

GOD'S PROMISES COME TRUE

INCLUDING
COLORING
PAGES



A DAWN PUBLICATION

GOD'S PROMISES COME TRUE

Introduction

Over the years, this book has introduced many children to the stories of the Bible.

Decades after it was first published in the 1930's, it has now been produced in a new format.

Coloring pages have been introduced, which adds a new dimension of attraction for the young reader.

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DAWN BIBLE STUDENTS ASSOCIATION



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DAWN BIBLE STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

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Preface

The BIBLE is God's revelation of His plan for the redemption and recovery from death of the human race, which lost life because of sin. It has been provided by the Creator primarily as a guide for his own people. It has also been used by God as a witness to the world of mankind in general, and in this respect its influence has been a powerful one for good, wherever and to whatever extent its standard of righteousness has been accepted and obeyed.

There is no better time to begin learning and practicing what the Bible teaches than early youth, yet the Bible is not written in such a simple, understandable manner that a child can easily comprehend much of its message. To simplify the stories and teachings of the Bible so that children can understand them is the objective sought in "God's Promises Come True."

The publishers trust, moreover, that this book will prove to be more than merely another book of Bible stories for children. It does contain most of the main stories of the Bible, beginning with the time before man was created, and ending with the Apostle John's vision on the Isle of Patmos. But these stories are in the Bible for a purpose. In them is interwoven the larger and much more important story of God's plan of redemption and restoration of a lost race, and we have tried to follow the theme of this larger story in relating the incidental narratives of the Scriptures.

This explains the reason for the title which has been chosen for the book, "God's Promises Come True." It is in these promises that God reveals his plan; and the real value of the Bible for children, as well as for all, is in the understanding of this plan, and in the assurances that it will be successfully consummated. In these days of distress and fear, when the best that human wisdom can do is to devise instruments of destruction which threaten to annihilate the human race, what could be more reassuring for children than to learn that God has an unfailing and loving plan for the security and blessing of all mankind?

One of the features of the book is the story of the Bible itself—Part I concerning the Old Testament, and Part II dealing with the New Testament. Necessarily these two stories concerning the Bible are brief. In them we have endeavored not to weary young minds with too much history, nor with great detail

concerning the contents of the many books which comprise the Bible. But we believe that what has been said will help children to grasp the general content of the Scriptures, and that this will in later years be a step toward a more detailed study of the sacred Word.

Christian parents do not need to be reminded of the privilege of instructing their children concerning the Word of God. "God's Promises Come True" is not intended to supplant this privilege and responsibility of parents. We trust, rather, that it will be a useful tool in helping children to know and love the Bible and its divine Author more than ever before.

