Moses — The Man of God

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PREFACE

Numerous young people in Switzerland and other parts of Europe have been blessed by the ministry of this book. Presented first in lecture form in a camp setting, its influence and usefulness greatly expanded when it was printed in French, then in German.

Now by the help of God we are privileged to present this ministry in English. It should be especially useful for study by Bible classes, youth camps, Sunday Schools, etc., because of the discussion questions provided at the end of each chapter.

With appreciation for the diligent work of Daniel K. Dreyer in translating this book into English, we commend it to the prayerful study of young and old.

"… Moses verily was faithful in all his house as a testimony" (Heb. 3:5). "Take, my brethren, the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord for an example " (James 5:10).

Grant W. Steidl. June 1975

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

Many editorial changes have been made in this second edition. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New Kings James Version, Copyright 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Grant W. Steidl, March 1990

J. N. Darby's Synopsis of the Books of the Bible and C. H. Mackintosh's Notes on Exodus and Numbers will help the reader to a deeper understanding of this outline of the life of Moses. It is recommended that the Scripture passages listed under each chapter heading be read carefully before proceeding into the chapter itself.

About the book…

Moses was born in a period of great stress and persecution by Pharaoh upon the children of Israel. But Moses' parents had great faith in God and so could commit their beautiful child to His care and keeping. Many lessons can be learned by Christian parents today from the example of Amram and Jochebed.

What prompted Moses to forsake the riches of Egypt for the reproach of Christ?

Why did God allow a great man like Moses to spend 40 years on the back side of the desert?

Learn from Moses' handling of disappointments and discouragements how you can and should react to distressing circumstances.

The author, in his own straightforward manner, makes many applications from the life of Moses, his personality, his training and his instruction in the path of God, that will benefit all who will read this book with a desire to please the Lord.

Chapter 1

CHILDHOOD, YOUTH, CALLING

1. THE PARENTS' FAITH:

Hebrews 11:23; Acts 7:20-22; Exodus 2:1-10.

Amram and Jochebed, according to Exodus 6:18-20, belonged to the tribe of Levi and to the family of the Kohathites. It was a family which in the future would perform such important duties in relation to the tabernacle.

Three children at this point are mentioned in the word of God: Miriam — probably ten to thirteen years old at Moses' birth; Aaron — three years older than Moses (Ex. 7:7); and Moses.

According to Pharaoh's decree, issued shortly before the birth of Moses, the Israelites were to cast into the river every son that was born. Only the female infants were to be kept alive. What an exercise of soul it must have been for Jochebed during the long months prior to the birth of the child! Would it be a daughter whom she would have the right to keep?

The child came into the world and it was a son; but not an ordinary boy. By faith his parents discerned in him a special beauty. Acts 7:20 reveals that he was "exceedingly lovely" (literally "beautiful to God"). Hebrews 11:23 expressly emphasizes that it was because the child was beautiful that his parents hid him.

There was no room in the world for this one whom God singled out from birth as special for Himself. Centuries later, there will be no room at Bethlehem for the Child Jesus. King Herod will try to slaughter Him as Pharaoh tried to destroy the child Moses.

As then, so today faith adheres to the One whom the world despises, the One who in the eyes of faith is "more beautiful than the sons of men."

Moses' parents were not afraid of the king's edict. For the first three months they did everything they could to keep the child hidden. Yet the moment arrived when this was no longer possible. With what care the mother prepared the ark of reeds, plastered it with resin and pitch, put the child in it, and placed it near the bank of the Nile River. There Miriam would keep watch on him from afar.

For a few years the children of Christian parents are under the special influence, protection, and care of their mothers. Then the moment comes when they must be exposed to the outside world through school and contact with other children in the neighborhood. Knowing very well that she cannot keep her treasures with her for ever, a Christian mother will be careful to take every possible precaution to prevent her child from becoming exposed to harmful influences during this new period. Above all, she will need faith to commit him to the care of the Lord who is able to keep him.

How marvelous the answer to the confidence expressed by Moses' parents! The hand of God appears in every detail: the selection of the place and hour at which Pharaoh's daughter comes down to bathe in the river; her compassion at the sight of the child; Miriam's presence of mind; and the kindness of the princess who delivers the child to his own mother for the first years of his life.

At home Moses will remain under the training of his parents — "The child grows." Later on he will be in the royal place where the daughter of Pharaoh will bring him up "for herself" (Acts 7:21). Moses, instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, will become mighty in his words and deeds just as Jesus was mighty in deed and word, in Luke 24:19 and Acts 1:1! Also, Moses knows the pleasures of Egypt.

Which of the two educations will prevail? Will it be the one imparted during the few years at his father's home where Amram (whose name means "God of thy father" Ex. 3:6) and Jochebed assuredly did not neglect to speak to Moses of the Lord and of His promises to His people? Or will it be the one provided at the court? Will the many years at the court erase even the memory of what Moses had heard in his parents' home?

Is not this problem still very prevalent? Christian parents endeavor to bring up their children for the Lord instructing them in the Word of God. They also take them to Sunday school, to the meetings, and to special occasions for further teaching from the Word. On the other hand, the influence of studies, apprenticeship, and/or professional training will certainly be felt; and it will cause a young heart to forget what it had received at home from the parents unless there is personal and living faith in the Lord Jesus. The case of King Joash demonstrates that a faith based exclusively on training vanishes when the supporting influences disappear.

2. THE CHOICE AT THE AGE OF FORTY:

(Exodus 2:11-15; Acts 7:23-29; Hebrews 11:24-26).

When Moses had reached the age of forty it came into his heart to visit his brethren. He went out to them, looking on their burdens. Certainly he had not learned at the court of Pharaoh that these despised Hebrews were his brethren; still less that God had made promises about them (Gen. 15:13). However, the teaching received from his parents was still deep-rooted in his heart.

The day of decision arrived, it seems, when he was to be officially called "the son of Pharaoh's daughter." Moses refused! (Heb. 11:24). We may well imagine that the reaction of the princess (about which the Word of God says nothing) was terrible. Moses' renunciation involved immense loss in terms of an honored position, material advantages, riches and "delights."

Similarly, we live in days when we must be able to say "no." Joseph's action in Genesis 39:10 illustrates this. In a situation where a wholehearted decision to cling to the Lord was required in order to refuse, break off, and go away from temptation, he triumphed by God's grace.*

Even if we are never called to renounce all that was refused by Moses, we can be sure that we also will face tempting circumstances. Some material advantages of this contaminated world will have to be declined so that they might not stand in the way of our fellowship with the people of God — even if such a decision involves a measure of self denial.

This takes more than the negative side of renouncing. Moses "chose." What did he choose? "To suffer affliction with the people of God." Although our level of decision may not reach to that of Moses, we also will find many opportunities to choose in favor of those whom the Lord loves.

The Word says that the "pleasures of sin," as real as they may seem, are only for a time; "but he that does the will of God abides for eternity" (1 John 2:17). Moses' renunciation and choice would later confer on him the authority necessary to ask others, especially his own people, to do the same in their measure.

Hebrews 11 gives us some insight into the heart of Moses and reveals to us the secret that prompted his faith. He did not choose by sheer force of will or through asceticism, but because he "esteemed" the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. The museum of Cairo and the tomb of Tutankhamen prove that no little wealth was meant by these riches. However, that which pertained to Christ (although no doubt only in figure) had more value for Moses' heart than everything else; it was a greater treasure!

Moses thought that his brethren would certainly admire his self-denial and devotion to their cause. As Acts 7:25 says, "he supposed that his brethren would understand that God would deliver them by his hand." What terrible disappointment! "They did not understand." The very Israelite whom he was reproving for wronging his neighbor "pushed him away." What was the good of having "refused," "chosen," and "esteemed," if this was the result?

Fearing Pharaoh, Moses fled to Midian and sat down near a well. There the most bitter reflections must have weighed on his mind, but he did not lose courage. As he witnessed the vexations to which the daughters of Reuel were exposed, he did not remain engrossed in his own pain but came to their help. Thus he remains in character a deliverer and a servant.

How was all that possible? Hebrews 11 reveals it: "He looked to the reward." His eyes were not cast in the direction of the immediate future with its lost advantages and ongoing afflictions. Even at the well of Midian and in the depth of distress, his actions prove that faith was enduring in his heart. He was looking farther ahead and higher up. In fact, the path which he had begun to walk was to lead him to the song of triumph at the Red Sea, to the revelations of Sinai, to the glory reflected on his face, to the intimate relationship with the Lord on Pisgah, and finally to the glorious appearing on the mount of transfiguration.

There is another side to this account. Before going out to his brethren in Egypt, he did not consult the Lord. The Lord's time had not yet come for the people nor for Moses. It was in his own strength that Moses was going, and this way did not exclude the fear of men. On the contrary, "he turned this way and that way" (Ex. 2:12).

However, in Midian under quiet conditions and alone with God, he would be trained as a shepherd, just as Jacob and Joseph had been trained before him and as David would yet be trained. Moses' faith was real and deep, but he needed to pass through God's schooling.

3. THE VISION AT THE AGE OF EIGHTY:

(Exodus 3 and 4; Acts 7:30-35).

"The time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham" (Acts 7:17). Years of silent training had forged the instrument. For Moses, the wilderness of Midian was what the prison had been for Joseph, what Cherith and Sarepta would be for Elijah, and what Arabia would be for Paul.

