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*The
Bible
Story*

VOL
II



The Bible Story

by BASIL WOLVERTON

Volume II

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INTRODUCTION

by Herbert W. Armstrong

With mingled gratitude and pleasure we publish Volume II of *The Bible Story*. Gratitude comes from the overwhelming and enthusiastic acceptance of Volume I. And it is our very great pleasure now to present the second volume.

Those who have read the first volume know already that there has never been a Bible story book like this. It is as unlike the common type of disconnected blood-and-thunder Bible story books for children as day is from night. Such books omit entirely the true *meaning*, the vital *lessons*, the important *connection*, of the incidents dramatized, to the true Gospel, the **PURPOSE** of life, and the Biblical revelation as a whole.

And so there was a serious need. Not only for children, *but for adults as well*. Most adults read the Bible spasmodically, at random, a verse here, a chapter there, failing properly to connect them. Most do not realize that there is *a continuous story-thread* running through the whole Bible. Those who do start to read the Bible through, from beginning to end, find the old English difficult to comprehend. And also they find portions such as genealogies an obstacle to hurdle.

This book was not written for children merely, *but for adults as well!* Even adults will gain, through *interesting* reading, an understanding of the **WHOLE BIBLE**—of its continuous story-thread—minus genealogies and other interruptions—such as they never grasped before. It has proved a new and thrilling experience to numerous thousands, as they have followed it avidly in chapter-by-chapter installments published in *The Plain Truth*.

It is, therefore, intended for people from five to a hundred and five.

By way of repetition from the Introduction to Volume I, a brief word about the author. Basil Wolverton is a nationally known artist and writer. He is equipped by natural talent, training, and professional experience, for this very important work. His work has appeared in more than 50 national magazines, including many pages in *LIFE*, *TIME*, *Pageant*, and others. He is famous for his own unique style of art. He is a member of the Board of Trustees of Ambassador College, an elder in The Church of God, and a student of the Bible.

Mr. Wolverton has written in language of the nine- to twelve-year-old level. But

his plain, simple, yet professional style makes it *interesting reading* for adults of all ages. After all, isn't it a refreshing relief, once in a while, to get away from struggling over multiple-syllable words, used to vaunt the vanity of some writers?

However, most children of seven ought to be able to read this book with interest, and even children of four or five can understand the essential sequences when read to them, with a little simplified parental explanation of some portions.

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

Volume I is, at the first printing of the present volume, out of print. An initial printing of fifty thousand copies was immediately exhausted, and a second printing of fifty thousand ordered at once. The first printing of the present volume is one hundred 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 present volume picks up the story from there. It is presented to you as a ministry of love, without money and without price; and it is our fervent hope that it will bring to you and your children enlightenment, interesting reading, understanding, and abundant blessings from its original and TRUE AUTHOR, Jesus Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Herbert A. Wolverton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line underneath it.

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The Bible Story

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MOSES FLEES EGYPT

AFTER Jacob's eleven sons had returned to their homes in Goshen, some of them began to worry about how Joseph might treat them. They still felt guilty about some of their past actions. Anxious to do everything they could to make up for the wrong ways in which they had treated Joseph when he was young, they sent him a message in which they asked for his forgiveness.

Joseph felt even more kindly toward his brothers after he received the message. Later, when they came to bow humbly before him, he broke into tears.

"You did evil to me," he reminded them. "But don't worry about it any more. It was part of God's plan to get me into Egypt and use me to help many people. Don't have any fear of me because I am next to Pharaoh in power. I want to help you and your families." (Genesis 50:15-21.)

Joseph Dies

After governing Egypt for many more years, Joseph died in Egypt at the age of one hundred and ten. Before he died he told his brothers that God would surely take their people back to Canaan some day, because that was the land that was promised to the Israelites. He asked them to take his body back to Canaan.

His body was embalmed, as was that of his father. But it was not taken back to Canaan then. Instead, it was put in an Egyptian coffin, where it remained for many, many years. (Verses 22-26.)

The Bible doesn't tell what happened in Egypt in the next two centuries after Joseph died. But during that time, the Israelites steadily grew in numbers until there

were two million of them in Egypt. Most of them lived in the rich farming lands and grazing areas close to where the Nile River flowed into the Mediterranean Sea. (Exodus 1:6-7.)

Meanwhile, there were many changes in the kind of people who ruled Egypt. Several kings ruled and died in the century after Joseph's death. The next Pharaoh the Bible mentions after Joseph's time lived so many years later that he had little or no knowledge of the good things Joseph had done for Egypt. (Verse 8.)

This Pharaoh didn't care for the Israelites. He noticed that there were many of them, and he feared that they would one day become so powerful that they would start a war and take over the whole Egyptian nation.

"We must act before there are more Israelites than there are Egyptians," Pharaoh said at a meeting of Egyptian high officials.

"But if we try to drive them out or kill them, it could result in a long, costly war," said one of Pharaoh's officers.

"It would indeed," agreed the king. "I have a better plan to get rid of these shepherd people and, at the same time increase the size and beauty of our cities. Let us hire them to help build great buildings, courtyards, walls and houses. Once they are working for us, they will lose the freedom they have long enjoyed."

"But these people are not builders," said another of Pharaoh's men of high rank. "They wouldn't be very willing to leave their flocks to go make bricks."

"Many of them will," said Pharaoh, "when we offer them good wages and plenty of good food. Thousands upon thousands of them will be willing to work for these things. Then, when we have them divided, we can force the other healthy males into slave labor gangs. From then on these Israelites will be under our control."

The Israelites Are Enslaved

The Egyptian king and his men planned matters well. Gradually the Israelites went into the jobs of building and preparing the materials for building.

At first the Israelites thought they were merely changing from farm work to building work. But before long they found that they had actually become slaves to Pharaoh, and that they would not be paid the good wages that had been offered.

Pharaoh thought that if the Israelites became slaves, they would not increase in numbers. But it didn't turn out that way. The Israelites increased more than ever in number.

"Work them harder!" Pharaoh ordered his taskmasters and guards. "Work them till they drop! Use whips and sticks on those who won't obey!"

After these harsher rules were used on them, the Israelites became harder to

handle. To keep them under control, they were divided into slave gangs with cruel Egyptian foremen over them, but they were well fed to keep them from rebelling. Little by little they fell into complete slavery to the Egyptians. It was too late to escape. Divided, they were powerless to overcome their masters.

Year after year of miserable hard labor followed for them. By the thousands and tens of thousands they were herded over the land to dig massive water canals. Other thousands built stone banks to cover the mud banks of the Nile. Other gangs built great walls and forts and many pyramids. Perhaps the greatest number of them worked at digging clay and making it into large, heavy bricks. (Exodus 1:9-14.)

Yet through all their misery, they continued to grow and grow in number!

Pharaoh at last knew that working the Israelites in a cruel manner would not cause them to grow less in number. He thought up a new scheme, therefore. Before long a decree was sent out to all Hebrew midwives, the women who were skilled to



"Make those Israelites work harder!" Pharaoh ordered. "Use whips and sticks on them, if they disobey!"

The Israelites became so hard to handle that they were divided into slave gangs controlled by cruel Egyptian officers.



help at the birth of Hebrew children. "From now on," the decree read, "you Hebrew midwives must kill every boy baby that is born to the Israelites. If you fail to obey, your punishment will be swift and terrible." (Verses 15-16.)

Many of the Israelites knew at least something of God's laws. Those laws had been known and obeyed by good men from Adam's time to the Great Flood, and from Noah on down through time. One of those laws said that no person should kill another person. The midwives knew it would be a terrible sin to take the lives of little babies, and they refused to obey the command from the Egyptian king.

When Pharaoh heard that he had been disobeyed, he was very angry. He called the head midwives of the Israelites to come to him, and demanded to know why they hadn't done as he had told them.

"The Hebrew women," replied the midwives, "are not like the Egyptian women. Hebrew women are stronger and more active. They give birth to babies even without our help. We aren't called to give aid, and therefore we don't know about most of the births."

Probably this answer didn't satisfy Pharaoh. But because the midwives obeyed God's law not to kill, God gave protection to them. Pharaoh decided not to punish them. In fact, they were treated with more respect than ever because the Egyptians wanted to know why the Israelites were so healthy. So the midwives were given good houses to live in. (Verses 17-21.)

But Pharaoh was not to be so easily turned from what he wanted to do. He sent out a new decree. This one went to his police and soldiers:

"Watch the Israelites closely. Whenever you learn that a male baby has been born to any of them, seize that baby and throw it into the Nile river. Spare only the female babies." (Verse 22.)

There is no way of knowing how many little boy babies were drowned in the Nile river, but there must have been many. The Israelites were filled with dismay. Their longing to become free of the Egyptians was greater than ever. But they were too well guarded to escape. All they could see was a dismal future of continuing to slave for Pharaoh.

No doubt they would have felt much more hopeful—at least for their children—if they could have known that God was preparing to send a man through whom they would be greatly helped.

The Birth of Moses

In those days a certain Israelite boy was born to parents who lived near the palace of the king of Egypt. This baby's mother and father kept his birth a secret for three

months. During those three months they were always fearful that Egyptian police would find out about him, and would take him away from them and drown him in the Nile river. (Ex. 2:1.) They were so anxious to keep him alive that they thought up a fantastic plan to try to save him. It was actually God who put the plan into their minds, because this boy baby was to do some very great things.

"I have learned that Pharaoh's daughter and her servants will come down to the river to bathe tomorrow," said the father of the child. "They will surely be there, because it is an Egyptian religious ceremony."

"That is well!" exclaimed the mother. "This is the day we have waited for. I have a water-proof basket prepared. We shall put our son in it, push it out into the Nile, and pray that it will float downstream to the right place to be seen and rescued."

Next day the mother and father sadly parted with their infant son, who was an unusually pretty child. The current of the river carried the little pitch-smearred basket downstream toward the spot where Pharaoh's daughter and her girl attendants were to dip into the Nile according to rules of their pagan religion. (Verse 3.)

Meanwhile, the parents of the boy baby sent their daughter, who was about eleven years old, to run along the bank of the river and see what became of the baby.

Matters worked out even better than the worried parents hoped. Pharaoh's daughter saw the basket floating among the tall reeds lining the banks of the Nile. She called for one of her girl servants who could swim, and sent that girl out after the basket. (Verse 5.)

All were surprised when they saw that a baby was in the basket. Pharaoh's daughter could see at once that it was an Israelite baby. But when she heard it cry, she felt very sorry for it.

The baby's sister saw all that happened. She hurried along the river bank to where her baby brother had been rescued, and bowed down before Pharaoh's daughter.

"I saw what happened," she said. "If this baby needs an Israelite nurse, I know where I can get one for you right away!" (Verse 7.)

Pharaoh's daughter liked the little girl's suggestion. She was so struck with the handsomeness of this little baby that she decided right there to save it from her father's cruel command to drown all Israelite boy babies.

"Go and bring this nurse you speak of," said Pharaoh's daughter to the little girl.

The girl hurried to get her mother, who was indeed happy to know that her baby boy had been found just the way she and her husband had prayed that the baby would be rescued.

"I will pay you well if you will take this baby and care for it for a while," Phar-



Pharaoh's daughter sent one of her servants out into the river to get the floating basket.

aoh's daughter said to the mother. Of course Pharaoh's daughter had no idea that she was speaking to the real mother. But even if she had known that she was speaking to the real mother, probably she would have said what she did. "Later, I will want you to bring this baby to me. Meanwhile, don't worry about my father's police finding it. I will make sure that they will pay no attention to your home."

After making certain where this woman lived, Pharaoh's daughter left the baby with her. When the woman's husband saw her bringing his little son back, he was very happy, too. They had done all they could to save the baby, and they trusted God to help them do it. God rewarded their faith by bringing the baby right back into their keeping.

Several years passed, and Moses grew into a lad. His parents brought him up according to what they knew of God's laws. Most Israelites, having lived with pagan nations for so many years, were getting further and further away from the right ways of living. Moses' parents hoped that in the years after he had been taken away, he would remember the good things he had been taught. Perhaps they felt that there was a great purpose in his being taken by Pharaoh's daughter, though they were unhappy at the thought of it. But at last when servants were sent to bring the boy to her, they thanked

God that He had allowed them to have a son for the years he had been with them.

Moses Adopted by Pharaoh's Daughter

Pharaoh's daughter adopted the boy and named him Moses. (Ex. 2:10.) From then on he was trained and educated by the best instructors in the land. Pharaoh's daughter was hopeful that some day he would become a man of high standing in the nation.

Certain writers of ancient history have stated that Egypt was later invaded by Africans from the south, and that Moses, then a grown man and general of the Egyptian army, drove the invaders out. This is not mentioned in the Bible, but perhaps it is true. It is very likely that Moses became a very important man in Egypt.

When Moses was about forty years old, he became more and more thoughtful and concerned about the Israelites, his own people. The more he looked around, the

more he could understand how they were being mistreated. Even though he had been raised and educated as an Egyptian, it was plain to him that the Egyptians were being very cruel.

One day he decided to go out and see for himself how matters were in a slave labor gang.

Moses was very upset when he saw how the Israelites were treated. At one place where they were working, he saw an Egyptian guard brutally clubbing a man who was too weak to stand up and do any more work. This took place out on the edge of the desert, where the workers were scattered and there were few people around.

But Moses saw what was happening. He was so angry that he rushed forward and snatched the club from the cruel Egyptian guard. He struck the guard in the same way the guard had struck the Israelite, who probably died.

Unhappily, the guard also fell dead from the blows from his own club. When



Moses became very angry when he saw the Egyptian guard brutally clubbing the Israelite worker.

Moses saw that the man was dead, his feeling of guilt almost overcame him. He buried the guard in the sand at a spot where he felt no one was looking. (Ex. 2:11-12.)

Next day Moses again went out to see more of what was going on with the same slave labor gang he had watched the day before. This time he saw many more things that weren't as they should be. Among other things, he noticed two Israelite laborers quarreling over something. The quarrel led to blows, and when Moses saw one Israelite strike another, he thought it was time to do something about it.

"Why did you hit your fellow man?" asked Moses, as he stepped up to the one who had started the fight.

"Is this any of your business?" growled the Israelite. "Maybe now you plan to club me to death just as you clubbed that Egyptian guard yesterday." (Verses 13-14.)

These words were shocking to Moses, who supposed that no one had seen what he had done to the cruel Egyptian guard. Moses knew that news of this thing would get to Pharaoh's police before long. The only thing to do was to get out of Egypt.

Moses Flees Egypt

When Pharaoh heard what Moses had done, he sent soldiers to find him and kill him. (Verse 15.) But Moses escaped from Egypt just in time. He traveled eastward and took refuge in a mountainous land called Midian (verse 15), where one of Abraham's sons had started a tribe of shepherds many years before.

While he was traveling through the country, he happened to arrive about noon at a well. As he rested there and sipped the cool water, seven young women herding flocks came to the well to water their animals. While the thirsty creatures gathered around the well, they drew up water and poured it into troughs. Just at that moment some rude shepherds rushed over a nearby hill. They shouted and screamed so loudly that the girls' flocks were frightened away.

Moses became so angry when he saw what happened that he boldly walked up to the rude men and reminded them that the young women were there first with their flocks, and that only unmannerly or dull-witted persons would be so unfair and mean as to edge in ahead of those who were there first.

Before the rude shepherds could say anything, Moses rushed in among their flocks and frightened them away from the watering troughs. But by this time, the flocks of the selfish shepherds had drunk most of the water the young women had drawn up from the well. Moses then worked hard to bring up more water for the flocks of the seven young women. (Ex. 2:16-20.)

After their animals had been watered, the seven shepherdesses took their flocks to the house of their father, Reuel, a priest, a man of very high rank in that country.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

GOD CALLS MOSES

“**W**HY IS IT that you girls are back home so much earlier than usual?” Reuel asked his daughters.

“An Egyptian was at the well where we go to water our flocks,” said the daughters. “Evil shepherds rushed in to drive our herds away, but this stranger drove the shepherds away. He also drew water for us, and that is why we are home so soon.” (Exodus 2:17.)

“Then let us properly thank the man,” Reuel exclaimed. “Go find him and invite him to eat with us.”

Moses Meets Reuel

Because he was lonely, Moses was happy to be invited to Reuel’s home. It didn’t take long for Reuel to see that this stranger was a very intelligent and educated man, well-trained in many matters.

Reuel knew that such a man could be valuable to him, and so he invited Moses to live in his home for a while.

“I should like to stay here,” Moses told Reuel. “But if I do, I want to earn my living.”

“The only work I can give you is that of herding sheep,” Reuel replied. “I don’t suppose a man of your ability and education would do that for a living.”

“I’ll take the job,” said Moses.

The lonely task of tending sheep was quite a change for Moses, who for so many years had been surrounded by crowds of people of high rank. He had enjoyed the best of food and clothing, and had lived in magnificent buildings. Now, however, he was free

to think and to pray. What was more, he had always wanted to be a writer. This job of herding flocks gave him a wonderful chance to do that writing. Many years later, his writings became a large part of the Bible.

As time went on, Moses became very fond of Zipporah, one of Reuel's daughters. They were married, and later had two sons.

Meanwhile, back in Egypt, matters were becoming steadily worse for the Israelites. The Pharaoh whose daughter had adopted Moses had long since died, and those who followed him as kings were even more cruel. The Israelites suffered more and more, and increasingly begged God to free them from the Egyptians.

God heard their prayers. He had not forgotten the agreements He had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He was soon to take action for the Israelites.

God Calls Moses

One day after Moses had been in Midian about forty years, he herded his flocks close to a mountain known as Horeb. Looking up the slopes, he noticed that a fire was burn-



To his surprise, Moses found the bush burning furiously, but not a single leaf was singed.

ing in the brush above him. He hurried up toward it, and found that a small desert tree was burning furiously. As Moses watched, the bush continued to burn, but it did not burn up!

"This is a most amazing thing!" Moses thought as he stared at flames that hissed up from branches that weren't even singed!

But even more amazing was what happened next. A strong voice sounded from out of the flames!

"Moses! Moses!" It called.

"Here I am!" Moses replied, though he saw no one as he glanced quickly about him. (Exodus 3:4.)

"Don't come any closer," said the voice. "You are standing on holy ground. Take off your shoes and listen to what I have to say!"

There was something about the voice that made Moses obey. It was rather frightening to hear such a strange voice coming out of nowhere. In the next few seconds Moses was to receive the greatest shock of his life.

"I am God!" the voice said. "I am the One who spoke to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!" (Exodus 3:6.)

When Moses heard those words, he was filled with such awe and fear that he was afraid to keep on looking at the dazzling flames, and he pulled his jacket up over his eyes.

"I have seen the troubles of my people, the Israelites," the voice continued. "I know their sorrows. I am going to rescue them from the Egyptians and take them to the good, rich land of Canaan. I want you, Moses, to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let the Israelites leave Egypt!" (Exodus 3:7-10.)

Moses was so surprised by what he heard that he could scarcely believe it. Why would God, he wondered, pick a sheep herder to tell the king of Egypt that he should let the Israelites go free?

At last Moses managed to speak.

"Why do you choose *me* to go to Pharaoh?" he asked. "I had to flee from Egypt years ago. If the present king learns who I am, he will have me killed. If he knows me for only a stranger, he won't listen to anything I say."

"I shall give you wisdom in what to say and do," the voice answered.

"But my own people, as well as the Egyptians, will want to know what right I have to tell Pharaoh what to do," Moses said. "They will want to know the name of the God who has told me what to do."

"Tell them that the God who calls Himself I AM THAT I AM has sent you," the voice said. (Exodus 3:14.) "Furthermore, tell your people that I am to be known

by that name for all their generations to come."

Now go back to Egypt and gather all the leaders of Israel together and tell them that the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob—has appeared to you to promise that He will bring the Israelites out of Egypt and into the rich land of Canaan.

Then you must go with them to the king of Egypt and tell him that I, your God, have commanded the Israelites to make a three-day trip into the desert to worship Me. The king of Egypt will not at first agree to let you go. Later, I shall bring some horrible calamities upon him and the Egyptians. Then the Israelites shall at last escape.

They shall not leave as poor people, however, because the women of Israel shall ask for payment for the services the Israelites have performed for the Egyptians. I shall cause the Egyptians to give so freely that a great part of their wealth will go to the Israelites." (Exodus 3:21-22.)

But Moses still couldn't be sure that the Israelites would believe that God had spoken to him to be their leader in this move for freedom.

God Shows His Power

"Unless I have some way to startle them into believing me," Moses told God, "they will not pay any attention to what I say."

"What do you have in your hand?" God asked of Moses.

"My shepherd rod," Moses answered.

"Throw it on the ground," God commanded.

Moses obeyed, and tossed the staff down before himself in the dust. The instant it touched the ground, it seemed to slowly wriggle as though it had come to life! Moses leaped back, staring in amazement. The rod had turned into a live snake! (Exodus 4:3.)

"Now grab the serpent by its tail," God said to Moses.

It took courage to seize a six-foot snake by its tail. But Moses knew he must obey, no matter what would happen. Slowly he moved toward the coiling, hissing reptile. Then he crouched down and swiftly snatched it by the tail.

Instantly the snake turned into a solid shepherd rod in his hand!

"If they don't believe you, perform this miracle," God told Moses. "Then, if there are still some who doubt you, there is another thing you can do. Put your hand inside your jacket."

Moses thrust one hand inside his jacket close to his chest. God then told him to withdraw his hand. When he did, he was horrified to see that the flesh of his hand



Moses was startled to see his rod instantly change into a wriggling snake!

had become white and bumpy and full of holes, as though it had been left in boiling water! Moses knew at once that God had struck his hand with a terrible, flesh-rotting disease known as leprosy.

"Now put your hand back inside your jacket," God commanded.

Moses obeyed again, and when he looked at his hand he saw that it was back to its normal, healthy condition! (Exodus 4:6-7.)

"If there are some of your people who still doubt you after these two signs, then perform a third miracle," God told Moses. "Dip some water from the Nile river and pour it out before them on the dry ground. It will at once turn to blood before their eyes!"

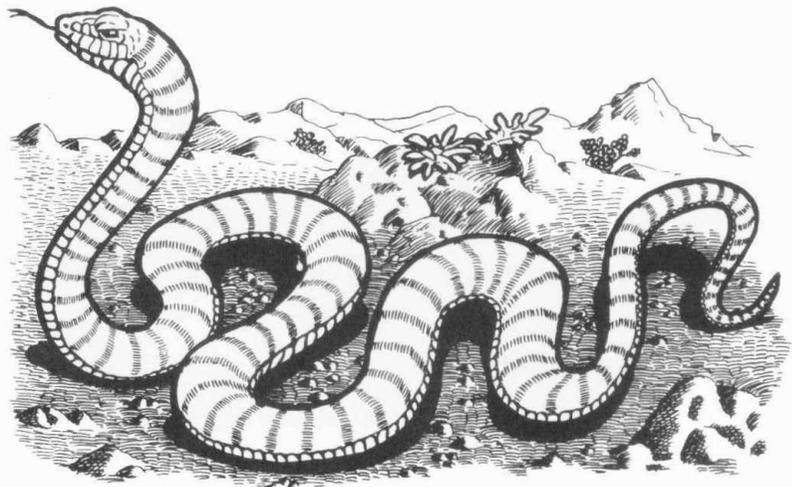
Moses Tries to Run Away from God's Calling

In spite of these miracles God showed him, Moses still felt that the task of getting the Israelites out of Egypt was much too great for him. Just as it has been with many people whom God calls for a purpose, Moses thought of reasons why he shouldn't be chosen.

"It's been so long since I left the region of the Nile that I can't speak the language well enough to be perfectly understood by the Egyptians," Moses said. "Besides, I can't speak Hebrew well enough for the Israelites to look to me as a leader."

"Don't worry about such things," God told Moses. "I have created men who can speak well just as I have created those who can't speak nor hear nor see. As your Creator, I have the power to cause you to speak well."

In spite of all the help



God had promised him, Moses still felt that it was too much for him to talk Pharaoh into freeing the Israelites. "Please send someone else who is more fitted for this great task," Moses begged.

These words from Moses displeased God, just as He is always displeased when some one tries to shirk special duties commanded of him by God. Still, He was very patient with Moses.

"Your brother Aaron, who is in Egypt, will help you," God told Moses. "I shall tell you what to say and do, and you will tell Aaron these things. Then Aaron will speak for you. As for the miracles, you must keep your rod with which to perform them. And don't fear the Egyptians who wanted to kill you years ago. All of them are dead."

Moses thereupon herded his flocks back to his home, which was one or two days' journey away. He went at once to his father-in-law, Jethro, who owned the sheep Moses herded. Jethro was another name of Reuel, the high priest of the land of Midian. Many people had several names in that day, just as we do today.

"I want to return to Egypt to visit my relatives," Moses told him.

Jethro must have thought it was rather strange that Moses should suddenly want to go back to Egypt after having been gone so long. Nevertheless, he agreed to let Moses leave. But if Moses had told him that he wanted to go back for the purpose of leading the Israelites out of Egypt, probably Jethro would have thought of Moses as being insane, and would have refused to let Moses depart with Zipporah



Moses met his brother, Aaron, on a trail leading over the slopes of Mt. Horeb.

and the two sons. Just before he left Midian, Moses received another message from God, in which he was warned again that Pharaoh would at first refuse to free the Israelites.

“When that happens,” God said, “I shall bring some terrible things upon the Egyptians. If the king still refuses, then tell him that I, the God of Israel, will kill his first-born son!” (Exodus: 4:23.)

Traveling on burros, Moses and his wife and two sons set out northward along the east side of the Red Sea. On the way, Zipporah became angry with Moses over a matter having to do with one of their sons. This caused Moses to decide that it would not be best for his family to go with him into Egypt, where difficult times were soon to come. Therefore he sent the three back to stay with Zipporah’s father, Jethro.

Meanwhile, back in the land of Goshen, Moses’ brother, Aaron, had received a message from God.

“Go out at once by way of the Red Sea and down the Sinai peninsula to Mt. Horeb,” Aaron was told. “There you will meet Moses, your brother who has been missing for forty years.”

So it was that God caused Moses, traveling alone to the north, to meet Aaron, his brother, traveling to the south past Mt. Horeb. It was a happy meeting, and it took hours and even days for them to exchange news and experiences. But the thing that was greatest in their minds was the task God had put upon them.

Together they went to Goshen in Egypt, and there gathered the elders of Israel to speak to them. Aaron told them all the things God had told Moses.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MOSES AND AARON MEET PHARAOH

MOSSES and Aaron had just finished speaking. Most of the Israelites believed these things. Some shook their heads in doubt. There were a few who felt that Moses and Aaron were trying to push themselves into being Israelite leaders. It was from these that shouts of protest came.

"It's easy for you to say that God sent you!" one of them yelled. "But can you prove it?"

"We want to get out of Egypt!" another shouted, "but we want to choose our own leaders—not just any one who comes along!"

Encouraged by those who spoke out, other doubters began to voice their opinions, whereupon Aaron held up his arms and called for silence.

God Performs Miracles Through Moses

"Our God knew there would be those of you who would fail to recognize His servants," Aaron told them. "God therefore has given Moses the power to perform miracles. That should leave no doubts that Moses is the one to go before Pharaoh and demand that our people be freed from slavery!"

A murmur arose from the group of elders as Moses stepped before them, holding his shepherd's rod at arm's length above his head. Then he tossed it out between himself and the onlookers. The instant it touched the ground, it turned into a long snake, wriggling toward the staring elders. There was a sudden shuffling of feet and a few grunts of alarm as those at close range struggled to retreat. Understanding the elders' alarm, Moses stepped forward and seized the snake by its tail. To the astonish-

ment of all, except Aaron, it became a shepherd's rod in Moses' hand.

Again the elders murmured among themselves, but this time there was a different note in their voices.

Now there was silence as Moses held up his right hand for all to see. He put it inside his jacket for a few seconds, then withdrew it to show a white, leprous, decayed hand that brought a chorus of cries of horror from the crowd. A moment later, when



Moses held up his hand for the elders to see that it was only a white, decayed stub.

Moses had put his hand back into his jacket and withdrew it a second time, the crowd was amazed to see that the hand was normal again.

"No man could do such things without the power of our God," some of the elders said in low voices.

"I have seen Pharaoh's magicians do greater wonders than those," some one spoke up. "Perhaps this man is only a clever magician without any power from God."

At a sign from Aaron, two husky men brought a large jar of water, and set it down before the crowd.

"As you people can see," Aaron announced, "this jar contains water. It has just been brought here from the Nile. I invite all who are interested to step up here to the jar and look at and taste this water."

The first one to step forward and examine the water was the man who had just spoken of Moses as possibly being only a clever magician. A few others followed him.

The Doubters Convinced

"Tip the jar over," Aaron told the men who had brought it. They obeyed, and as the many gallons of water surged forth across the ground, Moses held his rod over it.

Instantly the water turned red. Those who stood close by looked down to find their sandals and feet spotted with the thick, scarlet liquid!

"Blood!" someone cried. "The water has turned to blood!"

The loud murmur from the crowd of elders gradually died down until there was complete silence. Then someone began to speak out in a clear voice and thank God for sending Moses to lead the Israelites out of their misery. The others bowed their heads and joined silently in the prayer. (Exodus 4:29-31.)

As for Moses and Aaron, they thanked God for taking the troublesome doubts out of the minds of the elders.

Nor long after that, Moses and Aaron and many of the elders of Israel crossed the Nile river and went south to the Egyptian capital city of Memphis to appear before the king.

It wasn't a simple matter to get into the royal court and talk to Pharaoh. But Moses had been raised in the royal palace. He knew just what should be done, and it wasn't long before the group of Israelites was in the presence of the king.

"For what reason are these Israelites before me?" Pharaoh demanded of his aides.

"They are here to ask a favor of you," was the answer.

"I owe no favors to the Israelites," Pharaoh snapped. "But let them ask, so that I will have the opportunity to refuse them!"

At a motion from an aide, Aaron stepped forward from his group to address the king.

"We come in the name of the God of Israel," Aaron declared. "He has told us to come to you and tell you to let our people go out into the desert to worship Him."

There was a sudden, cold silence in the court following Aaron's words. It was broken by faint titters from several Egyptian women who were Pharaoh's guests for the day. Pharaoh leaned forward and frowned curiously down upon Aaron.

"Who is this God of Israel who attempts to tell me what to do?" he asked. "I don't know who he is or anything about him. But whoever he is, I am not going to let the Israelites leave Egypt!" (Exodus 5:2.)

"We must do as our God tells us," Aaron explained. "All we ask is that our people be allowed to go three days' journey into the desert. There we are to make sacrifices to our God. If we don't obey Him in this matter, He may bring horrible punishment to us through disease or by some enemy attack." (Verse 3.)

Moses had by this time stepped up beside Aaron. He held his shepherd's rod in his hand, waiting for the opportunity to use it. Pharaoh stared coldly down at the two.

"Don't think I don't know that you two are stirring up your people into trying to escape from Egypt!" he growled, shaking a forefinger warningly at them. "Now leave this court. Get back to whatever you're supposed to be doing, and stop trying to talk your people into doing less work for me!"

Armed guards quickly stepped forth to escort Moses and Aaron and the elders toward the doors. Forced out of the court, there was no opportunity to display their miracles before the king. Furthermore, it looked as though there would never be another chance to come before Pharaoh. Moses was disappointed and discouraged.

Pharaoh Oppresses the People

The more the king thought about being told to let the Israelites go, the angrier he became. Before the day was over he gave an order to be sent to all Egyptian taskmasters, the foremen of the Israelite labor gangs. The order also went to the Israelite officers who helped the taskmasters keep the gangs working.

Here is what the order said:

"From now on, all Israelites employed in making bricks must furnish the straw that goes into the making of bricks. At the same time, they must produce as many bricks as they have been making with straw furnished by the Egyptians. Israelites laboring at other tasks must be given more work to do. I, Pharaoh, demand these things because the Israelites have been idle, and have even been asking for time off on the seventh day of each week to worship their God." (Exodus 5:6-9.)

The Israelite labor gangs were working at many things, including digging irrigation canals, bricking up the banks of the Nile in various areas, building walls, erecting pyramids and making bricks. Whatever they were doing, this order from Pharaoh increased their labors and their misery.

Probably those who made bricks were most affected by this cruel ruling. As a result, they had to work longer than usual to go through the hay and grain fields to gather up the straws that were left after the harvests. When no more straw could be found, they gathered stubble to help hold the brick soil together.

As time went on, the Israelite brick-makers had to go farther and farther away to gather plant stalks and stubble, and thus there was less and less time for them to produce the amount of bricks they had made when straw was brought to them. (Verses 10-13.)

When the taskmasters saw that the Israelites were gradually falling behind in what was expected of them, they feared that Pharaoh would be angry with them, the taskmasters. Therefore they severely beat the Israelite officers, and hoped that in turn the officers would beat their people into working harder. (Verse 14.)



Israelite brickmakers were forced into working longer hours because of having to glean straw from the harvested grainfields.

Instead, the officers sent men to Pharaoh to complain about matters. When these men came before the Egyptian king, they told him that it was impossible for the Israelites to do all the work that was expected of them, and that the Egyptians were very unfair to expect so much work to be done.

Pharaoh stared as coldly at the Israelite officers as he had glared at Moses and Aaron.

"You Israelites are lazy!" he shouted. "Otherwise you would not be whining about wanting to take time off to worship this God of yours! Now get back to your jobs. My order still holds, which means you won't be furnished straw. But I expect just as much work from your people, even though they must get the straw themselves!" (Verses 15 to 19.)

The Israelite officers trudged wearily from Pharaoh's palace, realizing that matters were now far worse than ever before, what with their having increased the king's anger! Outside they met Moses and Aaron, who were anxiously waiting to learn the outcome of the officers' visit to the royal court.

"God should deal with you for what you've done," one of the officers said bitterly to Moses and Aaron. "Pharaoh is so angry because of your asking to go out into the desert to worship God that he may even order his army against us!"

Moses Prays for Help

Moses felt sorrowful about how things had turned out. As soon as he could be by himself, he prayed to God.

"Why did you send me to the king?" he asked God. "Instead of rescuing my people, you have allowed even more misery to come to them!" (Verses 20 to 23.)

“You shall see what I will do to Pharaoh,” God told Moses. “After I deal with him, he will be anxious to be rid of Israel. Remember, I am God Almighty, your Creator and the One who made a promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I know the sufferings of your people, and I have not forgotten my promises. Tell them that I—the Eternal—will bring great things to pass to rescue them from Egypt. When they see these things take place, they will have no doubts that I am their God. Then I shall give them the land they were promised.” (Exodus 6:6-7.)

Encouraged by hearing God repeat His promises, Moses sent word to the slaving Israelites of the things God had told him. He hoped this would brace up the spirits of the overworked people. But they were in such a miserable, hopeless state that they paid no attention to what Moses had to say. (Verse 9.)

Not long after that, God told Moses to go again to Pharaoh and tell him to let the Israelites leave Egypt.

“But if my people aren’t interested in even trying to escape, what good will it do to go to Pharaoh again?” Moses argued.

“Must I remind you again that I am your Creator?” God asked. “As your Maker, I am telling you and Aaron to do this thing! I have given you the power to do great things before Pharaoh, and to your brother I have given the ability to speak well. Even so, I shall allow Pharaoh to remain stubborn in his desire to keep the Israelites as slaves. Then, when I bring terrible things upon Egypt, so that my people will be rescued, this idol-worshipping nation will surely come to know that your God is the only God.” (Verses 10 to 13.)

