

THE STORY
OF THE BIBLE

VOLUME THREE

Herbert W. Armstrong led the Worldwide Church of God (formerly The Radio Church of God until 1968) until his death in 1986. Hundreds of millions heard his voice and read his literature. God called him in the fall of 1926 and he was converted in the spring of 1927. Over the course of Mr. Armstrong's ministry, God revealed through him a great many true biblical doctrines, which had been lost to the Church through the centuries. After his death, his successors ceased to believe and teach these doctrines. Although copyright law prohibits The Restored Church of God from reproducing and distributing literature produced while he led the Worldwide Church of God, we are committed to the preservation and teaching of all of these truths!

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INTRODUCTION

by David C. Pack

This is the third volume of a special series. These books truly represent “THE STORY OF THE BIBLE.” Many have attempted to write various kinds of “Bible Story Books,” but they are usually written only for children, and are primarily designed to entertain instead of *educate* or *inspire*. The reader will see that the wonderful style and artwork of this series capture the spirit of God’s Word, with its intended lessons and vital meaning.

Most children’s versions of the Bible terribly misrepresent important stories that it contains—and they are written with wrong emphasis—and wrong *meaning*! Instead of leading children to the true God, and to the true doctrines of His Word, children are left with the impression that the Bible only contains a *few* stories, and is mostly a book about war, violence, blood, thunder and death.

This is terribly wrong!

In keeping with the modern generation’s obsession with graphic violence, most efforts to reflect the teachings of the Bible “play” to this interest. Youth are given what they *want* to read, not what they *need* to understand. The many stories of the Bible are intended to teach VITAL LESSONS to people of *all* ages. Modern writers miss the mark when they *cater to* children, rather than properly *teach* them what God intends.

If young people learn the Bible in a *wrong* way—with emphasis on the *wrong* things, while ignoring the enormous number of lessons that the Bible contains—at least two bad things result.

First, all these wrong concepts and approaches must be unlearned and replaced by right knowledge and understanding of what the Bible *really* says. Unlearning error is a most difficult thing to do, and is actually far harder than learning the truth correctly the first time, leaving no need to sweep the mind clean of what has been wrong or misunderstood.

Second, young people will later find the stories of the Bible have been trivialized and made irrelevant, and they may find themselves turned off by its message rather than being excited and thrilled about what they are learning.

The modern system of education is morally and spiritually bankrupt! Deluded educators have been biased against God and His Word by the atheistic teaching of evolution poured into them from childhood. They have taught young people for decades that there are “no absolutes” and that they must follow “situation ethics.” They have led the world into a kind of secular humanism—where people are driven by how they *feel* rather than clear definitions of *right* and *wrong*! But there is right and wrong in life—and those who are teaching the children of this world have cut themselves off from this knowledge

(Isaiah 59:1-2). They cannot teach what they were never taught!

Also, this world's churches keep young people steeped in traditional pagan philosophies and teachings that have deceived the world for millennia. They have ignored the great spiritual principle of CAUSE and EFFECT that governs *every* aspect of life. They have neglected to teach true *spiritual* values. They have defaulted their responsibility in all the critical areas of leadership—and have utterly failed in their greatest responsibility, which should have been to instill in young minds the marvelous truths of God's Word—to teach youth how to live, not just how to earn a living.

This is a tragic state of affairs!

Many who attempt to study the Bible become confused, frustrated and disillusioned, believing that it is too difficult to understand. As a result, many who *would* seek to teach their children true Christian standards and values, either give up altogether or leave such education to the *many* theological “experts,” who offer no end of differing—and conflicting—views.

Such an approach only serves to further confuse young people about the Bible, thus, in many cases, alienating them from it. But those who truly seek to understand God's Word, without adding their own interpretation (II Peter 1:20), will find that there *is* simplicity in it (II Corinthians 11:3).

Children need to be taught this simplicity! They need to know who and what they are—and why they were born—that they are future sons of God in the making!

You were born for a *reason*. Your life has a SUPREME PURPOSE! The Bible reveals how to be in harmony with the true God—and His purpose for life. The world is ignorant of this. So are most parents. They have no idea how or what to teach their children. No one is guiding parents, because no one knows *how* to guide them. Sadly, though the Bible is a gripping, interesting—even *fascinating*—book of true stories (all part of one great story), most find it dull, dry and boring.

This series is written to completely change this misconception in the minds of people of all ages! It uses language designed to expand your mind through the use of word pictures. Our goal has been to make the Bible *real*—to make it talk directly to parents and children. With only a little explanation, parents will be able to read these volumes to children as young as age three.

In today's world, youth are universally misguided, abused, neglected and ignored and this fuels a variety of rampant, escalating social problems. This is because society as a whole has rejected the SOURCE of true happiness, success, peace and fulfillment—GOD'S WORD. As King Solomon admonished, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

How many are even *attempting* to do this today?

Many true doctrines of God were restored to His Church in the middle of the 20th century. By the 1990s, they had largely been discarded by its new leaders. Part of our commission is to once again “restore what was restored” and to continue to “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:6). The Restored Church of God *has* completely restored *all* God's doctrines to the Church!

Under the faithful leadership of Herbert W. Armstrong (1892-1986), various Church youth programs were established as part of the fulfillment of this important responsibility. These included the Y.O.U. program (Youth Opportunities United—for teens), and the Y.E.S. program (Youth Educational Services—for young children). There was also a *Summer Educational Program* (S.E.P.), providing teenagers with the opportunity to fellowship with other teens and develop many skills and talents in a camp environment.

There was also much youth-oriented *literature*, offered to the young people of God's Church. These included a *Youth* magazine for teenagers, *Youth Bible Lessons* for children from kindergarten through sixth grade—and *The Bible Story* series.

Children are far too precious to ignore or neglect. While parents *must utilize* the tools that are available to them, they cannot do this if these tools have not been created.

As the only true extension of Mr. Armstrong's ministry, The Restored Church of God is re-creating these same written tools—as well as the magazines, books, booklets, articles and letters that once taught the full truth of God to millions around the world.

This series is being rewritten—with new volumes to appear on a regular basis—to once again make the Bible *simple*, so that the stories in it come to life! But these volumes are *not* just for children! It is our hope that parents and children alike will enjoy and benefit from them. Its forerunner was a six-volume work, once described as “written for children 5 to 105.” The original series is no longer available—but this new one is!

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

THE FIRST CENSUS

Our story thus far: After years of living under the harsh rule of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, Israel was delivered from slavery by the Eternal God. Using Moses and Aaron as His human representatives, God led the Israelites out of Egypt and into the rugged, sparse wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula.

Then, after the people reached Mt. Sinai, God revealed the Ten Commandments. These great laws can be summed up in one word: Love—first toward God, then toward other people. God also revealed various laws, statutes and judgments designed to help Israel obey Him.

Next, God proposed a marriage covenant, or special agreement, between Him and Israel: If the Israelites agreed to put God first, worship only Him, keep His laws, and walk in all His ways, the Eternal promised to personally lead Israel into Canaan—the Promised Land. He would also protect the Israelites and grant them victory over their enemies. God would personally fight their battles for them, and drive out all the pagan idol-worshippers who lived in the land.

After hearing God's proposal, the Israelites quickly agreed to become His people. This pleased God.

He then led Israel to build a special tabernacle—a kind of portable temple—which represented His royal throne in heaven. Because it was portable, the Israelites would be able to take it with them as they traveled to Canaan. By having His presence dwell in His tabernacle, God would be able to live among His chosen people.

Dedicating God's Tabernacle

When the tabernacle was finished, Moses anointed it, setting it apart for holy use. Then, each of the leaders of the tribes of Israel (except for the tribe of Levi) presented special offerings for the tabernacle for Aaron, his sons, and the Levites. They were to use these gifts—carts,

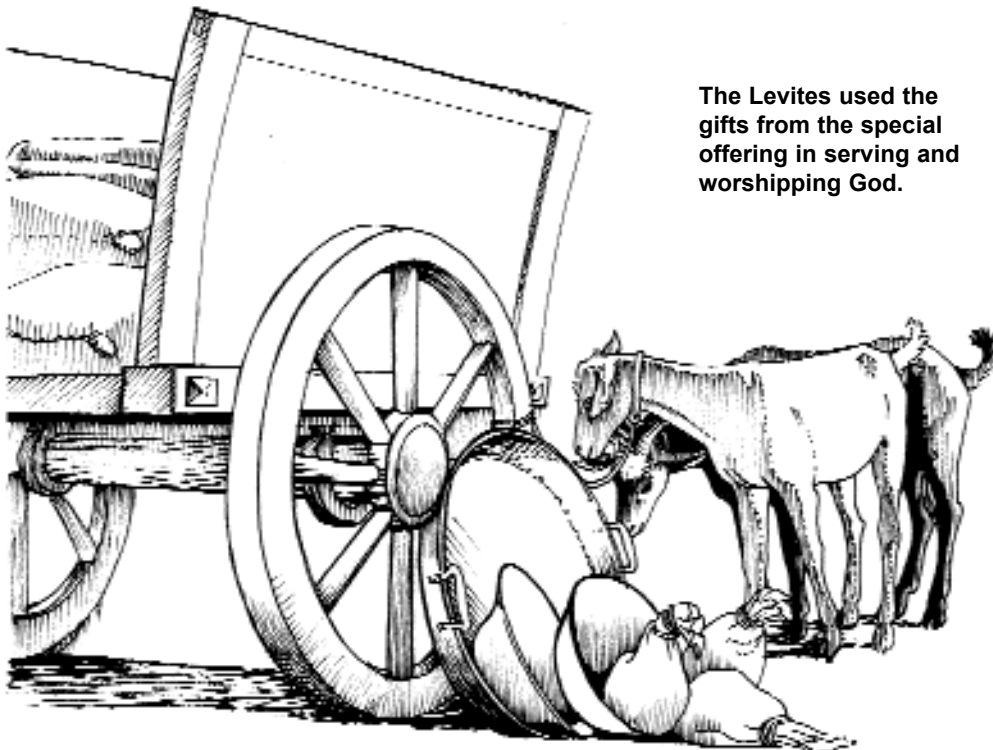
gold pans, silver platters and bowls, fine flour, grain, goats, sheep, bulls, rams and oxen—in worshipping God.

The Second Passover

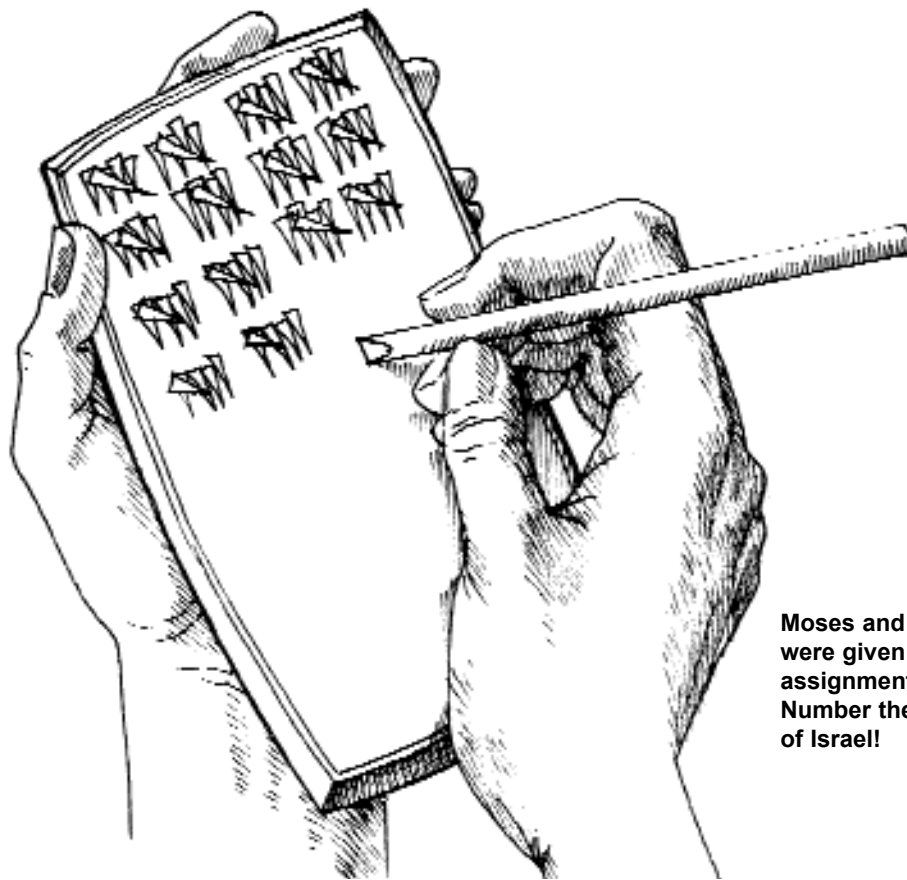
In the first month of the second year since Israel had left Egypt, God reminded His people to keep the Passover: “On the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month, you shall keep the Passover and present the offerings that are due.”

All of the Israelites wanted to keep God’s command. However, a problem arose. A group of men had a friend who suddenly died. Out of friendship and deep respect, they buried his body. But because they had come in contact with a dead body, the men were unclean before God’s eyes. They would not be allowed to keep the Passover ceremony. Wanting to obey God, the men went to Moses and Aaron to seek their help.

Moses said to them, “Wait here and be patient. I will go see what God wants you to do.” Then he drew away from the people, and privately sought God.



The Levites used the gifts from the special offering in serving and worshipping God.



**Moses and Aaron
were given a special
assignment by God:
Number the children
of Israel!**

The Eternal answered Moses' prayer, saying, "The Passover is extremely important for all My people to observe. Therefore, if serious situations arise that keep any of the Israelites from observing this ceremony—whether they have made themselves unclean from touching a dead body, or are far away on a journey—they shall keep the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the *second* month. But whoever purposely chooses to ignore the Passover and refuses to observe this day shall be cut off from My people Israel" (Numbers 9:1-14).

Israel's First Census

God then decided to give Moses and Aaron a special assignment involving the whole camp of Israel.

He said, "I want you and your brother Aaron to take a census of My people. Go throughout the whole congregation of Israel and count all the men who are twenty years old and above—all the Israelites who are able to fight in My army and go to war" (Numbers 1:1-3).

“But do not count the Levites; I have set them apart to work in My holy tabernacle” (verses 47-51).

“I shall appoint twelve leaders to help you take this census. Each leader will represent each tribe of Israel: Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, Asher and Naphtali” (verses 4-16).

Moses, Aaron and the twelve leaders faithfully carried out God’s instruction. They went through all the families of Israel and counted the number of men who were twenty years old and older. When this was done, the census revealed that Israel had a standing army of 603,550 men (verses 44-46).

Considering that the women and children outnumbered the men, and that neither the tribe of Levi nor the foreigners who lived among the people were counted, Israel must have had more than two million people living within its camp!

Some today do not believe this. They cannot understand how more than two million people could march through the harsh, barren wilderness of the Sinai, with its sparse vegetation and trees, and limited water supply, and survive. These same unbelievers fail to realize that the God of the universe was more than willing and able to protect, feed and guide His people.

Even today, God still offers His divine protection to those who willingly seek and obey Him.

Breaking Camp

After the census, the Israelites were ready to continue their journey. A buzz of wonder and excitement filled the air as neighbor talked with neighbor about their upcoming march to the Promised Land.

“Did you hear? Did you hear the good news?”

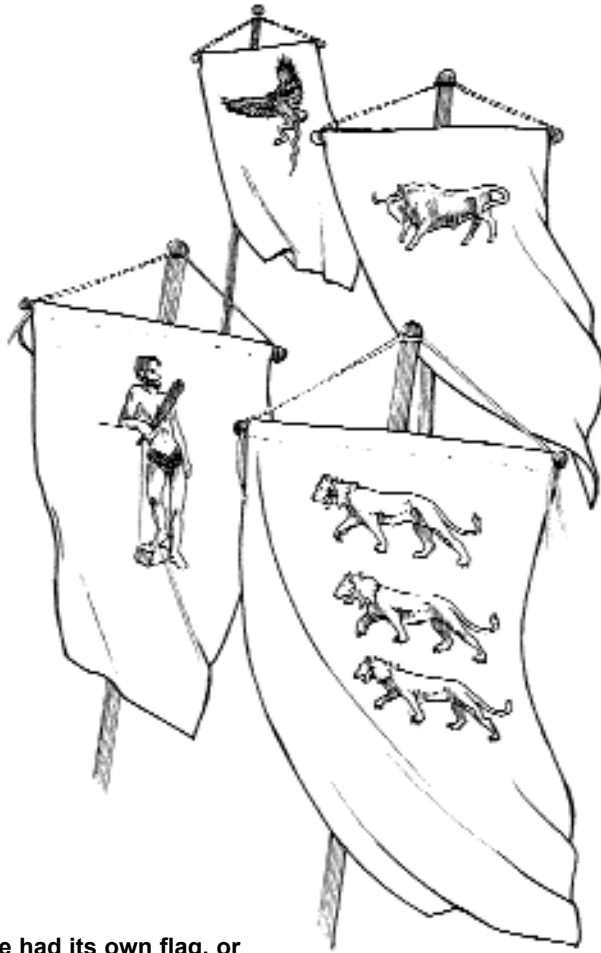
“Yes! We’re finally on our way to Canaan!”

“I wonder how long it will take us to get there.”

“Not too long, I’m sure. Soon we’ll all have our own land and plant our own crops and harvest food meant for our own mouths—not for our former Egyptian masters.”

Since God always does things in an orderly way, He decided to organize the way in which the Israelites were to march with His tabernacle and holy articles, and also how they were to camp around it.

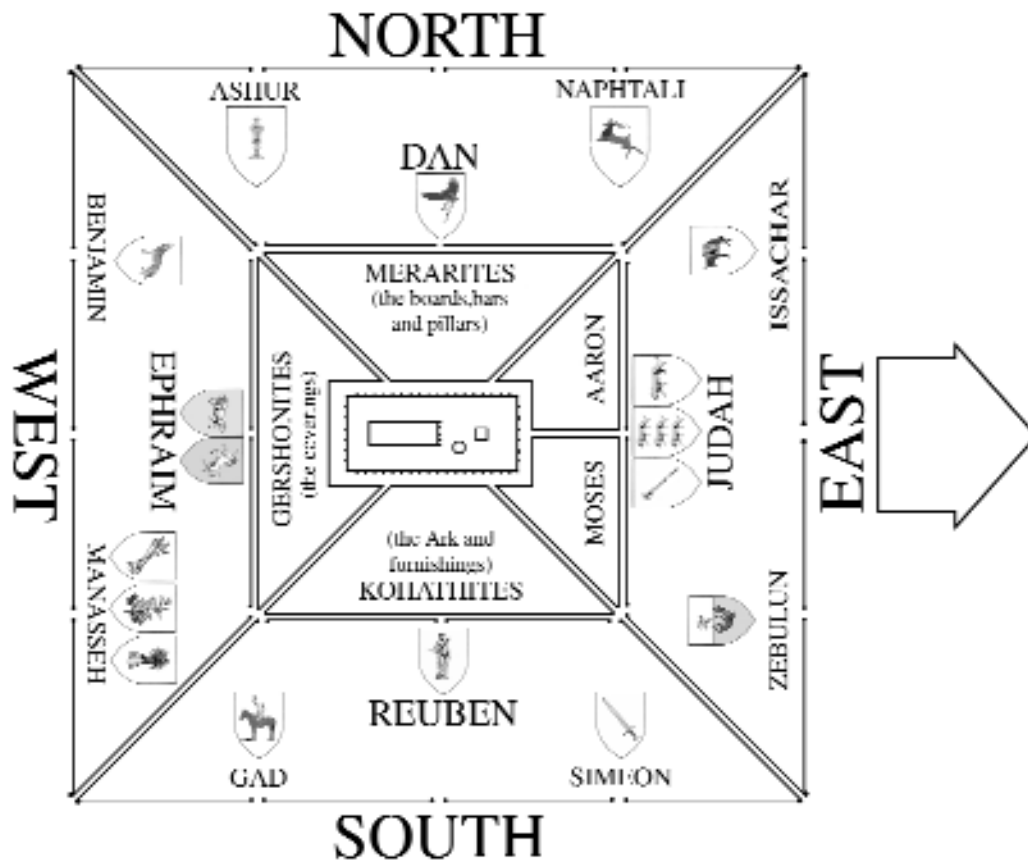
He said to Moses and Aaron, “All the people of Israel are to camp among their own tribe, and each tribe shall have its own standard, or flag. These flags will identify where I want each tribe to be encamped.



Each tribe had its own flag, or standard, which showed the people where their particular tribe was encamped.

“Each of the twelve leaders who helped you to count the Israelites will lead the tribe from which they come: Elizur will lead Reuben, Shelumiel will lead Simeon, Nahshon will lead Judah, Nethaneel will lead Issachar, Eliab will lead Zebulun, Abidan will lead Benjamin, Ahiezer will lead Dan, Pagiell will lead Asher, Eliasaph will lead Gad, and Ahira will lead Naphtali. Of the tribe of Joseph, Elishama will lead Ephraim and Gamaliel will lead Manasseh.

“The tribes are to camp around My tabernacle of meeting—but make sure that none of them camp close to it. They must keep a safe distance away from it, for My holy presence shall be there. Judah, Issachar and Zebulun are to camp at the east side of the tabernacle. Reuben, Simeon and Gad are to camp at the south side. Ephraim,



Manasseh and Benjamin are to be at the west side. And Dan, Asher and Naphtali are to camp at the north side.

“When I give the word for the Israelites to break camp, the tribes are to march in this order: First, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun will break camp. Then, Reuben, Simeon and Gad will break camp and follow them. After this, Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin will break camp, and march behind the Levites. Then Dan, Naphtali and Asher will march from the rear. The tribe of Levi, which shall be responsible for carrying My tabernacle and holy articles, will march in the middle, between the other tribes” (Numbers 2:1-31).

Setting Apart the Levites

God made the tribe of Levi responsible for taking care of His tabernacle and everything belonging to it. Only the Levites were allowed to take down, carry, set up, and serve in the tabernacle and handle its holy

articles (Numbers 1:50-53). If anyone who was not a Levite tried to do so, they were to be immediately put to death!

God has the authority and right to choose whomever He is willing to work through as His servants. He made the Levites separate—holy and special—from the rest of Israel, so that they would serve Him in carrying out His work.

However, this did not mean that the Levites were better than the other tribes. God does not have favorites (Acts 10:34). He wants all to have the same opportunity to serve Him and experience the many wonderful blessings of living His way of life—the way of love and outgoing concern for others. Just as He does in His Church today, God has always selected certain people to fill specific roles in His government. He does this so that things will run in a smooth and orderly fashion.

By setting Levi apart, God knew that the other tribes were bound to get jealous and think, “Why do those Levites get to serve God so closely and we can’t?”

Therefore, the Eternal gave Israel the law of the Nazarites (Numbers 6:1-21). A Nazarite could be a man or woman who made a special vow to devote a certain amount of time—separate himself—to more personally focus on serving God. When one took the Nazarite vow, he could not drink wine, vinegar or grape juice, or eat grapes or raisins. And he was not allowed to cut his hair, or go near a dead body.

The vow could last several weeks, years—or even an entire lifetime! For example, the apostle Paul took the Nazarite vow for a short time (Acts 18:18), while some of the greatest servants of the Bible—Samuel, Samson and John the Baptist—were Nazarites for their entire lives.

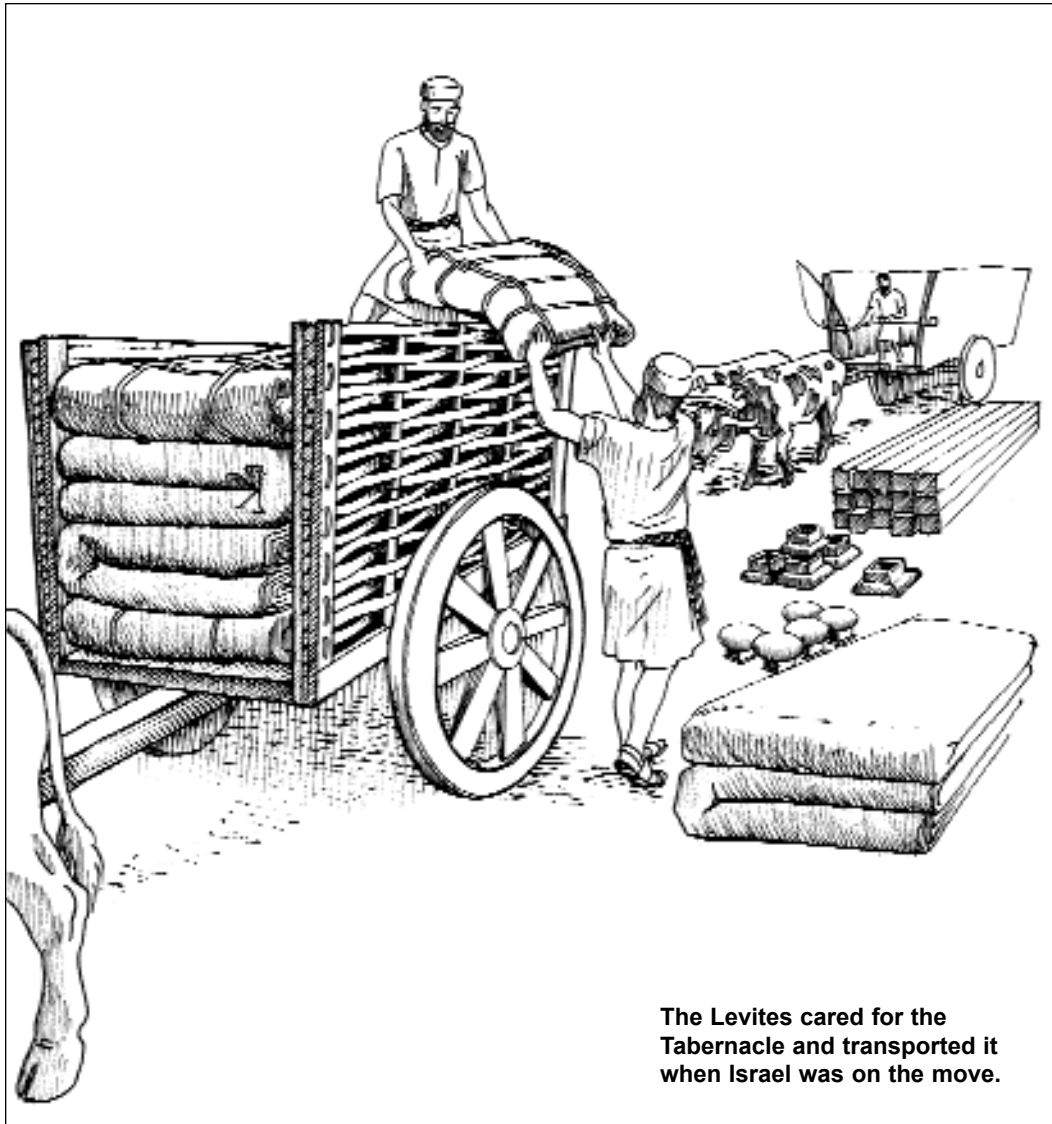
Today, many people (who were never taught the truth about God or His ways) mistakenly believe that Jesus Christ was a Nazarite, because they think He had long hair and did not drink wine. This is one of the many lies Satan the devil uses to confuse people about who Christ really was.