If in our lives God sometimes allows periods such as these that we cannot understand — if sickness or other circumstances interrupts our work and we are put aside, should we not use such seasons to feed more closely on the Word and to learn in the school of God what we would never learn in the activity and turbulence of our normal lives? Such periods can be wasted on vain regrets or in scattered and futile endeavors; but if we use them wisely, they will form the foundation for blessed service on behalf of the people of God.

God is now about to reveal Himself to Moses and call him to the service for which He had been preparing him from birth. How extraordinary and unique is the moment when a soul feels the presence of God and His holiness in a special way; when he hears His voice distinctively! Such a vision will mark his entire existence from then on, and render it fruitful or sterile according to the response made.

"Come now therefore, and I will send you" (Ex. 3:10). The moment of God has arrived. Formerly Moses wanted to go without waiting for God's time, but now he is about to hesitate. God does not say "Go" but "Come." It is with Him, in His company and fellowship that Moses is sent. However, Moses is not disposed to respond. He brings before God four successive objections:

Who am I? … I am unable … I am not prepared … I will not know how to act. How many similar excuses have arisen from generation to generation in the hearts of those whom God was calling? "I will be with you" is the peremptory and clear answer which should suffice for every servant. A Gideon, a Jeremiah, the apostles at the feet of their risen Lord, Paul in prison, and how many others have heard this answer and have made the happy experience of the preciousness of God's presence in the way!

For Moses, however, this promise was not sufficient. He raises another objection: "The sons of Israel will say to me: `What is his name?' What shall I say unto them?" Full of gracious condescension, God then reveals himself as the One who ever is: "I am that I am." Before, in, and after time, He ever remains the Word which "in the beginning … was with God" — Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today and for ever.

Every necessary instruction is given to Moses but still he is not satisfied. Pleadingly he says: "But behold, they will not believe me" (Ex. 4:1). God then gives him three signs through which his mission is to be accredited:

(1) The staff changed into a serpent which Moses can take by the tail. This is an illustration of the power which God imparts to His instrument in the presence of the enemy.

(2) Moses' hand that becomes leprous when placed into his bosom and then afterwards is made pure. This shows that God alone can heal the leper and purify the sinner.

3) The water of the Nile (the source of life for the Egyptians) that is changed into blood. This is a proof that judgment is about to come upon this rebellious people.

Moses, however, is still not willing to go: "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant" (Ex. 4:10). Earlier when he went out of Pharaoh's court, Moses had been mighty in words, but the years spent in the wilderness taught him the small value of this natural ease of speech. The Lord tells him: "And now go, and I will be with your mouth, and will teach you what you shall say."

Once more Moses raises an objection, though with more moderation this time (v.13). Compelled by the Lord's anger, he finally yields; he goes and asks his father-in-law's permission to leave and go back to Egypt, and prepares his return. It seems, however, that he delays in Midian and again the Lord must remind him to "Go, return to Egypt" (Ex. 4:19).

On the way God gives him instructions, and also brings to his attention a secret and deep obstacle — a small sin perhaps, but God sees everything and allows nothing in His servant that is contrary to His clearly revealed Word. As a concession to the Midianites, probably to Zipporah, Moses had not circumcised his son. Now amid the dust and confusion of the caravan, alive with people and animals, Moses becomes ill and is about to die. Zipporah discerns in it — and rightly so — the judgment of God, and hastens to perform the neglected rite of circumcision. Moses is restored in soul and body, and goes to meet Aaron. Together they will carry out the work for which God is sending them. In all likelihood, Zipporah goes back to her father. She will join Moses again at the mountain of God (Ex. 4:25).

What would have become of Moses, had he not obeyed on that supreme day of his life when God called him? No doubt, he would have remained in Midian, an unknown shepherd of whom we would never have heard. Israel would have remained in the bondage of Egypt; or rather God would have used another instrument to deliver the people.

Compelled by the faithful call of God, Moses answered. Through the years, he grew in the intimacy of the one whom he had learned to know as the God of grace who had appeared to him "in the bush" (Deut. 33:16).

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

1. Describe some of the circumstances which God arranged to preserve Moses in spite of Pharaoh's commandment.

2. Do you face decisions in your life similar to those faced by Moses when he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter?" What do you learn from his example that will help you to make the right decision?

3. Why did God allow a great man like Moses to spend forty years of his life in obscurity, tending sheep?

4. Consider again the four objections raised by Moses when God would send him to deliver the Israelites. How do they compare to objections you may have been using to resist God's will in your life? What is God's answer to these objections?

Chapter 2

In Egypt — The Deliverer

(Read Exodus 5 to 12; Acts 7:35-36; Hebrews 11:27-28)

1. FAILURES

At the burning bush Moses had received an immediate mission that was perfectly clear: "Bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt" (Ex. 3:10). God had not concealed from him the obstacles he would face: "I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a powerful hand. I will stretch out my hand and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof; and after that he will let you go" (Ex. 3:19-20). There in Midian God had even given Moses to understand that Pharaoh's resistance would be terrible, compelling Him to take the extreme measure of killing his (Pharaoh's) firstborn son.

Arriving in Egypt, Moses and Aaron gather all the elders of the children of Israel who accede to the message, bow their heads and worship (Ex. 4:29-31). Feeling quite encouraged, they go to Pharaoh and ask him to let the people go and celebrate a feast to the Lord in the wilderness. Pharaoh's insolence soon reduces their courage, but they still try to say to him: "The God of the Hebrews has met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the wilderness …" (Ex. 5:3).

The royal rebuff is explicit: "Why do ye, Moses and Aaron, wish to have the people go off from their works? Away, to your burdens!"

Instead of alleviating the people's burden, this first interview only makes it heavier still. Part of the Israelites must scatter about the country and gather the straw necessary to make brick; yet the same amount of bricks is required each day. Therefore, a reduced number of people must work all the more in order to fulfill the requirements. The officers of the children of Israel try to complain directly to Pharaoh without going through Moses and Aaron, but this only makes matters worse.

It is easy to understand Moses' distress at that hour, one of the darkest in his life. The Lord has not delivered the people at all through him. On the contrary, the people are oppressed more than ever and those whom he wanted so much to serve reproach him severely. What should he do? Should he once more give up, leave the people to their fate, and return to Midian?

Moses is at the end of his resources. Nevertheless, his faith stands fast (Heb. 11:27). In his deep distress he returns to the Lord (v. 22) and pours out before Him his affliction. Like so many times later on, he experiences the grace of his Lord who does not rebuke him. On the contrary, He reveals Himself still more to him.

Is there not an important lesson for each of us to learn through the misfortunes, disappointments and trials of this life? One person works hard to pass an examination and yet fails. Another tends a loved one with great devotion, and yet this loved one is taken away by the Lord. Still another tries to bring a soul to Christ, but Satan seems to hold that soul still more firmly in his shackles. What is to be done? We must not yield to depression but rather pour out our supplications before God as the Psalmist did — and then rely on His grace. He will not fail to reveal Himself still more to the soul that seeks after Him, and He will carry the matter to its conclusion.

At the beginning of Genesis, God had revealed Himself as the Creator: Elohim — Deity in the absolute. With the patriarchs He had assumed essentially the name of the Almighty — the one who meets all the needs of those who are pilgrims of faith and strangers on the earth. To Moses at this decisive hour, God reveals Himself as the Eternal God (Jehovah, or Yahweh) — the God of the covenant who looks after His people; the God who does not change and who acts in time according to what He is in Himself and not according to the merits of those favored ones on whose behalf He is operating (Ex. 6:2-8).

Having regained confidence in his mission, Moses goes back to the children of Israel, but they do not listen to him because of their heavy bondage. The Lord does not wait for another entreaty from His servant. He immediately strengthens his faith and orders him to go in and speak again to the king. Moses objects again: "The children of Israel have not heeded me. How then shall Pharaoh heed me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?" The Lord then gives Moses and Aaron commandments for the children of Israel, and for Pharaoh that he might let the people go out of Egypt (Ex. 6:10-13; Ex. 7:1-5).

Moses and Aaron, fully confident in God's promises (for they "persevered, as seeing Him who is invisible") go to the king. They acquire increasing boldness and authority during the entire time of the plagues upon Egypt, being strengthened in faith through the display of their God's power. Moses increasingly gains the upper hand, being fully aware that he speaks in the name of the Lord who spreads out "his strong hand and his outstretched arm" in favor of His people.

2. WHO ARE THEY THAT SHALL GO?

(Exodus 8:25-28; Ex. 10:8-11, 24-26)

There are signs for the people of God, and plagues for the Egyptians as the judgments of God come down upon the land. Seven times Pharaoh hardens his heart (look it up for yourself), and seven times the Lord hardens the heart of Pharaoh.

Pharaoh begins to yield a little, however, so that the Lord might withdraw the poisonous dog-flies from the land, and proposes to Moses that they go and sacrifice to their God "in the land." Immediately Moses answers: "It is not right to do so, for we would be sacrificing the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God … We will go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as He will command us" (Ex. 8:26-27).

This illustrates the first snare of Satan — that those who worship God do so in the world and as mixed with the world. How successful Satan has been in bringing about such a condition in Christendom: In many Christian congregations, probably in the most important ones, believers and unbelievers mix together in the same "religious service." As to the leaders, some of them no longer have faith in the Word of God or in the redeeming work of the cross.

In order to worship truly, a definite separation is necessary. There must be "the three days' journey into the wilderness" — a picture of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Pharaoh, harassed by the successive judgments which ravage his country, later yields still more. He calls Moses and Aaron and precisely asks the following question: "Who are they that shall go?"

Moses answers: "We will go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we will go" (Ex. 10:8-9).