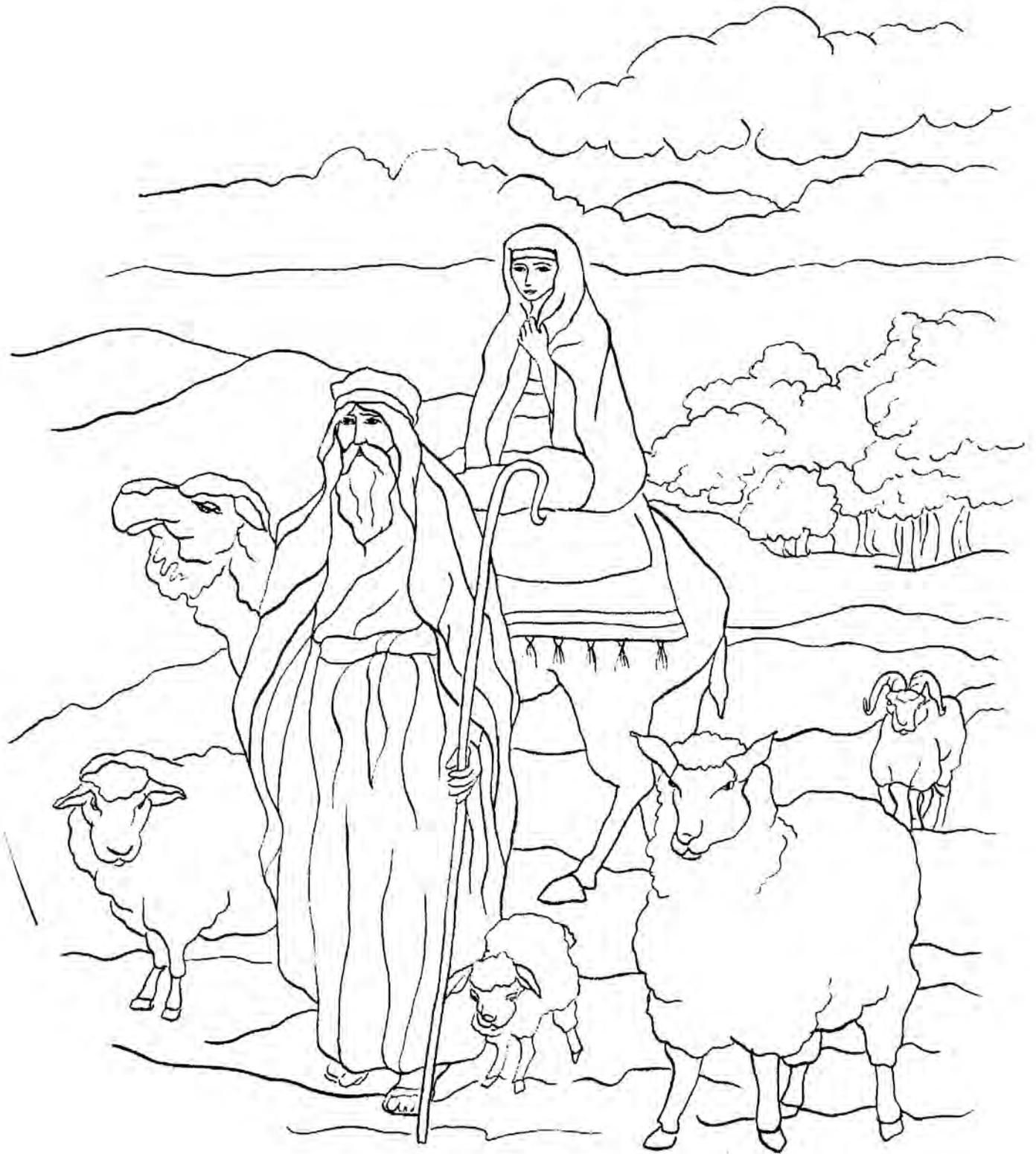
The preparation and publishing of "God's Promises Come True" has been a joy to all who have had a part in it. It has been a cooperative effort in which many hands and hearts have had a share. And with all the effort there has been the prayer that God may bless it to his glory. It is with this prayer that we send it forth, and commend it to all who in every place may wish to use it in the further instruction of their own children or the children of others.

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Tammy Kuenzli

Abraham and Sarah on their journey to Canaan



Tammy Kuenzli

Miriam checks on baby Moses in the bulrushes

Chapter One

The Beginning

God's promises! How wonderful! We know from our Bibles that when God promises something, we can rely on him to keep his word. Not one word has failed of all his excellent promises.

Everything we know about had a beginning — everything, that is, except God. This earth we live on was not always here. The trees, grasses and flowers, as well as the lakes and rivers and even the moon and the stars all had a beginning. There was a time long ago when there was nothing at all except our great God, the Heavenly Father. He was all alone in the universe and had no one to talk to.

The very first thing God made was the Logos, which means, Word. He was an awesome being like God who could love and help God and be his companion. The Logos was a “god,” or a “great one,” who later became Jesus Christ of the New Testament.

God loved his son very much and shared his power with him. Together they made everything in the universe. We can look up into the sky on a clear night and see many beautiful stars and planets. They are so far away that they look like tiny lights. But if we look at them through a telescope we can see they are really huge heavenly bodies traveling through space. Most of them are much larger than our earth. The Logos created all of them with the power God gave him.