Jesus was not a Nazarite—He was a Nazarene! People who come from America are called Americans. People from Canada are Canadians. Those from Britain are British. And people from Australia are Australians. In the same way, Jesus was called a Nazarene because He was raised in the town of Nazareth.

Also, Christ’s hair was short, not long. And He did drink wine, in moderation. In fact, His first biblically-recorded miracle was done at a wedding party. On that special happy occasion, Christ, at the request of His mother, turned water into wine! Jesus was a Nazarene—not a Nazarite.

Organizing Levi

God had made Aaron, a Levite, His high priest over Israel and set apart Aaron's sons as priests. The two eldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, were irresponsible with their priestly duties. They had set the wrong example for others to follow. God had no choice but to take away their lives. In doing so, He taught the whole congregation of Israel a sobering lesson: No one is above God's Law, and God expects His servants to always take their duties seriously and wholeheartedly. Aaron's two youngest sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, took their brothers' place as priests (Numbers 3:1-4).



The Levites cared for the Tabernacle and transported it when Israel was on the move.

The rest of the Levites were to assist the priests by taking good care of the tabernacle and all its holy belongings. But they were not to perform priestly duties, such as making sacrifices and offerings.

Just as He had done with Israel, God commanded Moses to take a census of the Levites.

He said, “The Levites shall be divided into three families. Each family will represent the three sons of your forefather Levi—Gershon, Kohath and Merari. Then I want you to count all the males that are a month old and above.

“These three families shall camp around My tabernacle:

“The Gershonites will camp on the west side. They are responsible for carrying and taking care of the coverings of My tabernacle.

“The Kohathites will camp on the south side. They are responsible for carrying the furnishings of the tabernacle, which shall be covered only by Aaron and his sons. If any of the Kohathites touch My holy furnishings, I will take away their lives.

“The Merarites will camp north. They will carry and take care of the wooden framework of the tabernacle.

“And you, Moses, and your brother Aaron and his sons will camp east, in front of the tabernacle’s entrance. Eleazar shall oversee the duties of the Kohathites, while Ithamar will oversee the duties of the Gershonites and Merarites.”

Again, Moses obeyed God. When he had finished counting, the census revealed that there were 22,000 Levite males who were one month old and above. They were to substitute for the 22,273 firstborn Israelite males whom God had claimed for Himself when He first delivered Israel from Egypt. God would provide a way for the Levites to make up for the 273 males that were owed to Him (Numbers 3:34, 43).

Once all of God’s instructions were carried out, the Eternal had Aaron and his sons bless Israel with these words: “May the Eternal bless you, and keep you; may He make His face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. May the Eternal lift up His face upon you, and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).

Then God placed His name upon Israel. This showed that He claimed the Israelites as His own people.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

**ISRAEL MOANS
AND COMPLAINS**

The pillar of cloud rose up above the tabernacle. This was a signal to the Israelites that it was time for them to break camp and march onward. All the tribes of Israel gathered and went out according to the orderly way God had commanded them.

The tribes of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun went first, peaceably gathering their personal possessions, and then marching out front. After Aaron and his sons had taken down the tabernacle, the Levites of Gershon and Merari carefully carried it, and followed in line. The tribes of Reuben, Simeon and Gad followed next. Then were the Kohathites, who carried the holy things, such as the Ark of the Covenant. Next were Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin, followed by Dan, Asher and Naphtali, who acted as Israel's rear guard (Numbers 10:1-28).

The Israelites marched for three days until they came to the Wilderness of Paran (Numbers 33:16-18; 10:12, 33).

Convincing Family to Stay

During the thirteen months the Israelites had traveled and lived in the wilderness since leaving Egypt, God allowed a mixed multitude of foreigners to travel with them. As long as these people carefully obeyed God's laws and did not try to deceive His people into rebelling against Him and serving other gods, they were permitted to live with Israel.

Among this multitude was a man named Hobab. He was the son of Reul (also known as Jethro) and brother to Moses' wife Zipporah. This made Hobab Moses' brother-in-law.

Like his father, Hobab was a desert dweller. He was used to traveling throughout the vast desert wilderness. Now that the Israelites were finally on their way to Canaan, Moses was worried that his brother-in-law would not go with them. So he tried to think of a way to convince Hobab to continue traveling with Israel.

Because Hobab knew much about the desert terrain through which Israel was to travel, Moses wanted him to stay with the Israelites.



Moses said to him, “Soon, God will deliver the Promised Land into our hands. Once we get there, we shall set aside a piece of land just for you. You and your descendants can grow lush crops of corn, wheat, barley, grapes—whatever your heart desires. The land will be yours. You and your descendants will live among my people in peace. All you have to do is come with us into the Promised Land.”

At first, Hobab refused. Pointing out in the wilderness, he said to Moses, “I’m a desert dweller. All my life I’ve lived out here in the back country. This is what I am used to. Besides, if I wanted to settle down someplace, it would be better for me to go back and live among my own people.”

But Moses would not easily take no for an answer.

“Hobab, you know the lay of the land and the dangers that lurk ahead. You know how we are to camp—where the watering places are located, where we can gather enough wood for burning campfires. You

can be our eyes and ears. Stay with us, and whatever good things God will do for us, we will do for you.”

Upon hearing this, Hobab was convinced. He and his family decided to stay with Israel. Over time, Hobab’s descendants, the Kenites, did come to live in the Promised Land with the Israelites (Numbers 10:29-32; Judges 1:16).

Israel Complains...Again

Despite the blessing of having God (in the pillars of cloud and fire) lead them to Canaan, the Israelites’ attitudes soon turned sour.

Some said, “How long are we supposed to camp here?”

“Yeah, what’s taking so long?” said others. “How many more days do we have to march out here in this wild country?”

“Are we there yet?”

The Eternal heard their carnal-minded complaints. He knew that their attitudes were rebellious. The people no longer showed respect toward God or His leadership. This made the Eternal angry because He had given so many wonderful things to a people who did not appreciate His amazing blessings.

To teach all of Israel a vital lesson, God shot down bursts of fire and burned up some of the complainers, those who grumbled among themselves at the outskirts of the camp.

Instantly, the people realized that God meant business. A crowd rushed to Moses and begged him for his help.

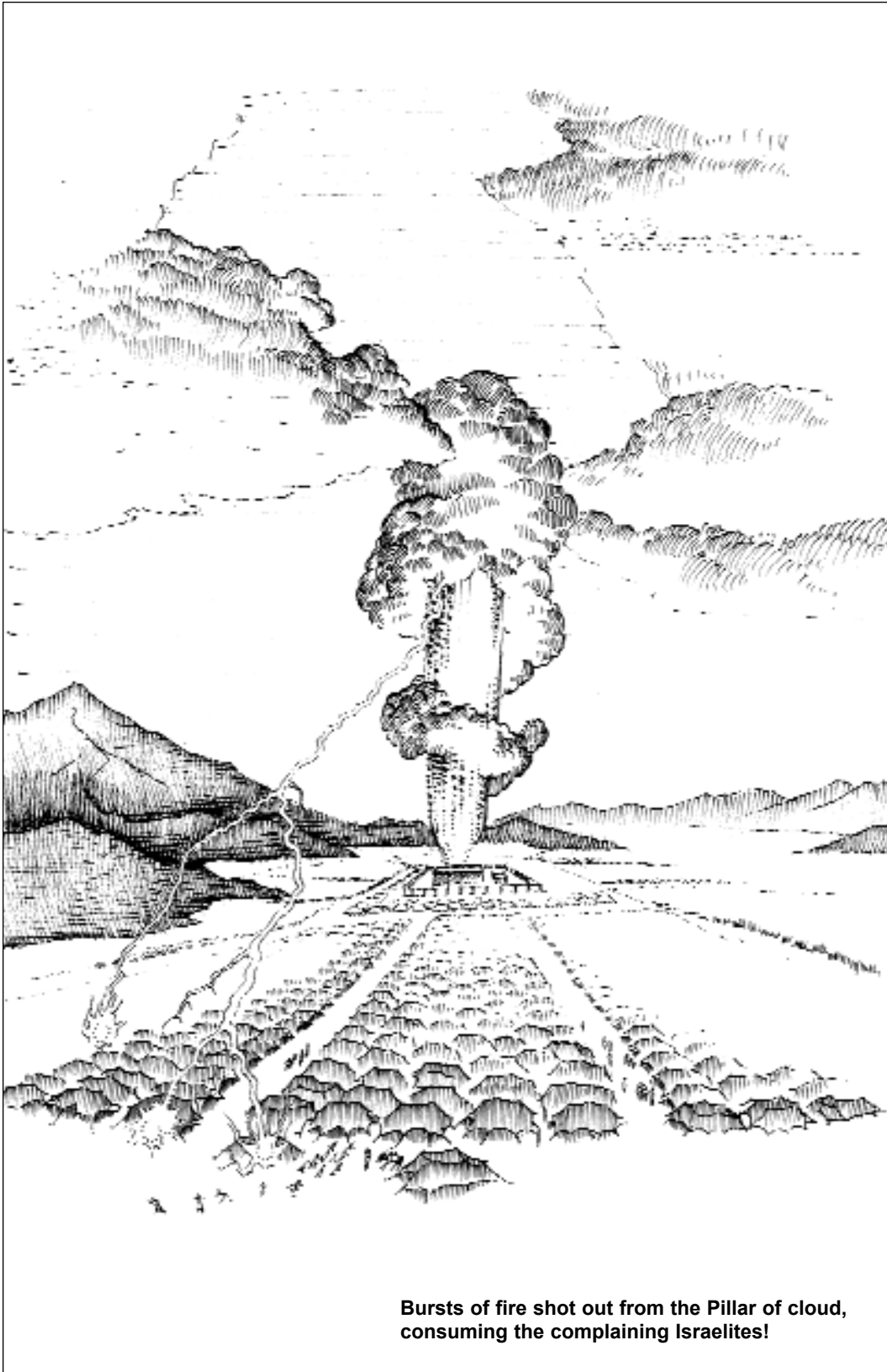
“Please, Moses!” they cried. “Speak to God for us, before He destroys us all! We were wrong, and now we’re sorry. Speak to the Eternal before it’s too late—He always listens to you!”

“Yes,” said others. “You always put your trust in God, and He respects you for it. Now pray for us before the Almighty reduces us to nothing!”

Moses shook his head and let out a soft sigh. Though the people truly appeared to be sorry for their wrong attitudes, experience taught him that their change of heart would only last for a short while. Yet, Moses deeply cared for Israel, and he wanted God’s people to reap the countless wonderful blessings of living God’s laws and way of life.

“Very well,” he said.

He separated himself to a private place, and then prayed, “Great Eternal God, please forgive the foolishness of Your people. Though they are blessed to have your wonderful laws, they do not have Your Holy Spirit working in their minds and changing their carnal thoughts,



Bursts of fire shot out from the Pillar of cloud, consuming the complaining Israelites!

attitudes and desires to become holy, kind and loving. Please be merciful to them.”

Upon hearing Moses’ sincere, heartfelt prayer, God showed mercy to Israel and quenched the fire (Numbers 11:1-2). God always listens to those who seek His will and put His ways first.

As the flames flickered out, the Israelites sighed. All were relieved.

They called the place “Taberah,” which means “burning,” because of the fire God had used to teach grumbling Israel a lesson (verse 3).

Even More Grumbling and Complaining

The Bible calls Satan the devil “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). This is because he constantly broadcasts rotten, rebellious thoughts and attitudes toward everyone—and especially toward those whom God chooses to work with as His servants.

The devil was behind the grumbings and mutterings of the Israelites. As God’s enemy (or adversary), Satan did not want God’s people to succeed and receive blessings. Seeing that the Israelites were repentant—they had changed their rotten attitudes and were sorry for their bad conduct—the devil came up with another plan to defeat Israel.

This time, he decided to use the mixed multitude of foreigners, who dwelled in peace with God’s people. Satan inspired them to grumble and complain, and spread their bitter attitudes to the Israelites. The devil used this same method years ago (perhaps millions of years) to subtly and gradually convince one-third of the angels to rebel against God!

“If only we were back in good old Egypt,” the foreigners muttered. “There we had plenty of thick, juicy meat to feast on, and all sorts of spicy foods. Remember how well fed we were back in Egypt?”

The Israelites listened to these foolish complaints and allowed themselves to get caught up in the lusts and cravings of these foreigners. Soon, a swelling crowd of Israelites agreed with the mixed multitude.

“Yes, that’s right!” they shouted. “In Egypt we had more than enough good food to eat: Fish, cucumbers, fat and juicy melons, leeks, and all kinds of onions and garlic. And the food was so rich and plentiful! No one went begging for food back in Egypt.”

Others said, “How true! Now look at us! We’re all on the verge of dying out here in this barren countryside. Why, we have barely anything to eat, except for manna. We can’t survive on bread alone!”

Like a spark of fire in a field of dry grass, the murmurings and grumbings of the Israelites and foreigners spread throughout the

whole camp. Soon all the people cried, moaned and complained. They no longer appreciated the manna, the special bread from heaven, which God had made especially for Israel. No other nation—before or since—had been blessed to enjoy such a wonderful treat, made by the hands of God. Yet the people foolishly treated His manna as though it were poison!

Like the mixed multitude, the Israelites made exaggerated statements about their past lives in Egypt. Instead of remembering how hopelessly harsh their lives were as slaves—how cruel and mean their former Egyptian taskmasters had brutally treated them—the Israelites made up lies. They deceived themselves into believing that their former lives as slaves were somehow better than their current lives as servants living under God’s divine guidance and protection (Numbers 11:4-6).

Even today, Satan tries to brainwash God’s people—His Church—with the same deception. The devil wants Christians to become bitter and angry about something—anything—as long as it will make them moan, grumble and complain. He tries to get God’s people to focus on petty problems, instead of focusing on the soon-coming kingdom of God and the Return of Jesus Christ. Satan’s goal is to deceive Christians into focusing on and longing for their past lives, when they were slaves to the ways of sin. He knows that if he can get them to do this, they will no longer appreciate God’s wonderful laws and blessings. And ultimately, they will forget their awesome human potential: To be born into the God Family!

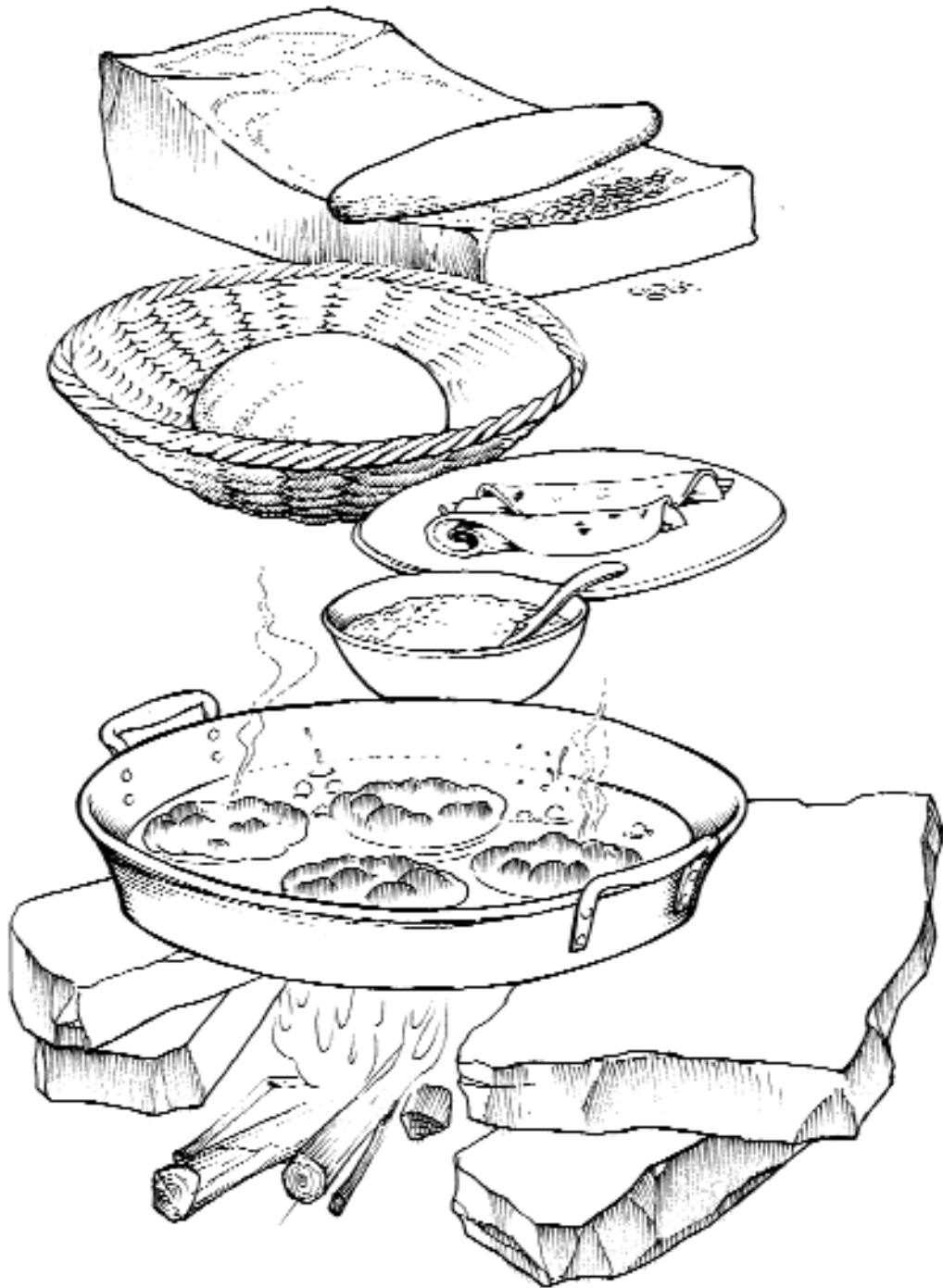
This is why God hates grumbling, complaining, and anything else that leads to bitterness.

A Moment of Weakness

For the Israelites, manna was their main source of food. In addition to eating it fresh, the people discovered several ways to prepare it. They ground it on millstones and made meal flour from it. They cooked it in pans of oil and make cakes from it.

Yet, even though manna tasted good and was healthy to eat, the people quickly grew tired of it. They wanted something new, something different. They were no longer satisfied that the God of the universe was taking care of all their needs—now they wanted Him to provide for all of their wants, too!

A gang of complainers went to Moses’ tent and grumbled: “Can’t you see how miserable we are, Moses? We won’t last much longer if we don’t soon get some meat in our bellies. This is all your fault,



God provided manna for the Israelites six days a week. Even though this delicious food could be prepared many ways, the Israelites still found reasons to complain.

Moses. At least back in Egypt, we always had all kinds of good and spicy things to eat!”

Moses could hardly believe his own ears. He scanned the growing crowd of complainers, who continuously nagged and grumbled. From all directions throughout the camp, he could hear the people moan and weep. They acted like spoiled brats who couldn't get their way.

This sad scene caused Moses to drop to his knees and pray: “Why, God? Why have You afflicted me with such lustful, carnal-minded people? Why do You leave all these ungrateful Israelites to bare their worries upon my shoulders? I'm just an ordinary man. There's nothing great or special about me. Yet these people nag and complain to me as though I were their mother! They cry out to me for meat—but where am I supposed to get enough meat to feed all the mouths of these selfish complainers? They cry like babies who haven't been fed for days. This burden is too much for me, God. I cannot bear it alone. Please have mercy on me, and take my life away. If I have found favor in Your sight, then let me sleep in the grave till my change comes” (Numbers 11:10-15; Job 14:13-15).

What Moses was experiencing was a weak moment in faith. Faith is when a person believes, in all boldness and confidence, that God will deliver His promises. Moses was one of the most faithful servants of God of all time—yet he was still only human. Sometimes he made mistakes. Sometimes he said and did things he wished he had not.

In a moment of weakness and frustration, Moses asked God to take his life away. Though this was wrong for Moses to do, God had this recorded in His Word, the Holy Bible, for a reason: To show that God understands the weaknesses and limits of His people. He knows that His servants must resist numerous problems, trials and pressures as they strive to live the right way of life. But God does not ask from His faithful servants more than they can bear. In His mercy, He always provides a way of escape (I Corinthians 10:10-13).



CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

A BLESSING—OR A CURSE?

God refused Moses' request to take away his life. However, God did offer Moses a solution that would provide some relief from dealing with these nagging, short-sighted Israelites. God told Moses to assemble the 70 elders of Israel and bring them to the tabernacle.

"The same Spirit that dwells in your mind I will put into their minds," God said. "Then I will use these men to assist you in bearing the burden of the people.

"Next, I want you to have the Israelites specially prepare themselves for tomorrow. Tell them that I have heard all their bitter and selfish complaints. Since the people lust for meat, then I will give them meat, more than they will know what to do with. They will eat meat not for one day, nor two days, nor five, ten, or even twenty days—but for a whole month! I will give them all the meat that they crave for until it comes out of their nostrils! In fact, I will give the people so much meat that they will despise it—just as they have despised Me, the God who dwells among them. After this, they will regret ever desiring their former lives in Egypt."

Moses, still weak in faith, questioned how God could possibly deliver a month's worth of meat to so many people.

He said, "But God, there are more than 600,000 men in our camp—not to mention all the women, children and even the mixed multitude of foreigners. How are You going to feed fresh meat to all these mouths for a whole month? Shall all our flocks and herds of livestock be slaughtered for this? Shall all the fish in the sea be gathered?"

God is patient and slow to anger, yet He understood that He had to set His servant straight. Plus, He wanted Moses' faith to grow and become strong again.

"Is My arm too short to perform such mighty miracles?" God asked. "Have you forgotten all the wonders I did in freeing Israel from slavery in Egypt? Or how I delivered My people through the parting of the Red Sea? Or how I am the One who produced fresh, clean water in the

desert, and have provided bread from heaven five days a week and twice as much on the sixth day? Stand fast and watch, Moses! Soon you will see whether or not what I say will happen” (Numbers 11:16-23).

Moses felt ashamed, and hung his head down low. Realizing that he had temporarily allowed himself to doubt God and His power, Moses determined not to do this again.

Prophecy—Inspired Speaking

Moses obeyed God’s instructions and gathered the 70 elders of Israel before the tabernacle. Next, the pillar of cloud came down and spoke to Moses, and then took a portion of the Holy Spirit, which empowered and guided Moses’ thinking, and placed it upon the elders.

An astonishing thing happened: God used His Spirit in the elders to inspire them to speak words of spiritual wisdom and understanding—to prophecy. These former slaves, like all the men of Israel, were untrained and new to God’s laws and ways. Yet, they were suddenly able to speak with godly insight and good judgment (Numbers 11:24-25). This event confirmed to all who watched—the Levites—that the Eternal was working through the elders. God did not want anyone to doubt this. (However, this gift of inspired speaking, or prophesying, was only temporary.)

While the elders continued to prophesy, a young man ran up to Moses and said, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!”

Eldad and Medad were two elders who, for some reason, could not make it to the tabernacle. It may have been because they had to deal with an emergency among the people. Though these two men did not assemble at the tabernacle with the other elders, God wanted Israel to recognize that He was using them as well. So He placed His Spirit into Eldad and Medad’s minds and inspired them to prophesy, too.

When Joshua, Moses’ personal assistant, heard the news, he became upset and nervous.

He said to Moses, “Master, forbid Eldad and Medad from prophesying! These men are drawing a following after themselves. They may even challenge you for leadership over Israel!”