This, however, is not the way in which Pharaoh understands it, and again he sets a new snare before the servants of God: "Go now, you who are men, and serve the LORD."

In some countries today young people can attend a Christian meeting only from the age of eighteen; in other countries one can present the gospel only to those over twenty-one. Even among Christians in countries which enjoy liberty, the enemy strenuously endeavors to induce parents not to take their children with them to the meetings; or he persuades them to think that attending Sunday School or other special meetings for the young is too taxing for them! The enemy's tactics have not changed. He knows very well that youth is the favorable age to turn to the Lord, for then the entire life becomes oriented toward Him to be lived for Him.

Nehemiah 12:43 describes a day of worship and rejoicing when all the people — not only the men but also the women and the children — were happy to be gathered in the presence of the Lord. When on the other hand, it was a question of listening to the reading of the law, Ezra spoke “before the congregation, of men and women and all who could hear with understanding” (Neh. 8:2).

Does this not teach us that we should all come to the worship meeting, including our children as soon as they are old enough to remain quiet? The oft-cited excuses about household chores and schoolwork should not prevent this. As for the meeting for Bible study where the Word of God is explained and studied, do not the Scriptures instruct us to bring along “all who could hear with understanding”? (Here understanding refers to natural intelligence, not the renewed intelligence which can exist only through conversion).

In the face of Moses' categorical refusal of his offer, and in order to avoid a further judgment of three days of darkness, Pharaoh devises still another solution. He says: “Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be kept back. Let your little ones also go with you” (Ex. 10:24). Moses, however, knows very well that if the flocks and herds are left behind, the heart of the people will be drawn back again to Egypt. Hence he answers: “You must also give us sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God. Our livestock also shall go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind.”

Let us be careful to keep our hearts from clinging unduly to the material possessions which God has entrusted to us. They could become a hindrance to the worship which the Lord expects from us. As Luke 16 teaches, the “unrighteous mammon” is entrusted to our management, but our hearts should not become attached to it as a treasure. It must always remain at the Lord's disposal to be used according to His will.

Because Moses himself had earlier refused the riches of Egypt and chosen the reproach of Christ, he now had all the more authority to urge the people to place everything that they had at the Lord's disposal.

3. The Passover

(Exodus 12:1-28; Hebrews 11:28)

The Epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes that Moses celebrated the Passover “by faith.” His parent's faith had been necessary to first hide him and then expose him on the river. Then at forty years old, his own faith was manifested through the choice that he made. Again he displayed this faith in “holding fast” in Egypt, despite the king's anger.

Why was faith necessary for the Passover? Pharaoh had nothing to do with it. At this point it is not faith acting in the presence of the enemy or under difficult circumstances, but it is still the same faith. It was not the enemy but God that was to be faced in judgment. During the nine preceding plagues the people had remained spectators, and beginning with the fourth plague had actually been protected in the land of Goshen. But now the people must act — and this in accordance with the Word of the Lord to Moses. Faith was required as to what God had said.

The people were just as guilty as the Egyptians, and even more so because their responsibility was greater. As other portions of Scripture reveal, they had indulged in idolatry in spite of some knowledge of the Lord; and in a considerable measure they had abandoned their God. If the destroying angel must pass through the land and kill all the firstborn, why should he spare the Israelites? After all, God's justice acts without respect of persons.

Only the blood of a spotless victim — a type of One who would come later — was able to shelter the people from the judgment. The Lord reveals this to Moses and Aaron (Ex. 12:1-20), who in turn instruct the elders of Israel. Moses' faith is an inspiring example: “The people bowed their heads and worshiped … and did as the Lord had commanded” (vv. 27, 28).

Abel's sacrifice demonstrates that the blood of atonement was necessary to come near to God. Genesis 22 presents the thought of substitution: Abraham offered a ram as a sacrifice instead of his son. The offerings of Leviticus, through the placing of the offerer's hand on the head of the victim, express the identification of the one approaching with the sacrifice. (In the sacrifice for sin, the offences of the guilty one pass onto the victim, whereas in the burnt-offering the merits of the victim are credited to the worshipper.)

In the Passover, the individual appropriation of the sacrifice is perfectly stressed: “Every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household” (Ex. 12:3). Moses did not offer one lamb for the entire people; each family had to slaughter a victim, the blood of which was to shelter them.

So it is in the gospel. Jesus is “the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (1 John 2:2). The value of His work in the sight of God enables God to offer His forgiveness to the whole world.

Other passages show just as clearly, however, that whereas the value of the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for the whole world, only those who accept it through faith are made beneficiaries of His work. In Romans 3 the righteousness of God is manifested “toward all, and upon all those who believe.” Only those who believe are justified “through faith in His blood.” Likewise John 3:16 teaches that God loved the world, but only those who believe in the Lord Jesus have life eternal. John 1:12 says that those who receive Him are given the right to be called children of God. Romans 10:9 says that “if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” It is a matter of personally and individually accepting and confessing the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

According to the Passover instructions, the blood of the lamb is put on the two outside doorposts and on the lintel of each house. The family gathered inside the house eats the Passover lamb with the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs. The family does not see the blood and assess its value but the Lord does. He declares categorically: “When I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you” (Ex. 12:13). Likewise, the repenting sinner who comes to the Lord Jesus is unable to assess the value of His blood; God alone does that. It is because of this blood He forgives and receives. The one who receives the Word of God as being true finds his certainty in the declarations of God's Word. He cannot explain it, but he knows that “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

THE PASSOVER NIGHT

(Exodus 12:42)

For Israel, the months began with each new moon; they were lunar months. Since the Passover took place on the fourteenth day of the month, the Israelites went out of Egypt on the full moon. In the evening they ate the lamb; their loins were girded; they were ready to leave. “At midnight … the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt … So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead” (Ex. 12:29-30).

One can understand the bewilderment of the Egyptians, each one rushing out of his house and telling the sad news to his neighbor; and then hearing his neighbor reporting the same calamity. With Pharaoh at their head the Egyptians drive Israel out of the land. The people, according to the instructions of the Lord to Moses (Ex. 11:2-3) ask from the Egyptians silver and gold, a well-deserved compensation for all their years of hard work and bondage.

Throughout the night, from various parts of the land of Goshen, the columns get under way “according to their hosts.” Their immediate goal is to reach Rameses and Succoth. Six hundred thousand men on foot with their families, plus a mixed multitude that went up with them — from two to three million souls, beside all the cattle that accompany them.

What a moment for Moses! When he was forty years old, he had wanted to give his brethren “deliverance through his hand” and now the time has arrived. After the tension caused by the successive plagues and the drama of this eventful night, a new life was to begin. The Lord had displayed His power and fulfilled His promise.

No doubt a feeling of deep gratitude was arising in the heart of His servant. Considering the problems which would soon assail him, what responsibility rested upon him! He had to lead this great multitude through the wilderness — a desert which he knew by experience — up to the promised land. The immense task that God had entrusted to him was just beginning.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

1. Describe some of the discouragements and trials Moses faced as he went back to Egypt and talked with his brethren and with Pharaoh. Why did God allow these?

2. How does God deliver Moses and Aaron from their discouragements? What is the best way for us to get deliverance from our discouragements?

3. How would you apply to your own life the four compromises proposed by Pharaoh to Moses?

4. How did the passover differ from all the other plagues upon the land of Egypt? Does the passover have a personal application to your life?

5. Suppose yourself to be a firstborn son of an Israelite on the passover night. Describe in your own words the dramatic events of that night.

Chapter 3

First Steps in the Wilderness — The Shepherd

Psalm 77:20

The last verse of Psalm 77 reads: “You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” Certainly, during the crossing of the Red Sea and through the wilderness Moses assumes this character of a shepherd.

The psalm further emphasizes: “Your way was in the sea, Your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps were not known” (v. 19). Such was the experience of the people. For them, the way of God was incomprehensible. It took them through deep waters — not only those of the Red Sea, but those of the successive tribulations which were intended to test their faith. The psalmist, however, adds: “Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary…” (v. 13). What God intends for His own is indeed constantly before Him and is perfectly made known by His wisdom and love, even when it seems to them to lead them through deep waters.

1. DELIVERANCE AT THE RED SEA

(Read Hebrews 11:29; Exodus 13:17-22; Exodus 14)

From the starting point of Rameses and Succoth the people had reached Etham at the edge of the wilderness. Normally the shortest route would have passed northwards through the land of the Philistines. God, however, was not willing that His people should face war during their first steps in the wilderness. He rather chose to lead them by His own path to Sinai.

But first the pillar of cloud led them to pitch their camp at a place as unsuitable as possible from the standpoint of safety. It hemmed them in between the mountain and the sea, leaving no exit except the way they had just come.

After a few hours, this sole exit was occupied by Pharaoh and his host: “…the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them” (Ex. 14:10).

Will Moses now lose the marvelous deliverance that God had wrought through his hand? He is not worried. Rather he stands fast by faith as seeing Him who is invisible.

The people, however, are not entertaining the same feelings. A great fear fills them and they cry out to the Lord. In their hearts they reproach Moses and rebel (Ps. 106:7). Panic-stricken they exclaim, “it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness!”

This produced the first crisis in the relationship between Moses and Israel. It would be followed by many others. Assured of the deliverance of the Lord, Moses inspires the people with his faith: “The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.”

The enemy, however, does not let people escape easily. Even today when one has placed his trust in the blood of Christ for forgiveness of sin, Satan tries to instill in that person doubt, unbelief, and uncertainty about salvation. His aim is to fill us with affliction and doubts instead of with joy in our Lord's accomplished deliverance.