The Heavenly Father furnished all the instructions and everything else his son, the Logos, needed to do this work. That is why He is called the Logos, or Word —because He carried out the Word of God. God was the architect and the Logos the master workman. There is no scripture that says the Logos was coequal with(the same as) God. Jesus always put God first and said that his Father in heaven was greater than himself.

Another name for Jesus in his pre-human life was Michael. He was also called an archangel, which means he was the chief angel, or most important one.

The Heavenly Father was without a beginning and will never have an end to his life. He is from everlasting to everlasting. He is a spirit being of the highest order, the divine nature. The angels are also spirit beings, but they are not divine, which means they are mortal and able to die. God has been and always will be immortal, meaning he cannot die. This can be very hard for us to understand because everything we know about has a beginning and an end.

One of the angels was named Lucifer. He was very handsome and was called “Son of the Morning.” At first he sang with the other angels over the wonderful works of God and the Logos. But Lucifer became proud and jealous and turned against God. His name was changed to Satan, which means “opposer.” He is also called the devil, and he has caused a tremendous amount of trouble here on earth..

After the angels and all the stars, sun, moon, and planets, were created, the Logos

began the work of making things here on earth. So much was made for our enjoyment! Mountains, rivers, trees, and flowers of all colors and perfumes were created. He gave us fruits, nuts, and vegetables, and so many other things in such variety. And there are the fish, birds, and all the animals — so many different kinds!

Then he made the most wonderful creation for the earth — the first human beings, Adam and Eve. They were created perfectly. They had the delicious foods in the Garden of Eden and were able to enjoy the beautiful plants and animals every day. Adam and Eve were told by God to have many children, grandchildren, and so on, and the earth has become populated with human beings.