Moses calmly turned to his assistant and said, “Joshua, are you jealous of their influence on my account? Clearly, God’s Spirit is leading Eldad and Medad to encourage and guide the people. This is a good thing. Oh, if only all of God’s people had the Holy Spirit converting and leading their carnal minds—it would inspire them to perform such awesome deeds” (verses 26-29).

Joshua nodded, and agreed with Moses’ wisdom.

A Blessing—or a Curse?

Early the next morning, Moses woke up to the sound of a strong wind blowing outside his tent. Curious, he arose from his bed and looked outside. He was amazed to see a thick mass of what seemed like dark clouds surrounding the entire camp. The clouds seemed to be moving as though they were alive.

Suddenly, it dawned on Moses that what he was seeing were not clouds at all—it was a massive flock of birds flying low just above the ground. They were quails!

The people of Israel stood beside their tents, their eyes and mouths wide open, astonished at what they saw.

God was using a powerful and intense wind to drive thousands and thousands of quail straight into the reaches of the “meat-starved” Israelites.

Moses turned to the people and said, “You lusted for meat, O Israel! Here then is your meat, brought to you by the hand of God! The Eternal has supplied all of your needs—but that was not enough for you. Now you will get what you have been lusting after. But when you have had your fill, you will soon regret your rebellious grumblings and complaints against the Eternal, and how you did not appreciate all of His many blessings!”

Some of the people wondered, “What have we gotten ourselves into? Will what we have craved for become a curse to us?”

But the majority ignored Moses’ warning. They were too concerned with catching as many quails as they could lay their hands on. All that day, throughout the night and all throughout the next day, the Israelites raced to catch all the birds they could eat. The quails flew low to the ground because they were tired from having traveled great distances, and from flying against the strong wind. Throughout the camp, people grabbed whatever they could—brooms, shovels, pots, pans—and swatted at the weary birds, knocking them to the ground. Soon the entire camp was filled with caught birds—enough meat to last thirty days.

In an almost riot-like frenzy, the people raced to pluck off feathers, gather wood and build campfires to cook their freshly-caught food. Some people were so crazed by their lust-filled desires that they did not even bother to cook the quails—instead, they ate them raw!

Even though God had sent them manna from heaven six days a week, the Israelites acted as though they were starving. Their selfish, outrageous conduct offended God.

It is fine to desire something good for yourself. But when people overly desire—covet—after things (especially things that belong to other people), they are in danger of allowing the spirit of covetousness to ruin their lives. People who covet are driven by, and slaves to, their personal lusts. They convince themselves that they “have” to get that new doll, that new top-of-the-line bicycle, that new video game. And their lusts will eventually lead them to do just about *anything* to get what they want—lie, steal, and even hurt other people!

Satan the devil inspired the carnal-minded Israelites and mixed multitude to covet, just as he broadcasts covetous attitudes today.

Starving for meat, the Israelites frantically gathered up the quail that had descended upon the camp.



Watching the people chomp down on their meat, God was angry. Their self-seeking attitudes and rash actions told Him that the people were more interested in serving the desires of their own stomachs than in thankfully serving God.

So the Eternal decided to teach Israel a much-needed lesson. He struck the people with a great plague. Those who had gorged themselves with all the quail meat they could stuff into their mouths soon felt sick. They felt as though their stomachs were about to burst. The people had eaten so much meat that they began to despise it—just as they had despised God’s manna.

As the plague spread from person to person, some grew so sick that they died. This made those who were still alive realize that the “blessing” they lusted after had actually become a curse (Numbers 11:31-33).



Many of the Israelites gorged themselves on undercooked meat, and became gravely ill in the process!

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

SPIES IN CANAAN

You would think that, after being punished by fire and a plague, none of the Israelites would dare grumble and complain against God or His servant Moses. After all, God used these punishments in order to show the Israelites their sins. Yet Moses' older sister and brother, Miriam and Aaron, did not take these lessons to heart.

One day, Miriam let her feelings get the best of her, and she began to complain. She spoke against Moses because he had married an Ethiopian woman. Many years earlier, when Moses was an Egyptian prince and a successful army commander, he had married an Ethiopian princess in order to form a peace treaty between the warring nations of Egypt and Ethiopia.

Instead of going to Moses about the situation, Miriam grumbled and complained to Aaron.

"Moses is just plain wrong," she muttered. "He should have known better than to marry that woman. And now he's been leading Israel for so long that he thinks he can get away with just about anything."

While Aaron gave thought to her rebellious comments, she continued her rant: "I think our little brother takes too much authority for himself. Has the Eternal spoken only through Moses? Has He not also spoken through us? You, Aaron, are high priest, and I am a prophetess. God has used both of us to do His work. Moses is not the only one with God-given authority."

Aaron slowly agreed with his sister. He said, "Perhaps Moses does take too much power for himself. But what shall we do about it?"

God saw what was happening. Nothing can be hidden from His sight. The Eternal realized that Miriam and Aaron were allowing the deadly seed of envy to grow in their minds, causing them to become bitter toward Moses.

God knew that if He did not act soon, Miriam and Aaron would eventually oppose their brother before all Israel. This would cause hatred and fighting among the people. Some would say, "I follow

Moses!” Others would say, “I follow Aaron!” or “I follow Miriam!” Israel would break apart into groups that hated each other, and go their separate ways. God’s people would no longer be able to inherit the Promised Land together, as a family.

God had to intervene!

Immediately, the Eternal’s booming voice cried out, “Moses! Aaron! Miriam! Come to the tabernacle at once!”

Aaron felt goose bumps and a cold sweat of fear. He suddenly realized that he and his sister had just made a very huge mistake.

But Miriam thought differently. She wondered to herself, “Perhaps God agrees with me. He probably wants to evenly divide power between me, Moses and Aaron.” Little did Miriam know that God was about to give her a rude awakening.

When the three arrived at the tabernacle, the pillar of cloud came down and stationed itself at the door. From the cloud, God said, “Aaron, Miriam, come here.”

When they stepped forward, God said, “Listen to My words: I speak to My prophets through visions and dreams. But Moses is different. I speak to him face to face, because he is faithful in all Israel. He obeys My will and seeks to do those things that please Me. Therefore, I speak to him plainly—not in visions and dreams. I have used Moses to lead My people out of Egypt, and I am using him to bring them into the Promised Land. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant?”



Miriam spoke out against Moses because he had married an Ethiopian woman. She had let a deadly seed of envy sprout in her mind.

Miriam and Aaron dropped to their knees and shivered. They stumbled over their words, trying to think up an excuse for their rebellious complaints. But God would not listen to such weak excuses.

Before Moses could intervene and ask God to forgive them, the cloud departed.

Then, Aaron turned to his sister and gasped.

“Moses! Quick, look at Miriam!”

Moses turned to his sister and saw that Miriam’s beautiful, healthy skin had turned dry and flakey—white as snow.

“She has leprosy!”

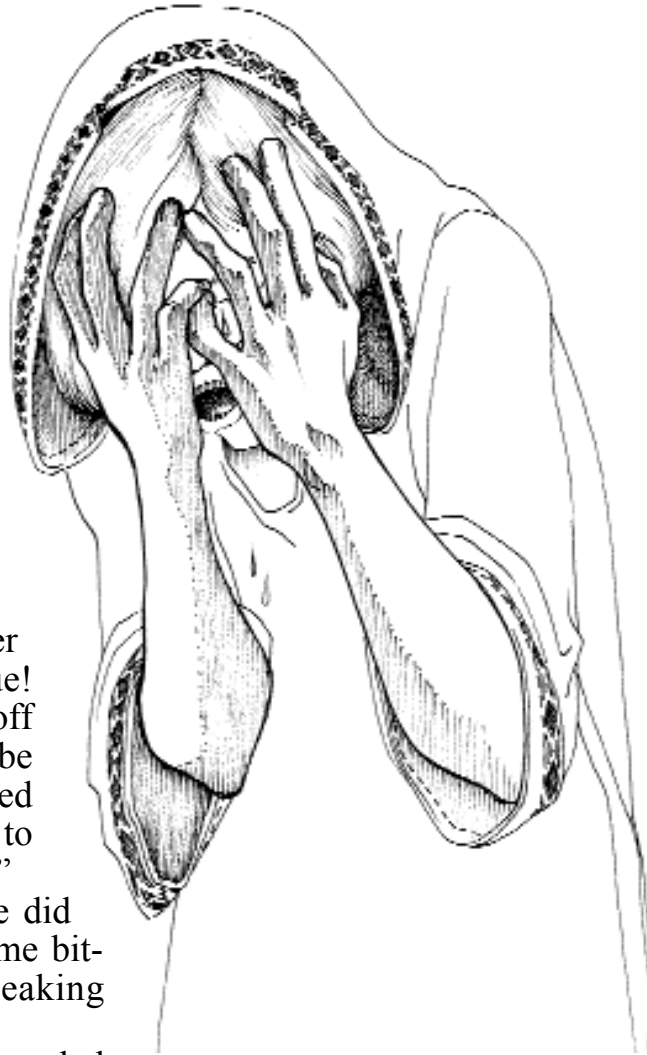
Leprosy is a painful, ancient skin disease that still afflicts some people to this very day. It is also contagious—those who have leprosy are in danger of spreading it to others.

Aaron grabbed Moses by the arms and pleaded with him to ask God to remove this disease from their sister.

“The words we spoke were foolish, and we have sinned. Please don’t allow Miriam to suffer from this horrible plague! She will have to be cut off from Israel, and she won’t be able to enter the Promised Land. I beg you, ask God to forgive us and to heal her!”

Moses did just that. He did not allow himself to become bitter toward them for speaking against him.

But God replied, “Miriam led your brother to speak against My servant. She and all of Israel must learn that I will not tolerate such rebellion. My people must always respect the office of whomever I use to lead them. However, I will not cut your sister off from Israel forever. For seven days, Miriam will live



outside the camp of the congregation. After this, I will heal her. Only then will she be allowed to live among the people of Israel again.”

News of Miriam and Aaron’s rebellion and God’s immediate punishment spread throughout the whole camp. All the people watched and whispered among themselves as Miriam, who felt deeply ashamed, walked out from the camp and into the wilderness. This was a warning to Israel—God hates rebellion. For seven days, Miriam sat alone and humbled herself. She thought long and hard about the sin she had committed—and how her wrong actions could have ultimately stopped the Israelites from inheriting the Promised Land.

When the seven days were finished, God removed her punishment and healed the leprosy. Instantly, Miriam’s dry, flaky leprous skin returned to its normal beauty and health (Numbers 12).

Special Spy Mission

After witnessing many miracles and wonders—the Ten Plagues of Egypt, the pillars of cloud and fire, the parting of the Red Sea, drinking water from a rock, receiving the Ten Commandments from God’s own voice, eating manna from heaven, building God’s tabernacle, and so much more—the Israelites finally made it to Kadesh. This was at the very southern edge of the Promised Land.

Moses stood before the people, pointed to the north, and said, “Look, Israel. The land that God has promised you is just within your reach. All you have to do is trust God, go up and take it. Canaan belongs to you. This is the land that the God of your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has promised you. So do not fear—go and take your land.”

All the people carefully considered Moses’ words. They spoke among themselves, saying, “Is this it? Are we really there? What shall we do next?”

After much talking, the people sent leaders to speak to Moses. Representing the concerns of the Israelites, these men said, “Moses, the people think that it would be wise to pick some men among us and let them spy the land. These spies will scout out the territory and give us an idea of what the land is like, what kind of people we can expect to meet, which is the best way to go, what kind of cities shall we come to, and so forth.”

Giving this some thought, Moses said, “Perhaps you are right. I can see the wisdom of not rushing into an unknown land without first knowing its strengths and weaknesses. If it is God’s will, twelve men—each of whom will represent a tribe of Israel—will be sent out

to spy on the Promised Land. Then, they shall return and bring back a detailed report” (Deuteronomy 1:21-23).

With God’s permission, twelve leaders were selected for this dangerous scouting operation. These men were Shammua of the tribe of Reuben, Shaphat of the tribe of Simeon, Caleb of Judah, Igal of Issachar, Joshua (or Hoshea) of Ephraim, Palti of Benjamin, Gaddiel of Zebulun, Gaddi of Manasseh, Ammiel of Dan, Sethur of Asher, Nahbi of Naphtali, and Geuel of the tribe of Gad (Numbers 13:1-15).

Moses instructed the 12 spies to travel up through the south and into the north, and venture through the rugged mountains. They were to see what the land was like, find out if the people were weak or strong, many or few, and so forth.

“Come back to camp by the end of forty days, and make sure you bring back some of the fruit of the land,” said Moses.

The twelve men nodded, and then prepared for their special mission.

Scouting Out the Promised Land

The spies carried with them enough tools and supplies to help them on their long journey. Then, waving goodbye to their families and friends, the men marched out of the camp and headed for the unknown.

Climbing through a series of craggy mountain ranges, they eventually came upon a high slope, from which they could see a walled city down on the plains below. This was Hebron, the same place where, centuries earlier, Abraham had built an altar of worship to God (Genesis 3:18).

The spies wondered what kind of people they would find living in that city.

“Well,” said Caleb, “there’s only one way to find out.”

Following his lead, the spies climbed down the steep slope until they came to the foot of the mountain, and then marched toward Hebron.

Along the way, Joshua grew concerned, and said, “Perhaps it would be wiser if we split up into smaller teams of two and three men. Otherwise, the inhabitants may take special notice of us if we—twelve strangers—ventured into their city all at once. The last thing we want to do on this mission is draw attention to ourselves.”

The others quickly agreed. The spies split off into teams of twos and threes, and then decided to enter the city at different times and from different directions. In this way, it would not appear to the city’s inhabitants that the Israelites were together.

The closer they came to the city, the larger its thick walls seemed to tower above them. The spies merged into a swarm of travelers, traders and merchants, who streamed through the large city gates. Guards were stationed at the gates and just about everywhere else. They cautiously patrolled the area and scanned the faces in the crowd for enemies, troublemakers and possible threats.

Inside Hebron, some of the spies came to an open-air market. Traders and merchants shouted for the attention of all who walked by, hoping to draw potential customers. Just about everything you can imagine was for sale: Pots, pans and other cooking utensils, tents, veils, robes, rope, idols and other things of pagan worship, fruits, vegetables, breads, all kinds of clean and unclean meats, and more.

The merchants smiled and motioned for the Israelites to draw near. “My friend, my friend, come see what I have especially for you. Surely you cannot afford to pass up such a bargain.”

The Israelite scouts politely shook their heads and walked away. They dared not speak, else the people would know that the men were foreigners, and might even suspect them of being spies (which they were).

Elsewhere in the city, a team of Israelites came to a strange-looking religious temple. Standing before its main entrance were several beautiful women. They wore colorful, flowing robes and see-through veils, and had painted on their faces a rainbow of eye-catching colors—purple, red, blue and black—which decorated their eyes, cheeks and lips, much like women who wear makeup today. The pagan women smiled and winked at the Israelite men and motioned for them to enter the temple.

“Wow! Look at them,” said one of the spies.

“Yeah, let’s go see what kind of gods these women worship.”

Joshua grabbed the two by their arms and said, “No! We’re not here to investigate pagan gods, we’re here to scout out the land for God’s people—that is all. Now let’s go.”

The men reluctantly followed Joshua’s lead.

The spies soon discovered that the people living in Hebron were very superstitious. The inhabitants worshipped various false gods, bowed down to strange-looking idols and other images, and put their trust in so-called good luck charms. They also ate just about every kind of clean and unclean animal they could catch.

“It’s almost like being back in Egypt,” said one spy.

Another replied, “Yes, you’re right. Except their clothing and language are different. And the people living here are not as well off as our former masters once were, before the Ten Plagues.”



Agreeing that it was time to go, the spies calmly headed for Hebron's main gate. Just as they were about to leave the city, a squadron of soldiers marched through the gate. The jaws of every Israelite dropped and their eyes grew wide in disbelief.

“Look at the size of them!”

Some of the soldiers were twice the size of normal men! From the scowls of the soldiers' faces, the spies knew that these gigantic muscular men were hardened warriors—battle-tested and always ready for a fight.

The Israelite spies whispered among themselves: “God wants US to fight THEM in order to inherit the Promised Land? How could we ever hope to defeat such giants?”

Caleb and Joshua said, “Quiet down. We have a lot of territory ahead of us to scout out. Let's move.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

FORTY YEARS OF PUNISHMENT

Back at the camp of Israel, the people were growing restless with each day that passed. Many of the Israelites whispered among themselves. Their hope-filled conversations soon turned to gossip and fearful rumors:

“Think any of our boys will come back alive?”

“I doubt it. Who knows what kinds of dangers are lurking out there, waiting to ensnare us?”

“Yes, you’re right. I remember how the Amalekites attacked us by surprise. They nearly destroyed the whole camp.”

And so the people became worried and anxious. Instead of trusting in the God who delivered them from Egypt, they were beginning to believe in their own fears and doubts.

By the time the forty days were up, the twelve spies were seen marching back into the Israelite camp. All the people jumped up and down with joy.

“They’re here! They’re here! Our boys have come back!”

Crowds of people swarmed around the men, hugging them, patting them on their backs, and saying, “Welcome back! How was it? Did you see anything interesting? What were the people like? Tell about the cities and farmlands—tell us EVERYTHING!”

Moses and Aaron said to the cheering crowd, “Understandably, all of you have many questions about the Promised Land. They will be answered, but first let’s allow these men to speak.”

One of the scouts stepped forward and pointed to the cluster of grapes they had brought back with them.

“As you can plainly see,” he said, “these grapes we brought back are so large and so many, they had to be carried on a pole by two men. We went throughout the land, from the southern tip to the northern edge of its borders. We discovered miles upon miles of golden wheat and barley fields, and trees bearing olives, dates and figs. There are plenty of soil-rich plains in which to start farms and raise cattle. We



saw majestic mountains and rich, fertile valleys, as well as clean, clear rivers, brooks and streams. Canaan is indeed a land flowing with milk and honey.”

The people smiled and cheered as they listened to his words.

But the man continued: “Nevertheless, Canaan is not defenseless. The people living there are strong and fierce. Their cities are more like fortresses. They are surrounded by towering walls, making it nearly impossible to conquer them. And the people who live in these cities are giants!”

Some of the listeners gasped.

“Giants?”

“Yes,” said the man. “We saw them with our very own eyes. And besides them, there are the ferocious warrior races, such as the Amalekites, who live in the south, the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites, who live in the mountains, and the Canaanites, who live by the Great Sea and along the banks of the Jordan River.”

“What?” cried the Israelites. “What is this? How are we supposed to inherit the Promised Land when walled cities and warrior races block our every path? We’re no match for them. What are we supposed to do now?”

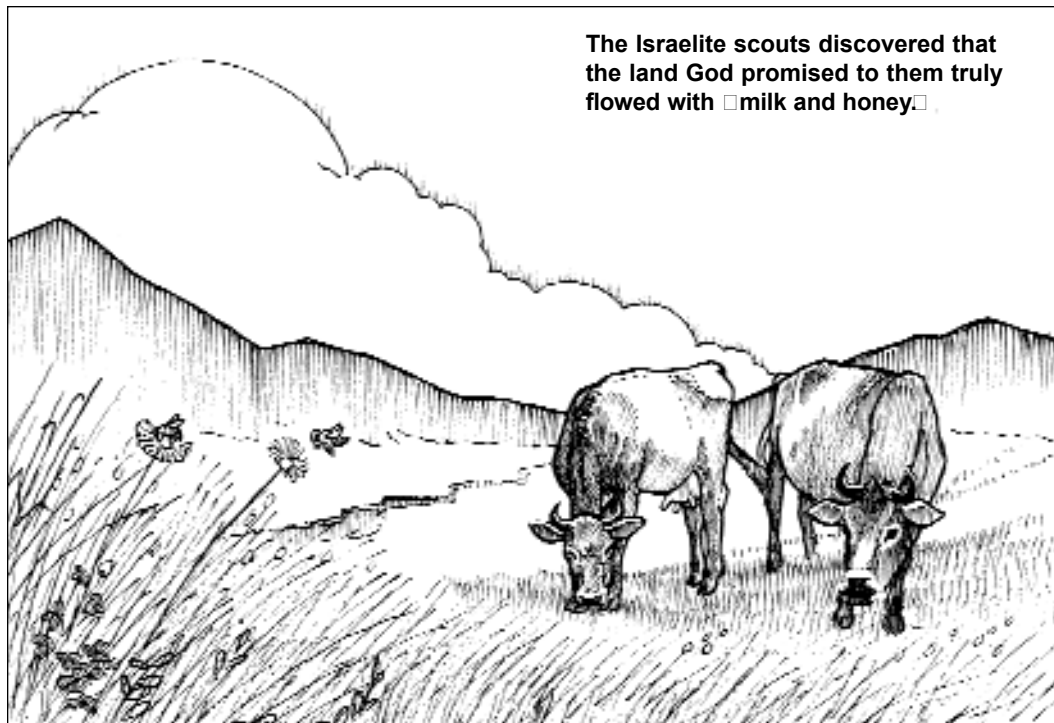
“Trust in the Eternal God!” Caleb shouted. With Joshua standing by his side in support, Caleb tried to quiet down the people.

He said, “People of Israel, listen to me. If we rely upon ourselves, we could never hope to defeat our enemies. But we are not alone. We worship the Almighty God—the Eternal. He is far more powerful than the so-called gods of these pagan nations. Just like He delivered us from Egypt, protected us against the Amalekites, and fed us along the way, God will deliver the Promised Land into our hands. All we have to do is trust Him and go forward. So let’s all go up at once and take possession of the land. With God on our side, we are able to conquer anything! Nothing can stop us!”

Some in the crowd began to take heart. “That’s right,” they said. “God has delivered us so far—why should we think He won’t deliver us again?”

But the other ten scouts did not agree with Caleb and Joshua. They said to the people, “Don’t listen to these liars. They are not telling you the full story. We report the whole truth—what we’ve seen with our own eyes. Danger awaits us in the land up ahead. It is a land that will eat us alive. Everyone there was a giant—and we were like grasshoppers to them! We could never hope to defeat such a people. If you listen to Caleb and Joshua, you will all lose your lives!”

Joshua and Caleb, along with Moses and Aaron, tried their best to reassure the Israelites that they should trust God and enter Canaan. But



the people refused to listen. Because of the evil report from the ten scouts, Israel was overcome by fear and dread (Numbers 13).

The people relied upon their carnal nature and reasoned among themselves:

“Ten scouts gave us a bad report of the land, while only two scouts gave a good report. Which group of scouts are we to believe?”

“The largest group, of course. Caleb and Joshua must be lying. How else can you explain why they don’t agree with the other ten scouts?”

Even to this day, carnal nature will always believe the majority over the minority. Yet, history has shown that, among God’s people, it is the minority—the few in number—who truly strive to obey God with all their heart and being. Carnal nature relies on safety in numbers, while those few who are led by the Holy Spirit fully rely upon the Eternal.

Israel Rejects the Promised Land

Throughout that night, all the tribes of Israel cried and complained. The short-sighted, carnal-minded people refused to believe that they could inherit the Promised Land—even with God’s help.

“What do we do now?” they grumbled. “Ever since we left Egypt, we’ve had to deal with problem after problem, trial after trial—and for what—so that we can die out here in misery?”

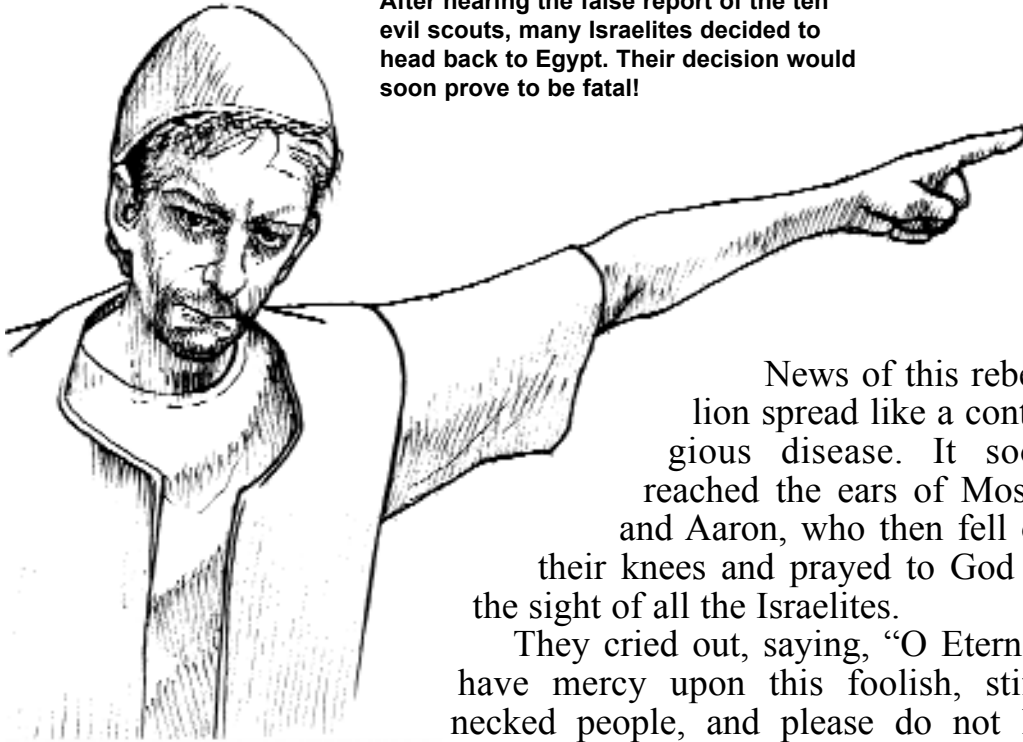
“We would have been better off dying back in Egypt or during our march in the wilderness. Now we’re stuck here! Now there’s nowhere else for us to go!”

