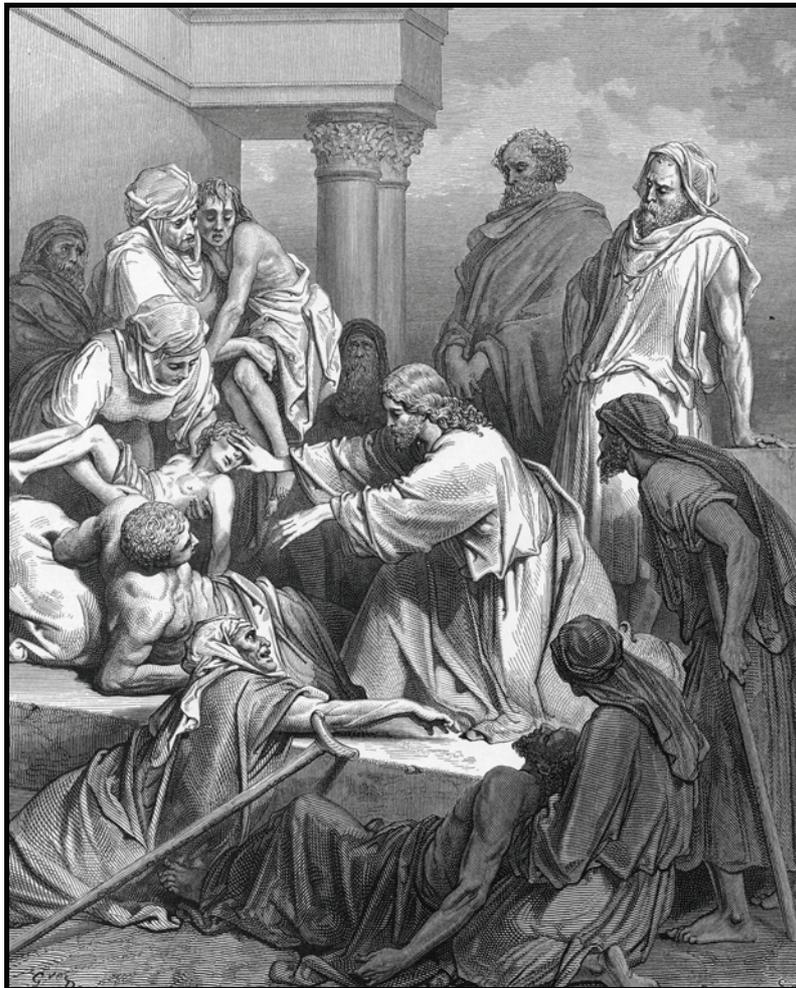


“For I am the Lord who heals you.” - God reveals Himself as *“Yahweh-rophe,”* that is, *“the Lord who heals.”* This most comforting title identifies the Lord as our gracious God, the God who not only watches over and protects us in the midst of our physical infirmities but has also resolved the cause of such woes by sending His only Son to win forgiveness for all of our sins.

“The Israelites already knew Him as the great I Am, the eternal and self-existent God. They had also come to trust Him as the God who hears, the God who rescues and the God who provides. Now God revealed Himself as ‘Yahwe-rophe,’ the God who heals. In the Old Testament ‘rophe’ refers to wellness and soundness, both physically and



“Christ Healing the Sick” by Dore



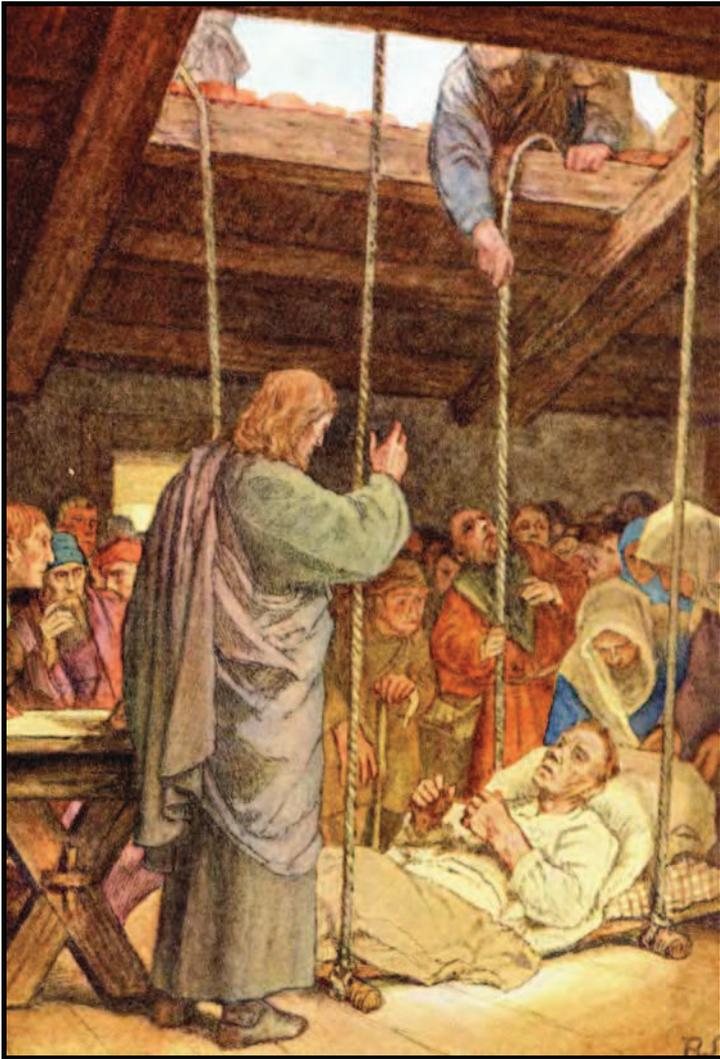
“The Plague of Boils” by Ted Larson

spiritually. It means ‘to restore, to heal, to cure..not only in the physical sense but also in the moral and spiritual sense.’ At Marah god demonstrated His healing power by curing the bitter waters. But this was intended to teach the Israelites to trust Him for every kind of healing.” (Ryken, p. 421)

The concepts of spiritual and physical healing are often linked in Scripture. So, for example, the prophet Isaiah foretells a day of revival and repentance in the land of Egypt:

“So the Lord will make Himself known to the Egyptians and in that day they will acknowledge the Lord...The Lord will strike Egypt with a plague; He will strike them and heal them. They will turn to the Lord and He will respond to their pleas and heal them.” (Isaiah 19:21-22)

Hosea uses the same image to describe the repentance of Israel in the days of the coming Messiah: ***“Come, let us return to the Lord, He has torn us to pieces but He***



*“Jesus Healing the Paralytic”
by Rudolf Schüfer*

will heal us; He has injured us but He will bind up our wounds.” (Hosea 6:1) Later in the same book of prophecy, the Lord speaks of His loving care for His people in the wilderness: *“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son...It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them.”* (Hosea 11:1,3) David also uses the language of healing interchangeably in a physical and spiritual sense as he celebrates the wondrous blessings of God:

“Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits - who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” (Psalm 103:2-3)

It is no co-incidence that miracles of healing playing such a prominent role in the earthly ministry of Jesus. Christ’s ability to heal the sick identified Him as the personification of the Lord Who Heals. In this way His physical healings validated his claim to be the Son of God and the promised Savior of the world. Accordingly, in the closing vision of the Book of Revelation the leaves of the tree of life, growing on the banks of the river of the water of life which flowed from *“the throne of God and of the Lamb”* are said to be *“for the healing of the nations.”* (Revelation 22:2)

Verse 27

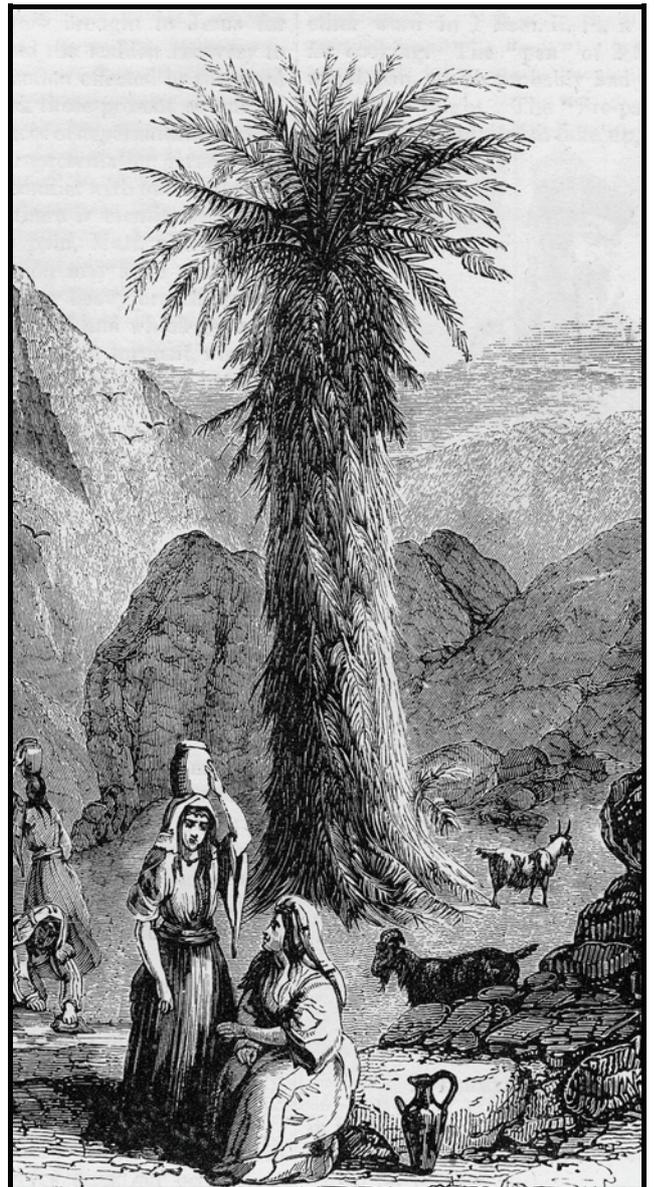
Then they came to Elim where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees and they camped there near the water.

“And they came to Elim...” - After the testing at Marah and the instruction which

accompanied it the Children of Israel proceeded a short distance to the relative abundance of a large oasis at Elim. In contrast to the bitter water of Marah, Elim was the site of groves of date palm trees, whose honey sweet fruit remains one of the staples of the desert dweller's diet to this day. On the traditional route through the Sinai, Elim is identified with the present Wadi Gharandel "*and its luxuriance of palms, tamriscs, acacias and tall grass.*" (Keyl, p. 424)

"Where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees." - Hebrew tradition notes that the twelve springs corresponded to the twelve tribes, enabling each of the tribes to place its encampment around its own well. Further, the seventy palm trees reflect the number of tribal elders making it possible for each of the elders to take his seat at the base of one of the trees as he carried out his responsibility to administer justice and resolve disputes among the people. The Talmud says of the sojourn at Elim:

"The men of understanding could at this place see a clear allusion to the fortune of the people; for there are twelve tribes of the people, each of which, if it prove God-fearing, will be a well of water, inasmuch as its piety will constantly and continually bring forth beautiful deeds; the leaders of the people, however, are seventy, and they recall the noble palm tree, for in outward appearance, as well as in its fruits, it is the most beautiful of trees, whose seat of life does not lie buried deep in the roots, as with other plants, but soars high, set like the heart in the midst of its branches, by which it is surrounded as a queen under the protection of her bodyguard. The soul of him who has tasted piety possesses a similar spirit; it has learned to look up and ascend, and ever busy itself with



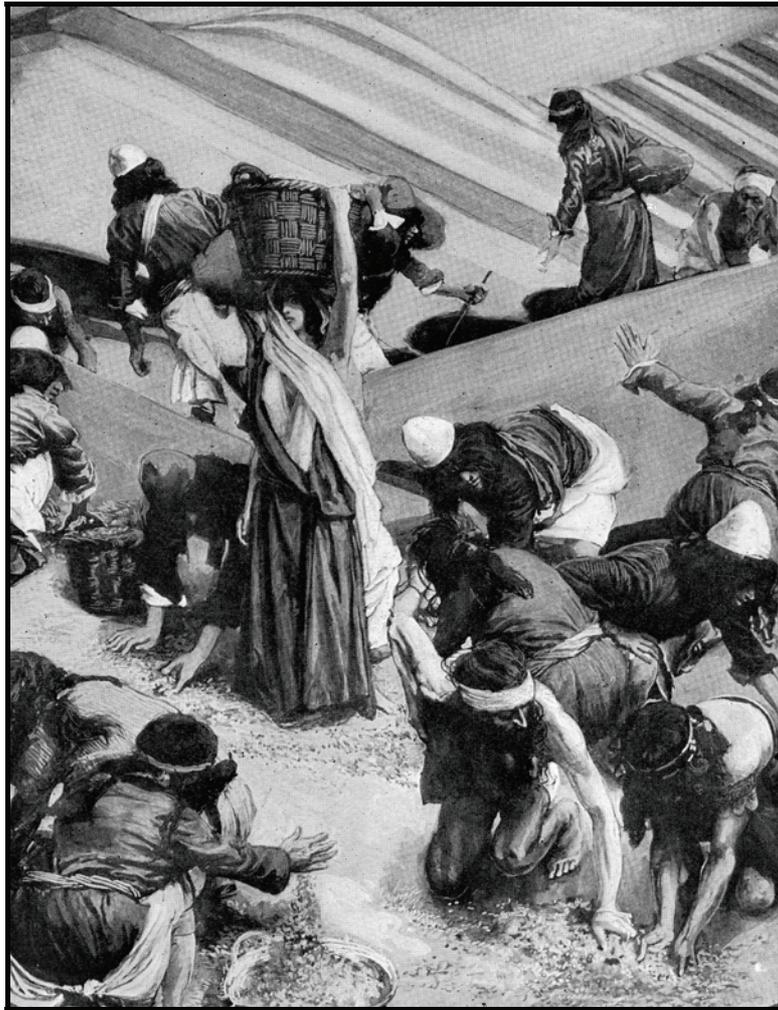
19th Century Engraving of a Date Palm Tree Growing Near a Desert Spring

spiritual things and the investigation of divine beauty, disdains earthly things and considers them only as childish play, whereas that aspiration alone seems serious. It was at Elim, where at the creation of the world God made the twelve wells of water and the seventy palm trees to correspond to the twelve tribes and the seventy elders of Israel, that Israel first took up the study of the Law, for there they studied the Law given them at Marah.” (Ginzberg II, p. 41)



“The Wadi Gharandel”

This early segment of the wilderness wandering is built around a series of contrasts. The needs of Israel are consistently met by the faithful provision of God. The desperate lack of water at Marah in the beginning is set against the comfortable abundance of the conclusion at the twelve springs of Elim. The bitterness of the water is contrasted with the sweetness of the date palm’s fruit which the Lord provided. The impatient grumbling of the people becomes more remarkable in comparison to the patient love and care of the Lord.



“The Gathering of the Manna” by J. James Tissot

Exodus 16:1-36

The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the month after they had come out of Egypt. In the desert, the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death!” Then the Lord said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow My instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days. So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because He has heard your grumbling against Him. Who are we that you should grumble against us?” Moses also said, “You will



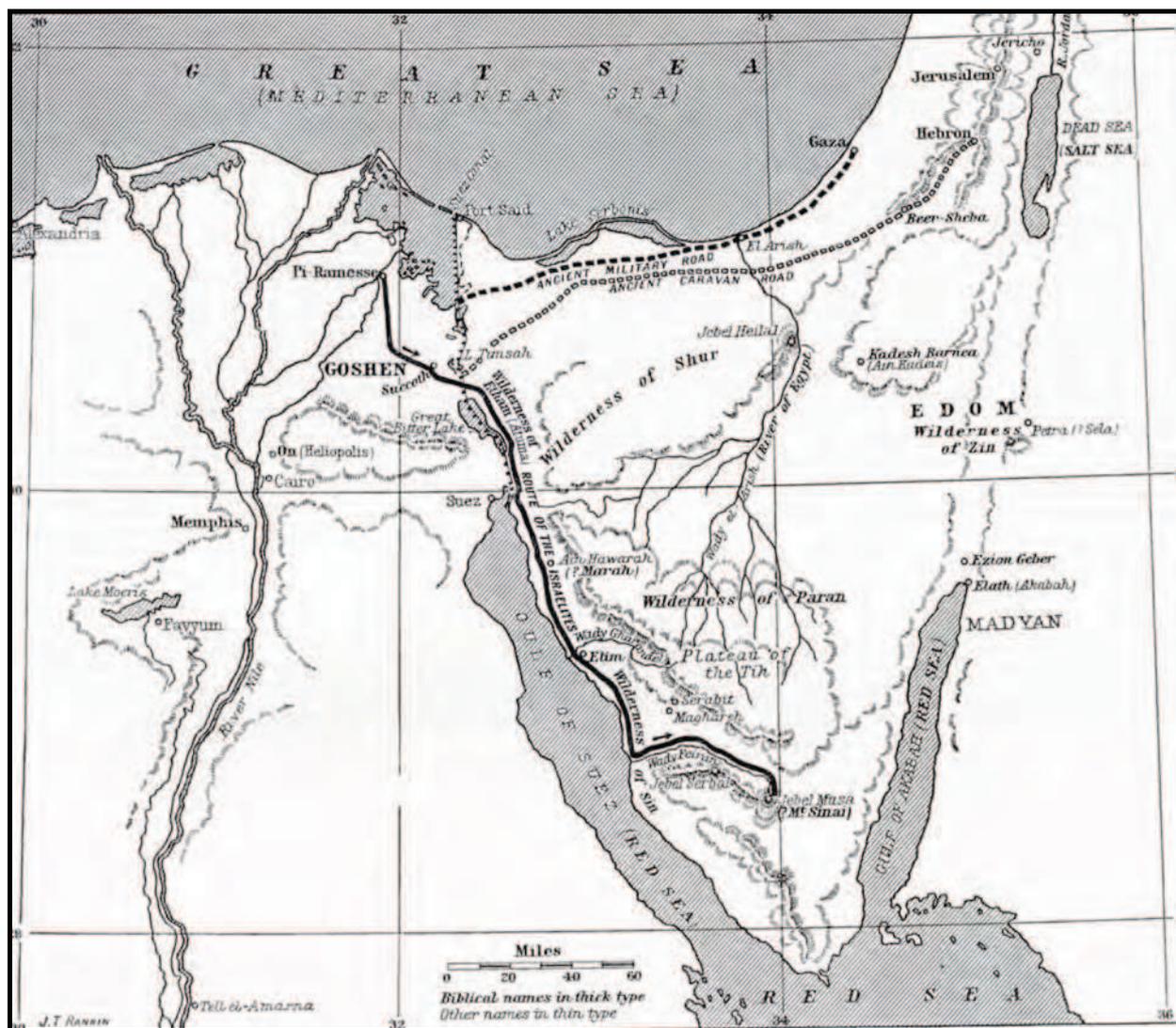
“The Omer of Manna” by Ted Larson

know that it was the Lord when He gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because He has heard your grumbling against Him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us but against the Lord.” Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the Lord for He has heard your grumbling.’” While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud. Then the Lord said to Moses, “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.’” That evening quail came and covered the camp and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.” The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed. Then Moses said to them, “No one is to keep any of it until morning.” However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses

was angry with them. Each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed, and when the sun got hot it melted away. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much - two omers for each person - and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. He said to them, "This is what the Lord commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.'" So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. "Eat it today," Moses said, "because today is a Sabbath to the Lord. You will not find any of it on the ground today. Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any." Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then the Lord said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep My commands and My instructions? Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day He gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out." So the people rested on the seventh day. The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. Moses said, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so that they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt.'" So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the Lord to keep for the generations to come." As the Lord commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna in front of the Testimony that it might be kept. The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan. (An omer is one tenth of an ephah.)



"The Gathering of the Manna" by Bachiacca



“The Traditional Route of the Exodus”

Verse 1

The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and the Sinai on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt.

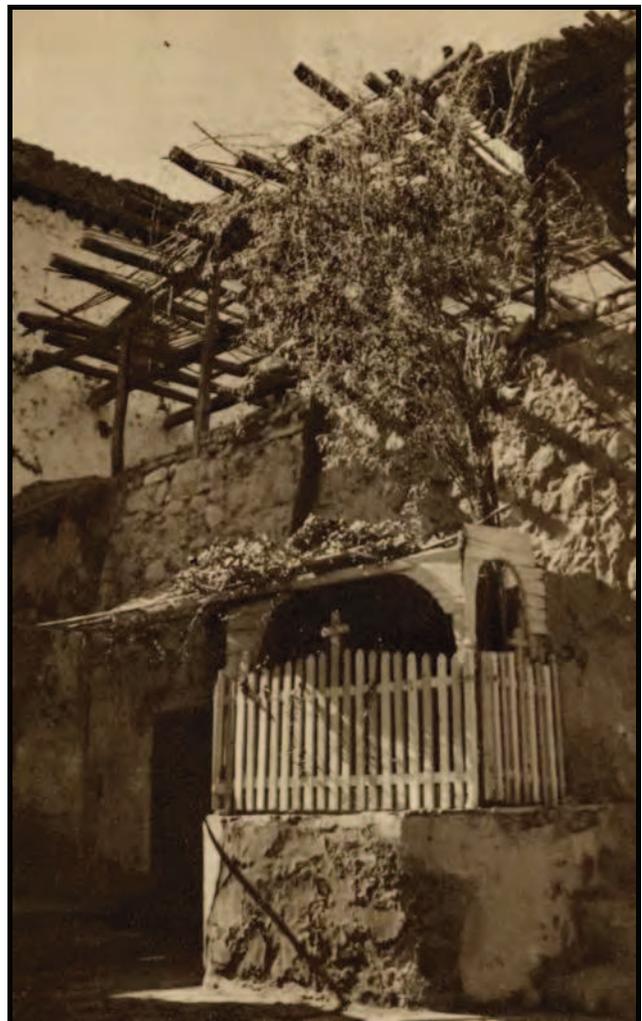
“The whole Israelite community set out from Elim...” - The sojourn at Elim was a time for rest and refreshment but Israel shortly found itself confronted with the rigors of travel in the desert once again as they continued to make their way toward Mount Sinai. The text continues to cite place names which can no longer be identified with certainty as it traces the Israel’s route through the wilderness. The result is an inevitable variety of opinion as to the path which was followed, each opinion, as previously noted, dictated by the particular’s scholar’s preference in locating Mount Sinai. John Durham concludes:

“The best interpretation we can manage, with any confidence, is a general plotting of area or vicinity for the movement of Israel in exodus, and even that is fraught with some ambiguity because of the uncertainty with which even the most important of all the places, Sinai, can be located.” (Durham, p. 218)

“and came to the Desert of Sin which is between Elim and the Sinai..” - The Old Testament utilizes a bewildering variety of names to identify regions within the Sinai peninsula or the entire area - Zin, Paran, Shur, Sin and Sinai. The confusion is increased by the fact that the designations are often used interchangeably. It would appear that these various designations overlap because they were drawn from different linguistic and historical traditions. In this verse, ***“the Desert of Sin”*** is simply an abbreviated form of the term ***“Sinai.”***

The etymology of both words is unclear, some arguing that the terms are derived from a Semitic noun for the thorn bushes which flourished throughout the area while others contend that the titles are based on the name of the moon god Sin who was worshiped by nomadic tribesmen in the region. In the absence of substantial evidence to support either position the debate remains unresolved and unresolvable. In any case, the *“sin”* in question has nothing whatsoever to do with its modern English counterpart.

“On the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt.” - According to Exodus 13:4, Israel had departed from Egypt in the Hebrew month of Abib, roughly corresponding to the month of March in our calendars. By that reckoning, these events then occurred during the month of May in the middle of the Hebrew month of Iyyar.



“The Shrine of the Burning Bush”

Verses 2-3

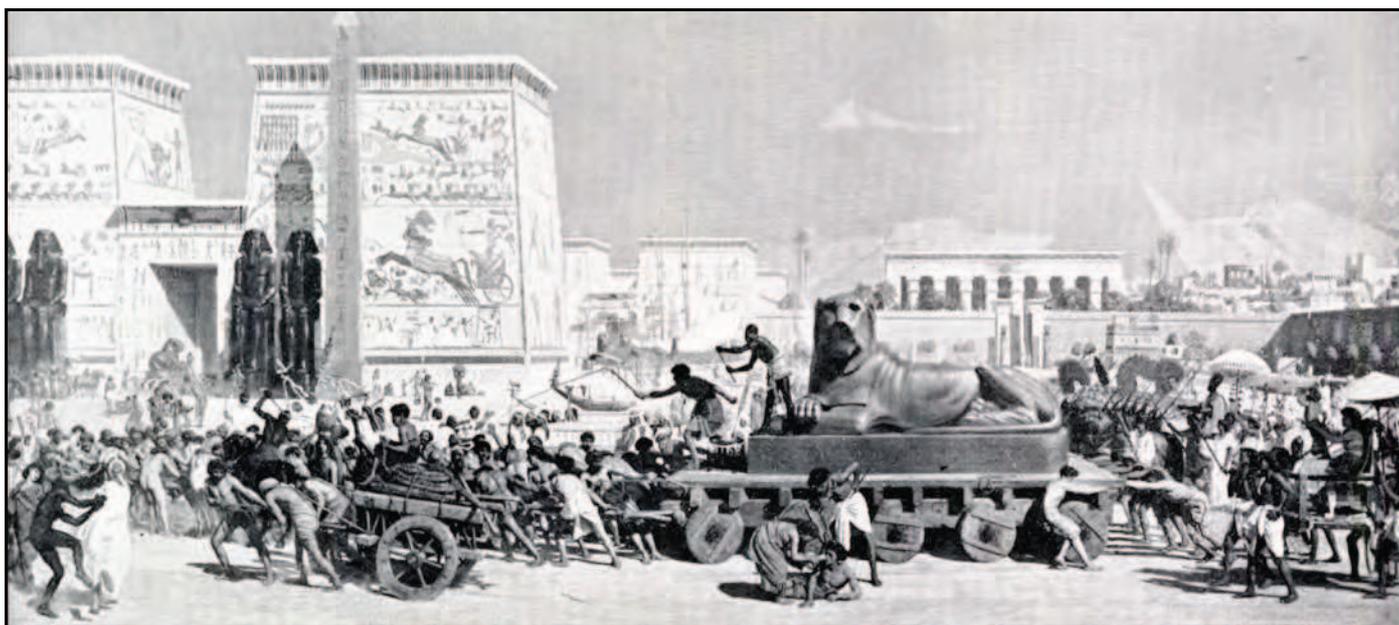
In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

“In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.” - The consistent pattern of whining and complaining which has characterized the behavior of Israel throughout Exodus continued with relentless predictability (cf. Exodus 3:13; 4:1, 8-9; 5:21; 6:9; 14:11-12; 15:24; etc., etc. etc.). The human capacity for ingratitude and selective recollection is boundless.

“Whining was Israel’s besetting sin. It started when Moses first went to Pharaoh and the Israelites complained that he was making their job harder instead of easier. They grumbled at the Red Sea when they accused Moses of bringing them out to die in the desert. They were even more bitter at Marah, but the complaining didn’t stop there. The Israelites wandered for forty years and they grumbled their way through most of it. By the time they reached the Desert of Sin, they were an entire nation of malcontents.” (Ryken, p. 423)

The episode begins, and is thus defined by, the complaints of the people. This textual priority is designed to highlight the discontent of the people. The language also stresses that this was not a matter of isolated unhappiness among a limited number of people - ***“the whole community grumbled.”*** The terminology is emphatically comprehensive. In the preceding Chapter, the need was presented first and only then did ***“the people”*** lodge their complaint. The intensification of the problem is noted here with the reversal of that sequence and the more comprehensive description of the complainers. Subdues grumbling has progressed to open rebellion against the Lord and His chosen leadership.

“The Israelites said to them, ‘If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt!’” - It may be that the language of Israel’s lament revealed more than they intended. By aring their preference to have died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt they are implying



“Israel in Egypt” by Frederic Lord Leighton

that if they die here in the desert it would also be by the Lord’s hand. In effect, they were accusing God of planning their murder - saying, *“If God wanted to kill us why didn’t He just do it in Egypt where we were at least comfortable and had enough to eat.”* Such blasphemy is indicative of the spiritual depths to which Israel had fallen.

“There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.” - Israel’s lament is remarkable both for its inaccuracy and its effrontery. When they were slaves in Egypt they had cried out to God for deliverance from their awful plight. At the burning bush God had indicated to Moses: *“I have indeed seen the misery of My people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers and I am concerned about their suffering.”* (Exodus 2:7) All of that is forgotten now as the discomfort and anxiety of their desert journey causes them to look back wistfully to the security which they enjoyed as slaves in Egypt. The slaves minimum needs of subsistence, food and water, are provided by his master. To that extent, the slave is at least secure. He has been demeaned to the status of property, and may be abused or oppressed by a cruel master -as indeed Israel was - *“in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly”* (Exodus 1:14) - but he doesn’t have to worry about where his next meal is coming from and he doesn’t have to make his own decisions or live with their consequences. This same selective recollection, longing for the security of slavery, would continue to recur throughout the wilderness wandering even

after the provision of the manna and the quail. Numbers 11 reports the further complaint of the former slaves:

“The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, ‘If only we had meat to eat. We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost - also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna.’” (Numbers 11:4-6)

Freedom inherently involves responsibility and risk. As they now confronted those risks, Israel longingly remembered the good old days of bondage in Egypt when there was meat in every pot. Ultimately it would be necessary for this entire generation of former slaves to perish during the forty years in the wilderness before the Israelites

would be ready to live as free men and women in the Promised Land.