Chapter Two

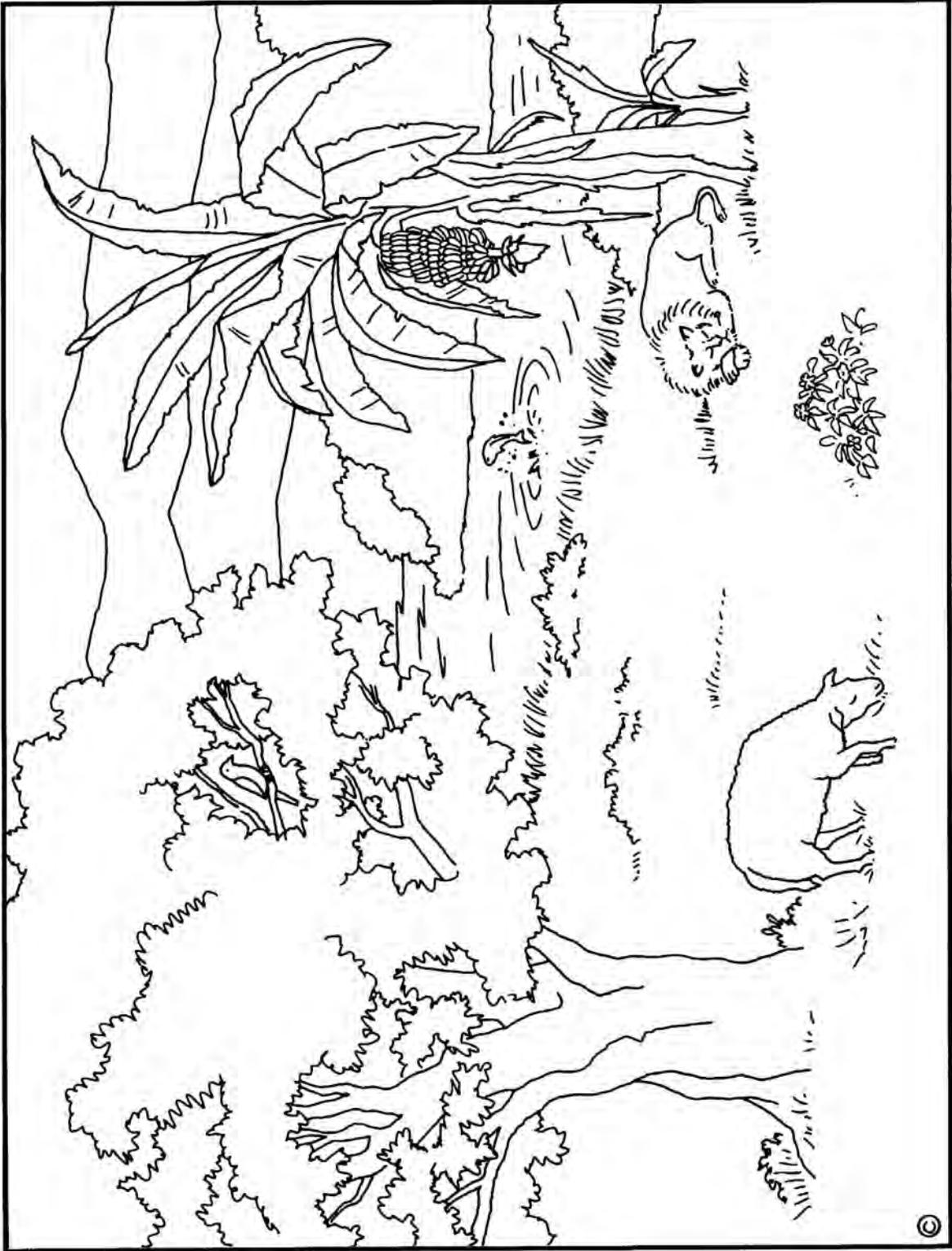
At Home in a Garden

The LORD God formed man out of the dust of the ground; then he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul. Man began to breathe and his brain and body started to work as he came to life. God had planted a garden in Eden and this became Adam's home. He was to take care of this perfect garden and enjoy it forever.

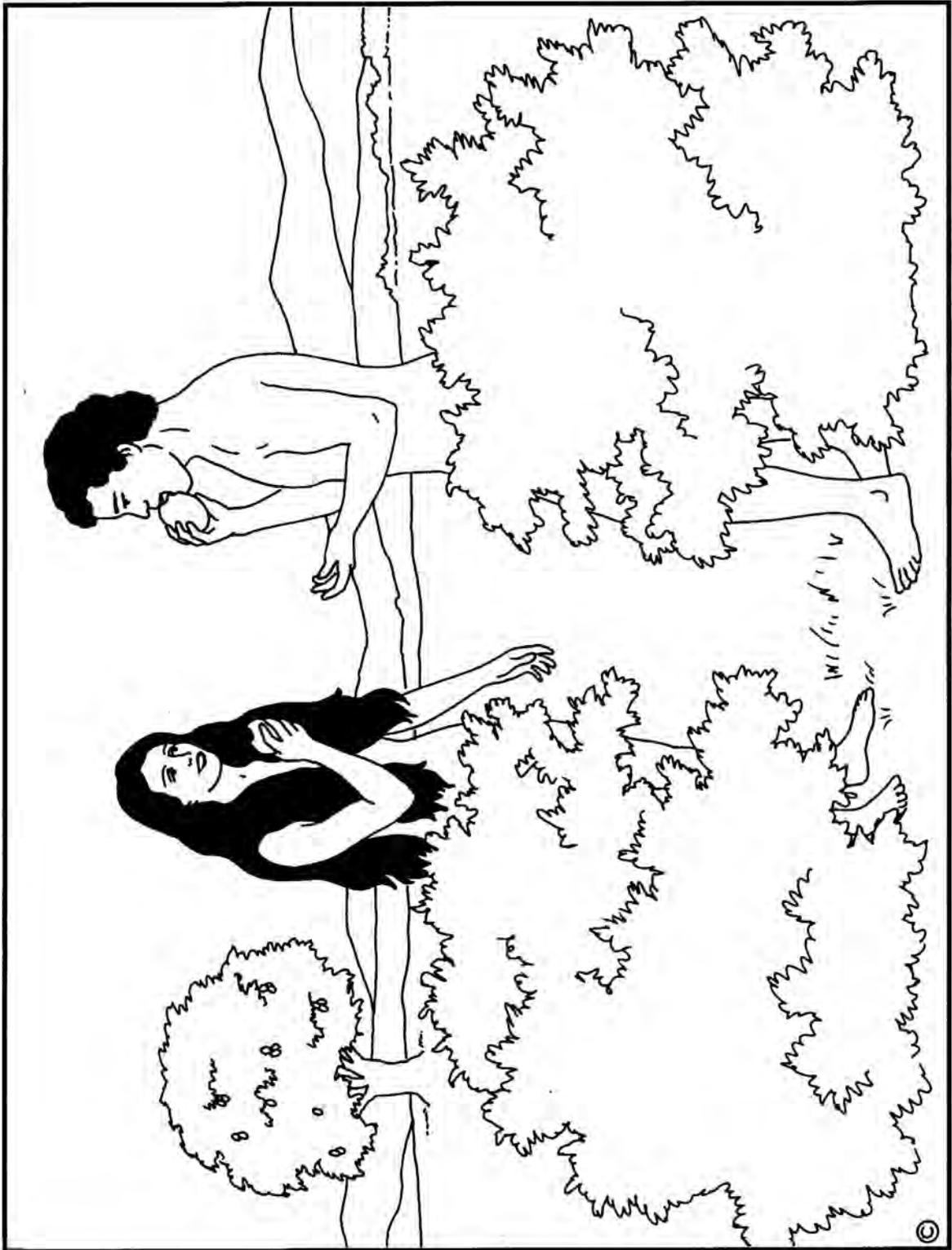
There were many animals and birds in the garden and God asked Adam to name them all. Of course, it was not necessary for Adam to hunt all over the garden for the various animals in order to see them and give them names. The Bible tells us that he was made a ruler over the animals, so they all obeyed him, and would come right up to him when he called them.