Pharaoh Again!

Moses and Aaron obeyed, and went again to Pharaoh’s court. When the king was told that they had come again to see him, he was a little amused.

“Show them in,” he ordered his court officers. “It should be interesting to hear what these two upstart Israelites have to say to me this time.”

As soon as Moses and Aaron were before the king, Aaron again asked him to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt.

“How do I know that you two have been sent by your God to demand this thing?” Pharaoh asked. “If you’re anything more than just the troublemakers I think you are, you should be able to show some kind of sign to prove the power of this God of yours.”

Hoping to amuse his guests who were seated in the court, Pharaoh settled back in his massive chair, prepared to enjoy the discomfort he intended to cause Moses and Aaron by his request for them to prove themselves to be true messengers from God.

Moses glanced around at the over-curious faces of the guests, servants and guards.



Moses and Aaron obeyed God, and went for the second time to Pharaoh's palace.

Some of them were grinning, as though expecting Moses and Aaron to turn and hurriedly leave in embarrassment.

"Throw your rod on the floor," Moses said to Aaron.

The rod Aaron held was the same one Moses had carried when God had first spoken to him. Aaron held it high for all to see, then tossed it forward on the wide, richly carpeted expanse of floor in front of the king's chair.

Onlookers could see and hear the rod thud to the carpet. For a moment they wondered why Aaron had done this. Did it mean that Moses and Aaron were giving up trying to get Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt? Guards grasped their weapons more firmly, alert to any possible surprise action by the two Israelites.

Then a surprise did take place. Grins faded from the faces of the onlookers. They were replaced by expressions of alarm and even horror. Pharaoh's bearded chin dropped a little. His narrowed eyes snapped open, and he lurched back a bit in his chair. Even the husky guards stiffened at sight of the thing on the floor. There were even a few stifled screams from women who were present.

The rod had turned into a large, coiling, hissing snake! (Ex. 7:8-10.)

Pharaoh quickly straightened up into a more kingly posture, and managed to gaze with some boredom at the repulsive serpent as he beckoned to one of his aides.

"Call in my magicians—quickly!" he snapped in a low tone.

Minutes dragged by as people in the court waited in uneasy silence, staring at the coiled, tongue-darting snake. As for Moses and Aaron, they stood patiently waiting for something to happen. Finally the aide came in to whisper something into Pharaoh's ear.

Egyptian Magicians Appear

"That was a very interesting and exciting display," the king said to Moses and Aaron. "Now let us see if my wise men can show as much ability and power as your God has shown through you."

At a sign from Pharaoh, the court musicians struck up a sort of fanfare on their horns, drums and stringed instruments. Curtains parted at one side of the huge room, and out strode several well-robed men. Each carried what appeared to be a shepherd's rod. They lined up before the king, each holding his rod upward at arm's length.

"Throw your rods on the floor!" Pharaoh commanded.

The magicians obeyed, and tossed their rods down on the carpet between the king and the snake that had come from Aaron's rod. Again there were gasps of horror. A babble of excited voices came from the onlookers.

Every rod had become a live snake!

In spite of so many reptiles crawling around before him, Pharaoh leaned back and smiled triumphantly at Moses and Aaron. (Verse 11.)

"I don't think," he told them, "that your God can do any more than our gods can do."



Pharaoh's bearded chin dropped at sight of the thing on the floor.

Handclapping and shouts of praise for Pharaoh and his magicians came from the onlookers. Moses and Aaron could only stand in discomfort before all. But perhaps they knew that it was an ancient trick to press certain nerve centers in snakes, so that they would become as rigid and straight as sticks, only to be brought back into action by the pressing of certain areas to relieve the rigidity caused by nerve control. Thus it could have been that the so-called rods of the magicians were actually snakes to begin with. And Moses and Aaron probably knew that some magicians and sorcerers could show amazing feats because they were helped in their tricks by Satan's demons—and demons sometimes have the power to do some astounding things.

But however Pharaoh's magicians worked their "magic," they caused the miracle by God to look like only a trick that could be performed by most any clever magician.

Discouraged and disappointed, Moses nodded to Aaron to pick up the serpent that had come from their rod. Aaron stepped forward to seize the snake by its tail, but at that moment it slithered quickly away toward the other snakes.

What happened then caused the babble of voices to fade away. There were a few gasps of astonishment. Pharaoh's grin dissolved, its place abruptly taken by an expression of utter disbelief.

The snake from Aaron's rod was darting around and gulping down all of the magicians' snakes! (Verse 12.)

This was too much for some of the people in the court. They began moving toward the doors. Even the magicians were shaken by what they saw, and they started to file out in defeat, shaking their heads in wonderment.

After all the snakes were swallowed, Aaron seized the devouring reptile by its tail, and it became a rod in his hand. When Pharaoh saw this, he got to his feet and started to leave. Not to be put off so easily, Moses and Aaron moved quickly toward the king.

"We have shown you the sign you asked for," Aaron called out. "It should be proof to you of our God's power. Now will you let our people go?"

The king of Egypt turned to stare coldly at the two Israelites. His gaze shifted to that amazing rod in Aaron's hand, and for a few seconds Pharaoh looked as though he would like to give in on the matter. But then a hard, stubborn expression moved over his face.

"I will not let them go!" he blurted, and strode from the court. (Ex. 7:13.)

There was nothing more Moses and Aaron could do. Guards cleared the room, and the two unhappy Israelites returned to where they were staying several miles down and across the Nile river.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT

GOD AGAIN spoke to Moses after Moses and Aaron had to leave Pharaoh's court. "In the morning," He said, "Pharaoh will go out to bathe at the edge of the river. He won't want to receive you in court so soon again, so go along the river bank till you reach his bathing pool. Tell him that your God has sent you again to tell him to let My people go into the desert to worship Me. Tell him that because he has refused to let the Israelites leave, I will turn the water of the Nile into blood. Remind him that the fish in it will die, and that the Egyptians will not be able to drink it because of the terrible taste and odor."

Nile River Turned to Blood

Hours later, when the king of Egypt was slipping into his beautifully tiled pool built into the bank of the Nile, he was startled to hear a somewhat familiar voice calling to him from the heavy, green foliage just outside the borders of the pool. He looked up over the wall to see Moses and Aaron looking down on him. Guards moved swiftly toward the two Israelites.

"Let them speak!" Pharaoh commanded, waving his hand for the guards not to interfere. "I should like to know what kind of show these two will put on this time."

When the guards saw that their king was wearing a smile, they felt free to smile. But when Aaron stepped forward with the rod, faces grew serious. No one had forgotten about the unpleasant episode of the snakes, and no one could even guess what God might next bring from that rod.

Aaron repeated all that God had spoken to Moses. When he spoke of the threat to

turn the water of the Nile into blood, Pharaoh held up a hand for silence. (Exodus 7:14-18.)

"The Nile is a very big river," Pharaoh spoke up, calmly splashing water over his head. "I just don't know what we would do with that much blood!"

There was a roar of laughter from the Egyptian guards and servants. Before the last giggle had died down, Aaron lifted his rod out before him, then brought it down with a splash into the water that flowed through the pool's filtering screens. The Egyptians stared at Aaron, wondering what this gesture of his could mean.

The first sign that anything unusual was happening was a yell from the servant who held Pharaoh's robe.

"Look!" he shouted. "The water is turning red!"

Pharaoh looked down to see that the water was much darker than it had been. Even as he stared at it, the water lost all clarity and grew increasingly red. The king's first sudden, wild desire was to get out of the pool, and this he did in a very hasty and undignified manner. His servant threw his robe about him to hide the crimson streaks that coursed down his body. But all the Egyptians, including Pharaoh, uneasily eyed the puddle in which the king stood. It was thick and red, just like blood! (Ex. 7:19-21.)

It was difficult for Pharaoh to regain his dignity and calmness. But he knew he must do so before his servants. Furthermore, he felt that he had to prove that the two Israelites



The King stared down at the water; it was turning red!

were simply trying to frighten him into freeing their people.

“Call my wise men,” Pharaoh commanded a servant, “and tell them what has happened. Get them here at once, so that these Israelites will soon know that their magic is no better than that of my magicians.”

Again there was a wait for the magicians to show up. Meanwhile, the king went back to his palace to dress. But before he left, he gazed in concern across the broad expanse of blood-red liquid of the Nile flowing slowly to the north. The result of God’s power was before his eyes, but he didn’t choose to believe it. He was hoping that it was just a trick of some kind, and that his wise men could prove that it was.

At last Pharaoh returned, flanked by guards and servants. Behind him walked his magicians, and behind the magicians came more servants bearing huge casks of clear water. Then, with Moses and Aaron looking on, the magicians waved their hands over the casks, and uttered strange words. Servants stepped forward to dump the contents of the casks on the ground.

The liquid that gushed forth was as red as blood!

Pharaoh smiled when he saw what his wise men had done. He turned to triumphantly regard Moses and Aaron.

“As you see again,” he said to them, “there is no miracle you can perform that my magicians can’t perform. Of course you had the advantage. You could hardly expect my wise men to turn the river into blood while it is already that way.”

Thereupon Pharaoh and his servants walked back to the palace, leaving Moses and Aaron standing by the red Nile. (Verses 22-23.)

Seven Days Without Water

A week passed, during which the Egyptians went through much misery. Nile water was the very life of the land. Having become as blood and filled with dead fish, it couldn’t be used for anything except irrigation.

Long before a week passed, the Egyptians were frantically seeking water to keep themselves and their livestock alive. Even the ponds and pools of the country had turned to blood—except possibly those in the land of Goshen where most of the Israelites lived. Either the Egyptians had to bring water in from outside their borders or get it by digging for springs away from the banks of the Nile. Wells were very few, but it might have been from a well or springs that the magicians obtained the water that was brought before Pharaoh in casks, and which was turned red by their deceptive powers.

Even many of the Israelite slaves must have suffered along with the Egyptians, inasmuch as many of them were captive in the areas where construction was going on. But

because of the shortage of water, possibly the Israelites weren't required to work for a few days.

In spite of all the misery in the land, Pharaoh stubbornly refused to change his mind about the Israelites. However, as the week went on, he began to wonder if the discomfort of his people was too high a price to pay to keep the Israelites as slaves. At the same time Pharaoh and those about him were not as miserable as most other people, because every effort was made to supply clear water to the royal family. But Pharaoh knew that the nation couldn't last long under those conditions. He realized that sooner or later he would have to give in and call for Moses and Aaron.



The Egyptians feverishly dug into the river banks in search of springs of clear water.

On the eighth day after the Nile had been turned to blood, Pharaoh was awakened by excited servants. "Why do you disturb me?" the king demanded. "Guards! Put these bumbling serfs in prison for breaking into my bedroom!"

"But we came to report to your highness that the Nile is again flowing clear and clean!" one of the servants blurted.

"Is this true?" Pharaoh demanded of the guards who were approaching.

When the guards nodded in happy agreement, Pharaoh sank back on his pillow and smiled with relief. To the Egyptian king's way of thinking, he had won out in a battle of patience with the God of the Israelites.

"You servants will be rewarded for bringing good news," Pharaoh murmured, waving every one away.

From that hour on there was great rejoicing in Egypt. Within a few days things were back to normal. But if the king thought that this was the end of his being bothered by Moses and Aaron and their God, he had some unpleasant surprises coming.

Later, God commanded the two Israelites to go again to Pharaoh with a warning. Moses and Aaron knew that they wouldn't be welcome, but they also knew that they

must trust God and obey Him. When Pharaoh heard that they had arrived to speak to him, he was angry. But the more he thought about them, the more curious he became. He soon calmed down.

Moses and Aaron's Return

"Perhaps they have come to tell me that they have given up the futile idea of leaving Egypt," the king told his advisors. "Send word to my guards to let them in."

After the two Israelites were brought into the court, Aaron stepped up to speak. But Pharaoh held up his hand for silence.

"Spare me that worn-out speech about your people wanting to go into the desert to worship your God," the king said in a weary tone. "Make your talk short simply by telling me, if you have a reason, why you're here."

"We have come again to ask you to let our people go," Aaron said. "If you refuse to let them go, our God will bring up millions of frogs from the Nile. They will spread out over your country in such great swarms that they will be in your beds, your kitchens and wherever you sit or stand or lie down!" (Ex. 8:1-4.)

Pharaoh frowned down on Aaron and Moses for a few seconds. This announcement of a plague of frogs was startling to him, but he wanted others to believe that he was nothing more than slightly annoyed.

"Perhaps by your magic you can do such a thing," the king finally spoke. "But my magicians have already proved that they can do anything you can do. If your God is no more powerful than my wise men and their gods, what have I to fear? Leave now and tell your God that I will not free the Israelites!"

"You will learn very soon what our God can do," Aaron told the king, and he and Moses left the court.

Pharaoh was worried. He knew that his wise men had really failed miserably in trying to outperform Moses and Aaron. He would have been even more concerned if later he could have seen two men standing by the Nile—one holding a shepherd's rod out before him as a kind of signal for God to bring a second grievous woe upon Egypt.

Very early next morning the king of Egypt was awakened by screams from somewhere in the palace. He was about to call for servants to find out what was going on when he felt something move under his hand. In the dim light of dawn he could see several small creatures crawling and hopping about on his bed cover. He jerked to a sitting position and blinked in alarm at the crawling things. They were tiny frogs. (Verses 5-6.)

Angered that his servants would allow such a thing, he leaped out of bed, only to plant his bare feet on more frogs on the floor. He roared out his displeasure, but his

words were drowned in loud sounds of scuffling and banging in the hall outside his bedroom. He moved toward the door to find out what the commotion was about, but with each step there was a cold, slippery feeling beneath his feet.

The light of dawn was increasing now, and the king could more clearly see little greenish-gray frogs hopping and crawling through the windows, across the floor, over his bed and even up the walls. It was too fantastic to be real, he thought. Surely it had to be only a bad dream!

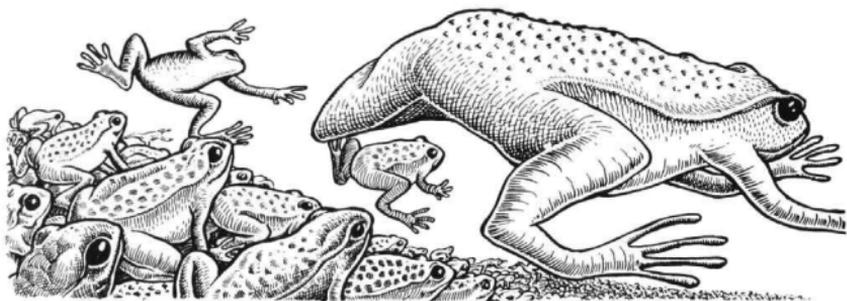
Just as he reached his door, it flew open and servants tumbled in, swatting and pounding at hordes of frogs swarming on the hall floor.

When the servants saw Pharaoh standing sternly over them, they ceased their swatting and bowed low to him.

"Forgive us, your highness!" one of them chattered. "The whole palace is being taken over by frogs, and we were trying to keep them from entering your rooms!"

"The frogs are coming out of the river and swarming over everything!" another servant blurted out.

It wasn't until that moment that the king recalled, with a shudder, what the Israelite Aaron had spoken just the day before. In that same moment Pharaoh's anger turned to alarm. He realized then that this was no mere nightmare. The plague of frogs was actually at hand!



The frogs crawled out of the Nile by the millions, and swiftly spread over the land.

"Close all doors!" Pharaoh commanded. "Cover every window in the palace! Then call all servants to help clear those frogs from inside this building!"

Within a few minutes scores of servants were feverishly working to rid the palace of frogs. Even the guards joined in the task of making the building almost airtight. Servants were stationed at every entrance to sweep the tiny amphibians back whenever doors were opened.

"Call my robe bearer," the king commanded. "I wish to go now to bathe in my pool."

One of the guards stepped forward a little nervously, holding up a hand as though to restrain Pharaoh from going outside.

"My master would find it impossible to go into the pool this morning," the guard said. "It is filled with frogs and tadpoles. Besides, the path to the pool is almost solidly covered with a creeping blanket of frogs."

The king frowned at the guard, and was about to say something when a servant approached, bowing as he came.

"Your majesty's advisors are here to see you," the servant panted. "They would like to have a meeting with you at once."

"Go tell them I never discuss affairs of state before breakfast!" Pharaoh snapped, and strode back to his private quarters.

Pharaoh's Breakfast

Later, waiters brought in trays of food to spread out on the king's large, private dining table. Pharaoh uncovered one of the steaming dishes, and his grim expression almost disappeared at sight of the savory contents.

"These frogs are a serious problem," Pharaoh thought, "but I'm not going to let them spoil my appetite."

He seized a pitcher of cream and poured it lavishly over the contents of the bowl in front of him. Using a spoon-like utensil, he began to eat with obvious enjoyment. His curled, carefully squared beard bobbed swiftly up and down with each movement of his jaws.

Suddenly he stopped eating. His mouth hung open, and he stared down into his bowl like one hypnotized and unable to act. Something was moving in the cream in his dish! The movement increased, and abruptly two small frogs burst out of his food, crawled up the inside of the bowl, leaped off the rim and went sprawling on the table in thick drops of cream. His spoon clanked to the floor while his gaze shifted to the equally upsetting sight of a frog floating lifelessly in a silver cup of his favorite beverage. The nearest waiter, having just noticed the situation, was horrified. It took all the courage he could muster to step up and snatch the offending articles from the table.

"Take this food back to the kitchen and tell the cooks to eat it!" Pharaoh growled. "Then bring me food without frogs in it or all you waiters and cooks will be dragged away by my guards!"

The Bible doesn't tell us just how the frogs affected Pharaoh and his household at first, and therefore the foregoing description must be made with the help of some

imagination. Probably the actual situations were in some ways much funnier and in other ways much more tragic. We do know that the Egyptians suffered a great deal during the next several days, what with the frogs continuing to emerge from the Nile and move in distressing hordes across the country.

As usual, in a weak attempt to prove to the Egyptians that his wise men could also work such great "magic," Pharaoh called in the magicians.

"Show me, before the witnesses gathered here in my court, that you can also produce frogs," the king commanded.

"We shall indeed do that, O Pharaoh," spoke up one of the chief magicians, whose name was Jannes. (II Tim. 3:8.)

"This Moses and Aaron," spoke up another named Jambres, "are not truly skilled

in the art of sorcery. They were simply clever enough to know that the marshlands of the Nile have been teeming with millions upon millions of tadpoles, and they guessed the day and almost the hour when those tadpoles would turn to frogs and crawl out of the river. In other words, O king, they have tried to deceive you into thinking that their God has given them the power to produce the frogs. But now, through the powers of sorcery, we shall produce frogs from nowhere!"

Several magicians took their places before the king. There was a mysterious waving of arms and hands along with some strange words from Jambres and Jannes, and little green frogs appeared as from nothing and started hopping about in all directions. (Ex. 8:7.)

This feat of magic pleased the king, but it was plain that he had already seen enough frogs for one day. He waved for the performance to cease.

"But our display of sorcery is not yet complete, O king," Jannes spoke up. "Look at the floor again!"

Pharaoh's gaze dropped to the floor. He leaned forward and blinked. The frogs the magicians had brought on had disappeared!



Another frog was floating lifelessly on its back in a silver cup of Pharaoh's favorite beverage.

"The gods who give you power for your magic are indeed mighty," Pharaoh nodded. "Let us beseech them to stop this plague of frogs. Surely it can't last another day."

But the king was wrong. Frogs continued to pour from the river day after day, and to spread out over Egypt—except possibly the land of Goshen, where most of the Israelites lived. Many of the frogs soon died for lack of shade and moisture. Many were killed by the constant efforts of the Egyptians. Soon there were great heaps of the tiny reptiles piled up everywhere. To bury them was too much of a task. For every frog that died, there was another to take its place, and the misery of the Egyptians increased each day by the frogs crawling into their food, their beds and everywhere they sat or walked.

Pharaoh Meets with His Advisors

Meanwhile, the king's troubles swiftly increased. His advisors and officers pressed him to do something about the plague. They pointed out to him that if it didn't end soon, the Egyptians would flee from their own country, and that the nation would be too weakened to live. This worried Pharaoh, who knew that he couldn't rule people if they weren't there to rule.

Another thing that worried the king was the way in which Moses and Aaron had outperformed his magicians. Although he had several times called in his wise men to try to prove to his people that the Egyptian gods were always ready to act through the magicians, Pharaoh knew that the power shown through Moses and Aaron was much greater, and he was afraid of it.

One thing that made matters difficult for the Egyptians was that their pagan religion required them to worship certain reptiles, including the frog. One of their idols even had the head of a frog. Therefore many of the people of Egypt had a superstitious fear of killing the frogs, or even to step on them by accident.

Still the frogs kept pouring out of the Nile and over the land, and their dead grew into ever-growing piles of sickening, decaying flesh.

"Something must be done at once or you will no longer have a nation to rule," Pharaoh's chief advisor told him. "Our people cannot bear up under this thing much longer. Many of them have already fled to foreign lands."

"You mean you want me to give in to those two self-styled Israelites and their silly demands?" Pharaoh asked.

"That is the only thing to do," the chief advisor replied, "unless you think your magicians have the power to stop this plague."

Pharaoh did not answer. He would not ask the magicians to try to rid the nation of frogs. He knew that their source of power was not as great as that of Moses and

Aaron. Deep in thought, the king sauntered to the window, then realized that it was tightly boarded up to keep out the tiny invaders. If only he could know just how long the plague would last, he could act accordingly. But he didn't know. If he gave in and let the Israelites go, his plans would be shattered. He wanted to keep on using the Israelites to build cities with more grandeur and splendor than man had ever known. Perhaps just a few more years, and his ambition would be fulfilled. But if the plague of frogs continued, he might lose everything.

"Send for Moses and Aaron!" Pharaoh suddenly blurted out.

Relief swept over the chief advisor's face as he heard those words. He turned to a servant to order him to send a message by the swiftest rider in the king's service.

Pharaoh was waiting in his court when Moses and Aaron arrived later. Moses felt that there could be only one reason to be summoned so hastily, and he was right.

"Ask your God to stop sending these terrible frogs!" Pharaoh commanded, staring sternly at the two Israelites.

"We would be most happy to do so," Aaron spoke out, "if you will promise to free our people."

Pharaoh hesitated. He leaned back in his chair, and blankly regarded one of his clenched fists.

"I will let your people go," he said with a sigh. "They will be free to go into the desert to worship your God." (Ex. 8:8.)

This, at last, was what Moses had worked for! He breathed a prayer of thankfulness that the king of Egypt had finally given in to their requests. But Moses knew that it wouldn't be wise to ask God to stop the oncoming frogs at just any time. He knew that if Pharaoh would choose a certain time, then the power of God would be better shown to the king.

"When do you want our God to stop the frogs from overrunning your land?" Moses asked Pharaoh.

"Tomorrow," the king replied.

"Then it shall be done tomorrow," Moses said. "Tomorrow the frogs will cease to hop through your cities and fields and buildings. The only live frogs to be found will be in the river. This will be a miracle from our God. It will be something that no other gods can do."

As soon as Moses could get to a place where he could privately pray, he asked God to stop the plague of frogs on the following day. (Verses 9-12.)

Next morning, the weary people of Egypt were relieved and happy to find that there were no more live frogs anywhere except in the Nile river. There was great rejoicing and celebrating. But there was still the huge task of raking the dead frogs

into heaps, and after that the horrible odor of decaying frogs was very unpleasant. (Verse 13.)

Meanwhile, Moses was anxiously expecting some kind of decree from the king, stating that the Israelites would be freed. Nothing happened. Angered at the delay by Pharaoh to declare the Israelites free, Moses went with Aaron back to the royal palace.

"I know why you are here," Pharaoh greeted them in wearied tones, "so there's no point in reminding me about my promise to let your people leave Egypt."



Pharaoh regarded Moses and Aaron with suspicion, at the same time ignoring his promise to free the Israelites.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE PLAGUES CONTINUE

PHARAOH had promised to let the children of Israel go. But with the plague of frogs over, he changed his mind. So Pharaoh told Moses and Aaron: "I didn't give the matter enough thought at the time, but now that I have done so, it is clear to me that it would be most unwise to free your people. Therefore it is my will that the Israelites remain in Egypt and continue their tasks." (Exodus 8:15.)

Moses could hardly believe what he heard. But he had to face the fact that no man, not even a king, should always be trusted.

"It is you who are most unwise," Aaron spoke out. "Our God is aware of how you have broken your promise. Because of your dishonesty He will bring another terrible thing upon your nation!"

These words worried Pharaoh. The more he heard of the God of Israel, the more he feared the very mention of the name.

"Get these two out of my court," the king commanded. Probably he would have preferred to put them in prison, but he was afraid that their God would somehow punish him for such an act.

Later, when Moses was alone, God told him to tell Aaron to strike the ground with his rod, so that the particles of dust and dirt would be changed into another misery for the Egyptians. (Verse 16.)

Dust Becomes Fleas!

When Aaron obeyed, a huge mass of insects crawled over the ground as far as the two men could see. It was only minutes later that the Egyptians, still busy burying

the dead frogs, found themselves in a sea of billions of biting, blood-sucking insects. They were so thick that it was almost impossible to breathe without inhaling them. Within only a matter of hours, people and animals moaned in agony as their bodies became matted with the stinging bugs. Wherever any Egyptian went, it was impossible to entirely escape this latest horrifying plague from God.

As for Pharaoh, his servants tried in vain to protect him from the swarms of insects that invaded the palace. In spite of his misery, the king made up his mind to wait and see how matters would turn out.

This latest distress caused many unhappy officials—more than ever before—to send messages to the king, begging him to save the nation by yielding to the requests of Moses and Aaron. By now even the common people of Egypt were becoming aware of what was going on, and more and more of them were increasingly fearful of the strange power causing the plagues.

“This is only another trick of those Israelites,” Pharaoh kept telling those about him. “My magicians can also produce swarms of insects. Call them here and they will prove it to you.”

Later, when the magicians came before the king, a very uncomfortable audience squirmed before some very uncomfortable performers. Pharaoh, covered with a fine netting which kept out some of the insects, stared impatiently at the magicians.

“Do something!” he commanded. “Prove again that our gods can produce miracles!”



The Egyptians were still working hard to clean up the heaps of dead frogs when Moses warned of a Third Plague to come.



People and animals moaned in agony as their bodies became matted with the stinging insects.

Perhaps the magicians had performed their former amazing tricks through clever, natural means. Perhaps they had been helped by evil spirits. Or possibly there was a combination of both. Whatever the means, it didn't seem to be with them as they stood in fearful embarrassment before the king. The head magician suddenly bowed low, and it was plain that he was trembling.

"We cannot do what this God of the Israelites can do," he muttered. "At first we believed that those two Israelites were performing feats of magic through their own cleverness and skill. But we have come to see that the terrible things that have happened through them could come only through the hand of a God who is most powerful!" (Verse 19.)

There was silence in the court. Pharaoh got to his feet. Perhaps no one could see, through the netting, the mixture of embarrassment and anger on his face.

"My people are turning into cowards!" he shouted. "Nevertheless, I will not allow the Israelites to go free!"

Meanwhile, God spoke to Moses again and told him what to do next. The following morning, when the king was striding with some of his servants to the river, where he hoped to get some relief from the louse-like insects crawling on him, he saw Moses and Aaron standing in his path.

"Why do you bother me like this?" Pharaoh frowned. "I should have you thrown in the palace dungeon for the things you have done!"

However, he made no move to call his soldiers, because he secretly feared what God might do to him if he harmed the two Israelites.

"We have come again to ask you to let our people go into the desert to worship our God," Aaron spoke out. "He has told us that if you refuse again, He will bring a

fourth plague upon Egypt. This time it will be swarms of flying insects, and to prove His power, He will not let the insects come into the land of Goshen to trouble the Israelites.”

“Then perhaps I should move my palace to Goshen!” Pharaoh snapped, and pushing past Moses and Aaron he stamped off to the river.

Next day the suffering Egyptians noted that the louse-like insects were dying. They hopefully brushed the tiny creatures out of their hair and clothes and off their bodies. The horrible plague seemed to have come to a quick end.

When Pharaoh noticed that the insects were dying, he became very jubilant.

“What did I tell you?” he boastfully addressed his advisors. “I knew it had to end. Now you can see how foolish I would have been to take your advice and let the Israelites slip away from us.”

“But your royal highness should realize that these things are ruining our nation,” the chief advisor spoke up. “Our livestock is dying. Our food supply has been cut down. The Israelites aren’t doing very much for us because our people have been too miserable to keep them busy. We can’t go on like—”

“We’ll make up for all that,” Pharaoh broke in, “after these miserable times are at an end. And they must end sometime.”

“We heard that the men Moses and Aaron met you this morning and threatened another plague,” one of the advisors spoke up.

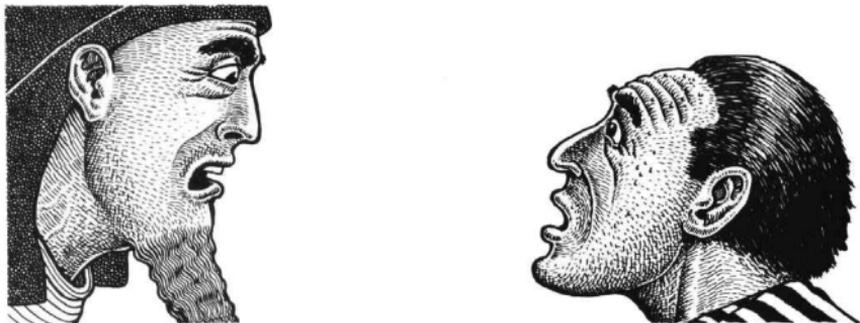
“That is true,” Pharaoh said, glaring at the advisor. “Perhaps if there is another one it will be the last one. Or perhaps our patient gods will at last be angered, and will step in to protect us.”

Deadly Flies Plague Egypt

There were moments of silence as the king nervously rubbed his beard, hoping to shake out any dead lice from the royal chin growth. The silence was abruptly broken by shouts of servants approaching on the run. The first one to reach the room bowed low to Pharaoh.

“A thousand pardons for breaking in this way, oh king!” the servant panted. “Clouds of flying insects are settling down over the city! We must close all doors and windows!” (Verse 24.)

Even before the excited servants could draw the vast expanses of curtains together, a swarm of winged insects buzzed into the large council room. Pharaoh was still wearing a gauze cape and headpiece, especially made for him as protection against lice. He quickly drew the top part over his head and sat in miserable silence as he watched others batting and swatting at these newest foes. There were shouts of pain



"Clouds of flying insects are swarming over the city!"
the servant gasped.

from some as the vicious insects sank their barbed jaws into human flesh. Servants opened inner doors through which the advisors could hastily retreat, leaving the king to sourly witness the battle between his excited servants and the maddened insects.

As the hours passed, the city became a place of miserable uproar. Caught in the streets or in other open places, many people frantically scrambled for places of safety from the deep-biting flies. But many of the buildings of the Egyptians were made with open windows and doors, and they were poor protection against insects.

Livestock in the fields suffered as much as did the people. Most animals had no way of escaping from the stinging flies. All they could do was race wildly about.

Normal activity came to a stop in all of Egypt. It was a full-time task for all to try to protect themselves from the infectious bites and stings of this latest plague. Even some of the crops and much of the food were set upon by the insects. Illnesses and fever soon overtook people and animals.

Insects swarmed everywhere and over everything and everybody in increasing numbers. Reports of misery, sickness, hardship and even death began pouring into Pharaoh's palace. Advisors pleaded with him to send for Moses and Aaron.

"Perhaps our gods will yet act to take these terrible flies from us," Pharaoh muttered. "Are the priests still offering sacrifices and praying?"

"The flies were too much for them," one of the advisors answered. "They're taking refuge in the wine cellar."

Even through the gauze hood, the frown on the king's face was very plain. Possibly he was thinking that the least the priests could do was stick to their work and go through the required motions of praying to idols—even though it was a waste of time and energy.

Pharaoh's gaze dropped to his gauze-covered hands, and he saw that the deep bites on them were beginning to swell and redden. They were smeared with a heavy ointment brought by the court physician, but nevertheless they were throbbing with increasing pain.

Pharaoh Weakens

"Send for those two Israelites, Moses and Aaron!" the king suddenly blurted.

When the two appeared somewhat later, Pharaoh was fretful and impatient. He noted that the Israelites were not wearing gauze hoods or gloves, and that there were no fly bites on their faces or hands. Their Egyptian escorts, on the other hand, had been painfully bitten in performing their duty.

"Why should your God continue this cruel plague?" Pharaoh asked. "If He is an intelligent God, He should know before now that I am willing to let your people make their sacrifices to Him. Go and tell that to the Israelites!"

"But you said nothing about letting the Israelites leave Egypt," Aaron reminded the king. "If you mean that we are to stay within your land, then we cannot sacrifice to our God. Some of the animals we intend to offer on our altars are sacred to you Egyptians. Therefore your people would be offended. We would risk being killed by mobs of stone-hurling Egyptians. Therefore we must make a three-day trip beyond the border of Egypt, just as our God has commanded us."

"Then go!" Pharaoh snapped, after a few moments of thoughtful silence. "But don't go too far or stay too long, or you may all die in the hot, dry desert. First, however, ask your God to take away these horrible flies."

"We shall go at once to ask our God to stop the plague," Aaron said. "But remember the promise you have just made to let us leave Egypt. Do not deceive us as you did before." (Verse 29.)

Later, Moses asked God to remove the clouds of stinging insects from Egypt. That night a strong wind swept over the land. By morning the suffering Egyptians were relieved to see that the insects had been blown away. But the flies—a different and much more harmful kind than the common housefly—had left the land in a terrible condition. Trees had been stripped of leaves. Food plants were gnawed and withered. Wounded and infected people and animals lay sick by the thousands, and a quick end had come to many who were set upon by dense hordes of flies, inasmuch as the victims were stung or chewed into lifelessness.

But even though Pharaoh realized the condition of his nation following this plague, the sudden disappearance of the stinging flies caused him to regret that he had promised to let the Israelites go into the desert.

Pharaoh Breaks His Promise Again

"Send a message to Moses," he commanded one of his aides. "Tell him that my decision to let the Israelites leave Egypt was made during a time of stress, and that after thinking the matter over with greater wisdom, I now forbid the Israelites to leave this land." (Verse 32.)

It was a deep disappointment to Moses when he received the message. But at once he and Aaron were sent by God to warn the king of Egypt that if he did not immediately let the Israelites go, a terrible disease would come upon the livestock of the nation. (Ex. 9:1-3.)

Pharaoh refused to be frightened by such a warning.

"I will not be bluffed," he told Moses and Aaron. "Why should I, Pharaoh, be moved by mere words?"

This fifth plague struck with such abrupt results that the Egyptians could hardly believe it was happening. Within a few hours the land was strewn with dead horses, cattle, sheep, goats, camels and burros. A horrible and fatal sickness of animals almost wiped out the valuable livestock of Egypt. But not so much as one animal belonging to the Israelites was affected by the death-dealing plague. (Verse 6.)

This was a great blow to the religious thinking of the Egyptians, too. Most animals were sacred to them because of being connected with their gods. It was difficult for them to understand why their many gods would allow the one God of the Israelites to slay the very animals after which some of their idols had been fashioned.