“The Gathering of Manna” by J. James Tissot

Aside from its flagrant inaccuracy, the effrontery of Israel’s complaint is nothing less than breathtaking. These are the same people who have seen the mighty power of God exercised on their behalf over and over again. They had witnessed the humbling of great Egypt in a series of ten awesome plagues which had utterly destroyed the credibility of the gods and goddesses of one of the world’s most ancient cultures. They had been delivered from centuries of harsh bondage and had gone forth from the land of their oppression and had gone forth from that land laden with the riches of their masters. Most recently they had crossed the Red Sea on dry land and had witnessed God’s destruction of the mightiest military force on the face of the earth, an army which had been bent on wiping out their



“Quail Are Sent to the Israelites” by J. James Tissot

entire nation. Despite all of this they now have the effrontery to deny both the power and the faithfulness of God accusing Him of misleading them out into the desert to destroy them. John Currid points out the bitter irony of their complaint: *“This point goes to the very heart of the Exodus story: was Pharaoh’s servitude easier to bear and more comforting than that of Yahweh? (Ironically, the Israelites are now groaning under Yahweh’s service as they did under Pharaoh’s.)* (Currid, p. 335) The gall of these people is incredible.

“To starve this entire assembly to death.” From these words, one might think that the food supplies were completely exhausted and the entire nation was on the brink of starvation. That was clearly not the case. This was an extreme exaggeration. No one was about to perish from hunger. The flocks and herds which had been brought out of Egypt remained intact with ample numbers to later provide the large numbers of sacrifices required after the construction of the tabernacle and the institution of its services (cf. Exodus 17:3; 19:13; 34:3). Those same rituals called for significant grain offerings which the Israelites had no difficulty in providing. As is so often the case, the crisis was largely the absence of confidence and faith in God, not food supplies. They doubted that God would be able to provide for them as they continued through the wilderness.



“Gathering Manna in the Wilderness” by Tintoretto

Verses 4-5

The Lord said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow My instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘I will rain down bread from heaven for you.’” - The gracious mercy of God surpasses the base ingratitude of men. He did not respond to their whining complaints and blasphemy with righteous judgement. Instead He acted in patient love to ease their fears and soothe their anxiety. Psalm 78 recalls this sad sequence of events. The psalmist tells of the Lord’s anger at the faithlessness of His people:

“But they continued to sin against Him, rebelling in the desert against the Most High. They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food that they craved. They spoke against God, saying, ‘Can god spread a table in the desert? When He struck the rock, water gushed out and the streams flowed abundantly. But can He also give us food? Can He supply meat for His people?’ When the Lord heard them He was very angry; and His fire broke out against Jacob, and His wrath arose against Israel, for they did not believe in God or trust in His deliverance. Yet He gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; He rained down manna for the people to eat, He gave them the grain of heaven. Men ate the bread of angels; He sent them all the food they could eat.” (Psalm 78:17-25)

Israel did not receive what they deserved - judgement and destruction. Instead God demonstrated the love which is the essence of His being as He used His divine power to miraculously feed them with ***“the bread of angels.”***



“Gathering Manna in the Desert of Sin” by Tintoretto

Before Moses could even ***“cry out to the Lord”*** as in the crisis at Marah (Exodus 15:25), God seized the initiative and acted to meet the self-perceived needs of His people.

“The Lord said to Moses” - Before taking action, God informed Moses of His intention. At the same time He provided specific instructions for the collection of the manna and explained the purpose for the manna’s method of distribution to the people.

“I will rain down bread from heaven for you.” - The wording of God’s statement to Moses serves to emphasize the unique and miraculous nature of that which God is about to do. Ordinarily bread is made from the grain which springs up from the earth. ***“He makes the grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate - bringing forth bread from the earth - wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil that makes his***



“Gathering the Manna” by H.T. Houghton



“I Will Rain Down Manna From Heaven” Woodcut by Hans Holbein

face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.” (Psalm 104:14-15) So Job also declares that it is *“the earth from which bread comes.”* (Job 28:5) In the natural course of things, as the seed sprouts in the ground the rain comes down to water the plants so that they may grow and produce the grain. But now, by the miraculous power of God, that natural pattern will be reversed and instead of growing up from the ground *“I will rain down bread from heaven for you.”*

“The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day.” - The daily collection of manna was designed to reinforce the people’s recognition of their complete dependance upon God, reminding them every morning that He had provided for them and that they could not have survived their journey through the desert without His constant care and providence.

“In this way I will test them to see whether they will follow My instructions.” - The Lord’s provision has profoundly greater significance than an ongoing supply of food for the body. They are to be tested and trained in this manner to trust in the Lord and to obey His Word. Accordingly, Deuteronomy 8:16-17 explains God’s purpose in this way:



*“The Gathering of the Manna”
16th Century French Altar Painting*

“Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands. He humbled you by causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God...He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You might say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today.” (Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 15-18)

It is instructive to note that this Deuteronomy reference is the text which our Lord later cited in response to Satan’s temptation in the wilderness, cleverly suggesting that He use His divine power on His own behalf to transform the rocks into the bread which would ease His hunger (Matthew 4:4). Tertullian, a learned father of the early church, aptly described Christ’s citation as His response to the grumbling of Israel in the wilderness so many centuries before. *“But so far as I, with my poor powers understand, the Lord turned back upon Israel the very reproach which they had cast upon the Lord by their murmuring for bread.”* (Rushdooney, p. 207) Here, as throughout His earthly life, Christ fulfilled the law which Israel had failed to fulfill. He obeyed where man had disobeyed.

Israel had to learn a crucial lesson about their total dependance upon God. The daily

provision of the manna throughout the forty years of wandering in the wilderness was designed to be a core component in their education. Such foundational spiritual truth was, and is, best learned by repeated experience. Could it be that the language of the prayer which our Lord has taught us to pray - ***“Give us this day our daily bread.”*** - is an allusion to the manner in which God had provided the manna for His people in the wilderness and the same truth at work in our lives. Each new day becomes a lesson in learning to trust the God who will provide for us this day. ***“Take no thought for the morrow for the morrow will take care of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*** (Matthew 6:34) This is every bit as true for us as it was for Israel in days of old.

God defines the nature of the test as ***“to see whether they will follow My instructions.”*** The noun ***“instructions”*** in this phrase is the Hebrew word ***“torah.”*** By the use of this most significant term the text signals that Israel’s painful experience in the Desert of Sin was part of God’s careful plan to prepare His people for the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai which was soon to follow.

“On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.” The crucial importance of the Sabbath



“The Temptation of Jesus” by Briton Riviere



“The Gathering of Manna in the Wilderness”

observance was emphasized through the instruction that on the sixth day Israel was to gather enough manna for two days. In this way it would be possible for them to conform to the Lord’s commanded rest on the seventh day. This too would be a test of their trust in the Lord and their obedience to Him. The text presents this stipulation without further explanation which would seem to suggest that Israel had some familiarity with the concept of a sabbath rest. As previously noted, rabbinic tradition argues that a basic form of the sabbath command had been introduced to the people at Marah (cf. 15:25). Commentators speculate that the Abraham and the patriarchs may have already practiced a sabbath in Canaan either by specific divine command or as a part of their ancestral religion. If that was the case, the practice had clearly lapsed in Egypt where the Israelite slaves were no longer in control of their own schedule. The idea of a sabbath rest would then not have been completely unfamiliar as Moses began the education of the people in the ways of their forefathers. At the same

time, the fact that the manna would not fall on the seventh day would be another unmistakable indication that its provision could not be a natural phenomenon but a gift provided for them by the gracious hand of God.

Verses 6-8

So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the Lord Who brought you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord because He has heard your grumbling against Him. Who are we that you should grumble against us?” Moses also said, “You will know that it was the Lord when He gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want

in the morning, because He has heard your grumbling against Him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us but against the Lord.”

“So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites...” - God had not specifically instructed Moses to convey His intention to provide food to the people but Moses and Aaron promptly did so nonetheless. It was self-evident from the nature of that which God had revealed that it was to be reported *“to all the Israelites.”* The language of this phrase parallels the scope of the grumbling described in the opening verses of the chapter. As all of the Israelites had complained, so now all the Israelites would hear the announcement of God’s response to their complaints. The characteristic *“Moses and Aaron”* indicates, as usual, that Moses spoke to Aaron who in turn relayed his words to the entire assembly. In this instance the joint response was particularly appropriate in that both Moses and Aaron had been the brunt of the people’s complaints.

“In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt...” God’s action is placed in a didactic context designed not merely to provide for their immediate need but to teach them another important lesson about the nature of God and their complete dependence upon Him. There would be no delay in God’s response - *“In the evening...”* Before that day was done they would see the hand of the Lord at work on their behalf once again in the provision of the great swarms of quail. God’s supernatural intervention to meet their need in this instance would demonstrate once again that everything which they had experienced leading up to and throughout their deliverance from Egyptian bondage had been the result of that which the Lord



“God’s Provision for Israel in the Wilderness” - 15th Century Bible Illumination

had graciously accomplished on their behalf - *“you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt.”*

“And in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord” - The provision of manna at the dawn of the new day would demonstrate to the people *“the glory of the Lord”* (Hebrew - *“kevod JHWH”*). This is the first occurrence of what will become a most significant phrase in the theology of the Old Testament. In this instance the phrase does not refer to a visible manifestation of God’s sacred presence but *“to the manifestation of God’s essential nature, as He caringly and beneficently provides for His people’s needs.”* (Sarna, p. 87)



“Manna in the Wilderness” by Pomponio Amalteo

“Because He has heard your grumbling against Him. Who are we that you should grumble against us?” - The prophet is careful to emphasize that the food which Israel is about to receive is not an entitlement which they deserve or have coming to them because of anything they have done. God had deigned to reply to their complaints because of his own nature as a gracious lover who gives even when His beloved is selfish and ungrateful. Moses was also careful to point out that their transparent evasion by criticizing God’s human representatives instead of God Himself had fooled no one. Moses’ reply dripped with sarcasm as he acknowledges that he and his brother were nothing more than tools in the hand of God - ***“Who are we that you should grumble against us?”*** This point is given particular emphasis by the use of the Hebrew pronoun ***“mah”*** normally employed of things rather than persons. Thus, Moses literally says *“What are we?”* thereby indicating that their own personalities and identities had nothing to do with that which God accomplished thru them. Israel’s *“beef,”* to use the modern idiom, was with God, not with Moses or Aaron. They had abandoned the fear of God and relapsed into unbelief.

“In the murmuring of the people their unbelief in the actual presence of God had been clearly manifested. ‘It was a deep unbelief’ says Luther, ‘into which they had thus fallen back, letting go the word and promise of God, and forgetting his former miracles and aid.’ Even the pillar of cloud, this constant sign of the gracious guidance of God, had lost its meaning in the eyes of the people; so that it was needful to inspire the murmuring multitude with a salutary fear of the majesty of Jehovah, not only that their rebellion against the God who had watched them with a father’s care, might be brought to mind but also that the fact might be deeply impressed upon their hearts, that the food about to be sent was a gift of His grace.” (Keil, p. 428)

“Moses also said, ‘You will know that it was the Lord when He gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because He has heard your grumbling. Who are we? You’re not grumbling against us but against the Lord.’ - The basic points of the previous statements are reiterated for particular emphasis with some expansion and explanation. God’s provision of both meat and bread in ample abundance - ***“all the bread you want”*** - was designed to highlight Israel’s ridiculous longing for the gourmet diet which they had savored in Egypt. The accusation implicit in the prophet’s earlier word’s as to the brunt of their complaints is now explicitly stated: ***“You are not grumbling against us but against the Lord.”***

Verses 9-11

“Then Moses told Aaron, ‘Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the Lord for He has heard your grumbling.’ While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud. The Lord said to Moses, ‘I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.’”

“Then Moses told Aaron, ‘Say to the entire Israelite community...” - The point is made most emphatically for a third and final time. God endorsed the ministry and the message of Moses by an unusual manifestation of His visible presence in the “*Glory Cloud*” and addressed Moses directly from the cloud in the presence of all the people. First the “*entire Israelite community*” was summoned to “*come before the Lord.*” In the future, this phrase would be used in reference to the ark, the tabernacle and the temple, but at this moment none of those sacred object and places yet existed. It is most likely that the people were gathered around the Pillar of Cloud, the visible sign of God’s guidance and leadership of His people in the wilderness. While Aaron was still addressing the multitude the cloud appeared and burning fire which ordinarily only appeared at night brightly illuminate the cloud - “*there was the glory of the*



“The Glory Cloud in the Wilderness Leading Israel by Night” by William West

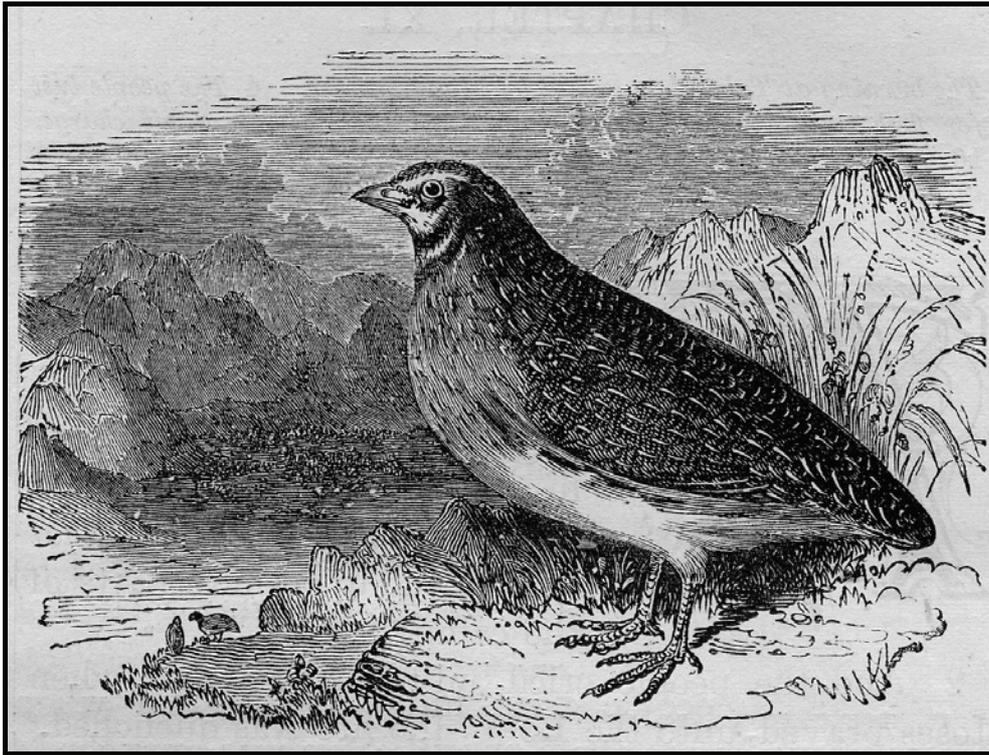


“God Providing the Manna” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

Lord appearing in the cloud.” Thus, in addition to the glory which God would display by His ability to feed and provide for His ungrateful people, the wonder of His glorious light was displayed before their eyes. *“What the people saw was the ‘Shekinah,’ the glorious cloud of God’s presence and protection. God was glorified in the cloud, which was a visible manifestation of His invisible glory.”* (Ryken, p. 428) As Israel gazed in awe upon the sight of God’s glory, the Lord spoke to Moses once again from the cloud and repeated the message which His spokesman had already delivered to the people. In this dramatic fashion God validated that message and identified Moses as His chosen representative.

Verses 13-16

“That evening quail came and covered the camp and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, ‘What is it?’ for they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, ‘It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded, ‘Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.’”

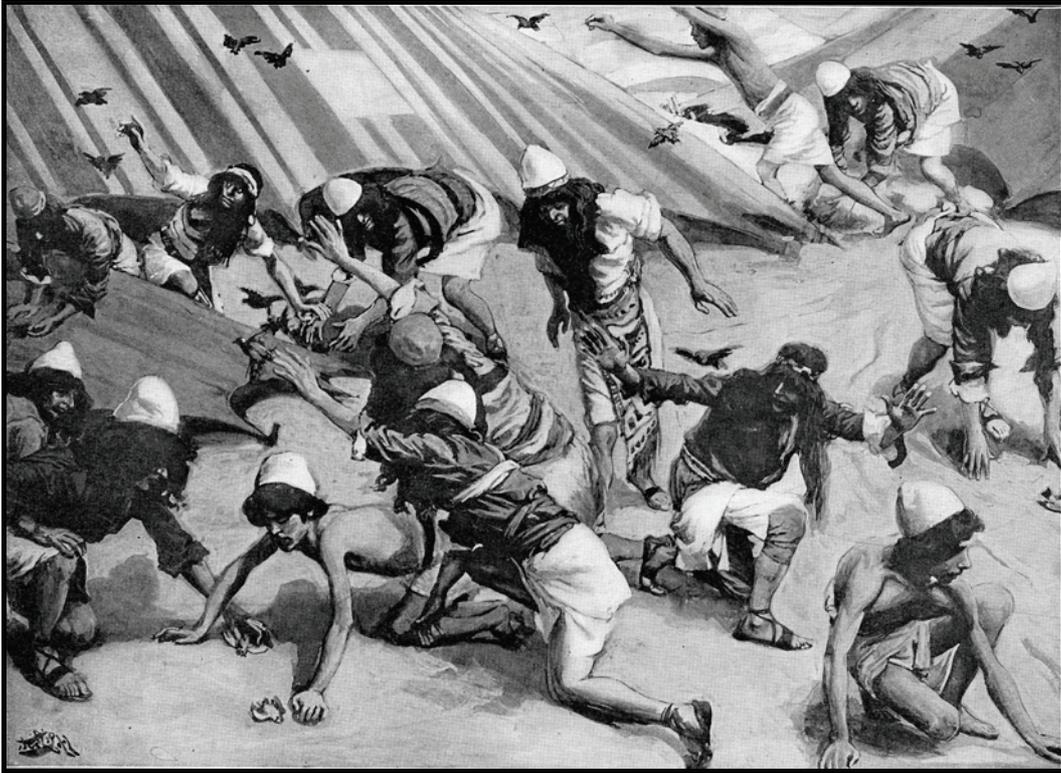


“Palestinian Quail”

“That evening quail came and covered the camp...” - As so it was exactly as the Lord had promised. That very evening great flocks of quail ***“came and covered the camp.”*** Quail are migratory birds, related to pheasants - scientifically known as *“Coturnix coturnix.”* They remain prevalent throughout Egypt and the Sinai to this day and are still caught in large numbers. They migrate in massive numbers from southern Europe to northern Africa in the Fall and return in the Spring. The birds are small in size and make the long, tiring journey in a series of stages. Flying low and landing exhausted, they are easily captured with nets or by hand. Egyptian wall paintings depict the netting of quail as a seasonal occupation throughout the land. There is no suggestion that the provision of quail was to be a regular event. God used what was essentially a natural event to provide for the unique need of His people at this moment. While the timing of the quail’s arrival and the magnitude of the flocks may have been the result of supernatural intervention, the quail migrations and capture were not. Sarna notes that for this reason the gift of the quail is not mentioned in the listings of God’s miraculous blessings to Israel (cf. Deuteronomy 8:3-16 and Nehemiah 9) A detailed description of another such episode later in the wilderness wandering is provided in Numbers 11:

“Now a wind went out from the Lord and drove quail in from the sea. It brought them down all around the camp to about three feet above

the ground, as far as a day's walk in any direction. At that day and night and all the next day the people went out and gathered quail. No one gathered less than ten homers. Then they spread them out all around the camp.” (Numbers 11:31-32)



“The Coming of the Quail Upon the Campo” by J. James Tissot

“Although large flocks of quail live in the Sinai peninsula (mainly on the Mediterranean coast) the miracle of the provision of quail in Exodus and Numbers is primarily in the timing and the extent of the events. The amount of quail in and around the Hebrew camp was astonishing.” (Currid p. 342)

Nor did the Psalmist Asaph hesitate to identify the Lord’s provision of quail as a miraculous demonstration of His love despite the use of natural means:

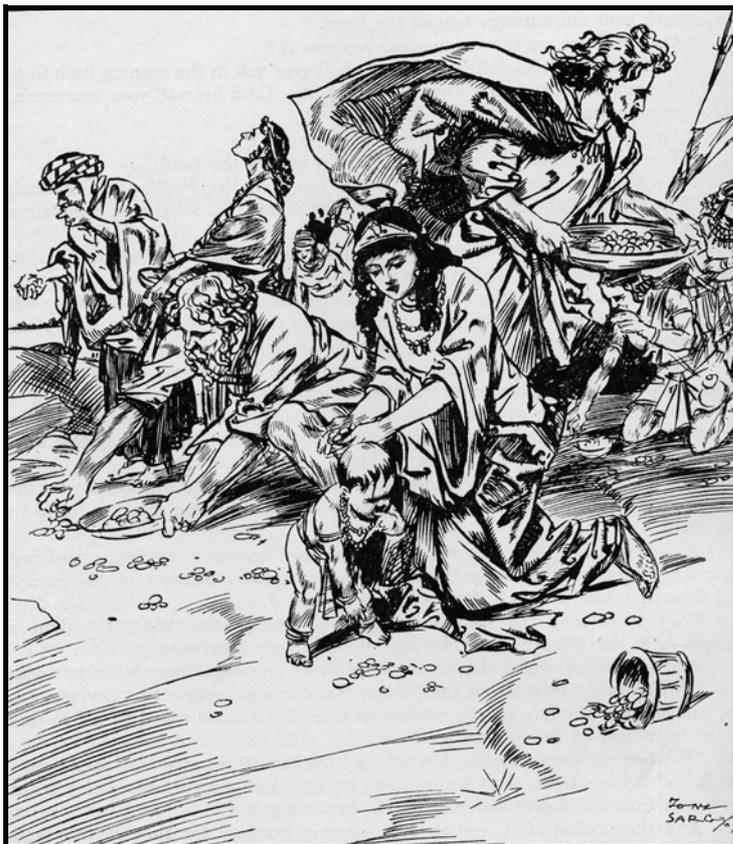
“He let loose the east wind from the heavens, and led forth the south wind by His power. He rained meat down on them like dust, flying birds like sand on the seashore. He made them come down into their camp, all around their tents. They ate till they had more than enough,

for he had given them what they craved.” (Psalm 78:26-29)

“And in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor.” - The second portion of God’s promised provision occurred at the following dawn. In this instance, however, the manna is clearly not the mere amplification of a natural phenomenon provided at the appropriate moment. Every proposed naturalistic explanation of the manna - whether it be the sap of the tamarisk bush or the manna moss both of which are still found in Sinai and the Sahara today - is absolutely inadequate in view of the magnitude of that which described in Scripture. God sent sufficient manna to sustain a group of between two and three million people in the desert every day without fail for a period of forty years. This was nothing less than a divine miracle the scope of which continues to boggle the human imagination. The falling of the manna is directly linked to the morning dew - *“there was a layer of dew around the camp.”* The parallel text in Numbers 11:9 suggests that the layer of manna came down upon the evening dew *“When the dew settled on the camp at night, the manna also came down.”*

Nahum Sarna points out the practical implications of this arrangement: *“This text, read in conjunction with Verses 13-14 here, yields a description of the manna as enveloped in two layers of dew. It would thereby remain clean until collected in the early morning.”* (Sarna, p. 88) The Jewish tradition of placing their bread upon the table between two pure white cloths is based upon this view of the manna coming down between two layers of dew. Dr. Louis Ginzberg reports the Talmudic tradition in regard to the characteristics of manna:

“For manna had been created on the second day of creation and ground by the



“Gathering the Manna”



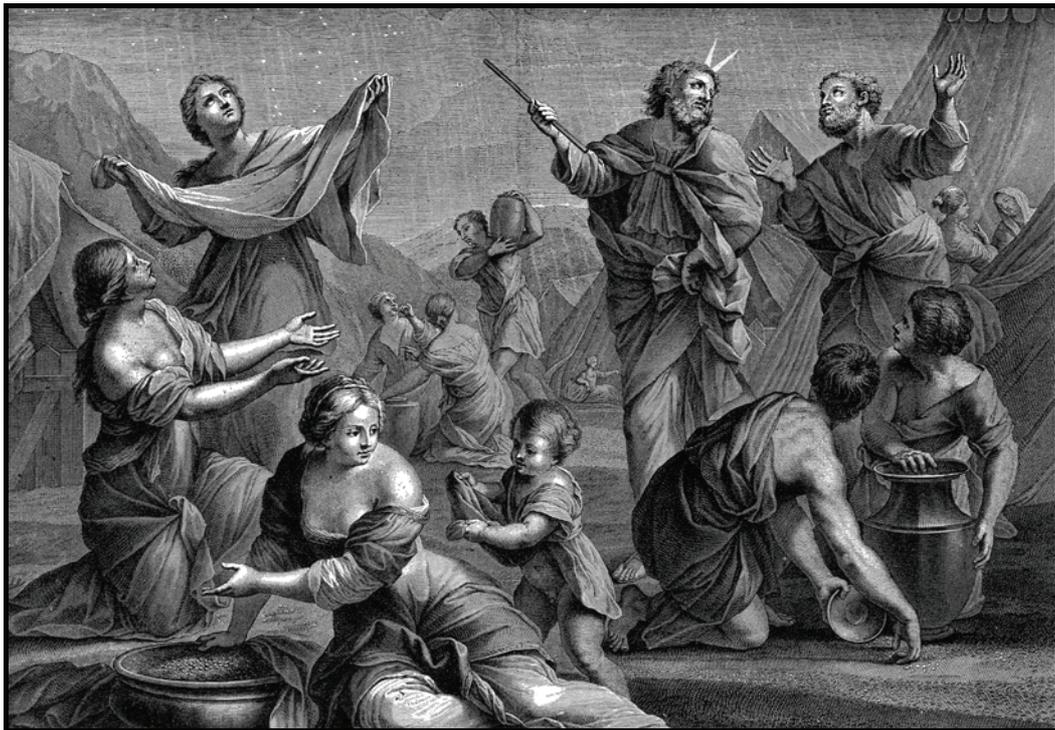
“Gathering the Manna” - 17th Century Luther Bible Woodcut

*“From the Heavens God fed His People with Manna there in the Wilderness
With the Flavor that Each One Craved.*

*Therefore a Man Should not be so Worried about from Whence his Bread Shall Come;
A God Reigns in Heaven Who Cares for Our Needs”*

angels, it later descended for the wanderers in the wilderness. The mills are stationed in the third heaven, where manna is constantly being ground for the future use of the pious; for in the future world manna will be set before them. Manna deserves its name ‘bread of the angels’ not only because it is prepared by them, but because those who partake of it become equal to the angels in strength...Manna also showed its heavenly origin in the miraculous flavor it possessed. There was no need of cooking or baking it, nor did it require any other preparation, and still it contained the flavor of every conceivable dish. One had only to desire a certain dish, and no sooner had he thought of it than the manna had the flavor of the dish desired. The same food had a different taste to everyone who partook of it according to his age; to the little children it tasted like milk, to strong youths like bread, to old men like honey, and to the sick like barley steeped in oil and honey. As miraculous as the taste of manna was its descent from heaven. First

came a north wind to sweep the floor of the desert; then a rain to wash it quite clean; then dew descended upon it, which was congealed into a solid substance by the wind, that it might serve as a table for the heaven descending manna, and this frozen dew glistened and sparkled like gold. But that no insects or vermin might settle on the manna, a frozen dew formed, not only as a tablecloth, but also as a cover for the manna, so that it lay enclosed there as in box, protected from soiling and pollution above and below.” (Ginzberg, pp. 44-45)



“The Gathering of the Manna” - 19th Century Engraving

The miracle hardly requires such fanciful embellishment to enhance its wonder. That which is simply related in the Biblical text is magnificent enough.

The manna is succinctly described as ***“thin flakes like frost on the ground.”*** The reference to ***“frost”*** is no doubt an indication of the manna’s white color. Again, Numbers gives us a more detailed description of the substance: ***“The manna was like coriander seed and looked like resin. The people went around gathering it or crushed it in a mortar. They cooked it in a pot or made it into cakes. And it tasted like something made with olive oil.”*** (Numbers 11:7-8)

“When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, ‘What is it?’” - The Lord had promised that their bread would appear with the coming of the dawn. Nonetheless, the people were puzzled by the appearance of this flaky white substance. This was clearly not what they had expected - ***“For they did not know what it was.”*** In their bewilderment, they marveled to one another - ***“What is it?”*** The Hebrew text records their question as *“Man hu.”* In this way, the name *“manna”* was derived from the question raised by the Israelites when they first laid eyes upon this remarkable gift from God.

“Moses said to them, ‘It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.’” - Moses promptly identified the strange substance as the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise to provide bread to ease their hunger. At the same time, the prophet reiterated the stipulation that each day they were to gather only enough for the needs of that day, based on the number of people in their household - ***“This is what the Lord has commanded: each one is to gather only as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.”*** An *“omer”* is a Hebrew measure which usually refers to a sheaf of grain. In this instance it appears to a container capacity of approximately two quarts. The Hebrew text literally identifies ***“each person”*** as



“The Descent of the Manna” - 15th century Bible Illustration

“each skull,” using a form of the same word from which **“Golgatha”** - “the place of the skull” would later be derived. We use the same language today with the Latin derivative “*per capita.*”

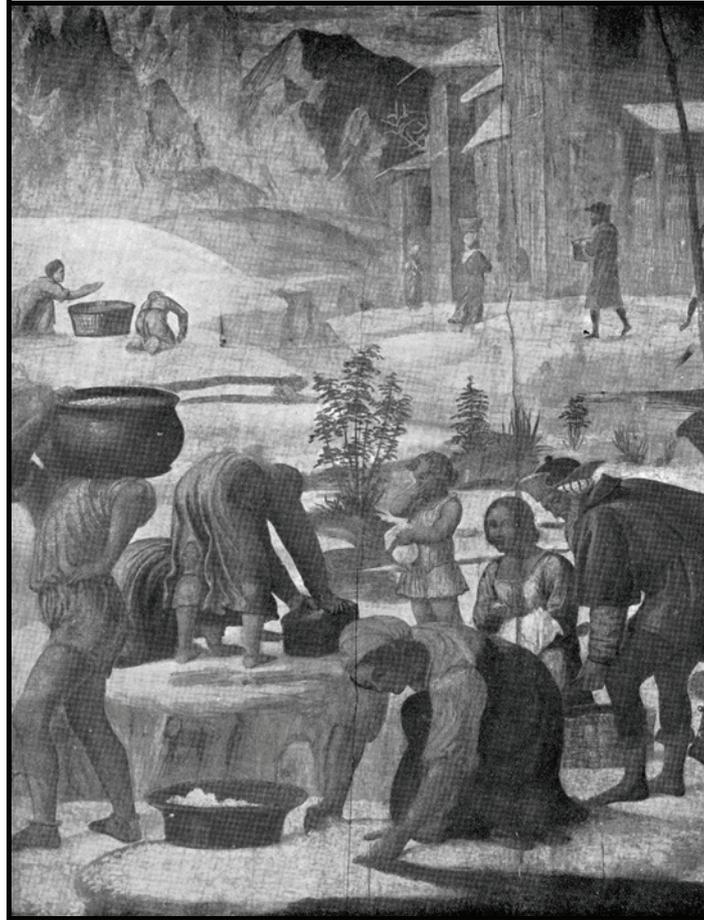
Verses 17-20

“The Israelites did as they were told: some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, he who had gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed. Then Moses said to them, ‘No one is to keep any of it until morning.’ However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them.”