Only the Word of God can give certainty as to salvation. Redemption is secured through the work of Christ. Since He performed the work that was required, we need not worry. The certainty of our salvation derives, through faith, from the declarations of the Word of God. We are called to behold “the salvation of the LORD” and to stand still, resting fully on the many passages of the word such as Romans 8:1: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” and John 3:36: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life.”

Still another effort of the enemy is to keep those who are saved in the “world system” and under its grip. How many Christians, although washed in the blood of Christ, remain morally wrapped up in the world — in Egypt? They actually comply with Pharaoh's injunction: ”Sacrifice to the Lord your God in the land.”

God, however, wants to have His own truly for Himself. So at night He opened a pathway for Israel through the stormy sea. The people “went through the midst of the sea on the dry ground; and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” Hebrews 11:29 states very precisely: “By faith they passed through the Red Sea.”

In this incident, faith characterized the people as a whole, whereas the earlier accounts in Hebrews 11 emphasize only Moses' faith. It was no trifling matter for them to start walking between those two walls of water which at any moment could cover them. It required trust in the word of the Lord through Moses.

“Toward the morning” the Lord threw the army of the Egyptians into confusion. As dawn broke, the sea resumed its strength, engulfing the enemy in its midst. “Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt … and believed the LORD and His servant Moses.” On the shore of the Red Sea a song of praise arises, sung by every one of the children of Israel. It is the first song in the Bible.

Only the redeemed, conscious of their deliverance, can sing. The psalmist and the prophets will never cease celebrating this memorable event. Indeed, the song of the redeemed which arose from thousands of hearts in Exodus, resounds on up to the book of Revelation. The song exalts the slaughtered Lamb, the One who is the eternal center of praises for all His own.

2. BITTERNESS AT MARAH

(Read Exodus 15:22-26)

Moses was acquainted with the wilderness — its aridity, heat and vastness (Ex. 3:1). What responsibility faced him there! He must lead an entire people with their flocks and herds through that wilderness.

As for the people, their new-found faith is about to be put to the test. The same thing frequently happens in the life of new Christians. After a brief period, God allows trials to arise in order to demonstrate whether our faith is real; and whether we will or will not trust in Him.

One day, two days, three days are spent in the wilderness, and no water is found. Finally arriving at Marah, they “could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter.” The people murmur against Moses and he cries to the Lord. “And the LORD showed him a tree; and when he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet.”

In the types used in the books of Moses, wood usually speaks of the humanity of the Lord Jesus — that perfect humanity in which He always did the will of God, even up to the supreme moment of Gethsemane where He was able to say: “Not as I will, but as You will.”

If trials arise in our lives, the first lesson to be learned is to accept them as coming from God. In the path of faith, we must submit to His will, knowing that He wants what is good for us. We must try to understand the special lesson taught by the difficulties thus encountered. For example, someone has applied for a position and is refused. A young father devotes himself entirely to supporting his family and furnishing his new home, but sickness stops him. A longed-for invitation fails to arrive. Someone is disappointed by the friend on whom he relied. Faith rises above bitterness and disappointment, finding in the perfect sympathy of the Lord Jesus, the strength to accept as from God's hand the trials of the way that are so bitter.

At Marah, the Lord reveals Himself by a new name: “the Lord who heals you.” The waters become sweet. The healing of the Lord restores. Their next stopping point, Elim, illustrates refreshment and necessary food. And after that comes the manna, provided each morning for the needs of the people. What a marvelous experience!

3. THE LESSONS OF REPHIDIM

(Read Exodus 17)

The purpose of this book is to understand what the Word of God says to us about Moses: his personality, his training, and his instruction in the path of God. Therefore, we cannot go into all the details of the wilderness and are omitting, among others, the chapter about the manna.

So far, everything has succeeded for Moses. Insolent and haughty Pharaoh has been overthrown. The Red Sea has been opened. The manna has met the requirements of the people. For the servant of God, however, it was necessary to further learn his helplessness again and again, and he learns this at Rephidim.

THE ROCK (verses 1 to 7)

At Rephidim there was no water. The people disputed with Moses and even spoke of stoning him. They said, “Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” Pharaoh had wanted to hold back the children and the cattle in Egypt, and now the people reproach Moses with having brought them out from there.

Entirely powerless before this unjust contention, Moses cries out to the Lord and says: “What shall I do with this people?” Now he will learn a new lesson — the very presence of God suffices for all the needs of His own. God says, “Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock.” In 1 Corinthians 10:4 we read: “The rock was Christ.” The rock must be struck by the rod of Moses, the rod of authority and judgment, so that the waters — a picture of the Holy Spirit — might flow in abundance (John 7:39).

Since Moses was personally attacked, he must now be personally honored. It is as He continues with dignity before the people in the presence of the elders of Israel that the water comes out of the rock for all to drink (v. 6).

AMALEK (verses 8 to 16)

Another obstacle arises during the march through the wilderness — Amalek. As a type of the flesh in us, Amalek attacks and harasses the people in the wilderness, especially the stragglers and the weak. There is the necessity to fight, but how?

This situation presents another new lesson for Moses. Joshua, a type of the risen Lord and of the Holy Spirit, is placed at the head of the people as they go out to battle. This is an illustration of Galatians 5:17, “The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.”

It is not enough, however, for Joshua to fight. Moses must go up to the top of the hill with the rod of God in his hand and intercede for the people. There he is not precisely a type of Christ, but of those who come near to God through Him to intercede either for themselves or for His redeemed ones.

Moses is aware of his own weakness: “And so it was when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.” But Moses' hands become tired. Is it not the same with us? Even if we have understood that the sole remedy for our infirmity is to persevere in prayer, we often are slack and lack constancy! Aaron and Hur come near and support the hands of Moses. Here Aaron is a type of Christ as Priest, “always living to intercede” for His own.

In his youth Moses wanted to fight: he killed the Egyptian. Now well on in years, he joins his brother and his companion in praying for the people of God.

The presence of God and the prayer of intercession — such were for Moses the great lessons of Rephidim.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

1. Explain why God so quickly led the people to a spot where they were entrapped between the mountains, the Red Sea and the pursuing Egyptian army.

2. How does the pursuing Egyptian army illustrate the efforts of Satan against those who are newly redeemed by the blood of Christ? How should we respond to his efforts?

3. Can you think of an incident in your life similar to the Israelites' experience at Marah where the waters were bitter? How did the Lord make the bitter waters sweet and give healing in the situation?

4. Again and again, the problem facing the Israelites in the desert was lack of water. Why didn't God give them an abundant and visible supply? For example, what lesson did the Lord wish to teach Moses and the people at Rephidim?

5. What do you learn about prayer through Israel's battle with the Amalekites? Try to think of at least two practical ways in which you might improve your prayer life.

Chapter 4

AT SINAI — THE MEDIATOR

(The first year)

In the first month after their departure out of the land of Egypt, the children of Israel come into the wilderness of Sinai (Ex. 19:1). Through Moses, the Lord gives them these remarkable words: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself” (v. 4). The unruly multitude that had gone out of Goshen was about to be formed into a nation (v. 6), complete with laws, worship, a center and a well-ordered army.

The first year of the exodus begins with the Passover and the Red Sea, and continues with God's care in the wilderness: the manna, the water from the rock, and the victory over Amalek. Then at Sinai the people receive the law and the statutes.

In its moral application to us, this first year refers essentially to our individual life: remission of sin, redemption, personal feeding of our souls, and our personal walk with the Lord.

The second year (Ex. 40:1-17) starts with the erection of the tabernacle. It continues with the consecration of the priests, the offerings of the princes, the institution of the rituals, the arrangement of the camp, and the march in the wilderness. In contrast to the first year, it emphasizes the collective life of the people.

So it is with us. As believers we have not been redeemed to live and walk alone, but rather to be found in the company of his brethren. Christ died to “gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.”

Already during the second year the people could have undertaken the conquest of Canaan, had they not lacked faith at Kadesh-barnea after receiving the report of the spies. In this sense, the additional thirty-eight years spent in the wilderness were not necessary at all; but Israel had to learn to know itself and to know God (Deut. 8).

1. RECEIVING THE LAW — THE LAWGIVER

Confronted with the majestic display of God's holiness, the people tremble (Ex. 19:16). Moses himself (as Hebrews 12:21 reminds us) was so fearful of the sight that he said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.” Then God pronounces the ten basic commandments on which the moral law is founded.

The people are frightened and stand afar off. They say to Moses: “You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.” They remain at a distance, but “Moses drew near.”

On another occasion, seventy of the elders of Israel go up with Moses to the mountain, along with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu; but Moses alone comes near to the Lord while the others stand back. As for the people, they must not even touch the mountain, much less go up with them. The sole information given about the vision of God as seen by the elders is that “there was under his feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity” (

Ex. 24:10).

Finally, Moses goes up on the mountain and hears the divine communications. He spends six days on mount Sinai in the company of Joshua. On the seventh day Moses alone enters into the cloud and remains in the presence of God forty days and forty nights. At that time He receives the two tables, the statutes, and the instructions relative to the tabernacle.

On three occasions when Moses relates to the people the words of God, they answer: “All that the Lord has spoken will we do!” (Ex. 19:8; Ex. 24:3, 7). In no way, however, would they be able to keep the law. As Galatians 3:21 says, “if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.” By committing themselves with this rash promise to keep God's commandments, the people revealed that they really knew neither God nor themselves. Someone will ask, “Why then was the law given?” This question is answered by the apostle Paul in Galatians and Romans: “I would not have known sin except through the law.”