Regardless of what his people thought or how great the livestock loss was, Pharaoh stubbornly stuck to his desire to keep the Israelites as slaves. He reasoned that inasmuch as Egypt had struggled through five plagues, Egypt could struggle through more. Some of them had lasted for only a matter of hours, and others had lasted for several days. But nothing could happen, Pharaoh thought, that would prevent him from building Egypt into a super-glorious nation.

If the king could have foreseen what was to happen to him and to his nation, he surely would have fallen on his knees to beg for mercy.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE WORST WEATHER EVER!

ONLY a few hours after Moses and Aaron were told that the Israelites could not have their freedom, the two servants of God returned to the royal court. Flanked by his guards and aides, Pharaoh was just starting out on a short tour outside the city to view the livestock damage.

"Perhaps it would not be best for you to make this tour at this time," one of the aides told Pharaoh. "A strong wind is coming up, and is whipping dust and sand in from the desert."

Moses and Aaron Reappear

The king was about to make some kind of reply when he saw Moses and Aaron standing on the palace steps only a short distance away. Between them they carried a large leather bag.

"You! Moses and Aaron!" Pharaoh called in a vexed tone. "What evil thing have you come to pronounce upon the land now? What do you have in that bag?"

The two Israelites came closer, put the bag down on one of the stone steps, and pulled the leather top folds open so that Pharaoh could see inside.

"Ashes!" the king snorted.

"Yes, very fine ashes from one of your brick-drying furnaces where many of our people have slaved for so long," Aaron explained. "Our God has instructed us to bring them here before you and toss them into the air."

Without more explanation, Moses and Aaron dipped their hands into the bag

and brought out fists full of the fine ashes, scattering them into the rising wind. The millions of tiny ash particles were swiftly whisked away into the sky.

"If this is one of your religious rites," Pharaoh muttered, shaking his head in mock concern, "then you're sure to run short of ashes if your people ever get out into the desert!"

"You had better pray that not one particle of those ashes touches your skin," was Aaron's only answer.

Moses and Aaron took their empty bag and walked away, leaving Pharaoh worriedly wondering what Aaron meant by his last remark.

Boils!

Almost at once people living in Memphis, Egypt, complained of suddenly breaking out in painful boil-like blisters and sores. Then people living in other parts of Egypt quickly were overtaken with the same thing. Within a few hours Egyptians



The Egyptians broke out in painful, fast-growing boils wherever the ashes touched their skins.

in every part of the land were victims of the painful sores. The only section of Egypt not affected was Goshen. (Ex. 9:11.)

What caused the boils was a mystery to the Egyptians. But when their king broke out in the bulging sores, he remembered what Aaron had said. Then he knew that the ashes tossed away by the two Israelites had caused the sores on every Egyptian touched by them!

Perhaps one might think that a plague of boils wouldn't be very serious. But even one boil can be so painful that the victim is unable to move about. During this plague, many of the Egyptians had several or even many boils—depending on how many ash particles touched their bodies. This meant that most of the people were plunged into

a terrible state of misery. They were unable to take care of the sick livestock affected by the previous plague, or to bury the thousands of dead animals littering the farms and fields.

Even the king's magicians, those men who had tried to imitate some of God's miracles, became victims of the sixth plague. What happened to them after that isn't known. They aren't mentioned again in the Bible as trying to prove that sorcerers could do the same things that God could do.

As for Pharaoh, he was utterly wretched. There was no one who could do much to help relieve him of his pain. Physicians and servants were busy nursing their own burning sores.

Pharaoh's pride and dignity were wounded as much as was his skin, and the more he thought about his condition the more indignant he became. He knew that Moses and Aaron were waiting for him to give in and promise that the Israelites could leave Egypt. For at least two days he fumed and groaned. It was a case of his pride, vanity and ambition striving to win out over serious pain.

At last he demanded that a messenger—one who at least didn't have boils on his feet—come to take a report to Moses and Aaron.

"Tell those Israelites," Pharaoh shouted, wincing with every jarring syllable, "that I am the king of Egypt! Remind them that mere boils and sores can't force the king to free the multitudes of slaves necessary for molding this land into the greatest nation ever to exist or that ever will exist!"

Moses and Aaron received the message. As usual, they were disappointed. But the very next day, following instructions from God, they showed up at the royal palace. Because of his condition and his bitter feeling toward the two Israelites, Pharaoh didn't want to see any more of them. However, he allowed them to come before him because of his great curiosity to learn what they might predict would happen next.

"We are here again to tell you that our God demands that you let our people go," Aaron spoke out, and Moses nodded in agreement. "Our God has spared your life till now only because He wants you alive to view the more terrible plagues He is about to pour out upon Egypt. If you will not let the Israelites depart at once, a heavy hail will fall upon the land. It will be so terrible that any man or beast caught out in it will die!" (Ex. 9:19.)

Uncomfortable in his well-cushioned chair because of his painful sores, Pharaoh nervously shifted his weight and impatiently stared down at the two Israelites.

"Hailstorms in this part of Egypt are quite uncommon," he told them in a wearied tone. "However, I have seen a few in my lifetime. I remember tiny ice particles falling, but they harmed nothing. If a mere hailstorm is your God's next plague,

then I do not fear it. I will not let you Israelites go out of my land."

Having heard the king's answer, Moses and Aaron felt that their warning was completely in vain. But there was a growing number in Pharaoh's court who had come to respect the power of the God of Israel. They sent word to their friends to warn them what was about to happen. The message spread among the Egyptians, many of whom brought their livestock in from the fields and quartered them in barns, houses or other shelters where the expected hailstorm couldn't harm them.

Hailstorm and Lightning

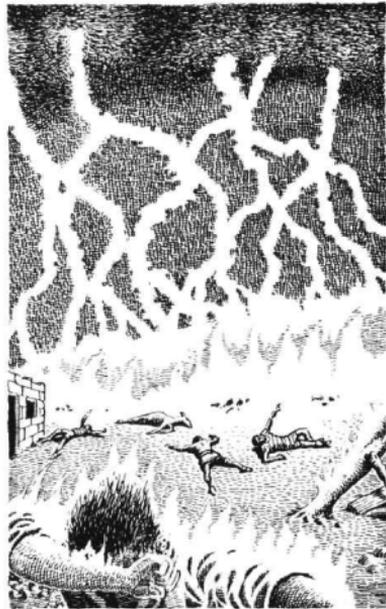
Acting later on God's orders, Moses pointed his shepherd's rod toward the sky, already darkened over Egypt with an ominous blanket of low clouds. The mere presence of heavy clouds over all of sunny Egypt was most unusual. But now the clouds began to boil and roll as though pierced by mighty shafts of swift wind. Flashes of light shimmered through them. To people below staring upward, it seemed that millions of giant, flickering torches were flaring high in the sky above the weaving layer of heavy vapors.

Then came the frightening booming of thunder from high in the heavens. It was no longer a secret to the Egyptians that something most unusual was happening up beyond that leaden cloak of clouds, and that something frightful was about to take place.

Suddenly fearful, those in the open—in the fields, on the river and on the roads—began to be concerned with gaining immediate shelter.

When the first dazzling bolts of chain lightning shot out of the low-dipping clouds, the pain-racked Egyptians were gripped with fear. Many of these idol-worshipping people were swiftly losing faith in their little gods, and were becoming more and more fearful of the God of Israel.

From the shelter of his palace, Pharaoh watched the display of power from the God he had kept on defying. The bolts of lightning hissed and cracked with increasing



Bolts of flame hissed and cracked from the low clouds, then shot along the ground to sear everything they touched.

intensity. Whenever their fire reached the ground, it shot along in sizzling tongues in all directions, searing everything it touched.

People were swallowed up in it, emerging in screaming agony, their bodies smoking. Livestock, trees, shrubs, crops, buildings and even the stones of the ground became blackened victims of the singeing electrical fire from the skies.

At the same time, large hailstones plunged out of the clouds. Any person or animal caught without a sturdy shelter was pounded mercilessly by the heavy hunks of ice.

Even many of the Egyptian buildings staggered under the growing weight of the hailstones, and collapsed on people and animals seeking shelter within.

But in the land of Goshen, where the Israelites lived, there was no lightning and no hail.

After hours of nerve-shattering watching and waiting, Pharaoh shakily turned from his window to confront the small group of Egyptian officials whose faces were as pale as his. They stared silently at the king, as though blaming him for what was going on. The accusing stares, the constant roar of great hailstones crashing on the roof, the vivid flashes of lightning, the violent hissing of the ground-charring fire, the hideous rumble of thunder and the cries of people in pain—all these were more than a match for Pharaoh's stubborn desire to hold the Israelites as captives.

"Send for Moses and Aaron!" he shouted. "Give the messenger who goes after



Giant hailstones plunged from the sky, viciously hammering people and livestock caught without shelter in the strange and dreadful storm.

them some kind of shield to protect him. But send him at once!"

God must have protected the messenger, and He must have protected Moses and Aaron on their way to the king's palace. Later, when Pharaoh saw the two Israelites being escorted into his court, he stepped forward to meet them.

Pharaoh Weakens

"I admit that I have done wrong!" he called out. "I couldn't believe until now that your God is the one and only God. I realize now that He has brought these terrible plagues upon my land because I and my people are wicked in His sight. We have had enough punishment. Ask your God to stop this awful lightning and hail. I promise to let your people go. They don't need to stay in Egypt any longer!"

It was difficult to believe these words from one who had so haughtily defied God just a few hours earlier. But it was encouraging to Moses and Aaron that this self-exalted man would admit these things before them and before the few worried-looking Egyptians who were present.

"We shall leave at once," Aaron told Pharaoh, "and ask God to stop the lightning and hail. When you see the storm letting up, give thanks to God that He has spared you. If you fail to do so, it isn't very likely that you will keep on having the respect for our God that you seem to have now."

Moses and Aaron left the palace and fearlessly moved through the downpour of hail and fire to a spot outside the city. There Moses lifted his hands toward the sky and asked God to stop the destructive seventh plague.

Gradually the hail ceased to fall. The bolts of lightning became fewer. Soon the skies grew silent, and the heavy blanket of clouds moved away.

Throughout the land the Egyptians ventured from their shelters to witness the great damage that had resulted from this latest plague. Wounded people and animals were cared for. The dead were prepared for burial. There wasn't much to be done about the ruined fruit trees and vegetable crops. About the only thing that had come through the plague without extreme damage were the fields sown to wheat and rye, where plants were not yet developed from the soil at that season. (Verse 32.)

Even while the nation was licking its wounds, the king began to regret that he had promised freedom to the Israelites. He had never completely lost his desire to build his cities into a cluster of wondrous, glittering areas—each as great or greater than the city of ancient Babylon. Pharaoh knew that without the tremendous aid of the Israelite labor gangs his ambition was nothing more than a dream.

For hours the king thought matters over. The more his mind dwelled on these things, the stronger he felt that his ambitions were more important than the best in-

terests of millions of people, including Egyptians as well as Israelites.

Pharaoh Changes His Mind

At last Pharaoh summoned a messenger, and not long afterward Moses received this message:

"As the one of highest rank in the great nation of Egypt, I again reserve the right and privilege of breaking an agreement made at a time of most unusual mental and physical distress. With that distress removed, and my judgment again clear and sound, I herewith cancel my bargain to allow freedom to the Israelites."

Moses wasn't very surprised to receive that message. He had learned that Pharaoh couldn't be trusted. But he was very disappointed, because he had prayed that the seventh plague would truly be the one by which God would break Pharaoh's stubborn will.

Again God spoke to Moses, telling him that He, God, had purposely caused the Egyptian king to be stubborn.

"I have done this," God said, "because I wish to show more of my power through further signs and plagues. Then you will tell the things I have done to the generations of Israel to come, and they will have a clearer understanding of my power, and realize that I am the one Creator and Ruler."

God gave Moses instructions in what to say and do. Moses had learned to obey without excuse or argument. Within a short time he and Aaron were again before Pharaoh in the royal court.

"If you have come to argue with me because I refuse to free your people," the king said, "then you are wasting your time. I do not intend to change my mind."

"Our God will not beg you to do anything," Aaron told Pharaoh. "He is a God of action, and if you refuse to change your mind now, He won't fail to deal harshly with you by this time tomorrow."

"Just what can I look forward to?" Pharaoh asked in a bored tone. He tried to appear unconcerned, although he was quite anxious to know what would happen next.

"Millions upon millions of locusts will come upon Egypt!" Aaron answered. "There will be so many that the ground will be lost from sight. They will eat up all shrubs and plants that have come through the last plague. They will stream into the Egyptian homes and buildings. It will be the greatest plague of locusts ever to come on the Earth!"

Without waiting for what the king would say or do, Moses and Aaron turned and walked out of the palace. At once there was a loud outcry from Pharaoh's advisors and officers.

"How much longer must we suffer these awful conditions?" one of the advisors demanded as he stepped quickly before the king.

"My vast farmlands have become worthless!" another complained in a bitter tone.

"Don't you realize, O Pharaoh, that our nation is all but ruined already?" someone asked.

"We can't afford another plague!" another shouted. "Let the Israelites go worship their God. We would be much better off without them!"

"Silence!" Pharaoh snapped, holding up his arms and gazing haughtily down on the group before him. Every one quieted down and stepped respectfully back to listen to what the king had to say.

"You are too impatient and hasty in your decisions," Pharaoh frowned. "Let us first find out just which ones of the Israelites are required to go worship their God. Perhaps it wouldn't include all the men. If so, I might let the women, children and old men go, and keep the youngest and strongest men to stay here and continue working."

A mutter of approval went up from the men in the court.

"Bring the two Israelites back here!" Pharaoh commanded. Two guards left hastily, and within a few minutes escorted Moses and Aaron back before the Egyptian king.

"You left too soon," Pharaoh told them. "I didn't tell you that I wouldn't let the Israelites go. It could depend on how many are to go."

"All of us must go," Aaron spoke out. "No one is to be left behind. All our flocks and herds must go, too."

This answer from Aaron angered Pharaoh. He stood up and glared down on the two Israelites.

"Then go!" he shouted, waving his hands toward them. "Leave, and you'll find yourselves in such trouble out in the desert that you'll wish you had stayed in Egypt!"

The king signalled to his guards, who stepped swiftly forward, seized Moses and Aaron, and hustled them out of the building.

After the two were out of the city, Moses held his rod up toward the sky, and asked God to bring the locusts upon Egypt. Thereupon an east wind began to blow. It grew steadily stronger, and continued all the rest of the day and into the night with such gale force that the people of Egypt were increasingly alarmed. By dawn of the next day it was still howling across the land, sweeping up huge clouds of dust and sand from the desert areas.

At his palace, Pharaoh tossed restlessly on his bed. The shrieking wind kept him awake with its dismal howl, as though foretelling of a doom to shortly come.

CHAPTER TWENTY

TWO MORE PLAGUES ON EGYPT

THE KING of Egypt tried to erase from his mind what Aaron had said about the coming plague of locusts. But the more he tried to forget it, the more he worried.

"There have been many locust swarms in the land from time to time," Pharaoh thought. "These insects have done damage, but they didn't bother people or animals. Surely another swarm of these creatures wouldn't mean great hardship."

Unable to sleep, Pharaoh got out of bed and quietly walked across the room to the curtained east windows. He didn't summon servants to pull the curtains, because he didn't wish to awaken his wife. He hoped that his children, bedded in adjoining rooms, would also sleep through the windstorm. There had been so much furore and excitement in the palace for so many days that everyone was in great need of rest.

The king yanked the curtains apart, disclosing a view eastward across the Nile river. The sun was just rising in a weirdly dull, red glow, apparently caused by flying dust and sand. But even as he watched, the sun became dim. Then it disappeared, as though blotted out by a vast, dark curtain!

"It must be a heavy bank of clouds coming in with the wind," Pharaoh thought.

Fascinated by the growing darkness, he kept staring into the sky. Gradually he was aware of a strange buzzing that grew louder above the low whine of the wind. Peculiar objects darted past his window. At first he thought that they were leaves carried by the wind. Then some of them landed on the window ledge.

Suddenly he realized that he was staring at huge red and black locusts! The eighth plague was starting!



As Pharaoh gazed eastward, he saw the morning sun gradually disappear in a strange, dark cloud.

Locust Plague Descends

Pharaoh backed away from the window, amazed at the size of the insects. They looked like grasshoppers, except they were much larger and brighter in color. Within seconds the wide window ledge was alive with them. The king snatched the ribbons that controlled the heavy curtains, and gave them a violent yank. But before the curtains could be drawn, an army of locusts had invaded the room. At first they flew and hopped aimlessly about, causing the king to duck and weave as he backed toward an inner door. Then the locusts located the flower beds in the long, stone planters built at one side of the room.

"My lilies! My rare, beautiful lilies!" Pharaoh gasped.

Before his eyes the hungry insects chewed the plants down to the soil. It was too much for the king, who had a special soft spot in his heart for flowers, if not for human beings. He stamped out into the corridor next to his bedroom, and shouted for servants.

Already the palace was in an uproar worse than the one caused by the plague of frogs. Servants and guards were dashing excitedly about, swatting and mashing the little invaders. But there were so many of them that it seemed impossible to keep them out.

During the next hours Egypt suffered terrible losses by the clouds of locusts dumped over the land. The strong east wind that brought them later died down. Every plant that grew out of the ground was chewed up by the insects. There were so many of the locusts that they crawled over each other in a horrible, live blanket several inches deep in many places. Although they didn't bite people or animals, it was

a ghastly experience for people and animals to be crawled upon and almost smothered by a sea of squirming, twisting, struggling, tumbling, buzzing insects. (Exodus 10:15.)

Meanwhile, Pharaoh's advisors and officers stormed back to his court to beg him to bring a quick end to the plague by calling Moses and Aaron.

"It makes no sense to keep the Israelites," they argued. "What good can they do us as our slaves if there is nothing left in our land for them to work with?"

"We have gone too far in opposing their God," the chief advisor said. "You are very close to losing your whole kingdom. Without a kingdom, how can you be a king?"

Pharaoh brushed a locust from his robe, then mashed it under the sole of his jewelled sandal. Somehow that one crushed locust seemed to be too much for the king. For hours and hours he had seen nothing but mashed locusts everywhere.

"Send for the two Israelites," he muttered, turning aside with a sick expression.

When Moses and Aaron were brought in later, Pharaoh hurried toward them with outstretched arms.

"I have done evil things against your God and against you," he sorrowfully said to the two Israelites. "I ask you to forgive me. I beg you to ask your God to take away these terrible locusts! Leave with your people whenever you wish, but don't let your God do any more damage to my land!" (Verses 16 and 17.)

Moses and Aaron silently regarded the king, who appeared to be quite sincere in his request. They turned and left the room, leaving Pharaoh in uncertain despair while locusts hopped and fluttered around him.

Out by themselves, except for the waves of insects milling about them, Moses and Aaron prayed, asking God to take away the locusts and spare the land from famine.

Shortly afterward a wind came up from the west. It grew in strength by the minute, until it was almost a gale over most of Egypt. People began to be fearful that it would destroy their homes. But instead of blowing houses down, it blew the locusts out of Egypt and eastward into the Red Sea. Thus it was that the billions of insects, which had probably been carried in from Arabia, were swept away and drowned. (Verse 19.)

When the Egyptians went out to see what damage had been done, they found that every green part of every tree and shrub and plant had been devoured.

After the wind had died down, Pharaoh walked through his outer courts to see what destruction had taken place in his expensive gardens. The king felt that if he hadn't been so hasty and stubborn, this last plague could have been avoided, and he regretted what he had done. But when he saw that his vast flower gardens, shade trees, hedges, lily ponds and walls of ivy had become nothing but stems, stocks and twigs,



The Egyptians found that the locusts had eaten every green leaf and plant.

he became angry.

"Send a fast messenger to tell Moses and Aaron that I have changed my mind!" he snapped at an aide. "Tell them that I refuse to let the Israelites leave Egypt, and if any of them try to go, they will have to deal with my army!"

Again Moses and Aaron, on receiving the message, were filled with disappointment. And again God gave instructions to Moses, who stretched the shepherd's rod toward the sky another time.

Plague of Darkness

The Egyptians must have been perplexed when they noticed a strange pallor creeping into the sunny, blue sky. Little by little the pallor grew into a weird grayness. The sun's light became less, as though some mysterious, drab veil were being drawn between the Earth and its source of light. Gradually the veil grew darker, until a deep, gray haze finally blotted out all sight of the sun. The haze descended, bringing a thickening vapor over all the land.

People were so filled with dismay that many of them almost forgot the terrible plague that had just ended. All of them, including Pharaoh, could only wonder at what evil thing was to result from the growing gloom. Soon that dismay turned to terror,

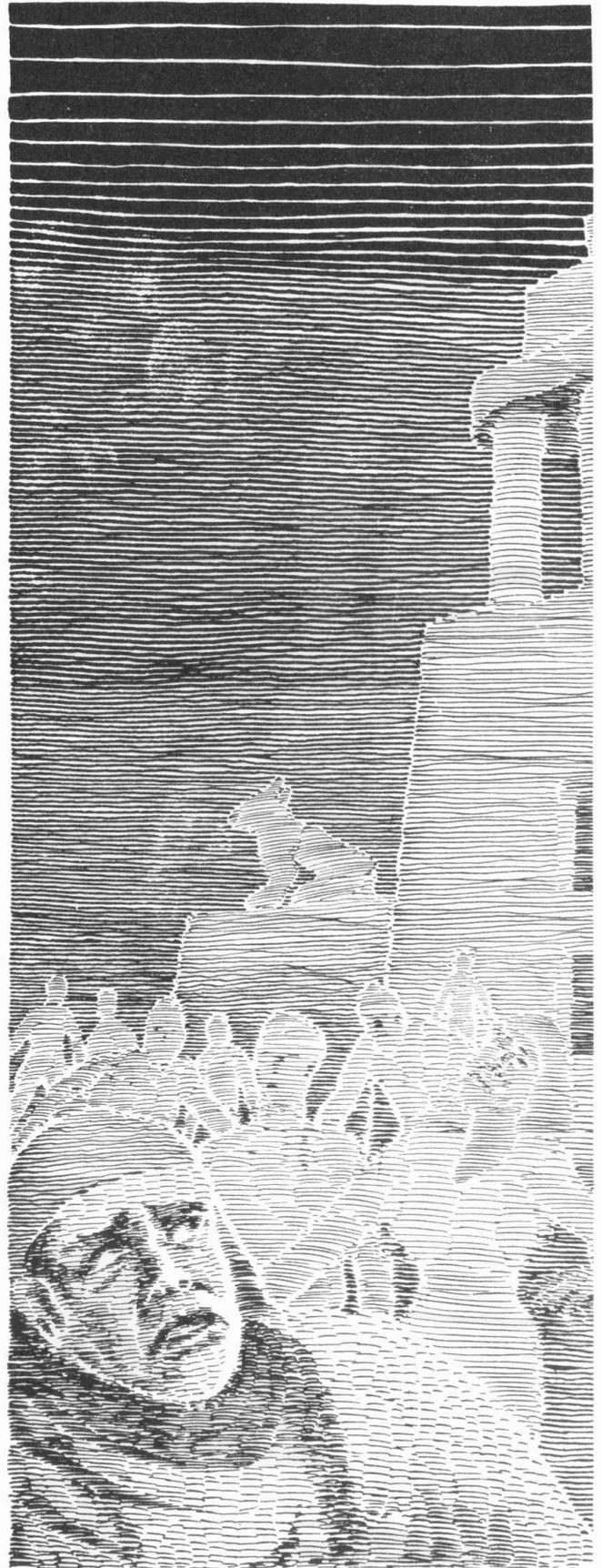
for within hours the gloom turned to the darkness of night, and from the darkness of night into horrifying, utter blackness! (Verse 22.)

Possibly God caused the blackness by producing a very deep fog layer carrying billions of particles of dust from recent dust storms. However He caused it, it must have brought greater fear to the Egyptians than did the other plagues. The darkness was so intense that no one could see anyone else. Even with fires, torches and lamps burning, there was a clammy murkiness in the air that seemed to almost drown the light. Figures took on a weirdness that added terror to the awful situation.

Most activity came to an abrupt stop. It was almost impossible to move safely about. Some were caught in the deserts, the fields and the river when the darkness came on. Many of these became lost, and some died in the hours to come because they were unable to find food or water. Most of the Egyptians stayed in their homes, hopeful that the frightful darkness would come to an end.

Meanwhile, in Goshen where the Israelites lived, there was plenty of light for the homes, although the sky was probably dark. (Verse 23.)

At the royal palace matters were especially in confusion. Pharaoh was more filled with fear than he had been during any of the other plagues, but he felt that the clammy darkness would probably last only a few hours, and that the next dawn would bring light. But when it came time for the



A strange, thick gloom began to settle over the land.



Even the brightest lamps and torches shone only with a weird, ghostly feebleness in the thick, dank darkness.

sun to come up, there was no light. Fright began to spread among the Egyptians in a way that sent many of them into a state of panic.

Even Pharaoh, a man of strong will, began to feel, after two days had passed, that the intense darkness would drive him into a state of madness if it were to continue very long. As did many of the people, he spent much of his time lying in bed, waiting for the terrible darkness to let up. Moving about was too dangerous.

In the sleepless, miserable hours that followed, Pharaoh could hear the wails and groans from the nearby temple, where priests were begging the Egyptian idols to wipe out the cause of the darkness and bring back the light of the sun. Pharaoh was quite sure by now that all the chanting and moaning to the many gods of Egypt meant nothing. Besides, it kept him from sleeping.

"Send word to the priests," he told a servant, "that they need not pray any more for now. Tell them that I suggest that our gods would perhaps be pleased by a period of silence, now that they have been prayed to for two days without ceasing."

But even after the wailing and moaning had stopped, the king was unable to sleep. The cold dankness of the darkness seemed to seep to his very bones. In spite of the many blankets on his bed, he shivered. From rooms close by he heard the muffled sobs of fear from his children. What bothered him most, however, was the weird, hazy

flickering of the lamps in his room. There were several of them—enough, in ordinary darkness, to make the room ablaze with light. But in this weirdly thick blackness, the lamps shone only with a maddeningly ghostly feebleness.

Suddenly Pharaoh sprang out of bed and struck a gong to summon an aide.

Pharaoh Calls for Moses and Aaron

“Send men to find those two Israelites, Moses and Aaron, and have them brought here as soon as possible!” the king commanded.

“But your highness,” the aide gasped, standing very close to be seen, “those two could be far away—perhaps even across the river! It is almost impossible to move through this terrible darkness!”

“See that they’re brought here at any cost!” Pharaoh thundered. “Use my whole army, if necessary, and plenty of the best torches. Get out the chariots, boats and anything that’s needed. But get them here!”

More miserable hours passed. When at last Moses and Aaron were brought before Pharaoh, he was relieved to recognize them. However, he was still very upset.

“Get out of Egypt—all you Israelites!” he commanded. “You are free to go serve your God and do as you wish.”

There was silence in the dark, shadowy court. Aaron didn’t speak up, inasmuch as he felt that Pharaoh, only dimly visible by the flickering torches, had more to say. The next human voice came from a guard, who pointed toward a window and shouted something about light.

It was suddenly obvious that dim light was showing through the windows! It increased by the minute, returning after three terrible days of absence!

Pharaoh, who had almost gone out of his mind because of the three-day darkness, felt his self-control and power swiftly returning to him.

“I repeat my promise,” he told Moses and Aaron in a tone that was a little more friendly. “All you Israelites are free to leave my land. All I ask is that you leave your flocks and herds behind.” (Verse 24.)

Pharaoh didn’t intend to lose the great numbers of livestock owned by the Israelites, especially now that the livestock of the Egyptians had suffered so heavily through the plagues. Besides, he believed that if the Israelites were to journey for three days into the desert without meat and milk from their flocks and herds, they would face starvation. If that happened, they would surely try to return to Egypt, and thus they would remain slaves to the Egyptians.

However, Moses and Aaron were aware of what the king had in mind, and they didn’t intend for him to succeed in tricking them.

"We shall take all our livestock with us when we leave," Aaron announced. "We don't know yet how much we'll need for sacrificing to our God. Therefore we'll not leave even one hoof behind."

The wearying three-day darkness had already driven the king into a very unhappy state of mind. Now this bold remark from Aaron greatly annoyed him. His face became red with anger. His fingers clutched and unclutched the arms of his chair. Abruptly he jumped to his feet and shook a trembling finger at Moses and Aaron.

"You Israelites are as greedy as you are rebellious!" Pharaoh shouted. "That remark about taking your livestock with you will cost you your freedom! You shall not leave my land. You shall remain as slaves! As for you two—get out of this city and never return! If you ever come within my sight again, my guards will kill you!"

There was a tense silence in the court as the gray light from outside filtered in through the brightening windows. Moses and Aaron stood still before Pharaoh, calmly regarding him as he glowered down upon them. Moses said something in a low voice to Aaron, who stepped closer to the king.

"You shall have your wish," Aaron told him. "You won't see us any more. But there will be one more plague upon you Egyptians, and we won't come to ask our God to stop it. On a midnight to come very soon, all the firstborn in your land will be killed! That includes your oldest son and the oldest sons of even your lowliest families. Even the firstborn of all your animals will be slain. But no person or animal of the Israelites shall die!" (Ex. 11:4-7.)

Even while Aaron was talking, Pharaoh's expression of anger melted from his face, to be replaced by a look of mingled shock and disbelief. He well knew that these two Israelites had never made a prediction before him that hadn't come true, and with more awesome results than he, Pharaoh, could imagine. It would soon be a fact, therefore, that he would lose his oldest son! He sank weakly back on his throne and stared in silence as Moses and Aaron, angered by his constant threats and promise-breaking, walked from the court.

What Pharaoh didn't know was that God had already told Moses that after the next and last plague—the slaying of the firstborn—the king would finally let the Israelites leave Egypt without changing his mind before they could get out of the land.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE EXODUS BEGINS

EVENTS now moved rapidly. God told Moses to tell the Israelites to ask their Egyptian neighbors and acquaintances to pay them on the fourteenth of the month for the many services that they had performed for the Egyptians for so many years. Many Egyptian people really appreciated the things that the friendly Israelites had done for them. Besides, they held Moses in very high esteem.

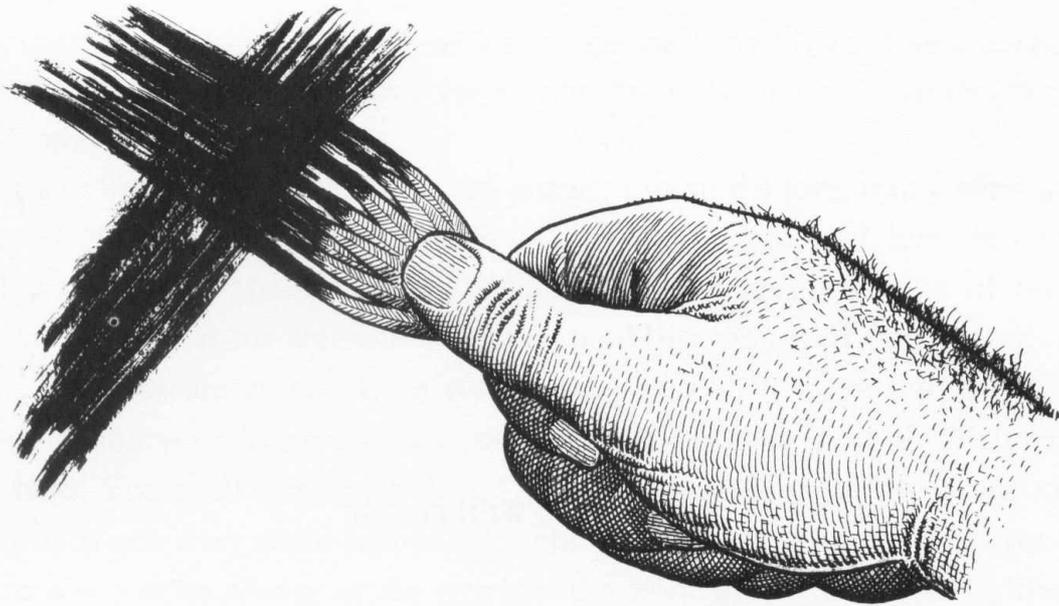
But first, another very important thing had to take place before the Israelites could receive their pay and leave.

Israel Observes the Passover

"This present month, which I have named Abib, is the first month of the year," God told Moses. (Exodus 12:1-9.) "Instruct the Israelites that on the tenth day of this month every family should provide itself with a perfectly healthy male lamb not more than a year old. These lambs must be kept till the evening of the fourteenth day of the month. Then each family must kill its lamb, roast it with its head, legs and inner parts, and eat it with bitter-flavored herbs and unleavened bread.

"Be sure to roast it well. Don't eat it half-cooked and don't boil it. Eat all of it if you can, but if any part is left over, burn it. Moreover, when you eat this lamb, be dressed as though you are about to start out on a long journey.

"When you kill the lamb, take some of the blood and smear it on the two sides and upper parts of the doors of your homes. Then, when I send angels to slay the first-born of Egypt, these signs on your doors will direct the angels to pass over those marked houses.



Using clusters of hyssop leaves as brushes, the Israelites in faith marked the doorposts of their homes with lamb's blood.

"This will be known from now on, therefore, as the Passover. It will show my mercy toward the people I have chosen to help carry out my plan on Earth. It will prove to Egypt that no heathen king, prince, idol or so-called god has any power against me.

"The Passover shall become a memorial to you, to be observed forever, to remember that I spared your first-born from the death angel when you were living in Egypt.

"One day later, on the fifteenth day of the first month—starting at sundown of the fourteenth day—you are to gather yourselves together to observe a yearly sabbath. It will be known as the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. You shall put all leavening out of your homes before that holy feast day starts, and for seven days the bread that you eat must have no leavening in it.

"The last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread—the twenty-first day of the first month—shall also be a holy annual sabbath. As on the first holy day of this week without leavened bread, you shall gather together to worship me, and no work shall be done except that of preparing food. (Verses 15-20.)

"This week during which you eat no leavened bread shall be a time to be observed forever by you. It is to help you remember my bringing you out of the sinful, idol-worshipping nation of Egypt." (Exodus 13:3-10.)

God then went on to explain that leavening (which we generally refer to as yeast, baking powder and baking soda) was something that caused a puffed-up condition. He pointed out that such sinful characteristics as pride, conceit and vanity caused people to be puffed up in their minds with false feelings of importance and goodness.

"Just as you must depart from sinful Egypt," God continued, "so must you leave

behind the sinful ways that are symbolized by leavening.

“Any one among you who continues to eat leavened bread during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, whether he is an Israelite or of any other nation, that person will not be allowed to go with my chosen people on their way to freedom in a land I have prepared for them.”

When the Israelites learned these things, they obediently prepared for what was to come. When the sun went down in the late afternoon of the thirteenth of the month, and the fourteenth day began, thousands upon thousands of families slaughtered lambs for the commanded Passover. In many cases young goats, or kids, were slaughtered, for God had said that young goats could be used if lambs were not plentiful.

After the lambs and kids were killed, the Israelites immediately smeared the animals' blood on their doorposts—the sign for God's death angels to spare the first-born human beings and beasts wherever the blood smears showed. (Exodus 12:22-23.)