“The Israelites did as they were told...” - The Children of Israel did as Moses had commanded and went out to gather the manna. Depending on the size of their household - ***“some gathered much, some little.”*** Evidently, during the gathering itself each only estimated its needs. The actual measurement did not take place until the gatherers returned to their tents with the manna. Then God performed yet another miracle. In every instance that which had been collected conformed exactly to the



“Gathering the Manna” by Jacopo Robusti



“The Manna in the Desert” by Bernardino Luini

needs of the household: ***“And when they measured it by the omer, he who had gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed.”*** *“That is, the manna collectors only estimated their ration. Some took too much and others too little, but Jahweh miraculously insured equity.”* (Propp, p. 569)

“Then Moses said to them, ‘No one is to keep any of it until morning..’ - The daily nature of the manna provision was reinforced by the command that there were to be no leftovers kept through the night. Reliance upon the provision of manna was designed to be a daily test of faith and a constant reminder of the people’s total dependance upon the Lord for sustenance and survival. While the manna became the basic ingredient in Israel’s diet, it was by no means the only food at their disposal. The German commentator Keil notes the other resources available to them as follows: *“But even in the desert the Israelites had other provisions at their command. In the first place, they had brought large flocks and herds with them out of Egypt (Exodus 12:38; 17:3); and these they continued in possession of, not only at Sinai (34:3) but also on the border of Edom and the country to the east of Jordan (Numbers 20:19;*



“Gathering the Manna” by Egemeier

32:1). Now, if the maintenance of these flocks necessitated, on the one hand, their seeking for grassy spots in the desert; on the other hand, the possession of cattle secured for them by no means an insignificant source of milk and flesh for food, and also of wool, hair and skins for clothing. Moreover, there were different tribes in the desert at that very time, such as the Ishmaelites and the Amalekites, who obtained a living for themselves from the very same sources which must necessarily have been within reach of the Israelites. Even now there are spots in the desert of Arabia where the Bedouins sow and reap; and no doubt there was a much larger number of such spots than there are now, since the charcoal trade carried on by the Arabs has interfered with the natural growth of the trees, and considerably diminished both the growth of the valleys and the extent of the green oases. For the Israelites were not always wandering about; but after the sentence was pronounced that they were to

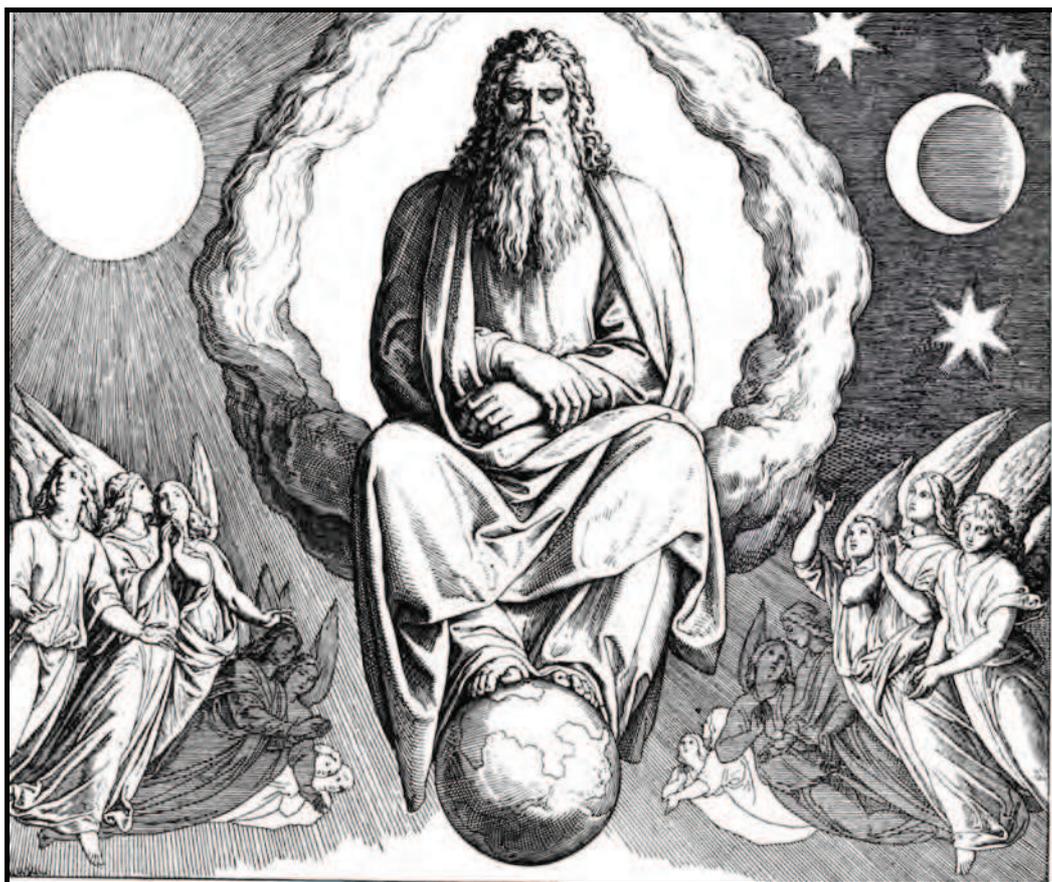
remain for 40 years in the desert, they may have remained not only for months, but in some cases even for years in certain places of encampment, where, if the soil allowed, they could sow, plant and reap. There were many of their wants too that they could supply by means of purchases made either from the trading caravans which traveled through the desert, or from tribes that were settled there.” (Keil, p. 432)

“However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it..” - As always, there are those who are unwilling to walk by faith. Those who defied Moses had to learn the hard way that God was not prepared to tolerance disobedience of His command in this matter - **“but it was full of maggots and began to smell.”** That which only a few hours earlier had been the delightful staff of life mutated overnight into the rotting, worm eaten stuff of death which filled the tents of the disobedient with the putrid stench of death. We are told that Moses re-acted to their faithless disobedience with anger and frustration - **“So Moses was angry with them.”** The

Hebrew verb is particularly intense. Moses was furious. The prophet's anger is understandable, given the circumstances of the situation. After all that God had done for and tolerated from His people they still would not trust or obey Him.

Verses 21-26

“Each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed and when the sun grew hot it melted away. On the sixth day they gathered twice as much - two omers for each person - and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. He said to them: ‘This is what the Lord commanded: Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.’ So they saved it until morning as Moses commanded, but it did not stink or get maggots in it. ‘Eat today,’ Moses said, ‘because today is a Sabbath to the Lord. You will not find any of it on the ground today. Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any.”



“The Seventh Day of Creation” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

“Each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed and when the sun grew hot it melted away.” - It was necessary to gather the manna in the cool of the morning before the heat of the day. When the sun rose high in the desert sky and ***“grew hot,”*** the manna melted away. Cassutto speculates that this refers to the fact that when the manna’s double covering of dew melted away before the rising sun the manna was absorbed into the dry ground or consumed by the desert’s hungry insects. Like the frost which it resembled, the manna could not survive the heat.

“On the sixth day they gathered twice as much - two omers for each person - and the leaders...” - Although it is not mentioned in the text, evidently Moses had already conveyed to the people God instruction that they were to gather double the normal

amount of manna on the sixth day and then refrain from gathering on the seventh day (cf. vs.5). The people complied with those instructions. Most commentators assume that the amount of manna on the ground also increased on the sixth day, thus facilitating the task. When the double gathering had been completed ***“the leaders,”*** (presumably the seventy tribal elders) approached Moses for further instruction and explanation of the command which he had conveyed. This series of events set the stage for the formal re-institution of the Sabbath.

“He said to them, ‘This is what the Lord commanded...’ - The observance of the seventh day as a day of rest in commemoration of the pattern established by God in His work of creation was to become a prominent characteristic feature of Hebrew religion throughout the balance of the Old Testament and beyond. The Sabbath observance became, in the



“God the Creator” - 16th Century Woodcut



“Gathering the Manna” by Tintoretto

words of the rabbis, *“the cornerstone of Judaism.”* (Sarna, p. 113) The profound significance of this command rested in the fact that in the weekly repetition of the of seven day pattern Israel was recalling the reality of creation and acknowledging the Lord as the Creator of everything that exists. As noted in the previous revelation of the divine name *“Jahweh,”* the nature of the Lord as the only independent existence and the source of all being is determinative for His identity as God. More succinctly stated: the truth that God is the self-existent Creator is that which makes Him God. Each week, as Israel interrupted its ordinary pattern of daily activity and labor to rest on the seventh day, it was thereby acknowledging God as the Creator of all things. Thus, the Sabbath command is consistently linked to creation. So, for example, in the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath command is the only one which includes an explanation.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you nor your

son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” (Exodus 20:8-11)

“Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord.” - This is the first appearance of the term **“Sabbath”** in the Old Testament. The repetition of the text - *“a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord”* serves to stress the unique significance of that which is taking place. Nahum Sarna explains the Hebrew terminology in this helpful manner:

“Hebrew ‘shabbaton’ (a day of rest) is an abstract form meaning ‘restfulness.’ It is also applied to the holy day latter known as ‘rosh hashasna’ and to the Feast of Tabernacles (‘sukkot’). However, the



“The Sixth Day of Creation” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld



“Manna in the Desert” by Dieric Bouts

weekly Sabbath and the Day of Atonement (‘yom kippur’) are designated ‘shabbat shabbaton,’ a superlative signifying the highest degree of rest. Hence ‘all manner of work’ is proscribed on the ‘shabbat shabbaton’ but only ‘laborious work’ on the ordinary ‘shabbaton.’” (Sarna, p. 90)

This day of rest is **“a holy Sabbath to the Lord.”** The language indicates that the unique sanctity of this particular day is the result of the fact that it had been set apart from all the other days both by divine precedent (in the seven days of creation - Genesis 2:3) and by divine command. Man does not make the Sabbath day holy. Its holiness is the result of divine initiative alone. Accordingly it is to remain - **“a holy Sabbath to the Lord.”**



“The Manna Had Gone Bad”

“So bake what you want to bake, and boil what you want to boil...” The labor of those who gathered and prepared the manna would double on the sixth day in preparation for the rest of the seventh day. Here too, the pattern of Israelite activity would reflect that of God in creation. On the sixth day God had also doubled His work load, so to speak, creating both land animals and man thereby enabling the rest of the seventh day (Genesis 1:24-31) There would be no manna to gather on the seventh day and there was to be no food preparation of the seventh day. Everything that needed to be done must be completed on the sixth day so that the seventh could remain a day set apart for the Lord.

“So they saved it until morning, as Moses had commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it.” - Yet another miracle was added to the sequence of events connected to God’s gift of the manna. On every other day, any leftovers kept overnight had been covered with worms and filled the tent of the disobedient with the stench of decay. But on the morning of the seventh day, the Israelites discovered that the extra portion of manna which they had set aside - *“as Moses had commanded”* - had been perfectly preserved without any sign of deterioration.

“‘Eat it today,’ Moses said, ‘because today is a Sabbath to the Lord. You will not find...’ - The miraculous preservation of the manna had certified Moses once again as an authentic spokesman for God. Those who obeyed his command found that his promise held true. The food which they had set aside for the seventh day was fresh and sweet, just as God had promised it would be through the word of Moses, His prophet. Moses utilized this moment of vindication to reiterate the command and reinforce the sanctity of the Sabbath as a sacred day within every week which was to be set aside - like the extra manna - to honor and acknowledge the Lord - *“a Sabbath to the Lord.”* As Moses had previously foretold, the manna did not fall on the seventh day - *“Six days you are to gather it. But on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any.”*

Verses 27-30

“Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘How long will you refuse to keep My commands and My instructions? Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day He gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out. So the people rested on the seventh day”

“Nevertheless some of the people went out...” - Once again, the text sets the remarkable faithlessness of men in contrast to the faithfulness of God. While most of the people had obeyed the command of God and trusted that the double portion which they had gathered on Friday would provide for their needs on Saturday, there were those who did not. The text highlights the perversity of this disobedience with the adversative conjunction **“nevertheless.”** Despite the manna miracles they had already witnessed these folks simply could not bring themselves to trust in the Lord and obey his word. Phillip Ryken highlights the gravity of their transgression:

“The Israelites who went out on the seventh day were guilty of a treasonable offense. They broke the Sabbath, of course, but there was more to it than that; They did not trust God’s Word. The instructions Moses had given them were perfectly clear. They were to gather twice as much on the sixth day, but nothing at all on the seventh. This was as straightforward as the Sabbath command that God gave to us all at Mt. Sinai. The problem was not that the people hadn’t heard or couldn’t understand, but that they wouldn’t listen. They went out looking for manna because they trusted



“Gathering Manna” by Leandro Bassano

neither God nor His Word. One wonders if these Sabbath breakers were the same people who earlier had tried to hoard their manna and ended up with maggots. Probably, they were because in both cases they committed the same sin: they failed to trust what God said. When God told them to take only what they needed, they tried to save some extra. But when God told them to take twice as much, they said, 'O no, we're not doing that again!' However, in this case, keeping extra was not a sin but an act of faith. Sadly, some of the Israelites always had their own ideas about what God wanted; so they refused to submit to God's will." (Ryken, p. 439)

God used this episode to illustrate the flagrant ingratitude of the people when He spoke through His prophet Ezekiel:

"Therefore I led them out of Egypt and brought them to the desert. I gave them My decrees and made known to them My laws; for the man who obeys them will live by them. Also I gave them My Sabbaths as a sign between us, so they would know that I, the Lord, made them holy. Yet, the people of Israel rebelled against Me in the desert. They did not follow My decrees but rejected My laws - although the man who obeys them will live by them - and they utterly desecrated My Sabbaths."
(Ezekiel 20:10-13)



"The Prophet Ezekiel Before the Lord' by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld



“Manna in the Desert” by Bacchiacca

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘How long will you refuse to keep My commands and My instructions?’” - The severity of the offense is indicated by the intensity of the response. In the previous instance (cf. vs. 20) it was Moses who became angry when the people failed to heed the command not to try to keep manna overnight. But in regard to the violation of the Sabbath it is the Lord Himself who is provoked to anger. God rebuke is addressed to Moses as the representative of the people. The second person pronoun in this phrase (***“you”***) is plural, indicated that the admonition is not personal but collective. God’s patience with this rebellious and ungrateful nation is growing thin.

“Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day He give you bread for two days...” The Sabbath was a precious gift from God to the nation which He had chosen to be the custodians of the covenant for the salvation of humanity. God had intended the observance of the rest day to be a source of blessing for His people and a unique opportunity for them to acknowledge Him as their Creator and Lord. He then went on to facilitate their observance of the Sabbath by



“Manna From Heaven” by Nicholas Poussin

making special provision for a double portion of the bread of heaven which He was graciously providing for them to be made available on Friday. **“Nevertheless,”** Israel continued to **“refuse to keep My commands and My instructions.”** As He summoned His wayward people to obedience yet again God called upon them to **“bear in mind”** the abundance of His blessing. The command is simple, easy to understand - **“Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out.”** Finally, even the recalcitrants got the message and complied with the command of the Lord - **“So the people rested on the seventh day.”** 19th Century Scottish commentator James Macgregor offers this apt assessment of Israel at this moment in its history: *“In every way, they went on showing when tested, that they were not true servants of God, but slaves let loose.”* (Rushdooney, p. 214)

Verses 31-36

“The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. Moses said, ‘This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt.’” So Moses said to Aaron, ‘Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the Lord to be kept for the generations to come.’ As the Lord commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna in front of the Testimony that it might be

kept. The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan. (An omer is one tenth of an ephah.)

“The people of Israel called the bread manna.” - This summary paragraph concludes God’s miraculous provision of manna to feed His people in the wilderness. Their designation for the wondrous food as “*manna*” was derived from their bewildered question *“What is it?”* (vs. 15) on the morning of the manna’s first appearance.

“It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey.” - The summary continues with a brief description of the appearance and flavor of the manna. *“It was like coriander seed, that is, that in its round shape and its size, which is twice that of a pea, it resembles the seed ((so it is generally designated, although it is actually the fruit) of the plant called coriander in the Bible.”* (Cassutto, p. 199) The rabbis suggest that the variety of descriptions given manna in Scripture are the result of differences in its method of preparation, eaten either uncooked, baked, or boiled.

“Moses said, ‘This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come...’” - God’s provision of manna for Israel in the wilderness was rightly perceived to be a convincing demonstration of His ability and willingness to care for and protect His people in times of danger. Therefore, arrangements were made from the outset to preserve a sample of the manna so that *“the generations to come”* might remain aware of that which God had done for their forefathers in the wilderness. This task was entrusted to Aaron as the father of the priesthood. He placed an *“omer”* of the manna within a sealed vessel which would later be kept in the Holy Place of



*“Manna Falling from Heaven”
Luther Bible Woodcut*

the Tabernacle in or near the Ark of the Covenant - *“before the Lord.”* Hebrews 9:4 reports -

“Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden Altar of Incense, and the gold covered Ark of the Covenant. The Ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron’s staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant.”

1 Kings 8:9 reports that after the chaotic days of the judges, when Solomon placed the Ark within the Holy Place of his Temple that only the tablets of the law remained. The other sacred objects had been lost or stolen. *“There was nothing in the Ark except the two stone tablets, that Moses had place in it at Horeb where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt.”*

“The Israelites ate manna forty years until they came to a land that was settled...” The conclusion ends with the observation that God continued to provide the manna for His people throughout their four decades in the wilderness. Manna remained the staple of the Israelites’ diet until they entered the Promised Land.



15th Century Bible Woodcut Depicting Manna and the Last Supper



Moses Striking the Rock at Meribah” by J. Jordaens

Exodus Chapter 17

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses replied, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test?” But the people were thirsty for water there and they grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?” Then Moses cried out to the Lord, “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.” The Lord answered Moses, “Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord, saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?” The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses said to

Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands. So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went up on top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands the Israelites were winning. But when Moses' hands grew tired they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. . Aaron and Hur held his hands up - one on one side, one on the other - so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." Moses built an altar and called it, "The Lord is My Banner." He said, "For hands were lifted up to the throne of the Lord. The Lord will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.



"The Defeat of Amalek" - 17th Century Bible Illustration by Matthias Merian



“The Pillar of Cloud Leading Israel in the Wilderness” by Ted Larson

Verses 1-2

“The whole Israelite community set out from the desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ Moses replied, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test?’”

“The whole Israelite community set out from the desert of Sin...” - The perilous journey toward Mount Sinai continued in a manner which demonstrated that Israel had learned little, if anything, from their past experiences. They remained spiritually immature, whining and complaining at the slightest provocation. The detailed narration of the stages in Israel’s travel in Numbers 33 indicates that there were two stops between the Desert of Sin and Rephidim: *“They left the desert of Sin and camped at Dophkah. They left Dophkah and camped at Alush. They left Alush and camped at Rephidim, where there was no water for the people to drink.”* (Numbers 33:12-14) This breakdown of the trip is consistent with the observation that *“traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded.”* The Pillar of Cloud/Fire continued to



“Water from the Rock” - Luther Bible Woodcut

direct their route. The text stresses that it was God who remained in complete control of the course of the trip. Accordingly, the difficulties at Rephidim which are soon to follow will be yet another demonstration of Israel’s unwillingness to trust in God and obey His word. The location of the particular sites cited in Exodus and Numbers remains uncertain, depending upon one’s theory as to the location of Mount Sinai. In any case, it is evident that they were approaching Sinai, wherever it may have been.

“They camped at Rephidim but there was no water for the people to drink.” - The specific cause for the lack of available water at the oasis of Rephidim is not explained. It may be significant to note that the phrase does not say that there was no water. It merely says that **“there was no water for the people to drink.”** Given the battle with Amalek that is about to follow, Nahum Sarna speculates that the problem was not the absence of water but that the Amalekites controlled the region and refused to allow Israel access to their water.

“Why, then, was there no water at Rephidim? Unlike the situation at Marah, potability is not mentioned as a problem here. Therefore, either drought conditions had caused severe depletion of the usually available local resources, or the people were forcibly denied access to them. The latter seems the more plausible explanation because it ties in with the next episode, verses 8-16. The hostile Amalekites were in control of this region and blocked the approaches to the sources of water.” (Sarna, p. 93)

Whatever the reason may have been, there was no water available to Israel and they promptly proceeded to take out their frustrations and anxieties upon their leader.

“So they quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’” - In the previous incidents the text had indicated that the people “grumbled.” The problem now intensified and the depth of their anger is signaled by the use of a much stronger verb - “they quarreled with Moses.” “The response of the people to their circumstances is more combative than mere grumbling. The word ‘quarreled’ is a strong word, meaning to strive or to find fault with a measure of hostility.” (Currid, . 359) This verb “carries quasi-judicial overtones. It conjures up a picture of angry and hostile



“Water from the Rock” by Giulio Romano

confrontation in which the people, professing to be the aggrieved party, levy charges against God and against Moses.” (Sarna, p. 94) Their charge was followed by an unequivocal demand which expressed implicit betrayal. Moses had failed to provide them with that to which they were rightly entitled - **“Give us water to drink.”** *“The peremptory demand is, in effect, a denunciation and an accusation.”* (Sarna, p. 94)

“Moses replied, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put God to the test?’ Moses responded sharply to this escalation in their disrespect for and disobedience of God. The prophet recognized both the bitterness of their accusation and its spiritual implications. He contemptuously dismissed their cowardly attempt to attack him rather than directly accusing God who was obviously the real object of their resentment - **“Why do you quarrel with me.”** As in the preceding incident with the manna, Moses was humbly acknowledging that he was nothing more than God’s representative. He was merely a tool in the hand of God. Moses unequivocally identified the real issue with his pointed question - **“Why do you put God to the test?”** Israel’s lack of trust in God’s care and protection is portrayed as putting **“God to the test.”** The phrase is used in the sense of trying His patience or provoking Him to anger. By their faithless disobedience, the people have chosen a dangerous course. God would later use the same terminology in His judgement that the generation which



“Water from the Rock” - Luther Bible Woodcut



“The Rock of Horeb” by Ted Larson

had left Egypt would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land:

“Nevertheless, as surely as I live, and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed Me and tested me ten times - not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to the forefathers. No one who has treated Me with contempt will ever see it.” (Numbers 14:21-25)

Moses later warned those who were to enter the land that they should not make the same deadly mistake which their fathers had made here at Rephidim:

“Fear the Lord your God and serve Him only...Do not test the Lord your God as you did at Massah. Be sure to keep the commands of the Lord your God and the stipulations and decrees He has given you. Do what is right in the Lord’s sight so that it may go well with you and you may go in and take over the good land that the Lord promised on oath to your forefathers...You also made the Lord angry at Taberah,



“Water from the Rock” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

at Massah and at Kirbroth Hattaavah.” (Deuteronomy 6:13-19; 9:22)

Psalm 78 made effective use of this episode, with other like it throughout the history of the nation, to contrast the faithfulness of God with the remarkable ingratitude of His people. The psalmist contended that arrogant testing of God was the consistent theme of Israelite history. The psalm particularly stressed the manner in which Israel’s insolent willingness to put the Lord to the test aroused His burning wrath against them:

“They would not be like their forefathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to Him...He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire by night. He split the rocks in the desert and gave them water as abundant as the seas; He brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers. But they continued to sin against Him, rebelling in the desert against the Most High. They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved. They spoke against God, saying ‘Can God spread a table in the desert? When He struck the rock, water gushed out, and streams flowed abundantly. But can He also give us food? Can He supply meat for

His people?’ When the Lord heard them He was very angry; His fire broke out against Jacob, and His wrath rose against Israel for they did not believe in God or trust in His deliverance...How often they rebelled against Him in the desert and grieved Him in the desert. Again and again they put God to the test and vexed the Holy One of Israel...But they put God to the test and rebelled against the Most High; they did not keep His statutes.” (Psalm 78:8, 14-22,40-41,56)

The flagrant rebellion at Meribah/Massah became one of the standard examples of Israel’s habitual disrespect for God and disregard of His blessing:

“For He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care. Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried Me though they had seen what I did.” (Psalm 95:7-9)

But while presumptuous, disobedient Israel believed they were testing God, in reality God was testing them. They were consistently failing His tests, but nonetheless He



“Water from the Rock”

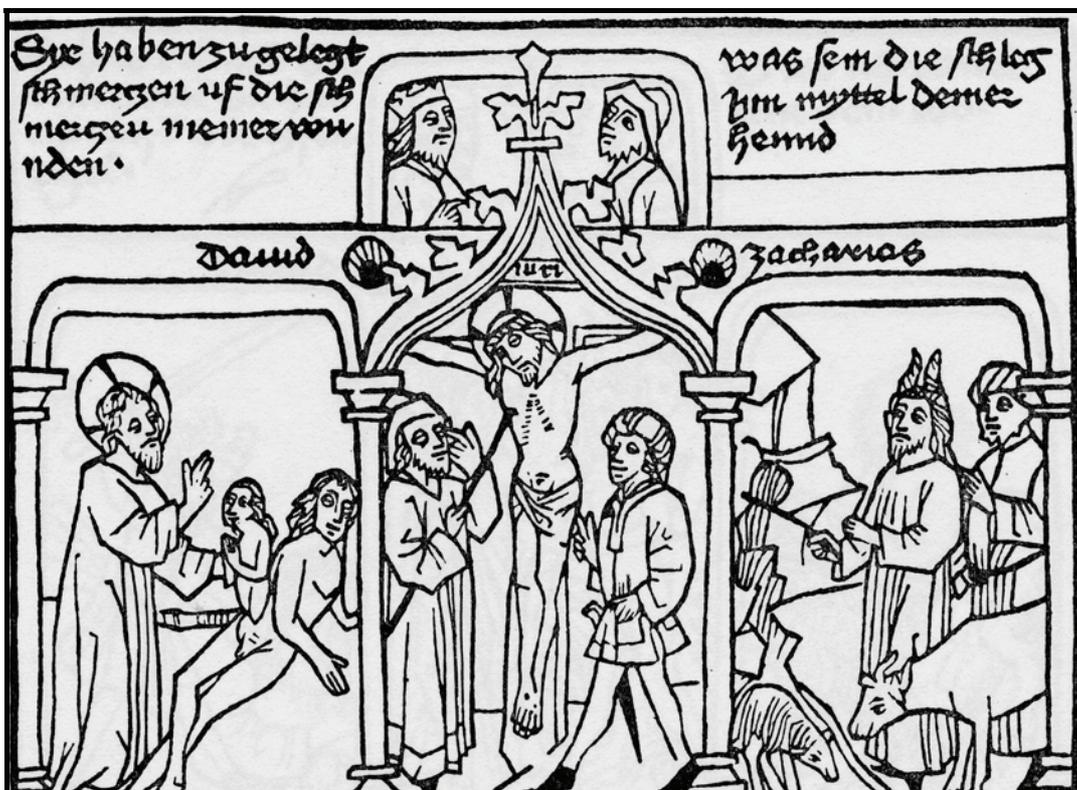
was training and preparing them for that which lay ahead. At the end of the forty years Moses would recall:

“Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands...He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you.” (Deuteronomy 8:2,16)

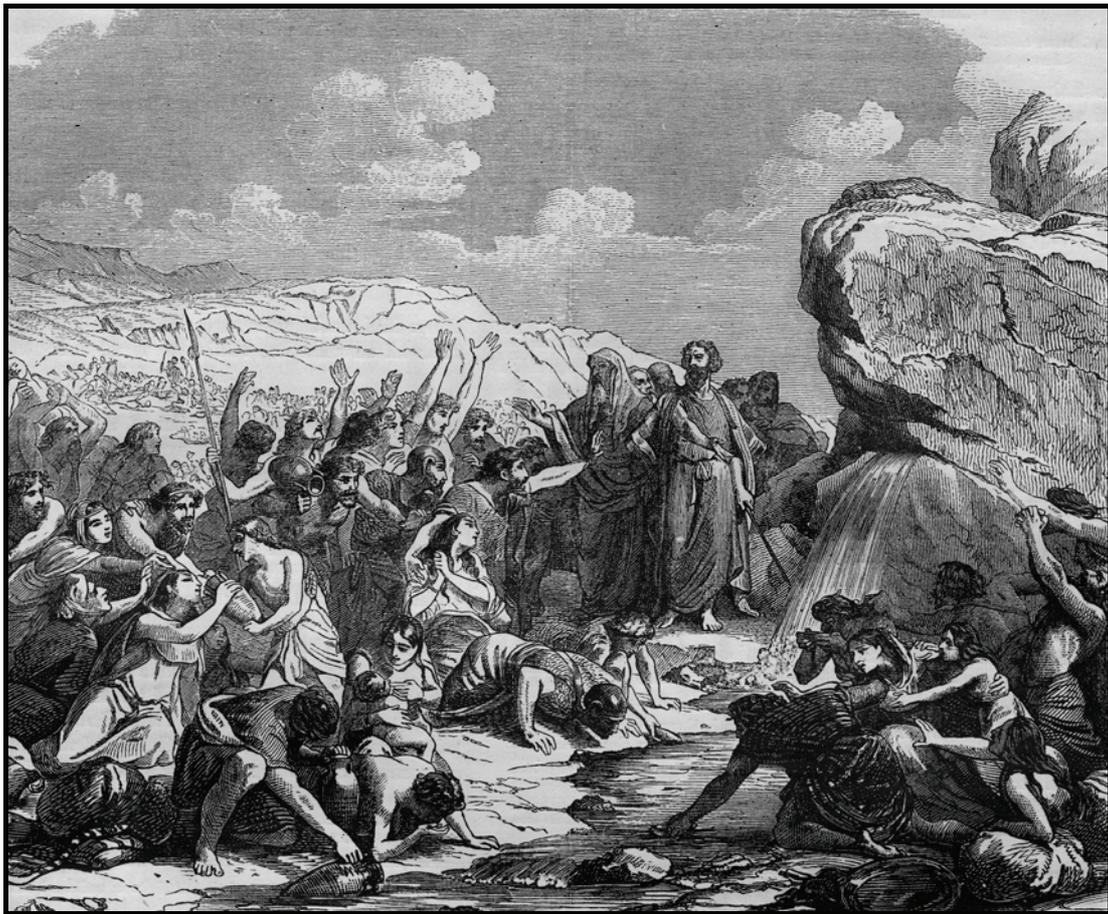
The psalmist specifically referred to the water from the rock as an example of God’s testing of His people: *“In your distress you called and I rescued you. I answered you out of a thundercloud; I tested you at the waters of Meribah.”* (Psalm 81:7)

Verses 3-4

“But the people were thirsty for water there and they grumbled against Moses. They said, ‘Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?’ Then Moses cried out to the Lord, ‘What am I to do with



“Medieval Bible Woodcut Comparing the Water from the Rock to the Blood and Water Which flowed from Christ’s Side on the Cross”



“Water from the Rock” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

these people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

“But the people were thirsty for water there...” - Despite Moses’ curt rebuff of their complaint, the people persisted in their demands. The urgency of their immediate need overcame any recollection of that which God had done for them in the past or any confidence that He could and would act to rescue them again. In their faithless fear they grew desperate and angry to the point of violence. The assembly was fast degenerating into a mob. That which had become their standard line whenever a problem arose was hauled out again: *“Why did you bring us up out of Egypt...”* The slightly veiled accusation in their words is that they had trusted Moses - that is God - with their lives and now he (He) was going to let them die in the desert.