Then the people blamed God, saying, “Why did the Eternal make us go through the trouble of leaving Egypt, only so that we would die in Canaan? Moses and his men want us to enter that dangerous land—but what’s in it for them? They must think we’re fools! If we dare go into Canaan, the people there would slay us, and take our wives and children as their slaves!”

Someone said, “What if we returned to Egypt? Surely, life was better back there than where we are now. At least in Egypt we had a future. Out here, our only future is death.”

“I agree! Let’s go back to Egypt! Forget about Moses and Aaron—let’s select a new leader from among us, one who will lead us back to where we belong!”

Throughout the whole camp, all the people agreed, saying, “Let’s return to the land of the Pharaohs. We should be living in Egypt, not here in the wilderness.”



After hearing the false report of the ten evil scouts, many Israelites decided to head back to Egypt. Their decision would soon prove to be fatal!

News of this rebellion spread like a contagious disease. It soon reached the ears of Moses and Aaron, who then fell on their knees and prayed to God in the sight of all the Israelites.

They cried out, saying, “O Eternal, have mercy upon this foolish, stiff-necked people, and please do not let them throw away this wonderful opportunity to inherit the land of Canaan.”

Meanwhile, Joshua and Caleb spoke out to the people: “The Promised Land flows with milk and honey, and is just within our reach. All we have to do is take it! Do not be afraid. If our ways please God, He will deliver Canaan into our hands. Nothing can stop this from happening—nothing, except our disobedience and wrong attitudes. Do not rebel against the Eternal. And don’t fear the people living in Canaan. With God on our side, we will eat them up like bread! Their pagan idols and false gods are no match for the God of the universe! Do not fear the people of Canaan.”

Using strong words, Joshua and Caleb boldly tried to persuade Israel not to abandon hope—but the Israelites were not convinced. Instead, the people became so angry that they picked up stones and surrounded Joshua and Caleb. They intended to kill these two faithful servants of God (Numbers 14:1-10).

Moses Stands in for Israel

Just as the Israelites raised their hands and were about to stone Joshua and Caleb, the glory of the Eternal appeared before all. Frozen in fear, the people let their stones drop to the ground.

God said to Moses, “How long will these people reject and despise Me? How long will they refuse to believe what I say, especially after all the mighty signs and wonders I have done in their sight? Since they dare to rebel against Me and refuse to go up into Canaan, I will destroy them with a plague. Then, I will make a mighty nation out of you, Moses, because you believe and obey Me. I know your heart. You are careful to do what is right in My eyes. Therefore, you and your descendants shall inherit Canaan in Israel’s place.”

Moses was stunned. Other men would have gladly accepted God’s decision, especially if it meant receiving much honor from Him. But Moses was different. He was humble and meek—he thought about others more than himself. He knew that he could not bear the thought of Israel being destroyed while he and his descendants took their place in the Promised Land.

So Moses said, “God, if You destroy Israel, the Egyptians will hear about it. They will gloat, and will tell all the people living in Canaan that You destroyed Israel because You were unable to bring Your people into the Promised Land. The Canaanites have heard of Your great fame—how You speak to Your servants face to face, and how You go before Israel in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. But if You destroy Israel, the Canaanites will say that Your awesome signs and wonders were all for nothing. Now let Your great mercy be known along with Your fame, Eternal God, and forgive Your people for their reckless sin.”

This was the second time Moses had to step in and save the foolish Israelites from utter destruction. And for the second time, Moses’ heartfelt plea changed God’s mind.

“Very well,” God said. “I have forgiven these people, as you have asked.”

Moses let out a quiet sigh of relief.

Then, God said, “However, Israel will be punished. The Israelites have seen My glory and all the miracles I have done for them in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet these stubborn-hearted people have put Me to the test ten times:

“When Israel was trapped between Pharaoh’s army, the mountains and the Red Sea, the people refused to trust Me. When I brought them to Marah, they murmured against Me. When these people grew hungry, they lusted for their former lives back in Egypt. When I fed them manna and ordered them to collect only enough for their daily needs, they disobeyed Me and gathered more than what they needed. When I commanded the people to rest on the Sabbath and not go out to collect manna on My day, they disobeyed My voice. When Israel thirst-

ed for water in the Wilderness of Sin, they spoke against My servant instead of trusting in Me. When Israel grew impatient, they made a golden calf, and then bowed down to it and called it their god. When the people came to Taberah, instead of fearing Me, they grumbled and complained. When Israel and the mixed multitude no longer appreciated the food I had given them, they again lusted after their former lives in Egypt. And now, when the Promised Land is just within their reach, these stubborn, carnal-minded Israelites refuse to trust and obey Me.

“Since they have refused to obey My voice, I refuse to bring this generation into the land that I swore to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

“But My servant Caleb is different. He has the right attitude—teachable and obedient. I can work with him. Therefore, I will bring him into the Promised Land, and his descendants shall possess it. Joshua shall inherit it also, because he and Caleb have fully obeyed Me.

“As for the rest of Israel, tell the people that when they complain, grumble, moan and murmur against My trusted servant, they have done so against Me. This generation of Israel—everyone twenty years old and older—shall live the rest of their lives out here in the barren wasteland of the wilderness. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, no one of this generation shall inherit the Promised Land. Because Israel sent spies to scout out the land for forty days, you shall wander in the wilderness for forty years. And after your first generation has died out, your children, who will have grown up—the second generation of Israel—will enter Canaan in your place. The great and awesome blessings you have passed up will be given to them. Thus says the Eternal” (Numbers 14:10-35).

God had to teach Israel that rebelling against Him and disobeying His instructions always brings bad results.

But most people today do not understand this. They believe that they can break God’s perfect Law, and lie, steal, break the Sabbath, etc., without suffering for their wrong actions. They see God’s Law as being harsh, instead of appreciating the many wonderful blessings God gives to those who keep His commandments.

Israel Fails to Learn

As for the ten scouts who gave Israel an evil report about Canaan, God immediately took away their lives with a plague. It was their shortsightedness that caused Israel to rebel against the Eternal.

When Moses relayed God's message to the whole congregation of Israel, all the people greatly mourned and wept, saying, "What have we done? Why did we listen to those ten wicked scouts? Why did we foolishly allow ourselves to think that Joshua and Caleb were liars? Now we shall never enter the Promised Land!"

Early the next morning, some Israelites banded together and decided to head for Canaan anyway. They reasoned, "The land is just over the mountain. All we have to do is enter it and claim what's ours. God has forgiven our sin. Surely, when He sees how courageous and brave we are, He will bless us in taking the Promised Land away from our enemies."

And so they went. Others in the camp who watched began to wonder if they should go up to Canaan with them.

When news of this new recklessness came to him, Moses warned all those who would listen: "First you refuse to obey God when He tells you to go into the Promised Land. And now that He has cut you off from it, you refuse to take your punishment—despite the fact that God has spared your ungrateful lives and has reserved Canaan for your children to inherit. Do not be foolish, Israel! If you disobey your Creator and try to take Canaan on your own strength, the Amalekites and the Canaanites will swoop down upon you, like vultures eating the dead—you and your loved ones will surely die by the sword! Because you stubbornly refuse to follow God's lead, the Eternal One will not be with you to fight against your enemies."

Despite Moses' strong and dire warning, Israel would not listen. Like all people who do not have God's Holy Spirit converting their carnal minds, the Israelites decided for themselves how to live, how to decide right from wrong, good from evil.

Moses climbed up a mountain slope and watched the people down below as they foolishly headed off for disaster. He sighed, and thought to himself, "Will they ever learn?"

Just like Moses had said, the moment these foolhardy Israelites tried to enter the Promised Land, hordes of Amalekite and Canaanite warriors swooped down upon them, slashing and hacking with their swords and other weapons. Those few who survived the attack managed to get back to camp. Again, the Israelites paid a deadly price for not learning to obey God (Numbers 14:36-45).

CHAPTER FORTY

KORAH'S REBELLION

As time passed, the Israelites began to take God's Law more seriously. They were finally realizing (at least up to a point) that their own wrong attitudes were causing them to rebel against God. So the people made a better effort in keeping His commandments, statutes, precepts and judgments.

For example, one Sabbath day, a group of Israelites discovered one of their people gathering sticks. This man was breaking God's Sabbath by working. If he really needed the sticks, he should have collected them the day *before* the Sabbath—the sixth day of the week, sometimes called the Preparation Day.

The group who found the man grabbed him by the arms and brought him before Moses and Aaron. The Sabbath-breaker was put under guard until Moses could talk to God and find out what should be done to the man.

God's judgment came swiftly, for the Eternal said, "The man has broken My Sabbath commandment and has set the wrong example for others to follow. He was fully aware of this law. He must be put to death."

God is not a cruel monster, as some might think. His ultimate plan is to help all people some day enter His kingdom. But in order for this to happen, people must learn to trust and obey God. His laws define the true and only way to real happiness and lasting peace.

At God's command, the man was taken outside the camp. Then the people of Israel took up stones and stoned the Sabbath-breaker to death. This taught all of Israel that God is serious about keeping His laws (Numbers 15:32-36).

One day, after God's kingdom is set up on the earth, this man will be brought back to life. God will then give him a chance to build holy, righteous, godly character. If he succeeds, that man will one day be born into the kingdom of God, and he will live forever in genuine joy and peace.

Another Rebellion

Among the Levites was a man named Korah. He was from the family of Kohath. Whenever the Israelites were on the march, the Kohathites were responsible for carrying the holy furnishings of God's tabernacle (Numbers 4:1-20). No other family was allowed to carry out this important and special responsibility.

Korah, however, did not appreciate this wonderful duty. Instead, whenever Aaron and his sons covered the holy furnishings for transport, Korah became jealous and resentful.

"How come only Aaron and his sons get to touch and handle the holy things of God's tabernacle?" he wondered. "Hasn't God made all of Israel His Holy people? What makes them think that they're better than the rest of us?"

Korah sat on his bitter feelings and allowed them to build. Eventually, his bitterness controlled his thinking. He slowly began to hate and despise Aaron.

Korah turned to his closest friends, and said, "How come we can't be priests? All we get to do is carry things, while Aaron and his sons take on the greater tasks—that's not fair!" Like a rotten apple in a barrel of ripe ones, Korah's rebellious attitude spread among his family and friends.

He soon discovered that there were other Israelites who felt the same way—bitter and dissatisfied. Among them were two brothers named Dathan and Abiram. They and their friend On were of the tribe of Reuben. They questioned Moses' leadership. They believed that he was the wrong leader for Israel.

Secretly, Korah plotted with these men in an effort to remove Moses and Aaron from their leadership positions. They managed to convince 250 Israelite leaders, who represented a rapidly growing crowd of disgruntled Israelites, to assist them in carrying out their wicked scheme. When they were ready to launch their plan, Korah, Dathan, Abiram, On and the 250 leaders gathered before Moses and Aaron.

Speaking for them, Korah jabbed an accusing finger at Moses and Aaron, and said, "You take too much for yourselves! You claim to represent the people before God, but in reality you have exalted yourselves as leaders. You, Moses, do not allow others to speak to God face to face, as you do. And you, Aaron, do not allow others the privilege of offering sacrifices before the Eternal. You both have gone too far! All the congregation of Israel is holy, every one of them. God is with

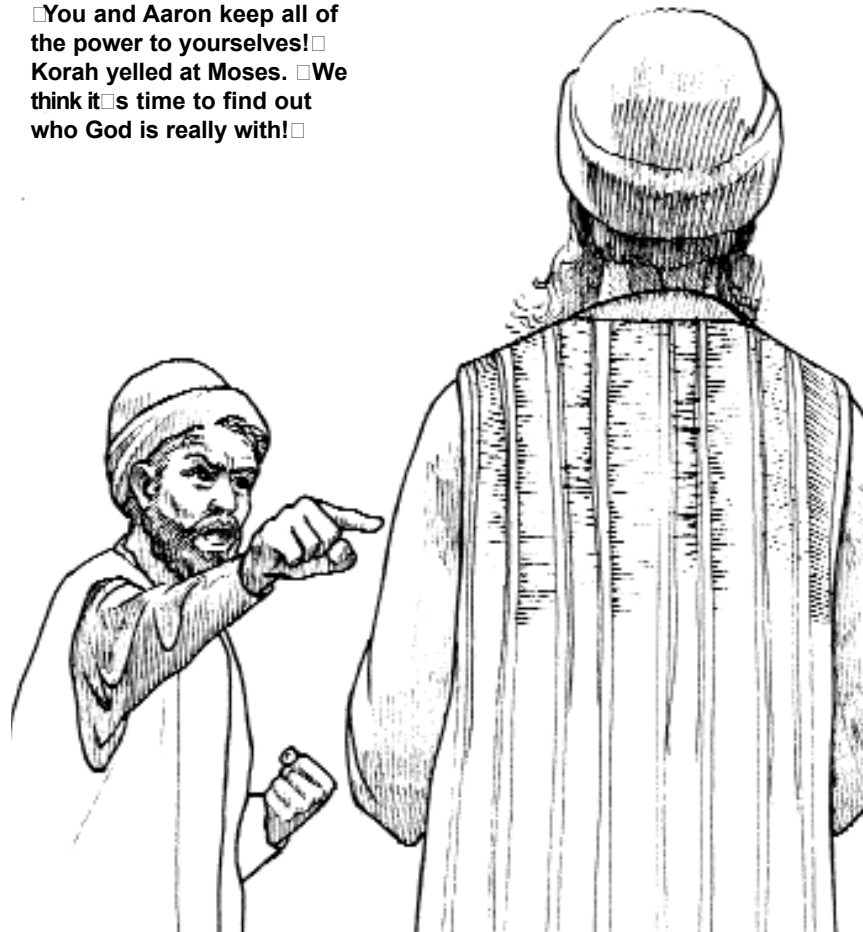
us all, not just with you two. We should all have a say in how things should be run. Why do you exalt yourselves above God's holy and sacred assembly?"

Moses and Aaron were taken aback. They looked at the angry faces of the men—men who held trusted positions of leadership. And now these men were trying to overthrow God's government!

After praying intensely for God's help and guidance, Moses faced Korah and his rebels.

"Be careful of what you say. It is you sons of Levi who take too much upon yourselves!" he said. "God has set you apart from the rest of Israel and has given you the privilege of working in His tabernacle—but apparently that was not enough for you! Now you want to be priests, too! Tomorrow morning, God will clearly show who He has picked to be His leaders and priests over Israel. Assemble at the tabernacle and bring with you censers with burning fire and incense, if you dare. God will clearly choose who His high priest should be."

**□You and Aaron keep all of the power to yourselves!□
Korah yelled at Moses. □We think it's time to find out who God is really with!□**



The censers, which were holy, were to be used only by God's priests; they were used to burn sweet-smelling incense in God's tabernacle, for the morning and evening sacrifices. The burning incense represented the prayers of God's people, which should come before His heavenly throne day and night (Revelation 8:3-4; 5:8).

After listening to Moses' courageous words, apparently On no longer wanted to be part of the rebellion. He quietly slipped away, hoping that he would not be punished for allying himself with these defiant men.

Meanwhile, Moses turned away from Korah and tried to convince Dathan and Abiram of their folly.

"Come—let's talk about this in private, away from these other men. Surely you must realize that nothing good can come from your actions."

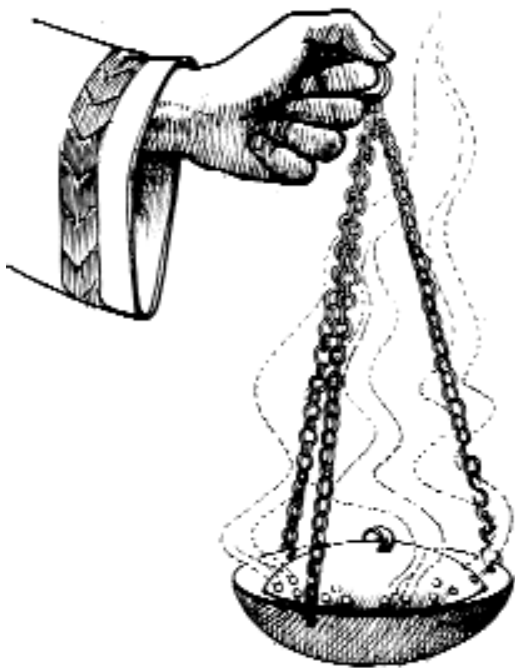
But Dathan and Abiram said, "We've heard enough from you, old man! You have brought us up out of Egypt, a land flowing with milk and honey, promising to give us a land we could never have! And now we're stuck wandering in this wilderness until this whole generation dies out. Yet, you have the nerve to act as though you're some kind of prince over us! Everyone here has seen your great failure as our supposed leader, Moses. It's high time we had some new leaders over Israel."

This said, the brothers walked away. The other men followed them.

As the crowd departed, shouting and laughing, one of the men gleefully said to Moses and Aaron, "See you tomorrow morning!"

News of Korah's rebellion spread throughout the whole camp of Israel. Many Israelites began to take sides, some for Korah and some for Moses. Israel was already becoming divided. Such is the danger of supporting men rather than supporting God's government.

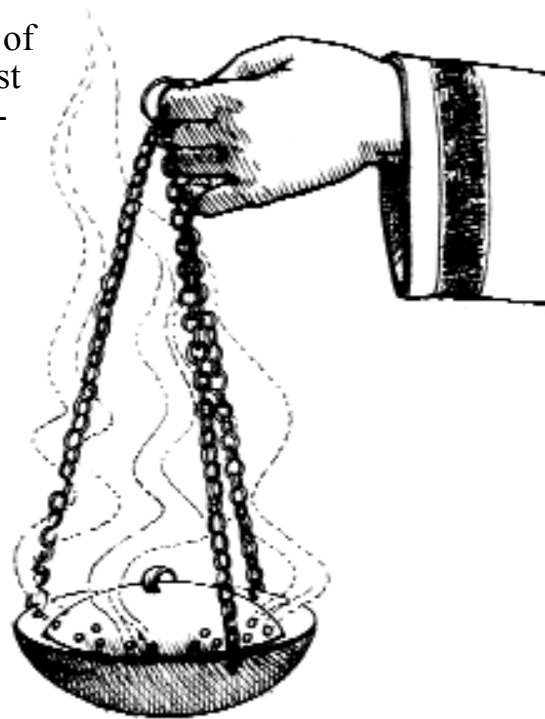
Though filled with much anger, Moses turned to God in prayer, seeking His help instead of relying upon himself. Moses reminded God that he did



nothing to hurt or offend any of these men, and that he did his best to be God's true and faithful servant (Numbers 16:1-15).

God's Swift Judgment

Early the next morning, Moses, Aaron and the elders of Israel met with Korah, Dathan, Abiram and the 250 rebel leaders at God's tabernacle. Every rebel brought with him a censer, using them to burn sweet-smelling incense. Aaron did the same. Then Korah and his men waited for God to make His decision. All the rebels



were self-confident that they would soon take on the special responsibilities and enormous duties of God's priesthood.

Suddenly, the glory of the Eternal appeared to all. Korah grinned and began to move forward, convinced that God was about to pick him to be Israel's new high priest.

But the voice of God said, "Moses and Aaron, separate yourselves from these rebels so that I can destroy them!"

Korah's smug grin disappeared, quickly replaced by a look of shock and disbelief.

Meanwhile, Dathan, Abiram and the other men trembled in fear. "What have we done to ourselves?" they thought. Realizing that God had clearly chosen Aaron and his sons to be His priests, the rebels ran back to their tents and hid among their families. But it was all in vain; no man can hide from God.

Moses and Aaron humbly spoke to the Eternal, praying with their faces to the ground. "O great and almighty God, You understand the hearts of all men. You know who has sinned, and who has not. In Your just anger, consider Your awesome power and do not destroy all of Israel along with those who have rebelled against You."

God said, "Very well. Warn the Israelites to move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Those who take heed will be spared the punishment that I will unleash upon these carnal-minded rebels."

Moses rushed out to warn the people who were at or near Korah, Dathan and Abiram's tents. Aaron and the elders followed him.

"Get out!" he shouted. "Get out now before it's too late! Get away from these men's tents—don't even touch anything that belongs to them, else you will be destroyed along with them!"

Many of the people fled, but a few stubbornly refused to leave. The wives, children and grandchildren of Dathan and Abiram would not budge, either. They did not believe Moses.

But the children of Korah did believe him, and departed from their father without hesitation (Numbers 16:16-27; 26:11).

Moses spoke to the gathering crowd of curious onlookers: "Listen to me! These rebels have questioned my leadership. They have stood up against my office, and Aaron's. They desire to take over Israel and rule by their own will—not by God's. Since many of you have doubted my authority, God will now show you whom He has chosen to lead His people."

Then, he pointed to Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and said, "If these men die naturally, as the way most men do, then God has not sent me. But if God opens wide the mouth of the earth and swallows these men alive—along with those who stand with them, and their belongings—then you will know that the Eternal has rejected these would-be leaders."

The very moment Moses finished speaking, the ground trembled and shook as the earth split wide apart! People shouted and screamed, and hung on to whatever they could grab. The surface of the earth rippled as it tore open beneath the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. They and their households dropped down into the belly of the rumbling, quaking earth. All were swallowed alive. Then, the earth's mouth closed tight, sealing the rebels' fate. Everything was gone—the men, their families, their tents and possessions. It was as though God had erased them from the face of the earth!

The curiosity seekers ran for dear life, crying, "Keep running! Keep running—before we get swallowed up alive, too!"

The 250 men who had dared to challenge Aaron and his sons for the priesthood wondered, "Nothing has happened to us yet. Has God forgotten us?"

They soon found out. God shot down a burst of fire upon the 250 rebel leaders, instantly consuming them and burning them to a crisp!

Quickly, God commanded Eleazar, Aaron's son, to gather the dead men's censers, which were caught in the deadly blaze. Since the censers were still holy, God decided to put them to a holy use. He had Eleazar hammer the censers into plates as a cover for the altar in the

tabernacle. From then on, this was to be a memorial—a reminder that only those who are descendants of Aaron may offer incense before God at His tabernacle (Numbers 16:28-40).

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

MOSES LOSES HIS TEMPER

Amazingly, the Israelites still did not learn the bitter lesson of complaining and rebelling against God or His servants.

The very next day, after God had crushed Korah's rebellion, the whole camp of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The people accused them of killing Korah and his men—ignoring the fact that God was the One who had taken their rebellious lives. The Israelites even claimed that Korah and his rebels were actually “men of God”—and that Moses and Aaron were not!

The whole congregation of Israel gathered before Moses and Aaron to hurl lies and false accusations at them. Even those people who were not quite sure about the actions of the rebels got caught up in the crowd's heated arguments.

As the Israelites angrily shook their fists and hurled insults at Moses and Aaron, someone in the crowd shouted, “Look! Look at what's going on at the tabernacle!”

The angry crowd turned to face God's tabernacle and saw that it was covered by the pillar of cloud. Then the glory of the Eternal suddenly appeared. This strange and awesome sight quickly brought the liars and false accusers to silence.

Moses and Aaron raced through the crowd of gawkers and onlookers and rushed into the tabernacle. Once there, God said to them, “Get away from this people. They stubbornly cling to their rebellious ways. Therefore, I will instantly consume them with a plague!”

Moved by fear and loving respect, the two men fell to their knees and prayed for God to change His mind.

Then Moses told Aaron, the high priest, to take a holy censer and put a fire in it from the holy altar, and use it to burn incense.

“Hurry!” he warned. “Then take the censer to the midst of the camp and make atonement for the people. Hurry—don't delay! God's wrath is already at hand!”

Aaron rushed to follow Moses' instructions, and by the time he raced to the midst of the people, God's wrath had already begun. A mysterious plague spread among the people, taking thousands upon thousands of lives. While the plague raged, Aaron stood between the heaps of dead bodies and throngs of living, crying, fearful people as he burned sweet-smelling incense in the holy censer. (The burning incense represented prayers of repentance, thanks and praise—which the Israelites should have been offering to God in the first place.)

At the very moment Aaron had made atonement for the people's sins, the plague stopped.

Those who survived clearly saw that God had accepted Aaron's intercession. And all were reminded of this when they later buried the 14,700 dead bodies (Numbers 16:41-19).

The Budding of Aaron's Rod

God had had enough of the people's constant complaining and rebellion against His government. God knew that, despite the recent plague, many still doubted He had chosen Aaron to be His high priest. Some people actually believed that the recent tragedies—the earthquake that had devoured Korah and his men; the fire that had consumed the 250 rebel leaders; the plague that had destroyed 14,700 complainers—were all just coincidences, flukes of nature or random events of time and chance. Amazingly, certain Israelites stubbornly refused to believe that these tragic events were, in reality, punishments from God. As a result, some still questioned Moses and Aaron's authority as leaders over Israel.

So the Eternal decided to put an end to all doubts, once and for all.