By the time the Passover animals were roasted and ready to eat, the Israelites were dressed as though prepared to leave. Obeying God's directions, they hurriedly ate the meat with the bitter vegetables and unleavened bread at this very first Passover. Little did they realize what would happen on that same night and at that same time of evening hundreds of years later.

What the Passover Represents

We know now that God's Son, often spoken of as the Lamb of God, was also slain as a sacrifice on the same day and month that the Passover was started.

God is good and perfect, and so He does things at the right time and on time. He made the weekly Sabbath a holy day. He did the same for the annual Sabbaths. He set certain dates for us to observe, and He carefully told us when these times would be, so that we could keep them in the proper manner.

These sacred dates are signs between God and His people—the people of His church who have been chosen for a very important task.

Down through the ages there have been proud, disobedient kings, priests, ministers, politicians, dictators and all kinds of leaders of men who have tried to change or blot out the days and times made special and holy by God. Many such men have succeeded in causing millions of people to believe that it is just as well to observe one day as another, or even that there are no worthwhile reasons to observe any of the days hallowed by God.

However, no man has succeeded in actually doing away with any of the days God has set aside for sacred purposes. If, for example, not one person in the world observed

the weekly Sabbath, yet the Sabbath would still be holy time. Meanwhile, no one would receive the wonderful blessings and happiness that come because of obeying God in these important matters.

Today, most people who are considered Christians aren't aware that there is only one time and one new way of observing the Passover. Many of these people don't even know what the Passover is. Some think that it was some sort of harsh, Jewish custom which later developed into a beautiful Easter service pleasing to their Creator.

It is well to remember that the Jews aren't even mentioned in the Bible till long after the Passover was started. That very first mention of the Jews pictured them at war with Israel! (II Kings 16:6.)

You will find the word "Easter" in some Bibles. It was never written in the original, God-inspired text, however. It is there in the English translations along with a few other errors made several hundred years ago by writers who thought, or who were told, that it would be a good thing for the Passover to be joined with the pagan worship of the ancient goddess Astarte, later called Easter.

Many people have been taught to observe Passover under several different names and in as many different times and manners. It is often called "Communion." Some partake of it as often as once a week. Others think that once a month is proper. Still others feel that four times a year is the thing to do.

Those who are obedient in this matter go according to the Bible, and observe the Passover once a year in the first month of the Hebrew calendar, at the exact time God has said it should be observed.

Jesus' Example

Since the death of Jesus Christ, who was killed as a supreme sacrifice for us, obedient Christians follow the example Jesus gave before He died. They now gather together on the date of the Passover, which ancient Israel observed in Egypt, and which was the same date upon which Christ was killed. They eat broken, unleavened bread, which stands for the sinless body of Christ, broken by the cruel whips that were used on Him. As a symbol of the blood of Christ, poured out so that our past sins would be blotted out, they also follow Jesus' example by drinking a very little bit of wine.

God gives special understanding to those who work and study to learn how they can best please Him. Little by little He opens their minds to grasp unusual knowledge and wisdom. Thus they come to know how important it is to properly observe God's sacred times and customs—beginning with the New Testament Passover—so that His wonderful plan for a happy future is made known to them.

You might think that God's plan—which will be told to you in more detail

later—would be taught in most churches and church schools, but it isn't. However, even the fact that it isn't fits into the way God is working. There are about two and one-half billion people in this world. Many millions of them live in our lands. But only a few thousand know how God is using human beings to prepare for glorious and amazing things to come.

God Again Punishes Egypt

Now to return to the story. During the night of the Passover in Egypt, the Israelites stayed in their homes, having been told that the only safe places would be behind the blood-marked doors. (Exodus 12:27-28.)

The middle of the night came and went, and those in the marked homes saw nothing unusual and heard nothing unusual.

It was much different with the Egyptians, however. At the stroke of midnight every first-born of their people and animals suddenly dropped dead! (Verse 29.)

Inasmuch as many Egyptian families were still up at that hour, hundreds of them fell dead before the eyes of their friends or relatives.

Whenever an Egyptian met death, it had long been the custom of the people to rush into the roads or streets and show their grief by wailing and howling in loud tones of dismal distress.

Those who first noticed the dead didn't lose much time in starting the mournful howling. This awakened their neighbors, who got up to find that there were dead in their homes, too. Before long every city, town and village in the land was filled with horrible moaning and yelling. Also, as was their custom, the mourners beat themselves with their fists and frantically ripped their clothing into tatters.

As for Pharaoh, he was stunned with surprise and dismay when he found his old-

The Egyptians ran out of their homes and mourned their dead by shrieking and moaning loudly.



est son lifeless in bed. If the king had thought that only Moses and Aaron were to blame for this thing, he would have angrily sent soldiers to kill them. But he then fearfully realized, more than ever, that the dreadful power of the God of Israel had come upon him and his people. This was one time when he didn't hesitate to act.

Israel Ordered Out of Egypt

"Send my swiftest messenger over to Rameses!" Pharaoh shakily commanded an aide. "Tell the messenger to go to Moses and Aaron with this command from me: 'Get all Israelites out of Egypt at once with their flocks and herds to go worship your God!'" (Verses 31-32.)

"It shall be done quickly, oh Pharaoh," the aide murmured, and turned to hurry away.

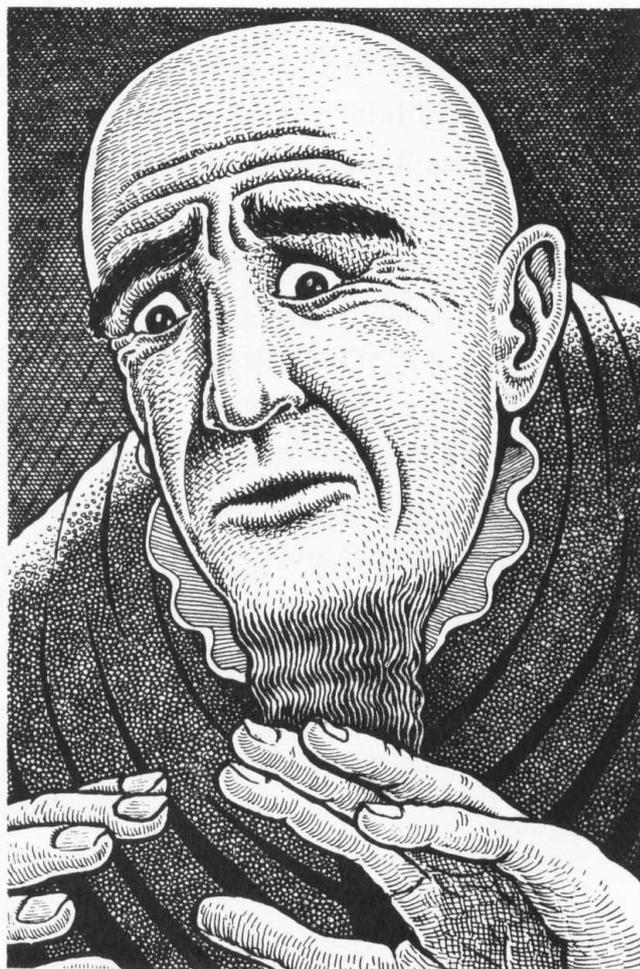
"Wait!" the king called. "One more thing. Tell the messenger to ask Moses and Aaron to pray to their God to have mercy on me!"

The sun was almost up when the messenger from Memphis arrived at Moses' residence with the command from Pharaoh. Because it was no longer dark, the Israelites were beginning to venture out of their homes. A large group of elders and officers had already gathered with Moses and Aaron, who were awaiting the king's next move following the terrible events of the last few hours.

"This is it!" Moses exclaimed to those around him after the messenger had spoken to him. "This is the moment we have long awaited. Send the signal to all Israelites to either gather here as soon as possible or meet us on the way by which it has been decided to leave Egypt."

The escape they had looked forward to wasn't to be made in a careless, unplanned manner. Moses and his officers had long since worked out the details, with help from God, and now messengers were rushed out to all parts of Goshen to tell the Israelites what to do.

Because of following God's orders to be dressed for a journey while eating the



Pharaoh froze with dismay when he saw the lifeless body of his oldest son.



Messengers rushed to all parts of Goshen to tell the Israelites when to leave their homes and where to meet.

Passover, they were ready to leave when word came to them. But even before the word to leave arrived, their wailing Egyptian neighbors came knocking on their doors.

“Take all of our gold, jewels, clothing, food and anything of ours you want!” the Egyptians begged them. “We will pay you in some measure for your services to us as our slaves. If you want more, say so. We’re willing to give you anything we have. All we ask is that you quickly leave our country before your God destroys all of us.” (Verses 35-36.)

This tenth and last plague—death to their first-born—was too much for the Egyptians. Now they feared what God might do next. They were frantic to get the Israelites away from them. Furthermore, it was no small matter that the first-born of their animals had been killed. Almost every kind of animal was worshipped by the Egyptians. To them, the sudden death of these creatures was almost like sudden death to some of their idols.

Now being urged by their Egyptian neighbors to depart at once, and also being told by messengers from Moses that they should leave without any delay, the Israelites didn’t have any extra time to pick up many belongings. They simply seized whatever they could load on their pack animals and what they could carry on foot. (Verse 33.)

Using long, wide pieces of cloth, they quickly bound up their necessary possessions. These included many of the things the Egyptians had given them, plus their bread-mixing bowls filled with meal and unleavened bread dough.

Having expected that they might receive a message to leave at any time, the Israelites had kept their flocks and herds close to their homes.

Thus prepared, they rounded them up as quickly as possible, and moved with them toward the city of Rameses or Old Cairo.

The Exodus Begins

In the next few hours there was a gathering of a tremendous number of people—a huge multitude such as the world had never known. By nightfall of the fifteenth they had arrived at camp along a trail from Rameses to points several miles northeast of that city. On this night they were to hold a joyous festival as God commanded.

There were about six hundred thousand men gathered for the escape from Egypt. However, many of these men had families, and that greatly increased the number of Israelites. Furthermore, there were people of other nations who wished to go with the Israelites. Adding up all the people, it is plain that at least two and a half million persons must have gathered together to move out of Egypt.

Cakes of bread made of the dough that was in their mixing bowls were the main items of food for the Israelites on that first night of camping. There had not been time to add yeast to cause the dough to rise. But it was according to the instructions they had been given—not to eat leavened bread.

It had been a great day for the weary Israelites. After generations in Egypt, they were at last on their way to freedom and a land of their own where sticks, stones and animals weren't worshipped as gods. They thanked God for bringing them out from among the idol-worshipping Egyptians, and for sparing their first-born the night before.

That eventful night of the fifteenth—the first annual Sabbath—was one long to be remembered. In fact, God told the Israelites to tell their children about it down through their generations, so that they wouldn't forget how He had freed them by performing awesome miracles. (Exodus 13:3-10.)

Today, many centuries later, the people of God's Church still remember the night of the fifteenth of the first month by meeting in a joyous festival together, as they have been told to do, at the beginning of the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

Later that night the Israelites prepared to leave the city of Rameses. They divided themselves into their twelve tribes and formed themselves into rough ranks. There was order and control in the manner in which they moved. God didn't want His people to rush from Egypt in an unruly mob.

Perhaps you will remember that before Joseph died in Egypt he asked to be buried in Canaan. Now, many, many years later, the Israelites took with them his bones from his tomb to carry out his wish. In fact, the bones of all twelve of Jacob's sons were brought to Palestine.

Starting out from a place called Succoth, around which they camped for the next night, the Israelites probably expected to travel northeast on the shortest way to the

land of Canaan. However, a small nation of people called the Philistines lay on this shortest route to Canaan. The Philistines probably wouldn't have let the Israelites pass through their land without attacking them or at least demanding some kind of heavy payment for the Israelites going through their land.

God didn't intend that the Israelites should run into wars as soon as they got started. Therefore He chose a different way for them to go. (Verse 17.)

Toward the Red Sea

That morning a strange thing happened. A small cloud appeared in the eastern sky. Slowly it grew larger, extending almost down to the ground like a massive, white pillar. It could be seen by all the Israelites—even by those who were several miles away in the rear ranks of the mass of people.

"This cloud will be our guide," Moses told those at the head of the multitude. "Send the word back through our ranks that God is leading us by it, and that we are to go when and where it goes."

This startling bit of news spread swiftly back to all the people. Probably there were many who couldn't believe that a cloud would be their guide, but when the cloud began to move eastward, they must have come closer to realizing a fact everyone should know: with God all things are possible. (Verses 21-22.)

Probably it was plain at first to only those in the foremost ranks that the cloud was moving, and they did likewise. Others behind them followed, until gradually the whole, vast multitude, spread out for several miles, was on the march.

Never in the history of mankind had there been a sight like this—millions of people walking or riding at the same speed, headed by a cloud that seemed to stand on one end!

It wasn't possible for that gigantic caravan to move fast. Animals usually move rather slowly when they are herded, and the people couldn't move any faster than they could drive their many thousands of cattle, sheep, goats, burros, and camels. A large number of these animals were heavily loaded. Besides, there were thousands of small children and elderly people on foot who couldn't go very far at a swift stride.

The journey from Succoth was one through an area where there was plenty of grass for the livestock. But by the end of the day the green vegetation thinned out. The Israelites were leaving the lush delta country of the Nile, and were approaching an arid region.

Many hours passed. Then the cloud ceased moving. This was the sign for the people to stop and camp. It was in the general area of a place called Etham.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

AT THE RED SEA

AS DARKNESS closed in on the Israelites who were leaving Egypt, a strange thing took place. The peculiar, upright cloud that had gone before them by day took on a startling, different appearance. It began to glow!

The darker the sky became, the brighter the cloud became. By an hour or so after sundown it was like a giant shaft of fire blazing silently up into the sky. (Exodus 13: 21-22.)

The Israelites gasped in wonderment at this amazing thing. If there were any doubts in the minds of any of them that their Creator was leading them, then all such doubts should have been wiped away by this awesome pillar of fire.

To add to their astonishment, a lesser light grew out of the blazing column and spread back over the miles of encamped people, insomuch that their camps were filled with a soft radiance from above all during the hours of darkness!

Next Morning's Events

Next morning, the light over and ahead of the Israelites encamped at Etham gradually lost its brilliance and turned back into cloud form. Now the people were at the edge of hot, dry desert country. The overhead streak of light that had extended over the camps turned into a long cloud whose vapors produced a cooling shadow. Otherwise, many infants and the aged would have become ill or would have perished in the burning heat of midday.

When the huge caravan was ready to move for another day, many were surprised to see the upright cloud turn to the right of Etham to lead them southward. Some of



At night the cloud turned into a giant shaft of fire blazing silently into the sky.

the elders who knew that the way to Canaan was northeastward hurried to the head of the caravan to speak to Moses and Aaron.

"Why are we being led to the south?" they asked. "We should go northeastward!"

"God is leading us by the cloud," Moses answered. "Are we to question His wisdom?"

"But going south means traveling away from our goal—not toward it," the elders argued. "If we follow the cloud, we will end up in arid mountains on the west side of the Red Sea!"

"God is showing us the way He wants us to go," Moses patiently repeated. "Any who choose to go any other way will be lost."

God had already spoken to Moses, even before the cloud turned to the right from Etham, and he trusted God to lead His people in the direction that was best for them, even though there were those among them who believed that they shouldn't follow the cloud southward.

Most people have failed to understand God's ways and directions ever since the time of Adam. It has seemed wiser, in their human reasoning, to go just the opposite of the ways God has carefully pointed out in the Bible and through the teaching of His servants. There have always been men, regarded as wise and religious, who insist on teaching people to live contrary to

many of God's ways. They are often sincere men or women who believe what they have been wrongly taught by others before them. Or, in many cases they have tried to reason matters out by themselves.

God tells us that the thinking powers of man are far, far below His. We should understand how true that is when we realize that God made the universe, us and everything in it. To be as intelligent as God, we would have to be able to create a universe.

As it is, man is just beginning to stumble across a few of God's great secrets in the realm of physical things. But what we need most is wisdom to help us live happily. The Bible tells us that if we respect our Creator and believe what He tells us, wisdom will start coming into our minds.

Respect to God means living by His laws. And the more we obey the rules He has given to us, the more understanding and happiness will come to us.

When told that they would be lost if they didn't follow the cloud, the protesting Israelites gave up talking with Moses and Aaron, and fell back into their places in the caravan. They knew that the power within that awesome cloud and pillar of fire was something to be respected, and they didn't want to run any risks of getting cut off from the caravan.

Now that the caravan was in a desert region, food for the flocks and herds wasn't so plentiful. The first day or two of the escape journey had been through areas close to Goshen, where locusts hadn't eaten up every green thing. But now that the Israelites were turning into the regions where locusts had swarmed, grass became less plentiful. Some grass had grown up in the several days since the eighth plague. Also, there were tufts of grass yellowed by the sun. The locusts hadn't cared for that, but it made good food for livestock.

You will remember that it was suggested to Pharaoh that the Israelites be given freedom to make a three-day journey into the desert to worship God. At first the king of Egypt considered this a favor he could never grant. But after the tenth plague, in which he lost his oldest son, he was anxious to get rid of the Israelites forever. The idea of letting the Israelites go for only a few days was lost in the frantic desire of Pharaoh and the Egyptians to see the last of the Israelites and the plagues from God.

Pharaoh Again!

Later, when Pharaoh's scouts and spies brought word to him that the Israelites were still moving on even after a three-day journey, Pharaoh wasn't surprised.

"I expected it," Pharaoh muttered with a grim smile. "They were so anxious to get away that they were willing to go out into the desert that will surely take all of



The King's scouts brought him news from spies who watched to see which way the israelites went.

them as its victims. Now I regret that I didn't send my army after them. But by now they must be moving across the sandy country where my chariots can't go. It is too late to either bring them back or slaughter them!"

It was then that a panting messenger arrived with the very latest word about the Israelites. When the king heard the messenger's report, his glum expression suddenly changed to one of subdued glee. Then he glowered down on the messenger.

"Your report had better be true," Pharaoh told him. "Otherwise you will be rotting in a dungeon for a long time!"

"My report is true, O Pharaoh," the messenger insisted. "May these miserable eyes of mine dwell forever in the darkness of your royal dungeon if I myself did not witness the Israelite caravan turning southward along the western edge of the Red Sea!"

The king of Egypt sat for a few moments in deep thought while a slight smile, more cruel than agreeable, seemed to freeze on his face.

"Send for all my top officers!" he suddenly snapped at an aide.

A short while later Pharaoh addressed the men he had summoned. Only those who knew him very well could tell that he was trying to hide a great excitement.

"I have been thinking lately," Pharaoh told them, "that perhaps I acted hastily in letting the Israelites go. But a message has just been brought to me concerning them, and I have decided that it was best that they did leave. Now I want them back, dead or alive, and I want all their livestock returned as well as all the things

that were given to them by my people.”

“But it is too late to overtake them, your highness,” a military officer spoke up. “We have heard the report that the Israelites are by now well on their way into the desert far east of here. Foot soldiers could never catch up. Chariots would become stuck in the sands.”

“If that were entirely so, then I wouldn’t ask you to pursue them,” Pharaoh frowned. “But I have learned that the Israelite Moses has bungled matters by taking his people the wrong way. Instead of guiding them straight east, he has turned south to lead them along the rocky west coast of the Red Sea. They are headed directly into a range of mountains. If we go at once, we can’t fail to trap them between the sea and the mountains!”

A few moments of silence followed the king’s short speech. Then those who were before him, most of whom were men of war, began buzzing with excitement. Many who had tried to talk the king into letting the Israelites go now made it known that they wished to pursue the Israelites. They seemed to forget the terrible things that had come upon Egypt. The thing that seemed uppermost in their minds was the thought of crushing a defenseless mass of people without risking their lives to do it.

“You be our leader in destroying the Israelites, O Pharaoh,” one of the officers suddenly shouted. “We are happy that it is our duty to go with you to overtake and to overcome the cowardly Israelites and rescue the livestock and other things they have taken from us!”

There was a loud, long, enthusiastic chorus of yells from others present. This sort of conduct was somewhat unusual for officers gathered before the king, but Pharaoh could hardly frown upon such zeal and agreement.

Although an Egyptian king generally went with his army into battle, the thought of roughing it for several days in the open was a bit distasteful to Pharaoh. However, the deep satisfaction that would be his at seeing the Israelites completely at his mercy promised to be worth more than any trouble or difficulty.

“I will lead you!” the king exclaimed, holding a fist up at arm’s length.

Egyptian Army in Hot Pursuit!

Time was short for the Egyptians, what with the Israelites being already more than three days’ journey by foot ahead. Thousands of horse-drawn chariots with drivers and fighting men were hastily mustered for speedy action. These included the king’s specially trained guard. This unit was made up of six hundred chariots, more than a thousand men and many hundreds of the strongest and most spirited horses in military service.

Chariots of that time each carried one driver and one or two fighting men. Often the driver was also considered a warrior, having been trained to handle spears or swords as he guided the chariot. Each chariot was pulled by either two or four horses, and when rolling at full speed it was no small task for the driver to keep the vehicle upright and all in one piece.

It was quite a sight for many Egyptians to see and hear Pharaoh's army thundering eastward out of Memphis and out across the plains in a vast cloud of dust. Besides chariots, there were many warriors mounted on horses. It was a remarkable fighting force for those times. It was a great display of the power of the greatest nation on Earth in those ancient days.

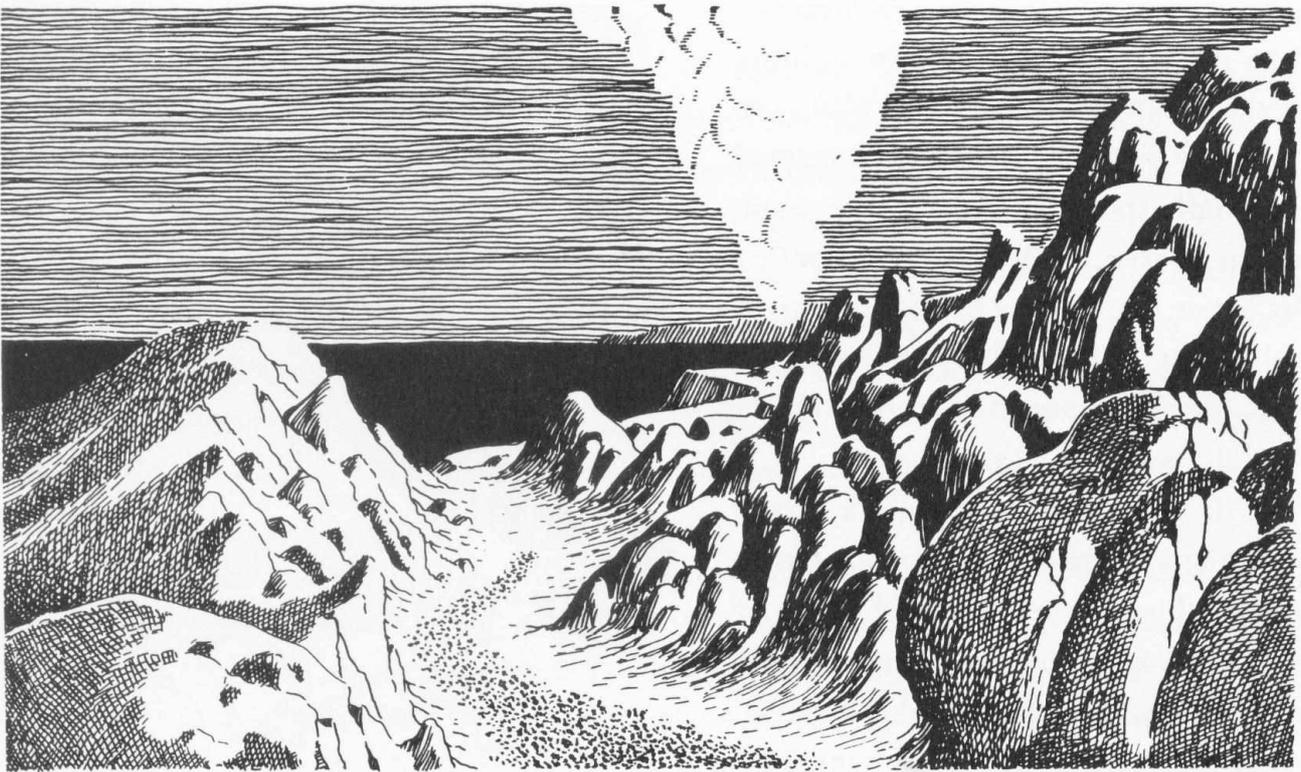
But even as the Israelites had to stop at night to rest, so did Pharaoh and his army. Horses couldn't gallop on hour after hour, and the speed of the Egyptian forces was soon slowed down to a walking pace. There was more than one overnight encampment by the Egyptian army before it could move up within sight of the Israelites.

At the Red Sea

Meanwhile, the Israelites had arrived at a point near the Red Sea where the mountains jutted up like an unfriendly wall. Nevertheless, the upright cloud continued to move southward as though beckoning them to



Pharaoh called for thousands of men, horses and chariots to set out after the Israelites.



The Israelites arrived at a point near the Red Sea where the mountains jutted up like an unfriendly wall.

move into the narrow passes. Again some of the elders came to Moses to voice their objections to moving to the south.

"This is madness," they declared. "Even if we manage to get through these mountains, we'll still be in Egypt. The Red Sea will be even wider between us and freedom."

"God knows what is best for us," Moses answered. "Either get back into line and move on or fall out and try to return to Egypt."

It was then that a lone Israelite rider came racing along the moving column.

"The Egyptians are coming after us!" the rider excitedly panted as he alighted from his mount and hurried up to Moses.

The elders who had complained to Moses glanced at each other in alarm. One of them stepped up and roughly seized the panting rider.

"What are you talking about?" the elder demanded of the shaking rider. "Explain what you mean!"

"My family and our herds are at the rear of the caravan," the winded man told them. "Part of our stock strayed away this afternoon. Some of us rode back several miles to try to round up these strays. We noticed a big cloud of dust off to the north. At first we thought it might be our cattle. We got just close enough and stayed just long enough to see that it was a whole army of chariots—thousands of them! It must be

the Egyptians, and at the rate they're moving, they'll overtake us very soon!"

"Have you told any one else of this?" Moses asked.

"Of course I did," the rider answered. "I yelled out an alarm all the way down the column of our caravan. People are getting terribly excited."

"Ride back to your place at the rear of the caravan," Moses told him. "On your way, spread the word to our people that I am asking them not to be afraid. Tell them that there is no reason to worry, because God will take care of us." (Exodus 14:13-14.)

Moses wasn't surprised at this turn of events. God had already told him that Pharaoh's army would set out after the Israelites. Moses hadn't told the people because he knew that they might become fearful even before the event took place.

After the rider had gone back, the elders who had come to Moses were more upset than ever. But realizing that they couldn't cause Moses to change his mind about anything, they hastily rode back to their places in the caravan.

Moses and Aaron and their officers continued riding southward, leading the Israelites along the rises at the foot of the mountain range towering so close to them. Then, as the sun began to slide out of sight behind the mountains, the guiding cloud ceased moving. This was a sign that the caravan should stop and camp for the night.

"Send the word back for the people to move up for the night as close together as possible without crowding themselves," Moses instructed some of the men.

"This is as God told you it would be," Aaron quietly reminded Moses when others couldn't hear. "But how shall we escape if the Egyptian army rushes in and traps us here?"

"I don't know—yet," Moses replied. "But we have obeyed God in coming to this spot and camping here. We must leave it to Him to take care of us."

At this same moment, several miles to the north, there was great excitement among the Egyptian officers. Sharp-eyed soldiers had spotted the rear part of the Israelite caravan moving slowly up into the higher areas. Pharaoh was so elated that he at first ordered his army to increase its speed and overtake their intended victims. However, the sun went down early in the mountainous area, and twilight came on so quickly that the king decided it might be unwise to attack in darkness.

"They cannot move at night in this region," Pharaoh triumphantly told his officers. "We will stop and camp here and attack when we choose tomorrow."

Pharaoh and his officers retired to their tents, satisfied that the next day would bring about the capture of the Israelites.

Meanwhile, the Israelites were becoming more and more fearful as the news

spread that the Egyptian army was pursuing them. With darkness coming on, some of them imagined that a blood-thirsty mob of soldiers would charge them at any moment. Anxiety grew steadily amid their millions. Most of them had little faith that their God would make any move to help them. They felt that Moses was mostly to blame for their terrible situation, and so a huge part of them moved up around the camp of Moses and Aaron, and shouted all kinds of unkind and threatening remarks.

"We told you at first that we didn't want to leave Egypt!" they yelled. "It would have been better to remain there as live slaves than to come out here in the desert to be slaughtered by Pharaoh's swords and spears!"

Moses Stills the People

However, not all the people were so rude to Moses and Aaron. Many of them realized that they should look to God for help. Thousands fell to their knees and begged for divine aid. But even as they prayed, the tumult and confusion increased as others kept on bitterly shouting against Moses for leading them out into the desert. (Exodus 14:10-12.)

Moses knew that something must be done to calm them. Ordinarily, Aaron spoke for Moses because Aaron was more gifted as a speaker. Moses felt that this was a time when he should do his own speaking. He asked God for wisdom in what to say and do, then walked to an elevated spot where many could hear him. But only a small part of all the Israelites were close enough to even see him. Though they had set up their camps closer together than usual, they were still spread out for miles around. Moses held up his hands and spoke as loudly as he could to as many as possible.

"This loud complaining and wailing must stop!" he cried out.

Perhaps it was the mere sight of Moses that caused the people for quite a distance to suddenly quiet down. Perhaps it was the ringing sound of his voice, made louder by echoing back from rocky cliffs behind him.

"This display of fear and confusion is anything but pleasing to God!" Moses exclaimed. "He has promised to take care of us. The only voices God wants to hear from us right now are those from you who are sincerely asking Him for help. You don't need to be afraid. Just be patient and see how God will rescue you. Remember that, and pass it back through your numbers. Some of you have looked back and have seen the Egyptian army approaching. Believe in God; that is the last any of you will ever see of Pharaoh and his chariots and his men!" (Verse 13.)

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

CROSSING THE RED SEA

ALTHOUGH the crowd around Moses remained silent, there were many who wanted to speak out and demand to know just how the Egyptian army encamped nearby would disappear. But at that moment something happened to the cloud that was gradually changing into a fiery mass.

It moved northward over the Israelites—then stopped in a spot midway between the Israelites and the Egyptian army! (Exodus 14:19-20.)

The Long Night Begins

When the people saw how the fiery column had placed itself between them and their pursuers, their frenzy turned into awe. Still there were those who were fearful of Pharaoh's army, regardless of God's fiery sign in the sky. Even after the base of the blazing pillar settled right down to the ground there were many who were unable to be calm as long as they knew that Egyptian soldiers were so close.

However, the very presence of the pillar of fire behind them made it possible for most of them to lie down and sleep, realizing that God was watching over them.

Back in Pharaoh's camp there was sudden confusion. Observers had been ordered to keep their eyes on the Israelites to make certain that there was no sign of their breaking camp during the night. When the observers reported that the campfires of the Israelites had suddenly gone out, Pharaoh was notified.

"It could be a trick," one of Pharaoh's officers remarked. "Perhaps they wanted us to think that they were camping for the night. Now they may be trying to escape through the mountains."

"Perhaps their campfires just naturally died down," another officer spoke up.

"Not all at once!" Pharaoh snapped. "Whatever is going on, I won't let these Israelites outsmart me. Alert my best chariot drivers and warriors to be ready to go within the hour. We will attack tonight!"

There was great excitement among the Egyptians because of the sudden order from their king. But the desire for a night attack died down when observers came in again to report that a very heavy fog had suddenly settled in from the south, and was covering almost all the area between the Egyptians and the Israelites.

"It is so heavy and thick that our forces could become lost and separated in it," one observer reported to Pharaoh.

In a way this was good news for Pharaoh, who reasoned that the sudden fog was the cause of losing sight of the Israelites' campfires.

"They can't possibly move on through the rough area along the sea south of here," Pharaoh declared to his officers. "With night coming on and a fog, they are hemmed in at our mercy. Let us wait until tomorrow to attack, when we can better observe the grand triumph of herding them into the sea!"

What the Egyptians didn't realize was that God was using the cloud pillar in the sky in such a way that the north side of it was composed of heavy fog to curtain off the Israelites and confuse their pursuers. At the same time, on its south side, the pillar was like a towering torch that lighted the Israelite camps for the amazing action to come.

Now that the fears of many of the Israelites had been lessened, the people began settling down for the night. They didn't know yet that it wasn't God's plan for them to spend the whole night where they were.

Everyone Ready!

Just a little while after the pillar of fire and clouds moved behind the Israelites, God told Moses what to do next. Moses obeyed, and riders were quickly sent out to the long lines of people, telling them to be ready about midnight to move on. This order caused more excitement. Some of the people decided that they were about to be attacked, and wanted to leave at once. Others complained because they would lose their sleep. Many didn't wish to leave the warmth of their fires that soon.

Puzzled at Moses' order to move on in the middle of the night, several of the elders came to inquire what direction would be taken.

"We shall move to the east," Moses replied.

"But the Red Sea is to the east!" they exclaimed.

"That is where we shall go," Moses said. "I shall let you know when to start

the people moving toward the beach.”

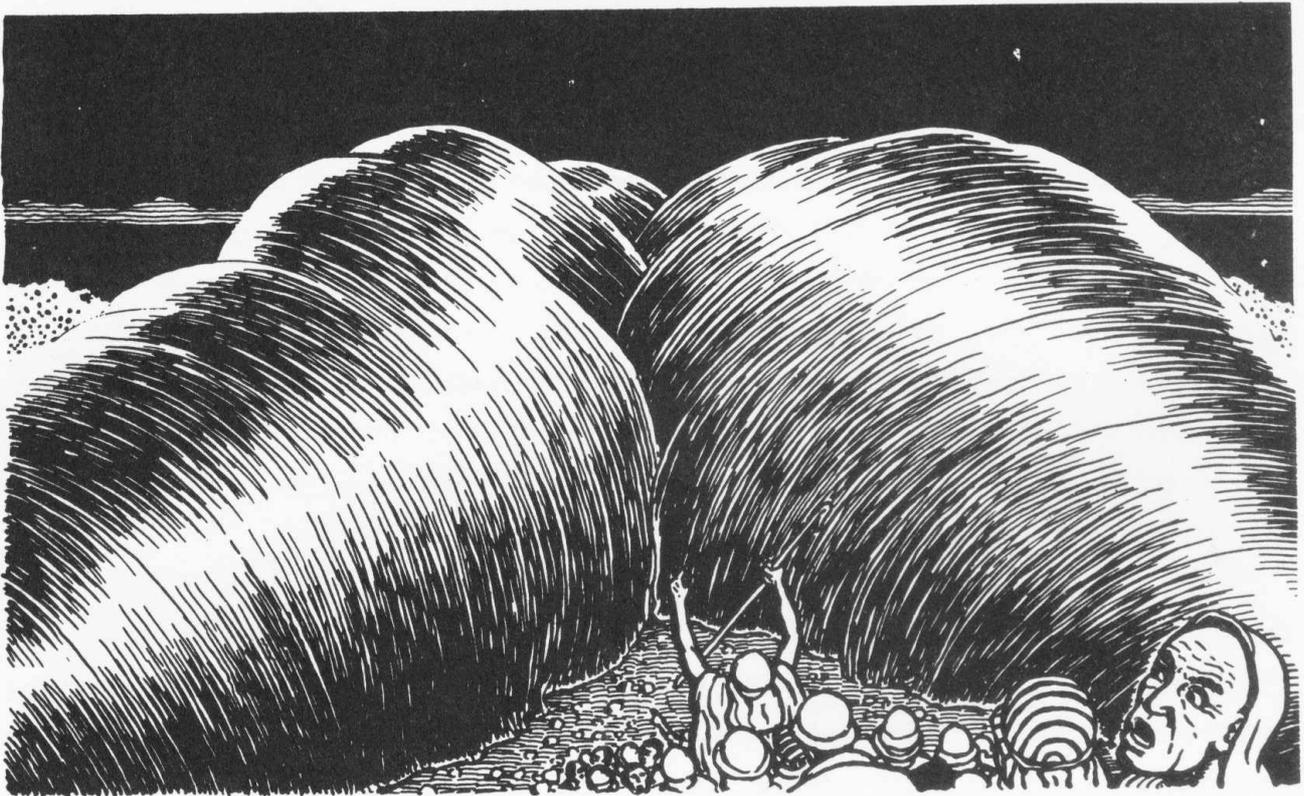
Curious to follow Moses and his officers, a perplexed mass of people later edged toward the dark waters to their left. Moses dismounted and gazed with Aaron upon this body of water which was a very long gulf, several miles wide, shooting up from the main body of the Red Sea. In the light from the blazing cloud, as thousands of people in the foremost ranks watched, Moses lifted up his shepherd's rod and held it out toward the water.