“Then Moses cried out to the Lord...” - To his credit, Moses did not try to reason with them or to solve the problem on his own. Instead, he turned immediately to God for help, thereby humbly acknowledging his total dependence upon wisdom and power from on high. Moses recognized that the moment of crisis had come and in that crisis *“Moses cried out to the Lord.”* The verb *“cried out”* signals the urgency



“Moses Striking the Rock” by Tintoretto

of the situation. The prophet acknowledged that things were slipping out of control. The prophet’s plaintive cry - **“What am I to do with these people?”** expresses his exasperation and frustration. Moses is at his wit’s end. Cassutto paraphrased the prophet’s lament in this way:

“I am at a loss to know what to do with this people. They have risen up against me and very nearly have reached the point of stoning me to death.’ The people raised their complaints against Moses, and Moses voiced his against the people. The contention was reciprocal.”
(Cassutto, p. 202)

After all that God had done for them they were now on the brink of violent revolt - **“They are almost ready to stone me!”** The Hebrew text is a bit more dire - **“Yet a little while and they will stone me!”** Death by stoning was the typical method of mob execution in Israel and would remain so all the way down to the murder of Stephan

at the beginning of the apostolic era (cf. Acts 7:54-60).

Verses 5-7

“The Lord answered Moses, ‘Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink. So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’”

“The Lord answered Moses...” - God did not address the ingratitude or rebellion of the Israelites. Rather, in a series of terse instructions He informs Moses as to how He will act to provide for the need of His people.



16th Century Luther Bible Woodcut of Moses Striking the Rock

“As soon as Moses staff only struck the rock

Everyone of those who were thirsty could drink as much as they pleased.

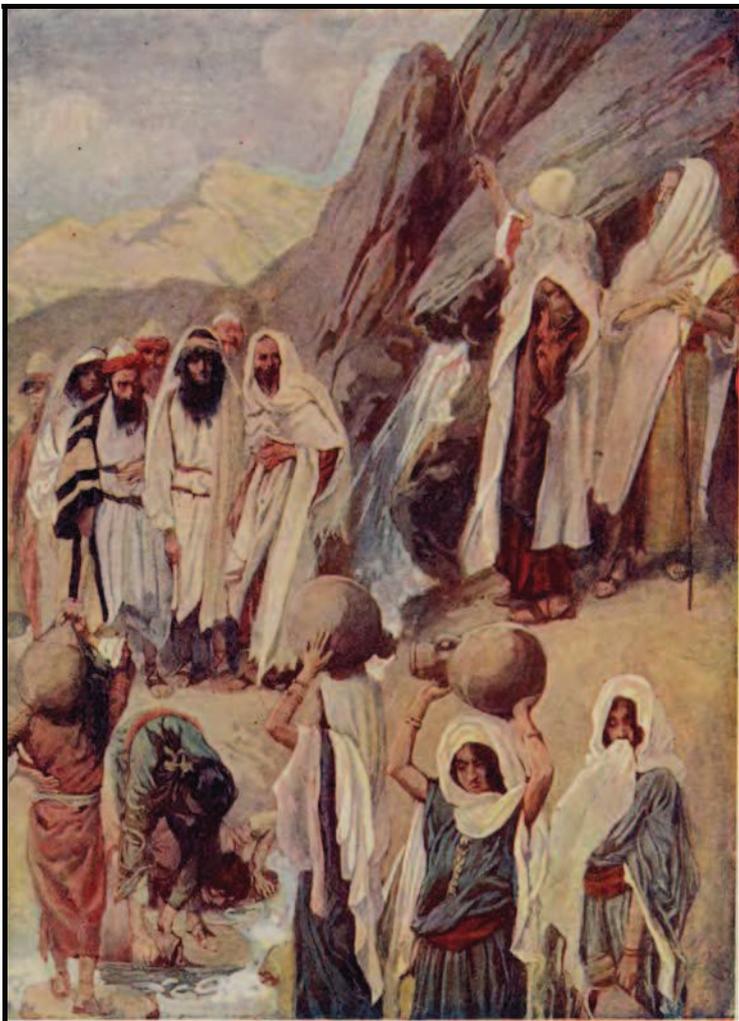
Trust that if I, like the Shepherd, in the midst of cross and pain

Cry out for a sip of fresh water, that God will send it from the stone.”

“The Lord’s reply to Moses is on a lofty a majestic plane. He does not interfere in the strife between the people and Moses, neither in regard to the people’s allegations against Moses, nor in respect to his counter-charges against the people. His attitude is that of a father whose children are in distress, and in their distress an altercation breaks out between them; he pays no attention to the wrangling, but endeavors only to deliver his children from their trouble.”(Cassutto, p. 202)

“Walk on ahead of the people” - While a mob is bold, every person in it is a coward. They find their courage only in one another and in the rage which brought them together. God’s solution to the problem necessarily began with Moses facing down

the angry mob which had threatened him. Only in this way could his leadership of the people survived this crisis. He had to demonstrate that with the Lord by his side he had no fear and they could not intimidate or coerce him. Thus, in a remarkable act of courage and faith, Moses walked through the mass of angry people to carry out God’s instructions. Imagine the drama of the scene. As the stern prophet stepped forward with the staff of God’s power in his hand the people immediately in front of him stumbled back to get out of his path. The crowd parted - much like the angry waters of the Red Sea had parted - and Moses, followed by those few elders who were brave enough to follow him and who would serve as eye-witnesses to the miracle, moved toward the rock which God had designated. Furious shouts diminished to angry murmuring, and finally there was only silence as the



“Water From the Rock” J. James Tissot

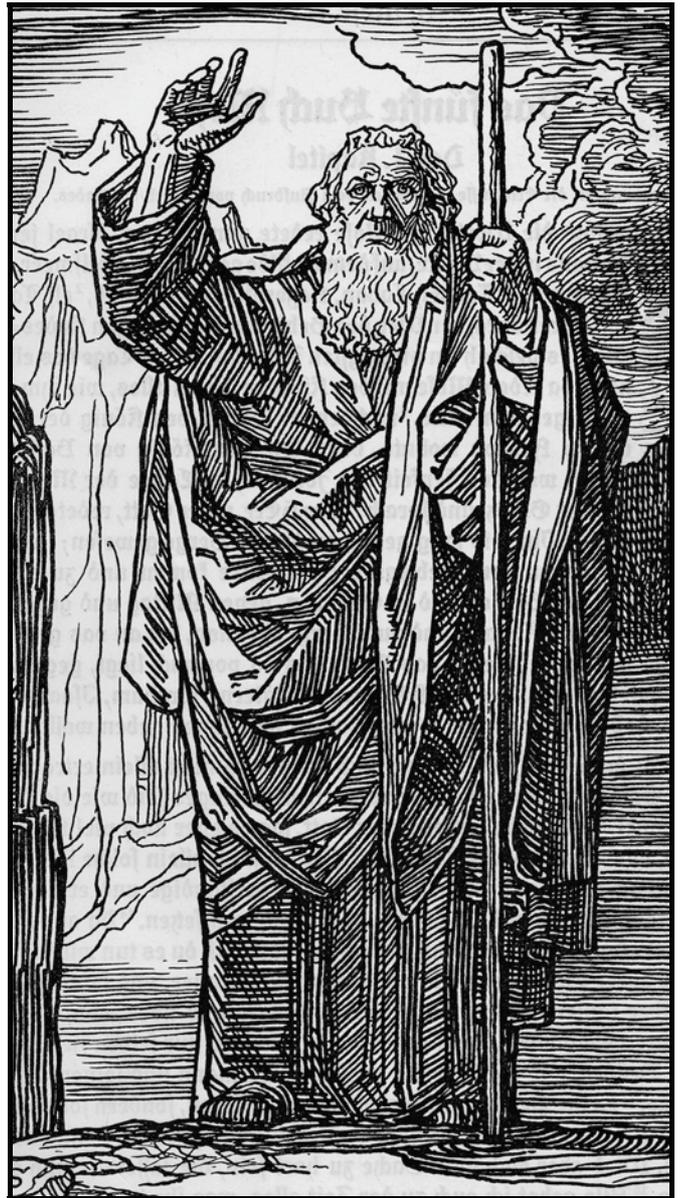
people watched Moses move up the rocky slope.

“Take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go.” - God’s command to use Moses’ staff as the instrument through which the wonder would be performed along with the specific reference to the first of Egypt’s plagues (cf. 7:17-19) served both as a reminder of the fact that God had already performed great miracles on behalf of Israel and a sadly ironic assertion of the fact that in this instance Israel had taken the place of the Egyptians as those who doubted the ability of the Lord to fulfill his promises. *“The probable reason for the comments is to draw a contrast. The very rod that had struck the Nile river to deprive Egypt of water now becomes the source of benefit to the people of Israel by providing water for them.”* (Currid, p. 361)

“I will stand there before you at the rock of Horeb. Strike the rock and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” -

The host of Israel had evidently drawn near the mountain of God or one of its projecting ridges. This location is reinforced by subsequent references to the springs of Massah and Meribah as being near Mt. Sinai. After the destruction of the Golden Calf, Moses took the fragments

“and threw the dust into a stream that flowed down the mountain.” (Deuteronomy 9:21) In the aftermath of the idolatry with the Golden Calf, only the Levites rallied to Moses and slaughtered 3,000 of the idol worshipers at his command. In Deuteronomy, Moses praised the loyalty of the sons of Levi with these words: ***“Your Thummin and Urim belong to the man you favored. You tested him at Massah, you contended with him at the waters of***



***“Moses With the Staff of Power”
by Rudolf Schäfer***



“Water from the Rock” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

Meribah. He said of his father and mother, I have no regard for them. He did not recognize his brothers or acknowledge his own children but he watched over Your Word and guarded Your covenant.” (Deuteronomy 33:8-9)

At the same time with this reference to *“the rock at Horeb,”* God offered His beleaguered and frustrated representative assurance and comfort. This was the place where God had called Moses to be His spokesman. The reference to *“the rock of Horeb”* would have reminded Moses of that calling and of God’s original promises of presence and power. This was not his problem. Moses was not alone. In effect God was reassuring him *“I will stand before you at the rock of Horeb”* as I stood before you in this same place at the burning bush. God was also assuring Moses that He had the power to resolve the crisis and that He would provide for the need of His people - *“Strike the rock and water will come out of it for the people to drink.”*

“So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel.” - Moses obeyed the command of the Lord with hesitation or doubt. The text devotes few words to the

miracle itself. Nonetheless, we must keep in mind the scope of the miracle. With the striking of the rock, God provided sufficient water for millions of thirsty people. This was no mere trickle as is typically depicted in the numerous artistic representations of the scene. No, God must have produced a veritable river of fresh, clean, life-giving water. But the issue at Rephidim was the grumbling and rebellion of the people. God's ability to provide for their need was never in question. The presence of the tribal elders further highlighted the real issue. They were eyewitnesses so that they might authenticate the miracle to skeptical deniers. The fact that such witnesses would be necessary at this point is sadly indicative of how far Israel had fallen. That sad reality is further evidenced by the fact that there was no repentance or thanksgiving from the Israelites when the water came gushing out of the rock, the most unlikely of all sources. They were too busy scrambling to get themselves a drink to stop and give thanks to the God who had provided them with water.

“And he called the place ‘Massah’ and ‘Meribah’ because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’” - While Israel was content to immediately forget its ingratitude and rebellion against the Lord, Moses was not. The names which he bestowed upon this place were designed to serve as a reminder of the shameful offense which the people had committed there.



“Water from the Rock at Rephidim” by Robert Leinweber

“Massah” literally means *“to be placed on trial,”* recalling the formal accusation which the people had raised against the Lord. **“Meribah”** means *“to quarrel.”* Quoting the 19th century English commentator Joseph Parker, John Rushdooney observed the ongoing relevance of this sad episode for contemporary Christians:

“More than a century ago, Joseph Parker saw the Christian community approaching its own Rephidim, a place where necessities would test our faith. We have not, he observed, gone an inch beyond Rephidim, the place of necessity, because, with all God’s provisions and care, we see only our own needs, our necessities, not what God has done and is doing. Parker wrote: ‘How far have we advance, morally, spiritually, and in all the higher ranges and Diviner outlooks of our being? Here we seem to be still at Rephidim, Geographers say they cannot find out the exact locality. Verily, there need be no uncertainty about the exact locality - it is just where we are. We carry the locality with us.’” (Rushdooney, p. 219)



“Striking the Rock” by Joseph Durham

“Because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord, saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’” - The renaming of the site was to be a permanent reminder to the Children of Israel of their ingratitude and effrontery. After the series of incredible blessings which God had bestowed upon them in the plagues of Egypt, the deliverance at the sea, and the miraculous provision in the desert, these people still had the unmitigated to demand that God prove to them once again whether or not He remained present in their midst. Were it not for our own experience of mankind’s incredible capacity for ingratitude and selective memory, this sequence of events would surely have been beyond belief. Unfortunately the complaint *“What have you done for me lately?”* still sounds among us.



“Victory, O Lord!” By John Everett Millais

Verses 8-15

The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, ‘Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow, I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.’ So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up - one on the one side, one on the other - so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword. Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.’ Moses built an altar and called it, ‘The Lord is My Banner.’ He said, ‘for hands were lifted up to the throne of the Lord. The Lord will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.’”

“The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim.” - The Amalekites were descended from Jacob’s older brother Esau through his oldest son Eliphaz. (Cf. Genesis 36) They had become nomadic herdsmen in the region of the Negev and Sinai. ***“The Amalekites live in the Negev, the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country, and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.”*** (Numbers 13:29) It is not surprising that Amalek would have viewed the arrival of the massive Israelite migration through their territory as an unwelcome intrusion which threatened their grazing and their access to the oasis springs which were the key to survival in the desert. Amalek was the first heathen nation to oppose Israel after their departure from Egypt and the savage manner in which they did so earned them unique notoriety among the enemies of the Israelites. As the false prophet Balaam recalled in his review of the enemies of Israel: ***“Then Balaam saw Amalek and uttered his oracle: ‘Amalek was first among the nations, but he will come to ruin at last.’”*** (Numbers 24:20) Moses later noted the particular duplicity and the



“Joshua Leading Israel Against the Amalekites” - 18th Century Silk Tapestry



“The Battle with Amalek” by Rudolf Schüfer

ferocity of Amalek in that they ambushed and slaughtered the weak and weary who had fallen behind the main body and were struggling to catch up with the other tribes when the Amalekites savagely fell upon them without warning:

“Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God. When the Lord your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land He is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot the memory of Amalek out from under heaven. Do not forget!” (Deuteronomy 25:17-19)

The rabbis told horrendous tales of Amalek’s deceit and cunning, of the mutilation of the dead and the bitter jealousy which these descendants of Esau continued to hold against the favored position of the family of Jacob:

“So Amalek now marched forth from his fortress in the desert of Seir...He insisted upon being the first to declare war upon Israel...In his

expedition against Israel he made use of his kinship with them by pretending, at first to be their friend and kinsman. Before going over to open attack, he lured many unsuspecting Jews to death with his kindly words...Amalek appeared before the Jewish camp, and calling the people by name, he invited them to leave the camp and come out to him. 'Reuben, Simeon, Levi, etc.,' he would call, 'come out to me, your brother, and transact business with me!' Those who answered the enticing call found certain death at his hands; and not only did Amalek kill them, but he also mutilated their corpses, following the example of his grandsire Esau, by cutting off a certain part of the body, and throwing it toward heaven with the mocking words, 'Here shalt thou have what thou desirest!' In this way did he jeer at the token of the Abrahamic covenant." (Ginzberg, p. 57)

The brutal bitterness of this family feud suggests that there is a great deal more at stake here than territorial integrity or grazing rights. The divine commands in the verses which follow in regard to ongoing enmity between Israel and Amalek and the ultimate destruction of this particular foe highlight the same reality. Amalek would

come to typify the world's relentless enmity against the people of God and the unwillingness of worldly power to tolerate the offense of a nation set apart and dedicated to the Word of God.



***"The Battle with the Amalekites" - 19th Century
Illustration***

"There they fell upon the Israelites, probably in the Sheikh Valley where the rear had remained behind the main body, not merely for the purpose of plundering or of disputing possession of this district and its pasture ground with the Israelites, but to assail Israel as the nation of God, and, if possible, to destroy it. The divine command to exterminate Amalek (ver.14) points to this; and still more the description given of the Amalekites in Balaam's utterances, as 'the beginning - that is,



“Moses, Aaron and Hur on the Hilltop Overlooking the Battle with the Amalekites” by James Tissot

the first and foremost of the heathen nations - (Numbers 24:20). In Amalek, the heathen world commenced that conflict with the people of God, which, while it aims at their destruction, can only be terminated by the complete annihilation of the ungodly powers of this world.” (Keil, pp. 437-438)

The final elimination of the Amalekite remnant did not occur until the reign of King Hezekiah, late in the Old Testament era: ***“The men whose names were listed came in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah...And five hundred of these Simeonites, led by Peltiah, Neariah, Rephaiah, and Uzziel, the sons of Ishi, invaded the hill country of Seir. They killed the remaining Amalekites, who had escaped and they have lived there to this day.”*** (1 Chronicles 4:41, 42-43)



“The Battle With Amalek” by Hoet

“Moses said to Joshua, ‘Choose some of our men to go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow, I will stand at the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.’” - Moses delegated the military command of the Israelite host to ***“Joshua.”*** This is the first reference to the man who would become Moses’s successor and the commander of the Israelite conquest of the Promised Land in the Book of Exodus. The Hebrew name ***“Joshua”*** literally means ***“God is salvation.”*** The name ***“Jesus”*** (***“Savior”***) is drawn from the same root. Numbers 13:16 indicates that Joshua was not his given name, but a title bestowed upon him by Moses at the time when he entered into the service of the people and saved Israel from the Amalekite menace: ***“(Moses gave Hoshea, son of Nun, the name Joshua.)”*** Joshua is introduced here without further identification, no doubt in view of his subsequent prominence. We are subsequently informed that Joshua was the son of Nun (Numbers 13:8) and that he was a prince of

the tribe of Ephraim (1 Chronicles 7:26-27). The reasons for Joshua’s selection are not cited nor is there any indication of military command experience. It is most probably safe to assume that, as usual, Moses acted in this instance in response to divine instruction.

“Tomorrow I will stand at the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.” Moses assured young Joshua that he would not be undertaking this daunting task by himself. Moses promised to position himself on a hilltop overlooking the battlefield ***“with the staff of God in my hands.”*** In this way Joshua was promised that God would go with him into battle and would bless his efforts to defeat the enemies of Israel.

“So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill.” - The following day, Joshua led the Israelite counterattack against the Amalekites. As he had promised, Moses went up onto the

overlooking hilltop to call down God’s blessing upon the Israelite host. The prophet was accompanied by his older brother Aaron and by “*Hur.*” This is also the first reference to Hur in the Book of Exodus. Later, in Exodus 24, Aaron and Hur were designated to serve as the judges of Israel during the time that Moses and Joshua went up to the Lord upon Mount Sinai (cf. Exodus 24:13-14). Hur was from the tribe of Judah, the grandfather of the craftsman Bezael who supervised the construction of the tabernacle (cf. Exodus 31:2; 35:30; 38:22). Rabbinic tradition further indicates that Hur was the husband of Miriam, Moses’ sister. That tradition would be consistent with his selection to accompany Moses and his brother to the hilltop in this text.



“Moses Overlooking the Battle with Aaron and Hur” by F. Pickersgill

“As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.” - By raising the staff of God in his hands Moses was at the same time praying to the Lord that He might empower the warriors of Israel and give them the victory over the hosts of Amalek and holding before the Israelites the very instrument through which God has accomplished such great wonders on their behalf. In this way they were reminded that the Lord fought by their side and they fought all the more fiercely and courageously against their foe. Hands upraised toward heaven was the characteristic Old Testament posture for prayer. Thus did David pray that the Lord might answer his prayer in words that have been incorporated into the church’s historic Vespers service: ***“Let my prayer rise before Thee as incense; the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”*** (Psalm 141:2) The fathers of the early Christian church perceived in the outstretched hands of the prophet holding a staff a prophetic image of the arms of our Lord outstretched upon the cross (Lienhard, pp. 89-90).

“If he is openly raging through a sinful people, he is like Amalek. By his opposition he denies the passage to the land of promise. He must then



“The Battle with Amalek” by Matthias Merien



“The Battle with Amalek” - Luther Bible Woodcut

then be overcome by the cross of Christ, which was prefigured by the extended hands of Moses.” (St. Augustine)

“For my own warfare, however, I am at a loss what course to pursue, what alliance, what word of wisdom, what grace to devise, with what panoply to arm myself against the wiles of the wicked one. What Moses did to conquer him by stretching out his hands upon the mount, in order that the cross, thus typified and prefigured, might prevail.” (St. Gregory of Nazianzus)

“As long as Moses held up his hands the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands the Amalekites were winning.” -The fortunes of Israel on the battlefield depended up whether or not the hands of Moses were uplifted in prayer holding the staff of God. Keil warns against viewing the staff as some sort of magical talisman or luck charm which could by use of supernatural power within itself grant the Israelites the victory. It was the command of God and the prayer of Moses which accomplished the miracle of Israel’s victory on the battlefield that day.

“The lifting up of the staff secured to the warriors the strength needed to secure the victory, from the fact that by means of the staff Moses brought down this strength from above, that is, from Almighty God in

heaven; not indeed by a mere spiritless and unthinking elevation of the staff, but by the power of his prayer which was embodied in the lifting up of his hands with the staff, and was so far strengthened thereby that God had already chosen and employed this staff as the medium of His saving manifestation of His almighty power.” (Keil, p. 439)

“When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands - one on the one side, and one on the other - so that his hands so that his hands remained steady until sunset.” - The battle raged on throughout the day with each side advancing and retreating. As the hours passed, the arms of the prophet grew weary. Exhausted, both by the spiritual intensity of his urgent prayer to the Lord and the physical effort of holding the staff in his upraised arms, Moses eventually let his hands fall to his sides. At that moment Aaron and Hur, who had evidently accompanied him in anticipation of this need, stepped forward and provided ***“a stone”*** of sufficient size to provide a resting place. The men then took their stations, one on either side of the weary prophet, and aided



“The Defeat of Amalek” - 19th Century Bible Illustration



“Victory Over the Amalekites” by Gerome

him in raising up his arms and the staff once again. The three remained in this position for the balance of the day, calling down the blessing of God upon the warriors who battled on the field below. With the presence of God in the conflict, the outcome was never truly in doubt. The text succinctly notes: ***“So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.”*** A formidable opponent had been utterly defeated. No doubt the other nations in Israel’s path took uneasy notice of this event and its ominous implications for their own futures. At the same time, Israel had been given an essential lesson in their absolute dependence upon the strength of God.

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it; because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.’” - The unique significance of Israel’s first military victory was indicated by God’s specific instruction that Moses was to write down a careful record of these events ***“as something to be remembered.”*** At the same time, the Lord’s insistence that Joshua be made aware of God’s intention to ***“completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven”*** provided a clear

indication of the crucial leadership role which this young man would be called upon to play in the future of the Israelite people. The repeated references to the formation of written records throughout these texts give direct Biblical support to the historic conviction of both Jews and Christians that Moses is the author the Torah.

“Moses built an altar and called it *The Lord is My Banner.*” - The construction of an altar at the site of the battle was an acknowledgment that the victory had only been achieved by God’s power and an expression of gratitude to God for his intervention on behalf of Israel. The stone altar would further serve as a memorial of the battle and a reminder to the people of that which the Lord had done for them in that place. There is no indication that this memorial altar was intending for the actual offering of sacrifices. The erection of such altars was common throughout the Old Testament (cf. Genesis 33:20; 35:7; Judges 6:24). Moses gave this altar the title **“*The Lord Is My***

***Banner.*”** (Hebrew- *“Adonai-nissi”*) The designation no doubt referred to the crucial role which the staff of God in the upraised hands of Moses played in rallying the Israelite warriors and inspiring them to victory over their enemies. Moses drew the connection in his explanation of the title - **“*For hands were lifted up to the throne of the Lord.*”**

“*The Lord will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.*” The Amalekite assault upon Israel was in reality a deliberate attack upon God and His sovereign power. God’s judgement upon that defiant rebellion would ultimately be the total extermination of the Amalekite nation. King Saul’s failure to carry out God’s instruction that he end this war and totally destroy the Amalekites led to his rejection by God and the downfall of his dynasty. (1 Samuel 15)



“Joshua Leading Israel in Battle” by J. James Tissot

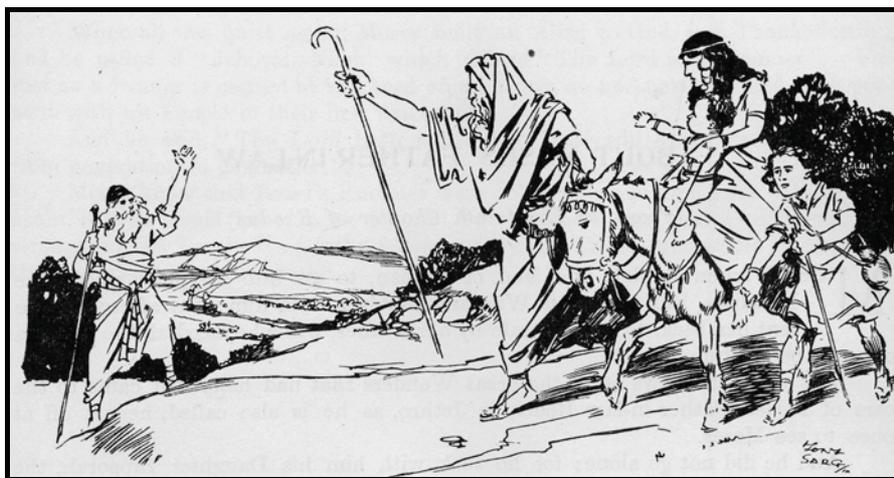


“Moses is Reunited with His Family” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

Exodus Chapter 18 Jethro Visits Moses

Now Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard everything that God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, and how the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt. After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro had received her and her two sons. One son was named Gershom, for Moses said, “I have become an alien in a foreign land;” and the other was named Eliezar, for he said, “My father’s God was my Helper, He save me from the sword of Pharaoh. Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, together with Moses’ sons and wife, came to him in the desert where he was camped near the mountain of God. Jethro had sent word to him, “I, your father-in-law Jethro am coming to you with your wife and her two sons.” So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent. Moses told his father-in-law about everything the Lord had done to the Egyptians for Israel’s sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the Lord had

saved them. Jethro was delighted about all the good things the Lord had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. He said; "Praise be to the Lord who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods, for He did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly." Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God and Aaron came with all the other elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God. The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people and they stood around him from morning till evening. When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said; "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?" Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will. Whenever they have a dispute it is brought to me and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and laws. Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to Him. Teach them the decrees and laws and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. But select capable men from all the people - men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain - and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will



"Moses Reunited with His Family" - 19th Century Bible Illustration

go home satisfied.” Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything that he said. He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves. Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.