Through Moses, God commanded that the leader of each Israelite tribe bring a wooden rod to the tabernacle. Each of the 12 rods was to have written on it the name of that tribe's leader. The rods were then placed in the tabernacle before the Testimony (the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments, which were kept inside the Ark of the Covenant). Among these rods was one representing the tribe of Levi; this rod had Aaron's name written on it.

God said, "Here is how the whole congregation of Israel will know whom I have chosen to be My high priest: I will cause the rod of the man whom I have picked to blossom. No human being can produce this miracle. Therefore, in this way you will know that this wondrous sign came from Me."

The people listened to Moses relay God's decision, and all nodded in agreement.

The next day, Moses went into the tabernacle to bring out the rods. Meanwhile, the whole congregation anxiously waited outside to see the results. When Moses came back out, he showed everyone the rods. The people could clearly see that only one rod had sprouted with buds and blossoms—it even yielded ripe almonds! It went above and beyond what God said He would do. This was because God wanted to leave no room for doubt in the minds of these carnal-minded Israelites.

Moses lifted the budded rod high above his head for all to see. He shouted, “This rod bears the name of Aaron! He is the man God has chosen to be His high priest over Israel. The Eternal God has spoken!”

After all the Israelites got a good look at the rods, no one could any longer doubt which man’s rod had blossomed. The people soon realized their sin of challenging God’s government and opposing the man God selects and uses to do His work.

Feeling guilty and ashamed, they cried out to Moses, saying, “We have sinned! Surely God will take our lives because of our foolishness and rebellion.” They were finally learning to respect God’s government.

The Eternal, who offers mercy and forgiveness to all who seek Him with their whole heart, decided not to take their lives (though He was well within His right to do so).

God commanded Moses to bring Aaron’s rod back before the Testimony. From then on, the budded rod was to be a reminder—a sign against the rebels who grumbled and complained against God and His government. Aaron’s rod would remind people to never challenge the authority of God’s true servants (Numbers 17).

Return to Kadesh

For the next forty years, Israel wandered through the barren wilderness. God’s Word reveals very little about what went on during those four decades. In a way, the Bible’s silence represents how wasted and empty those years were for Israel. Had the people been willing to fully obey God and follow His directions, the Israelites could have spent those forty years prospering in the Land of Promise.

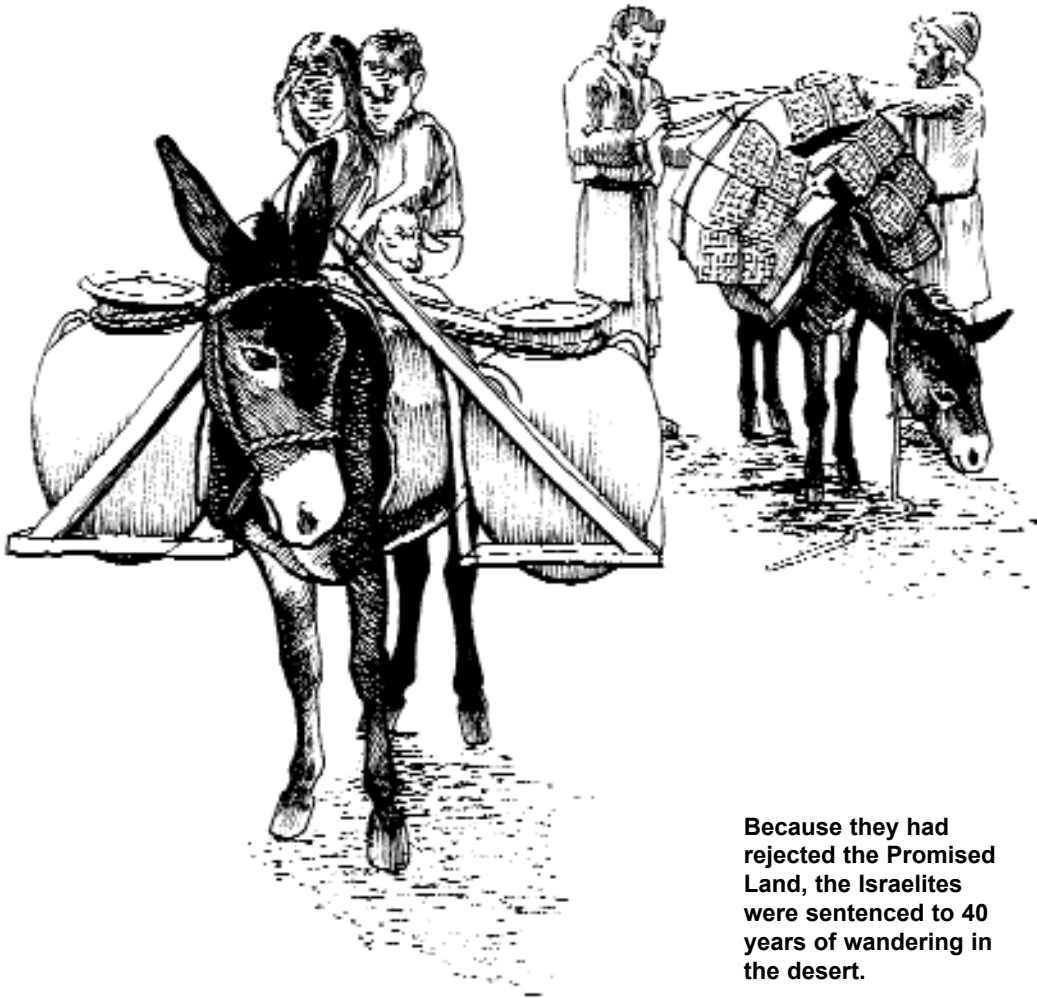
Year after year, the people gradually died, generally of old age, and were buried out in the wilderness. By the time the forty years were finished, the entire first generation of those whom God had delivered from Egypt had died. Their children, who had become adults, took their parents’ place.

God was now ready to deliver the Promised Land to the second generation of the children of Israel. He led His people back to Kadesh,

in the Wilderness of Zin. This was the place where the Israelites had rebelled against God, four decades earlier.

A buzz of excitement and eager anticipation electrified the air. This new generation of Israelites knew that they would soon inherit the land that their parents would not see. Though they suffered witnessing their parents, aunts, uncles and other loved ones die of old age over the years, this second generation was determined not to repeat the mistakes of the first.

And the recent death of Miriam, Moses and Aaron's older sister, reminded Israel even more that God would not bring the first generation into Canaan (Numbers 20:1).



Because they had rejected the Promised Land, the Israelites were sentenced to 40 years of wandering in the desert.

Moses Sets the Wrong Example

Just like their parents and grandparents before them, this new generation of Israelites was carnal-minded. The vast majority of them did not have God's Holy Spirit working within their minds. And without this power, the people could not fully trust God to work out all their problems.

This is why Israel grumbled and complained when they arrived at Kadesh. There was no water to be found anywhere. Scouts searched the land, but all that could be found was sparse vegetation and dust.

Angry and upset, the Israelites confronted Moses and Aaron, who by now were very old.

“Why did you bring us out here to die? Was it not enough for you that all our parents died in the wilderness? If only we would have died with them! At least we would not be out here dying of thirst. You, Moses, are the reason why we left Egypt. Our parents were right—we were better off back in Egypt, where we had plenty of good things to eat and lots of fresh, clean water to drink. Why did you ever bring us out here, Moses?”

As was their habit, Moses and Aaron went to the tabernacle, fell down on their knees, and sought God. (Unfortunately, few people today follow this habit of always seeking God first.)

When the glory of the Eternal appeared, God said to Moses, “Take your rod, and then you and Aaron shall gather before the whole congregation of Israel. When you speak to the rock, the people shall see water pour out from it. Then the Israelites and their animals will have all the water they can drink.”

Moses and Aaron went before the people, just as God had commanded. But when Moses scanned the bitter, grumbling faces in the crowd of accusers and complainers, he began to think. For 40 long years he had to contend with complaints, lies, false accusations, insults, ingratitude, and disobedient and rebellious attitudes. Several times, Moses had to step in and ask God to forgive these stubborn, carnal-minded people, lest God destroy them without a trace. Day after day, year after year, the whole congregation of Israel saw God's presence dwell with them, in the pillars of cloud and fire. Yet, Israel still would not respect God.

“And they do not respect me,” Moses thought to himself.

Anger began to fill his mind. Bitterness began to take root. In a fit of bottled-up, slow-boiling rage, Moses lifted up his shepherd's rod, and yelled, “Hear me, you rebels! You wanted water from me? Here is your water!”



Moses swung the rod and struck the rock.
Nothing happened.

Moses grew even angrier. He swung the rod again, striking the rock even harder than before. Immediately, water gushed out from it, and the people rushed to drink and store as much as they could. This place came to be called “Meribah,” which means “contention” and “quarreling.”

Later, God had some choice words to say to Moses and Aaron: “You are supposed to represent Me before My people, yet you did not follow My instructions. I told you to speak to the rock—not strike it with your rod. By disobeying My orders, you did not honor Me before Israel—you honored yourself!”

Suddenly, Moses realized his great sin—he now understood that he had let his anger and bitterness control him. In his outburst of rage, he had disrespected God before all Israel and set the wrong example.

Realizing how terrible his sin was, Moses felt deeply ashamed. And so did Aaron, who had silently stood by and supported what his brother had done. Now both men sought God's forgiveness.

Though God did forgive them, He knew that they still had to be punished. God had to set an example for Israel to learn.

The Eternal said to Moses, "Because you did not honor and respect Me before My people, I cannot allow you to bring Israel into the Promised Land. Someone else will bring them into Canaan."

Unlike carnal men, Moses did not act like a spoiled brat and scream, "That's not fair!" Instead, Moses—who was the meekest man alive—agreed with God's decision.

He simply said, "Yes, Sir" (Numbers 20:2-13).

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

FIRST VICTORIES

The Edomites living in Mount Seir, near where God's people were encamped, were for the most part friendly with Israel (Deuteronomy 2:29). But not all Edomites were friendly.

The people of Edom descended from Esau, brother of Jacob (God had changed Jacob's name to Israel). This made the Edomites and the Israelites close relatives.

The Edomites of Mount Seir had a healthy respect for the power of Israel's God. This fear led them to sell food and water to His chosen people. They also allowed the Israelites to travel safely through their territory.

Encouraged by their hospitality, Moses decided to send a message to the king of Edom, since this king's territory provided a direct route to the land of Canaan. Through messengers, Moses asked the king for permission to pass through his land. He reminded him that Edom and Israel were brother nations—family.

“By now you have heard of all the hardships Israel has suffered,” the message went. “How we were forced into slavery in Egypt, how God miraculously delivered us from Pharaoh's hand, and how we have wandered forty years in the wilderness due to our disobedience.

“O king, let us now pass through your kingdom. We will not pass through your fields or vineyards, nor drink from your wells. We will only stick to the King's Highway, where you can keep a close eye on us. We will pass through your territory as quickly as possible. Do this kind favor for us and our God will greatly bless you.”

When Moses' messengers had finished speaking, they could see from the king's face that he was none too pleased. They began to worry that he might kill them where they stood.

Slowly, the king of Edom said, “Tell your Moses that I have heard all about him. Does he think that I am a fool? What other king would be foolish enough to allow a nation of three million people to pass through his land and not expect them to attack? Tell Moses that I am

no fool. Israel shall not pass through my kingdom. If any Israelite dares to trespass, he will be met with force.”

The messengers rushed to deliver the king’s message to Moses—but they soon returned to the King of Edom with another message.

They told the king, “Thus says Moses: ‘If you let us pass, we will only stick to the King’s Highway. We have no intentions of attacking you. And if you are worried that we will eat your food or drink your water, we will pay for anything we consume. We only want to get to Canaan.’”

The king sent another message back to Moses: “If you set foot in my land, you will die!”

Then, the king sent out a strong show of force—an army of fierce warriors—to stand guard at Edom’s border. He also sent his scouts to keep tabs on Israel’s every move.

God could have stepped in and escorted Israel through Edom. The Edomites could not have stopped Him. However, God had given Edom to Esau’s descendants long ago. It was not a part of the Promised Land. In fact, Israel was forbidden to take any part of it, not even a foot (Deuteronomy 2:2-6; Numbers 20:14-21).

Death of the High Priest

God led the children of Israel from Kadesh to Mt. Hor, which bordered Edom.

From there, all the people watched Moses, Aaron and Eleazar climb up the mountain. Many began to cry, for they knew that one of the greatest servants of God would not be coming back to them.

When the men came to the right spot, Moses followed God’s instruction and removed from Aaron the garments of the high priest. Moses then placed them on Aaron’s son; God had chosen Eleazar to become Israel’s new high priest. After this, Aaron, at 123 years of ripe old age, died in peace atop Mt. Hor (Numbers 33:38-39). He was not allowed to enter the Promised Land with Israel because he had assisted his brother Moses in dishonoring God at Meribah.

Tears of sorrow poured from Eleazar’s eyes, but he soon was overcome with a sense of great responsibility. He knew that he had to do his very best in fully obeying God and carefully setting the right example for Israel in his new office.

Eleazar and Moses climbed back down Mt. Hor, and were met by the sorrowful looks and bitter weeping of the people. For the next thirty days, the whole camp of Israel mourned the loss of Aaron (Numbers 20:22-29).



After Aaron's death, his son Eleazar took over his duties as the Israelites' high priest.

First Victory

Ever since God had delivered the Israelites from slavery, news of their amazing release spread throughout Canaan. Merchants, traders and others who regularly traveled between Egypt and Canaan told incredible stories of Israel and God. Having learned that the same God who miraculously delivered them from Egypt had promised to lead the Israelites to inherit Canaan, the kings and people living there were naturally worried and afraid. So they regularly sent spies down into the lower Sinai Peninsula to monitor Israel's march through the wilderness.

The Canaanites were relieved when they heard that God sentenced Israel to wander the desert for forty years. But now those years were over. The kings of Canaan raced to come up with a plan to destroy God's people before it was too late.

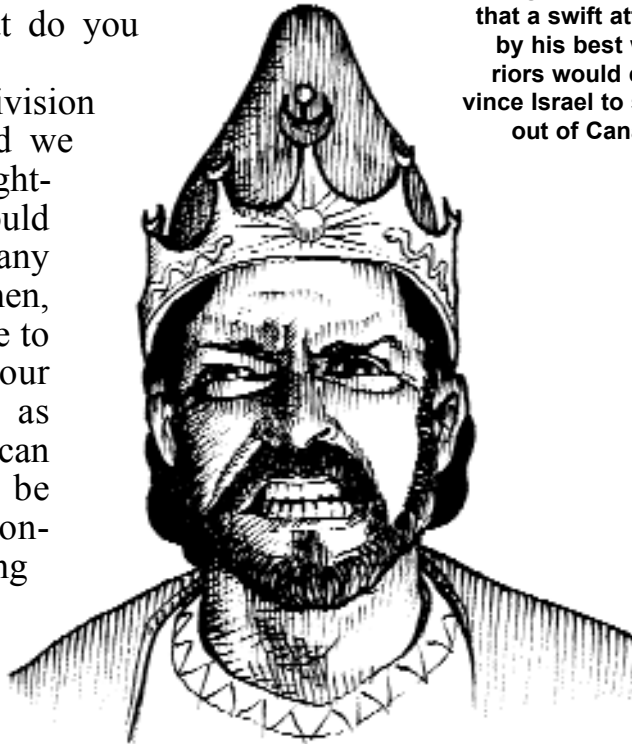
King Arad said to his generals, "From what my spies tell me, Israel's army may be inexperienced, but it is large and organized. Perhaps we cannot defeat them."

A general stepped forward to say, "My king, maybe we do not need to totally destroy Israel. Instead, what if we just gave the Israelites a bloody nose, so to speak?"

The king said, "What do you mean?"

"Suppose we sent a division of our best warriors and we ordered them to do a lightning attack. Our men would rush in and kill as many Israelites as possible. Then, before Israel has a chance to react, we would pull our men back out, taking as many prisoners as they can gather. Israel would be bruised, broken and confused. Such a humiliating defeat would make this Moses think twice before coming up against us."

King Arad rubbed



King Arad hoped that a swift attack by his best warriors would convince Israel to stay out of Canaan.

his hands together and grinned. “Make it so.”

The generals quickly carried out the king’s command. The army of Canaanites swooped down upon Israel, striking fast and hard. Then, just as quickly as they had rushed in, the Canaanites retreated, taking with them prisoners—Israelite woman and children.

King Arad thought his plan was a success—but he soon learned that his scheme had backfired. Instead of making Israel sorrowful and afraid, the Israelites were incensed with anger! With one voice, God’s people said, “If You, Almighty God, will deliver these wretched Canaanites into our hands, we promise to utterly destroy their cities. We will wipe them off the face of the earth!”

God agreed. It had long been His will to remove the ungodly, idol-worshipping Canaanites. Often, they sacrificed their own children to their false gods. The Eternal knew that Israel could not live alongside such horrible pagan worshippers. He recognized that the Canaanites’ evil ways would corrupt His people and lead them down the path to their own destruction.

With God on their side, Israel marched through Arad’s kingdom and utterly destroyed his people and their cities. After this, the name of that place became Hormah, which means “utter destruction.”

Once the Israelite prisoners had been rescued and released, all of Israel shouted and danced for joy. The people praised and thanked God for giving them this great victory.

This was Israel’s first successful battle for the Promised Land. If Israel continued to diligently seek and obey God, many more victories would be just ahead (Numbers 21:1-3).

Attack of the Fiery Serpents

Though Israel had rejoiced, the people fell back into their carnal ways of grumbling and complaining when things did not go their way.



Because Israel could not get permission to pass through the land of Edom, God led His people in a longer, more out-of-the-way route to Canaan. In this way, Israel could travel without worrying about being attacked by foreign nations.

But when the Israelites noticed that they were being led on a longer route, they became discouraged and upset. An angry crowd confronted Moses. “What is this?” they shouted. “We thought our wandering in the wilderness was over!”

Others in the crowd used this opportunity as an excuse to complain about other things: “That’s right! We’re tiring of all this wandering when Canaan is just within our reach. And we’re running out of bread and water, too!”

Moses was taken aback. “What are you saying?” he asked. “Has not God provided you with water in the past—why don’t you believe He will do so again? And as for having no bread, what about all the manna God has given you? There’s plenty of bread from heaven to eat. And it’s even healthier and sweeter than any bread made by human hands.”

But the complainers said, “Bah! We’re sick of this manna. It’s the same old thing every day. Besides, it’s too light. We want something meatier—we want something new!”

Manna represented God’s Word, the Holy Bible. Just as the ancient, physical Israelites were to eat manna every day, spiritual Israelites today—Christians—must study the Bible daily. God’s Word—His written instruction to mankind—tells us how to live: First, how to obey and please God; second, how to help, serve and get along with other people.

God was not pleased with Israel’s ungrateful attitude. To teach His people a lesson, He decided to punish them. He sent fiery serpents to invade the whole camp of Israel. People screamed and ran, while others were bitten by these serpents. Their vicious bites inflicted great pain, and the wounds made the victims feel as though their skin was on fire. Many Israelites died from these poisonous bites.

Those who escaped came before Moses and asked him to pray to God on their behalf. Taking pity on them, Moses did as they requested.

Immediately, God answered. He had Moses make a bronze image of a serpent and fashion it upon a tall pole.

Then, God said, “Have all of the survivors who were bitten come before the pole and look upon this serpent. Let this bronze image remind them of their folly, and that I will not tolerate such foolish complaining.”

Moses followed God's instruction. All the survivors who passed by the pole and looked at the serpent were instantly healed.

The serpent on the pole was not some kind of magical idol. It was simply a tool God used to remind His people of their sins. It was also a test to see if Israel would obey Him (Numbers 21:7-9).

And there was another important purpose God had in mind concerning the serpent on the pole (John 3:14-15)

Sin is the breaking of God's Law (I John 3:4). All people have sinned (Romans 3:23). The penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23).

As a symbol, the serpent on the pole pointed to a (then) future event—when Jesus Christ died on a stake in order to take upon Himself all the sins of mankind. By doing this, Christ, our Savior, died in our place so that we won't have to.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

THE KING AND THE FALSE PROPHET

God led Israel to circle around the borders of Edom and Moab, whose land the Israelites were not allowed to take. Just as the Edomites were Israel's close relatives, so were the Moabites. They descended from Lot's son Moab.

Lot, the nephew of Abraham, was the man whom God's angels rescued just before Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction. Abraham had allowed Lot to choose for himself a portion of the Promised Land. Lot chose the land that eventually became Moab. God remembered what Abraham had done for Lot and decided to honor His servant's kind decision. This is why the land of the Moabites was off-limits to Israel.

God led His people around Edom and Moab until they came to the Arnon River. This was the border between northern Moab and the Amorite territory.

The Amorites were a Canaanite people who generally dwelled in the hill country of the Jordan River. Many of these Amorites were giants who towered over average-sized men (Amos 2:9).

Even though God did not forbid Israel from taking the land away from the Amorites, Moses decided to pay the Amorite king a courtesy. He sent messengers to King Sihon in Hesbon, asking permission to pass through his territory. Moses assured him that Israel would not raid the Amorites' crops or drink from their water wells. But the king refused to give his permission. He was well aware that Israel had destroyed King Arad and his cities.

"And now these Israelites think they can do the same to me," said Sihon to his advisors. "They are already within striking distance of my cities."

One of his advisors spoke up: "Don't trust Israel. If you let these people pass through our country, they will be in a position to take whatever they want."

"Yes," said another man. "Better to destroy the Israelites now while they are still outside our land."

The king agreed. He rushed to gather all the soldiers he could collect and sent them to attack Israel at Jahaz.

But what Sihon feared most came true: Israel, delivered by God, utterly destroyed the king and his army. Israel conquered all the cities, towns and villages in the land, which the Amorites had taken from Moab. Even though the Moabites once owned this land, God allowed Israel to keep it, since it no longer belonged to Moab (Numbers 21:10-13, 21-31).

Israel's new territory extended from the Arnon River in the south, to the Jabbok River in the north. It was bordered by the Jordan River in the west and the land of Ammon in the east.

The Ammonites descended from Ben-Ammi, another son of Lot. Just as with the Moabites, Ammon's territory was off-limits to Israel. God's people were also forbidden to attack the Ammonites (Genesis 19:36-38).

King Og Attacks

Moses sent spies to secretly search out the land of Jazer. They soon brought back reports that Jazer had abundant fertile grazing land—just right for the many herds and flocks of livestock Israel was amassing. With God's blessing and leadership, His people captured the villages of Jazer and drove out the Ammonites.

Once settled in their new territory, Israel was ready to attack Bashan. This, too, was a fertile region, lying west of the Sea of Chinnereth (which, centuries later, became known as the Sea of Galilee).

Og, the Amorite king of Bashan, was a giant. His bed was more than thirteen feet long and six feet wide! Besides many small towns and villages, Og ruled over sixty cities. These cities were like fortresses—large, protected by walls, and crammed with people.

Hearing that his ally, King Sihon, had been defeated, Og sent his mighty army of warriors to attack Israel.

King Og's reputation as a fierce warrior was known far and wide, even among Israel. Many of the Israelites began to doubt they could stand up to Og and his soldiers.

But God told Moses, "Do not fear this man. I will deliver Og and his people into your hands, just as I did with Sihon and his people."

Encouraged, Moses had his generals lead the charge against King Og's forces. The two armies clashed at Edrei. The fierce battle ended only when Og, his warrior sons, and all his people were destroyed. Among those who attacked Israel, there were no survivors.

With the enemy out of the way, Israel took possession of Og's sixty cities and the rest of the territory (Numbers 21:33-35; 32:1; Deuteronomy 3:1-11).

Throughout Canaan, the people trembled with fear. The kings and military leaders talked among themselves, saying, "Something has to be done about Israel! How could former slaves defeat the armies of Og and Sihon so easily?"

Others said, "Because Israel's God is more powerful than the gods of Og and Sihon. Look at how Israel's God humbled the gods of the Egyptians."

"But what can we do? Israel picks and chooses what territory to take. How can we hope to stand against such people?"

The people of Canaan searched for a plan to destroy Israel—before Israel destroyed them!

A King Hires a False Prophet

Having conquered and secured their new land, Israel marched back to the plains of Moab and encamped near the Jordan River. God was preparing Israel to attack the rest of Canaan from there, starting with the city of Jericho.

The Moabites, who dwelled south of Israel's camp, were frightened, almost sick with fear. Balak, their king, worried that Israel was about to invade his kingdom. Balak and his people did not know that God had forbidden Israel to attack Moab or take any of the land.

The king and his elders met with their allies, the elders of Midian, to devise a plan to destroy Israel: "These Israelites have defeated Og and Sihon—they have conquered the land like a plague. Now that Israel is camped right at our border, what can stop them from attacking? If the Israelites chose to attack, they would eat us alive, like an ox does to grass! What can we do?"

One man said, "The Israelites are too many. They even cause our soldiers to shake and tremble. We are no match for Israel."

"Well," said another man, "If we can't defeat Israel's army, maybe we can defeat the God who leads them?"

The king said, "But how? Israel's God has defeated the gods of Egypt and every kingdom that dares oppose His people."

The elders of Midian said, "We should send for Balaam."

The other men in the room hushed to hear more.

"Balaam's reputation is well-known. Whenever he blesses people, they are truly blessed. And when he curses people, they are always cursed."