The LORD God and the Logos designed every beautiful tree and plant that grows on the earth — trees that are pleasant to see and many that are good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden as well as a tree called “the tree of knowledge.” Adam was told that he could eat the fruit of any tree in the garden but he must not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge. It was made clear to Adam that if he disobeyed God's command he would surely die.

God didn't plan that Adam should remain all alone in the Garden of Eden forever, but he wanted Adam to understand how much he really needed company. He created a friend for Adam, who also became his wife. Her name was Eve, which means “life-giver,” because she was the very first woman.



Creation: Genesis 1



The Fall of Man: Genesis 3:6

God wanted Eve to be like Adam — like a part of him yet separate — so they could talk together and be good friends to each other. He made her in a very special way. He put Adam to sleep and while he was asleep God took one of his ribs and with that rib he made Eve.

There was a serpent in the garden and Satan used it to tell lies to Eve that made her believe that it would be all right to eat the fruit of that forbidden tree, the tree of knowledge. So Eve did eat of the forbidden fruit and, what was worse, she coaxed Adam into eating it also.

God did what he said he would do, and Adam and Eve began to die—not at once, but over a period of many years. They were thrown out of the Garden of Eden, where everything had been provided for them. Now they had to learn to grow their own fruits and vegetables and make a place to live.

Some day God will use his great power to bring Adam and Eve back to life again, and then all that they experienced will be a big help to them. Besides Adam and Eve, all of their children who have ever lived and died will be made alive again. By and by the whole earth will again be just like the Garden of Eden. That was God's plan from the very beginning.

Chapter Three

The First Two Brothers

You can imagine how Adam and Eve must have felt when they were expelled from their beautiful home in the Garden of Eden where they had been so happy. They had to work hard to grow food to eat and make a place to live. It wasn't easy! The world outside the garden was not finished and it was filled with thorns and weeds.

They must have had many unhappy days after they were sent out of the garden and they probably thought God had forgotten all about them. They were being punished for their disobedience, but God still loved them and remembered them. Mother Eve had the right idea when Cain was born — she said he had been given to her by the LORD and she was very glad.

Not long after Cain was born God gave Adam and Eve another boy whom they named Abel. Cain must have been very excited to have a brother! Adam and Eve had many

more children, boys and girls, throughout the years, but we do not know how many or what their names were.

Since there were no schools, Cain and Abel had to learn in other ways. Surely Adam and Eve could teach them many of the lessons they had learned, especially since being put out of the garden.