“Moses Conferring With Jethro” by J. James Tissot

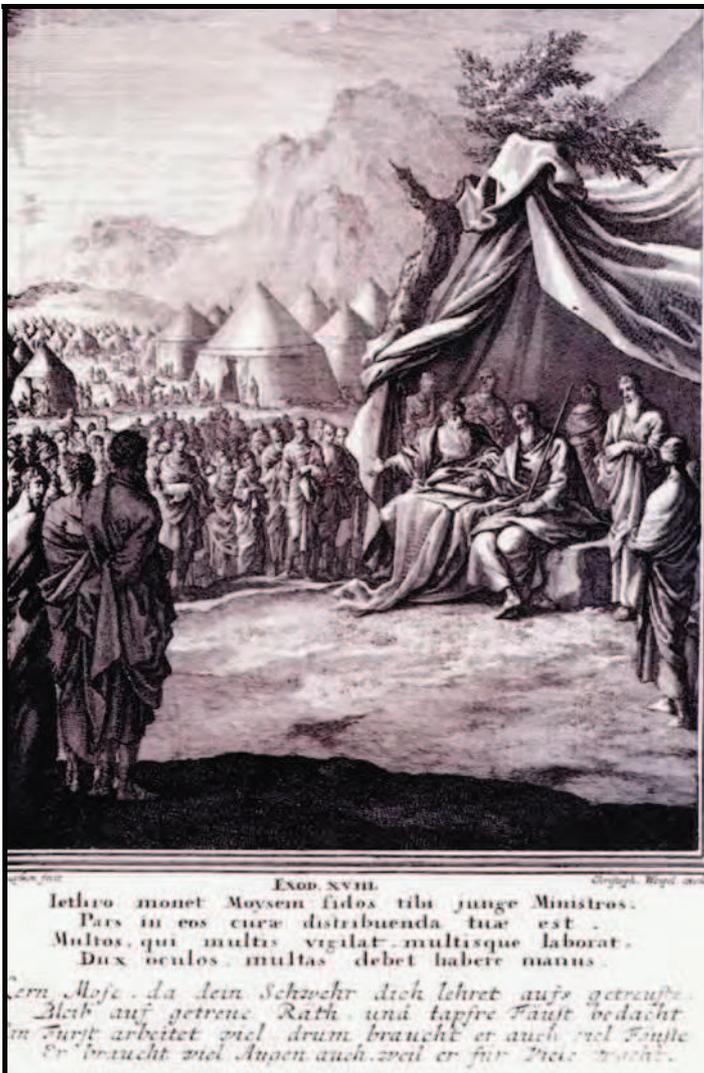
“Now Jethro the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything that God had done for Moses and for his people, Israel, and how the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt.” - Jethro had been previously introduced as the Midianite tribal leader who had provided a refuge for Moses during his initial flight from Egypt (cf. Exodus 2:15-22; Notes p. 68). Jethro was a believer in the true God and had given his daughter Zipporah to be Moses’ wife. Accordingly, Jethro is identified here as *“the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses.”* Jethro’s presence reminds us that rare and isolated pockets of faith in the true God remained scattered across the region even apart from the covenant relationship which God had established with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Midianites were

descendants of Abraham and Keturah, the wife whom he married after the death of Sarah (Genesis 25:1-4). The juxtaposition of the battle with Amalek and the cordial visit with Midian serves to illustrate the radically different re-actions to Israel among the various descendants of Abraham.

The news of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt and the great wonders which God had performed on their behalf had preceded them to Midian, borne by the endless stream of caravans which passed through the region. Jethro had **“heard of everything that God had done for Moses and his people, Israel, and how the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt.”** As a family member he had come to celebrate that which **“God had done for Moses.”** As a fellow believer he had come to rejoice in the vindication

of God power before the nations and to join in offering sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise.

“After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law had received her and her two sons.” - The last mention of Moses’ family had come on the way back to Egypt in reference to Zipporah’s hasty circumcision of Gershom at the inn. At that point it had been Moses’ intention to take his family back to Egypt with him (Exodus 4:20). Hebrew tradition suggests that shortly thereafter Aaron prevailed upon Moses to send his family back to Midian because of the great risks which they were all about to face in Egypt. The comment here that **“Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah”** would appear to support that tradition. Some rabbi’s have argued that the verb **“sent away”** indicates that Moses had then divorced his wife because of her resistance to the practices of Judaism. Although the verb can be used in



“Jethro’s Counsel to Moses” - 17th Century Bible Engraving



“The Reunion of Moses and Zipporah” - 19th Century bible Engraving

reference to divorce, there is nothing in this context to suggest that to have been the case. During the episode of the inn Zipporah had acted to save Moses' life when God was angry because his son had not been circumcised (Exodus 4:24-26). The text here consistently refers to Zipporah as the wife of Moses and the cordial relationship between Moses and Jethro offers no hint of family tensions or divisions.

“One son was named Gershom, for Moses said, ‘I have become an alien in a foreign land’; and the other was named Eliezer, for he said, ‘My father’s God was my Helper, He saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.’” The birth and naming of Geshom had been mentioned previously in Exodus 2:22. The name was given in response to Moses' flight from Egypt to find refuge in the land of Midian. Exodus 4:20 alludes to the birth of his second son in connection with the family's departure to return to Egypt. The Hebrew name ***“Eliezer”*** means ***“God is Help.”*** It was given in recognition of God's protection of Moses throughout the chaotic events which had led to his first flight from Egypt.

“Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, together with Moses’s sons and wife, came to him in the desert where he was camped near the mountain of God. Jethro had sent word to him, ‘I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two



19th Century Sketch of ‘Jebel Musa’ - the Traditional Site of Mount Sinai

sons.’” - The formal protocols of visits among the desert tribes were observed as Jethro sent a messenger on ahead to announce his impending arrival. The text notes that Israel was encamped near **“the Mountain of God,”** namely Mount Sinai. This is consistent with the geographic indications of the preceding verses.

“So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent.” - The traditional civilities customary among the desert tribes of the region continued. Moses recognized the importance of his visitor and the nation which he led by according him the honor of going out to meet him, rather than simply awaiting him in the camp. The alliance with the Midianites was crucially important for Israel and would impact its relationships with the numerous other tribal groups which would be encountered throughout their journey. The perception of Midian as an ally of Israel would have significant impact on the way in which the other tribes would respond to the passage of these interlopers through their territory. Thus, Jethro was accorded all of the honors due him as an important ally - **“and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and went into the tent.”** There was a great deal more at stake here than the personal

reunion of family members who had been separated from one another. By the series of ritual actions, Moses was acknowledging that Jethro was a personage of greater stature than his own (cf. Genesis 33:3; 2 Samuel 14:33) The phrase **“they greeted each other”** literally means *“they asked, each of his comrade, as to their peace and welfare.”* *“This is a Hebrew idiom of greeting, that is, finding out how the other person has been faring in life (see its use in Judges 18:15; 1 Samuel 10:4; 17:22; 25:5).”* (Currid, p. 376) This formal expression of interest and concern explained and introduced the narration of events which followed.

“Moses told his father-in-law about everything the Lord had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the Lord had saved them.” - Moses related the entire sequence of events which had led up to their meeting, narrating all that God had done on Israel’s behalf in the plagues of Egypt and the deliverance at the sea (**“everything that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel’s sake”**) and the continued guidance and provision of God throughout the wilderness wandering thus far (**“and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the Lord had saved them.”**) This repetitive recitation also served to reinforce the reality that the Israelites were the chosen people of God and thus enjoyed His special blessing and protection, a message that Moses wanted Jethro to understand and proclaim among all of the other tribes throughout the region. Moses was meticulously careful to give all of the glory to God for everything that had transpired - **“everything the Lord had done...how the Lord had saved them.”** He claims no credit for himself in any of these things. His comments call to mind the observation of Numbers 12:3 - **“Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than any one else on the face of the earth.”** Despite all of the wonders which God accomplished through him and the most



***Moses Bringing Water from the Rock”
by Alexander Koskin***



*“The Destruction of Pharaoh at the Red Sea”
by Sasha Schneider*

prominent role he was called to play in the history of Israel, Moses always remained completely mindful of the fact that he was nothing more than a tool in the hand of God.

“Jethro was delighted to hear about all the goods things the Lord had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. - As a devotee of the God of Israel, Jethro was most pleased to learn in detail of the dramatic manner in which the Lord had humbled mighty Egypt. The verb ***“was delighted”*** is rarely used in the Old Testament. It is drawn from a Hebrew root which means to shudder or tremble in awe. Its use here is designed to emphasize the unusual intensity of Jethro’s feeling. This could only have served to strengthen his own position in the area because of the marriage of Moses to his daughter. At the same time, the death of a powerful Pharaoh virtual destruction of the Egyptian military would have been most welcome news for all of the peoples of the Sinai in that Egypt would necessarily be preoccupied with the re-establishment of internal stability for a long time to come and thus unable to meddle in the affairs of the desert tribes, perhaps even offering the raiding tribesmen a rare opportunity for incursions into Egyptian territory.

“He said, ‘Praise be to the Lord who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians.’ - Jethro’s exclamation of praise and thanksgiving to God utilized ***“Jahweh,”*** (***“the Lord”***) the personal name of God which had been revealed to Moses at the burning bush. ***“It is also important to note that Jethro does not employ a generic name applying to any deity, but he specifically names ‘Yahweh’ as the blessed one. Here is a Midianite calling upon the personal name of the God of the Hebrews!”*** (Currid, p. 377) The verb ***“rescue”*** is repeated three times in these two sentences to give particular prominence to the deliverance which Jahweh had accomplished.

“Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods, for He did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly.” - Jethro correctly perceived God’s deliverance of His people from Egyptian bondage as the victory of the one true God over the false God’s of Egypt. As previously noted, each of the ten plagues, and ultimately the death of Pharaoh himself in the waters of the sea, demonstrated the impotence of the non-gods of Egypt. In the context of this declaration, ***“those who had treated Israel arrogantly”*** refers to the Egyptians acting on their misplaced confidence in the superiority and strength of idols whom their wrongly believed would protect and defend Egypt in return for the sacrifice and service of its people. God had



“The Destruction of the Host of Pharaoh” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

conclusively proven His unique power and authority by shattering the arrogant beliefs of the mightiest nation on earth. Jethro’s faith in the one true God is further emphasized by the sacrifice and fellowship meal with the Israelite elders which would follow shortly.

Jethro’s blessing takes the form of a personal testimony of faith in the one God - *“Now I know...”* Commentator John McKay argues that the verb *“I know”* is designed to contrast the faith of Jethro with the unbelief of Pharaoh who had refused to acknowledge the true God:

“‘Now I know’ indicates a freshly acquired insight into the person and work of the Lord. It may be an insight which marks the beginning of faith (2 Kings 5:15) or an advance to a deeper understanding (1 Kings 17:24). In either event, this was the appropriate response to what the Lord had done. ‘Know’ is a key word in the development of the Exodus narrative (10:2; 14:4,18). Here in contrast to the blind refusal of the Egyptians until it was too late.” (McKay, p. 313)

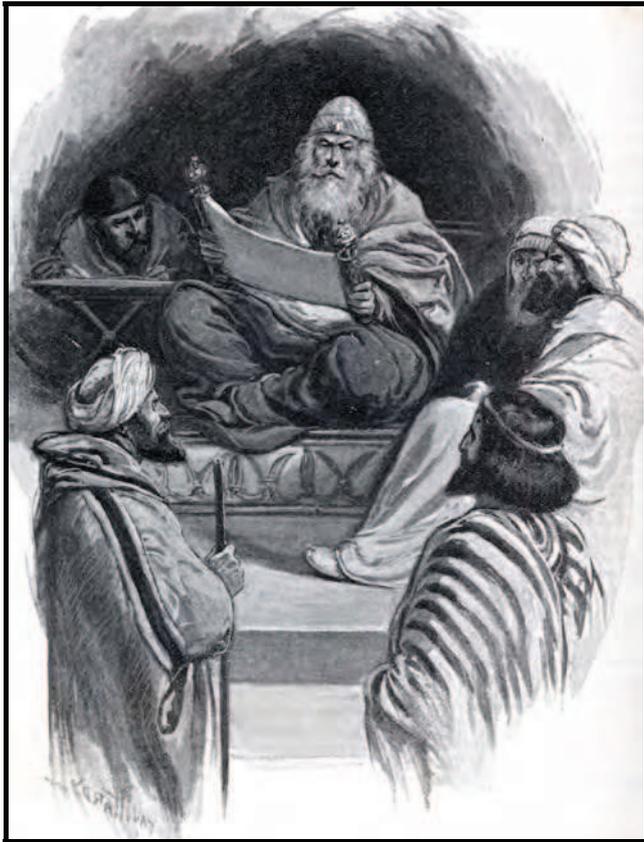
The detailed account of events which Jethro had heard from his son-in-law had renewed his won confidence and trust God.

“Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law in the presence of God.” - As an expression of his faith in Jahweh, Jethro presented ***“a burnt offering”*** - that is, a holocaust offering which was totally consumed by the fire upon the altar - in addition to ***“other sacrifices”*** - that is, peace offering in which only portions of the animals were burnt upon the altar and the remainder was reserved for use in the meal which followed. The meal itself was designed to seal the covenant, or treaty, which had been established between Israel and Midian. The profound significance of this meal, eaten ***“in the presence of God”*** - was indicated by the fact that Aaron and all of the tribal elders were also included in the fellowship of the table.

*“The elders are the representative extension of the whole people of Israel. In this narrative of reunion, it is important to stress that they were **all** there. Aaron accompanies them as their leader, since he is, like them, one to whom some of Moses’ authority had been delegated. Moses remains the bridge person, one already belonging to Israel and to Midian. So it is then, that the bread, or food, of the communion meal is eaten ‘in God’s Presence by Aaron and all the elders of Israel on the one side, and, no doubt, by Jethro, who had received, prepared and offered it, on the other side.’”* (Durham, p. 245)

Hebrew commentator Umberto Cassutto hails this episode as Israel’s *“welcome as one of the nations of the world.”* (Cassutto, p. 211)

“The next day, Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening.” - In this remarkable sequence of events the foundation of the Israelites judiciary is attributed to the initiative and advice of a Midianite. As a guest in the household of his son-in-law, Jethro had the opportunity to observe Moses’ daily routine as the chief judge of Israel. ***“The next day”*** - Even the presence of important guests could not interrupt Moses’ daily responsibility to serve as the arbiter of the endless disputes which arose among the people. The text describes the events as though they were part of a well-established routine - ***“Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people.”*** The language suggests a scene of



“Moses Judging the People” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

chaos and confusion, with Moses overwhelmed by the large numbers of people who crowded in around him throughout the entire day - ***“and they stood around him from morning till evening.”***

“When his father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, ‘What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?’ - Jethro, himself an experienced tribal ruler, observed the activities of his son-in-law with considerable alarm. Jethro’s concern is that Moses had failed to realistically delegate the responsibility for the arbitration of disputes among this overwhelming number of people. Later in his summary of these events in Deuteronomy Moses described the magnitude of the dilemma in this way: ***“At that time, I said to you, ‘You are too heavy***

a burden for me to carry alone. The Lord your God has increased your numbers so that today you are as many as the stars in the sky. May the Lord, the God of your fathers, increase you a thousand times and bless you as He has promised. But how can I bear your problems and your burdens and your disputes all by myself?’” (Deuteronomy 1:9-12)

“Moses answered him, ‘Because the people come to me to seek God’s will. When ever they have a dispute, it is brought to me and I decide among the parties and inform them of God’s decrees and laws.’ - Moses explained his role in the process as that of an arbitrator, not a lawgiver. As God’s representative ***“the people come to me to seek God’s will.”*** The details of the particular dispute were presented and Moses then rendered his decisions ***“based upon God’s decrees and laws.”*** The decisions of the judge were not to be arbitrary or based upon his own opinions or preferences. ***“This usage reflects the conception of true justice as being ultimately the expression of the will of God communicated through a human judge.”*** (Sarna, p. 100)

This perspective is foundational for an understanding of the Biblical concept of law.

The point of Moses' response to Jethro's questions was that up to this point he had acted alone because he alone was the representative of God among the people.

“Moses father-in-law replied, ‘What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.’” - Jethro did not challenge the appropriateness of Moses' role as the judge of Israel, nor did he question the basis upon which Moses rendered his judgements. Instead, the old man challenged the practicality of the approach that Moses had taken. When he declared ***“What you are doing is not good”*** the point of his objection, as explained in the phrases which follow, was that it was not effective for Moses to attempt this great task by himself - ***“You cannot handle it alone.”*** The inefficiency of a single individual attempting to personally resolve every dispute which arose among the millions of Israel was exhausting both Moses and the crowds which waited around him all day long to receive their judgments. The verb ***“you will only wear yourselves out”*** literally means *“to fade away.”* The psalmist used the same verb to express the transitory existence of plant life: ***“For like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon fade away.”*** (Pslam 37:2) In the Hebrew text the verb is repeated twice for special emphasis, literally - *“fading you will fade.”* The assertion ***“The work is too heavy for you”*** utilizes the Hebrew adjective *“kabad”* which has occurred frequently in Exodus (i.e. for Pharaoh's heart - 8:15,32; and the arms of Moses during the battle with Amalek - 17:12).

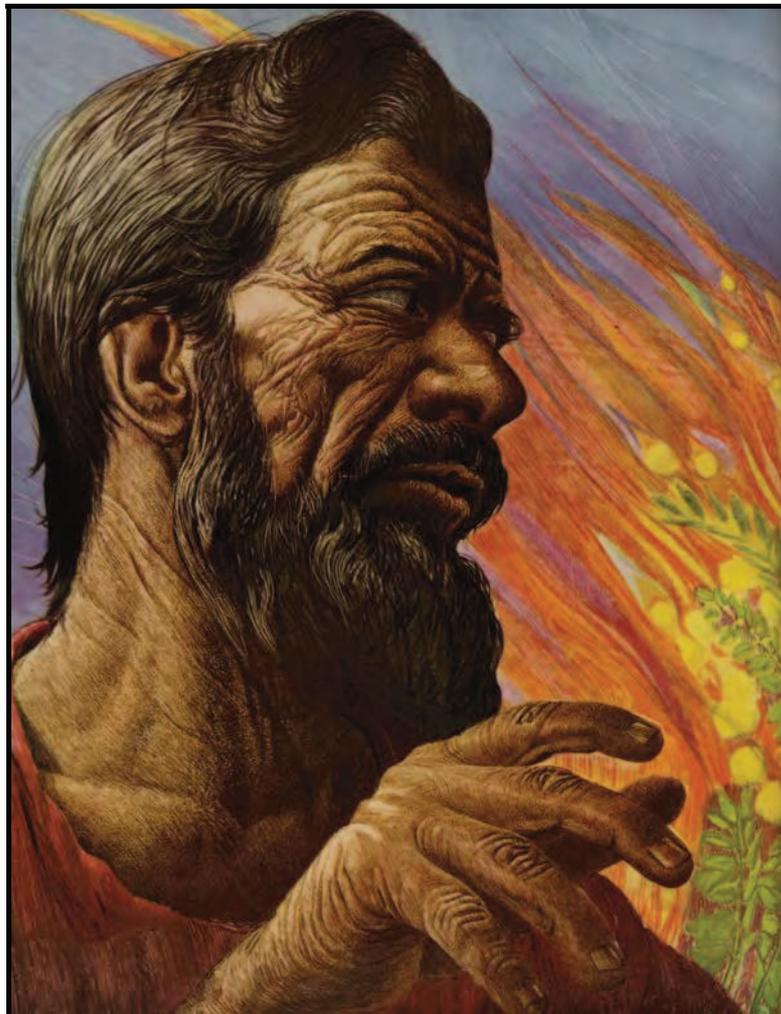
“Listen now to me and I will give you some advice and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to Him. Teach them the decrees and laws and show them the way to live, and the duties to perform.” - Jethro began his counsel with the clear assertion that he was not suggesting any changes in his son-in-law's unique role as God's appointed representative to and teacher of the people. The text repeats the



***“Moses Addressing the Children of Israel”
19th Century Bible Illustration***

personal pronoun “*you*” twice in Verse 19 and again in Verse 21 to stress Moses individual role as the spokesman who God Himself had chosen. The opening words of the phrase are the imperative verb “*Listen now.*” The command implicit in the original might be more clearly conveyed if we were to reverse the word order and translate - “*Now listen to me.*” Jethro immediately softened for force of his demand with the customary blessing “*and may God be with you.*” In this way he indicated that his counsel was consistent with the will of God and would assist Moses in carrying out the responsibilities that God had given him in a more effective manner.

“But select capable men from all the people - men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain - and appoint them as official over thousands, hundreds,



“The Call of Moses” by Guy Rowe

fifties and tens.” Having unequivocally affirmed the unique role of Moses as the representative of God to the people, Jethro went on to insist that it would be necessary for Moses to broadly delegate some of his authority among the people for the effective administration of justice. The selection of these judges was to be done by Moses himself - **“But select capable men from all the people...”** In this way, the judges would be perceived as extensions of Moses’ prophetic office and would be endowed with the authority of that office. The verb **“select”** in this phrase literally means **“to see”** and is often used in reference to the visions of a prophet. Its use here suggests that God would assist Moses in the selection of the appropriate candidates. The potential judges are to be **“capable men,”** that is, individuals who are competent and will be able to carry out their responsibilities effectively. *“The term is frequently applied in military contexts to ‘men of strength’, but here it implies one of sterling character.”*(Currid, p. 386) The parallel text in Deuteronomy, Moses describes the men he chose in this way: **“So I took the leading men of your tribes, wise and respected men, and appointed them to have authority over you.”** (Deuteronomy 1:15) The stature of these men within the community was a crucial consideration. If they were to be accepted as representatives of Moses they would have to be men who already enjoyed the respect of their peers.

Three specific character traits are cited as essential - **“men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain.”** The key component in the character of these judges would be the fear of Lord which is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). The fear of God is the awe and respect of the creature in the presence of his Creator. The result of that fear of the Lord is a reverent submission to the truth of His holy Word. As the psalmist rightly declared: **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His precepts have good understanding.”** (Psalm 111:10) Furthermore, this is a practical reverence, a reverence which results in obedience. Such men would necessarily be **“trustworthy.”** The Hebrew term refers to one who loves the truth and will not deviate from that truth in any way. His rulings as a judge would be consistently based upon the truth of God and would not be influenced by human popularity or power. Finally, the judges which Moses was to appoint had to be **“men who hate dishonest gain.”** An effective judiciary must be incorruptible. Justice cannot be for sale. The scandal of those who abuse their office for personal gain was sadly illustrated by the sons of the prophet Samuel. **“When Samuel grew old he appointed his sons as judges for Israel...But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.”** (1 Samuel 8:1,3) The prophet Isaiah would later bitterly denounce the



“The Dedication of Samuel at Shiloh” by Topham

corrupt leaders of church and state in his day who abused their office for such *“dishonest gain.”*

“Israel’s watchmen are blind, they lack all knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep. They are dogs with mighty appetites, they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way; each one seeks his own gain.” (Isaiah 56:10-11)

The language is most emphatic. This is more than a mere unwillingness to personally accept a bribe. These God-fearing truth lovers must despise corruption and unjust gain of every sort. They must be willing to stand for that which is good, right and godly no matter how powerful the opposition or how great the personal cost.

“Appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.” - The structure of the judiciary appears to reflect that of the military organization used to prepare Israel for war. ***“Moses was angry with the commanders of the army - the commanders of thousands and the commanders of hundreds - who returned from the battle.”*** (Numbers 31:14)

“Israel is frequently depicted in the Torah as an army marching out of Egypt and proceeding in military formation through the wilderness to the promised land. The administrative structure recommended here corresponds to the organization of the army.” (Sarna, p. 101)

If the numbers cited here referred to individuals or even individual male heads of households the number of judges needed would have been overwhelming. It is most likely that we are talking about clans and subgroups within the various tribes. This would reduce the number of judges needed and provide an adequate supply of judges to deal with the disputes which arose among the people.

“Ten people, even ten nuclear families would not need their own judge. And if each high judge governed a thousand men, there would be six



“Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro at the Well of Midian” by Arnold Friberg

hundred supreme justices and a total of 78,600 magistrates, assuming an adult population of 600,000. This makes no sense...the numbers refer not to men but to clans.” (Goldingay, p. 633)

“Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide from themselves. That will make your load lighter because they will share it with you.” - The judiciary structure instituted here was to be permanent. This was not merely a temporary set-up designed to deal with the immediately crisis - ***“Have them serve as judges for the people at all times.”*** The straightforward cases where the law could be directly



“Abraham’s Angelic Visitors” by Fritz von Uhde

applied and precedent had been clearly established could be decided by the judges of smaller sections while more difficult and complex disputes would be sent on to Moses himself. This does not appear to have been an appellate system in which the same dispute would have been heard on a series of different levels. Rather, the scope of the dispute determined the level on which the arbitration occurred. Only the most complex and difficult matters continued to be heard by Moses who would then have had the alternative of taking the matter directly to the Lord for resolution. The result of this division of labor would be a significant reduction in Moses' workload and a much more efficient system that would have been more satisfactory to everyone involved.

“If you do this, and God so commands you, you will be able to stand the strain and all these people will go home satisfied.” Jethro was careful, in his conclusion, to emphasize that his plan should only be adopted if it met with divine sanction - ***“and God so commands you.”***

“Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves.” At the beginning of his counsel to his son-in-law, Jethro had commanded ***“Listen now to me.”*** The same word appears here to indicate that Moses had listened and heeded the good advice that he had been given. The verses which describe the implementation of the new system are largely a repetition of the instructions which Jethro had given.

“Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.” - Jethro's visit concluded with the same observance of tribal protocol which had marked its beginning. Moses, as the host, gave formal consent to his guest's departure - ***“Moses sent his father-in-law on his way.”*** As a sign of respect for his esteemed kinsman he accompanied him for a short distance on his journey. We see Abraham following the same pattern with the angels who visited his camp to announce the impending birth of Isaac: ***“When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way.”*** (Genesis 18:16).



“Israel at Sinai” by Ted Larson

Israel at Mount Sinai

Exodus 19:1-25

In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt - on the very day - they came to the Desert of Sinai. After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, “This what you are to say to the House of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagle’s wings and brought you to Myself. And now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all the nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words that the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, “We will do everything the Lord has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord. The Lord said to Moses, “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the

people will hear Me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.” Then Moses told the Lord what the people had said. Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, ‘Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. He shall surely be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on him. Whether man or animal, he shall not be permitted to live. Only when the ram’s horn sounds a long blast may they go up to the mountain.’ After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes. Then he said to the people, “Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations.” On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning with a thick cloud over the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke because the Lord descended on it with fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up and the Lord said to him, “Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the Lord and many of them perish. Even the priests who approach the Lord must consecrate themselves or the Lord will break out against them.” Moses said to the Lord, “The people cannot come up Mount Sinai because You Yourself warned us, ‘Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.’” The Lord replied, “Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the Lord, or He will break out against them.” So Moses went down to the people and told them.

The arrival of Israel at Mount Sinai brings us to a crucial moment in the history of God’s relationship with His chosen people. Here the sacred covenant which He had instituted with Abraham and his descendants would be formalized and implemented. The role of Israel in God’s plan for the salvation of humanity was of critical importance. They were to be the custodians of the promise of the Savior. They were to be set apart by the observance of God’s Law so that they might remain separate and distinct to carry out His divine purpose for mankind. His mighty acts of deliverance on their behalf, which had humbled the great Egypt and set the Hebrews free from



“Moses Upon the Mountain” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

bondage had all be carried out to bring them to this place and this moment. This was the sign of His presence which God had promised Moses at the burning bush: **“And God said, ‘I will be with you. And this will be the sign to that it is I who have sent you; when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.’** (Exodus 3:12) Now they had finally arrived and the holy mountain.

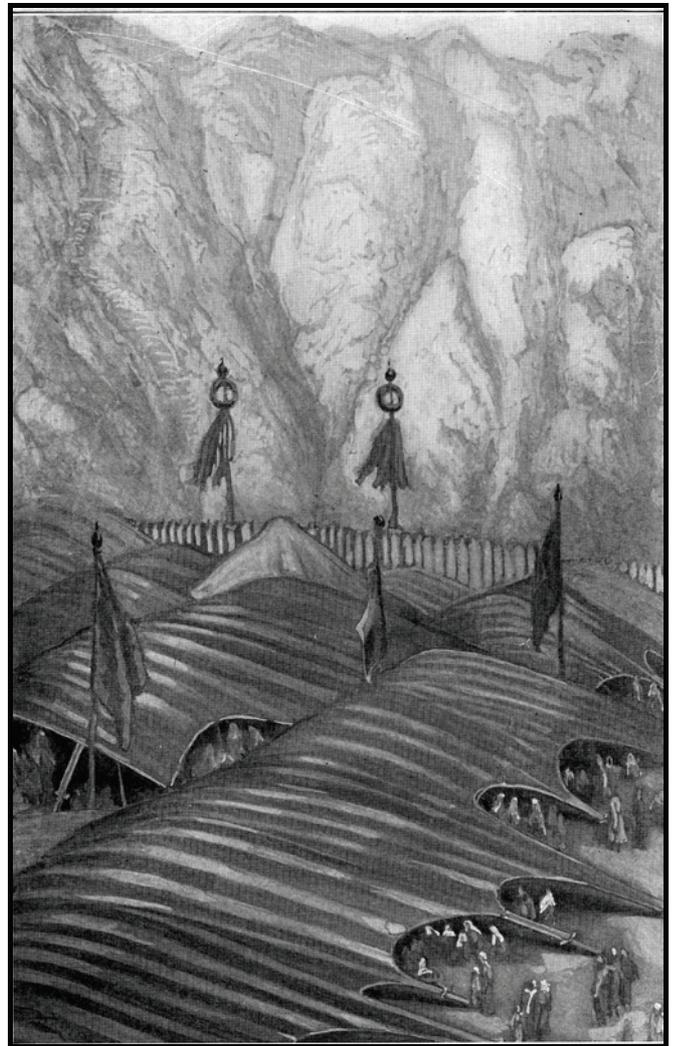
“The arrival at Sinai inaugurates the culminating stage in the process of forging Israel’s national identity and spiritual destiny. The shared experiences of bondage and liberation are to be supplemented and given ultimate meaning by a great communal encounter with God.” (Sarna. P. 102)

The Israelites looked expectantly toward Sinai’s cloud shrouded crest and awaited the coming of their God. Umberto Cassutto notes that style of the Hebrew text in this

chapter shifts in a manner consistent with its lofty content:

“Now begins the most sublime section in the whole Book. The theme of this section is supremely significant, playing a role of decisive importance in the history of Israel and of humanity as a whole. And as befits a passage treating of so exalted a subject, the diction rises above the level of prose, and even assumes, at times, poetic aspects in its form, qualities, and poetic rhythm.” (Cassutto, p. 223)

“In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt - on the very day - they came to the desert of Sinai.” - This segment begins abruptly in the Hebrew text without the typical conjunctions or connectives. This is designed to highlight the importance of that which follows and to set it apart from the preceding narrative. *“The passage begins...without any link with the previous text, as though to notify us that here begins a theme that stands alone, that is unique, that requires the reader to forget about everything else and concentrate his full attention on what he is about to be told now.”* (Cassutto, p. 224) The unique significance of these events is further indicated by the emphasis which the text places on fixing the exact time of Israel’s arrival at Sinai - ***“in the third month after the Israelites left Egypt - on the very day.”*** The Hebrew noun translated as ***“month”*** literally means *“new moon.”* The new era of Hebrew existence commenced, appropriately at the beginning of a new month, on the very day when the full moon rose in the night sky. The arrival at Sinai was so important that nothing could precede in within this time period. It had to be first because of its primary significance. The exodus itself, the great day of liberation, served as the starting point of the time



“The Encampment Before Sinai”
by J. James Tissot

calculation. This would become common practice throughout Israelite history (cf. Numbers 1:1; 33:38; 1 Kings 6:1) We find the same **“very day”** language marking the date of the exodus in Chapter 12, emphasizing the significance of the event in exactly the same manner as the importance of the arrival at Sinai is stressed in this passage: **“The length of the time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the Lord’s divisions left Egypt.”** (Exodus 12:40-41)

“They came to the desert of Sinai.” - The text demonstrates no interest in identifying the location of Mount Sinai, much to the consternation of modern historians and Bible scholars. Widely divergent sites across the Sinai Peninsula and beyond toward Kadesh Barnea and into Midian, east of the Gulf of Aqaba each have their adamant advocates. It is likely that the Bible’s ambiguity in this matter was deliberate:

“The location of the Wilderness of Sinai and of Mount Sinai is in doubt.”