Balaam was a false prophet. He used sorcery and fortune-telling to contact evil spirits. These spirits were actually demons, posing as “gods.” Many kings and other important leaders regularly paid Balaam to pronounce curses on their enemies. People thought that this false prophet had great powers, but Balaam’s powers really came from the devil and his fallen angels—demons. The truth is, Balaam could only do what God allowed him to do.

Desperate, King Balak sent a team of ambassadors and princes far away to the Euphrates River to hire Balaam’s demonic services. When they finally arrived at his home, the king’s representatives presented this false prophet with an expensive gift.

They said, “There is more where that came from,” as Balaam’s lust-filled eyes saw the bag of silver. “All you have to do is come back with us and curse the Israelites. Then you will be given more silver and gold than you will know what to do with.”

Balaam was willing to curse whomever King Balak wanted cursed—but he knew that he first had to get God’s permission. Not that Balaam worshipped and obeyed God—far from it. Balaam allowed himself to be controlled by Satan. Neither the devil nor his human servants can harm others without God’s permission. The Eternal is mightier and more powerful than any being, whether made of flesh or spirit!

Balaam asked the princes and ambassador to stay the night.

“I will seek God’s permission and see if He will allow me to go away with you.”

The men agreed.

That night, Balaam used animal parts in his black magic in order to contact God. This pagan ritual was unnecessary. God is willing to listen to those who wholeheartedly obey and seek to please Him. But Balaam thought that God was like the false gods of the pagans. Therefore, Balaam sought God the same way he sought those false gods.

God, in His supreme wisdom, decided to use Balaam for His own purposes. He listened to this false prophet ask for permission to travel to Moab to curse His people.

God said, “You shall not go with these people. Stay here. You shall not curse Israel, for I have blessed them.”

Balaam did not like God’s answer.

“What shall I do now?” he thought.

The next morning, King Balak’s princes and ambassadors expected Balaam to come back to Moab with them.

“Did you see how he reacted when we gave him that bag of silver?” they said to each other. “Balaam licked his lips like a starving man

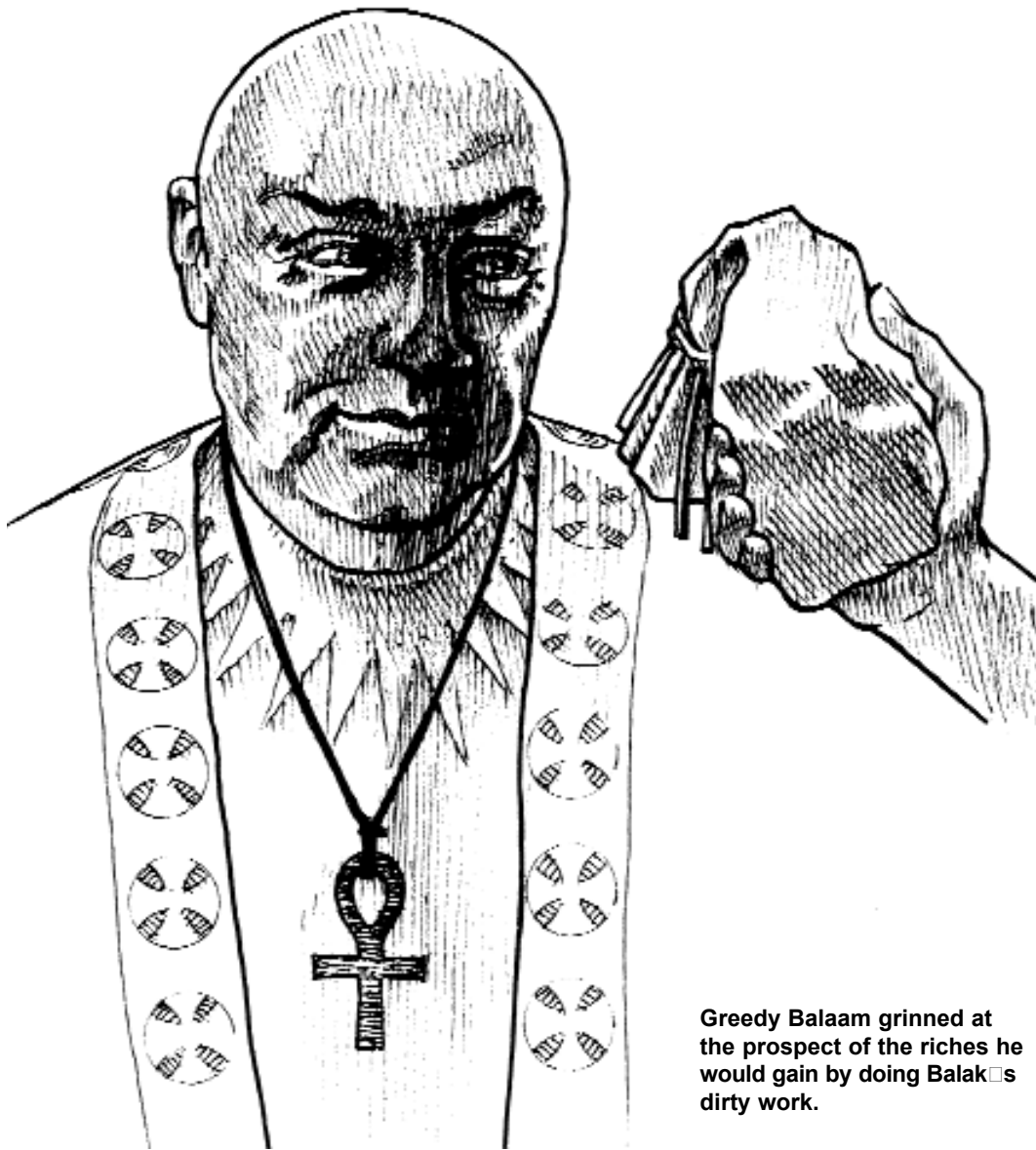
who's about to dine on a feast. I bet his bags are already packed and ready to go."

The men all laughed—but their laughter quickly turned to silence when Balaam announced his decision: "I cannot go with you. God will not allow me."

"What?" they said, shocked by what they had just heard. "What is this?"

Reluctantly, Balaam explained, "You might as well go back to your home. God keeps me from going with you."

The men departed, and told Balak what had happened.



Greedy Balaam grinned at the prospect of the riches he would gain by doing Balak's dirty work.

The king grew nervous. “But without Balaam’s curse, my kingdom is doomed.”

Thinking he could bribe Balaam with more riches, Balak sent another team of royal representatives to Balaam’s home. This time, the men were even more important and more in number.

The moment Balaam saw Balak’s men, he knew that he had another opportunity to increase his wealth.

The men said to him, “If you come with us and curse our enemy, our king will shower you with honor and riches. Whatever you desire, he will do for you.”

Balaam desperately wanted to say, “Yes, I’ll come with you!” But he knew that he could not—he was powerless to do anything without God’s permission.

Keep in mind that Balaam did not respect or obey God’s laws. He wanted to get as close to sin as God would let him. Balaam had no interest in worshipping God or serving and assisting other people. All he thought about was himself. Balaam wanted to do evil—he wanted to curse Israel and profit from it—but God would not allow it. This frustrated Balaam. His heart was set on getting all the wealth, honor and power he could get. He hated God’s laws—which sum up God’s way of give and outgoing concern for others: The way of supreme love.

Balaam wanted so badly to say “Yes” to Balak’s men that it hurt his pride to say “No.”

He said to them, “Even if your king gave me his own royal palace full of silver and gold, I cannot do or say more than what God will allow.”

The men were troubled by this. They exchanged looks with each other as if to say, “Have we traveled all this way for nothing?”

Slowly, they began to leave, but Balaam said, “Stay with me for the night, while I contact God. Perhaps He has changed His mind.”

The men stayed, though some of them thought that Balaam was trying to stall for more treasure.

That night, God spoke to Balaam: “You have My permission to go with these men.”

Balaam was excited. Thoughts of silver and gold pieces danced in his mind. Like many people today, he lusted after money and wealth and all the things he could buy with them. But not once did Balaam seek to follow God’s will. He only wanted to know how much God would let him get away with.

God said, “But when you arrive at Moab, you shall speak only the words I speak to you—nothing more.”

Balaam thought hard about this. “What’s the point in going if God won’t allow me to curse Israel?”

Then he reasoned, “Since God had changed His mind about me going to see Balak, maybe He will change His mind about me cursing Israel. It’s a long journey to Moab. Maybe by that time I can convince God to give me what I want. What do I have to lose?”

As you can see, Balaam did not concern himself with what God wanted. He only cared about himself.

The next morning, Balaam told Balak’s representatives the news that they wanted to hear (Numbers 22:1-21).

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

OLD SINS DIE HARD

God was well aware that Balaam did not desire to serve Him. He understood that this false prophet was willing to do whatever evil thing he could get away with.

Here was a man who knew God—knew that God exists and rewards those who diligently seek Him—but Balaam hated God and His ways. He thought that Satan’s way—the way of get, selfishness and greed—was a better way to live. Balaam lived and loved the way of sin.

This made God angry. Those who know His truth are responsible for living His truth. So God was incensed with Balaam and his carnal ways.

On the long journey to Moab, God placed the Messenger of the Eternal (the One who would later become Jesus Christ) in the middle of the road to block Balaam’s path. God’s Messenger, who had a sword in His hand, was invisible to the false prophet. But the donkey Balaam was riding could clearly see the powerful Being—and was afraid for her life!

As a false prophet, it was Balaam’s custom to use animal parts in his sorcery and fortune-telling in order to contact the spirit world (demons). But this carnal-minded man was too blind to see what even a mere donkey could see.

Frightened, Balaam’s donkey turned off the path and went into a field. Her master tugged at the reins, trying to steer her back onto the road. But the animal was too afraid of God’s Messenger to obey. Balaam took his staff and struck the donkey hard for not obeying. When she saw that the Messenger of the Eternal was gone, the donkey turned back onto the road.

Balak’s men asked, “Is there something wrong with your animal?”

Balaam grumbled, muttering a sharp, “No.”

Some of the men laughed. Others wondered, “How can this man curse Israel when he can’t even control his own donkey?”

Somewhere down the road, the caravan traveled along a narrow path between two vineyards, which had a wall on each side. The Messenger of the Eternal suddenly appeared. His glorious and majestic presence caused Balaam's donkey to panic. In a rush to get away, the animal backed herself into one of the walls, crushing Balaam's foot against it. He cried out in great, throbbing pain. Then he took his staff and struck his donkey again.

"What is wrong with you?" Balaam screamed.

While Balaam rubbed his foot, doing his best to ease the pain, God's Messenger disappeared again.

Sometime later, and farther down the road, the Messenger of the Eternal appeared again. But this time, He stood in a path so narrow that the donkey could not turn around to flee. When the animal saw Him, she was so frightened that she lay down in the dirt and shivered with fear.

Balaam could take no more. He struck the animal again, screaming at her to get up.

Then, an amazing thing happened: God caused the donkey to speak! She said, "Why have you struck me these three times?"

As incredible as this miracle was, Balaam was too focused on himself to take notice. Amazingly, he was so blind with anger that he did not realize that his donkey was speaking to him. Even today, people can get so caught up in themselves that they fail to recognize when God is dealing with them.

Balaam said to his animal, "I struck you three times because you have mocked and abused me three times. I wish I had a sword in my hand—if I did, I'd kill you on the spot!"

Still blinded with selfish rage, Balaam could not see that God was producing a miracle right before his eyes and ears.

To get Balaam's full attention, God made the animal say, "Am I not just a donkey? Have you ever heard me speak to you before?"

Suddenly, it dawned on Balaam that this was indeed a miracle.

Then God opened Balaam's eyes so that he could see what his donkey saw all along: The Messenger of the Eternal with a sword in His hand, blocking Balaam's path.

The false prophet bowed, falling flat against the ground. Unfortunately, he did not do this out of fearful respect and love for God, but out of fear for his physical life.

In a booming voice, God's Messenger said, "Now your stubborn heart can see what even this mere animal could see. Behold, I have come to stand before you because of your perverse and carnal ways. Your donkey saw Me these three times, and three times she turned



Infuriated by her disobedience, Balaam lashed out and violently struck his donkey. Little did he know that the donkey was saving his life!

aside. Consider this: Had she not turned aside, I would have killed you, yet let her live.”

Filled with fear, Balaam said, “I have sinned! I didn’t know that You stood in the way against Me. If you want, I will turn around and go home—only let me live.”

“You may go to Moab. But make sure that you speak only what I command you to speak—nothing more” (Numbers 22:22-35).

If Balaam had any previous thoughts of speaking his own will, he quickly abandoned them. He cared for his physical life far more than he did material wealth.

God had sent His Messenger to get Balaam’s full attention, to ensure that this carnal false prophet would do only what he was commanded to do.

Today, God expresses His will through the Bible. God’s written Word explains His great plan for mankind. It also tells us how to live happy, abundant lives filled with joy and peace. Those who love God and actively seek His ways study the Bible daily for godly teachings, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (II Timothy 3:16).

When you pray to God, He listens to you. And when you study His Word, God is speaking to you.

Old Sins Die Hard

When Balak learned that Balaam had just entered his kingdom, he was overjoyed. He immediately rushed out to meet the false prophet at the city of Moab, which bordered the king’s territory.

Upon meeting him, Balak said, “At last, you have arrived! Why didn’t you come when I first sent for you? I am able to honor you with all the gold, silver and jewels any man can imagine.”

Realizing he was showing how worried and frustrated he felt, Balak had to tell himself not to say anything that would offend Balaam and cause him to leave. Yet the king could not help but let some of his frustration be known.

Balaam said, “I am here now, as you have requested. But do not think that I have the power to go against God’s wishes. I can only speak what God puts in my mouth. I cannot control God’s message.” However, in the back of his mind, Balaam wished that he could.

“Yes, yes, I quite understand.” But the king did not understand. He thought that Balaam said this in order to bargain for more riches.

Balak smiled and said, “But surely you did not come all this way just to tell me that you cannot honor me with your services. Perhaps I can show you some things that will help change your mind.”

The king clapped his hands, which was a signal for his aides to bring out a wagon of sparkling and shiny treasure.

Balak said, “These are yours. Think of them as tokens of my appreciation for traveling so far at my request.”

Balaam’s lusts got the best of him, and he became a slave to his carnal desires. What fear Balaam had for God was quickly replaced by his lust for material possessions.

The king put his arm around Balaam and said, “There’s more where that came from.”

Careful not to make promises he could not keep, the false prophet smiled, saying, “Perhaps we can work something out.”

From then on, Balaam tried to come up with every argument he could think of to get around God’s will. He wanted to get as close to sin as God would let him.

Balaam’s First Oracle

The king and the false prophet went to Kirjath Huzoth. There, Balak sacrificed oxen and sheep to his false gods. He gave some of the animal parts to Balaam to be used in his evil magic (Numbers 22:36-41).

The next day, Balak escorted his guest up to the top of a mountain, where the king pointed down to the land below.

“See how far these people extend?”

Balaam looked and saw a living sea of people—millions of Israelites encamped down below, just outside Moab’s border.

“No wonder these Moabites are so afraid,” Balaam thought to himself.

Balak wanted Balaam to see all of Israel for a reason: The king’s superstitious mind thought that the Balaam could curse only what he could actually see.

Balaam told the king, “Build seven altars for me here. And prepare seven bulls and seven rams.” Balaam may have thought that he could impress God by offering Him a grand sacrifice.

But animal sacrifices and burnt offerings do not impress God. He is impressed by those who willingly obey Him and seek to do His will (I Samuel 15:22-23).

Gleefully, Balak clapped his hands and ordered his men to provide the things the false prophet had requested. After the burnt offerings were made, Balaam told the king to stay by his altar.

“I will seek God in private. He will show me what I should tell you.”

King Balak agreed.

When Balaam later returned, Balak said, “Now are you ready to curse Israel for me?”

His face grim and serious, Balaam replied, “God has told me what to say.”

Though Balak noticed that Balaam’s face was grim, he did not worry. “This prophet will say anything to gain the treasures I have shown him.”

Balaam stood before the king of Moab, all his princes, ambassadors, royal elders and the pagan altars, and began to speak. Though he desperately wanted to curse Israel, God had other plans.

Balaam said, “The king of Moab has brought me from a great distance to curse the people of Israel. But how can I curse when God does not allow me to curse? From the top of this mountain slope I see a great people camped below. They are a nation that no other people can reckon with. Look at how vast and wide Israel is spread. Who can hope to count all these people—or even count one-fourth of them? They are destined for natural greatness and success. If only my future would be as blessed as Israel’s.”

Balak’s men exchanged puzzled looks. The king stepped forward and screamed: “What is this? What have you done to me? I hired you to curse my enemy—not bless him!”

Balaam shrugged his shoulders.

“Can I fight God? If He puts His words in my mouth, can I, a mere man, overcome His will?” (Numbers 22:36-41; 23:1-12).

Balaam’s Second Oracle

King Balak thought that the overwhelming sight of Israel’s camp must have frightened Balaam. So he took the false prophet atop another mountain, called Pisgah, where Balaam could only see a section of Israel’s camp.

“See. Now you can only see the outer camp. All you have to do is curse this part of them, and you will earn great riches.”

Balak thought that if Balaam was successful, the king could then get the false prophet to curse the rest of Israel.

Another seven pagan altars were built, and a bull and a ram were sacrificed on each. Balaam could see that Balak badly wanted Israel to be cursed—and was willing to give anything to have this done.

Again, Balaam told the king to stay by the altar. “Meanwhile,” he said, “I will contact God in private.”

When this was done, and Balaam had returned, Balak said, “Well? What has God spoken to you?”

You could have heard a pin drop as all the men silently listened to Balaam's second oracle:

"Listen, Balak, and listen well. God is not like a man. He never lies. When God says He will do something, it shall be done. He has commanded me to bless, not curse. And what God has blessed I cannot reverse. God does not see unforgiven sin in Israel. Nor does wickedness reign in the camp of His people. The Eternal God is Israel's Great King—and this King has brought His people up out of Egypt. Who can fight against such ox-like strength? No amount of sorcery or fortune-telling can defeat Israel. God has made His people to rise like a lion on the hunt: Israel shall not rest until it devours his prey!"

Balak was enraged.

"Again you fail me!" he screamed. "You have blessed Israel even more than the last time. Neither curse them at all, nor bless them."

Balaam said, "Did I not tell you that whatever God commanded me to speak, I must do? If you want to blame someone, blame God" (Numbers 23:13-26).

Balaam's Third Oracle

While the princes, ambassadors and elders tried to calm Balak down, Balaam tried a third time to curse Israel. He decided that it was pointless to use his sorcery and magic to speak to God. Balaam realized that God was going to use him, no matter what, to fulfill His great purpose for Israel.

After seven more altars were built on a high point at Peor, another set of bulls and rams were sacrificed on each. Then Balaam started to speak. But this time, God's Spirit came upon him. This does not mean that Balaam became like a Christian, one who willingly seeks and obeys God's will. In many cases, God has used His spirit to give carnal men certain special abilities.

For example, God used His Spirit to enhance Bezaleel and Aholiab's artistic and craftsman ability to design and construct God's tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-7). But this does not necessarily mean that these men's minds were converted, like Moses and Abraham.

God used His Spirit to temporarily give Balaam special speaking ability. God was showing that He could use anyone to fulfill His plan—even His enemies. How much more can God use someone—even you—if that person willingly yields to Him and puts God's will first!

Back to our story: Balaam stood before Balak and said, "Listen to the words I must say. These are the words of a man whose lips have been opened by God. I speak of the future that He has allowed me to

see: Wherever Israel dwells, he shall be blessed. His descendants will spread across the land, like valleys that stretch out, like gardens by the riverside, like healthy trees planted by God Himself.

“Israel’s seed shall pour out like water from many buckets. And Israel will produce a King unlike any king you have ever seen. This Ruler will consume all nations that oppose Him. He shall break His enemies’ bones, and pierce His adversaries with arrows. When He bows down, He will do so like a lion, fearing no one. Who will dare challenge Him and live? Whoever blesses Israel will be blessed. And whoever curses Israel will be cursed” (Numbers 23:27-30; 24:1-9).

Although Balaam did not know it, the future King he spoke of is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He currently sits at His Father’s throne in heaven. Soon, when Christ returns to earth to set up His Father’s kingdom, He will start His government with the modern-day descendants of ancient Israel. These are the peoples of the United States of America, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and many nations of Western Europe. He will guide these Israelites to live by God’s Law. This will set the right example for the rest of the world to follow. Then all will live in peace and harmony under Jesus Christ’s rule. But those nations that foolishly oppose Him will have no future in the wonderful world to come.

Balaam’s Fourth and Final Oracle

King Balak exploded with great anger. He balled his hand into a fist and slammed it into the palm of his other hand.

He said, “I hired you to curse Israel, not bless them three times! Get out of my sight! Go home! And forget about all the silver and gold you could have earned. I’m not going to pay you for services you refuse to deliver!”

The sight of the enraged king made Balaam worry that Balak might have him executed instead.

“As I have told your men when they first came to see me, God will not allow me to speak my own will concerning Israel. Even if you were to give me your palace filled with all kinds of precious jewels and things, I can only speak what God will allow me to speak—nothing more.”

Balak motioned for his guards to escort Balaam away.

“Very well, I will go. But before I do, listen to what Israel shall do to your people in the future.”

King Balak motioned for his guards to leave Balaam alone. Then the false prophet told the king about Moab’s future—how a great

Israelite King (meaning Christ) would rise up and smash the Moabites into submission. Those who will survive would become His servants. Even the neighboring people of Edom and Seir would fall to this future Israel and their King. The great and powerful Amalekites would be utterly destroyed. Even the Kenites, who thought that they were secure in their rocky strongholds, would be taken captive. At the end of the age, many powerful nations would attack and be attacked. A great trouble would fill the whole world.

Balak, amazed and startled, asked, “When will these happen?”

“Long after you are dead and buried. After the great time of trouble comes, Israel and his mighty King will stand victorious.”

Balak and his men were speechless. They watched Balaam ride away and talked about all the things they had heard (Numbers 24:15-25).

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE

The elders of the Midianites who lived in Moab began to worry: “If Israel becomes as great and powerful as Balaam has said, how can we expect to survive?”

The men debated with each other about what to do.

Then one of the elders said, “What about Balaam?”

Another said, “Balaam? What about him? What could he possibly do for us?”

“He may not be able to curse Israel, but you have to admit that he is shrewd and cunning. Maybe he can think of another way to get rid of Israel. What have we got to lose?”

Agreeing, the elders rode out to stop Balaam before he could leave the country. Catching up to him, they explained what they wanted. Balaam thought hard—especially when the Midianite elders told him of all the wealth he would receive if any plan he came up with succeeded.

Finally, Balaam snapped his fingers and said, “I’ve got it! If I cannot curse the Israelites, perhaps we can deceive them into cursing themselves.”

Balaam shared the details of his wicked plan with the elders, who then brought them before their people as well as the Moabites. Once everyone was ready, Balaam’s scheme went into motion.

Here is what happened: The Moabites and Midianites pretended to be Israel’s friend. They sent their most appealing and attractive women to invite and lure Israel’s unmarried men to a special religious ceremony over in Moabite territory.

“We offer sacrifices to our gods, just as you offer sacrifices to your God,” the women said softly. “We are not so different from you. Come and see.”

Most of the Israelite men could not resist the temptations of these pagan women, who painted their faces with eye-catching makeup and wore brilliant, attention-grabbing robes and see-through veils. These



Balaam's wicked scheme involved using pagan women to entice and mislead Israelite men into breaking God's laws.

women were not like the modest women of Israel, who did not dress to call undue attention to themselves.

Before long, Israelite men were engaging in unlawful marriage-like relationships with Moabite and Midianite women. These pagan women lured, seduced and ensnared their Israelite boyfriends to worship Baal and other false gods. Baal was one of the many names used by Satan the devil!

What the Israelites were doing was against God's will. They were breaking the First Commandment: "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). Breaking or transgressing God's Law is sin (I John 3:4). And sin cuts people off from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). He can no longer work with those who cling to their sinful ways.

Balaam's evil plan was to get Israel to reject God and replace Him with pagan gods. Balaam knew that without God on their side, the Israelites could never fulfill their destiny to become a powerful kingdom. So far, his plan was working.

An Unholy Alliance

God was furious with His people. He watched as they gave themselves over to pagan gods, which were not gods at all, but fallen angels (demons).

God commanded Moses to gather all the leaders of Israel and have them execute the offenders. “Do this now,” He ordered, “so that My fierce and burning anger will not consume Israel.”

Without hesitating, Moses carried out God’s judgment. He told all the judges of Israel to kill every man who had gotten involved with the pagan women and worshipped Baal. So many Israelite men had committed this sin that the judges hesitated to make a move.

So God sent a plague to sweep through Israel’s camp, claiming the lives of thousands. The people not yet touched by the plague wept and moaned over the loss of their loved ones.

Meanwhile, Zimri, a prominent and popular prince of Israel from the tribe of Simeon, came back to the camp with a surprise: He brought home Cozbi, his new wife and Midianite princess. Zimri knew it was against God’s will to be in a marriage-like union with her, but that did not matter to him. He was too concerned with gaining power. He thought that marrying a Midianite princess would give him authority and influence both in Israel and among the Midianites.

In view of all the camp, Zimri boldly brought his pagan mistress before Moses, the leaders and all the people.

“I have made an alliance with the people of Moab and Midian,” he boasted. “Cozbi and I will raise a royal family, sealing a union between our nations. As your humble servant, I will lead the path into our future.”