A child might easily promise to behave well and always obey his parents. God, however, will allow definite situations in which the child will find himself at fault so that his conscience might be reached. Would there be any real conversion without at least some measure of the conviction of sin? Some realization of one's own ruin? Some impression of the holiness of God?

When young Isaiah entered the temple, he exclaimed: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5). Peter, sensible of the honor done to him, received Jesus into his boat; but after launching out into the deep and witnessing the miraculous “haul of fishes which they had taken” he understood that his passenger in the ship was God Himself. Then he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (Luke 5:8).

Likewise, we must place ourselves before the ten commandments and seriously examine whether we have observed each one of them. It is not enough to have refrained from stealing. The mere wish to steal is a transgression of the tenth commandment! Which young man can say that the lust mentioned in Matthew 5:28 never arose in his heart? Are there many people who have never said “fool” to a brother or friend? (Matt. 5:22).

When suddenly convicted by the Word, one of our young friends stated that he deserved hell since he had treated his brother in this way more than once. What should be said in answer to his confession? Something like: “That was not so serious. Your brother got on your nerves, and you got angry with him?” Certainly not! Every sin is serious according to the Word of God. The Lord Jesus condemns even slight anger at one's brother. Therefore each one of us deserves hell!

Of course, our young friend was trembling at this thought. At such a point, how marvelous it is to present the work of the Lord Jesus. He atoned for our sins, bearing them in His body on the cross. The chastisement that we deserve fell on Him. “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13).

2. THE CRISIS OF THE GOLDEN CALF

(Exodus 32)

In making the golden calf, Aaron and the people did not really want to abandon the Lord. They rather transgressed the second commandment: “You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; You shall not bow down to them nor serve them” (Ex. 20:4-5).

The human spirit always tends to materialize what is spiritual. It must have a visible form, an object that can be at least revered, if not worshiped. This was Aaron's problem. As he saw the golden calf, “he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD” (Ex. 32:5). In their thoughts, Aaron and the people lowered the Lord to the level of the gods of Egypt, saying, “Here is your God.”

Idolatry always brings man down and leads him to disorder (v. 25), orgies and licentiousness (v. 6). Romans one shows this convincingly. Nothing is more serious than to associate the name of the Lord with idolatry.

What will be Moses' attitude in this situation?

(A) On the top of the mountain, the Lord informs Moses of what has taken place (v. 7-10). Putting him to the test, He proposes to consume the people and then make a great nation out of Moses. What an opportunity for him to be carried away by anger, and to accept this divine proposal! After all, the people have murmured so many times against him.

However, he has the interests of his God too much at heart to act in this way. Instead, he immediately beseeches the Lord, setting forth two decisive arguments for sparing Israel: (1) What would the Egyptians say if the people of Israel were annihilated from the face of the earth? They would boast, saying that God is powerless. (2) The Lord had promised positively to the patriarchs that He would multiply their seed and give to them the land of Canaan. What would become of the fulfillment of this solemn promise?

Is it not the same in our intercession for our brethren? On the one hand, we must remember the faithfulness of God, his promises, his righteousness toward Christ ("He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins"). On the other hand, we must think of the testimony which Christians bear before the world: "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life" (1 John 5:16).

(B) When Moses sees the calf and the dancing (v. 19), his anger burns and he shatters the tables of the law. This was righteous anger and not an outburst of carnal feelings. Scarcely had the law been given, and it was already transgressed. He takes the calf, grinds it to powder, scatters it on the water, and makes the children of Israel drink it. They must realize the gravity of their sin.

Likewise, if we have gravely failed, we must acknowledge it and confess it before God; but we must also feel deeply in our souls how serious sin is and how abominable it is to God.

Moses entrusts to the Levites the terrible mission of exterminating those who apparently had plunged more deeply into idolatry. Even their brethren, their neighbors, or their intimate friends must not be spared. Three thousand men thus perish. This stands in contrast to the introduction of grace on the day of Pentecost some 1500 years later. As the gospel is preached on that first day of a new dispensation, three thousand souls are brought to the Lord (Acts 2).

(C) By the next day, the tumult and anger have subsided. Will Moses now say: "Yesterday I became angry, but the evil was not so serious?" On the contrary, he speaks again with deep feeling: "You have sinned a great sin." Having pondered the matter in his innermost heart, he goes up again to the Lord, declaring, "Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin" (v. 30). He does not reveal what means he will use to do this, nor is he even sure that this means will succeed.

Bowed down with grief before the Lord, Moses acknowledges that the people have committed a grave sin. He adds: "Yet now, if You will forgive their sin … " He is not able to finish his sentence for he knows well that God cannot forgive without atonement being made. Hence he expresses what he has secretly conceived in his heart: "If not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written." He thus offers himself as a propitiation for the people. He has not yet learned what the psalmist will declare later: "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Psa. 49:7).

And yet, the Lord forgives. However, He cannot accept that Moses should suffer for the people: "Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot him out of my book." If the Lord seems to bear with sin, it is because He has before Him the future coming of Another One who will offer Himself in sacrifice for sin. Through Christ, He will set forth a mercy-seat, so that He might be just, and the Justifier of the one that has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:24-26). It was possible for God to endure in absolute righteousness "the sins that were previously committed" (that is, those committed during the entire period of the Old Testament) because He had before Him the perfect Victim who would be manifested in His own time.

Thus God will be just and He will also forgive. He will be faithful to His promises (Ex. 33:1) while also maintaining His glory as to the Egyptians. In His "government" however, He will have to chastise His own; He withdraws His presence from their midst (Ex. 33:3).

3. THE TENT OF MEETING — THE INTERCESSOR

(Exodus 33:7-11)

After the sin of the people God departs, saying "I will send My Angel before you" (Ex. 33:2-3). Upon hearing this disturbing word, the people mourn and strip themselves of their ornaments.

What is to be done under these circumstances? The camp had been abandoned to confusion. The presence of God was withdrawn. Moses, however, had already received on the mountain the instructions to build the tabernacle; the habitation of God was to occupy the central place and the tribes were to camp all around it.

Since the people are in utter confusion, Moses realizes that it is no longer possible for God to dwell among them. Will it then be necessary to renounce every manifestation of the divine presence for those who fear the Lord? Moses takes a tent and pitches it for himself outside the Camp, far from the camp, and calls it the tabernacle of meeting. "And it came to pass that every one who sought the Lord went out to the tabernacle of meeting." So it was, whenever Moses went out to the tabernacle, that all the people rose, and each man stood at his tent door and watched Moses until he had gone into the tabernacle" (vv. 7, 8).

Thus there were two categories of persons: those who were seeking the Lord and went out of their tents; and the others who only looked afar off from the entrance of their own tents.

Do we not have a similar instruction in Hebrews 13: "Let us go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach"? Christendom, because of its confusion and errors, resembles in many ways the camp of Israel. Like the godly Israelites who went out to Moses, it is possible for us today to go forth out of the camp; and in recognition of 2 Timothy 2:19-22, to meet simply to the name of the Lord Jesus. We can do this with full confidence in His promise of Matthew 18:20: "Where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there I am in the midst of them." Since everyone does not obey the Lord's commandment, only a "remnant" gathers around Him; but this remnant can fully rely on the promise of His presence.

"And it came to pass, when Moses went out to the tabernacle, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the entrance of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses." The entire people could recognize that the presence of the Lord was manifested there, and no longer in the midst of the camp. In that outside place Moses, the faithful servant, could find a communion which he had never known before. The Lord speaks with him "face to face, as a man speaks with his friend."

Moses then intercedes for the people on the principle of grace, a new principle at this point. Being aware of himself as the object of God's favor, he beseeches the Lord to extend His grace to the entire people. He receives the marvelous answer: "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." This, however, was not enough to satisfy Moses. Since he had found grace in the eyes of the Lord, he intercedes that God might go with the people as well as with himself. Finally the Lord yields to his prayer: "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight" (Ex. 33:17).

The Vision Of Grace

Moses, deeply encouraged by this intimate relationship with his God, fervently prays to see the glory of His face. However, the moment has not yet arrived for the knowledge of the glory of God to shine in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Therefore, the Lord must say to His servant: "You cannot see my face; for man shall not see Me, and live." Although the Lord cannot yet reveal His glory, He declares: "I will make all My goodness pass before you."

Thus placed in the cleft of the rock and alone in the sanctuary of God's presence, Moses receives a new revelation of God whom he has so faithfully followed until now. At the bush, he had learned to know Him as the one who does not change: "I am that I am." In Egypt, God revealed Himself to him as "The Lord, the God of the covenant." At Sinai, he received the law from "the righteous and holy God." In the cleft of the rock, however, he learns to know the very nature of the One who is love: "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy unto thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Ex. 34:6-7).

Later, in the secret of the temple, young Isaiah will learn to know the grace which takes away his iniquity and makes propitiation for his sin. In the vision at Horeb, Elijah will hear the soft and gentle voice which will touch his heart. In the temple at Jerusalem, Paul will see the One who sends him to the nations far off. And alone in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea and flooded with the light of the resurrection morning, Mary of Magdala will fall at the feet of her risen Savior.

One may well understand that after coming down from the mountain, Moses is no longer the same. He now has in his hands the tables of the law. They are not shattered this time, but placed intact into the ark, a type of Christ. He no longer comes chastising the culprits and spreading terror in the camp. The skin of his face shines, reflecting the goodness and grace of which he had caught a glimpse. He had "spoken with Him." Aaron and the people, afraid at first, come near to him and Moses puts a veil on his face. The time had not yet come for the glory of grace to be fully revealed. Even today the veil remains on the hearts of the people of Israel (2 Cor. 3:15).