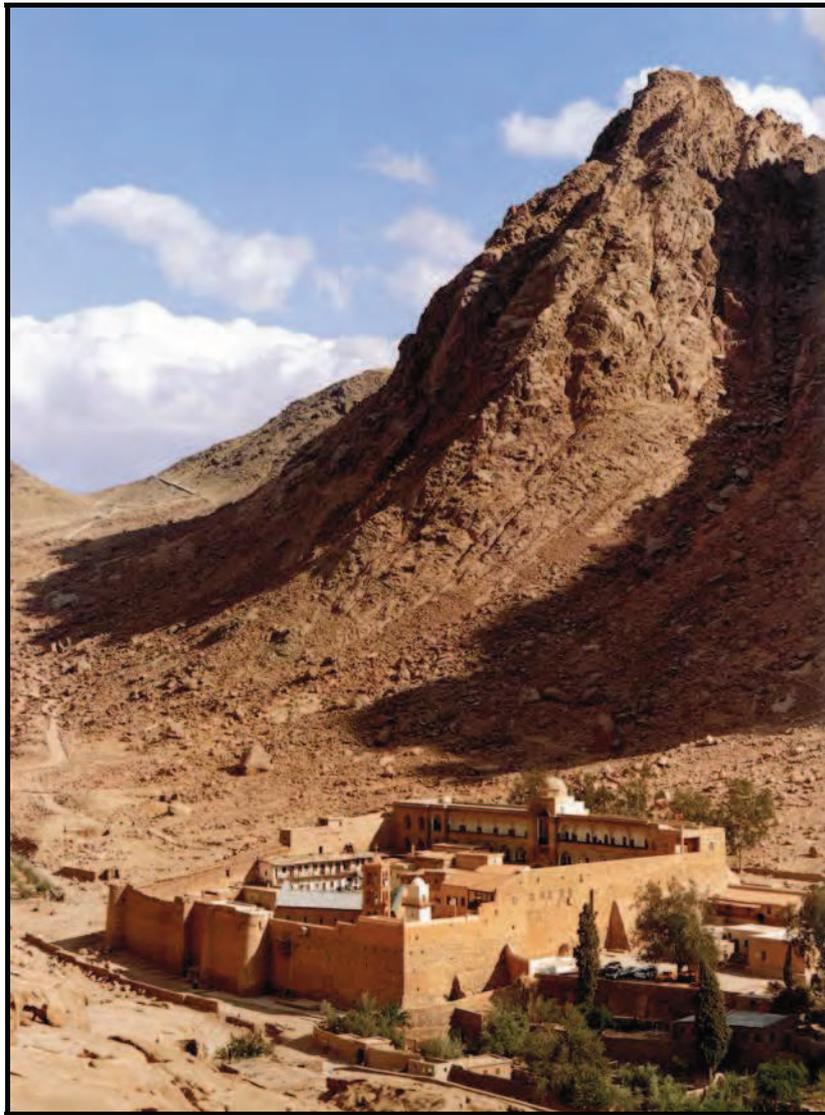
“The Peak of Jebel Musa Illuminated by the Morning Sun”



Early 20th Century Photograph Looking Down from the Crest of Jebel Musa Toward the Traditional Site of the Israelite Encampment

Even if we reject the view of those who set the route of the Israelites in the north and seek Mount Sinai near Kadesh Barnea and also of those who look for Mount Sinai in the land of Midian and we search for it in the southern part of the peninsula, called today the Sinai Peninsula, it is still impossible to determine precisely the site of the Biblical Mount Sinai. The local tradition that identifies it with Jebel Serba or Jebel Musa is a very late one. The text gives us no details that can help us determine the site, and possibly this silence is not unintended. Just as the Torah did not desire to associate the theophany expressly with a specific time, even so it did not wish to link it with a definite place, so that a person should not be able to corporealize the memory of the event and declare; Here, upon this mountain the Lord revealed Himself to the Children of Israel and from here He uttered the Ten Commandments. It is fitting that the happening should remain shrouded in the mists of sanctity.” (Cassutto, p. 225)

It is significant to note that a “*cult of Sinai*” never developed within Israel. There was no attempt to identify or venerate a sacred site. Nor is there any indication of



“The Monastery of St Catherine in the Sinai Wilderness”

religious pilgrimage or veneration among the Israelites in reference to the Mountain of God. This striking absence set the religion of Israel apart from the pagan religions which flourished throughout the region, all of which had their sacred groves or mountains upon which their gods or goddesses were believed to be particularly accessible. Pilgrimage to the now traditional sites of Mountain Sinai, the burning bush, etc. did not begin until well into the Christian era and even then was often linked not only to the Old Testament events but also the veneration Christian saints or martyrs. The ancient monastery of St. Catherine at the base of Jebel Musa in the Sinai is the foremost example of this pattern. Commentator R.J. Rushdoony observes that God may have deliberately chosen the character of Mount Sinai to avoid the typical sacred site cultic worship of the pagan religions: *“God chose a desert area and a mountain as a place for the giving of His Law. Paganism associated power*

of trees, streams and abundance. For God to give His law to Moses in so bleak a place as Sinai was to go against all current opinion and belief. This set God apart as outside the realm of power as men saw it.” (Rushdooney, p. 233)

“After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert, in front of the mountain.” - The previous encampment had been at Rephidim where Moses had provided the grumbling multitudes with water from the rock (cf. Exodus 17:1-7). The Hebrew text actually repeats the verb “camped” twice, literally reading - *“They camped there in the wilderness and Israel camped there in front of the mountain.”* The repetition, omitted in the English translation, may signal a longer journey with more than one encampment. *“It is possible that this refers to two separate stages. On the first day they stopped at the edge of the desert plain, and then they moved closer to the mountain.”* (Mackay, p. 324)

“Then Moses went up to God and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, ‘This is what you are to say to the House of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel.’” - For Moses, Israel’s arrival at Sinai was the return to the place

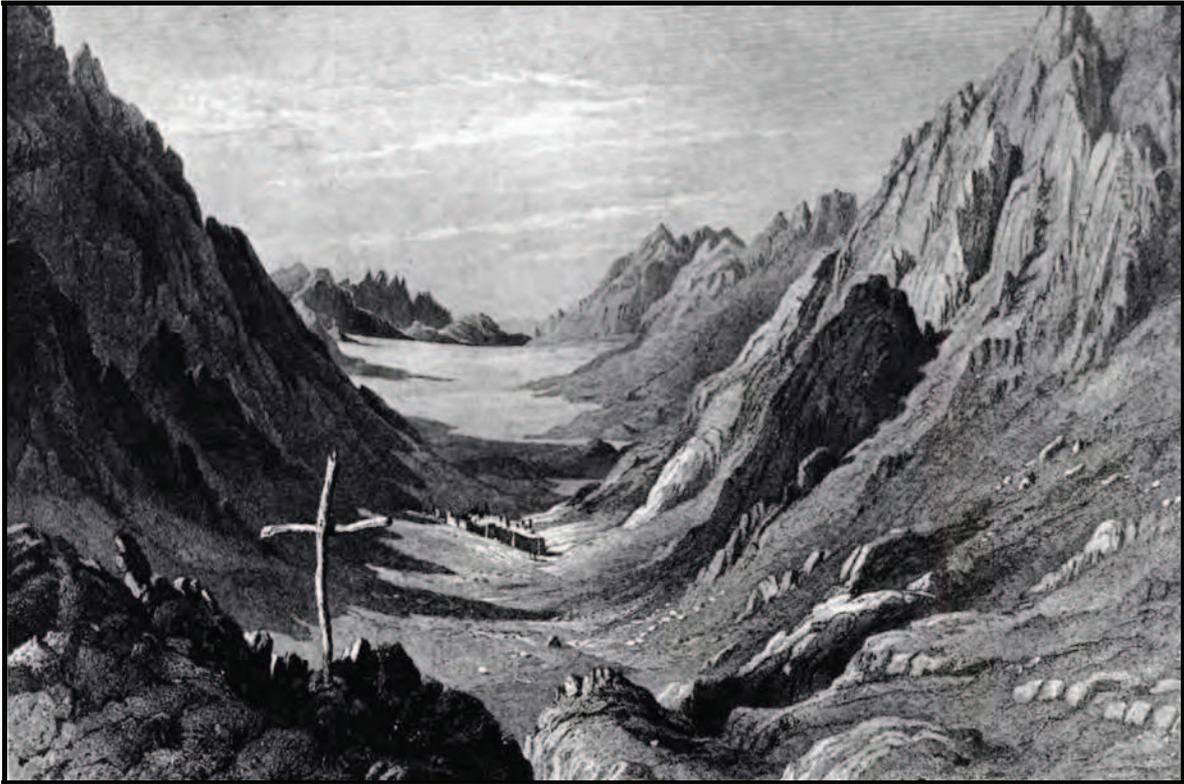


19th Century Bible Engraving of Mount Sinai

where he had personally encountered Yahweh and received His call to go to Egypt and accomplish the deliverance of Israel from bondage. The fact that he had now returned accompanied by millions of liberated Israelite slaves was the vindication of his calling which God had promised him - ***“And God said, ‘I will be with you and this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought My people out of Egypt you will worship God on this mountain.’”*** (Exodus 3:12) Everything had taken place exactly as God had promised. The structure of the text suggests that ***“Moses went up to God”*** immediately, as soon as Israel arrived at the base of the mountain. His eagerness, under the circumstances, is understandable. The rabbinic commentaries report that ***“Moses waited most longingly for the promised time.”*** (Ginzberg, p. 78) Evidently Moses had only proceeded part of the way up the mountainside before he heard God speaking to him from the crest - ***“And the Lord called to him from the mountain and said.”*** ***“Moses had probably ascended one of the lower heights, whilst Jehovah is to be regarded as on the summit of the mountain.”*** (Keil, p. 451) The structure of the Lord’s address to the Israelites is majestic and formal in keeping with the significance of the occasion. The parallelism of the text - ***“say to the House of Jacob - tell the people of Israel”*** is characteristic of classic Hebrew poetry. The terminology of the message that Moses



“The Plain of Encampment” Before the Traditional Site of Mount Sinai



19th Century Engraving Looking Down from the Mountain Toward the Plain of Encampment

is given reminiscent of the formal pronouncement of a royal herald who has been sent to proclaim the words of the king. Moses retained the role of mediator, going up to God and then conveying the Word of God to His people.

“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself.” - God’s initial message to Israel at Sinai expressed the essence of the covenant idea. *“Israel has been chosen to enter into a special and unique relationship with God. This bond imposes obligations and responsibilities.”* (Sarna, p. 103) The covenant documents of the ancient Near East were typically divided into three segments. First, *“the Preamble”* in which the King identified himself and initiated the covenant. Second, *“the Historical Prologue”* in which the King reviewed the past relationship between himself and his vassals. Third, and finally, *“the Stipulations”* which defined the terms of the agreement and the mutual obligations of each party to the other. In this context, God calling out to Moses, his chosen representative, from the summit of the mountain formed the Preamble. This verse, which reviews how God delivered the Children of Israel from bondage in Egypt and led them safely through the wilderness to Sinai constituted the Historical Prologue. Particular emphasis was placed on the fact that the Israelites



"You Yourselfs Have Seen What I Did to Egypt" by Harold Copping

had been eyewitnesses to all that which the Lord had accomplished on their behalf - ***“You yourselves have seen.”*** The reflexive translation of the pronoun - ***“You yourselves”*** - accurately expresses the emphatic nature of the Hebrew text. Israel did have to settle for second hand reports or hearsay information. They had seen the mighty acts of God with their own eyes and benefitted from them personally. God used three poetic phrases to summarize the miraculous demonstrations of His power which had brought Israel to this moment. ***“What I did to Egypt”*** reminded the Israelites of the ten plagues and the destruction of Pharaoh at the Red Sea. The use of the first person singular pronoun - ***“What I did”*** - emphasized that God had acted unilaterally on their behalf. Israelites had been passive observers of the miracles which God accomplished for them. They had not earned them nor did they contribute to them. God chose to exercise His divine power on their behalf.

“And how I carried you on eagles wings.” - The use of the majestic eagle as an image of God’s protection and care of His people is common throughout the Old Testament. In the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32), the prophet extended the comparison:

“For the Lord’s portion is His people, Jacob’s allotted inheritance. In a desert land He found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of His eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The Lord alone led him. No foreign god was with him.” (Deuteronomy 32:9-12)

The mighty eagle is also a fierce bird of prey and as such became an image of the inescapable judgement of God upon the enemies of His people: ***“Look! An eagle is swooping down, spreading its wings over Moab...Moab will be destroyed as a nation because she defied the Lord. Terror and pit and snare await you, O people of Moab, declares the Lord.”*** (Jeremiah 48:40-43) ***“Look! An eagle will soar and swoop down, spreading its wings over Bozrah. In that day the hearts of Edom’s warriors will be like the heart of a woman in labor.”*** (Jeremiah 49:21-22) The soaring eagle became a picture of the strength and hope which the Lord would unfailingly provide for His people: ***“Even youths grow weary and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and***



“The Golden Eagle of Syria and Palestine”

not be faint.” (Isaiah 40:30-31) *“How I carried you on eagle’s wings”* referred specifically to the picture of a mother eagle teaching her young to fly. As she nudged them out of the nest and into the air, she continually flew beneath them so that when they faltered and fell she would be there to carry them to safety. With this beloved image, God made the point that Israel’s journey through the wilderness had not been by their own strength or courage. Like a mighty eagle, He had carried them every step of the way. The same point was reiterated in the third and final phrase - *“and brought you to Myself.”* This was not to be a covenant between equals (*“Parity Covenant”*) but a covenant between a gracious and all-powerful Lord and those whom He had chosen to be His subjects (*“Suzerainty Covenant”*).

“Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are My words you are to speak to the Israelites.” - Here begins the Stipulations segment of the covenant which defined the responsibilities of the parties. This phrase - *“and keep My covenant”* - is the first actual mention of this crucial term in the Book of Exodus. Unlike the preceding Abrahamic covenant which was a unilateral promise from God - *“I will make you into*

a great nation and I will bless you; and I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:2-3) - the covenant at Sinai clearly stipulated that Israel’s national covenant relationship with the Lord was conditional upon their obedience - ***“Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant.”***

“Notice the ‘if’ which the Lord places in this sentence. This covenant between the Lord and Israel made on Sinai would be conditional. It would be two-sided. The Lord was choosing this people as His treasured possession. He has just proved that to them by their rescue from slavery. He had given them the promise that they would be His very own nation, blessed above all the others in the world. But in return for this, He would expect obedience from His people. He wanted them to demonstrate that they would be His very own people by keeping the laws which He was about to give them.” (Wendland, p. 126)



***“The Prophet Jeremiah Amid the Destruction of Jerusalem”
by E. Bendemann***

Later, through His prophet Jeremiah, God would promise that in the coming of the Messiah He would establish *“a new covenant”* with His people of every tribe and nation that would be completely unlike the old covenant which had been broken by their ungrateful disobedience:

“‘The time is coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and with the House of Judah. It will not be like the covenant which I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke My covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord. ‘This is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be My people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know Me from the least to the greatest,’ declares the Lord. For I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.’” (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

The judgement which God brought upon His rebellious people, in the destruction of their land and the dispersion of their people was well deserved and long overdue. They had been guilty of flagrant disobedience of the covenant since the very beginning:

“‘The people of Israel and Judah have done nothing but evil in My sight from their youth; indeed, the people of Israel have done nothing but provoke me with what their hands have made,’ declares the Lord. ‘From the day it was built until now, this city has so aroused My anger and wrath that I must remove it from My sight. The people of Israel and Judah have provoked Me by all the evil they have done - they, their kings and officials, their priests and prophets, the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem. They have turned their backs to Me and not their faces; though I taught them again and again they would not listen or respond to discipline. They set up their abominable idols in the house that bears My Name and defiled it. They built high places for Baal in the Valley of Ben Hinnon to sacrifice their sons and daughter to Molech, though I never commanded, nor did it enter My mind that they should do such a detestable thing and so make Judah sin.’” (Jeremiah 32:30-35)



“Sacrificing Human Infants to the Canaanite Idol Molech in the Valley of Ben-Hinnon”

The Sinai - or Mosaic Covenant, as it is often called - was intended by God specifically for Israel. The multifaceted rules and regulations of that covenant were designed to set Israel apart among the nations and thereby enable them to carry out their role as the custodians of God’s promise to provide a Savior for fallen humanity. In the hundreds of messianic prophecies, scattered throughout the Old Testament, God provided the context in which the Messiah could be recognized and His ministry authenticated. With the coming of the promised Savior, the Sinai covenant had accomplished the purpose for which it was intended. Its laws are no longer applicable. ***“Christ is the end of the law, so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”*** (Romans 10:4) ***“Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the law.”*** (Galatians 3:23-25) The sacrifices,



*“Christ the Fulfillment of the Law”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

ceremonies and celebrations of the Sinai covenant - all of which pointed forward to the coming Savior - have now been rendered obsolete. ***“Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. These were a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”*** (Colossians 2:16-17)

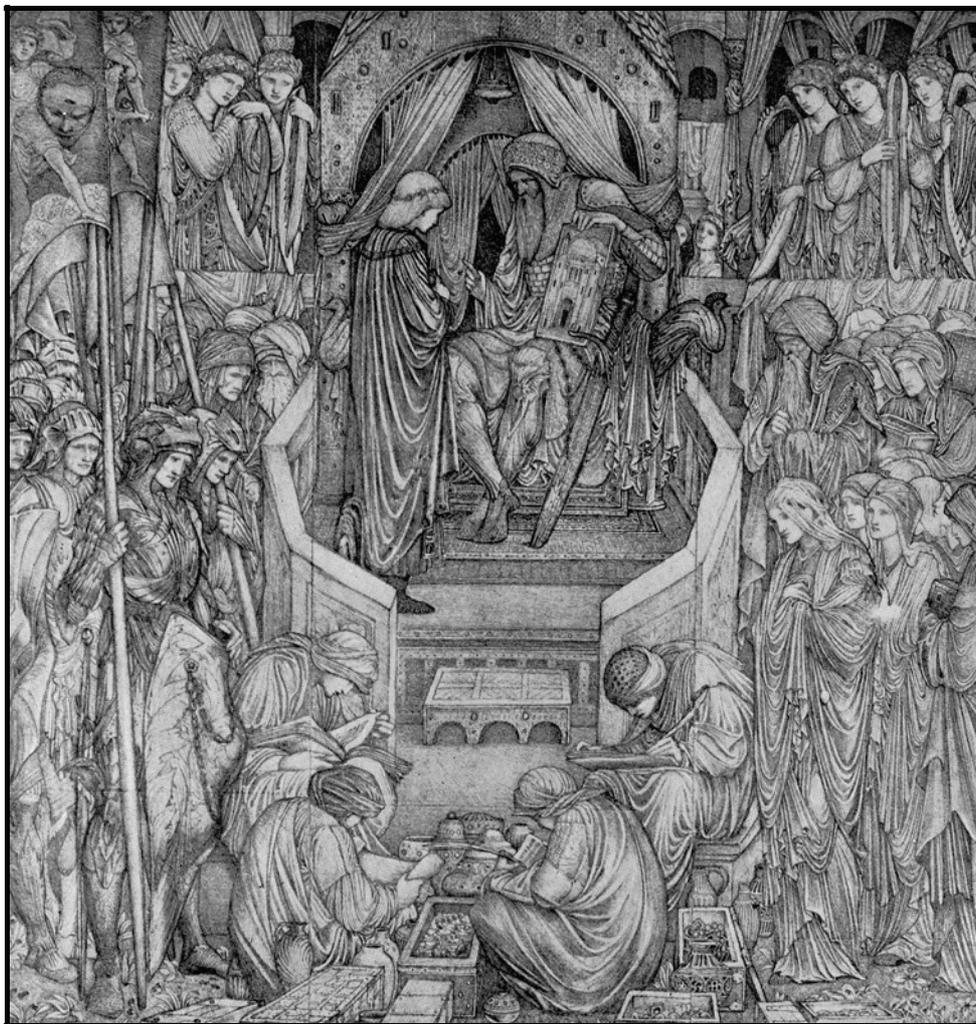
“Then out of all the nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine...” - A crucial difference in that which is taking place here must be understood if we are to recognize the wondrous magnitude of that which the Lord was proposing to Israel. Unlike the national deities of all the kingdoms and tribes which surrounded them, the Lord’s sovereignty was not limited to a particular people. He was the divine Creator of the entire universe and every living being - ***“Although the whole earth is mine.”*** In this sense, the relationship which God was graciously

offering to Israel was completely different than that of the traditional national deities worshiped by their neighbors. Those petty gods and goddesses purported to be nothing more than paltry local deities who offered their protection to those who lived within a given area in return for the bribes of placating offerings and sacrifices. In this instance, however, the almighty Creator of all things had chosen the Children of Israel to carry out a unique role in His divine plan to accomplish salvation for all of humanity. The text carefully points out this difference with its universal terminology - ***“out of all the nations...although the whole earth is Mine.”***

“From among all the peoples of the earth who are all Mine. I am not your God alone, but the God of the whole world. I am not like the gods

of the land of Egypt whence you went forth; nor like the deities of the land of Canaan wither I am bringing you; these divinities, even according to their worshipers, have dominion over their own people only, whereas I am the God of all peoples.” (Cassutto, p. 227)

Implicit in this emphasis, of course, is the reminder that God could just as well have chosen another nation to carry out this unique role since all of the nations belonged to Him. His selection of Israel was by grace alone. There is no hint or suggestion here - or anywhere else throughout the Old Testament - that there was any particular quality or merit in Israel which led to their selection as the chosen people of God. God’s national call of Israel was identical to his personal call of every believer, purely



*“David Giving Solomon His Instructions for the Design of the Temple”
by Edward Burne-Jones*

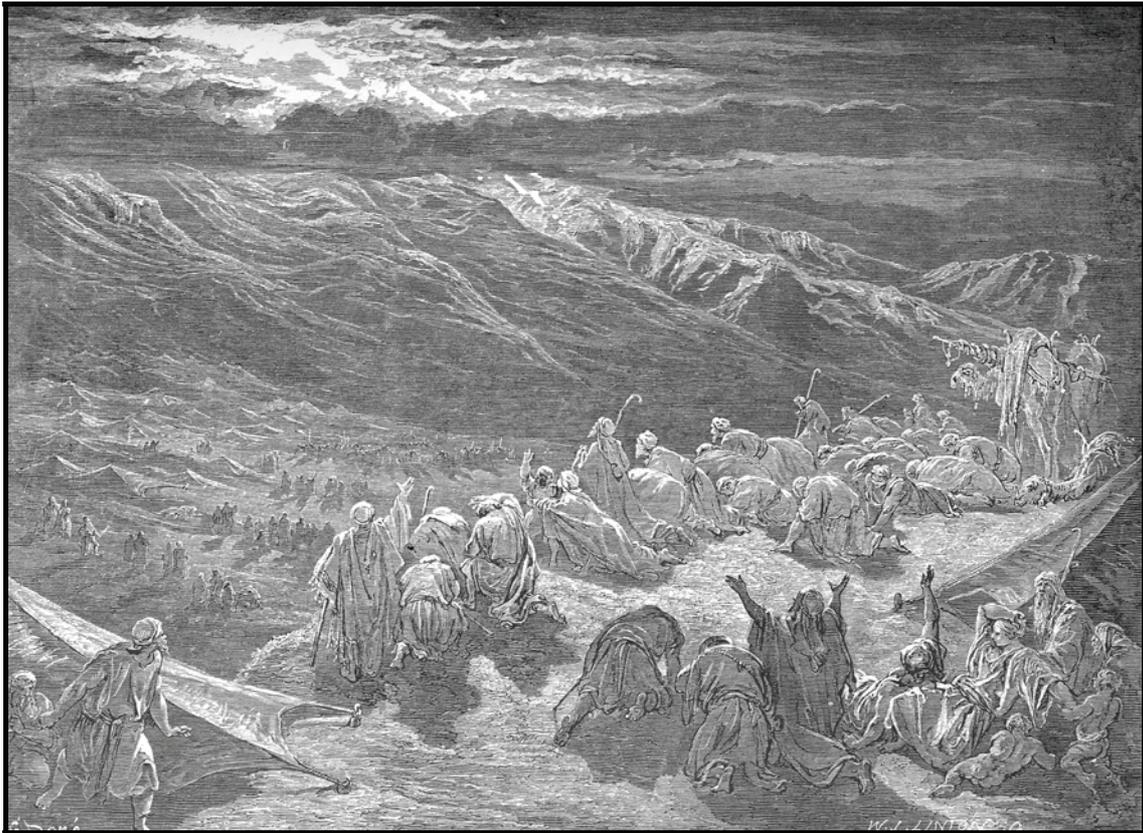
by grace - “without any merit or worthiness in me” - to use Luther’s well-chosen language from the Small Catechism.