When Cain and Abel grew up to be young men, Cain was a vegetable farmer and Abel raised sheep. Adam knew that the best way for them to learn was by working with him. He helped Cain learn what to do about the weeds, and also taught him how to care for the various kinds of plants he wanted to grow in order to provide food for the family.

Abel also had a lot of things to learn about the best way to take care of the sheep — where to find the best grass, good water, and how to care for them when they were hurt or sick.

Cain and Abel worked very hard, yet they were very thankful to the LORD for all they had. They wanted to show their appreciation to God for all he had done for them, so they brought him gifts — Cain's was from the fruits and vegetables he had grown, and Abel's was one of his sheep.

In those days, gifts to God were called offerings or sacrifices. They were placed on an altar which was usually a pile of stones. When God was pleased with the offering he caused it to catch on fire. God was very pleased with Abel's gift, but he did not accept the offering made by Cain. That was because God had a very special lesson to teach. God has a good reason for everything he does and we can trust that he knows what is best because he is so much wiser than we are.

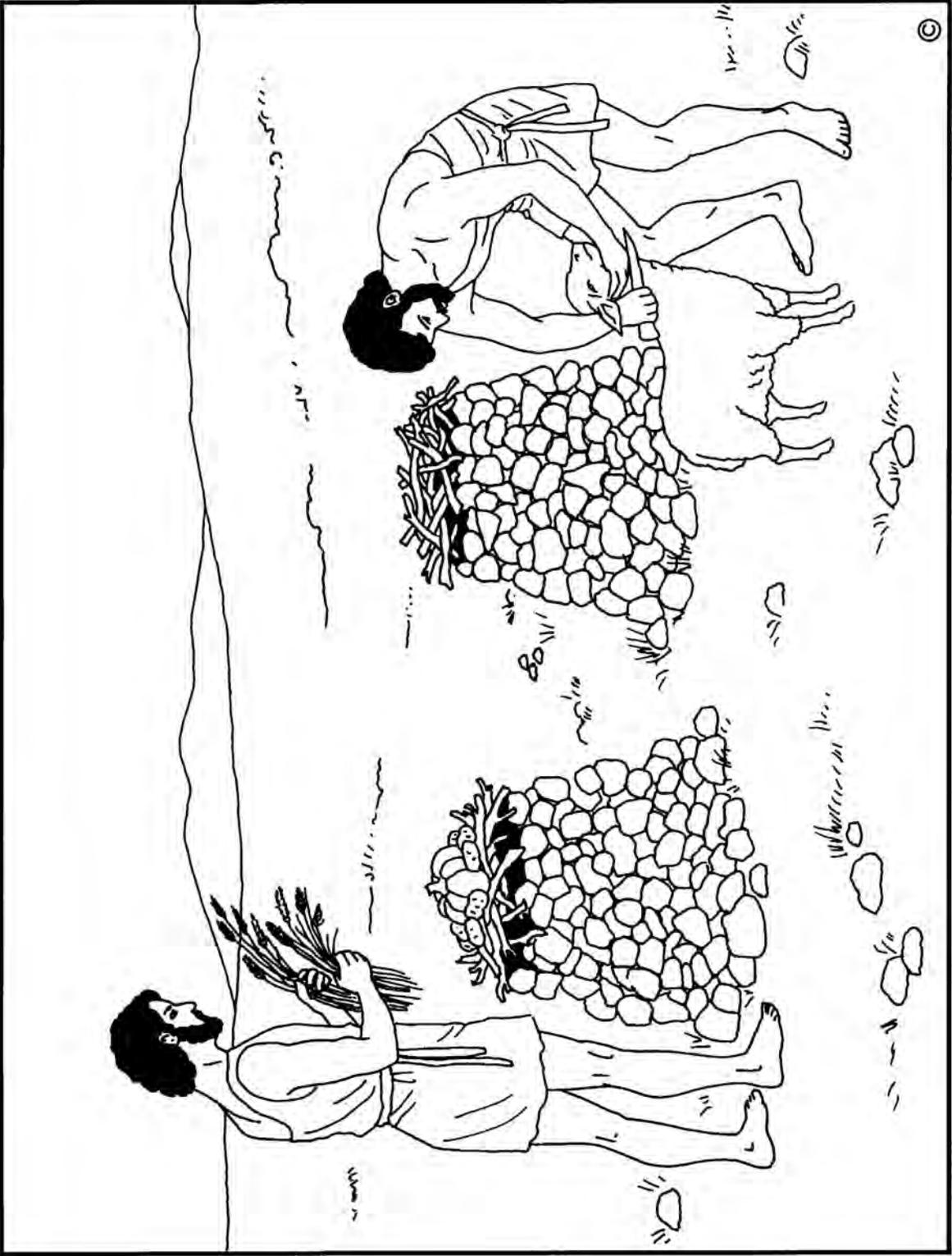
Cain could have asked Abel for a sheep so that he would have an appropriate offering for the Lord too. Instead, he became very jealous of Abel. Cain started to argue with Abel and became so angry that he killed him!