There was a distant roaring sound. It grew louder by the minute, until it sounded to the people near the shore like a giant waterfall.

“Look!” someone shouted. “There's a hole in the water!”

A great murmur went up from the seashore throng as thousands of the Israelites witnessed something so astounding that at first they couldn't believe their eyes.

In the blazing light from the pillar of fire, a huge ravine was gradually appearing before them in the sea! It was as though some invisible, gigantic hand had scooped out a trough in the water all the way across the gulf to the east shore miles away! A wide expanse of muddy sea bottom was exposed to view. To the right and to the left of this giant trough were towering cliffs of water that seemed frozen in upright walls, but which actually flowed freely as though it were level.



Roaring like a gigantic waterfall, the water began to roll back before Moses' outstretched arms!

God had miraculously plowed a road right through the Red Sea gulf by which the Israelites could escape to the east!

"There is where we shall travel to freedom!" Moses called out.

After the Israelite officers and elders had somewhat recovered from their first shocks of surprise, some of them pointed out to Moses that it would be impossible for the people and their livestock to wade through the slimy, muddy sea bottom.

"We needn't be concerned about that," Moses explained. "It will be a little while yet before we leave here. Meanwhile, God will prepare the way for us."

Even before Moses spoke, a strong, dry wind had come up. It increased in speed, soon sweeping down through the water-walled trough with gale force.

The dry, howling wind continued for several hours. The dust and sand it blew up made the Israelites who were nearest the seashore uncomfortable. But although it was a slight hardship for them, it was the means by which God dried up a part of the sea bottom so that they could walk upon it safely. (Ex. 14:21.)

Shortly after midnight the wind died down. There was a strange silence, broken only by the peculiar sounds of throbbing splashes from the upright walls of water. Then came the order to move on.

Crossing the Red Sea

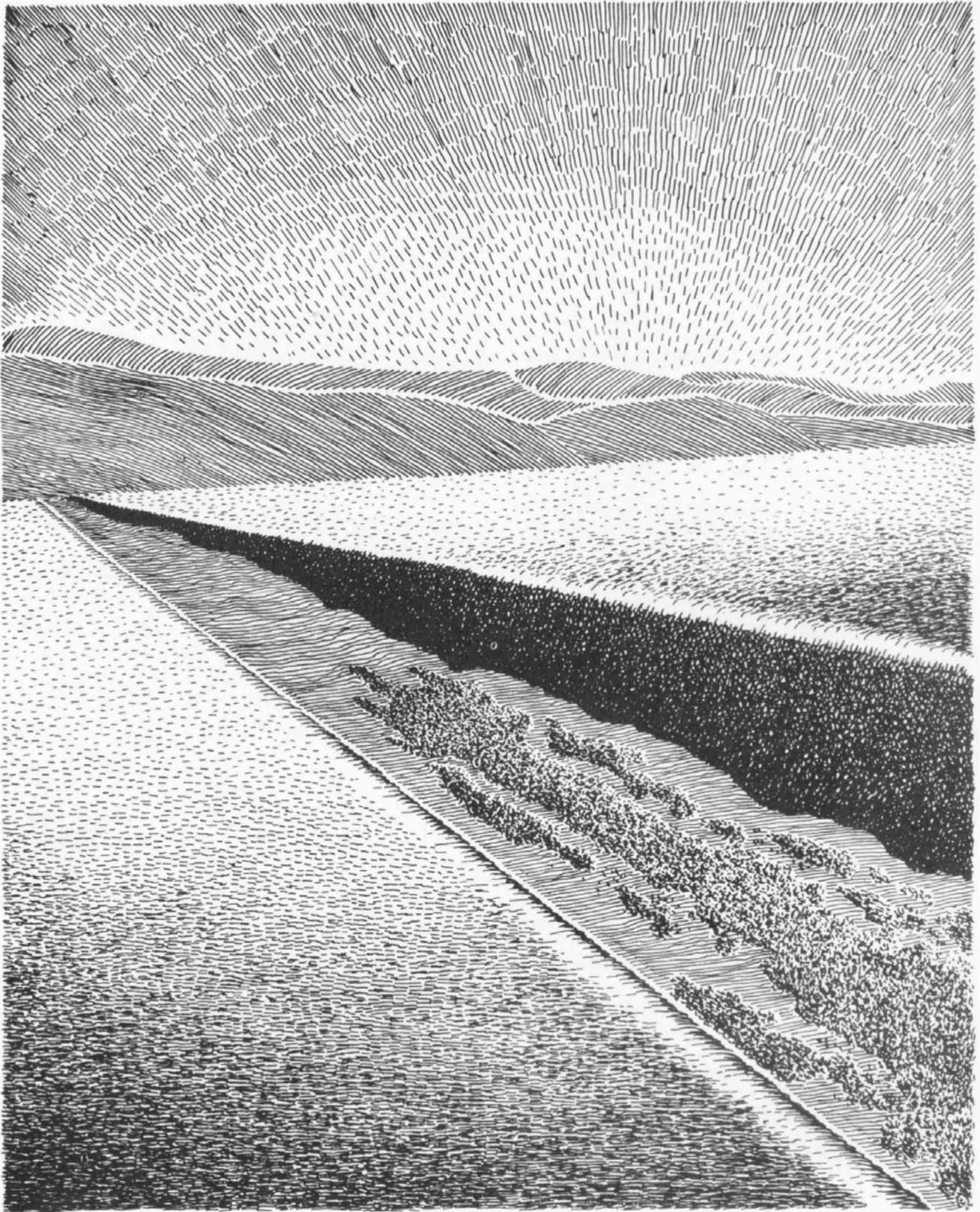
There must have been many Israelites who hesitated to move on, even though they saw Moses and Aaron and their officers ride down across the steep beach and out upon the dried mud valley between the awesome walls of water.

Nevertheless, the ranks of the Israelites passed on to the left and descended into the bed of the Red Sea gulf. To the right and to the left the walls of water loomed higher and higher as the people approached the lowest and deepest part of the great trough. At that point the water towered upward about three hundred feet!

It required faith and courage to make this unusual descent into a sea bed. Moses and Aaron were good examples in faith and courage. Thus it was easier for the Israelites to follow, though many of them had trouble herding shying livestock through the water-walled chasm.

Most of the people were too intent on reaching the east shore to notice the many things of interest on the sea floor. Some, however, noted the objects in their path. There were fish, crabs, octopi and other saltwater creatures that had been stranded in the mud when the waters parted. Of course most of them were not alive, having been out of water for quite a while. There were also half-dried remains of strange underwater plants and the shells of sea mollusks that had long since died.

As for live fish, there were plenty of those, too. Here and there a fish would



At the lowest part of the dry seabed, the water towered hundreds of feet above the trudging Israelites.

swim right out through the upright water and fall to the ground below. But the Israelites were interested only in escape, and even the largest of the wall-piercing

fish went almost unnoticed.

Back in the camp of the Egyptian army, events had been taking place that were soon to mean much both to Pharaoh and the Israelites. The Egyptians had bedded down for the night, but their sleep didn't last very long.

It was that strong, dry wind that aroused the Egyptians to action. Some alert guard noted that the heavy fog to the south of them didn't seem to be affected at all by the high wind. Word of this was finally brought to Pharaoh. The Egyptian king had suffered through many miracles from God, and now he was suddenly suspicious.

"Something peculiar is going on," he remarked to his officers. "Send word out for all to be ready to move on at top speed!"

When at last the Egyptian army did move on to the south in pursuit of the Israelites, it immediately ran into what appeared to be a very thick fog. Actually it was the base of the cloud pillar that had been leading the Israelites, and which had settled to the ground to separate them from the Egyptians.

Confusion overtook the Egyptian forces. The inky blackness of a night fog made it almost impossible to move on without running into all kinds of trouble.

Furthermore, the strong east wind whipped in from their left, blowing stinging sand and soil into the eyes of men and horses. Pharaoh was furious. As he couldn't get at the Israelites, he felt



Here and there fish would dart out of the upright water and fall unexpectedly to the ground.

increasingly certain that they were fooling him in some way. Now he regretted that he had failed to attack them when they were first sighted.

"Our drivers can't see which way to go," one of the king's officers reported. "Our horses and chariots will be lost or ruined if we continue in this manner."

"Then have every man and horse halt where he is," Pharaoh ordered. "We'll stand where we are until daylight comes and the fog lifts. Then we'll rush those fleeing slaves and either march them back to slavery or push them into the sea!"

The Egyptians didn't have long to wait. The hot east wind gradually died down. Then the fog began to lift. Actually, God was lifting the cloud pillar to move it out over the Red Sea.

Now the first faint rays of morning made it possible for the Egyptian army to move. Pharaoh's spirits soared. He felt that the Israelites had to be somewhere just ahead in the uncertain gray of dawn, and that there was no way for them to escape. Here, at last, was his happy opportunity to get revenge on the people whose God had caused so much trouble for him and for Egypt! Here was his chance to prove that he, Pharaoh, the supreme king of Egypt, would at last be the conqueror.

"Charge!" Pharaoh yelled.

The order was relayed back to thousands of men and horses and chariots. The elements of the Egyptian army sputtered forward in the growing dawn. It was the greatest battle force ever to be used since man had been put on Earth.

But it was not like one great army rushing against another army. It was one vast military force bearing down upon a helpless mass of men, women and children. It was a plan for large scale murder. That plan had been schemed out by a man who believed that he could triumph over the people God had chosen for a special work.

God, however, was allowing Pharaoh to do these things. He was using the Egyptian king to show both the Egyptians and the Israelites that there was only one Supreme God and Creator.

Riding in his special chariot near the head of the charging forces, the king of Egypt was one of the first to notice that the camp sites of the Israelites appeared empty. It was still early morning dusk, and difficult to see very far.

Minutes later the Egyptian chariots and cavalry thundered past a vast area of dead campfires. But here and there a campfire was still smoldering.

"Those smoking ashes prove they haven't been gone very long!" one officer shouted. "They might be hiding in the rocks and defiles ahead!"

"Impossible!" Pharaoh shouted back. "Millions of people and animals couldn't squeeze into those places! Turn left toward the shore! Perhaps a low tide allowed

them to file around those crags next to the water!”

The foremost part of the force veered to the left and clattered toward the water. Suddenly the king held up an arm as a signal to halt. Gradually the speeding army ground to a stop.

Pharaoh stood in his chariot, his head stretched forward and his eyes popping and blinking in disbelief and bewilderment at what he saw.

“It—it looks like a ditch in the sea!” an officer blurted out.

“I can’t believe it!” the king muttered. “Calm water *has* to be level. But here it is *upright!*”

“I—I—I don’t like this,” a paling officer stammered. “It’s too much like those mysterious plagues we went through. We’d better turn back before something terrible happens.”

“Look, oh king!” a young lieutenant blurted out, pointing to the space in the sea. “I see them!”

Pharaoh and those about him stared hard into the water-walled valley. The growing light of morning revealed very faintly, in the distance, the rear columns of the Israelites moving slowly to the east between the divided waters!

Pharaoh was jubilant. He raised his arms to silence the excited officers.

“These walls of water must indeed be a miracle from the God of the Israelites,” the king shouted. “But if the Israelites don’t fear to pass between these two bodies of water, why should we? As long as the Israelites are between the waters, their God won’t let the sea go back into place. We’ll be just as safe in there as they are. We can overtake them shortly. Pass the word back to move on after them at once!”

Egyptians Plunge Ahead

There were many Egyptian soldiers who were so startled at sight of the hole in the sea that they quavered at the very thought of going forward. But Pharaoh believed that he saw victory in sight, and no one dared fall back at such a time.

Thousands of clattering hoofs and rattling chariot wheels set up a din again as the vast army rolled down the steep shore and into the yawning space in the waters. (Ex. 14:23.)

Although the sea bed was dry on the surface, there were huge tufts of sea plants and dips and ridges that forced the chariots to go slower. Nevertheless, the speed of the Egyptian army was much greater than that of the plodding Israelites. The distance between the two groups was narrowing so swiftly that it would be only a matter of a few minutes before the rear columns of the Israelites would be cruelly set upon by their pursuers.

Several miles to the east, at the same time, the head columns of the Israelites had already emerged from the gap in the waters, and were moving slowly along the east shore of the gulf. Those who had come through felt a great relief to be out of that watery maw. But a fear of Pharaoh's army still gnawed at many of them, even though Moses had told them that they would never see that army again.

As for the rear part of the mass of Israelites, they were spared the fright of seeing their pursuers move so close to them. The cloud by which God aided them had moved out over the trough in the sea. Just before it descended, it allowed Pharaoh to view his intended prey. Then it moved down so that its base touched the bed of the sea, thus keeping the Israelites from knowing that Pharaoh and his army were so close to them.

For a second time in a matter of hours the Egyptians were to have great trouble with that cloud. Pharaoh and his officers saw the growing fog-like condition ahead of them. But with the morning growing brighter, they didn't think that low cloudiness would slow them up very much.

Suddenly a sizzling bolt of lightning spat out of the sky. The Egyptians looked up to see that what had seemed to be a fog bank had abruptly turned into a seething, towering mixture of clouds and flames! For the first time the Egyptians had a good look at the thing that had led the Israelites by day and by night. They were so startled that many of them came to a halt.

"Tell them to keep going!" Pharaoh ordered his officers. "The Israelites are just ahead of us!"

The king's voice was lost in the loud rumble of thunder from the cloud. Chariots and horsemen that had come to a halt or slowed up were rammed by those who continued the charge. Sudden confusion swept across the whole Egyptian army. To make matters worse, there was a sudden heavy downpour of rain. Within minutes the ground was a slippery, muddy mess. Chariots skidded together, smashing wheels and injuring horses and drivers. Horses and chariots became mired in the mud. What only minutes before had been a mighty fighting force was transformed into a struggling, helpless mass of men, horses and chariots. (Verses 24-25.)

"Let's get back out of here while we can!" one of Pharaoh's head officers yelled. "We can't win in a fight against these Israelites and their God!"

Other officers shouted out their agreement to the idea of a hasty retreat on foot. Pharaoh was dismayed to realize that he was fast losing control of his fighting force. Even so, he kept trying to preserve order.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

SAFE AT LAST!

“KEEP on toward the east!” Pharaoh shouted from the floor of the Red Sea. “The Israelites are just ahead! We can overcome them within the hour!”

That was one of the last sentences Pharaoh uttered.

While the Egyptians were struggling in the slippery mud, the last parts of the Israelite columns were coming up out of the gulf of the Red Sea. A mounted messenger was sent ahead with the information that all the people had reached the east shore of the gulf. As soon as Moses had received the news, God spoke to him, telling him to stretch his hands and shepherd’s rod out toward the sea so that the parted waters would merge. Moses halted the movement of the people, and went to the shore to obey God’s instructions. (Exodus 14:26.)

Pharaoh Perishes

At that same time, in the deepest part of the Red Sea gulf, thousands of frantic Egyptian soldiers struggled through knee-deep mud to get back to the west bank of the gulf. Chariots were left behind. Riderless horses floundered helplessly in the mire. Yelling in terror, the Egyptians crawled and pawed over one another in their wild efforts to get back to the west beach. From his royal chariot Pharaoh tried to keep on issuing orders for his men to pursue the Israelites. But no one heeded his commands. The king of Egypt became furious, screeching orders at the top of his voice. It was impossible to be heard above the tumult. And even if the soldiers could have heard their commander, they wouldn’t have obeyed.

It was then that God allowed the divided waters to flow together. Imagine, if

you can, two invisible walls three or four hundred feet high holding water that deep. Think what would happen if those invisible walls, hundreds of feet apart, were suddenly snatched away to let two bodies of water rush together.

The lofty waters thundered together with such force and fury and sound that the entire Egyptian army was crushed to death as instantly as a stream from a fire hose would drown mosquitoes. (Verse 27.)

This was the abrupt end of the man who had planned to wipe out the people God had chosen for a special task in His plan for things to come. This was sudden death for thousands who had a part in Pharaoh's efforts to enslave or destroy the Israelites. Probably that Egyptian king was born for the very purpose of troubling the Israelites. God used him for a purpose, even permitting the king to be more stubborn than usual. Nevertheless, Pharaoh himself chose to get revenge on the Israelites by his own free will. As a result, not one of the pursuing Egyptians escaped the awesome destruction by two bodies of water smashing together like the jaws of a gigantic vise. (Verse 28.)

The Israelites, moving slowly to the south along the east side of the Red Sea gulf, had been startled to see the water suddenly recede from the shore and move northward like the current of a swift river.

Suddenly there had been a thunderous roar. A long, frothy curtain of water had spewed skyward all along the area where the Israelites had walked through the Red Sea. By that time they had moved too far away to see that this upshooting sheet of water hurled men, horses and chariots high into the air where the two parts of the sea waters collided.

The astonished Israelites had no idea that their pursuers were being crushed and drowned by that massive clash of waters. But the sea became so turbulent that soon great waves started crashing up on shore. Up from those waves came objects that caused many of the Israelites to turn aside and hurry to the beaches to see what the waves had washed onto land.

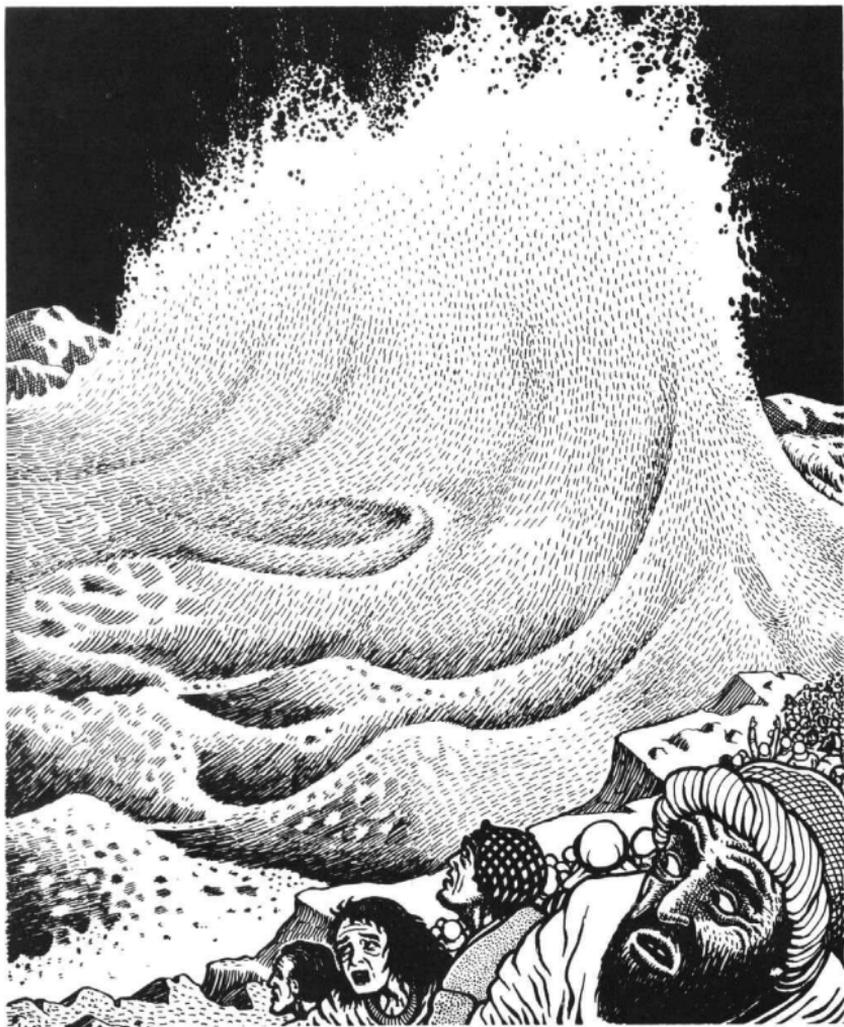
"Bodies!" some of the foremost to the beach exclaimed. "Bodies of people!"

"Egyptian soldiers!"

That was the remark that fell from the lips of many astonished Israelites. (Verse 30.)

Not until then did the Israelites begin to realize that the Egyptian army had been right behind them as they passed through the Red Sea, and that Pharaoh's fighting force had been caught in the tremendous collision of the parts of the sea that had been divided.

Realizing at last what had happened, the Israelites were greatly impressed by



The two sections of water crashed together, forcing a long, frothy curtain of water into the sky across the Red Sea gulf.

this miracle God had provided for their protection, and a great feeling of thankfulness welled up in most of them. (Verse 31.)

Corpses weren't all that the waves brought up. Thousands of dead horses soon littered the shore. Even heavy chariots were thrust up on the beaches. When the people examined the chariots, they found that many of them contained knives, swords and shields. They took all these things, along with spears and other weapons washed in from the sea. Inasmuch as most of the Israelites had left Egypt with very few necessities, here was their opportunity to also obtain clothes, leather harness, tools and numerous other items lost by the destroyed Egyptian army. Thus the Israelites were supplied, through the drowning of the Egyptian army, with many of the things they needed for their trip to come—a trip that was to last much, much longer than they imagined.

Moses Assembles the People

Because of their huge numbers and because they were spread out over so much territory, not all of the Israelites were close enough to the sea to witness the huge waves and what the churning waters washed ashore. Word quickly spread to all the people. When the news reached Moses, he wasn't surprised. Because of his close connection with God, he knew what to expect. His main concern was to give thanks to the One who had kept the Israelites safe.

Moses sent word for all the Israelites to assemble as closely together as possible for the purpose of thanking their Creator for completely freeing them from the Egyptians.

Back in those days, as well as now, there were people who had great ability to produce beautiful music, and others who could write well-chosen words to go with the music. Such talented ones, inspired by God's mighty deeds, quickly produced a wonderful song for the Israelites to sing. Probably Moses was among those who hastily created this song. You will remember that he was raised by an Egyptian princess, and was well-trained in culture.

Millions of people gathered together over hundreds of acres to sing praise to God or to listen to the singing. The song was started by Moses. He sang a few words, then hesitated while those around him repeated the words and tune. Then Moses sang a few more words and the people again repeated while their leader hesitated. This went on until the whole song had been sung to God for the wonderful things He had done for the Israelites.

It might seem impossible that such a vast host of people, scattered over many miles, could successfully sing together. Probably not all of the Israelites sang. Those thousands closest to Moses raised their voices in such tremendous volume that the crowds far beyond them were able to hear and appreciate the song. Possibly the most

distant parts of the crowd repeated the words and music they had heard from those nearest Moses, so that the music swelled up from different areas of the crowd at different times without confusion.

In any event, it was probably the greatest and loudest mass display of gratitude ever to come from man to God. (Exodus 15:1-19.)

Strong male voices, accompanied by horns, flutes and other wind and string instruments, were joined by the voices of women and the rhythmic beat of their tambourines. Miriam, a sister of Aaron, led the Israelite women in a graceful dance. This woman had long before been chosen to lead and instruct the women in many things. Now she directed the female dancing in a way that was pleasing to God. (Verses 20-21.)

Later, in preparing to travel on, the Israelites watered their animals from the full wells in that area. They also filled their gourds and leather water bottles with the precious liquid that was so scarce in the arid regions into which they would travel.

Moving into the Desert

The people now moved on to the south, following the cloud and gradually edging away from the east shore of the Red Sea gulf. This led them into a region where there was mile upon mile of sand dunes. All day long they slipped and skidded through the shifting sands. It was a hot day. They consumed a great part of the water they had brought, but this didn't concern most of them because they believed that water would be available at a place they would reach at the end of the day.

But when darkness came on and it was necessary to camp, there were no signs of wells, springs or streams.

Next day, traveling in the heat of the desert, the water supply dwindled swiftly. The people used up most of what they were carrying, and there was little or none for their animals.

By nightfall there was no sign of water. Again they camped on the warm sands of the desert, then started out into a third hot day without enough water for themselves or their animals. Many of them began to doubt that they could get through the day on what little water was left. (Verse 22.)

Somehow a rumor became started that by sundown they would reach a place where there was plenty of water. This bolstered the hopes of the worried Israelites.

Late that afternoon their hopes began to be realized. The first columns of the caravan arrived at a place called Marah. Palm trees and other lush vegetation indicated that water must be present.

First men to enter the green area were overjoyed to see quite a large pool of

clear, sparkling water. In the middle of the pool it gushed out of the ground in a cool, splashing geyser.

Men rushed to the pool to fall face down and gulp the cooling, life-giving liquid. But their joy was cut short. They spewed the water out of their mouths and struggled to their feet.

"It's bitter!" someone shouted. "We can't drink this!"

"Perhaps it's poisonous," someone else remarked as he continued spitting.

Regardless of the remarks of the first tasters, Israelites by the thousands milled around the place where the water gushed from the ground. But all who tasted agreed that it was far too bitter for people or animals to swallow. (Verse 23.)

Having become accustomed to the unusually fine flavor of the water of the Nile, the Israelites began to bitterly complain that they would die of thirst unless better water could quickly be found.

"Moses has led us into this hopeless and miserable situation," was the comment that began to come from many Israelites.

This ill feeling against Moses blossomed out to such an extent that Moses' officers reluctantly reported it to him. Moses was disappointed and discouraged that millions of people blamed him for the fact that the water at Marah was bitter. (Verse 24.)

Realizing that something had to be done at once, Moses called on God for help.

The Water Becomes Sweet

"There is a tree growing just outside your tent," God told Moses. "Cut it down and throw it into the pool where the water gushes out of the ground."

Moses obeyed. People who were gathered around the water hole thought it very strange that their leader should walk up and toss a small tree into the pool. This strange act must have caused some to lose even more faith in Moses as a leader.

Meanwhile, hordes of people continued pressing in to taste the water that was causing such dissatisfaction. All of them, annoyed at the taste of the water, spit it out in disgust.

However, after Moses threw the tree into the pool, the water tasters began to change their attitudes.

"I do not find this water bitter," remarked one who had just arrived. "Why are people complaining that it doesn't taste good?"

From that moment on the complaints against the water were wiped out by the happy remarks of thousands upon thousands who arrived to obtain water. Hordes of people and their flocks began an almost endless movement up to the pool which had suddenly and miraculously given out water that wasn't bitter. (Verse 25.)

It quickly became plain to the Israelites that God had performed another miracle by causing the water at Marah to become sweet and pleasant to drink.

This was another test for Moses, who once again had to rely entirely on God for help during a trying time. God spoke to Moses, telling him to tell the people that if they would carefully obey their Creator, He would keep them free of the many diseases that He had brought on the Egyptians.

"I am your healer," God said, "Keep my commandments, and I will keep you healthy." (Verse 26.)

Since that time, only a very small part of this world's inhabitants have observed God's laws. But those who have done so have been able to claim that promise God made to the Israelites. God has protected and healed multitudes of such faithful people.

Today, in all this world, commandment-keeping people number only in the thousands, whereas there are many, many millions of so-called Christians. Those relative few who keep God's laws still are claiming that ancient promise, and are enjoying the miracles of protection and healing from a merciful and loving Creator.

Within only a few years from now, however, millions upon millions of people will turn to keeping God's laws. As a result, good health, prosperity and happiness will rapidly spread throughout the Earth.

On to Sinai

Refreshed with water and rest, the Israelites later set out southward. Still in desert land, many of them wondered how soon they would reach fresh water again. They journeyed many miles through the hot, arid land. Then, to their relief, they arrived at a place called Elim, where there was even more green vegetation than there was at Marah. (Verse 27.)

They camped for several days at Elim. Strange as it may seem, there were twelve wells there—one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Furthermore, there were just seventy palm trees—the exact number of Israelite elders.

After leaving Elim, the people continued southward over a vast desert area. By then it was about a month since they had left the Nile region, and their food was beginning to run low. (Exodus 16:1.) Even though sheep, goats and cattle could have been slaughtered for food, the Israelites began to complain that Moses and Aaron had brought them into the desert to starve.

This feeling against their leaders became so strong that soon Moses heard about it from some of his officers. (Verse 2.)

"Bring some of these complainers to me," Moses told his officers.

A few men who claimed they were spokesmen for the people were brought

before Moses and Aaron and some of the elders.

"Why are the people saying that we have brought them out into the desert to starve?" Moses asked them.

"There is no more food," one of the spokesmen muttered bitterly. "The grain we brought from Egypt is almost gone. So is our oil. We will soon have nothing with which to make bread!"

"Why not use some of your flocks for food?" Moses asked.

"If we eat up our animals, how shall we start our livestock ranches where we are going?" queried another spokesman in a sarcastic tone.

"Our people are unhappy," another spoke up. "We feel that it would have been better to die along with the Egyptians than to wander around out in the desert and run out of food." (Verse 3.)

"You mean that the people would rather be back in slavery in Egypt than to be free out here in the desert?" Moses asked.

"That's right!" one of the spokesmen answered. "We worked hard back there. But we had plenty to eat. The Egyptians gave us all the meat we wanted. We had enough bread and other good things, too. Out here, all we have to look forward to is day after day of marching in the hot desert, only to die under the scorching sun when our food is completely gone."

Moses was again disappointed and discouraged, just as he had been several times before when the Israelites had become upset and unreasonable.

"I told you before that God will protect and take care of us." Moses told the spokesmen from the Israelites. "He hasn't failed us and he won't fail us. Go tell that to the people. And tell them to stop complaining against their Creator, who is giving them life from day to day!"

Moses took the matter to God at once, asking Him for help in handling the unruly and unreasonable Israelites. As usual, God acted to aid his servant Moses.

God Acts for Moses

"I have heard the people complaining," God told Moses. "To remind them that I am mindful of their needs, I shall give them flesh in the evening, and in the morning bread from heaven will come down for them. I want them to learn to be obedient and to depend on Me for help. Therefore from morning to morning, through a miracle, I shall give them what they require to keep alive. Each day they must gather only what they need of this special bread for that day. On the sixth day of the week, the day before my holy Sabbath, they must gather twice as much. Then they may grind it for meal, bake it or cook it for eating the next day." (Ex. 16:4-5.)

God gave Moses other instructions for keeping the people under control. Moses passed these things on to Aaron, who spoke to thousands upon thousands of persons who had been told to gather together to hear messages that had come from God. (Verses 6-9.)

"Either you have already forgotten the great things God has done for us," Aaron said to the crowds, "or you seem to think that your Creator's power is quite limited. You have been blaming Moses and your elders and myself for bringing you here, and for the many miseries that exist mainly in your imaginations. Very soon you will see something that will remind you that our loving and powerful God is the real leader of this journey from Egypt. Instead of complaining, you should be thankful for the kindness, mercy and patience He has shown toward all of us."

Even as Aaron spoke, shouts of excitement welled up from the crowds. People began pointing to that mysterious cloud that had guided them. It was off to the south-east, hanging over the desert. (Verse 10.)

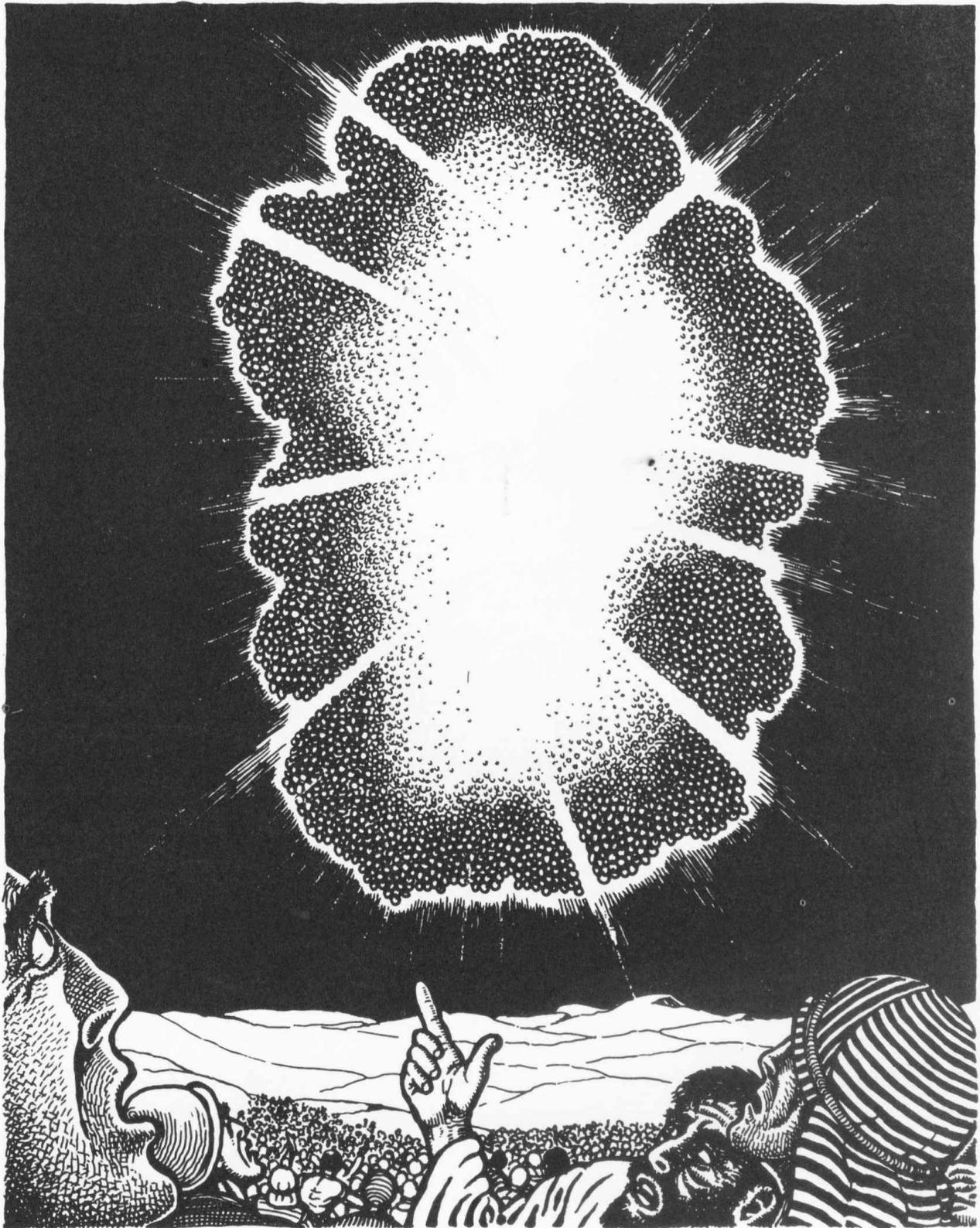
One might think that the very presence of that cloud, changing to fire at night, was enough to keep the people in awe of God. But most of the Israelites had become spiritually dulled from years of servitude and slipping away from the truth of things that were important. They were filled with awe when they walked across the bottom of the Red Sea—but not for long. They were wide-eyed with wonderment when they first saw the guiding cloud which became a pillar of fire. But after a month of seeing it, it became as common to them as the sun or the moon. What impressed the Israelites most were the material things that gave them relief from their strong physical needs and desires. Other things didn't matter much to them.