“You will be My treasured possession.” - The Hebrew word utilized in this phrase (“*segulah*”) refers to an object of special value which is particularly important to the king and has therefore been set aside by him for a particularly important use. King David had used this same word in reference to those of his most highly prized possessions which he donated to the construction of the temple in order to prove his devotion to the Lord’s temple and inspire his officials to do the same:

“Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God, I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything which I have provided for this holy temple; three thousand talents of gold - the gold of Ophir - and seven thousand talents of fine silver for the overlaying of the walls of the buildings, for the gold work and the silver work and for all the work to be done by the craftsmen. Now, who is willing to consecrate himself to the Lord?” (1 Chronicles 29:3-5; cf. Ecclesiastes 2:8)



“Israel at Sinai”



“Israel Before Mount Sinai” by Gustav Dore

The same term is used repeatedly in Deuteronomy to describe the covenantal bond between God and the nation which He had chosen to be His own: ***“For you are a holy people to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession.”*** (Deuteronomy 7:6; cf. also 14:2; 26:18-19)

“You will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” - The pronoun in this phrase is emphatic (“*you yourselves,*” “*you alone*”), stressing the unique role of Israel. The entire nation of Israel was to become ***“a kingdom of priests.”*** Over the centuries to come, while all of the gentile nations would be shrouded in the heathen darkness of spiritual ignorance and unbelief, the light of God’s truth and expectation of the Messiah whom God would send as the world’s Savior would continue to shine within Israel. There would be difficult times when only a tiny remnant remained that had not been corrupted by heathenism and ***“bowed the knee to Baal”*** (1 Kings 19:18). The light would flicker, but it would never go out. As Jesus would later remind the Samaritan woman - ***“Salvation is from the Jews.”*** (John 4:22) Israel would not merely be served by priests. Rather the entire nation, as the custodian of the messianic



“Moses Consecrating Aaron and His Sons as Priests”

promise would serve as God’s priest for all of humanity. The role of the priest was that of a mediator who represented God to the people and the people to God. *“As a priest is the mediator between God and man, so Israel was called to be the vehicle of the knowledge and salvation of God to the nations of the earth..”* (Keil, p. 453) Nahum Sarna defines the nature of that mediation in this way:

“The priest’s place and function within society must serve as the ideal model for Israel’s self-understanding of its role among the nations. The priest is set apart by a distinctive way of life consecrated to the service of God and dedicated to ministering to the needs of the people.” (Sarna, p. 104)

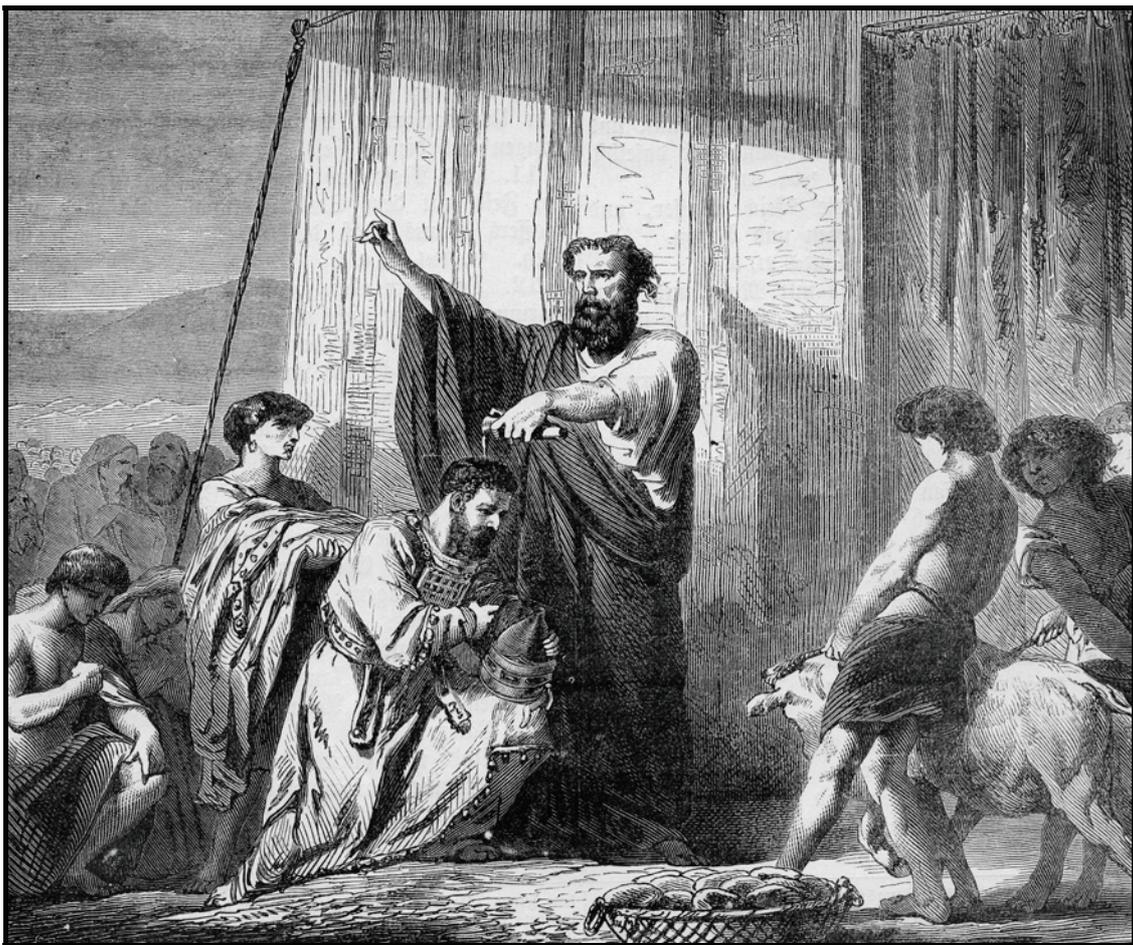
The only other Old Testament text which specifically referred to the priestly role of Israel among the nations was included in Isaiah’s messianic promise of the restoration of Zion:

“And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers

of our God...In My faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed.”
(Isaiah 61:6,8-9)

The psalmist expressed a similar concept of the unique role of Israel among the nations when he compared the Israelites to the temple itself, the dwelling place of God among men: *“When Israel came out of Egypt, the House of Jacob from a people of foreign tongue, Judah became God’s sanctuary, Israel His dominion.”* (Psalm 114:1-2).

In the New Testament, the apostles apply the kingdom of priests language to the church, the people of God in Christ. Peter wrote to the Christian congregations of Asia Minor:



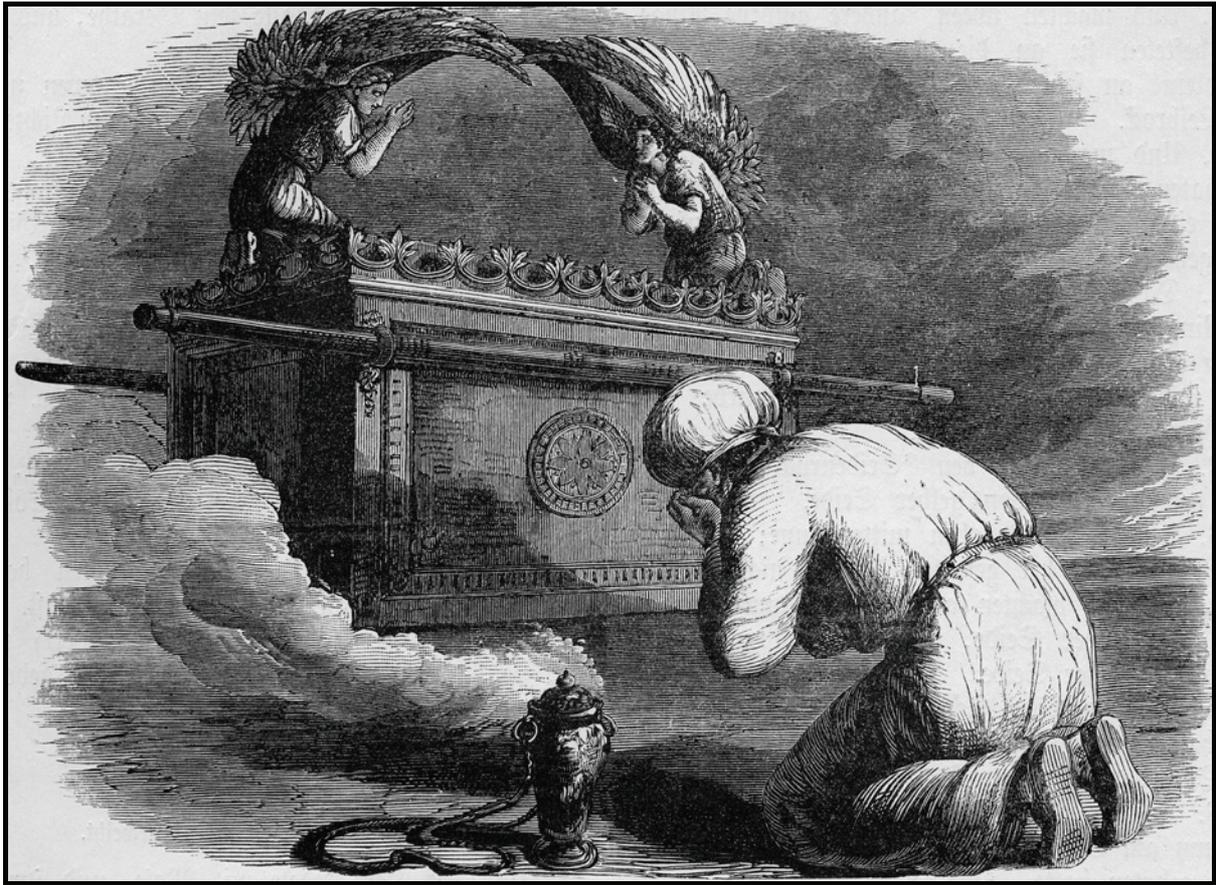
“Moses Consecrating Eleazar, Aaron’s Son, As the Second High Priest”

“You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:5,9)

Shortly thereafter, John wrote words of encouragement to those same struggling congregations which were also clearly derived from the terminology of Exodus 19: ***“To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve His God and Father - to Him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen!”*** (Revelation 1:5-6) The language recurred again in the vision of the seven seals as the heavenly chorus praised the worthiness of the Lamb:



“Worthy Is the Lamb” by Carolsfeld



“The High Priest Before the Ark Within the Sanctuary”

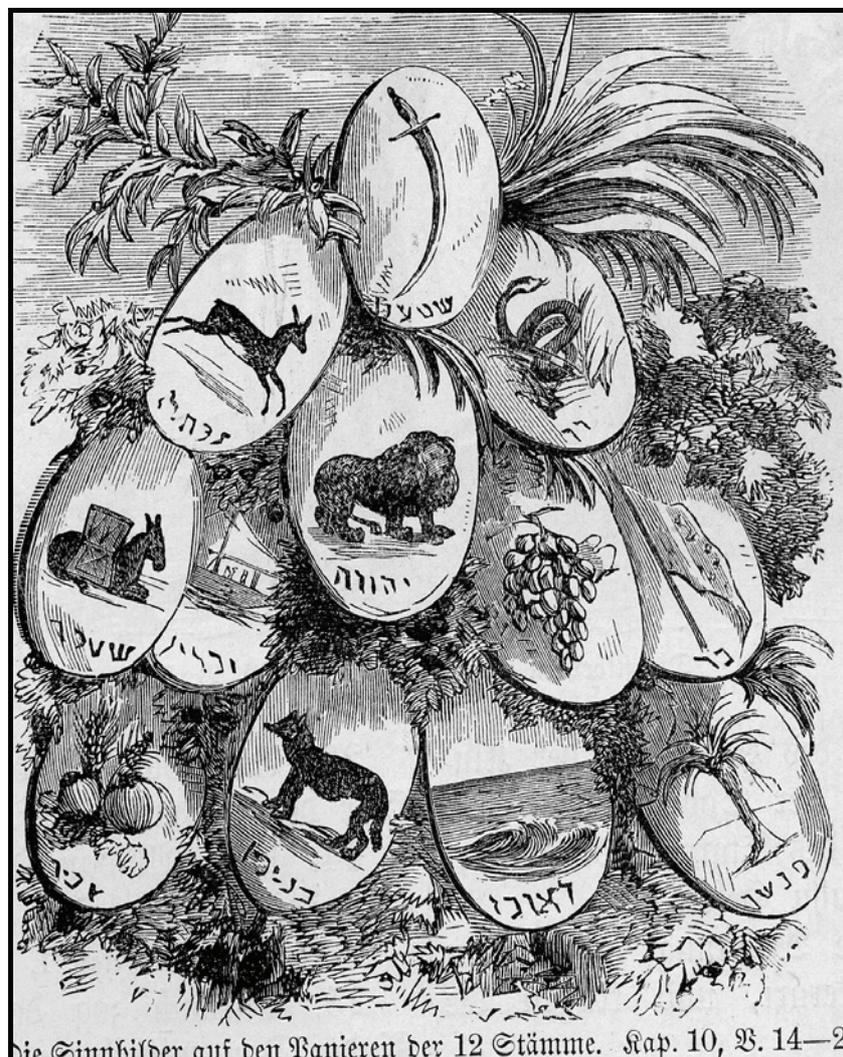
“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:9-10)

The identity of the church, the new Israel, as the holy priesthood of God was asserted for the last time in Scripture in the grand crescendo of Revelation as a part of John’s inspired description of the triumphant reign of the risen saints in heaven: **“Blessed and holy are those who have a part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.”** (Revelation 20:6)

Rabbinic tradition speculates that had it not been for the apostasy of the Golden Calf the Levitical priesthood would never have been established and the entire nation would have continued to serve as priests without recourse to a particular priesthood. *“If Israel had not sinned by worshipping the Golden Calf, there would be among them*

no caste of priests; the nation would have been a nation of priests and it was only after their sin that the greater part of the nation lost the right to priesthood.” (Ginzberg, p. 87) While there is no hint of support for this speculation in Scripture, the tradition does indicate a recognition of the profound significance of God’s designation of His people as **“a kingdom of priests.”**

“And a holy nation” - The third and final phrase which describes the unique role of Israel as the recipient of God’s covenant is **“a holy nation.”** The Hebrew adjective **“gadosh”** (**“holy”**) literally means **“set apart”** or **“separate.”** As the Levitical priesthood was set apart within Israel and consecrated for service to the Lord, so the entire nation would be set apart among all of the other nations of earth in order for them to carry out their role as the custodians of the messianic promise. The



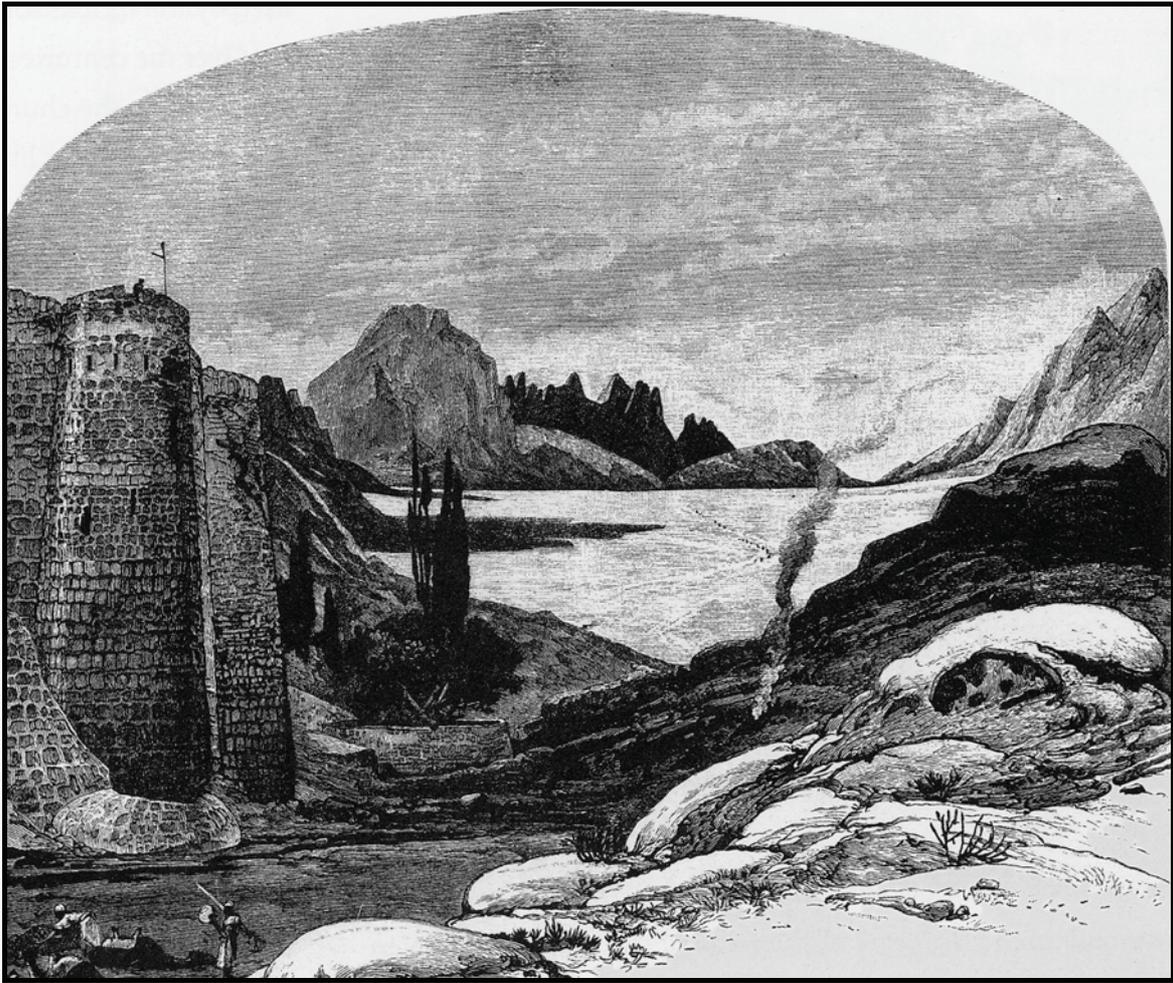
“The Emblems of the Twelve Tribes of Israel”

stipulations of the law, with their requirements for moral purity, ritual cleansing and dietary uniqueness were the implementation of this consecration. They were designed to set Israel apart and make it impossible for them to be absorbed into the mass of humanity as so many other nations would be absorbed by others throughout history. The effectiveness of those laws is tragically indicated by the fact that the Jews retained their distinct identity for nearly 2,000 years while living among the Gentiles without a homeland of their own.

“The notion that all Israel possesses a priestly quality, observing special restrictions in diet, marriage, sexuality, mourning, hygiene, etc., surfaces throughout the Bible. Deuteronomy 14:1-21, in particular, is a commentary on Exodus 19:5-6. ‘You are sons to Yahweh, your deity; do not gash yourselves in mourning, and do not make a baldness between your eyes on the forehead for the dead, for you are a holy people to Yahweh your deity, and you Yahweh chose to become for Him a treasure people beyond all the peoples that are on the earth’s face...Don’t eat any carcass...for you are a holy people to Yahweh your deity.’” (Propp, p. 158)

“So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all the words that the Lord had commanded him to speak.” - Moses returned from the presence of the Lord upon the mountain and reported that which God had said to the tribal elders as the representatives of the people, in keeping with the Lord’s instruction - *“These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”* The term *“elders”* literally means *“the bearded ones,”* reflecting the age, wisdom, experience and respect necessary for one to carry out this influential role among the people. The presence of elders as the heads of clans or families within a large group is historically attested among other groups throughout the ancient Near East, including the Babylonians, Hittites, Egyptians, Moabites and Midianites (cf. Genesis 50:7; Numbers 22:7). The elders, in turn, communicated the prophet’s message to the people whom they represented.

“The people all responded together, ‘We will do everything the Lord has said.’ So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.” - The response of the Israelite nation was immediate and overwhelming. *“All responded together”* literally means *“in their unitedness.”* The phrase is designed to stress the unanimity of their acceptance. This was not a decision which was debated or which was accepted by a mere majority. The response was given without any hesitation or dissent. *“The unanimous and*



“Looking Down Upon El-Raha, the Plain of Encampment With the Eastern Tower of the Monastery of Saint Catherine in the Foreground”

unhesitating response is to accept, readily and freely, God’s charge, even before hearing the terms of the covenant.” (Sarna, p. 104) Nor was there any attempt to specify, negotiate or define the terms of the covenant agreement - *“We will do everything the Lord has said.”* This comes as something of a surprise to some commentators because those terms had not yet been spelled out. *“All the Lord has said,”* at this point, are nothing more than general propositions about His relationship with His people. Accordingly, one commentator characterized Israel’s answer as *“blind obedience of whatever is required.”* (Propp, II, p. 160) It would be more accurate to recognize Israel’s willingness to accept the Lord’s proposal sight unseen as a demonstration of their faith and trust in God. They had witnessed His gracious love for them demonstrated time and time again in the host of miracles which had brought them to Sinai. By now they had come to recognize that whatever their Lord would require of them would be an expression of God’s wondrous love and would therefore be in their best interest. Such confidence would hardly have constituted

“blind obedience.” Nor were there any second thoughts later on when God’s Law had been given in detail. In Exodus 24, the same language is used to express the people’s restatement of their unanimous acceptance after the terms of the covenant had been spelled out:

“When Moses went and told the people all the Lord’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, ‘Everything the Lord has said we will do.’ Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said...Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, ‘We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.’”
(Exodus 24:3,7)

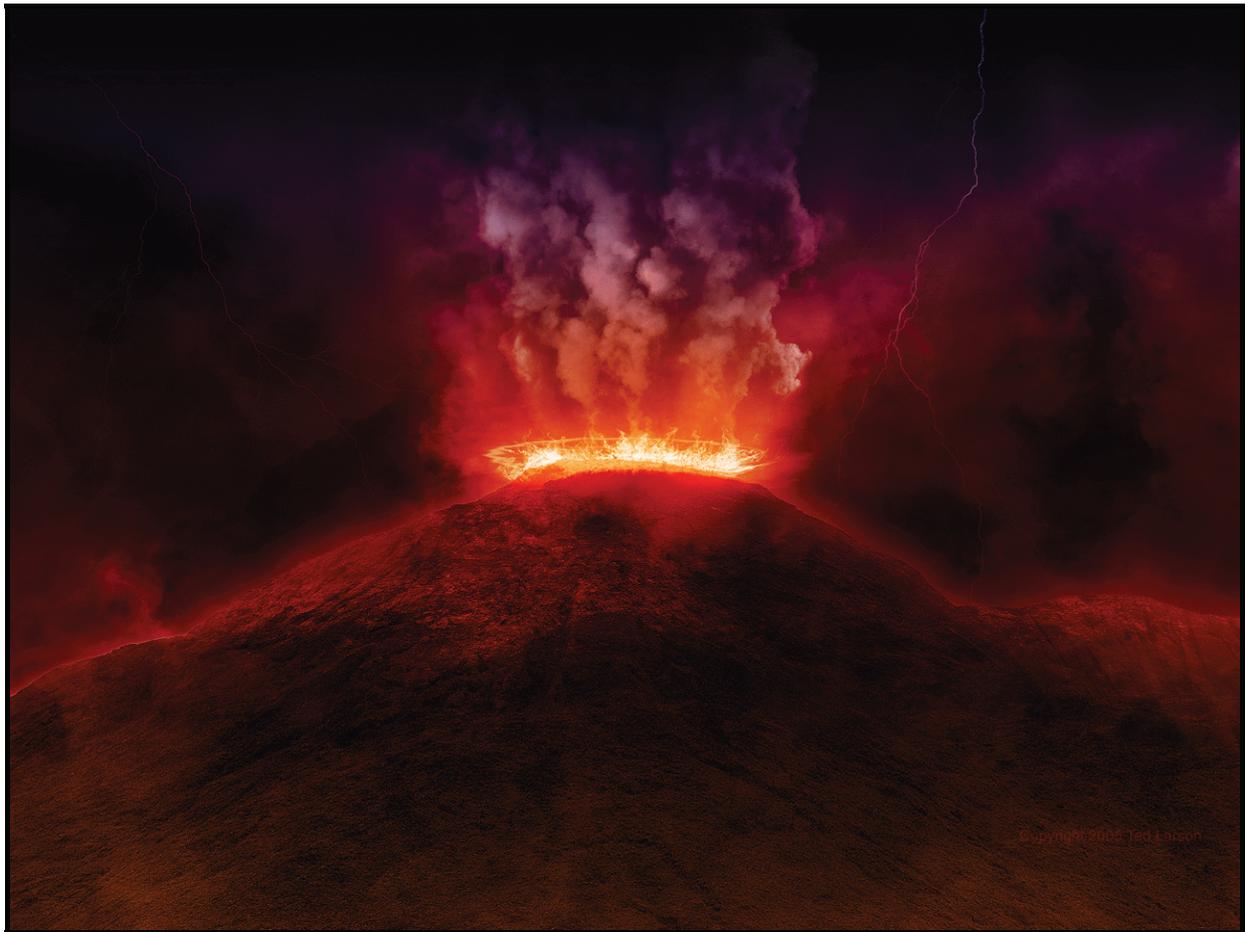
While Israel subsequently failed in their attempts to remain faithful to the covenant, at this point they appear to be resolved to attempt to do so.

In his role as intermediary between God and the people, having heard Israel’s reply, Moses returned to the mountain to await further instructions from the Lord - ***“So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.”***

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘I am going to come to you in a dense cloud so that the people will hear Me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.’ Then Moses told the Lord what the people had said.” - The Lord explained to Moses that He intended to visibly demonstrate His divine endorsement of the prophet’s leadership with a theophany - a physical manifestation of His presence - before the entire nation. God stated His intent clearly - ***“so that the people will hear Me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.”*** In the aftermath of the miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea the people had



“Deliverance at the Red Sea”



“The Presence of God Upon Mount Sinai” by Ted Larson

been convinced that Moses was the chosen leader whom God had sent: **“And when the Israelites saw the great power that the Lord had displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant.”** (Exodus 14:31) It was the Lord’s design, through yet another visible appearance, to reinforce that trust permanently. The appearance of God would carefully avoid anthropomorphism, that is, God would refrain from taking on the form of a man. In the idol saturated context of ancient paganism, the appearance of God in the physical form of any creature would most certainly have resulted in the worship of that form rather than of God Himself. The sad episode of the golden calf would shortly demonstrate the compelling nature of that temptation. Thus, throughout the Old Testament, any idolatrous physical representation of God was strictly prohibited. Instead, the Lord informed Moses that He would come **“in a dense cloud”** and that His voice would be physically audible - **“so that the people will hear Me speaking with you.”** The term **“cloud”** (Hebrew - *“anan”*) is the same word which is typically utilized in reference to the pillar of cloud by which God led Israel through the wilderness. Here the adjective **“dense”** (Hebrew - *“ab”*) is added. This word signifies

the swirling blackness of a dark storm cloud and is frequently associated with judgement. In the Song of Deborah, for example, the prophetess recalled the judgement of God upon the heathen in the context of the dark clouds of Sinai:

“O Lord, when You went out from Seir, when You marched from the land of Edom, the earth shook, the heavens poured, the clouds poured down water. The mountains quaked before the Lord, the One of Sinai, before the Lord, the God of Israel.” (Judges 5:4-5)

The parallel text in Deuteronomy also emphasized the dark and threatening appearance of the cloud: ***“You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness.”*** (Deuteronomy 4:11) The presence which God would manifest was intended to be awe-inspiring that it might strike reverent fear into their hearts.

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready for the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.’”

- The Lord emphasized the unique significance of the establishment of His covenant with Israel at Sinai by the elaborate preparations which were to precede the



“Moses Upon Sinai Before the People” - Luther Bible Woodcut

event. *“This will not be an everyday occurrence, but an event completely transcending the plane of ordinary life; hence it is necessary that the Children of Israel prepare for it in a unique manner.”* (Cassutto, p. 229) The verb **“consecrate”** is drawn from the same root as the term *“holy.”* Accordingly, the word means *“to set apart”* or *“to make distinct.”* As the day itself was to be set apart as a uniquely important moment in the history of the nation of Israel, so all of the people were to cleanse themselves and the clothing they would wear upon this sacred day (cf. Genesis 35:2). They were about to come into the presence of the holy God, and it was necessary that they prepare themselves accordingly:

“This was presented primarily as an external act of separation from anything inappropriate that would defile them...For the spiritually perceptive, however, the outward action would symbolize the need for inner cleansing that was necessary before there could be true fellowship with the King.” (Mackay, p. 331)

Similar ceremonial washing were required of the priests prior to their service in the Tabernacle and the Temple. Thus, for example, ceremonial washing was a part of the consecration of Aaron and his sons to carry on their priestly ministry in the Tabernacle: ***“This is what you are to do to consecrate them, so they may serve Me as priests...Then bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and wash them with water.”*** (Exodus 29:1,4)

The language of ritual cleansing was often used throughout the Old Testament in reference to the spiritual cleansing of the individual from sin and its corruption. After confessing his sin with Bathsheba, King David prayed: ***“Wash away my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”*** (Psalm 51:2) God promised through Isaiah: ***“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be like wool.”*** (Isaiah 1:18) But the prophets also warned that outward ritual action was no substitute from authentic contrition and repentance: ***“‘Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before Me,’ declares the Lord.”*** (Jeremiah 2:22)

“And be ready by the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.” - Three days is the typical interval throughout the Old Testament for a significant period of time that was less than the seven days of a week. This was not an event that was to take place on the spur of the

moment, without appropriate consideration or preparation.

“The people’s immediate assent to God’s declaration may otherwise have been given impulsively, without proper consideration. The three days of preparation and self-restraint allow time for sober reflection, so that acceptance of the covenant can be considered an undoubted act of free will.” (Sarna, p. 105)

The phrase - ***“the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai”*** serves to emphasize the absolute transcendence of God. The pagan gods and goddesses of the nations were nothing more than the personification of natural forces. They dwelt within the realm of time and space and were most often nothing more than exaggerated parodies of the deluded humans who worshiped them. The best illustration of this pattern at work is the attempted seduction of the Babylonian hero Gilgamesh by the goddess Ishtar. Ishtar, the moon goddess appeared to Gilgamesh and pleaded with him: *“Come, O Gilgamesh and be my lover. Gift thy strength unto me. Be thou my husband and I will be thy bride.”* The wise human rejected the proposal of the fickle goddess with these contemptuous words recalling the sad fate of her past loves:

“To what husband hast thou ever remained faithful? Each year, Tammuz, the lover of thy youth is caused by thee to weep. Thou didst love the Allala bird and then broke his wings as he moans in the woods crying, ‘O my wings, my wings!’ Thou didst love the lion and then snared him. Thou didst love the horse and then



“Ishtar’s Seduction of Gilgamesh”
by E. Wallcousins

laid harness on him, and made him gallop half a hundred miles so that he suffered great distress, and thou didst oppress his mother, Silili. Thou didst love a shepherd who sacrificed kids unto thee and then thou didst smite him so that he became a jackel. His own herd boy did drive him away and his dogs rent him to pieces...Alas, if thou wouldst love me, my fate would be like unto the fates of those on whom thou hast laid affliction.” (MacKenzie, pp. 175-176)



The Babylonian Goddess Ishtar

The transcendent God of Scripture could not be subject to such trivialities. He is not a part of time and space reality nor the mere personification of any natural force. His existence is completely independent of the acceptance or the affection of men. All existence has its origin in Him and the continuation is completely dependant upon Him. He has always been and He will always be, the only absolutely independent reality.

“The Torah’s conception rises to a loftier level; the Godhead is not bound to nature, but stands above and outside it, and everything in nature, even the most powerful natural elements, are merely creatures formed by His word.”