Cain knew that God was very angry with him, so he ran away. God punished him by putting a mark on his forehead, so that anyone who saw him knew that he had done something wrong. Cain took his wife and went away to live in a place called Nod. They must have been very lonesome, but after a while they had children and were not so lonely anymore.

Adam and Eve missed Abel very much. Later, God gave them another son, whom they named Seth, to take Abel's place.

After Adam and Eve had sinned, God spoke to them about the one he would send to punish Satan. He called him the "seed," which simply means "son." Eve thought Seth was that seed, or son, but no. It was to be a great many years before God would send that seed. However, God never forgot the promise he had made. In fact, he has already sent that seed, the Son of promise, Jesus, who had been the Logos as a spiritual being in the heavens with his Father.

God was pleased with the lamb Abel offered to him as his gift. The blood of Abel's lamb was shed, which made his gift much like the incredible offering which would be brought to God thousands of years later.



Cain and Abel Bring Offerings to God: Genesis 4:2-5

Jesus was called the Lamb of God because he shed his blood so that Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and all the people of the world who have ever lived, can eventually return to the earth in the resurrection. The whole earth will then be beautiful and perfect — just like the Garden of Eden. That offering, brought to him by his son Jesus, was very pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

Chapter Four

The First Shipbuilder

A very long time ago there weren't nearly as many people living on the earth as there are today. Most of the people were very wicked because Satan was busy doing all he could to lure people into doing things that were sinful. Satan knew there were other angels who were not loyal to God and he talked those angels into helping him.

Satan wanted to be like God and rule the world. He thought if angels would come to earth as humans and marry the women, then he would have a kingdom and he would be in charge. The children that were born to the angels and the women were called Nephilim, which means "giants." They were very tall and extremely strong, and always wicked.

Mankind and the Nephilim became more and more wicked and violent. God had foreseen that Satan would do this, and he knew that this would be a test for the angels also, so he let Satan try his plan — but only for a while. God knew that the best thing to do would be to cover the earth with water and in that way all the wicked people would be drowned.

Of course, not everyone was wicked. Noah was a good, righteous man and he had a good family. Noah loved God and wanted to do all he could to please him. God loved Noah, too, and did not want him or his family to drown in the coming flood. So God told Noah to build a very large boat. The Bible calls the boat an ark.

Think of it, Noah had never even seen a boat before! But God told him exactly how to build it — how long, how wide, and how high it should be, and that it should have three decks. There was a window so they could have light, and there were different rooms for storage. It was huge — over five hundred feet long! It needed to be very big and strong and it also needed to be shaped in a way that the flood waters would not smash it to pieces.

GOD'S PROMISES COME TRUE

The next thing Noah was told to do was cover the ark with pitch. Pitch is black and oily and was used to make the ark watertight. The ark had no sails or engines to make it go because it didn't have to do anything except float.

Then God instructed Noah to collect two of all the different animals, a male and a female, to be taken onto the ark. But he was told to bring seven pairs of certain animals like cows and goats. They would be very useful later when they were back on dry land. He also brought many different birds.