However, God has shone forth the knowledge of His glory in the face of Christ. All of us who know the Lord Jesus can contemplate with unveiled face this glory of the Lord. We can be transformed according to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).

Have we not noticed the details of this remarkable verse? "We all … are transformed?" It is not now as it was with Moses the privilege of one particular man or the prerogative of some eminent servant. This marvelous vision is there for all. There is no longer any veil …but one must have the time and a heart to contemplate it.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

1. Explain how Israel's first year in the wilderness illustrates the individual Christian life; and how their second year illustrates the collective Christian life.

2. Pick out one feature from the giving of the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai which especially impresses you. Tell why it impresses you.

3. What was God's purpose in giving the ten commandments?

4. How does the Golden Calf incident illustrate the meaning and results of idolatry? Is it possible for a true believer to be guilty of idolatry? Explain your answer.

5. Describe Moses' reaction to the Golden Calf incident. Note his intercession, his righteous indignation, his decisive judgment on the people, his self-sacrificing concern for them. What is your response when other Christians sin and publicly dishonor the Name of the Lord?

6. What practical lessons do you learn from Moses' pitching the tent of meeting outside the camp? What were the two opposite responses of the people to his action?

7. Review the various ways in which God revealed Himself to Moses: at the burning bush, in Egypt, at Sinai, and in the cleft of the rock. How did these revelations change Moses? What revelations have we had from God's Word that have changed our lives?

Chapter 5

FROM SINAI TO KADESH

(The Second year)

On the first day of the first month of the second year after the children of Israel had left Egypt, the tabernacle was set up (Ex. 40:2). Different events occurred one after the other: the consecration of the priests, the offering of the princes, the celebration of the Passover. On the first day of the second month Moses proceeds to number the men “that go forth to military service” (Num. 1:3).

Finally, on the twentieth day of the second month of this second year, the cloud over the tabernacle begins to move. The children of Israel leave the wilderness of Sinai, for the first time following the commandment of the Lord about journeying. Six tribes preceded the ark and the sanctuary, and six tribes formed the rear-guard.

1. EYES IN THE WILDERNESS

(Numbers 10:29-36)

Fundamentally the cloud directed the movements of the people (Num. 9:15-23). When the children of Israel were to strike camp, the priests blew the trumpets (Num. 10:1-8). The Lord had provided everything, and His presence accompanied Israel.

Why does Moses wish for some human help in the person of his brother-in-law, Hobab? Being a Midianite, he would, of course, be well acquainted with the wilderness and the places where to encamp. It can further be said that Moses seemed to have his welfare in mind, insisting on letting him share in “whatever good the Lord will do to us.”

Actually, Hobab will not precede the people and find the place to encamp. The ark itself, proceeding out of its normal place in the midst of the tribes, will go before them “in the three days' journey” to search out a resting place for them! The movement of the cloud ratifies that they are to move, thus manifesting the divine presence. This is God's gracious answer to the persevering intercession of Moses, despite the lack of confidence in God which he displayed in asking for Hobab's assistance.

Is it not the same with us? In John 10 the Good Shepherd puts forth His own sheep and ”he goes before them.” The sheep follow Him, because they know His voice. This precious experience of knowing that “He goes before” can be made at any age.

If you are facing an unknown stage in your life: a new period of studies, a sojourn abroad, another course of professional training, remember that “He goes before.” Trust Him and rely on Him. The ark leaves three days in advance so there is no need to hurry. It is enough to quietly follow the way He opens. “Whoever believes will not act hastily” (Isa. 28:16). May we avail ourselves of the promise made to the psalmist: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye” (Ps. 32:8). We get this instruction from the word of God, applied in practical fellowship with the Lord.

2. THE BURDEN OF ALL THIS PEOPLE

Numbers 11:10-17; 24-29)

Numbers is the wilderness book; it is also the book of complaints. How many times the Israelites complain, weep and wail! In our chapter “the people complained … the people cried out to Moses … the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again … Moses heard the people weeping … every one at the door of his tent.”

One can understand how these constant complaints (which brought on Israel the chastisement of the Lord) could overtax the patience of their leader. So Moses pours out his complaint before God: “Why? … Why? … they weep all over me … I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me.”

Exodus 18 tells how Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, advised him to obtain some help in administering justice by providing able men: chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. His counsel was that these men judge the people at all times and bring only the great matters to their chief. On the one hand, Moses would “stand before God for the people, so that (he might) bring the difficulties to God.” And on the other hand he would teach them the statutes and the laws. Moses followed this advice, taking it as from God (Ex. 18:23). In Deuteronomy 1:9-18 he recalls the incident without adding any negative comment. A counterpart to this might be found in 1 Corinthians 6:4.

However, in Numbers 11 it was not a matter of dispensing justice or hearing problems. It was rather Moses' feeling of being overwhelmed with the burden of his responsibilities. Certainly God was able to give Moses the means necessary to carry out his charge, and He had instructed him to lead Israel.

Today, in the light of the New Testament, one must acknowledge that it is not God's intention for His people that only one man assume responsibility for the entire service of the local assembly. The decision of Acts 15 was not reached by one apostle, however prominent, but by the apostles and the elders, with the concurrence of the whole assembly (v. 22). According to passages such as Philippians 4:3 and Colossians 4:11, Paul had several “fellow laborers” whom he sent here and there, or who accompanied him on his journeys.

Passages such as 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4 show that each member, every joint, has his/her particular service in the body of Christ; and that all work together for the advantage of the entire body. The Lord alone imparts through the Spirit various gifts, not only the fundamental ones of shepherd, evangelist or prophet, but also every kind of work and function to be performed in the body. All do not have the same qualification, but all the members must equally care for one another: “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

Hence, even if it was not proper for Moses to complain to God in this way, we can think that God answered him in grace by giving the seventy elders to assist him in carrying the burden of the people. And Moses did not take it in the wrong way. When Joshua wanted to prevent Eldad and Medad from prophesying in the camp, Moses replies: “Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!” (Num. 11:29). Moses did not at all wish to be the sole channel of the Spirit of God.

First Corinthians 12:21 reminds us that “the eye cannot say to the hand, `I have no need of you'; nor again the head to the feet, `I have no need of you.' Each of us has received from the Lord a service to perform, and we cannot abandon it to somebody else. Neither should we despise or try to imitate the function which God might have entrusted to others. All are called in dependence on the Lord, to be “joined in the work and laboring” (1 Cor. 16:16 JND) in a spirit of submission and mutual esteem (Phil. 2:4; Rom. 12:3). This is not collaboration as understood in a human organization. Rather, it is cooperation in a living organism, each member operating at the place assigned by the Master (Eph. 4:16); and particularly today in the scope of 2 Tim. 2:19-26.

3. BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT AT KADESH

(Deuteronomy 1:19-46; Numbers 13 and Numbers 14)

“It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea” (Deut. 1:2). A few days would suffice to reach the frontier of Canaan. Yet, more than thirty eight years after the departure from Sinai we meet the people at Kadesh-barnea again (Num. 20:1). So today, the spiritual progress of a soul can be rapid, but often many years are wasted through lack of faith, vigilance, and love for the Lord.

This is just what happened with the people of Israel. As the starting point for the conquest, Kadesh-Barnea was situated at the frontier of Canaan. Moses mentions it in Deuteronomy one. After the “great and terrible wilderness” which they had crossed, the Israelites had only to move forward fearlessly and take possession of Palestine. As Moses said, “You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us. Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged” (Deut. 1:20-21). In these words one can sense all the relief felt by Moses. He had brought the people through the different stages of the wilderness up to the frontier of Canaan. Just a few more efforts, and through God's kindness he would soon be able to lay down his heavy burden and enjoy rest.

Why then was the course of events different?

(A) The people conceived the blameable wish to send spies to examine the land. Was it not enough that God had declared to them that it was a country flowing with milk and honey, and that He would accompany them in their conquest of it? No, they want men to examine the land on their behalf and bring them news about it. Numbers 13 describes how the Lord accedes to their request and tells Moses to send out spies. In this way, He tries the people to see whether they will trust Him or not.

(B) The people wrongly accepted the majority report of the spies. True, these men reported that Canaan was as God had promised: “The land … truly flows with milk and honey” (Num. 13:27). However, they quickly add that the people dwelling in the land are strong; the cities are walled and very great. They discredit the land and completely discourage the children of Israel from conquering it.

Caleb protests boldly: “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.” The following day. Joshua joins him, insisting that Israel must not “fear the people of the land, for … the LORD is with us” (Num. 14:9).

Will Israel listen to the disheartening declarations of the ten, or to the two men of faith who, trusting the Lord, assure them of the victory?

How is it with us? Are we among those who recommend “the land” or those who hold back souls from following the Lord? Are not criticisms, detractions, depreciation of the ministry of the Word, negligence in attending the meetings, and so many other insinuation elements which discourage our brethren from possessing the spiritual blessings given by God? Let us, like Joshua and Caleb, rely on God to take possession of what He has given us, and incite others to do the same.

(C) The people listen to the ten spies. During the entire night they lift up their voice, crying and weeping. In the morning they reject Moses and prepare to appoint a captain who will lead them back to Egypt. They further declare that Joshua and Caleb should be stoned.