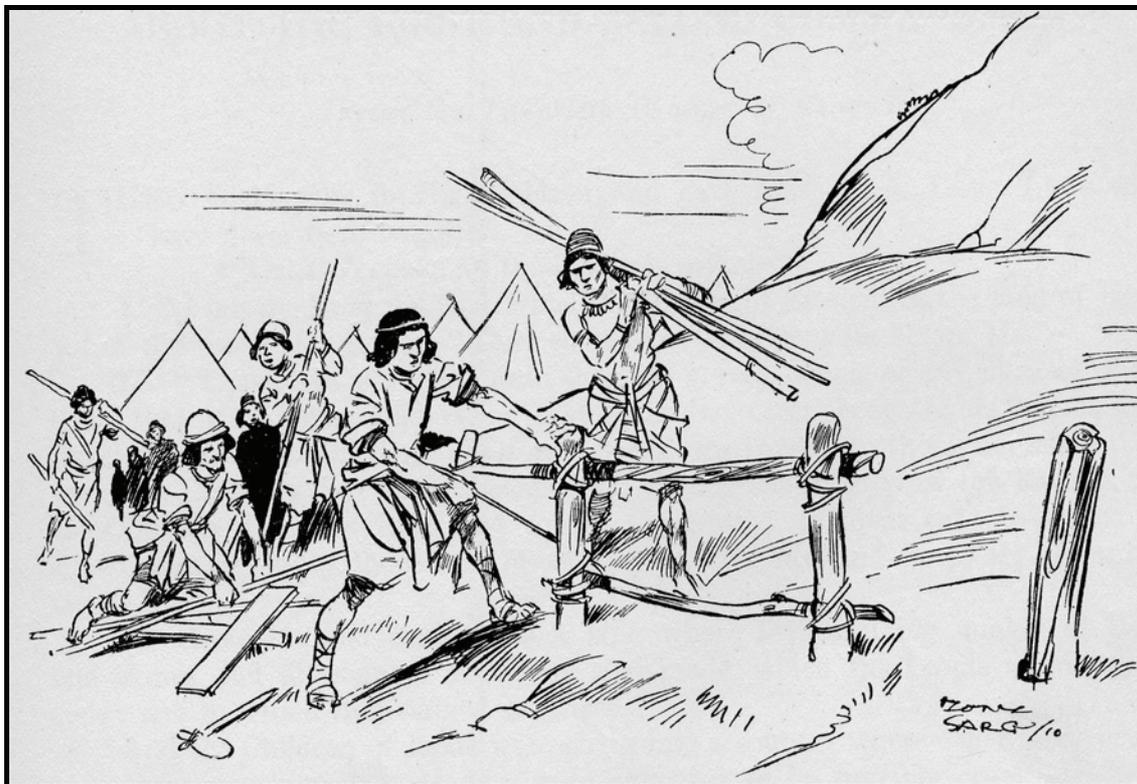
(Cassutto, p. 230) All that the creature can know of the Creator is that which God deigns to reveal to him. The creature can only dare to approach the Creator at His gracious invitation on His terms at the place which He has specified.

The promise that *“the Lord will come down to Mount Sinai”* constitutes an awesome, incomprehensible reality. The transcendent God has deigned to make Himself accessible to His people in this place.

“Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, ‘Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.’” - By virtue of God’s presence there, Mount Sinai would become holy ground. This perception echoes the Lord’s command to Moses

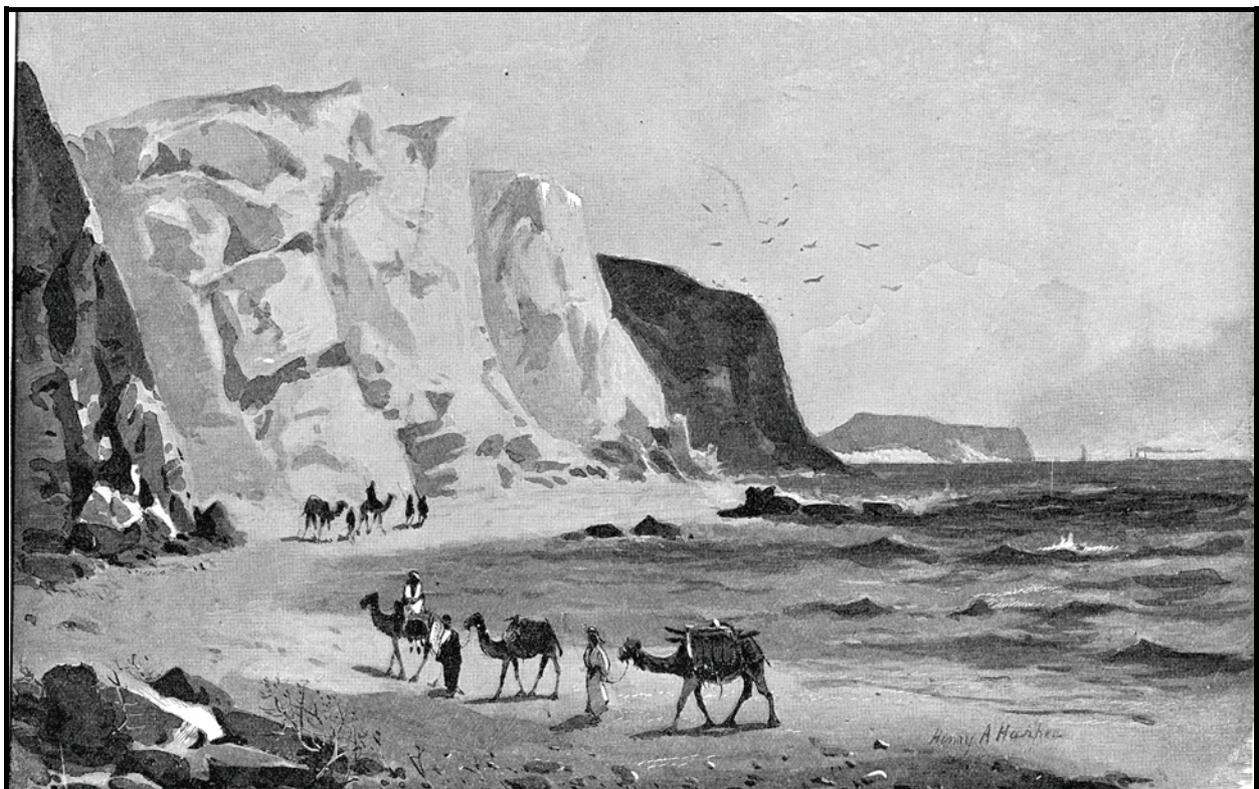
at the time of the burning bush - **“Do not come any closer,’ God said. ‘Take off your sandals, for the place you are standing is holy ground.’”** (Exodus 2:5) Unauthorized contact with God was strictly prohibited. For sinful man to approach the righteous God on his own terms would have presumptuous and disrespectful. Therefore, Moses was commanded to **“put limits for the people around the mountain.”** The text does not specify the nature of the boundary. Some suggest the erection of a fence while other argue in support of the type of stone boundary markers which were commonly used to define property limits throughout the ancient Near East. Whatever the specific implementation may have been, the sacred space were meticulously defined to protect the mountain from being unintentionally profaned by unauthorized intrusion. Nahum Sarna observes the numerous parallels between the sanctity of Mount Sinai and the subsequent design of the Tabernacle:

“Mount Sinai assumes the character of a sanctuary for the duration of the theophany, A close similarity to the wilderness Tabernacle is suggested by several shared characteristics. Both Sinai and the Tabernacle evidence a tripartite division. The summit corresponds to the Inner Sanctum, or Holy of Holies. The second zone, part way up the mountain, is the equivalent of the Tabernacle’s Outer Sanctum, or Holy



“The Boundary at the Base of Mount Sinai”

Place. The third zone, at the foot of the mountain, is analogous to the outer court. As with the Tabernacle, the three distinct zones of Sinai feature three gradations of holiness in descending order. Just as Moses alone may ascend to the peak of the mountain, so all but one are barred from the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle. Just as the Holy Place is the exclusive preserve of the priesthood, so only the priests and elders are allowed to ascend to a specific point on the mountain. The confinement of the laity to the outer court of the Tabernacle, where the altar of burnt offering was located, evokes the parallel with Sinai to the restriction of the laity to the foot of the mountain, where the altar was built. The graduated restrictions on access, touch, and sight are the counterparts of the repeated regulations about the unlawful invasion of the sacred domain in the same three ways. God is said to ‘descend’ upon the mountain as upon the Tabernacle, and He communicates with Moses on the summit as He does in the Holy of Holies. Finally, the vivid descriptions of smoke, dense cloud, and fire that issues from and enveloped Sinai are paralleled by the cloud and fire that become associated with the Tabernacle.” (Sarna, p. 105)



“The Wilderness of Sinai” - 19th Century Bible Illustration



“The Fire of God Upon the Crest of Sinai” by Gerhardt Hoet

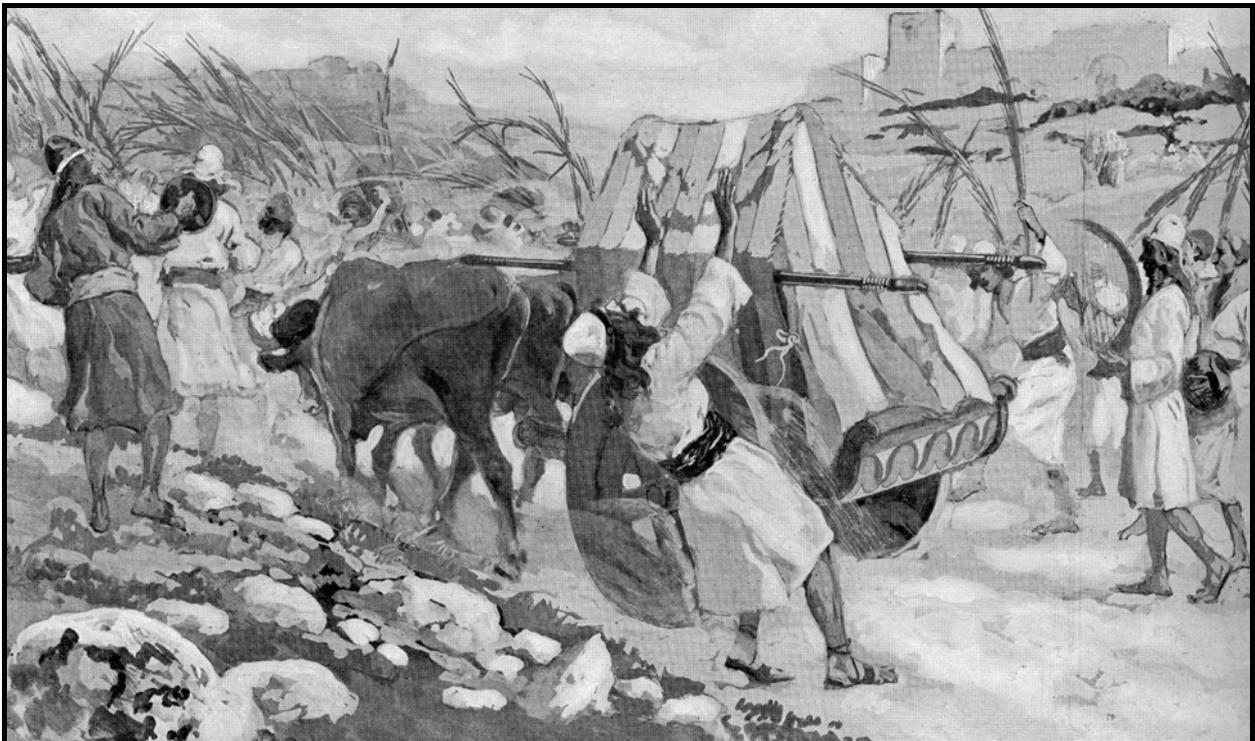
In both instances neither Sinai nor the Tabernacle are inherently hallowed. They become sacred because God has chosen to dwell there and there remain sacred only so long as His presence persists.

The violation of the sanctity of God is a most serious matter. Therefore, only the most severe punishment could be appropriate for this transgression - ***“Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.”*** The Hebrew verb form is repetitive - literally *“dying you will die”* - designed to intensify the certainty and the severity of the action. This is the same expression used in God’s warning to Adam and Eve of the consequence of disobedience: ***“But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”*** (Genesis 2:17) The punishment of death for the desecration of that which is sacred to the Lord is consistently enforced throughout the Old Testament. So, for instance, Uzzah, the wagon driver was killed instantly for reaching to steady the Ark of the Covenant as David brought it into Jerusalem:

“When they came to the threshing floor of Kidron. Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark. Because the oxen stumbled. The Lord’s anger burned against Uzzah, and He struck him down because he had put his hand on the Ark. So he died there before God.” (1 Chronicles 13:9-10; cf. 2 Samuel 6:6-8)

“He shall surely be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on him. Whether man or animal, he shall not be permitted to live.” - The method of execution for those guilty of sacrilege was designed to prevent any further desecration of the mountain by the executioners. The condemned, whether man or beast, was to be killed from a distance without any one else entering into the forbidden area which had been declared sacred to God.

“Only when the ram’s horn sounds a long blast may he go up to the mountain.” - This phrase does not use the customary Hebrew “*shofar*” in reference to the ram’s horn trumpet, but the less common “*jobel*” which is ordinarily used of the battle horns which issued signals in time of war. A parallel usage is found in Joshua 6:5 in connection with the fall of Jericho: ***“When you hear the sound of a long blast of the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse***



“The Chastisement of Uzzah” by J. James Tissot

and the people will go up, every man straight in.” Perhaps, the sharper shrill noise of this horn would more effectively have reached all of the people waiting the signal at the foot of the mountain. *“It has been described as functionally akin to a siren, and its use here may be the functional equivalent of sounding the all clear after the Lord has left the mountain and it has again become safe to venture up it.”* (Mackay, p. 332)

“After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them and washed their clothes. Then he said to the people, ‘Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations.’” - As in the preceding revelations, the summary verse indicates that Moses returned to the camp and faithfully conveyed God’s instructions to the people. In this instance an additional specification was provided - ***“Abstain from sexual relations.”*** The Hebrew text uses the more modest euphemism - *“Do not approach a woman.”* The prohibition of sexual activity as a source of ritual defilement reflected the unique perspective of the Old Testament. Leviticus 15:16-18 includes a similar prohibition in its enumeration of the causes of ritual uncleanness. These regulations were shaped in the historical context of the wide variety of fertility cults that flourished throughout the peoples of the ancient Near East, most prominently in the land of Canaan. The worship of these cults typically occurred in verdant sacred groves whose abundant greenery signified the desired fertility of the participants. Endless variations of the act of intercourse and wild sexual orgy became the substance of their worship. Sex was power, the most intense form of self-assertion and achievement of personal pleasure. In the procreative possibility of sex these pagans



***“Lilith - Canaanite Fertility Goddess”
by John Collier***

believed themselves to be participating in divinity itself. John Rushdooney explains:

“In the fertility cults, a variety of sexual practices, including very perverted and abnormal ones, were obligatory to worship, because it was believed that sexuality meant man’s participation in the ultimate fertility creation. Thus the barren Sinai desert and the abstention from sexuality, meant that God was requiring a thorough separation from humanistic doctrines of man’s power and potential.” (Rushdooney, p., 238)

Dr. John Kleinig offers a similar explanation of the rules of ritual defilement in regard to sexual emissions in Leviticus 15:

“God’s classification of semen and menstrual blood as impurities desacralized them and prevented the Israelites from engaging in pagan and occult practices. Since the emission of semen made people unclean, no couple could ever have sexual intercourse at the sanctuary as part of any ritual enactment, nor could any man present his seed as an



“Greek Fertility Cult Worshiping the Goddess Diana”



***“King Solomon Worshipping the Goddess of His Pagan Wives”
by Sebastian Bourdon***

offering to the Lord. Thus, these laws located sexual intercourse securely in the common realm. Sex as not, under any circumstances, sacred; it was not at all divine. Yet, this teaching still associated reproduction with the will of God and the flow of life that came from Him into Israelite homes and families.” (Kleinig, p. 322)

Shorn of its formal religious trappings, the modern obsession with sexuality, its power and its pleasure, serves basically the same function for contemporary culture. We worship ourselves in this mindless pursuit and reject any virtue or value beyond the satisfaction of our own passions.

“On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp

trembled.” - At the designated time, the Lord appeared upon the mountain top as He had promised. The theophany was accompanied by awe inspiring physical signs and wonders. *“Violent atmospheric disturbances are said to precede and accompany the theophany. The Bible frequently portrays upheavals of nature in association with God’s self-manifestation.”* (Sarna, p. 106) The psalmist declares: ***“May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in His works - He who looks at the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke.”*** (Psalm 104: 31-32) None of these physical signs, however, are God Himself, for He is above and beyond all of creation. The sights and sounds merely prepare the way for His coming and signal His arrival. This point was made most emphatically on a subsequent visit to Mount Sinai by the prophet Elijah:



“Elijah on Mount Sinai”

“The Lord said, ‘Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.’ Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face, and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.” (1 Kings 19:11-13)

The entire crest of the great mountain was obscured by the dark swirling clouds and the brilliant flashes of lightning which signaled that coming of the Lord. Such physical manifestations often occurred to inspire God’s people and terrify His enemies.

“While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites.” (1 Samuel 7:10; 12:18; Job 38:1; 40:6)

David made use of the same dramatic imagery - using much of the terminology of Exodus 19 - to describe the fearsome wrath of God as He came down to the earth:

“From His temple He heard my voice; my cry came before Him into His ears. The earth trembled and quaked, and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled because He was angry. Smoke rose from His nostrils; consuming fire came from His mouth, burning coals blazed out of it. He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under His feet. He mounted the cherubim and flew; He soared on the wings of the wind. He made darkness His covering; His canopy around Him - the dark rain clouds of the sky, Out of the brightness of His presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning. The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. He shot His arrows and scattered the enemies, great bolts of lightning and routed them. The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at Your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of breath from Your nostrils.” (Psalm 18:6-15)



“The Glory of the Lord Upon Mount Sinai” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

“And a very loud trumpet blast” - The majesty of the great storm upon the mountain was immediately followed by the rising crescendo of **“a very loud trumpet blast.”** These were not the metallic instruments of the modern era but the traditional ram’s horns utilized by the Hebrews throughout the Old Testament era, and in connection with religious festivals, throughout the history of Judaism. The use of the customary **“shophar”** returns in this verse. *“While the ram’s horn is rather faint by modern symphonic standards, it probably made a greater impression on the ancients who inhabited a quieter world. Perhaps many were blown at once.”* (Propp, p. 164) The blast of the shophar would become the standard method of announcing the religious festivals of the Jews. **“Then have the shophar sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the shophar throughout your land.”** (Leviticus 24:9) The prophet Isaiah foretold that the blast of the shophar would announce the deliverance of God’s people: **“And in that day a great shophar will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.”** (Isaiah

7:13; cf. Psalm 47:6; 81:4) In Zechariah 9, it is the Lord Himself who will sound the blast of the shophar to herald the coming of His messianic king as He comes ***“righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey:”***

“Then the Lord will appear over them; His arrow will flash like lightning. The Sovereign Lord will sound the shophar; He will march in the storms of the south, and the Lord Almighty will shield them...The lord their God will save them on that day, as the flock of His people.” (Zechariah 9:9,14-16)



“The Call of the Shophar in a Modern Synagogue”

It is most probable that the shophars which were to be sounded had been strategically placed throughout the encampment. When the signal was given the shrill sound of their call blasted from every direction to announce the coming of Yahweh and to summon His people to the foot of the mountain that they might stand before Him.

“Everyone in the camp trembled.” - Like the mountain itself, the people ***“trembled”*** in reverent awe and holy fear at the reality of the Lord’s arrival upon the peak of

Sinai. The wording stresses that this response was not limited to a particular group or category of people but was experienced by all - ***“everyone in the camp.”*** Imagine the overwhelming thought of actually being called to stand before the Lord as He appeared amid the thunder and lightning which had engulfed the mountain’s crest! This holy awe was a deliberate part of God’s design, intended to impress upon all of Israel the importance of the covenant which was to be established that day:

“Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when He said to me, ‘Assemble the people before Me to hear My words so that they may learn to revere Me as long as they live in the land, and may teach them to their children.’ You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness.” (Deuteronomy 4:10-11)

The Epistle to the Hebrews utilized the fear which filled the hearts of Moses and the Children of Israel before Mount Sinai to highlight the wondrous confidence of Christians who can now approach the holy God upon Mount Zion through the mediation of Jesus Christ:

“You have not come to a mountain that cannot be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast; or to such a voice speaking words, that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: ‘If even an animal touches the mountain it must be stoned.’ The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, ‘I am trembling with fear.’” (Hebrews 12:18-21)

The 17th century English commentator Matthew Poole offered this insightful assessment of the significance of the signs of God’s coming and their impact upon the Children of Israel:

“The thunders and lightnings were sent partly as evidence of God’s glorious presence, and of the anger of God, and the dreadful punishments due to the transgressors of the law now to be delivered; and partly as a means to humble and awaken, and convince, and terrify proud and secure sinners, that they might more reverently attend to the words and commands of God, more willingly yield obedience to them,



"The Awesome Presence of God Upon Mount Sinai" by Rudolf Schüfer

and be more afraid of the violation of them. A thick cloud was both a fit means for the production and reception of the thunders and lightnings, and a signification as well of the invisible and unconceivable nature of God, as of the obscurity of the legal dispensation in regard of its types and shadows, etc. (2 Corinthians 3:13,18; 4:6). The trumpet was a fit instrument, both for the promulgation of God's Law and for the signification of that war that is between God and sinners."
(Rushdooney, p. 240)

"Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God and they stood at the foot of the mountain." - In his divinely appointed role, Moses led the vast multitude of the people to the foot of the mountain. They approached to the boundary which had been established by the Lord and marked out so that it would not be transgressed by man or beast.

"Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder." - These manifestations of the presence of God are obviously not natural phenomena. F.M. Cross dismisses the efforts of those who seek to explain the phenomena as evidence of some sort of volcanic eruption with the half-humorous words - *"We need not send for the seismologists!"* (Cross, p. 169) Fire in Scripture is a symbol of purity and cleansing. *"Fire is a symbol of God's presence in that it represents purity, and is threatening and dangerous, with an elusive attraction."* (Mackay, p. 234) Accordingly, the prophet Malachi warned: ***"But who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears? For He will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver. He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver."*** (Malachi 3:2-4) Through His prophet Zechariah, God had foretold the cleansing of His remnant among the people: ***"This third I will bring into the fire. I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on My Name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'"*** (Zechariah 13:9) The billowing clouds of smoke points to the mystery of God's presence with the humbling reminder that the entry of the infinite God into our realm of time and space defies the meager categories of human understanding. He is truly present, but the manner of His presence is beyond our comprehension. So it was in the sublime vision of Isaiah: ***"At***



"The Awesome Presence of God Upon Sinai" - 19th Century Bible Engraving



“Abraham Looking Down Upon the Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah” by Tissot

the sound of their voices, the doorposts and the thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.” (Isaiah 6:4) At the same time, *“the smoke from a furnace”* which cloaked the mountain peak carries the connotation of judgement and the wrath of God against sin. The *“furnace”* is the smelting pit in which metals were forged, producing thick clouds of dense black smoke. The only other occurrence of this expression in the Old Testament come in reference to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah - *“He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.”* (Genesis 19:28) As the people had *“trembled”* before the Lord, now the very mountain itself shakes and quakes as the presence of the Creator God descends upon. At the same time, the rising crescendo of the ram’s horns continued to build. The intensity of the language has led some commentators to conclude that these were not human instruments at all, but the horns of heaven which will one day announce the coming of the judgement itself. Many of the texts which speak of those judgement trumpets use language similar to that of the theophany at Sinai: *“Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on My holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the Day of the Lord is coming.”* (Joel 2:1) *“That day will be a day of wrath, a day*

of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry.” (Zephaniah 1:15-16) “And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing...will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 27:13) “For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” (1 Corinthians 15:52) “For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

“Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.” - Surrounded by the overwhelming manifestations of the divine presence “Moses spoke.” With the courage of faith, trusting in the divine promise, Moses called upon the Lord as he had been instructed. “And the voice of God answered him.” - The nature of the conversation which occurred is further explained in the parallel text of Deuteronomy: “Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form. There was only a voice.” (Deuteronomy 4:12) The Hebrew term for



“Moses Speaking to God Before the People” by Matthias Merian

“voice” in this phrase can also be used for the sound of the thunder. Its usage here stresses the volume of God’s speaking to Moses so that He could be heard over the blast of the trumpets and the sounds emanating from the mountain peak. In this way, the people would also have heard the voice of God speaking to Moses, thus validating his leadership among them as God had intended - **“I am going to come to you in a dense cloud so that the people will hear Me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.”** (Verse 9)

“The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up and the Lord said to him, ‘Go down and warn the people so that they do not force their way through to see the Lord and many of them perish. - The contrasting language of these verses serves to reassert **“the separation or divide that exists between the holy, pure God and the unholy, profane Israelites”** (Currid , p. 29) and the unique role of Moses as the divinely appointed mediator between the two. **“The Lord descended”** while **“Moses went up.”** The people are to remain strictly at the bottom of the mountain while God was upon **“the top of Mount Sinai.”** The Lord reiterated His strict warning against unauthorized intrusions onto the mountain and the dire consequences for those who transgressed. It may be that this repetition was needed because in the exhilaration of the moment the people were



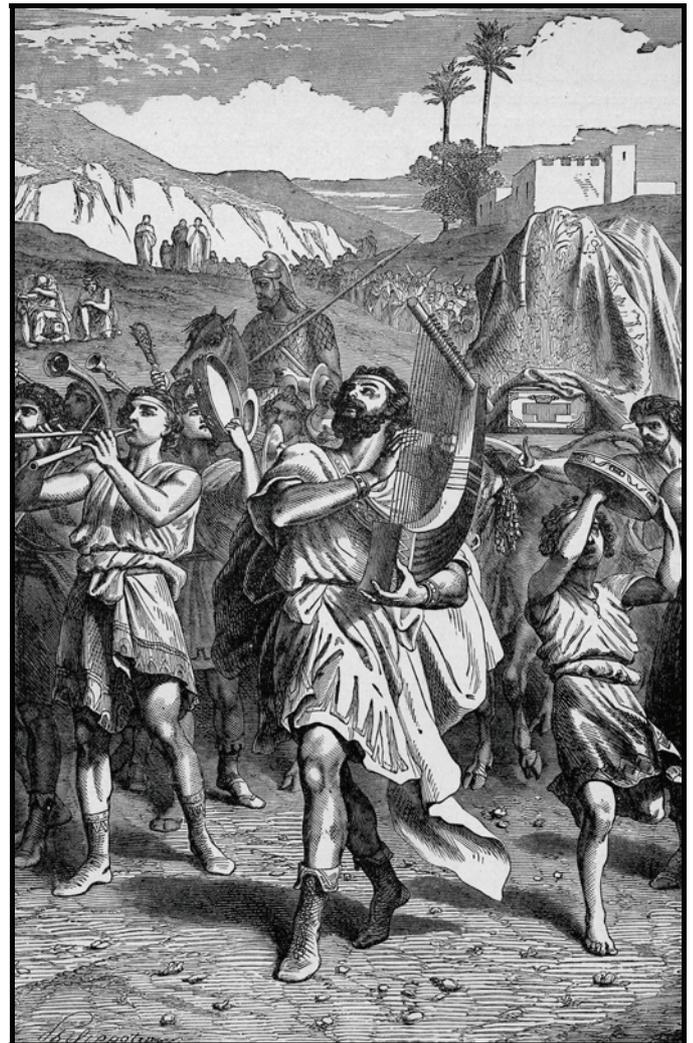
“The Lord Speaking to Moses Before Israel” by Hans Holbein

growing eager to draw closer to the Lord and satisfy their curiosity **“to see the Lord.”** Having seen Moses pass beyond the barrier and ascend the mountain, others, assuming that they were every bit as worthy as Moses, might have been tempted to do the same. A few could quickly have led to a multitude as still more, who jealously did not want to miss out, crowded up after them. The result would have been disaster - **“and many of them perish.”** Sinful man dare never approach God at his own initiative or on his own terms. If fallen humanity is to be reunited with its Creator it must be His doing in the manner that He alone can provide. Every human effort to bridge that gap can be nothing other than presumptuous self-assertion.

“Even the priests who approach the Lord must consecrate themselves or the Lord will break out against them.” - This

observation anticipates the Levitical priesthood which had not yet been established at this point in time. The rabbis traditionally understood the mention to priests in this verse in reference to the heads

of each household or clan who functioned as the priests of their families prior to the formal institution of a priesthood for the tabernacle and the temple (cf. Numbers 3:11-13; 8:16-18). However, the rules of ritual purification which would shortly be provided in regard to the service of the priests, when these men would take up the task as the divinely designated mediators between God and the people, appear to be the focus of this comment. The verb **“will break out against them”** expresses the appropriateness of God’s punitive response. Those who cross the forbidden line to profane the sanctity of God will find that God will in turn break in upon them with destructive fury. This is the same verb which would later be used to describe the punishment of Uzzah for unauthorized contact with the sacred ark as David was



“The Death of Uzzah as David Conducted the Ark to Jerusalem” - 19th Century Engraving

bringing it into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:8).

“Moses said to the Lord, ‘The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, because You Yourself warned us, ‘Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.’” - These words insert a discordant note into the grand harmony of this majestic moment. Moses presumptuously insisted that God’s additional warning was superfluous in view of the boundaries which had already been placed around the base of the mountain. Moses had dared to argue with the Lord before (cf. Exodus 3 & 4). Evidently he had failed to learn from his previous mistakes.

“The Lord replied, ‘Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the Lord or He will break out against them.’” -



***“Moses Before the Lord”
by Lucas Cranach***

The NIV translation of the Lord’s response inaccurately suggests that the Lord accepted Moses’ objection and conceded that Aaron be allowed to accompany him when he returned to the mountain top. In fact, the Hebrew text clearly indicates that the Lord brusquely dismissed His prophet’s disrespectful challenge. Cassutto correctly observes: *“Moses’ statement is rejected sharply.”* (Cassutto, p. 234) In Hebrew, the phrase opens with an emphatic double imperative, literally *“Go, go down!”* The repetition expressed the Lord’s angry impatience with Moses’ impertinence. *“God sternly overruled Moses’ objection.”* (Currid, p. 31) The KJV more accurately reflects the sense of the Hebrew text - ***“And the Lord said to him, ‘Away! Get thee down!’*** Moses is being rebuked and commanded to immediately get on with that which God had instructed him to do. The additional instruction to bring Aaron upon his return is unrelated to original command which is simply restated one more time without modification - ***“But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the Lord or He will break out against them.”*** The prophet obeyed God’s renewed command without further objection - ***“So Moses went down to the people and told them.”***