Before Moses or anyone else could respond, Zimri proudly walked away, taking his new wife to his tent—their new home.

The people exchanged worried looks. “What are we to do?” they wondered. “After all, Zimri is a prominent prince—who can challenge him?”

The answer came from Phineas, son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron. When Phineas saw Zimri proudly show off his pagan mistress, setting the wrong example for Israel to follow, Phineas thought to himself, “This is an outrageous offense to God!”

Without saying a word, he grabbed a javelin from the hands of a soldier who stood nearby and headed for Zimri and Cozbi’s tent. The whole congregation of Israel watched Phineas enter the tent and take Zimri and Cozbi’s lives with the javelin.

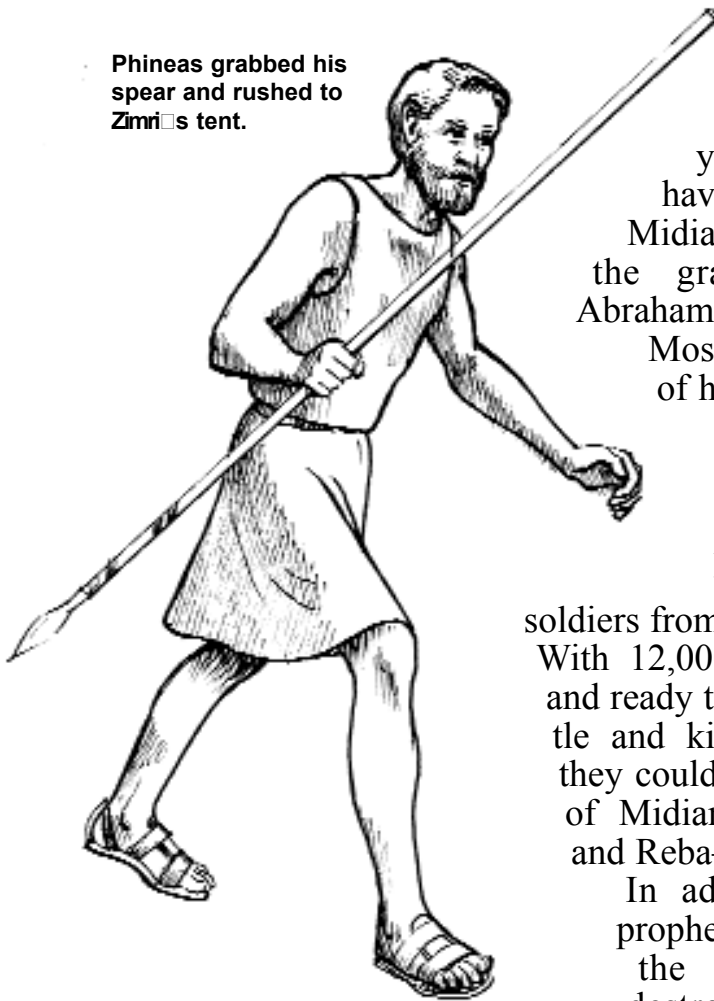
Now that Phineas had righteously stood up against this sin, God immediately stopped the plague. In the end, 24,000 bodies had to be buried as a result of Israel's disobedience.

God was so impressed by Phineas that He made a special covenant with him: "From this moment forward, the priesthood shall be established with you and your descendants. I do this because you were zealous for your God, and your right action of getting rid of evil atoned for Israel's sin."

All the men who had been in these intimate, unlawful marriage-like unions with pagan women, and worshipped their pagan gods, were executed.

Next, God told Moses to attack the Midianites living in Moab: "Take revenge upon them, for they have used evil tricks and schemes to seduce My people away from Me."

Phineas grabbed his spear and rushed to Zimri's tent.



Moses nodded, but God had more to say: "You have been My loyal and faithful servant all these years. Sometime after you have taken your revenge upon Midian, I will allow you to rest in the grave with your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Moses understood that the end of his life was near.

An Unpleasant Task

According to God's direction, Moses assigned 1,000 soldiers from each of the Israelite tribes. With 12,000 fighting men assembled and ready to go, Israel rushed into battle and killed every Midianite man they could catch. Even the five kings of Midian—Evi, Rekam, Zur, Hur and Reba—were crushed.

In addition, Balaam the false prophet, who tried to hide among the fleeing Midianites, was destroyed. Because he prized

physical material possessions more than God's spiritual treasures, his

rotten life was cut off.

The triumphant Israelites carried away all the woman and children who survived the great battle. Israel also captured other spoils of war, such as cattle, flocks and all kinds of possessions. Next, the Israelites burned down the Midianite cities and forts.

Bringing home their new captives and spoils of war, the victorious soldiers saw Moses, Eleazar and all the Israelite leaders waiting for them outside the camp.

An officer shouted, “Good news! God has given us victory! Look at all the loot and plunder we have been blessed with.”

But Moses burned with anger: “And why have you kept all these women alive? Most of these were the ones who enticed our men away from God, causing them to worship Baal. These women are the very reason God had to strike down our people with the plague. And now you dare to bring them back to our camp—have you learned nothing from these recent events?”

The officer who had spoken hung his head low in shame. So did the rest of the soldiers.

“God wants revenge on these Midianites. Now go and slay all the male children so that none can grow up to seek revenge upon Israel. Only keep alive all the females who have never been married or been intimate with a man in the way that is only for husbands and wives. Keep the female children alive too. We will raise them among us to fear and serve Almighty God. Only then will they be able to marry among the Israelites.”

Though it was an unpleasant task, the soldiers promptly obeyed.

The pagan women and children whose lives were taken will be brought back to life at the White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-13), after the Millennium. At that time, they will have an opportunity to know the one true God. They will no longer be deceived into worshipping idols and false gods.

Though Balaam’s evil scheme ultimately came to nothing, Israel still had to learn to always put God first above all things. If God’s people failed to remember this, they would be doomed to failure (Numbers 25; 31:1-18).

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

A NEW LEADER FOR ISRAEL

About 40 years after Israel's first census, God had Moses and Eleazar count the people again. This new census for Israel's second generation was done to decide the size of each tribe's inheritance in the Promised Land.

According to God, "A large tribe shall receive a large inheritance of land. A small tribe shall receive a smaller inheritance."

When the second census was finished, Moses and Eleazar discovered that Israel had 601,730 men aged 20 and above. This second generation of Israel had 1,820 fewer fighting-aged men than the generation before it. However, the tribe of Levi, which was counted separately just as it was in the first census, came to 23,000. Levi had increased by 1,000.

Together with women and children, Israel had at least two or three million people. Had Israel obeyed God instead of rebelling numerous times, there would have been more Israelites among them (Numbers 26).

God's Inheritance Laws

Not only was the Promised Land to be divided among the twelve tribes, it was also to be further divided among the families of each tribe. God wanted each Israelite family to have their own portion of land. He declared that when the father of a family died, his inheritance would pass on to his son.

But a problem soon arose: What were the Israelites to do when a father who died had no son to pass his inheritance on to?

Among the tribe of Manasseh was the family of Gilead. From them came the Hopherites, whose father was Hopher. He had a son named Zelophehad, who had five daughters, but no sons.

When Zelophehad died, his daughters came before Moses, Eleazar and all the leaders and pleaded their case: "Our father died during the

forty-year wandering in the wilderness. He did not take part in Korah's rebellion; he died as a result of his own sin. Therefore, our father has not cut off himself or his family from receiving an inheritance. Now that Zelophehad has died without having a son, why should our family be kept from receiving our portion of the Promised Land?"

Touched by their plea for help, Moses brought their case before God.

The Eternal decided to modify the inheritance law so that all families could benefit. He said, "The daughters of Zelophehad shall receive an inheritance from among their father's brothers, their uncles. From now on, when the leader of a family dies, his inheritance will go to his son. If he has no son, it will pass to his daughter. If he has no daughter, then the father's brother shall receive it. If he has no brothers, the inheritance will go to the closest living relative in the father's family. In this way, no family will be left out from receiving a portion of the Promised Land" (Numbers 27:1-11).

Also, to ensure that a family's inheritance would not pass on to another tribe, daughters who received an inheritance could only marry within their own tribe (Numbers 36).

Joshua Ordained as Israel's New Leader

Moses was unlike any man who ever lived. He had experienced a long and unique life. His first forty years were spent being raised and trained to be an Egyptian prince. The next forty years he spent living as a humble shepherd who cared for his flocks of sheep. After this, God used Moses in a forty-year period to lead His people out of Egypt and bring them to the Promised Land. These three forty-year periods added up to 120 years of life-changing events for Moses.

God said to him, "Moses, the time for you to rest in the grave draws near. Because you rebelled against Me at the waters of Meribah and failed to honor Me before My people, you shall not enter the Promised Land. However, before you die, I will allow you to go up atop a high mountain and see the land I have given to Israel."

Moses thanked God for His great mercy. Then, as a shepherd who truly loves and strives to protect his sheep, Moses thought about Israel. He did not waste time feeling sorry for himself. He knew that death was like sleeping. It was temporary. Moses and all of God's faithful servants will be raised to eternal life as Spirit Beings, born into the God Family.

Since his future was secure, Moses worried about the safety of the Israelites. He knew from experience that they needed a leader who

As Moses's long-time personal assistant, Joshua was the perfect choice to lead Israel after Moses's death.



would be patient, faithful to God’s laws, and deeply cared for God’s people.

With this in mind, Moses said, “Great Eternal God, set a man over Your people who will lead them to great success. Please do not let Israel be without such a faithful and loyal leader, like sheep without a shepherd.”

God assured His servant that Israel would not be left leaderless: “I have already picked such a man—Joshua, your long-time personal assistant. He has My Holy Spirit in him, as you do. Take Joshua and set him before Eleazar the high priest and all My congregation. Lay hands upon Joshua so that all may see that he has been ordained as the next leader of Israel. In this way, Israel will know that the authority I have given you has been given to Joshua.”

Moses gratefully did as God had commanded. He was confident that Joshua was the right choice in leading Israel to conquer the land of Canaan (Numbers 27:12-23).

Revisiting Offerings and Vows

While there was still time left, God used Moses to remind Israel of the many laws, statutes and judgments the people were to obey. Moses reminded them that they were to make sacrifices daily, monthly, and during God’s annual feasts and Sabbaths (Numbers 28 and 29).

He also spoke about the importance of keeping all vows or solemn promises (Numbers 30). Centuries later, Jesus Christ taught that it is far better for people not to make vows—especially ones they cannot keep (Matthew 5:33-37).

Early Inheritance

Israel was still encamped on the east side of the Jordan River, in the plains of Moab. Soon, God would give the command to cross the Jordan, where the lion’s share of the Promised Land lay.

But the tribes of Reuben and Gad had their eyes on the rich, fertile grazing lands of Jazer and Gilead. Since the Reubenites and Gadites owned a massive amount of livestock, they came to believe that Jazer and Gilead were the best regions for them to inherit.

The leaders of Reuben and Gad met with Moses, Eleazar and all Israel’s leaders to make their case heard: “Gilead, Jazer, Nebo and all the country that God has blessed us to conquer is perfect for raising our animals. And since we have such a large and growing amount of sheep and cattle, we ask that you allow us to inherit this land. We do not need

to cross over the Jordan River with the other tribes—the land we want is right here.”

Moses was taken aback by their bold request.

He said, “Canaan is to be conquered by ALL the tribes of Israel. Shall your brother Israelites go into battle while you stay behind and tend cattle? What you are requesting could discourage the rest of Israel from crossing the river and possessing the land there. If Israel refuses to go, the people will be severely punished—just as they were when they refused to enter Canaan after hearing the evil reports of the ten scouts. Remember how God punished Israel’s disobedience: We had to wander in the wilderness forty years until an entire generation died out. If what you now request causes Israel to rebel, God will leave His people in the wilderness again—and then your generation will die out!”

The Reubenites and Gadites talked about this among themselves. Then one of them said, “Consider this: After we build here pens for our livestock and cities and towns for our families, we will join our fellow Israelites and cross the Jordan with them. Our men will fight beside Israel until all of the tribes inherit the land. We will not take any of the land over there; we will take this land instead. We need only to first build fortified cities for our wives and children so as to protect them from potential enemies while we are away.”

Moses liked this plan. What Reuben and Gad had proposed would benefit everyone.

He said to them, “If you promise to keep your word and join your brother Israelites in war until all the land is conquered, then this land you desire shall be yours. God will make it so.”

The men of Reuben and Gad smiled and shook hands, congratulating each other.

“But,” continued Moses, “if you break your promise, your sin will find you out. You will have sinned against the Eternal God of Israel.”

Sobered by Moses’ words, all the men agreed. It became an official agreement, with the leaders of Israel as witnesses.

Half of the tribe of Manasseh, which also had large herds of cattle, joined in the agreement. They were also permitted to inherit the east side of the Jordan River—provided that their people help Israel conquer all of Canaan (Numbers 32).

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

FINAL INSTRUCTIONS

Through Moses, God told the Israelites that when they crossed over into Canaan, they were to drive out all the people dwelling there.

“And destroy all of their idols—their engraved stones and molden images. Totally destroy all of the high places of these pagan god worshippers; these are altars built up on the hills, which the Canaanites use to worship their false gods. By casting lots, you shall divide the land as an inheritance among all your families.”

Next, God gave Israel this warning: “If you fail to drive out all of the people living in Canaan, they shall become like sand in your eyes, and a thorn in your side. They shall attack and harass you and your descendants. And I will do to you what you should have done to them” (Numbers 33:50-56).

Many who heard this were sobered. They knew that God never made idle threats. If the Israelites continued to fear and obey God, they would have nothing to worry about.

Levi was the only tribe that would not inherit large amounts of land. God had already set the Levites apart to take care of His tabernacle and attend to His work.

However, God did grant Levi 48 cities throughout the Promised Land. They were also granted grazing land, which surrounded the immediate outskirts of these cities. This land would be used for raising cattle. The Levites did not inherit these cities; they only lived in and took care of them.

Six of the Levite cities were to be cities of refuge. Here was their purpose: Death, murder and revenge were common in the land. Sometimes people killed others by accident. Family and friends of the unfortunate victims might seek revenge—even if a court of law found that the man who caused the death was innocent. God decided that there needed to be six cities of refuge in Israel—a safe haven for the innocent man to flee to. As long as he stayed within city limits, the innocent man would be protected from those seeking vengeance. It

would be his personal place of safety, and he would have to live there until the high priest died. But if the innocent dared to leave the city and was killed by someone seeking revenge, the avenger would not be declared guilty, for the innocent man had been warned.

Three of these cities of refuge were to be established on each side of the Jordan River (Numbers 35).

Moses Gives Final Instructions

Much time was needed for Israel to take care of the many tasks that needed attention. The Israelites had to teach their new Midianite captives how to properly live by God's laws. They had to tend to the needs of their growing herds and flocks. And they had to thoroughly clean, polish, sharpen, and in some cases repair all the plunder they had gained from recent battles.

While the people were busy attending to their duties, God had Moses give them final instructions before they were to cross the Jordan River.

Moses reminded Israel of the events of the last forty years. Then he revealed that, because he had disobeyed God and failed to honor Him at Meribah, Moses would not be permitted to enter the Promised Land.

He said, "After I witnessed God deliver our enemies, Og and Sihon, into our hands, I pleaded with God to let me go into Canaan. I desperately wanted to witness the success God will hand you there. But the Eternal grew angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me. So I accepted His decision" (Deuteronomy 1-3).

Moses then reminded Israel that God does not tolerate sin, and that all law-breakers would be punished.

"But if you seek God with all your heart, He will be merciful to you. He will not forsake or destroy you if you strive to obey Him and His laws."

Moses told Israel to remember to keep the Ten Commandments, which were revealed at Mt. Sinai decades earlier (Exodus 20:3-17; Deuteronomy 5:1-22).

"Remember, you are a holy people, special to God and set apart for His great purpose—but not because of your greatness. God chose you because you were the least of all people. He took pity on you, and made you His own" (Deuteronomy 7:6-8).

Moses told the people to observe God's annual Sabbaths and feasts: "These Sabbaths are a special sign between God and His people, as is the weekly Sabbath. Keep them, and you will remember God, and He

will remember you. But if you break His Sabbaths, you will forget God and will no longer remember that He chose you to be His special people.”

Moses also addressed tithing: “Remember to pay God one-tenth of all that you earn through your labor. The Eternal owns everything. In His mercy, He allows us to enjoy His material possession. He only requires ten percent, which will be used in His work.

“Save another ten percent for yourself. This is the second tithe, to be used mainly in the fall, at the Feast of Tabernacles.

“And remember the third tithe. This is paid every third year in order to provide for the Levites, who will not share in your inheritance. It is also for needy foreigners who live among us in peace and keep God’s laws; and for the fatherless and widows. Do this and God will bless you in all your labor” (Deuteronomy 14:22-29; 12:17-19).

Moses also spoke about the year of release: “At the end of every seventh year, all debts will be cancelled between all Israelites. This will ensure that families will not remain in continuous debt. However, debts between Israelites and foreigners shall not be cancelled.

“Israel must never be in debt to other nations. You may lend to them, but you must not borrow from them. Israel must never be at the financial mercy of foreigners” (Deuteronomy 15:1-6).

In addition, Moses declared that all Hebrew servants must be set free after seven years of service. And their owners were to liberally provide these newly released servants with livestock, food and other goods (Deuteronomy 15:12-14).

Rules of War

“Israel must never ally or enter into agreements with the nations God wants driven out of the Promised Land. Instead, you shall utterly destroy them. Whenever you go to war to drive out your enemies, do not cut down fruit-bearing trees so that you can use them as ramps, siege works and such against fortified cities. If you do, the land will be ruined from the lack of trees. Plus, you will not have their fruit to eat” (Deuteronomy 20).

Avoid Pagan Practices

“Do not seek or tolerate the wicked customs and practices of the pagan nations. They practice witchcraft and fortune-telling, which God hates.

“If a priest, Levite or prophet teaches you to worship false gods, or to worship God in the wrong way, or claims to speak by God’s author-

ity when God never gave him His authority—that man must be put to death!”

Moses said that a special Prophet would some day rise up from among the Israelites. This Prophet would teach all of God’s ways and would only speak God’s will. Moses was speaking of Jesus Christ (Deuteronomy 18:9-22).

Blessings and Cursings

Moses reminded the Israelites that if they carefully obeyed God, they would be extremely blessed. Their blessings would include: National wealth and prosperity. Success in everything they sought to do. No sickness or disease. Plenty of healthy, growing children and livestock. Abundant rain and water supplies. Healthy crops of fruits and vegetables. Protection from accidents and from all foreign enemies.

God’s goal was to have Israel lead all nations, setting the right example of how all should live. These nations were to fear and respect God’s chosen people. The Israelites and their descendants would live long, happy, successful, abundant lives—as long as they put God first.

“However,” Moses warned, “If you seek your own ways, or go after the ways of the pagan nations around you, and forsake your God and



Shortly before his death, Moses reminded Israel of the Ten Commandments and their covenant with God.

break His laws, you shall be cursed: All success shall be taken away from you. All kinds of sickness and disease will spread throughout your borders, striking everyone—from little children to the old and gray. You will also suffer famines so severe that parents will even eat their own children!

“Your abundant crops and grasslands will wither away as your lakes, rivers, streams, creeks, reservoirs and wells dry up. Your soil will harden like iron so that your farms will be empty. Your herds and flocks will become sickly and diseased, and will die from lack of food and water.

“All of Israel will be sick, frightened and miserable; many will wish that they were dead or were never born. Accidents will strike you down everywhere you go. Israel shall become the least of all nations. Your worst enemies shall crush you; those of you who are not slain will be taken captive and scattered among foreign nations as slaves. This is the price for rejecting the God who has set you apart as His holy nation” (Deuteronomy 28).

The Book of the Law

God’s laws were written down into a book and placed beside the Ark of the Covenant. Every seven years, this Book of the Law was to be read before all Israel at the Feast of Tabernacles. The priests and Levites were also to teach portions of the book every year at God’s annual Sabbaths and feasts and throughout the year in all their cities (Deuteronomy 31).

The Song of Moses

God called Moses and Joshua to the tabernacle to re-affirm that Joshua was to be Israel’s new leader.

God explained that He knew carnal-minded Israel would rebel against Him once His people settled into the Promised Land and their bellies were satisfied and full. So God had Moses write a song, a sort of national anthem, to remind them of their faults, and of what God expected of them. The song would also serve as a witness between God and His people, and warned of events in Israel’s future.

Moses reminded Israel to “Rely on God, not on what you think is right. Trust God to bring all your success. Obey Him and respect the man He has chosen to lead you—Joshua.”

Then Moses gave final blessings on various Israelite tribes (Deuteronomy 33).

Death of a Great Servant

The time had come for Moses to depart from Israel. He climbed up the Pisgah mountain range and headed up Mt. Nebo, its highest peak.

The whole congregation of Israel, from the oldest to the youngest, wept at the sight of this great leader and servant leaving them for good. In a sense, Moses had been like a loving father to them all. His departure meant that Israel was about to enter a new era: Conquest of the Promised Land.

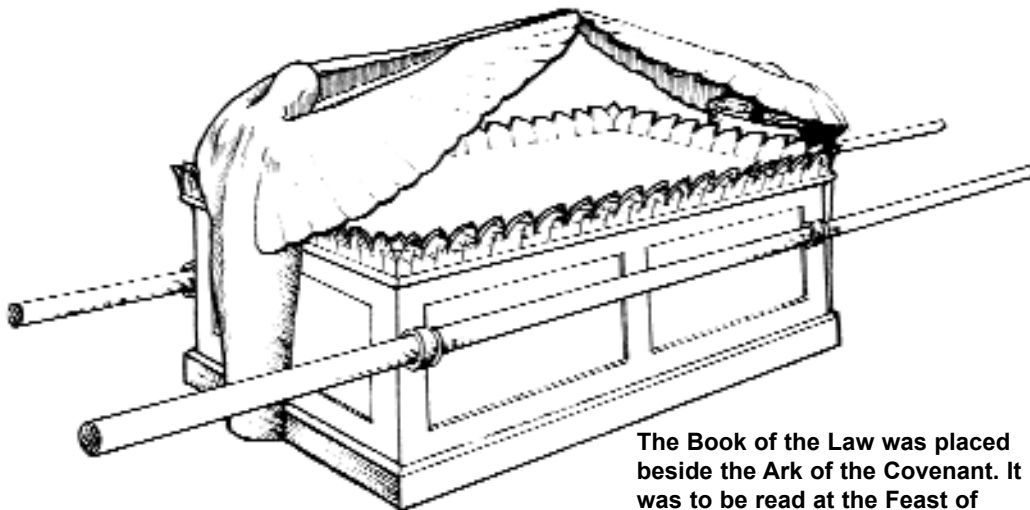
After Moses had reached the top of Mt. Nebo, God pointed out the land that lay on the other side of the Jordan River.

God said, "This is the land I swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Moses was amazed by the richness and vastness of Israel's inheritance. Deep inside, he sorely wanted to go down and visit it. But he knew that this could not be.

So Moses placed his life in God's hands and looked forward to being born into the kingdom of God. Even though thousands of years will have passed before Christ raises him to eternal life, Moses knew that it would seem as though only a split second had passed.

Looking forward to his wonderful future, Moses turned away from gazing at the Promised Land and headed down the other side of the mountain. There, in the land of Moab, he died in peace. Though he lived to be 120 years old, Moses' eyes had never grown weak and he maintained the energy and endurance of a young man (Deuteronomy 34:1-6).



The Book of the Law was placed beside the Ark of the Covenant. It was to be read at the Feast of Tabernacles every seven years.



Because of his rebellion against God at Meribah, Moses was not permitted to enter the Promised Land. He died shortly after viewing it from atop Mt. Nebo.

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

SPIES IN JERICHO

For thirty days, the people of Israel mourned the death of Moses, one of God's greatest servants of all time. God said of him, "There has not risen in all Israel a prophet like Moses, whom I knew face to face" (Deuteronomy 34:10).

While Israel mourned, the burden of leadership weighed heavily on Joshua's mind: "What am I to do now? How can I hope to lead God's people into victory? What if I don't measure up to God's expectations? I am not fit to lace Moses' sandals—how could I ever fill his shoes in leading Israel?"

God was well aware of Joshua's thoughts. He appreciated that Joshua did not think highly of himself; if he had, God could not have used him as Israel's new leader. However, God also knew that Joshua needed encouragement.

So He said to him, "Joshua, do not fear. I am with you. You shall lead My people to great victory in the land I am giving them. Arise, cross the Jordan River and take the Promised Land. Every place you step on will be yours—all you have to do is take it. From the Mediterranean Sea in the west, to the Euphrates River in the east; from the wilderness in the south, to Lebanon in the north—all the land is yours. I am with you, and I will give you success.

"As I was with Moses, so shall I be with you, Joshua. Be strong and courageous, for I will never leave you nor forsake you. Observe all My laws, and everything you do will prosper. Meditate on the Book of the Law—study it day and night. Know and understand the way that I expect you to live. These laws are for Israel's great success. Keep them, and you will prosper. Do not be afraid or worried. No man will be able to stand against you, for wherever you go, I, the Eternal God of Israel, will be there with you."

A spirit of boldness and great confidence filled Joshua's mind. Inspired by God, Joshua felt ready, willing and able to take on the impossible.