Once again, however, they were filled with awe when they gazed up at the cloud. Its vapors were moving and tumbling in a peculiar, rhythmic fashion. Here and there an opening appeared in the cloud, releasing dazzling beams of light in all colors.

While over two million people gazed in astonishment, the shape of the cloud kept changing, and with each change there was some other beautiful display of light. At times the cloud glittered as though it were a pulsating mountain of diamonds. Then it would turn into moving ribbons of brilliant color, cascading masses of dazzling sparks or swirling flashes of multi-colored flame!

To most of the Israelites this was nothing more than an amazing display of God's power. Hearts beat faster in awe and excitement. But it wasn't until the cloud became a glowing mass as bright as the sun that the people became startled and afraid.

Many of them drew back in fear, blinking into the blinding light. A loud, booming crash, like that of intense thunder, roared out of the cloud. Many of the people shuddered in alarm when this deafening clap of noise occurred. It lasted for many

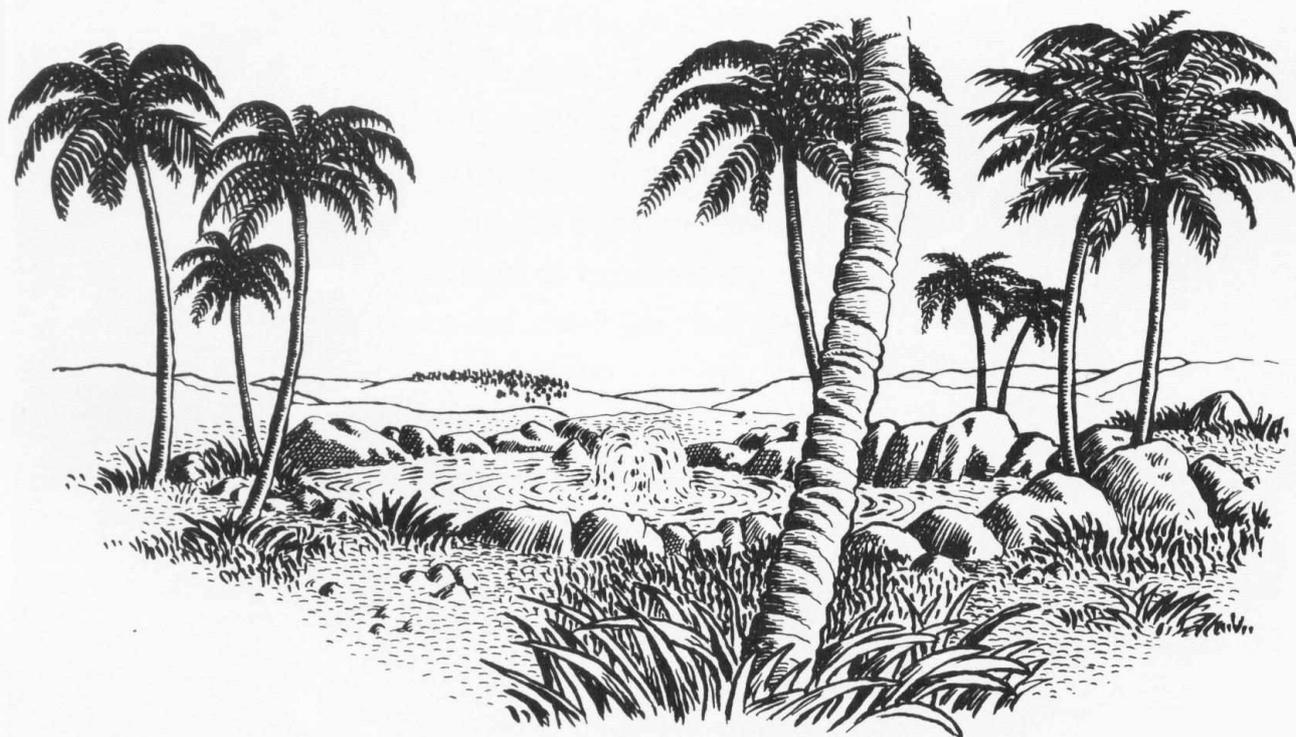


The Israelites became fearful when the cloud glowed brighter and brighter.

seconds, and it sounded like the bass voice of a tremendous giant muttering words of warning the people couldn't quite understand. Gradually, then, the rumble and the

light faded away, and there again was the cloud floating peacefully over the desert.

The awed throng was silent. Probably there wasn't to be found even one person among those millions, right then, who had the slightest desire to complain about anything.



Many Israelites recalled at that time how their first columns had previously topped a dune to joyfully welcome the sight of one of the pools at Elim. God was providing for them—after all!

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

WAR WITH AMALEK!

MOSSES now spoke to the people, who by this time were willing and eager to listen to words of advice. They were shocked by God's mighty presence in a cloud that supernaturally appeared.

"God has told me," Moses said to them, "that He has heard all of your complaints. He is not pleased by them, but because of His great mercy He has asked me to tell you that this very evening you will receive the flesh you believe you need to eat. Furthermore, when morning comes, you will find plenty of food on the ground. These miraculous gifts from our Creator should prove to everyone that God is watching out for us all the time, and that we should please Him by not complaining." (Exodus 16:8-9.)

Food By Divine Miracle

That evening the Israelites were surprised to see the sky darkened by a vast flock of birds. At first it appeared that this was an unusually great migration of fowl seeking the climate that was best for them.

All of a sudden the thick hordes of birds swept down on the Israelite camps. Recognizing them as quail—birds very good to eat—men, women and children reached out to seize the winged creatures. The birds seemed very weary as from a long flight, and they were easy to catch. Within only a few minutes the Israelites captured millions of the tasty birds!

Thus God kept His promise to supply flesh for the people to eat.

Next morning, as God had also promised, there was more food for the people. It

came in a strange way. Dew had fallen during the night. In the morning hours it evaporated from grass, bushes, trees and rocks. In place of the beads of moisture there were soft, round, white particles. (Verse 14.)

“What is this peculiar white stuff that is in place of the dew?” the Israelites asked one another.

When Moses heard that the people had discovered the peculiar white substance, he sent word out to all of them that this was the promised bread from heaven.

“God is giving us plenty of this good food,” Moses told them. “Each morning you should gather three quarts of it for every person in the camp. Don’t wait until too late in the day to take it in, or the hot sun will melt it. And don’t try to keep it overnight, or it will spoil.” (Verse 16.)

Anxious to try this new thing, the Israelites swarmed out around their camps to gather it into bowls and baskets and bags. They soon found to their enjoyment that it tasted like fresh bread and honey! (Verse 31.)

Before the intense heat of the day began to set in, the people easily gathered the amount they were told to get. Those who were late gathering it found nothing. It had melted.

Although Moses had warned the people not to keep this food overnight, many of them ignored him and kept it till morning, when they awakened to become aware of an unpleasant odor. When they looked to see what caused it, they found that it came from the substance they had gathered the day before, which was now infested with worms. (Verse 20.)

Moses was angry when he learned that so many people had gone against God’s orders. But by this time he had learned that it was no small task, even with God’s help, to lead over two million people into doing what was right.

The Sabbath Revealed

“On the sixth day of the week you must gather twice as much as usual of this food from God,” Moses told the people. “Whether you bake it, boil it or just let it stand, it won’t spoil on the seventh day—which is the holy Sabbath of our God hallowed at creation, right after He remolded this Earth as a dwelling place for man.”

On the morning of the sixth day of the week the people went out to gather twice as much as usual—about a gallon and a half for each person.

Next morning, on the Sabbath, the Israelites found that the substance had not spoiled during the night. It was as fresh and pure as when it had been gathered the previous day. During the many, many years that the Israelites had been in bondage in Egypt, the Israelite slaves seem to have lost count as to which day was actually a holy

twenty-four-hour period. Here was now proof to all the Israelites just what day God wanted them to observe as a day of rest.

"This is a sign that the seventh day of the week, the Sabbath, is holy time," Moses told the Israelites. "Do not go out to gather food on this holy day. God will not provide this bread from heaven on His Sabbath, and you won't find anything to gather." (Verses 22-26.)

Regardless of what Moses said, some of the people went out on the morning of the seventh day of the week to gather the miracle food. Although they carefully searched over a broad area around the camps, they could find no trace of it.

This rebellious act of hunting for food on the Sabbath, after being told not to do so, was very displeasing to God.

"How long are your people going to keep on disobeying my orders and my laws?" God asked Moses. "Look out there at the edge of the camps. See how many people are laboring to find bread from heaven—even though you told them not to go after it on the Sabbath. Remind them that there is no reason to work on the Sabbath. Tell them to keep close to their tents on this day, and not to labor nor seek out their pleasures during this holy time."

Moses told the Israelites what God had told him. Thereafter, for a time, the people were more obedient.

As for the miraculous food God had provided, the Israelites named it *manna*, which meant "what is this"—the words most of them had spoken when they had first seen it. (Verse 31.)

Little did they realize then that they would be gathering manna for a long, long time. They supposed that it would be only a matter of days or weeks until they reached the land of Canaan. But it turned out to be forty years! In the meanwhile, their main food was manna.

God wanted the Israelites to remember—even long after their trip to Canaan—that He had fed them manna for forty years with this miracle. Therefore He commanded that a golden jar be filled with three quarts of manna, and that this jar and its contents (which would specially be preserved by divine power) should be kept to add to certain articles that would be of greater value and meaning in years to come. (Verses 32-36.)

The cloud continued to lead the Israelites to the southeast. Several days later, after moving over hot desert lands, they arrived at a place called Rephidim. From there they could see a menacing mountain range just ahead. It was obvious to the people that they would be travelling on an upgrade for the next several miles. Going would be difficult in the heat, and their water supply was dangerously low.

Moses was aware of conditions. He knew what to expect as soon as camps had been established. Therefore he wasn't surprised when he was told that an angry crowd was moving toward his quarters.

Moses Again Falsely Accused

Moses emerged from his tent. Flanked by Aaron, some of his officers and several elders, Moses held up his arms for silence from the noisy, growing crowd. The shouting and muttering started to die down.

"Let me speak to them," Aaron asked of Moses. "Perhaps I can calm them."

"They're here to blame me for the lack of water," Moses told Aaron. "It's better that I should do the talking this time."

When noise from the crowd had almost ceased, Moses lifted up his voice to say that he knew how short their water supply was, but that he was certain God would soon do something about it.

"How could even God find water in all this dry sand and rocks?" someone yelled.

"My children are crying for water!" another shouted. "So are the children of thousands of those families camped off to the north for miles in this terrible desert! Are you going to let those children die of thirst?"

"You have led us into this barren, miserable land just to watch us and our animals die!" someone else screamed at Moses. "Now you have made it impossible to return to Egypt. For this we should stone you and those who have helped you lure us out into this arid death-trap!" (Exodus 17:1-4.)

This bitter demonstration was much worse than Moses had expected. He ordered officers to spread out at once to control the crowd. Realizing that this could be the start of a bloody conflict, Moses went back into his tent, fell upon his knees and begged God for wisdom in knowing what to do before the crowd could get out of control.

A short while later, when he came out of his tent, he seemed quietly confident, like a man who had suddenly been relieved of a great mental burden.

"Tell the elders to meet me here at once and be prepared to ride on ahead with me," Moses said to his messengers.

When the elders had gathered at Moses' tent, Moses, Aaron and some of their officers mounted their animals and the whole group rode out of the camp and off to the south. The divinely appointed cloud guided them to a certain spot where jagged rocks jutted up out of the dry sand. Then it came to a stop right above a huge boulder that stood out in size and color from the other rocky formations.

"Stand well back from this rock on the higher ground behind it," Moses called to all those with him.

Carrying the shepherd's rod he had brought from Egypt, Moses went around the rock, climbed up its gently slanting back side, and stood atop the great chunk of red granite.

"Our God has promised more than once to take care of us," Moses spoke out to the onlookers, who were more and more curious as to what Moses was going to do. "Here is another example of His miraculous power to provide for us. You elders are here to witness just another way in which our Creator faithfully keeps His promises to His people—even though most of them fail to realize or remember what God has done, and is willing to do, for them."

The onlookers gazed in silence, almost fearful of what might happen. A few, feeling a bit of guilt because of their lagging faith, wondered if fire and brimstone would hiss out of the sky or up through the ground. It was an uneasy moment for several who were present.

Moses lifted his shepherd's rod high over his head, then brought it down sharply upon the edge of the huge boulder of red granite.

Water From a Rock!

Immediately there was a muffled but loud crackling sound from within the rock. Onlookers standing safely off to the sides were amazed to see several parts of the sides of the rock explode outward like giant corks from so many gigantic bottles. Then crystal clear water spewed forth in huge, forceful amounts from those openings! (Exodus 17:5-6.)

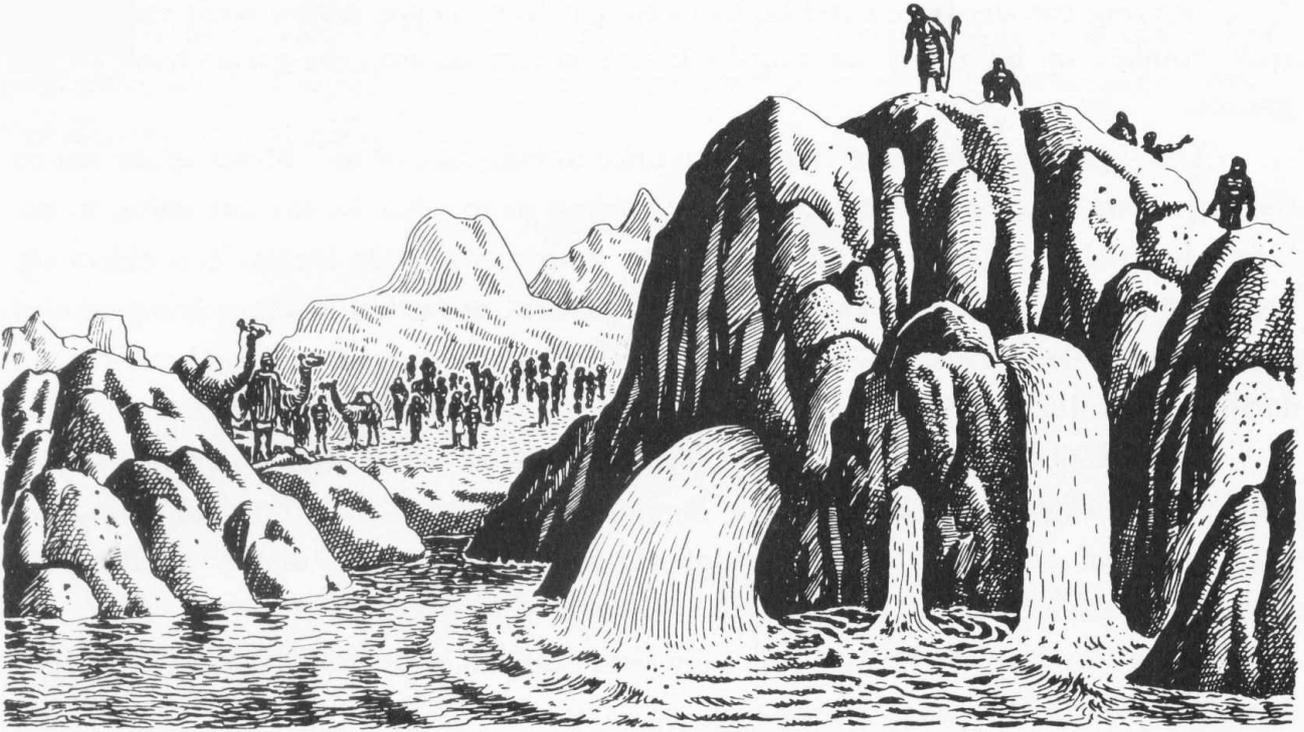
The water cascaded into a nearby ravine and plunged in a foamy, muddy torrent toward the slightly lower elevations to the north where the Israelites were camping.

A short time later, Israelites at the head camp were startled to see a sheet of water moving slowly over a dry wash bed nearby. Spectators yelled out their surprise, thus alerting others camped to the north. When the first of the waters finally reached those Israelites near the end of the camps, it came to a gradual stop in a level area which later grew into a small lake.

The mere sight of fresh, moving water greatly excited the Israelites, even though the liquid was at first so muddy from picking up dirt and sand that it was unfit for drinking or even bathing. But with each passing minute the water became a little clearer. It wasn't long before clear, cool water was flowing into the camps of the Israelites!

The people were overjoyed.

For the first time since they had left Egypt there was more than enough water for them and their animals. Learning later how God had miraculously provided a



Crystal-clear water gushed out in great quantity from the openings in the rock!

steady stream of water from a solid block of granite, many of them regretted that they had complained so bitterly against Moses—which was the same, in a way, as complaining against God.

Moses named the area *Massah* and *Meribah*, which meant *trouble* and *strife*. The trouble and strife hadn't come from God or from Moses, but because of the Israelites' lack of faith and dependence on God. (Verse 7.)

Because there was such a wonderful water supply from out of the rock just to the south of their camps, the Israelites stayed in this spot for many months. The cloud remained overhead, which was a direct sign from God that the people should stay in that place.

The clear, fresh water in such abundance made life much easier for everyone. The attitude of the people was much improved, and there was very little complaining, if any, against Moses. But here in this area, just north of where Moses had herded flocks of sheep only a few months before, something unpleasant was beginning to take place.

An Enemy Arrives

Here and there, amid the rocks and rises sloping toward the mountain range to the south, unfriendly eyes peered at this vast band of people who had come from

Egypt. Day after day those eyes kept watch on what went on in the camps. Meanwhile, the Israelites had no reason to suspect they were being spied on. Perhaps there were some who suddenly caught glimpses of furtively moving figures at a distance, only to conclude that the wobbly effect of desert heat had caused illusions of strange objects in motion.

It was late at night when trouble that had been brewing came upon the people in the rear camps. Campfires were out or low, and most of the Israelites were soundly sleeping.

A peculiar rumble, growing in intensity by the second, came to the ears of those who were awake. Within a few moments it was so loud people began to awaken. Startled women and children cried out. Men sprang from their beds and darted out of their tents to find themselves confronted by a huge band of sword-brandishing warriors mounted on camels and horses!

Having managed to surprise their intended victims, the attackers began a frightful yelling and shrieking. Driving their mounts at top speed, they charged into the startled Israelites, who were at first too surprised to do anything.

Swords and knives of the spiteful attackers found their marks. Within only a few minutes the ground was covered with dead and wounded. Realizing that victory was theirs, the attackers dismounted and quickly ransacked the tents. Children and elderly people still in the tents became their victims. They seized anything they could carry away—even some of the young women.

The noise of the attack had been heard by those Israelites in adjoining camps off to the south. Some of the more fearless men in these camps quickly organized hundreds of others to rush to the stricken area. When the attackers heard and saw this horde of men running toward them, they leaped astride their mounts and fled into the night. It was impossible for the Israelites to follow them afoot. All they could do was listen to the fading screams of their captives.

It was a sad night for many Israelite families. But probably not all the dead and wounded were Israelites. A few of the attackers may have lain dead with the others, and a few, still alive, were captives of the angry Israelites.

It required a while to convey the news of the attack to Moses, whose tent was at the head of the multitude a considerable distance to the south. Moses was greatly troubled. But he wasn't very surprised. He realized that this desert was inhabited by roaming bands of hostile men who were anything but friendly to strangers.

"Bring the prisoners to me at once," Moses said to one of his officers.

Later, some swarthy, bearded men were brought before Moses. Some of them glowered at him hatefully, but two of them were nervous and fearful.

"Hold those two men who seem frightened," Moses told his officers. "Let the others go."

After the other prisoners had been taken away, Moses began questioning the last two. He spoke to them in Egyptian and in Hebrew. And having some knowledge of the peculiar tongue in which the desert people spoke, he tried that language, too. The more he talked to them, the more fearful the prisoners became. Officers who watched and listened were not exactly certain what Moses was saying to the desert men. But before long they were cringing in fear, and were stuttering out answers in a language much like Hebrew.

"Give them water and food and let them go," Moses said.

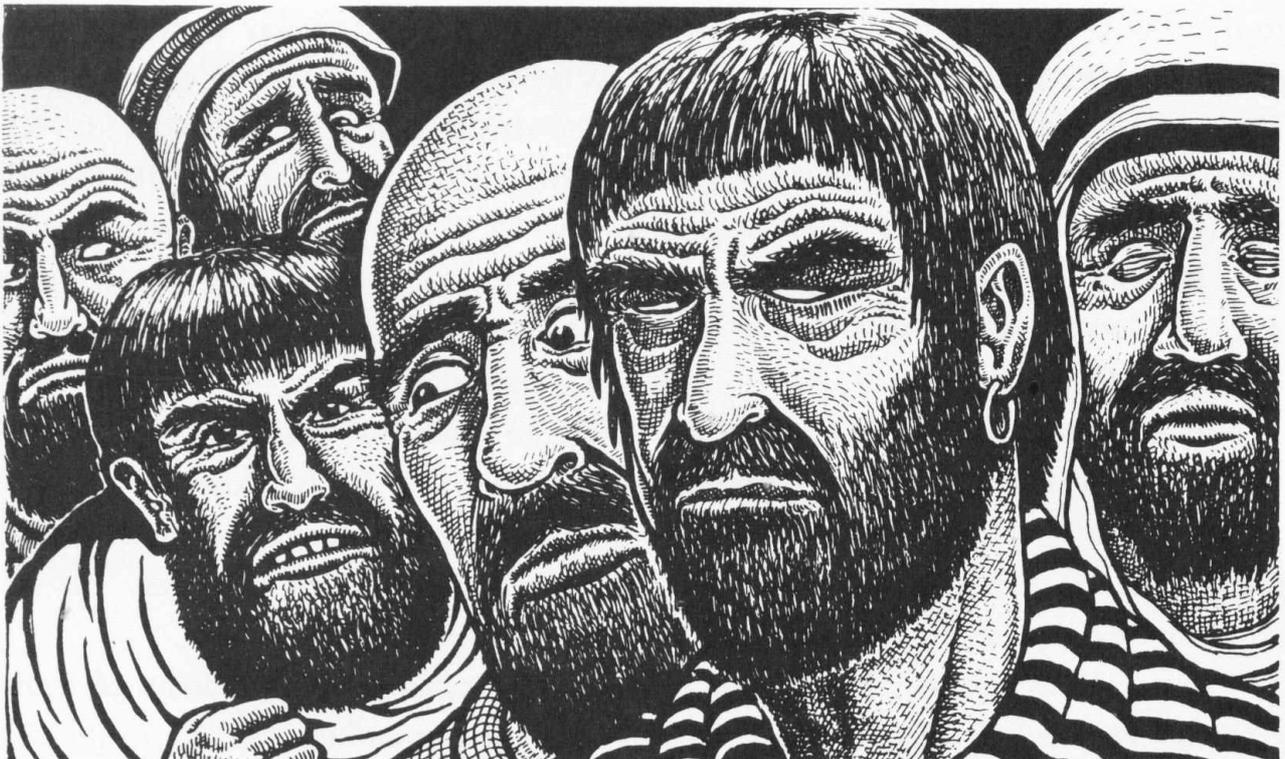
"You are too merciful with these murderers," one of Moses' officers remarked. "They will probably return to their tribe and join others in another bloody attack on us. Wouldn't it have been better to kill them and thus show our enemies that we will show no mercy for anyone who attacks us?"

"I prefer to let them think that we are not a cruel, war-like people," Moses replied. "Perhaps then they will be less likely to use their full strength against us."

"But we don't even know who our enemies are or when they might strike again," another officer spoke up.

"I know," Moses patiently replied. "All I did to find out, was to threaten to send

Some of the swarthy, bearded Amalekite prisoners appeared fearful. Others glowered sullenly at their captors.



those two you just released back to the camp where they were captured—that is, if they didn't answer my questions. Then I learned that our attackers were the Amalekites, desert people who have come down from Esau, the brother of our forefather Jacob. These Amalekites, therefore, are our distant cousins, and it would be good to meet them in peace. However, they are planning another attack tomorrow morning. Our men must take the few weapons we obtained from the drowned Egyptians and be prepared by sunrise to defend ourselves against these Amalekites!"

Joshua Comes on the Scene

A young man named Joshua, a top officer under Moses, was then and there assigned the great responsibility of choosing strong, willing men who had the courage to band together and fight off the Amalekites. Even if Joshua had been given this task days before, it would have been a very difficult duty. But as it was, he had only until sunrise to prepare for battle! (Exodus 17:9.)

By this time, news of the attack had reached all camps. This was quickly followed by messengers asking able-bodied men to report to Joshua at once and bring any kinds of weapons with them.

Before dawn a host of many thousands of men had gathered. Most of them were young, strong and full of zeal for the excitement of battle. Many others were angry and vengeful because of the vicious attack made on the rear camps just a few hours previously. There was no time for any training. All Joshua could do was encourage them to stick together in battle against the enemy.

"I am going to that high ridge over there," Moses told Joshua, and pointed to a long hill off to the south. "There I will be praying for the people. God revealed to me that I must hold the rod of God high as a token of victory against our enemies when they attack us again—which they shall surely do."

Moses and several of his officers and elders went at once to the high vantage point he mentioned. Immediately they spotted hordes of Amalekites off across the desert, moving swiftly toward the Israelite camps. Moses quickly sent a messenger back to Joshua to tell him that the enemy was already on the way.

Thus forewarned, Joshua speedily hid his men in the low spots to the east of the main body of Israelites. When the mounted Amalekites came charging over the desert knolls and rises they found themselves suddenly blocked by thousands of Israelite men. Not only were they blocked, but within seconds they were all but surrounded by the teeming defenders.

The Amalekites wheeled about to flee from this dense multitude of spear wielders. But only a part of them succeeded in escaping. The Israelites, using any weapons they

had, including shepherds' slings and their bare hands, brought down hundreds upon hundreds of the foe from their mounts.

The battle seemed to be over almost as soon as it had begun. The desert was strewn with dead and wounded Amalekites, whereas the Israelites seemed to be unharmed.

Having witnessed the apparent victory, Moses ceased his prayers and with great relief lowered the shepherd's rod he had been holding up while he prayed for the defeat of their foes.

"Look!" Aaron shouted, pointing to the northeast. "They're returning to attack again!"

Moses realized that he had assumed too much in thinking that the foe had been totally overcome. He raised his shepherd's rod again and resumed his fervent prayer for victory.

Again the attackers ran into trouble. The Israelites were ready for them because of a signal from the hill where Moses was. Hundreds and hundreds more Amalekites lost their lives or were too wounded to fight. They fell by the same weapons of war by which the Egyptians had intended to slay the Israelites at the Red Sea, and which had been vomited up by the sea so that the Israelites could be armed for combat to come!

Again it seemed that the Israelites had won out over the Amalekites. Again Moses stopped praying. He let his arms down, thankful for the relief from the physical strain as well as being thankful for God's helping the Israelites to stand fast against their foe.

But no sooner had Moses lowered his arms than the Amalekites charged back for the third time. This time they rushed into the Israelites with such fury that they forced them back dangerously close to their camps.

Perhaps it was then that Moses began to understand that Israel succeeded in battle only when he, Moses, held up his hands in prayer. At last realizing this fact, Moses again prayed diligently and held up his hands in an attitude of begging help from God Almighty.

The result was miraculous. Again the Amalekites fell back before the Israelites and fled away! (Exodus 17:11.)

This is a wonderful example of how Christians should pray when they have problems. Asking just once is often not enough. Sometimes God tests our sincerity by requiring that we be willing to ask several or even many times for the things that we need.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

ON TO SINAI

THE BATTLE with the Amalekites near Sinai had now lasted all day. Little by little the Israelites cut down the numbers of the enemy, and gradually forced them eastward away from the camps. By late afternoon Moses was very tired because of praying and holding his arms toward the sky. Believing that the foe was about to give up, he ceased praying and fell back to rest.

A Sudden Turn of Events

From that moment the Amalekites began to put sudden fury into their fighting. The Israelites had to retreat over much of the ground they had gained. (Exodus 17:11.)

"We're losing!" exclaimed Aaron. "Lift up your hands and pray, Moses, or these Amalekites will slay us all!"

"My arms are too tired to hold up any longer," Moses muttered wearily.

Among those with Moses on the hill was a man named Hur. He is said to have been the husband of Moses' sister, Miriam, and was a help to Moses because of his great influence and popularity with the Israelites.

When he heard Moses complain that he was weary, Hur quickly looked around to find a rock about the height of a bench. He motioned for others to help him, and the men rolled the rock up behind Moses.

"Sit back and rest on this stone behind you," Hur said to Moses.

Moses sat down with relief, but he was still too tired to hold his arms up. Hur took one arm and held it up. Aaron held up the other. Still holding his shepherd's rod, Moses started praying again. The three men thus carried on until the setting of

the sun. (Exodus 17:12.)

By that time the Israelites had scored a victory! Dead and wounded Amalekites littered the ground. The rest of them fled eastward to disappear among the sand dunes and hills.

Very tired, Moses returned to his tent. There was much celebrating that night because the Israelites had won in battle with little or no loss of life. But many weary ones, including Moses, didn't join in the celebration.

God spoke to Moses, instructing him to carefully record that day's events in the book in which Moses was writing the events happening to Israel during his lifetime.

"Tell Joshua to remember these things, too," God told Moses. "Tell him that he will have to look forward to more war from the Amalekites, but that I shall one day cause that enemy of yours to be utterly destroyed."

Not long after that, Moses ordered an altar built at Rephidim to honor God for sparing the Israelites, and to remind the people that God would continue to protect them from their enemies. (Verses 14-16.)

On to Sinai

After hovering for several weeks in the same place, the guiding cloud one morning began to change shape and move a little. This was the signal that it was about to lead the people onward.

The Israelites broke up their camps, banded their flocks and herds together and were ready to move on when the cloud started to float to the southeast. There was a range of mountains in that direction, and movement was increasingly difficult around high rocks and through narrow defiles. Travel was upgrade, and the multitude made slow progress over the rough, arid ground.

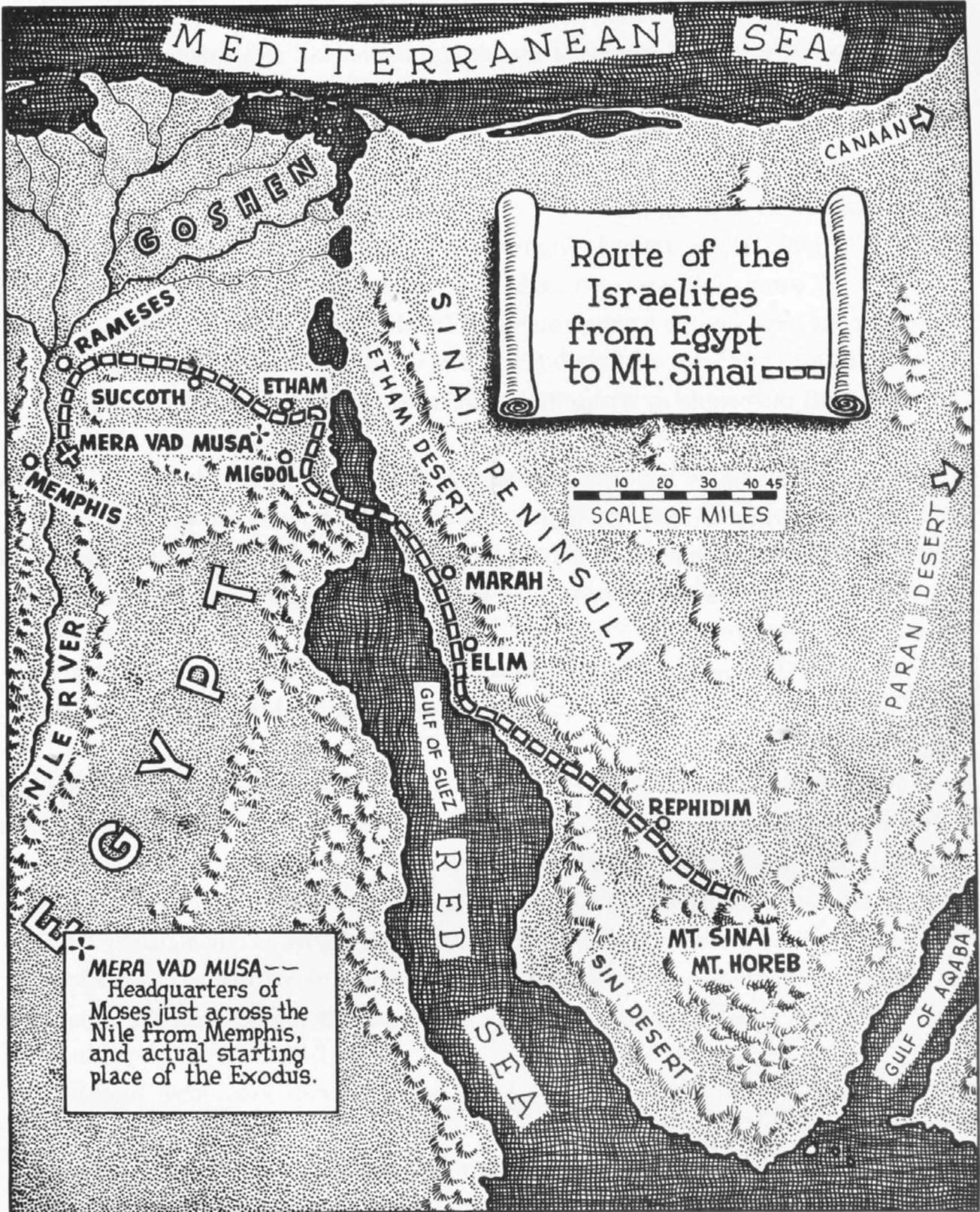
"This is a peculiar route by which to cross this country," one of Moses' officers remarked.

"Would you choose some other way and not follow the cloud?" Moses asked.

"But we are moving upward and directly toward those mountain peaks," the officer observed.

"I am familiar with those mountains," Moses told the officer. "That lofty one with the two peaks is Mt. Sinai, otherwise known as Mt. Horeb. Some call the higher peak Mt. Sinai and the lower peak Mt. Horeb. I herded sheep in those regions for a long time, and so this area is almost like home to me."

