nimrod and his mother-wife Semiramis. Soon most of the nation had lost respect for what Gideon had accomplished and what God commanded. It was evident that Israel was once more heading for a downfall, this time to plunge into the misery of civil strife. (Judges 8: 30-35.)

An Evil Man Lusts for Political Power

Abimelech, one of Gideon's sons, was very desirous of being king of Israel. He started his ambitious scheme by going to his mother's family in Shechem to persuade them that one of Gideon's sons should reign over the nation.

"Someone has to determine which of my father's sons should rule," he told his relatives. "Now would you prefer about seventy of them to reign over you, or would you choose just one? I am of your flesh and bone, so why should you prefer anyone except me?" (Judges 9:1-2.)

Abimelech's relatives quickly perceived the advantages of having a



After Gideon's death, the worship of Baal grew among the Israelites, and the city of Shechem was the place where it developed most.

king from their family. They launched a campaign in and around Shechem to promote the idea of how worthwhile it would be to have a leader of Israel from Shechem, so that their city might be established as the capital of the nation.

Shechem had lately become one of the cities where the worship of Baal was most active. Some of the contributions to Baal were turned over to Abimelech, who used the money to buy the services of the kind of evil men who would do anything for a price. (Verses 3-4.)

Appalling Treachery Afoot

Abimelech's next move was shockingly cold-blooded and barbarous, proving that he would stop at nothing to gain what he wanted. He led his hired band of cut-throats to his father's home in Ophrah, about seven miles northwest, where Gideon's other sons were gathered. The hired hoodlums surprised the sons, and managed to overcome them and tie them up. At this point Abimelech arrived on the scene. He carefully examined and counted all the bound men.

"There should be seventy-one here!" he barked at the leader of the gang he had hired. "You have bound only seventy!"

"We took every man we found in this house," the leader explained. "We saw no one else."

"I wanted you to get *all* of them!" Abimelech snapped. "But go ahead with the job. Use that large stone in the back court."

The stone to which Abimelech referred was a part of the architecture in the backyard, but within the next few minutes it became a gruesome chopping block!

What happened next in the absorbing history of the ancient Israelites will be eventually continued in Volume V of *The Bible Story*. If readers prefer not to wait for that book, they will find it possible to learn how matters turned out by referring to a currently available publication which gives a much more inspired but condensed account of Israel—the *Bible*. (See Judges 9.)