What a terrible hour for Moses! It may have been the darkest hour in his life. How many times had he not interceded for this people? He had even offered himself for them as a propitiation for their sin, if this had been possible. With faithfulness and constancy he had led them up to the frontier of the promised land. Now they reject him and want to return to Egypt. He falls on his face before the entire assembly, painfully aware that the promised rest is about to be forfeited.

The Lord puts his servant to the test by again proposing that He destroy the people and make of Moses a nation greater and mightier than they. Moses, however, would not accept to enter the land alone, sacrificing his brethren and the glory of God (v. 16). He beseeches the Lord to forgive once more "according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people from Egypt even until now" (v. 19). "Then the LORD said: I have pardoned, according to your word."

Moses, however, will have to submit to the discipline that will strike Israel on account of their unbelief. The entire generation that came out of Egypt will perish in the wilderness. What a faithful servant is Moses! He accepts rather to be thirty-eight years in affliction along with the people of God than to witness their destruction and himself be honored. He bows down, submitting to the suffering which he has not deserved. He will see the bodies of his companions fall one after another and die in the arid solitude. As he sees it at this time, only four will survive the thirty-eight more years in the wilderness and enter the promised land: himself, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb.

Several of the people seem to reconsider: "And they rose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, `Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised, for we have sinned!'" (Num. 14:40). However, they are persisting in their own strength. Moses rather submits to the divine discipline and remains in the camp. Then, as he expresses with deep melancholy in Deuteronomy 2:1, " … we turned and journeyed into the wilderness of the Way of the Red Sea, as the LORD spoke to me."

Making all due allowance, do we not at times face the same experience? Must we not also humble ourselves and bow under the hand of God who disciplines His people, even if personally we have had no direct part in the fault that brings divine chastisement upon us?

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

1. Describe the camp of Israel as they left the wilderness of Sinai. In what ways do you see God's concern for them, His desire to be among them and lead them?

2. How is the functioning of various members in the body of Christ illustrated by the distribution of Moses' responsibility among seventy of the elders of Israel? What is your place and function in the body of Christ?

3. What factors prevented the Israelites from going in to possess the promised land when they first arrived at the frontier town of Kadesh- Barnea? What was the result of their failure to possess the land at that time?

4. What are some of the ways in which we hinder one another from possessing our land of spiritual blessings in Christ?

5. How does Moses' great heart for God and for the people of God shine forth once again at Kadesh-barnea?

Chapter 6

THIRTY-EIGHT MORE YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS

In Deuteronomy 2:14-15 we read: "And the time we took to come from Kadesh-Barnea … was thirty-eight years, until all the generation of the men of war was consumed from the midst of the camp." A choice had been made at Kadesh by these men; they did not have the faith to go up and conquer the land of Canaan, as Caleb and Joshua had urged them to do. Frightened by the enemy, they had renounced God's desire for them to possess it.

Regarding salvation or the daily walk, there are decisive days in life when we too are confronted by a crossroads. Will we really decide for the Lord, adhering to Him and giving Him the first place? Or do we still want to enjoy the things of this world a little longer? The broad road will lead us far away from fellowship with the Lord. For the Israelites there was no return, no recovery. Under the government of God, the face of the wilderness was strewn with their graves.

We will not take time to consider the various incidents recorded in the Word which occurred during these long years. However, three of them may retain our attention as marking more particularly the character of Moses. These are: the criticism by Miriam, the rebellion of Korah, and the tension at Meribah.

1. MEEKNESS AND HUMILITY

(A) In The Face Of Miriam's Criticism

(Numbers 12)*

Miriam, the older sister of Moses, had come out with him from Egypt. She had led the choirs of the women in the song of triumph after the Crossing of the Red Sea, and had no doubt acquired an important position within the family and among the people because of her age (Micah 6:4).

Now however, Zipporah** (who had left Moses for a time) reappears (Ex. 18:2). Now that Moses has a wife again, Miriam can no longer have the same place as before. As easily happens under such circumstances, Miriam starts to criticize her brother, speaking against him and belittling him. She wins Aaron over, and together they ask insinuatingly: "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" (Num. 12:2).

How many times, even among us, do envy and jealousy cause criticism and slander? 1 Peter 2:1 teaches us that we must lay aside all envyings and jealousy if we want to be fed by the pure milk of the Word; if we want to come near the Lord and worship Him. The account in Numbers 12 emphasizes the seriousness of these faults.

Furthermore, Miriam and Aaron, blinded by their self-importance, refuse to acknowledge the place given by God to Moses. "And the Lord heard it" (Num. 12:2). Someone may think that he has whispered a critical word only in the ear of a brother or sister, advising him or her not to tell it to anybody else. Let us remember that the Lord has heard it and will hold us accountable.

Moses probably knew the criticisms that Miriam was spreading against him. However, as the Word of God says, he was very meek, "more than all men who were on the face of earth." Humbly he kept silent, just as his Master would do in a future day. When we become the objects of criticism or even slander, should we not also leave it to God? He will bring everything to light at the right moment, and will not allow any bad effect beyond what He deems advisable for his servants.

"Suddenly" the Lord intervenes, calling Moses, Aaron and Miriam to the tent of meeting. Perhaps Aaron and Miriam imagine that what had just happened with the seventy elders will now take place with them. That is, the Lord will take of the Spirit which is on their younger brother and place it on them. If this is what they think, their eyes will soon be opened. The Lord summons Miriam and Aaron to appear alone before Him. Undertaking Moses' defence, He says: "Why … were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?"

We may well underline this verse in our Bibles so that we might take care not to do the same. Criticisms against the servants of God, against their ministry, and against their behavior are so easily expressed!

"So the anger of the LORD was aroused against them, and He departed. And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow." She must suffer the consequences of her failure. Moses intercedes for her, a fresh proof of his love and humility; but the entire people will know the chastisement that has struck the prophetess who had not been afraid to criticize her brother. During seven days she is to be excluded from the camp; and Israel cannot journey until Miriam is healed and received back into the camp. Regretting a fault is not enough. We must feel deeply within ourselves its gravity in the eyes of God, if not in those of men.

Let us emphasize the attitude of Moses who prays and intercedes for his sister, just as Job did for his friends, and as John invites us to do if we see a brother sinning. Matthew 18 teaches us to go and see such a brother and try to win him. If this move although made in the humble spirit of footwashing as described in John 13 — remains fruitless, two or three brothers must be taken along in order to try to recover the guilty one. It is only after the second visit has failed that one must tell it to the assembly, and then only if the case is sufficiently serious. Evil must in no way be spread abroad. Let us not forget how much Miriam suffered for it.

(B) In The Face of Korah's Rebellion

Numbers 16 relates the most serious difficulty faced by Moses during the forty years in the wilderness. Korah, a Levite of the family of the Kohathites, becomes puffed up. Rallying two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly to himself, he intends to seize religious power. He boldly asks, "Why is the priesthood reserved for the family of Aaron? Why do the Levites not have access to it? Since the entire assembly of Israel — all of them are holy and the Lord is in the midst of them, why do Moses and Aaron lift themselves up above the congregation of the Lord?"

It is not only in our days that an alleged zeal for the holiness of God's assembly is used as a pretext to put oneself forward and to gain influence!

Dathan, Abiram and On of the tribe of Reuben also attack, so to say, the civil authority of Moses, saying, "Is it a small thing that you … should keep acting like a prince over us?" (v. 13).

The double rebellion grows to the point of involving the whole assembly (v. 19). What will Moses do? As at so many other times, he falls on his face (whereas Korah exalts himself) and leaves the decision to God, saying, "Tomorrow morning the LORD will show … whom He chooses" (v.5). On the one hand Moses relies on the decision of God to confirm the position which He has given to each one; on the other hand he waits until "to-morrow." He does not want to act hastily in spite of the gravity of the situation. He would rather allow Korah and those with him enough time to repent.

The ingratitude and rebellion experienced by Moses might have caused him to go away and leave the people to their fate. He stays however, aware of the responsibility involved in his God-given position. He keeps his position of authority without losing his spirit of grace and humility.

Is this not the first lesson that we must learn from this chapter, that is, to acknowledge the position imparted by God to each one of his people? In the body of Christ the members do not all have the same function. God has placed each one in the body as it has pleased Him. None can say to the others: "We do not need you." Members who seem less important cannot think that they therefore do not belong to the body.

The Levites, as Moses emphasized, occupied a privileged position. They could come near to God in performing the service of the tabernacle (v. 9). Why then should they also want to assume the priesthood for themselves? If God has entrusted it to the family of Aaron, should they not acknowledge this special position? And if God has invested Moses with authority, must not His decisions be obeyed with all submission?

Today it is not quite the same since all believers are priests. However, The Word of God does mark out some as elders and some as leaders to be obeyed. Those who labour in the Word must be highly esteemed in love. It is important for us to first discern the place of personal service which the Lord has entrusted to each of us. Then in dependence on Him, seek through His grace to faithfully fulfill that place without trying to encroach on the ground entrusted by the Lord to others.

Faced with the insolent attitude of Dathan and Abiram, Moses once more places himself in the hands of the Lord (v. 15). The day after, Korah gathers his two hundred fifty men. As they all offer incense together at the entrance of the tent of meeting, thus acting as priests, the Lord again threatens to destroy the entire people (v. 21). Moses, however, intercedes for them, and the Lord spares them on condition that they depart from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Because the case is so serious, God cannot show mercy. A simple exclusion from the assembly is no longer possible for these men. One must depart from them and leave them to their fate.