Moses glanced at the officer, and saw that his remarks obviously hadn't swept away the man's belief that the cloud was leading the people into the wrong path.



The land of Goshen was given to Israel by Egypt's Pharaoh in Joseph's day. It included all the eastern half of the Nile Delta down to the city of Rameses or Old Cairo.

"God has a definite reason for bringing us this way," Moses told him in a sterner tone. "When you learn what that reason is, you will remember it all your life."

The guiding cloud continued to move slowly but directly toward the high mountains. In fact, it moved straight toward Mt. Sinai, the mountain Moses had mentioned. It was on the slopes of this mountain that God had first spoken to Moses several months before—out of the burning bush.

Suddenly the cloud stopped—right over the top of Mt. Sinai!

"Look!" some of Moses' men exclaimed. "The cloud has come to a stop in the middle of the day! Are we to pitch our tents for the night this early in the day?"

"The cloud has stopped here," Moses told them. "We must do the same. It would be wise to tell the people to set up their camps for more than just an overnight stay." (Exodus 19:1-2.)

The people happily welcomed the opportunity to stop early. It had been a hot and difficult journey up into the higher elevations. But now, in the vast valley nestled amid the cluster of mountain peaks, the Israelites quickly discovered many springs of cool, pure water. This was a happy surprise in this area of bleak rocks and great stretches of arid sand and gravel.

Not long after his quarters were set up, Moses received a message from God.

"Come up on Mt. Sinai," he was told. "Come alone to receive word directly from your Creator."

Accompanied by Aaron, Hur, Joshua and other mounted officers, Moses rode up to the sloping base of the mountain. When the way became quite steep, Moses alighted and told the others that he would go alone on foot.

Moses was still spry for his age, and he set out with amazing agility up the rough, rocky side of the mountain. After a while he reached a flat ledge. He walked back from its edge, out of sight of those below.

Suddenly a clear, booming voice came from somewhere above on the mountain!

God Speaks

"Moses, you will deliver a message to the Israelites in the valley below."

Moses bowed in awe when the vibrating tones broke upon his ears. This was the same, tremendous voice he had heard from the burning bush months before. No other voice was like it—not even the angel voices by which God had contacted Moses from time to time.

"Remind the people," the Voice spoke out, "that I, the Creator of all the universe, have freed them from the Egyptians and have brought them safely to this place. Tell

them that if they will obey my laws, they shall become a special people—a nation I shall treasure more than any other nation of this world. They shall become a holy kingdom of priests who will guide and help all mankind, and who will some day rule over the whole world! Now go down to the people and tell them what I have spoken.” (Verses 3-6.)

Moses obeyed. He went back down the mountain to his tent. There he called for the heads of the twelve tribes and other elders. When they arrived, he repeated God’s words to them.

“Tell these things to the people,” Moses instructed them. “Show them that God has honored and blessed us by giving us a wonderful task to do. If we are faithful in these things, and live by God’s rules, a glorious and useful future is in store for us and our future generations.”

The elders, in turn, took God’s message to the people. Probably there were thousands and thousands who were thrilled by this message from God. On the other hand, there were probably more thousands who utterly failed to understand that God was giving them a wonderful opportunity no other nation would ever be given.

However, when the people were told about God’s great promise to them, they were quick to agree to the terms. Their attitude was reported to Moses, who later went back up the mountain to tell God that the Israelites were anxious to obey him. (Verses 8-9.)

“Go back to the people,” God told Moses, “and tell them to wash themselves and their clothes, so that they may be clean when I come down upon Mt. Sinai three days from now to be heard by them. Tell them that because I shall come down upon the mountain, no one is to come up too close to it. Set barricades along the slopes to keep the people from coming too near. Any man or beast who passes those barricades must be put to death for trespassing on hallowed ground.” God wanted to make sure the people respected Him so they would fear to break His righteous laws which make people happy. (Verses 10-13.)

Moses went back down the mountain again to take God’s instructions to the Israelites.

Before three days had passed, the people were prepared for God’s visit to Mt. Sinai. They didn’t know exactly what to expect. They had been told that they would hear their Creator’s voice, and although they were curious to know how He would sound, many of them felt somewhat fearful about what would happen. If people today were told that God would come down from heaven in three days, most of them would also be fearful—simply because most of them aren’t living as God wants them to live.

The third day dawned clear and mild, as it had for the past several days. The cloud still hung motionless above Mt. Sinai. There was nothing unusual to indicate that anything special would take place.

Suddenly, as out of nowhere, clouds began to form over the valley. Within only a few minutes the bright, blue sky was veiled by tumbling masses of dark gray vapor. The guiding cloud was lost from sight as the swirling vapors swung downward.

The mere sight of the darkening sky was enough to startle the people. But when crackling, blinding tongues of lightning began to stab out of the clouds, the Israelites were greatly alarmed.

Roaring thunder echoed and re-echoed between mountain peaks. The valley was filled with jolting, awesome sound and sights. It seemed that the noise couldn't possibly be any greater. But through it all came a long, piercing, clear blast of a great trumpet, which caused every man, woman and child to tremble.

It was the tremendous strain from a mighty, heavenly trumpet, announcing that God was coming down to Mt. Sinai! (Verse 19.)

The people had been told that a sounding trumpet would also be the signal for them to come out of their tents and camps and gather close to Mt. Sinai without trespassing beyond the marked barriers.

The mighty sound of the trumpet continued ever louder, but the thunder and lightning subsided. The clouds lifted, exposing most of the mountain to the searching gaze of millions surging toward it.

Abruptly the top of the mountain broke out in gigantic tongues of brilliant flame, as though it were being consumed in a sea of fire! Pillars of lighted smoke spewed skyward. Then the peak of the mountain seemed to explode in an awesome burst of eye-paining light!

People covered their eyes. Many of them fell to the ground, for at that moment the ground rocked and shook. Huge boulders, shaken loose by the earthquake, came thundering down off the mountain. None of them rolled so far as to injure anyone. Clouds of dust appeared here and there on the slopes where tons of soil and loose rocks cascaded from the mountain sides.

Even Moses shook with fear and awe at this overwhelming display of God's power. Yet Moses knew that it was as nothing, compared to what God could do—such as causing mammoth planets to collide or creating galaxies of stars in great, fiery, celestial upheavals over billions of miles of space.

The brilliant light remained atop the mountain. The ground ceased to shake. The blasting note of the trumpet faded away. Because the Israelites didn't know what to expect next, the utter silence that followed was, to some, even more terrible than



Roaring, ear-splitting thunder echoed and re-echoed between the quaking mountains.

the blinding lights and furious sounds.

What did happen next brought more fear and trembling to the Israelites. A loud voice, louder than the recent thunder, boomed down from the mountain top and

reverberated across the valley to the awe-struck listeners. It was like the voice that might come from a giant thousands of feet tall; and it spoke in Hebrew, the mother tongue of the Israelites.

"Come up on the mountain, Moses!" the voice thundered. "Come alone! Do not allow anyone to follow you!"

Still trembling, as were all the elders and officers about him, Moses walked past the barricades, slowly made his way up the side of Mt. Sinai and disappeared over a smoky ledge.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

SEEING Moses walk out of sight in the vaporous heights of Sinai had a strange effect on many of the people. Regardless of how terrified the Israelites had become, they were so filled with curiosity that they wanted to break across the barriers at the slopes of the mountain and follow Moses.

Before Moses could get most of the way up the mountain, God therefore ordered him back down.

Moses Rushes Down

"People are about to try to follow you up here," God told him. "Return at once and warn them again not to trespass on holy ground. Otherwise they will surely die. You may bring Aaron with you when you come back up—but no one else at this time." (Exodus 19:21-24.)

Moses went back down to order the would-be trespassers to move back from the barriers.

"Go back! Go back!" he shouted from a distance as he hurried down toward the people who were already climbing over the barriers.

This disobedient crowd, momentarily growing as others pushed forward from the main body of people who stayed respectfully at a distance, failed to heed Moses. As soon as Moses reached them, he again shouted his warning.

"Move back at once—all of you!" he cried out, motioning violently with his arms. "God will destroy any who come up on these slopes without His permission!"

Those close to Moses edged back, but the greater part of the throng, spread out around the base of the mountain, failed to hear him. They stuck close to the boundary



Moses hurried back to the Valley to head off the people who wanted to follow him up Mt. Sinai.

markers, determined to close in and learn what Moses had seen on his quick trip up Mt. Sinai.

Suddenly several huge bolts of lightning cracked down from above. Like gigan-

tic swords they stabbed into the ground only yards from the boundary fences. Sparks, rocks and stones hissed in blinding explosions in all directions. Those Israelites pressing against the barriers were showered with hot stones and sand. Gasping with terror, they stumbled and scrambled over one another as they struggled back.

When the people looked over the barriers to see the black, smoking pits where the lightning bolts had struck, they realized what could have happened to them if they had advanced up the slopes. All the people, awed at what had happened, moved a little way back from the base of the mountain. (Exodus 20:18.)

The claps of thunder following the lightning bolts were deafening. As the sound rumbled away, behind it could be heard again the strange and awesome tones like the voice of a giant.

The Voice of the Eternal Booms Out the Ten Commandments

"I am the Eternal, your God, who brought you out of Egypt—the land of slavery!"

This pronouncement of the One whom we know as Jesus Christ was followed by utter silence for a short while. It was almost more awesome than the trumpet blast that followed. The mountain vibrated to the ear-splitting thunder that introduced God's great laws—THE TEN COMMANDMENTS!

"You shall have no gods but me!" boomed the thunderous voice after the last echoes of the trumpet notes had died away. Remember, this was not the Father in Heaven speaking. It was the Lord—the spokesman who became Jesus Christ—who was speaking in the name of the God Family, which is the One Supreme, Divine Family. (Ephesians 3:15 and John 1:18.)

There was silence again. Moses and Aaron didn't know what to expect next. They didn't even dare glance up and face the brilliance of the light above them.

"You shall not carve idols or images of things in Heaven or on Earth for the purpose of bowing down to honor or serve or worship them!" the voice blasted forth. *"I am a jealous God. I punish those who hate me down to the third and even fourth generations that follow. But I show great kindness and mercy to all the descendants of those who love me and obey my laws!"*

Again there was a short period of utter silence.

"You shall not use the name of the Eternal your God in any wrong or useless manner!" the voice thundered. *"I will punish those who utter my name without a spirit of respect and reverence!"*

For a fourth time an intense quiet prevailed for a little while, to be broken by the tremendous voice giving the fourth of the Ten Commandments.

"Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy! You shall labor and do all your busi-

ness only on the first six days of the week! The seventh day of each week is a holy day in honor to your God! On that day you shall not do any servile work! Neither shall any of your family, nor your servants, nor your animals nor any persons living with you! Remember that your God rebuilt the Earth in six days and rested on the seventh! Therefore he blessed the seventh day, making it forever a period of holy time!"

Meanwhile, below, the awed Israelites down in the valley could hear the booming voice of the One who became Jesus Christ. (Deut. 5:26.)

The fifth silence was longer than the others. People grew tenser, wondering what was about to happen. They weren't aware, at the time, that this was the dividing point of the Ten Commandments; that the first four fundamentally instructed man in his duty toward his Creator, and that the last six were to show man's duty to his fellow man—all adding up to perfect love for God and for man.

Again the voice pealed out to give the last six of the great laws, each one set apart by a short span of dramatic silence.

"Give special respect and honor to your parents, that you may live a long time in the land that is a gift from your God!"

"You shall not murder!"

"You shall not commit adultery!"

"You shall not steal!"

"You shall not tell lies about anyone!"

"You shall not desire to wrongfully own the home of anyone else! You shall not covet the wife, servants, animals nor any of the possessions of another person!"

(Exodus 20:1-17.)

Again the heavenly trumpet sounded, signaling the conclusion to uttering of the Ten Commandments—the great, basic laws through which all mankind can find and enjoy happiness, good health, long life and prosperity.

In Force From the Beginning

These ten holy laws had been in effect long before then. Adam and Eve knew about them, and bitterly regretted breaking several of them. All the men of ancient times—including Abraham—who walked with God were aware of and obeyed the laws. (Genesis 26:5.) But down through the centuries man had become confused by the many pagan ways and rules that had become mixed in with God's laws. God chose this time and place to distinctly set forth these rules to His people, so that they could know exactly how to live in ways that would please God and be best for them.

But the Israelites were not the only ones to whom these laws applied. From the very beginning they were meant for every human being on down through time.

Obedience to them would have resulted (and does result and will result) in the best of everything for mankind. (Romans 2:11, 12 and 3:23 and I John 3:4.) A commandment-keeping world would have meant no wars, no poverty, no sickness, no divorces, no jails, no hospitals, no mental asylums, no military forces and no unhappiness.

Most men—even those who have been well aware of God's laws—have chosen down through the centuries *not* to follow these ways in which God has so carefully directed. This means that man obviously believes that his ways are wiser and better for him than the ways his Creator has given him.

Would anyone actually believe that a little baby has more knowledge, ability and wisdom than its parents? If that were so, then that little baby would have no need for its parents. That idea is no more ridiculous, however, than the belief that we can happily and successfully go through a long life and at the same time continually break every physical and spiritual law a wise God made for our own good.

For six thousand years most of the people of this planet have suffered with sickness, poverty and unhappiness because they have wittingly or unwittingly ignored the living laws of God. It is true that millions of people never even heard of God. That is mostly because their ancient ancestors chose to forget about their Creator.

Today the Bible is the best-selling book in most nations, and the chance to find out about God and His laws has come to millions and millions more people than ever before.

But at the same time, unfortunately, there are many highly respected church leaders, claiming to be Christians, who are doing a terrible thing. They are teaching that God's son, Jesus Christ, came to Earth to die so that man could be freed from keeping the Ten Commandments, and that those who attempt to keep these laws will be cursed by God!

There are no scriptures in the Bible to bear out this harmful lie. But there are many, many scriptures telling that religious leaders will spring up to publish such falsehoods. There are also many scriptures that show how God will punish those "false shepherds" who try to discourage people from becoming true Christians. (Acts 20:29, 30 and II Peter 2:1.)

Moses Returns Atop Sinai

Finally Moses and Aaron got up from where they had been kneeling at the base of Mt. Sinai. The light above them had been covered by a cloud, and there had been silence for quite a while.

Meanwhile, the elders came to Moses with a message from the waiting millions.

"Our people want to know what else God has to say to them," they told Moses. "However, some are afraid that they might even die of fright if they hear God speaking again. They hope that God will talk to you, and that you will tell them what God would have us all to know."

"That is as God wants it," Moses said to the elders. (Ex. 20:18-20.)

"Tell the people," Moses continued, "that as long as they stand in awe of God and obey Him, they should not be terrified to the point of illness or death. Our God is a merciful and loving God. Only those who disobey Him need cringe in terror before Him."

Again Moses went up Mt. Sinai. All the congregation of Israel remained at the base of the mountain, restlessly awaiting what would happen.

Moses was a little weak and shaky from this most unusual experience. As Moses reached the Eternal, a clear voice called out to him from somewhere above.

"Stay where you are, Moses. There is much more for you to learn before you return to the people."

"I am your servant," Moses spoke out. "Use me as you will."

"Then tell the Israelites these things," the voice continued. "Remind them that although they have heard a voice speaking to them, they have not seen me. Therefore forbid them to try to make gold or silver images of me to regard as gods to worship."

It wasn't necessary for Moses to try with great effort to remember what he had been told or what he would hear in the minutes to come. There was something about that voice that seemed to burn the words into his memory.

"Whenever the people sacrifice their burnt offerings and their peace offerings they must do so on a simple altar made of soil," the speaker went on. "Wherever and whenever this is done, I will come to bless the people. If stone happens to be more obtainable than soil for the altars, do not cut the stone. Tools will pollute the altar, so use stone only as you find it naturally. And don't build altars so high that steps have to be built to reach them. Keep them low so that the priests won't have to stride up and down in an unworthy manner."

A period of silence followed. Moses decided that the message from God was finished, and he started to leave.

"I have much more to tell you," the voice spoke out. "Your people will have trouble among themselves, just as they always have. They need further rules and decisions by which they can be judged. I shall now give you those judgments."

Thereupon God gave to Moses judgments or rules for the Israelites under most all circumstances. This required a much longer time than did the giving of the Ten Commandments. There were many subjects and situations to take into account.

They included how to deal with murderers, thieves and sorceresses, what to do with rough and disorderly people, how to settle various charges and claims, how to observe God's annual sabbaths, and even what to do with certain vicious animals. (Exodus, chapters 21, 22, and 23.)

God then gave a warning to send to the people—that they should always obey Him and be careful not to slip into a spirit of rebellion, insomuch that their Creator would be angered to the point of punishing them.

He also gave them a promise that if they would do as He directed them, He would perform more great and helpful miracles:

"When you come into the lands of the tribes to the north, I shall drive out those idol-worshippers before you. I shall even set swarms of hornets upon them, so that even their best armies will be unable to protect themselves. I shall free you of sickness and disease. Your women will bear many children. Your flocks will greatly multiply. You will live long, healthy lives. You will take over all the land between the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the deserts of Arabia and the Euphrates river. The inhabitants will be driven out, lest you mingle with them and begin to serve their gods." (Exodus 23:28-33.)

Moses returned to the valley to tell the elders what God had said. When the elders passed these rules on to the people, the whole congregation of Israel readily agreed to abide by them. (Exodus 24:3.)

Moses at once wrote down all these laws and conditions God had given him, thus making a record of the agreement between the people and their Creator.

The Making of the Old Covenant

To establish the covenant with proper ceremonies, Moses early next morning directed the building of an altar at the base of Mt. Sinai. Around the altar were erected twelve unhewn stone pillars to represent the twelve tribes of Israel.

Moses chose a group of young men to prepare oxen and goats as peace offerings and sheep and lambs as burnt offerings. After the carcasses had been placed on the huge altar, he took half of the blood from the animals and sprinkled it over the wood fuel on the altar. As the flames crackled through the dry wood, Moses read aloud the newly written agreement before all the people.

The elders, gathered fairly close to the altar, lifted their voices as one person.

"So be it!" they cried out. "We will do whatever God asks of us! We will be obedient!"

"So be it!" the people chorused. "We will do whatever God asks of us! We will be obedient!"

"Then witness this blood of our agreement with our Creator!" Moses shouted, and sprinkled the other half of the blood on the elders representing the people. (Verses 4-8.)

God had already told Moses and Aaron to come back up Mt. Sinai. They were to bring with them Aaron's two oldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, as well as the seventy head elders of Israel, which included Joshua and Hur. The party, with food and drink, set out to ascend the mountain not long after the sacrifices had been made to God.

At a place about halfway up the mountain all of them stopped to rest. Suddenly the guiding cloud, which was still hanging above the mountain peak, moved down to hide the upper part of Mt. Sinai. It grew dark so quickly that everyone became a little fearful. But then, out of the darkness, came a growing glow of dazzling light!

The light became intensely brilliant, causing Moses and the others to look down and close their eyes. When they hesitantly looked up, a few seconds later, every man gasped in surprise and awe.

The cloud was no longer to be seen. Instead, there appeared a flat, glowing expanse of beautiful blue, like a vast, level pane of azure crystal flecked with millions of tiny beams of light. (Ex. 24:10.)

"It's like a gigantic, floating sapphire stone!" some one exclaimed.

"It's growing clearer and clearer!" another burst out. "I can see right through it!"

Suddenly the men fell to their knees when they they saw a shining, radiant Person above the transparent, blue pane overhead. They just stared in amazement.

"God has come down to us!" Moses declared. The One whom they saw appeared later as Jesus Christ! It was not the Father whom no man has seen. (I John 4:12.)

At first the men were afraid. But as the minutes passed, a wonderful feeling of contentment and joy came over them.

"These are indeed the most precious moments of our lives," Aaron murmured. "Now we know what it means to be close to our God, basking in the unutterable glory of His wondrous love and mercy!" (Verses 9-11.)

Now, relaxed and at ease, they realized that they were hungry and tired from their long climb. They brought out their food, and happily ate and drank in the mighty presence of the One who had created the whole universe! (Verse 11, last part.)

That was a wonderful privilege—talking with God and conversing about His Law—that only those few men of ancient times enjoyed. And yet true Christians right now have an even greater privilege because of God's Holy Spirit guiding and dwelling in them, making it possible to talk with the Father in heaven through prayer.

After a time the beautiful sight above suddenly faded from view and was replaced by the cloud hiding the top of the mountain.

"Come farther up alone on the mountain, Moses," a voice spoke from out of the cloud. "I have written My laws on tables of stone to give to you. You must take them down and teach them to the people."

Moses realized that he might be gone for a long while, so he told the elders to wait for a certain time, but that if he didn't return by then they should go back to the valley.

"If I am gone a long time," Moses said, "look for advice to Aaron and Hur as your leaders." (Verses 12-14.)

Moses chose Joshua to go with him at least part of the way, and the two started on up the mountain. When they had reached a place not far from the top, their progress was stopped by a heavy cloud settling down over the summit. A little later, blinding, multi-colored beams of light moved through the vapor. (Verses 15-16.)

This condition continued hour after hour. Not knowing how long it would last, the two men made a sort of crude camp, and patiently waited to learn what God expected of them. Meanwhile, they spent many of those hours wondering what was about to happen and discussing the exciting events of recent days.

"Our God has shown us a glorious and happy future," Joshua observed. "The things He has promised seem almost too wonderful to be true!"

"God does not lie," Moses replied. "He will surely do all He has promised, but only as long as we obey Him. I can't help but wonder just how long the people will do their part."

Probably it was just as well that Moses couldn't foresee what was to happen within only a few weeks.

What Was the Covenant?

The covenant or agreement made at Mt. Sinai between God and Israel was nothing to be taken lightly. It was later referred to in the Bible as a sacred marriage contract between God, as the husband, and Israel as the wife. It was a binding promise that God would always take care of His wife, Israel, who would always be faithful—never to have anything to do with the false gods of other nations.

God, from the beginning, made the rules and terms which became the basis of the marriage covenant at Sinai. The rules were the great spiritual laws—the Ten Commandments—and the civil laws He later gave on Mt. Sinai. The terms were that Israel was to obey those laws, thus remaining faithful to the husband. Remaining faithful would mean happiness, good health, many children and prosperity. Unfaithfulness would mean misery, disease and poverty. It could even mean *divorce*.

When telling a story, it's generally not wise to jump ahead of the chain of events in the order of their happening. But to better understand about the old covenant, it must be told here that Israel later failed to live up to its terms.

The covenant was broken. Israel was punished and divorced. God sent Israel away—out of Palestine. (Jeremiah 3:6-10.)

Hundreds of years afterward, when Jesus Christ came to Earth, He drew up terms for a new marriage agreement with Israel. Jesus became the mediator or go-between agent of a proposed new covenant, much as Moses was the mediator of the old covenant. This new covenant will not be completed until Jesus returns to rule the world. (Hebrews 8:8.) After proposing the new covenant Jesus died, thus freeing Israel from the first marriage contract. You see, even though God (who was Jesus Christ) gave Israel a divorce and let Israel go, Israel was still bound to Him until the death of one of the partners. The one who died was Jesus Christ, who was the husband under the terms of the old covenant.

Meanwhile, hundreds of religious denominations are teaching that because the old covenant is broken and dead, the Ten Commandments are also dead and not to be obeyed. Nothing could be further from the truth. What terrible misery most of mankind has suffered because of believing that lie!

The Ten Commandments were the basis of the old covenant. They are living, unchanged spiritual laws, much as the physical law of gravity is a law that stays in effect no matter what any one has to say about it. The Ten Commandments are meant for man all down through time—not just for Israel. After the covenant was broken, the Ten Commandments remained in force. Remember they existed before the old covenant was made and it was because they were broken that Jesus had to die! They are also the ten main spiritual laws of the new covenant. Many ceremonial and ritualistic laws were later given to the Israelites to remind them of their sins, but those were not part of the Ten Commandments, and were added even after the old covenant was agreed to. (Jeremiah 7:22 and Galatians 3:19.)

For six long days Moses and Joshua waited for something to happen. It took courage and patience to wait that long in the cloudy vapors, huddled on rough, uncomfortable slabs of stone. There were probably moments when both men had the urge to give up and swiftly return to their warm tents and plenty of food and water. But they waited on God.

On the seventh day, probably a weekly sabbath, a voice finally called for Moses to advance up the mountain. Moses asked Joshua to wait for him, and disappeared into the mists which curiously parted just enough for him to see his way.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE GOLDEN CALF

THE ELDERS of Israel, who had been waiting about halfway down Mount Sinai, had long since returned to the valley. They had waited for hours for Moses and Joshua to return from the rocky heights of Mt. Sinai. But, not wishing to spend the night on the mountain side, they had hurried back before darkness could overtake them.

In the camps of the Israelites they excitedly told of the marvelous experience of being so close to the Eternal that they could almost see Him. The people were thrilled by the reports, but they were also interested in learning what had become of Moses and Joshua.

Moses and Joshua Disappear

"We saw them go up into the cloud that came down over the mountain," they were told. "We don't know what happened to them, but probably they'll show up soon."

The Israelites had watched Mt. Sinai from the time the elders and Moses had started to climb it. They had seen the cloud come down and envelop the summit. They had stared in awe at the long, multi-colored flames shooting up from the mountain and through the cloud as though from a belching volcano. They were still watching when a week passed and the giant tongues of fire shot up even higher on the sabbath.

By that time many of them were becoming more and more concerned about Moses and Joshua. Were the two men really safe up there on that blazing summit? Or had they wandered off on a side trail and become lost? Or could it be that they had fallen to their death in some deep ravine?

"God will protect them and provide for them," Aaron told the people. "We

shouldn't be worried as long as they are in God's hands."

The days passed into weeks. Still the cloud and the fire continued to crown the mountain. Even Aaron, who at first was certain that nothing was wrong, began to worry. Several times he and Hur considered leading a group to go up and search for Moses and Joshua, but each time they decided against it. They knew that it would be almost impossible to move around safely inside the heavy cloud. Furthermore, they feared that if they went up too high they might be struck dead for trespassing on holy ground.

Probably the one most concerned about Moses was Joshua. He didn't dare go up in search of Moses. Neither did he feel that he should desert the man who had chosen him to share that week-long wait before God called Moses farther up the mountain. There was nothing to do but patiently wait as the hours and the days dragged slowly by.

Constantly shrouded in the brilliant vapor, Joshua felt at times almost like a prisoner. But there was something about being so close to God that imparted to him a feeling of warm satisfaction. As for his physical needs, he and Moses had already discovered a small brook, and there was a fresh supply of manna six days a week.

Rebellion Against God's Law

Regardless of the signs, wonders and miracles God had displayed to Israel in the months just past, there were some of the people who secretly wanted to cling to the habits of idol worship they had picked up in Egypt. In spite of the awesome blaze atop Mt. Sinai, these people began to complain that Moses' absence showed that his God had forgotten them.

"We need a leader we can trust to take us out of these mountains and deserts!" these rebellious people declared.

This outbreak of ill feeling was quickly seized upon by others—the foolish, violent type of people who all down through time have sought their pleasure in forming loud mobs and creating disorder and destruction.

Within only a few days there was growing confusion and uproar in the camps of the Israelites. Made bolder by the increasing numbers of those who wanted to cause trouble, the complainers changed their demands a little.

"We need gods who can lead us to freedom!" they chanted over and over.

When Aaron and Hur first heard about these things taking place in various camps, they became very concerned. They sent officers to seek out the offenders and have them punished. But it was too late for that kind of action. The offenders far outnumbered the officers, who suddenly found themselves faced by a howling, frenzied mob in front of the tents of Aaron and Hur.

"Why are these people here?" Aaron asked an officer. "I can't tell what they mean by all this yelling."

"They're like people possessed of demons!" was the answer. "They've come to demand that you create a god or gods that they can actually see and to which they can pray to guide them quickly and safely to a land of plenty!" (Exodus 32:1.)

Aaron and Hur could scarcely believe these shocking words. But a careful study of the faces of the men before them made it plain that the mob was seriously intent upon what it had come for. It was evident that these men were the scum of the Israelites. Many of them weren't even Israelites, and they didn't truly represent all Israel. But their cause, however foolish, was gaining swiftly in favor with the Israelites. Furthermore, they were well armed. Something had to be done at once to keep them from violence.

"We must think of a plan to hold them off till Moses returns," Aaron said to Hur.

"Then perhaps it would be best to appear to agree with them for now," Hur suggested.

Silently praying that he could find a way to calm the mob down, Aaron strode out and raised his arms for silence.

The yelling gradually died down. The crowd surged in, anxious to surround Aaron, Hur and other officers and elders who were present.

"I have just learned what you want!" Aaron exclaimed. "You desire a new god or gods you can see! But how do you expect us to give you a new god?"

A confusing chorus of voices came from the crowd. One of the mob's leaders stepped up close to Aaron, and the people became silent again.

"When we were back in Egypt," the leader shouted, "the Egyptians and all of us had all we wanted to eat and drink. Yet the Egyptians didn't worship this invisible God you keep talking about. We want a god like one of theirs—one made of stone or wood or metal. We want a god that won't bother us with a lot of useless laws; a god that we can understand and see; a god that looks like something we know about—perhaps like a snake or an ox!"

Aaron did not reply at once. An idea was occurring to him. It was a risky plan to try to delay matters until Moses would return—if ever.

"Would you like a huge calf made of gold?" Aaron called out to the crowd.

A discouraging silence followed. Aaron was about to suggest something else when the thousands before him broke out in thunderous applause and shouts of agreement. This wild consent to his suggestion was small relief to Aaron, however. It was a frightening thought when he realized that the people would probably consider this a promise of his to actually build an idol for them!

"Make the idol now!" someone shouted, and thousands of voices rang out in agreement. Aaron realized that there was no backing out now. He would have to act on his words, meanwhile trusting that Moses and Joshua would return to rescue him from this horrid deed.

Aaron Makes a Golden Statue

"I am not doing this thing willingly!" he cried out. "If we create and worship any gods but the One who gave us the commandments, then we would be breaking the first two commandments. Only a few days ago we promised to abide by those laws. If we fail, God will be angry with us because He does not want to see us make ourselves miserable!"

A volley of angry shouts swelled up from the crowd. The people moved in even closer, glowering menacingly at Aaron and the officers who stood with him. Aaron held up his hands and nodded his head in consent.

"I shall arrange for your idol to be made," he told them in a faltering voice. "But you will have to help. Every man, woman and child wearing golden earrings must take them off and bring them here. We will fashion them into one piece, and from that gold will come the metal calf you desire for your god."

Aaron hoped that the Israelites would refuse to give up their ear jewelry, thereby sparing him from his promise to create a golden calf. But his hope faded when he later witnessed the long lines of people filing up to give their earrings.

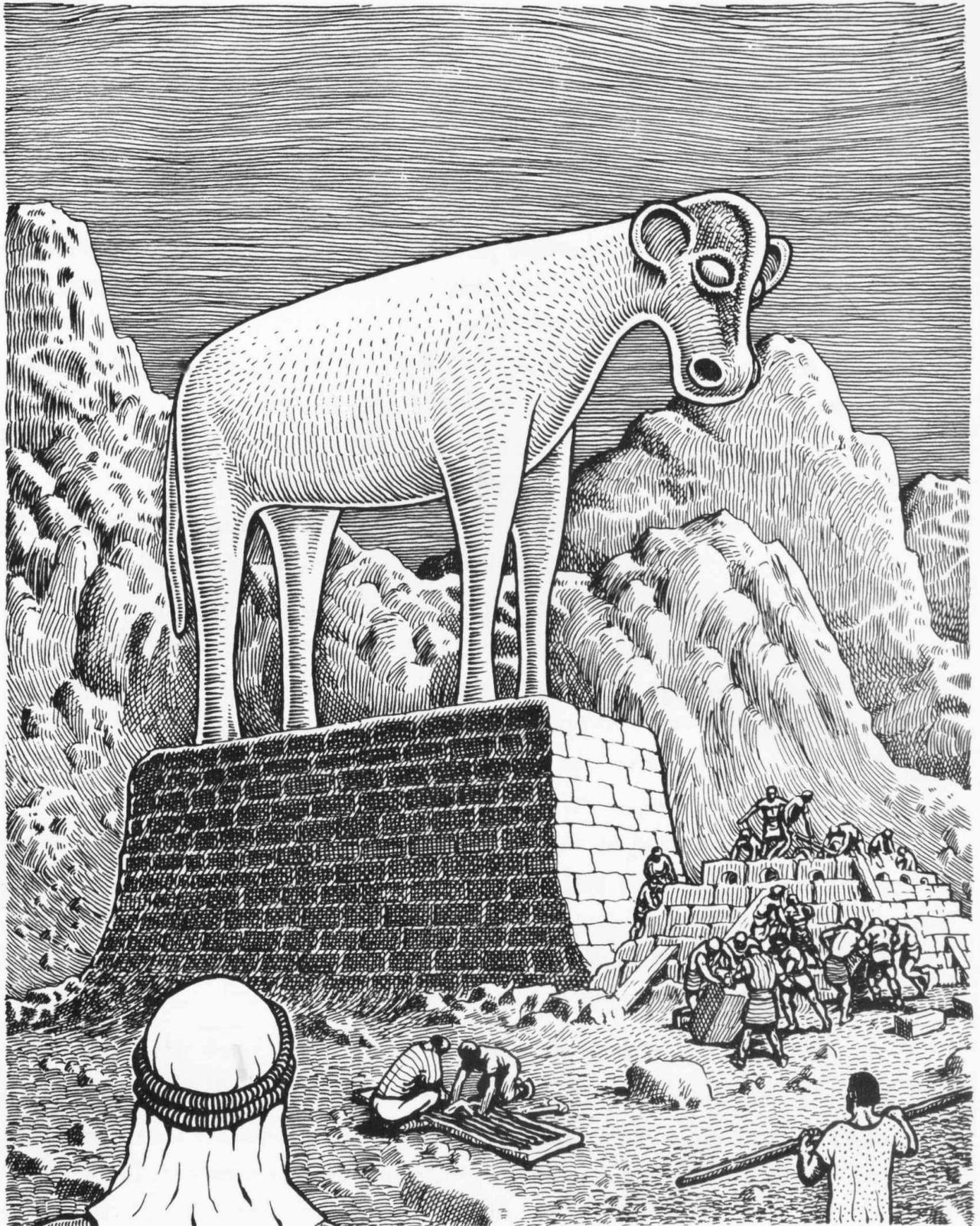
By the end of the next day there was an astonishingly large heap of ear jewelry not far from Aaron's tent. Hundreds of pounds of gold were in that gleaming pile. It was up to Aaron to carry on from there.

He sent for carpenters, metal workers, designers and sculptors to come from the multitude. Hoping to stall for time, he instructed these men to do their work well even if it required weeks. However, it took the workers only a few days, laboring in the privacy of a large enclosure, to completely build the large mold in which to pour the hot, melted gold to make a molten gold calf. (Exodus 32:1-4.)

Aaron then ordered a large altar built in front of the tent in which the calf image stood. When it was finished, he sent out messengers to all the people to proclaim that the next day would be a feast day to God.

He hoped that the people would change their minds and make their offerings to God instead of the golden calf. But it was a rather futile wish, what with an altar built so close to the idol.

That evening, when the tent was stripped away, the people gazed at the shiny, gold thing resembling a calf. From some there were grins and cheers of approval. Oth-



Hoping that Moses would return before it could be finished, Aaron ordered an altar built before the calf idol.

ers merely stared and shook their heads.