He called for his military officers and issued a command: “Get the people ready! In three days we will cross the river and take the land God has promised us.”

The officers wasted no time in carrying out Joshua’s command (Joshua 1:1-11).

Spies in the City of Jericho

Joshua had assigned two of his best men to take on a secret mission: Cross the Jordan River and scout out the nearby land.

“Especially check out the city of Jericho,” he said to them. “We need you to discover its strengths and weaknesses, such as how thick its walls are, how many guards they have on patrol, and so forth.”

The men nodded, then departed to prepare for their secret mission. Knowing that there were Canaanite spies watching Israel’s every move, the two men did their best not to be seen by them.

Disguised as ordinary travelers, the Israelite spies crossed the river and headed for Jericho, which was about seven miles away. They carefully studied the surrounding terrain, all the while making sure not to bring attention to themselves.

When they came to the city, they were amazed by its towering walls and the number of guards on patrol. Jericho’s walls were about thirty feet tall—more than five times taller than the average-sized man! The spies entered through the city gates and soon discovered that Jericho was not protected by one wall, but two. These walls stood about fifteen feet apart. Though both were the same height, the outer wall was six feet thick, while the inner wall was twice as thick.

Yet, as protected as Jericho was, the spies noticed that something was not quite right: The citizens were acting nervous and jittery. They could see fear and worry in their eyes. And the scent of doom and desperation was in the air.

Some of the citizens began to nervously eye anyone who was a stranger—including the spies!

The Israelite men took notice.

“It’s getting dark,” said one. “If we try to leave now, it might look suspicious. We had better find a place where we can safely spend the night.”

The other man agreed.

The spies saw that people had built homes along the top of the inner and outer walls. One of them turned out to be an inn, a place where travelers paid to spend the night and get a meal. Since the city gates were closing for the night, the spies needed a fast way of escape in case

they were discovered by the authorities. By staying at the inn, they could escape over the wall, if need be.

Rahab the innkeeper took in her new guests and provided them with temporary sleeping quarters. She detected something different about these men. It caused her to suspect that they were not the ordinary travelers they appeared to be. But Rahab decided not to let on.

Later that night, as she and her guests were eating dinner, there came a loud knock at the door. When Rahab answered it, she found herself staring into the frowning faces of a squad of tough, serious-looking soldiers.

Their lieutenant said, "I understand that you have two new guests staying with you. These men are Israelite spies. Bring them out at once!"

"Spies?" she said. "Are you sure?"

"Of course we're sure. Our scouts have just reported to the king that two men left the camp of the Israelites and have entered our city. We know these spies have entered your inn. Bring them out now, by order of the king of Jericho!"

Rahab thought for a quick moment, and then said, "There were two strange-looking men here, but as I was fixing dinner, they disappeared."

She raised her hand, motioning the lieutenant to stay put. "I'll check with my other guests to see which way these men left."

Before the lieutenant could reply, Rahab shut the door. Turning around, she saw the two Israelite spies staring at her.

She whispered, "I guess you overheard our conversation. Quick, come with me. I'll hide you."

"Why would you risk your life for us?"

"I have my reasons," she answered. "Hurry! These soldiers won't wait outside for long."

Rahab hid them on top of the roof under stalks of flax, which were put up there to dry out during the day.

Then she rushed back to speak with the waiting soldiers, who were growing impatient.

"You were right," she said to them. "These men did come here, but neither I nor any of my guests knew who they really were or where they came from. The spies must have noticed that the city gate was being shut for the night. They must have escaped Jericho before they found themselves trapped behind our walls. I don't know where they could be."

Rahab could see doubt in the lieutenant's eyes. Clearly, he did not believe her.

So she said, “The men you’re looking for are probably headed to the Israelite camp as we speak. If you ride out now, taking that main road that leads to the river, you can still catch them. It would be unfortunate if they got away—our king does not tolerate failure from his soldiers.”

This caused the lieutenant and his men to ride out to the Jordan River in hot pursuit (Joshua 2:1-7).

Rahab had lied. She may have meant well, but she broke God’s Law. There is never a good reason to lie or commit any other sin. In spite of her lie, God was able to make things work out just the way He had planned. As He did with Balaam and his donkey, God can use anyone or anything to fulfill His purposes. However, He would much rather that people trust Him and follow all His ways completely. Those

□ We know you are hiding Israelite spies, □ the soldier snarled. □ Send them out! □



who do are telling God, by the way they live, that He can trust them to do the right thing, no matter what.

A Promise of Protection

When all was safe, Rahab went up to the roof and spoke with the two spies. She said, “I know who you are, and I know that the God of Israel has given you this land. The gods I was raised to worship since my youth are worthless to me. They are no match for your God. All the people living here and throughout Canaan have heard of your great success and triumphs in battle—how you were delivered from Egyptian slavery, how God parted the Red Sea for your escape, and how you recently destroyed the armies of Arad, Sihon and Og.

“The hearts of the Canaanites are quivering in fear because of you. We know that our city is doomed—Jericho is destined to fall by your hands. This is why I have risked my life to save you. I beg of you, promise me by your God that you will return the kindness I have shown you.”

“How?” the men asked.



Rahab hid the Israelite spies from the king's soldiers.

“When Israel comes to attack Jericho, spare me and my family—my parents, brothers, sisters and all that they have. Deliver our lives from certain death.”

The spies agreed, but added that if Rahab or her family told anyone about their mission, the promise would be cancelled. In addition, when the attack came, Rahab and all her family had to stay inside their house, which had to have a scarlet cord tied to a window. The cord would be bright enough for Israel’s army to see. It would serve as a sign for the Israelite soldiers to keep from harming anyone inside the home.

“But be warned,” the men said. “If any of you leave this place, your life is no longer protected by our promise. As long as you keep your end of the deal, your lives shall be spared. Our lives will be taken if what we say is not so.”

With that, Rahab let the spies down the rope through a window, and they escaped over the walls of Jericho. Next, they took her advice and hid in the nearby mountains to the west, which were honeycombed with caves they could hide in. The men stayed there for three days until the king of Jericho’s soldiers returned to the city.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

AND THE WALLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN

The spies headed back to Israel's camp, which had since moved about seven miles closer to encamp on the east side of the Jordan River. The two men informed Joshua of everything that had happened, including how God had protected them through Rahab the innkeeper (Joshua 2:8-23). They also told him about their promise to keep Rahab and her family from harm.

The words of the spies' report echoed in Joshua's mind and greatly encouraged him: "News of our reputation has spread even to Jericho. The inhabitants there are shaking in their sandals because of us. Truly, God has already delivered them into our hands—all we have to do is confront our enemies."

Later, Joshua was even more encouraged when God spoke to him: "This day I will show all Israel that I am with you, just as I was with Moses. I will leave no room for anyone to doubt this. Now command My priests to carry the Ark of the Covenant and lead My people across the Jordan. When they come to the water's edge, they shall stand in the river. I will take care of the rest."

It was springtime. Because of the spring rains and the melting snow from Mt. Hermon, the waters of the Jordan River had swollen wide and deep, overflowing all its banks. This would make it nearly impossible for Israel's soldiers to cross over while bringing all their women, children, senior citizens, livestock, goods and belongings. Only the strongest swimmers could ever make it to the other side. Those who were not strong enough would be swept downriver or sucked underneath the waters and drowned. Many lives would be lost.

But Joshua did not worry. He decided to follow God's instruction, and let God take care of the rest.

At Joshua's command, the whole congregation of Israel broke camp. The priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant led the way. The Israelites made sure to stay at least 1,000 yards behind them; they

had been commanded not to get closer to the Ark, which represented God's holy throne.

The people watched as the priests marched to the river's edge and stepped into its swollen waters.

Then God intervened. About 16 miles north, He caused the rushing downstream waters to stand still and gather into a heap at the city of Adam. Soon, the priests were standing on dry ground after the waters had lowered and abated until it disappeared. God's miracle had dried up the Jordan River where the priests stood, allowing the whole camp of Israel to cross over into Canaan!

All the people had crossed over with their livestock and belongings. About 40,000 soldiers from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh went with them. Then Joshua followed God's command and selected twelve men, one from every tribe, to perform a special task.

Each of the twelve men picked up a stone from the bone-dry riverbed. These stones would be used to build a monument at Gilgal, where the Israelites would later camp. The men also set up a twelve-stone monument at the feet of the priests who stood in the riverbed carrying the Ark.

Joshua said, "Let these twelve stones be a memorial to the miracle God has performed for us. In time to come, when your children ask about the meaning behind these stones, you shall say, 'Our God cut off the waters of the Jordan River, and made a way for all of Israel to safely cross over on dry ground.' These stones shall be a memorial to the children of Israel forever."

When they were sure that all had crossed over to the east side of the Jordan, the priests carrying God's Ark crossed over also. The instant that the soles of their feet came out of the riverbed, God stopped holding back the river. The waters of the Jordan rushed back into place and overflowed its riverbanks as it had done before (Joshua 3 and 4).

Passover in Canaan

Canaanite spies informed their generals and kings how Israel had miraculously crossed the Jordan River, and was now encamped at what would later be called Gilgal. The Israelites were now within striking distance of Jericho.

News of Israel's progress caused quite a stir among the people of Canaan and all their kings. A cold sweat of worry and fear came upon them—for they knew that their cities, towns and villages, and the pagan lives they led, were doomed.

Meanwhile, the Israelites kept their first Passover in Canaan. Everyone feasted on the produce of the land—dates, barley, olives—and dined on unleavened bread and roasted lamb.

The next day, the Israelites awoke from their tents and discovered that there was no manna to be found. For about four decades, God had sent down bread from heaven to feed His people as they traveled and camped in the barren wilderness. Now it was gone.

Joshua and Eleazar had to explain to the people, “Now that you are in the Promised Land, you no longer need God to feed you manna. You can easily survive, and even prosper, from the food this land produces.”

Expecting to see and taste manna every morning was a habit that some Israelites found hard to give up. Most of Israel had been fed bread from heaven virtually since the day they were born.

The Captain of the Army of the Eternal

The time to attack Jericho was at hand. Joshua was a man of action. It was not easy for him to sit around and wait, so he decided to personally scout out the city.

Concealing himself against the rugged terrain, Joshua positioned himself at a point where he could safely see Jericho and its massive walls. He took note of the many soldiers that were standing guard along the top of the walls, armed with swords and spears. He also noticed that the city’s gates were securely shut.

“The king of Jericho and his soldiers must be preparing for our attack,” he thought to himself.

Up until that time, Jericho had been the greatest city in the world. Its massive walls consisted of large stones, some weighing as much as three to five tons! Inside the city lived a wealthy community. Though its inhabitants had grown rich through mass trade, they also achieved their wealth through violence. Jericho was a city known for attacking other towns and villages. Its people routinely ambushed and attacked other people, taking away their livestock, food, precious jewelry and other valuable goods. Jericho’s large, thick walls had been built to defend the city’s inhabitants from attackers. Since Jericho had been built on a hill, the only way for an army to conquer the city was to surround it and attack it from below—this gave Jericho’s defenders a great high-ground advantage. This, coupled with the city’s double walls, made any attack extremely costly in lost lives and time. It would take several months to starve Jericho’s inhabitants into surrendering. And since the city had vast stores of grains, fruits and other foods, the

people could survive several months, maybe even years, before they ran out of food. To those who wanted to destroy this wicked city, Jericho was untouchable.

Joshua was so deep in thought that he was startled when a man suddenly appeared before him, holding a sword. Joshua sensed something different, something out of the ordinary, about this man, who wore the sparkling, shiny uniform and fighting gear of a soldier.

Eyeing the sword in the soldier's hand, Joshua said, "Who are you? Are you for us or for our enemies?"

With a voice that would make any heart quiver and grow weak, the man said, "No. I come as the Captain of the army of the Almighty God."

Suddenly realizing who was before him, Joshua quickly dropped to his knees and worshipped the Captain. With his face to the ground, he asked, "What is God's message for me?"

The Captain of the Eternal's army said, "Remove your sandals from your feet. My presence has made this ground holy."

Without hesitation, Joshua quickly obeyed. He recognized that the Captain of the Eternal's army was none other than the Word, also known as the Spokesman and the Messenger of the Eternal—the One who is today known as Jesus Christ.

Since Jericho was to be Israel's first conquest in Canaan, God chose to appear to Joshua in the form of a great Army commander. God wanted to remind Joshua that in this upcoming battle, He would be the One who would bring victory to Israel. The battle would not be won by human hands, but by the personal intervention of the Almighty Eternal God.

The Captain said to him, "Listen now, Joshua, to God's message: 'I have given the city of Jericho into your hand. Its king and mighty warriors are yours to take and destroy. At My command, My army shall march around the city once. You shall do this for six days. Seven priests shall march with you, each man blowing a trumpet made of a ram's horn. And with them shall be priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant. You shall not shout or make any noise with your mouth. You will simply show your presence these six days, marching in an orderly fashion. The only noise that should be heard shall come from the trumpets. But when the seventh day arrives, My army shall march around Jericho seven times. Then the trumpets shall sound in one long blast, and My people shall shout with a great shout. Then the walls of the city shall fall down flat, and My army will attack. I shall make this so.'"

In God's mind, Jericho represented mankind's evil world, which is ruled by Satan. The city's thick and towering double walls, which

made Jericho untouchable and invincible to its enemies, were a symbol of this world's towering and inflated pride, vanity and arrogance. The people living there had "puffed up" attitudes—they thought they were better and greater than everyone else. They practiced the way of Cain, who had viciously murdered his brother Abel. This is the way of "get"—the way of greed, selfishness, pride, envy, bitterness, rage and lust. It is the practice of stealing, lying, deceiving and murdering in order to please the self—the way of sin. These are the same rotten attitudes and selfish, hurtful conduct that the devil inspires in people today (Ephesians 2:2 and II Corinthians 4:4).

God planned to tear down Jericho's walls—make them fall down flat—during the Days of Unleavened Bread. This seven-day festival, observed even today by the Church of God, pictures people removing all leavening (sin) from their lives, replacing it with unleavened bread (God's truth), and living according to His perfect laws and standards (I Corinthians 5:7-8 and Psalm 119:172). Israel was to march around Jericho during each day of the feast. On the seventh and last Day of Unleavened Bread, God would flatten the walls of the city.

What would happen to Jericho will also happen to mankind's system of "get" in the near future. God has given man 6,000 years (which are like six days to God – II Peter 3:8) to decide for himself right from wrong, and to live according to his own carnal standards. But when those "days" come to an end (and we are nearing that time now), God will step in and destroy man's system of get, hatred, selfishness and greed.

The Eternal will then replace man's system with a newer and far better one—the kingdom of God. At that time, all will learn to live in peace and harmony with one another. There will be no more walled cities or villages (Ezekiel 38:8-12), because people around the world will finally be living the way that produces peace and safety (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Any doubts that may have lingered in Joshua's mind were replaced by great courage and boldness. Joshua was now ready to fight God's battle.

Joshua marched back to camp, and then gave commands to the priests, his officers and to all the people of Israel, telling them what God wanted them to do (Numbers 5:13-15; 6:1-7).

And the Walls Came Tumbling Down

"Sire, sire! Wake up! Come quickly!"

The king of Jericho awoke and wiped the sleep from his eyes. "What is it now?" he said.

He looked around and saw that he was surrounded by a group of servants, guards, aides and a few army commanders. Each man's face showed worry and fear.

"I asked you a question—what's wrong?"

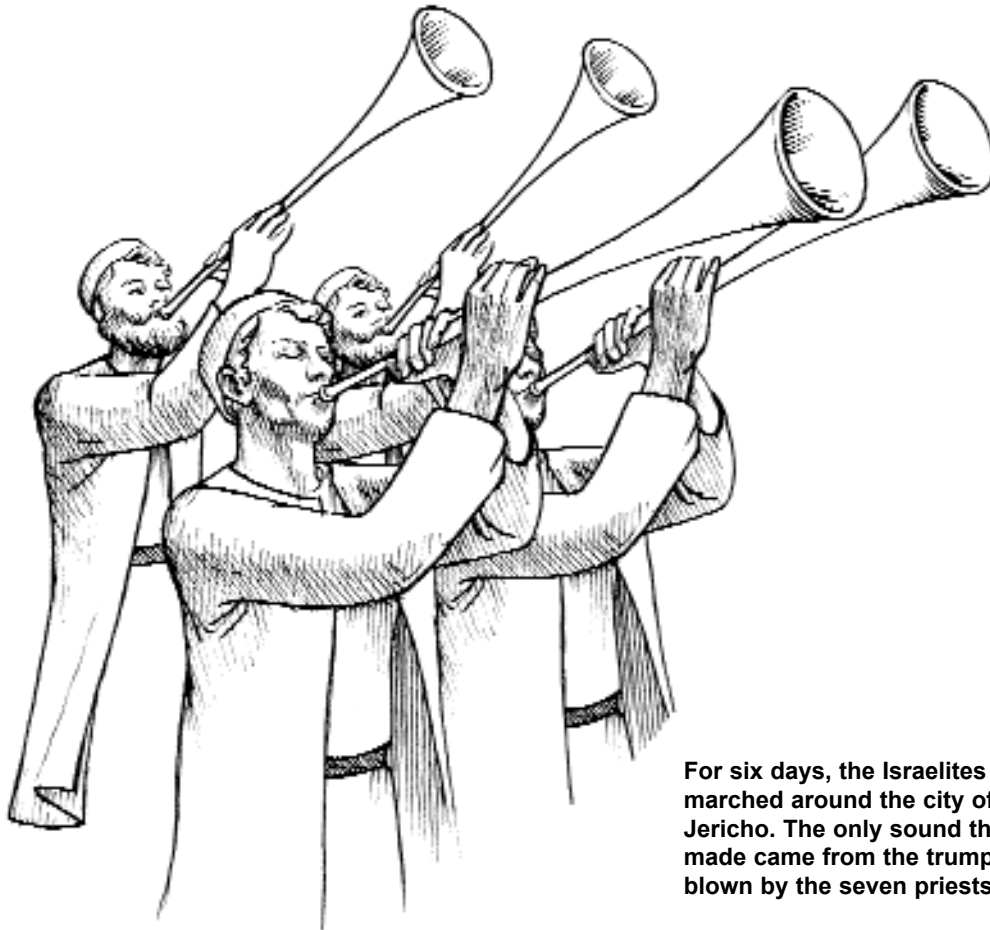
Then the king recognized a troubling sound from off in the distance. "What is that noise? Are those trumpets?"

Stepping forward, the king's top lieutenant said, "Perhaps you should see for yourself."

The king went to the window that the lieutenant pointed to and saw the army of Israel silently marching around the city. Unlike other invading armies who shouted and screamed in order to frighten their enemies, the Israelite soldiers remained silent. All that could be heard from them was the sound of seven trumpets.

The king ordered his men to get into position, saying, "The attack should come any minute now!"

But Israel did not attack. The soldiers simply marched around the city once, and then headed back to camp. Though relieved, the king and all the people of Jericho were puzzled by Israel's bizarre behavior.



For six days, the Israelites marched around the city of Jericho. The only sound they made came from the trumpets blown by the seven priests.

The king asked his aides, "What do you think this means?"

"Perhaps they have heard of our warriors and have lost heart," said one man.

"Or maybe this is some kind of strange ritual commanded by their God," said another.

The king ordered his commanders and his watchmen to stay alert. "These Israelites must have had a reason for what they just did. They will be back. We mustn't let our guard down."

Though the watchmen stayed up on the walls all that day and later that night, Israel did not come back.

The next day, Israel's army returned. All of Jericho stood and watched as the Israelites marched around the city. Again, not one Israelite soldier said a word. The only sound came from the priests blowing their trumpets.

"This is it!" shouted one aide. "Israel's going to attack."

But no attack came. The next day, the third, Israel returned and did the same thing, and did not attack.

On the fourth day, many of Jericho's soldiers shouted insults and taunts at Israel's army:

"Go on back to Egypt! You're nothing but a bunch of slaves! We have more than enough food and supplies to outlast your puny attacks!"

"You're wasting your time, Israel! Your God is no match for our gods!"

"Do you really think you can frighten us with your false acts of madness? Go away and bother someone else!"

For six days, Israel's army came and went without attacking.

When the seventh day came (which was also the seventh and last Day of Unleavened Bread), the Israelites awoke at dawn and, again, marched around the city. Though nervous, the people of Jericho had grown somewhat used to this.

But the people noticed something different: When the Israelites had marched around the city, they did not return to camp. Instead, they continued marching.

At once, the royal aides alerted the king. Meanwhile, the king's officers ordered their warriors to be more vigilant. The whole city watched nervously as the Israelites marched around Jericho twice. Three times. Four times. Five, and then six.

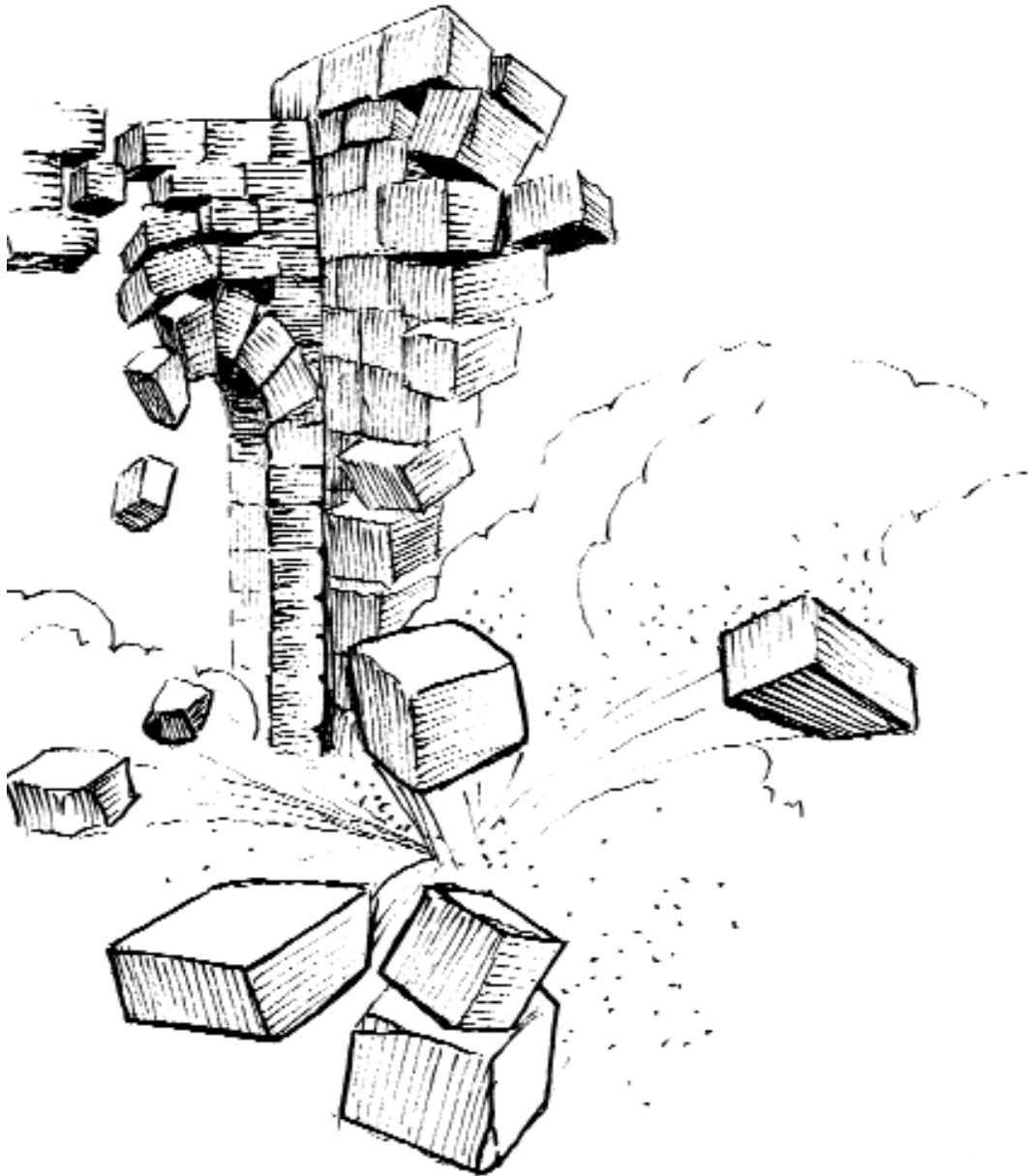
"What are these madmen up to?" the king thundered.

When Israel faithfully followed God's instructions and marched around Jericho for the seventh time, the priests blew the seven trumpets in one long blast.

Joshua commanded his men, “Shout! Shout with all your heart, for the Eternal has given you this city!”

Then all the Israelite soldiers wholeheartedly obeyed, striking fear and dread into the hearts of Jericho’s people. The king and his subjects clapped their ears with their hands and hoped that Israel’s “madness” would soon end.

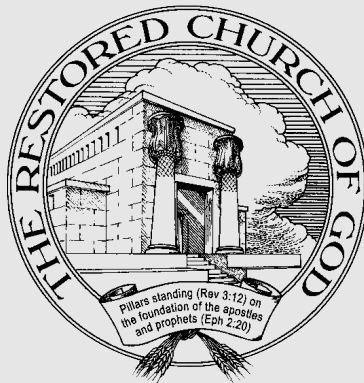
But something worse happened (Numbers 6:8-16, 20). To the surprise of the people, Jericho’s walls came tumbling down!



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