These men learn nothing from the situation. On the contrary, they stand in the entrance of their tents with their wives, their sons and their little ones, defying the entire assembly. Suddenly, the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up! Fire from the Lord also consumes the two hundred and fifty men who offered the incense. Thus the entire people must learn that only the intercession of Moses — a type of Christ — was able to keep them from perdition; They also must know that God's judgment does not spare the guilty ones who do not repent.

As with the incident of the golden calf, order is not yet restored by the following day. The whole assembly again murmurs against Moses and Aaron, saying that they have killed the people of the Lord. A plague breaks out and would have destroyed them all, had not Aaron taken a censer upon Moses' instruction, and stood between the dead and the living. Thus, the plague is stayed. The incense speaks of an offering, the sweet odor of which would ascend before God. It is a perfect figure of the Victim who alone can save from eternal death those who trust in Him.

This time 14,700 people die. This shows how serious it is to continue to rebel after God's judgment has been clearly declared.

God, however, wanted to confirm openly the priesthood of Aaron. Hence, He gives a sign to clearly designate the one whom He has chosen. It is not a sign of death like the fire which consumed the two hundred fifty men, but a sign of life. The rod of Aaron, placed in the sanctuary together with the rods of the princes of the twelve tribes, alone buds forth, bearing flowers and fruit. Thus, Aaron is a type of that other Priest, " … Who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life" (

Heb. 7:16).

2. TENSION AT MERIBAH

(Numbers 20:1-13)

It is now the fortieth year in the wilderness. Since the incident of the spies in the second year, the people have been roaming about and have finally gathered again at Kadesh.

At this time, Miriam dies and is buried.

Once more there is no water. How will the new generation, raised in the wilderness, react? They know the law and the statutes, they have celebrated the Passover, and the tabernacle is dwelling in their midst. One may understand the murmurings of those brought up in Egypt, but the younger generation had heard the teaching of Moses. They were the object of his care. They saw the glory of the Lord so many times in the wilderness. Will they not behave better than their fathers?

Not at all. The human heart remains the same and again murmurings, reproaches, and questions are raised, this time from the new generation. Moses and Aaron fall upon their faces, not before the congregation as on other occasions, but "at the entrance of the tent of meeting" (Num. 20:6 JND). The glory of the Lord appears to them, this time not to consume the people but to use grace. Such grace would be shown on the basis of the priesthood, confirmed through the life manifested in the rod of Aaron.

The Lord gives Moses precise instructions: he must take " … the rod from before the LORD" (Num. 20:9) — the rod that had budded forth. He must gather the assembly together and speak before them to the rock. Moses takes the rod as the Lord had commanded him. The two brothers gather the congregation before the rock.

It is a moment of tension, irritation, and indignation for Moses whose career will be broken down through his ill-considered action on this occasion. He says to them: "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock? Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod."

Had Moses' faith decreased? Had he become somewhat tired of the prolonged ingratitude of the people? Whatever the case might be, he lacks the faith that would enable him to simply speak to the rock. He wants to use authority in striking it with his rod. He thus disobeys the Lord's precise order to only speak to the rock while holding in his hand the rod of grace connected with the priesthood.

Grace alone was able to introduce the people into the land. Neither authority nor the rod of judgment could do so. The whole incident is a picture of Christ who would be offered only once. Even if Moses was unable to understand the entire import of his gesture, it still was a serious matter to strike the rock a second time.

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land" (v. 12). In our eyes, the divine sentence seems to be out of proportion to their fault. However, the Lord holds more responsible those who have received much, especially his servants (Luke 12:48).

Several times Moses beseeches God to revoke his sentence, but the divine decision remains inexorable (Deut. 3:25-26). The old servant of God recovers communion and intimacy with the Lord, but under the divine government, the consequences remain: "You shall not go over this Jordan." A similar thing occurred with regard to David and Bathsheba's child.

3. ALONE AT PISGAH

(Deuteronomy 34)

A short time after the contention at Meribah, Aaron, along with Moses and Eleazar, must go up on mount Hor. There Moses strips his brother of his priestly garments and puts them upon Eleazar, his nephew. "Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain" (Num. 20:28).

At the time of the golden calf, Aaron had been spared. When the fire of the Lord destroyed Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire, Aaron had kept silent, aware that the fault of his sons was not as grave as his own had been. Once more he is spared. Now at the end of his life he must die, stripped of the garments that marked the high position to which he had been called. His faith, like that of his brother, had been defective at the critical moment.

For a few more months Moses will remain alone at the head of the people. His last year is quite occupied. The entire book of Deuteronomy is filled with his memories. As legislator, he briefly restates the ordinances, gives new instructions for the land, and makes his last recommendations to the people. In the presence of all the people he invests Joshua with the authority needed to assume the succession. He gives expression to the song which will remind Israel of the warnings of the Lord. Before dying he blesses the tribes one after the other, thus showing that he is aware of the future ruin of the people as well as God's resources for them.

Before leaving those whom he has served and led so faithfully, he pronounces these last words: "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:27). In his prayer preserved in Psalm 90, he can say: "LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations." Had not this communion, this intimacy with God, marked his career on earth from the burning bush to the plains of Moab? Alluding to such vital fellowship, the Lord Jesus will later say: "Abide in me, and I in you" (John 15).

The God whom the fathers had known, the God who had revealed Himself to Moses, was always the same. His eternal arms had carried him as He carried his people through all these years.

The last day arrives. Moses leaves the plains of Moab where the tents of the people were pitched, and slowly goes up to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah. His work is completed. He has led this nation through so many difficulties and obstacles up to the frontier of the land. He has also communicated to them the thoughts of God. Now his task is finished, although not in the way he would really have liked, since he cannot introduce Israel into the land. Unlike Aaron, he does not have a brother and a son near him to assist him in his last moments. Even his faithful Joshua who had accompanied him at Sinai has remained in the plain.

A greater One, however, comes near to him and lets him experience His presence and intimacy: "This is the land of which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, `I will give it to your descendants.' I have caused you to see it with your eyes.'" Abraham of old had walked "in the land through its length and its width," knowing that God would give it to his descendants (Gen. 13:17). The men of faith of Hebrews 11 saw from afar the promised things, the heavenly land, and they embraced them. John at Patmos, aware of the ruin of the assembly (Rev. 2-3), saw the heavenly city, the Lamb's wife (Rev. 21).

At the thorn-bush, Moses had been alone with God on holy ground. There the I AM THAT I AM revealed Himself and constrained His servant to accept the mission being entrusted to him. At Sinai as lawgiver, he had been alone with the Lord on two occasions of forty days each. Then in the cleft of the rock, he had learned to know God's thoughts of grace.

How many times this leader, tired of the ingratitude of the people, had entered the most holy place to listen in the silence of the sanctuary to the voice speaking to him from off the mercy-seat? (Num. 7:89). "And he spoke to Him." Now on barren Pisgah at this supreme moment of Moses' life, His faithful and well known Friend is there near His servant.

After contemplating the good land which God will give to His people, Moses, alone, falls asleep. The Lord Himself buries him in the valley and no man knows his sepulchre to this day. God takes care of the body of His servant, just as later He will make sure that the body of His Son is given the right burial. The Epistle of Jude records a dispute between Michael and Satan about the body of Moses. God watches, lest the enemy might make of it an object of veneration and idolatry as he did with the brass serpent.

One day Moses did enter the promised land. On the mount of transfiguration, he saw in glorious humanity, the Face that had remained hidden at Sinai (Luke 9:28-31). The purpose of this meeting was not to speak of the past and of all that had been involved in the journey through the wilderness. Neither was it to consider the remote future when the glory of the Son of God would shine in His kingdom. Rather, it was to speak of His death which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

In the Passover lamb and in the Levitical sacrifices, Moses had presented the type. Now the reality was there: Jesus was to be presented as the propitiation "that He [God] might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

The marvelous vision disappears; the cloud takes away Moses and Elijah until the day of resurrection; the disciples no longer see anyone but "Jesus alone with them."

Moses — man of God, man of faith, deliverer, leader, shepherd, lawgiver, mediator, intercessor, prophet, and so frequently a type of Christ. This great figure of Moses remains before us unique and lonely so that considering the outcome of his conduct, we might imitate his faith (Heb. 13:7).

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

1. Describe the unhappy situation in which Miriam and Aaron begin complaining against Moses because of his wife. How does this illustrate the strife and murmurings which can arise in an assembly?

2. What personal lessons do you learn from Moses' response (or lack of response) to the complaints against him?

3. Consider the rebellion of Korah and his allies against Moses and Aaron: their complaints, their presumption and God's judgment upon them. Why do you suppose the congregation generally sided with these rebels after all Moses had done for them? What can you learn from Moses about the right attitude towards those who show cruel and unjust ingratitude towards us?

4. Explain the difference between priesthood then and now. Considering this vast difference, what are the lessons we can yet learn from this rebellion against God's established priesthood?

5. Describe the incident at Meribah where Moses hit the rock. Considering the forty long years in which Moses had borne with this disobedient and rebellious people, we might excuse him for acting in anger and self-will, but how did God view it? Yet, what do the further references to Moses in the Bible reveal as to what God wants us to remember about His beloved servant? (Luke 9:28-31; Acts 7; Heb. 3:1-5; Heb. 11:23-29; etc.).

6. Walk with Moses up to Pisgah and meditate there upon his last moments, alone with God. Such times with God had been the secret of his blessed and fruitful career, and his refuge in frequent troubles. How much do you know of time spent alone with God? Consider your daily schedule in the light of this vital necessity.