Early next morning people started thronging toward the calf idol, bringing ani-

mals for burnt offerings and peace offerings. The creatures were slaughtered not far from the altar that had just been built, and before long the idol was loaded with their carcasses.

Ever since dawn Aaron and Hur and some of the elders had kept anxious eyes on the slopes of Mt. Sinai, hoping that Moses and Joshua would return in time to pit their authority and influence against the rebellious Israelites.

But there was no sign of Moses and Joshua, and with almost seven weeks having passed since they left for the mountain, there seemed to be very little chance that they would ever return.

When Aaron saw men about to set fire to the altar wood under the intended offerings, he hurried out before the altar and raised his hands in protest.

"This is a feast to the God of Israel!" he shouted to the crowd. "These carcasses belong on the other altar—the one over there by the twelve stone pillars!"

"If you don't want us to sacrifice here, then why did you make this golden idol and the altar before it?" some of the rebellious leaders demanded in loud voices.

"Because I knew that so many of you wanted it so badly that you would get it one way or another," Aaron replied. "I had hoped that Moses would return before the idol could be finished, or that you would realize how wrong it was and would give up the mad idea of serving and worshipping an idol!"

"We know what we want!" the men shouted back, pointing to the idol. "*This* represents the god who brought us out of Egypt!" (Exodus 32:4.)

Striding past Aaron and up to the altar, they motioned for the people to move closer and watch the ceremony that followed. Aaron walked slowly back to his tent, where he turned to watch a plume of smoke billow upward from the crackling fire. Looking out over the crowd, he shuddered to witness thousands bowing before the calf image, which now appeared to him as something very ugly and evil.

The People Declare a Holiday

After the first offerings had been consumed in the leaping blazes, other offerings were tossed on the altar. Intense heat from the glowing coals quickly roasted the meat, which was passed out in smoking chunks to be eaten by the closest ones in the crowd. When others more at a distance complained of having no meat, more carcasses were flung on the altar. By then, although it was only mid-morning, a holiday spirit of revelry was swiftly developing. It was obvious that the altar would be in use all day and perhaps far into the night to supply broiled meat for the people.

The careless mood caught on with the people who had been standing far from the idol. Musicians banded together to play. Huge groups of Israelites began to dance and

sing to idolatrous tunes they had learned in Egypt. Many of them imbibed too freely of their wines and liquors.

Little by little the festive spirit developed into careless abandon. Riotous laughter and profane shouts gradually built up in the noise from the crowd. Encouraged by the basest beings in the mob, many of the Israelites allowed themselves to carry out some of their most shameful desires. Their disgraceful and ribald acts shocked the thousands of Israelites who stayed back and had no part in the sordid affair. (Exodus 32:6.)

Meanwhile, in the sight of all, the glory of God's presence glowed brightly from within the cloud resting over Mt. Sinai. Perhaps we would consider it very strange that the revellers would so quickly forget God when He was so near.

Yet if we stop to think about it, probably most of us completely forget about our Creator for hours or even days at a time, even though He is watching everything we do. When this happens, we're much more likely to forget what He wants us to do, and we incline to do the wrong things.

Moses Talks with God

Let us go back a few weeks to the time when Moses was called up toward the top of Mt. Sinai. You will remember that he left Joshua at a point high on the mountain, and that the thick cloud miraculously parted so that he could see to proceed without risking a fall from the dangerous trail. (Exodus 24:12-17.)

The moving lights from above became brighter as Moses came closer to the mountain's summit. By the time he had climbed almost to the top, the lights were so intense that the cloud vapor was burned away.

The higher he climbed, the less tired and more exhilarated Moses became. He realized that it was because he was approaching so close to the terribly powerful presence of the Almighty Creator of the whole universe.

"Stay where you are!" a strong voice suddenly called out.

Moses stopped and quickly looked around. He was on a flat, rocky ledge dotted by boulders that had fallen from the heights above. Although the shining aura that came from overhead nearly wiped out every shadow, he could see only a few yards in every direction.

"You will remain in this spot for many days," the voice continued. "During that time I shall tell you what you must speak to the Israelites when you return, and what things you must perform."

Moses fell to his knees and fearfully bowed his head to the ground.

During the next forty days he spent many hours listening closely to God's instructions uttered at various intervals. Every word and vision was burned into his mind,

made unusually alert and keen by God's inspiring presence. (Verse 18.)

Meanwhile, although trembling with awe, Moses was otherwise comfortable in that presence. Without it, he could have been miserably cold or could have perished from thirst or hunger, since he did not eat nor drink during those forty days. But he needed no physical protection from the elements, and no food nor water. The spiritual energizing power surrounding him gave him all the shielding and strength he needed. (Deuteronomy 9:9.)

All that God told Moses was to be carefully repeated to the people. He was to ask them to contribute materials with which they were to build and decorate a temporary tabernacle. It was to be a huge portable tent which God could grace with His presence while being worshipped or contacted during the Israelites' journey to Canaan.

Moses received every detail on how this tabernacle and its surroundings were to be built and furnished. So that he would know how everything should look, Moses experienced many interesting visions. These stayed in his memory so clearly that he later remembered exactly what God required.

"When this tabernacle is finished, Aaron and his sons are to be the chief priests in charge of all things having to do with it," God told Moses.

He even showed Moses how the priests' clothing was to be made and what ceremonies were to be performed. So many measurements, descriptions and directions were given that they require seven chapters in the book of Exodus. (Chapters 25-31.)

Sabbath Command Repeated

Toward the end of the meeting on Mt. Sinai, God again commanded Moses to remind the Israelites to carefully observe His Sabbaths. He spoke of more than one Sabbath, and by that God meant the several annual Sabbaths as well as the weekly Sabbath. These annual Sabbaths are mentioned in Exodus 23:14 to 16.

"My Sabbaths are holy," God told Moses. "They are a sign forever between me and everyone of you who continue to observe all of them that I am your God and you are my church, a people chosen for a very special task. It shall remain a sign throughout every generation forever. It is an everlasting agreement that your people will be blessed as long as they obey me in respect to my holy days. Those who refuse to obey will die!" (Exodus 31:12-17.)

Many years later we find not only Jesus, but the apostle Paul keeping these same days, according to John 7:14 and 37 and Acts 18:21.

On the fortieth day of Moses' stay near the top of Mt. Sinai, God ended the meeting by giving Moses two slabs of elegant stone. The Ten Commandments were on these

stone tablets, perfectly and beautifully written on both sides by God. (Exodus 31:18 and 32:15-16.)

"Leave here at once!" God commanded Moses. "Don't waste a minute getting back to your camps in the valley!"

Moses was a little puzzled that God would keep him on the mountain for so long and then almost angrily demand that he leave at once. Firmly grasping the two heavy stone tablets, he turned and strode swiftly toward the trail leading down from the ledge.

"You should know now, Moses," God called to him, "that many of your people have been acting wickedly while you have been up here. They have built a huge, metal calf, and right at this moment they are already breaking our covenant by worshipping this cursed idol!"

Moses froze in his tracks. If any man had uttered the words he had just heard, he would have doubted them. But he knew that God never lies nor wastes words.

He was too shocked to say anything at the moment. His hands shook as he carefully lowered the stone tablets to the ground. He sank to his knees and bowed his head to the ground.

"Do not crouch there and try to delay me in what I should do," God thundered. "I know how unruly and stubborn your people are. You have been a faithful servant, and from you I can still produce a great nation. As for the Israelites below in the valley, I should utterly wipe them out with a shower of fire from the sky!" (Exodus 32:7-10.)

"Have mercy on them!" Moses pleaded. "You have brought them this far. I beg of you not to let it be said by the Egyptians that you used your great powers to take the Israelites out of Egypt, only to slay them as soon as they reached the mountains. Remember the promises you made to Abraham, Isaac and Israel. You told them that you would multiply their children till they were as many as the stars. You promised to give the land of Canaan to those children. How can they receive it if you destroy them in your anger?" (Verses 11-13.)

There was only awful silence following Moses' sincere appeal. But after a short while, to Moses' great relief, God answered him in a tone that showed that His anger was somewhat lessened.

"Because you do not wish me to deal harshly with these sinful people of yours," God said, "I shall leave the matter up to you for the time being. Go down and seek out those who are guilty of starting this idol worship. Punish them. If you fail, I'll blast them out of my sight!"

Moses delayed only long enough to thank God for sparing millions of people in

the valley. Then he picked up the two tablets and hurried down the mountain side.

In a short while he approached the spot where he and Joshua had spent seven days while they waited for God to call Moses higher up on the mountain. Having been gone so long, Moses didn't expect Joshua to still be there, but to his pleasant surprise he found Joshua still faithfully waiting.

"I was certain that God would send you safely back," Joshua said elatedly. "What happened to you during these past weeks? What are those stone slabs you are carrying?"

"I must tell you all that later," Moses replied. "Right now we must hurry back to the valley. A terrible thing is taking place there!"

The Return to Camp

At that very moment the loud voices of the revelling people reached the ears of the two men on the mountain.

"War!" exclaimed Joshua. "The Amalekites must be attacking again! Otherwise what reason would there be for so much shouting?"

"Those are not the shouts of victors in battle," Moses murmured, shaking his head gravely. "Neither are they the shouts of battle victims. Don't you hear singing, too?" (Exodus 32:17-18.)

Joshua was momentarily puzzled.

Without further talk, Moses set off down the trail. A few hundred feet below,



Moses and Joshua emerged from the cloud and hurried down toward the noisy Israelite camp.

the two men emerged from the cloud over the mountain. From there they could look down to see a large throng of people grouped together, but they were too distant to make out what the crowd was doing.

Meanwhile, within their tent, Aaron and his family sat in glum silence as they listened to the howls, shrieks, chants and laughter of the people who were celebrating with such evil abandon.

Suddenly an excited officer appeared at the door of the tent and called loudly for Aaron.

"There is a report that Moses and Joshua have been seen coming down Mt. Sinai!" he shouted.



CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

MOSES BREAKS TEN COMMANDMENTS

AARON leaped to his feet when he heard Moses and Joshua were coming.

"Send out men to the base of the mountain!" he ordered.

"But don't you want to meet them?" the officer queried.

"No. Not yet," Aaron answered hesitantly, waving the officer off to his duty.

"Let Moses see for himself what is going on first."

Moses Arrives

A little later, when Moses and Joshua came into camp, the people who recognized them stared in silence. Those who were guilty were ashamed of what they had done and were doing. Those who were having no part in the idol worship were ashamed of those who were having a part.

When he came close enough to plainly see the towering, gold-covered statue of a calf, Moses came to an abrupt halt. Although God had told him that the people had turned to using an idol in worship, he hadn't expected this sordid scene.

He could hardly believe his eyes. The sight of so many of his people bowing, dancing, parading and chanting before the shining idol gave Moses a sudden sick, sinking feeling. At the same time he became very angry.

He seized the two stone tablets and angrily strode up before the altar in front of the golden calf.

"Here is the agreement we made with our Creator only a few weeks ago!" he shouted, holding the stone slabs aloft. "We promised to keep it forever, and yet you are already breaking it!"

Because there was so much noise from the people, only those who were closest to Moses looked up to see who was speaking in such a loud voice. When they saw that it was Moses, whom they had thought of as dead, they straightened up in surprise and quickly directed the attention of others to the angry figure before the altar.

The vast mob of noisy revellers became motionless and silent. Thousands of pairs of eyes stared with unbelief at Moses.

"Look!" some woman screamed hysterically. "It's that man Moses! He has come back to haunt us!"

A low murmur of awe rumbled up from the people. Another of the revellers, having imbibed too much to care what he was doing, staggered up to Moses and shakily pointed with pride to the golden idol.

"What do you think of our new god?" he mumbled loudly.

Immediately Moses was so filled with fury at what he had heard and seen that for the moment he lost control of his temper.

Tables of Stone Broken

He lifted the two stone tablets high above his head, then threw them down with all his strength at the idol altar. The slabs shattered to pieces and flew in all directions. (Exodus 32:19.)

Even before he had finished this rash act, Moses realized that he had let his feelings get the better of him. He had foolishly broken something holy that had come from the very hand of God.

Somehow the huge crowd was greatly affected by what Moses had said and done. People began to slink silently back to their camps. It wasn't long before most of the throng had dissolved. Those who remained gathered into sullen groups. They were mostly the ones who had tried from the very first to threaten Aaron into helping create an idol.

Aaron, Hur and their officers had little more to say in their defense. It was obvious to Moses that they realized that it would have been wiser to have relied more upon God and less upon their own schemes.

Even as he stood there, Moses was again filled with anger at the thought of how some of the Israelites had forced idolatry on the people.

"Build a huge fire around the idol!" Moses suddenly commanded. "Burn it up! Melt down every bit of gold in the abominable thing!"

Men hurried to carry out Moses' order. Before long there was a huge heap of wood and brush around the calf idol, and flames soared up to hide it in smoke and intense heat.



Intense heat from the heaps of burning wood and brush soon melted the golden calf down to the ground.

Most of the Israelites were relieved to see this evil image slowly melt down to the ground. But there were many who bitterly and wrathfully watched their idol go down to such a quick and inglorious end.

“As soon as the fire has cooled,” Moses commanded, “pick every bit of gold out of the ashes. Get workmen to grind all the pieces of gold into a very fine powder. Sprinkle that gold powder in the springs, brooks, wells and containers from which the people drink!”

It took many hours to carry out Moses’ orders. But they were carried out to the letter. Soon it was impossible for the Israelites to drink water without drinking some of the gold. To those who hadn’t taken part in the mad festival of idolatry, drinking the gold in their water wasn’t such a terrible task. But it did remind them that idolatry was a great sin. As for those who had worshipped the golden calf as their god, it was a grievous and shameful thing that they should actually consume a part of their idol. (Exodus 32:20.)

Aaron Repents

Discouraged by what had happened, and disappointed in himself, Moses turned to go to his tent. Looking up, he found Aaron, Hur and several officers and elders standing beside him.

For a long moment Moses stared searchingly at Aaron and Hur, in whose hands he had left the governing of Israel when he went up Mt. Sinai with Joshua.

“What happened while we were gone?” Moses demanded of Aaron. “How did the people manage to talk you into letting this terrible thing take place?”

“Don’t be angry with me because of what has happened, sir,” Aaron replied. “You know how these people are. They always want to do the wrong thing.” (Verses 21-22.)

“That isn’t a very good answer to my questions,” Moses rapped out impatiently.

Aaron hesitated a little before replying. He wasn’t anxious for Moses to learn what had taken place because he was ashamed of his part. He seemed to be more fearful of Moses than he was of God. He had tried in his own way—which wasn’t the best way—to handle the people simply by stalling for time and expecting help in the meanwhile.

“The people became impatient when you failed to return in a few days,” Aaron finally answered. “They thought that you and Joshua had probably died on the mountain. They began begging us for a new leader. It turned out that many of them actually wanted an idol. At first I refused to do anything for them. Then they became angry and threatened me. I decided to go along with their wishes, but I was hopeful that you would come back in the meantime, and that the idea of building an idol would never come into reality.”

“This monstrous statue of a calf—just how did that come about?” Moses queried.

"They wanted a metal idol," Aaron continued. "So I made them give up their gold jewelry. I had it melted down. I had already suggested that a large calf image could be made if there were enough metal. I reasoned that it would take many weeks to create something like that, and that you surely would return before it could be finished. As it turned out, the carpenters and metal workers labored with such speed that this gold-covered image was formed and erected in only a few days. If it could have been delayed only one more day, you would have arrived before this evil worship took place." (Verses 23-24.)

Moses listened to Aaron's story, but he wasn't pleased to learn what had happened.

"You know that our enemies are always spying on us," Moses said. "If they had chosen this day to attack us again, when so many of our people were lost in their pleasures, the Amalekites might have conquered us."

Moses wasn't yet finished with God's command to punish those who were guilty of starting the recent trouble. In fact, he had hardly begun.

Moses went to the main gate of the foremost camp. From there he sent out officers to go among the people and find those men who had no part in festivities before the golden calf, and who desired to worship only the one true God. In a little while a large crowd had gathered around Moses.

"These are the men who claim loyalty to God," Moses was told. "They are sons of the tribe of Levi, and they are willing and anxious to follow God's orders." (Exodus 32:26.)

"God has told this nation to punish those who were responsible for breaking the covenant," Moses said to them. "You who had no part in this thing must equip yourselves with sharp swords and go into all the camps to seek out and slay the offenders!"

There was a silence amid the crowd.

"I know how you must feel," Moses continued. "Many of the guilty are close friends and perhaps even your brothers. But you must follow this command which God gave to punish evildoers. The blood of those who must die will not be on your heads. God gives life and He takes it. It will be God using you to punish these criminals."

Realizing that God was using them as instruments of divine justice, the Levites obediently armed themselves, divided into groups with leaders and firmly went about their appointed task.

By the end of that day, when they had carefully gone through every camp, about three thousand men were executed. Thus were the idolatrous Israelites cut off from God and the good things He had promised them. (Verses 27-29.)

Next morning, while there was mourning for the dead, Moses called the elders together.

"Go and remind the people what a great sin—what a great crime—has taken place here," Moses instructed them. "Even though the guiltiest ones have been slain, God is probably still very angry with all the people for allowing it, and perhaps He has even more punishment in mind for them. I shall go back up the mountain and plead with Him to be merciful to all of us."

Moses Returns Atop Sinai

Already Moses had made several trips up Mt. Sinai. But he was anxious to go still another time to talk to God. When he reached the place just beneath the brilliant light on the summit, he kneeled with his forehead to the stony ground.

"My people have sinned even more than I realized at first," Moses said to God. "I know that you are a jealous God, and that you are very angry with them because of what they have done. But I beg you to forgive them. If you don't intend to forgive them, and if your anger is so great that you still choose to deal harshly with all of them, then I pray that you will do away with me."

"I shall not cause the innocent to suffer," God replied. "But remember that the guilty shall not escape my anger. I will not allow them to live.

"Now go back down to the people and tell them that because of their breaking the covenant, I no longer will be so close to them, lest I blot them out if they ever again so carelessly break my laws. I shall send an angel to lead them toward Canaan. As for now, let them show me whether or not they are sorry for their wrongdoing. Then I shall decide how to deal with them." (Exodus 33:1-3.)

When Moses had returned to the people and had told them what things God had spoken, many of them were quite unhappy to learn that their Creator no longer chose to dwell close to them as their Leader.

A large part of the people failed to realize just how great a loss this was to all. But most of them, to show that they regretted the golden calf affair, took off their jewelry and their best clothes and spent the next days in a spirit of mourning, as God commanded them. (Exodus 33:4-6.)

God was moved when He saw that the Israelites were willing to show that much of a spirit of repentance. For the time being He withheld any other punishment He might have had in mind.

There had been times when God had spoken to Moses within a large meeting tent. Knowing that God would probably no longer visit him in this tent while it was in the camp (because God had said that He didn't care to dwell too close to the sinning Israelites), and not wishing to lose contact with God, Moses had the tent taken up and moved outside the camp, and called it the Tabernacle of the congregation—

or the church meeting place; and those who were faithful to God went out to this Tabernacle to worship Him. (Exodus 33:7.)

When the people saw what was happening, they stood by their tents and stared in curiosity—especially when they saw Moses going out to the Tabernacle.

“Can it be that he is leaving us?” many Israelites anxiously asked.

“God said He was going to leave our midst,” others observed. “Perhaps He is taking Moses with Him!”

The farther Moses moved off in the distance, the more concerned the watchers became. Then something pulled their attention elsewhere.

The cloud floated away from Mt. Sinai and began to move in the same direction Moses was taking! There was a great stir among the people, inasmuch as it appeared that both God and Moses were deserting them.

People watched closely to see Moses disappear into the Tabernacle. By that time the cloud pillar had moved to a point directly over it, and as soon as Moses entered, it slowly descended until its lower tip was right over the door of the tent!

Because of the height of the cloud pillar, most all the people could see that it swept down to meet Moses. Most of the Israelites who saw all of what happened were greatly moved by the sight. Thousands were comforted to learn that God and Moses were still so close. Many of them stood by their tents and uttered words of thanks and praise to God. (Exodus 33:8-10.)

Later, the cloud returned to Mt. Sinai. Moses returned to his camp. For the next several weeks he went out to the tent that was removed from the crowd. Whenever the people saw him go there, and noticed the cloud going to meet him, they would again praise God.

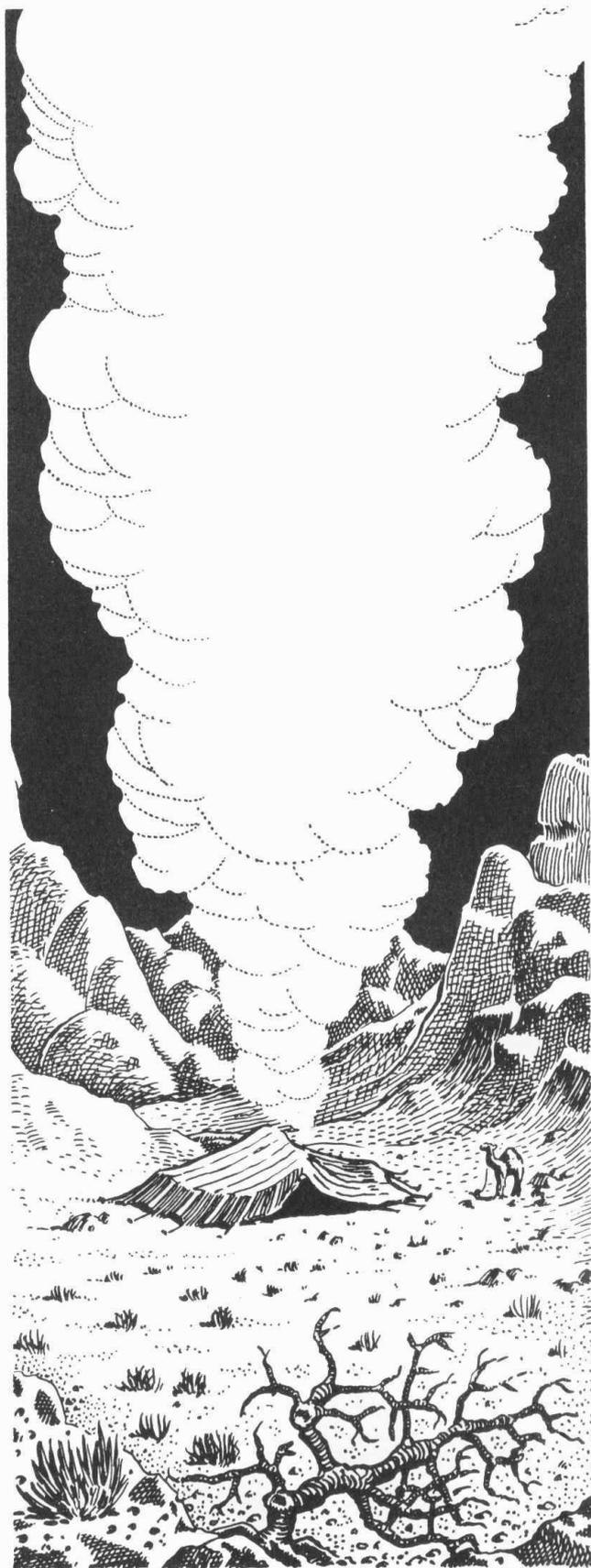
Thus Moses very often spoke with God, though the Eternal God stayed away from the Israelites. As for the meeting tent, it was never empty. Joshua was stationed there to keep things in order at all times. (Verse 11.)

Moses clearly remembered what God had said about not choosing to dwell with the Israelites because of their breaking of the covenant. The more Moses thought about it, the more concerned he became. He knew that without God's presence and help he would never be able to lead the people to Canaan.

Plans for the Future

In a conversation with his Creator, Moses finally became bold enough to ask what God intended to do about getting the Israelites out of the wilderness and into the promised land.

“Show me how I am to lead these people in safety and good health and keep



Whenever Moses needed to talk with God, he went to the special tent pitched off by itself, and God met him there in the cloud.

them from idolatry," Moses inquired. "I can't see how I can possibly do it without your help. In fact, I don't think I would even dare to try."

"The things you have said and done have pleased me," God replied. "I shall go along with you to guide you toward Canaan."

This statement from God made Moses happy. He was relieved and thankful, and felt so close to God that he made a most unusual request.

"Please show yourself to me," Moses asked God. "I know that I could more successfully lead the people to the land you have promised us if only you would let me know how my God appears."

"No man can look upon my face and live," God told Moses. "However, I want you to cut two tables of stone similar to those you broke. Bring them up to the top of Mt. Sinai early tomorrow morning, and I shall write on them the words that were on the first set of tables. While you are there, I shall quickly pass before you, and you will receive a glimpse of my back—but not face to face." (Verses 18-23.)

"Is anyone to come with me?" Moses asked.

"No," God replied. "You must come alone. No man must come up on any part of the mountain except you. Make certain, also, that none of your flocks or herds are allowed to graze too close to the base of the mountain."

When the conversation was ended, Moses sent out officers to make sure that

the barricades beneath the mountain were intact, and that the people were warned again not to go beyond them nor to allow their animals to pass them. (Exodus 34:1-3.)

Moses then quickly called in expert stonecutters and directed them to carefully hew two stone tablets out of beautiful rock similar to that from which the first tablets had been made.

While the stone slabs were being cut, Moses met with his top officers, including Joshua, Aaron and Hur.

"Tomorrow morning I am going again up Mt. Sinai to meet our God," he told them. "Perhaps I shall be gone many days. But no matter how long I am gone, I am now charging you with the task of keeping order in these camps. If you let these people get out of control as they did before, God will blot out every living being in this valley. Remember, your lives depend on your ability to keep matters in hand."

Early next morning Moses set out alone up the mountain. At that hour not very many people were up and around. But some of them in the camp nearest the mountain noticed their leader climbing up the rough slopes, and a few of these were curious enough to try to follow. However, they were stopped by officers who had been ordered to patrol the barricades.

Meanwhile, the cloud over Mt. Sinai floated down to hide the mountain peak. Moses climbed up through the thick vapor until he arrived at the ledge where he had received the laws from God.

"Enter the small cave at the end of the ledge, Moses," a voice instructed him. "Do not come out of the cave until your God has passed by."

Moses obediently stepped into the small opening in the solid rock and waited. Suddenly he found himself shaking nervously. The grayness of the heavy cloud was melting away under a dazzling light. He had reason to tremble, for the very Creator of the universe—the One who later became Jesus—was approaching close to him.

"I am the Eternal God!"

The tremendous voice, seeming to come from all directions, cracked like lightning. The growing brilliance became so strong that it sent stabs of pain through Moses' eyes.

In the next instant a dazzling figure—even brighter than the surrounding light—burst on Moses' vision. It was more blindingly brilliant than the sun, and seemed to be standing with His back to Moses. He saw the figure only for a moment. Then, before he could clap his hands over his eyes, the figure was gone and the light faded. (Exodus 34:5-6.)

"I am a merciful and gracious Creator," God continued. "I am slow to anger, loving and faithful. My love for thousands is not to be swayed. I forgive men of

their sins, but I will punish those who continue in their guilt. Furthermore, I will also bring punishment on their children, their grandchildren and even their great grandchildren!”

Weak, trembling and temporarily almost blinded, Moses stumbled out of the little cave and dropped face down on the rocky ledge.

“Oh, God!” he cried out. “If I have found favor with You, forgive the sins of my stubborn people! Dwell with us from this day on. Don’t cut us off from your protection and the things that only You can give us!” (Verses 7-9.)

After quite a silence, during which Moses remained with his face to the ground, God spoke again.

“I will renew the covenant with your people,” He said. “I will do marvelous things for them—things that have never been done before on this planet. They shall witness my great and terrible miracles.”

God went on to repeat to Moses many of the plans He had told him when Moses was on the mountain to obtain the first two stone tables. Moses stayed in God’s presence for another forty days and forty nights, during which he neither ate nor drank. As before, God’s energizing presence kept him well and strong.

God again wrote the Ten Commandments—this time on the stone slabs brought up from the camp. When at last Moses went back down the mountain, he was a happier man than he had been



Even before Moses could clap his hands over his eyes the dazzling figure was gone, the light faded.

when he previously had come down with Joshua. Now he had a new set of tables, the covenant had been renewed and there was no sign of trouble in the camps. (Verses 27-28; Deuteronomy 10:1-5.)

When he reached the barricade, the first people to meet him stared and backed away in fright.

"Look at his face!" some of them muttered fearfully.



CHAPTER THIRTY

MOSES RETURNS

MOSSES had just come down Mount Sinai. He wondered why those who saw him became frightened. He wasn't aware that strange, dazzling shafts of light were beaming out from his skin!

Aaron was among those present to meet Moses, and even he fell back with others when he saw the rays of light shooting forth from Moses' face.

"Why are you people staring and backing away from me?" Moses demanded. "Don't you recognize me?"

No Answer!

No one answered him. The wide-eyed people silently continued moving back. Moses stepped up his pace until he was closer to the retreating crowd. Suddenly, even in the growing darkness, he spotted Aaron.

"Approach me, Aaron!" Moses called out.

Aaron slowly but obediently moved out of the crowd and toward Moses.

"Why do these people keep walking away?" Moses asked in a puzzled tone. "They act as though they are afraid of me."

"They are!" Aaron replied, shielding his eyes from the strong glow of Moses' face. "Don't you know that your skin is shining so brightly that one can hardly see your eyes, nose and mouth?"

Moses was indeed startled to learn this from Aaron. (Exodus 34:29-31.)

"It must be because of the close contact I have had with God," Moses observed thoughtfully. "My skin must have absorbed a bit of His glorious radiance!"



When Moses reached the barricade, he was puzzled because the people backed away from him in fear. He did not know his face radiated light from God's presence.

"Night is coming on, and your face appears to be glowing even stronger," Aaron said. "Take my cape and hide your head in it while I accompany you to your tent. If you go through the camp without a covering, you will surely create too much alarm

—especially among little children.”

Moses took Aaron’s suggestion, and the two of them, along with some servants, reached Moses’ quarters without causing any fright. However, a curious, murmuring crowd followed them all the way from the slopes of Mt. Sinai.

Moses Summons the Elders

Next morning Moses summoned the elders together to tell them what had happened to him while on Mt. Sinai. But before appearing before them, he put a heavy veil over his face so that they wouldn’t be troubled by the dazzling light from his skin.

After speaking to the elders, he appeared before the congregation. Again he wore the veil, but the Israelites could plainly see light coming through. Some, including small children, were somewhat frightened. Others felt a sense of guilt and discomfort at the mere sight of this light that had come from God. Most of them were so curious and excited over this mysterious light that they regarded their leader with renewed interest and respect, and listened closely to all he had to say.

As the days passed, Moses continued to wear the veil except when he was alone or when he went out to talk with God in the tent pitched outside the Israelites’ camps. There were times when certain ones saw his dazzling face, but not very often. (Verses 32-35.)

Moses’ skin gradually lost its unusual glow as the weeks went on, and when at last it was again normal, he no longer had any use for the veil.

Moses was wondrously blessed in having this exciting experience of being so close to the Creator that his skin shone brightly for many days. Wouldn’t you be happy and excited to have such a thing happen to you?

Believe it or not, it’s possible for you to experience a blessing that is very much like that given to Moses. It can come by your being truly sorry for the wrong things you have done, and turning to being faithfully obedient to all of God’s living laws, as Moses was. When that happens, your face won’t glow with a blinding light. But it will glow with happiness, and you’ll become a shining example of how God wants all of us to live. And as long as you stay close to God you will be a strong light to those about you. (Matthew 5:14-16.)

In his talk to the people after he had come down from Mt. Sinai, Moses told them that God had reminded him again to warn them that they should be very faithful in carefully observing the weekly Sabbath. Any who forget it soon forget that God is Supreme Ruler and soon forget His truth.

“God wants us always to keep both the weekly and annual Sabbaths. They are an eternal sign that we are God’s people and that He is our God,” Moses explained.

“But now I bring you news of a very special work we are to do right away. Some of you will be so ambitious in this task that you will be tempted to work on the Sabbath. Our God knows this, and therefore He has instructed that no fire shall be kindled on the Sabbath for the purpose of sharpening tools, melting metals or any other such reason having to do with unnecessary labor. God is aware of your needs. He hasn’t forbidden the use of fires on the Sabbath for light or heat or other necessities.” (Exodus 35:1-3.)

How Men Misrepresent God’s Law

Moses had constantly been discouraged by the manner in which many of the Israelites had failed to obey that fourth commandment. But if he could have foreseen how so-called spiritual leaders of the future would twist, distort and even turn their backs on that particular law, he probably would have been a lot more discouraged.

Posing as ministers of God, these men today proclaim to any who will listen that it is impossible to obey the Ten Commandments, and that a curse will be upon any who try to obey these eternal spiritual laws. One of their many arguments is that it isn’t possible to observe the fourth commandment because people can’t live without kindling a fire every day of the week!

“Jesus nailed the Ten Commandments to the cross,” they foolishly argue.

The Ten Commandments were not nailed to the cross. *Christ* was nailed to the cross to pay for our sins by dying in our stead. Because Jesus Christ was the supreme sacrifice, the temporary laws having to do with sacrifices are no longer necessary. They were given in Moses’ day to remind us of sin and of our coming Saviour. We don’t need them today since Christ has already come. (Galatians 3:19 and Hebrews 10:3-4.) But the Ten Commandments are everlasting. They are not ceremonial but spiritual.

Eternal life is a gift from God. You can’t earn eternal life—But God will not give you eternal life unless you are willing to obey Him!

To seek for the gift of living forever as a son of God—as a spirit being—we must first repent of our sins. That is, we must really feel deep regret and sorrow for all the wrong things we have done. Every human being has sinned, which means that every one has at one time or another failed to obey God’s sacred laws—and the Ten Commandments are the main laws.

When we repent, and ask that Christ bare our sins away, God is pleased to forgive us of our wrong ways—neglecting to live by the Ten Commandments. When God forgives us, all the mistakes we have made in the past are blotted out. But from this time on, if we hope to gain the priceless prize of everlasting life, we must continue to please God by living by His rules. These rules are for our own hap-

piness, good health and success. Some of them are difficult to obey at times. But if God knows we want to keep them, He helps us do so. Sticking to those rules gradually changes our lives. We become stronger and stronger in character—in the ability to obey God. We overcome, one by one, the ways of living that aren't good for us.

God shows us, through His Ten Commandments, the way of life we are to follow. And if we follow it to the very end of our lives, we have the great hope that we will one day be changed into ever-living spirit beings. (Mat. 10:22.)

When we stop to consider that most of the churches of this so-called Christian world teach the exact opposite of many things God teaches through the Bible, we begin to realize how careful we must be to see if the Bible actually says what many self-styled spiritual leaders have to say.

This matter of "kindling fires," though it may not seem very important at first reading, is just one example of how those who dislike God's laws vainly try to talk away the Ten Commandments. They just do not see the spiritual intent of God's law.

Having warned the people of the importance of observing the Sabbath, Moses outlined to them God's wonderful plan for a tabernacle in which He could be with the Israelites as they moved toward Canaan.

"Even though we have greatly sinned," Moses told the people, reminding them of their shameful conduct before the golden calf idol, "our God has promised to stay in our midst."