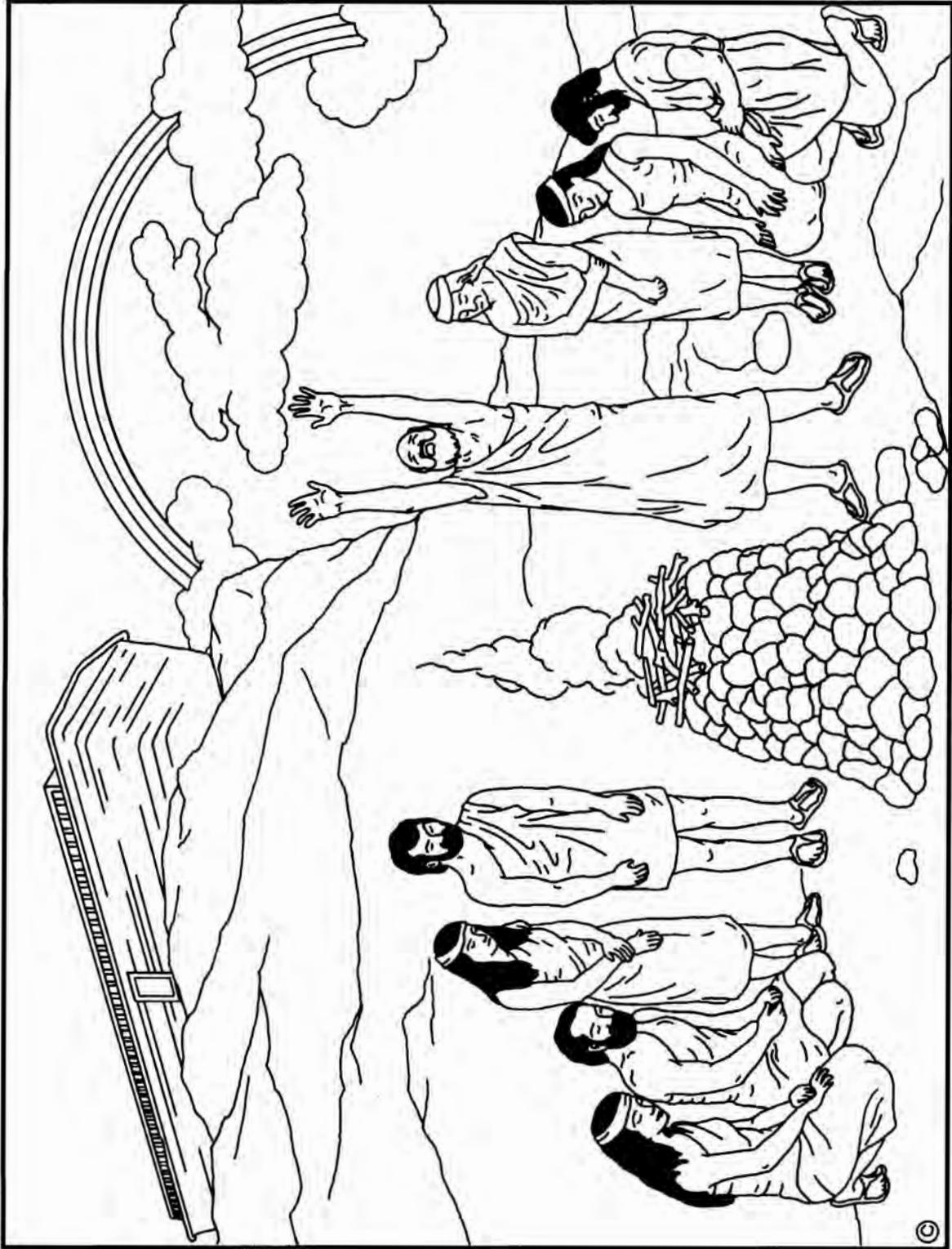
Noah had gathered lots of food and stored it in the ark. There was enough food and water for Noah and his family and for every animal.

When everything was ready, Noah and his wife and their three sons and their wives moved into the ark. It had never rained before and their friends probably thought they were crazy. But Noah and his family trusted the Heavenly Father. He shut the door and sealed it so that no one could open it.

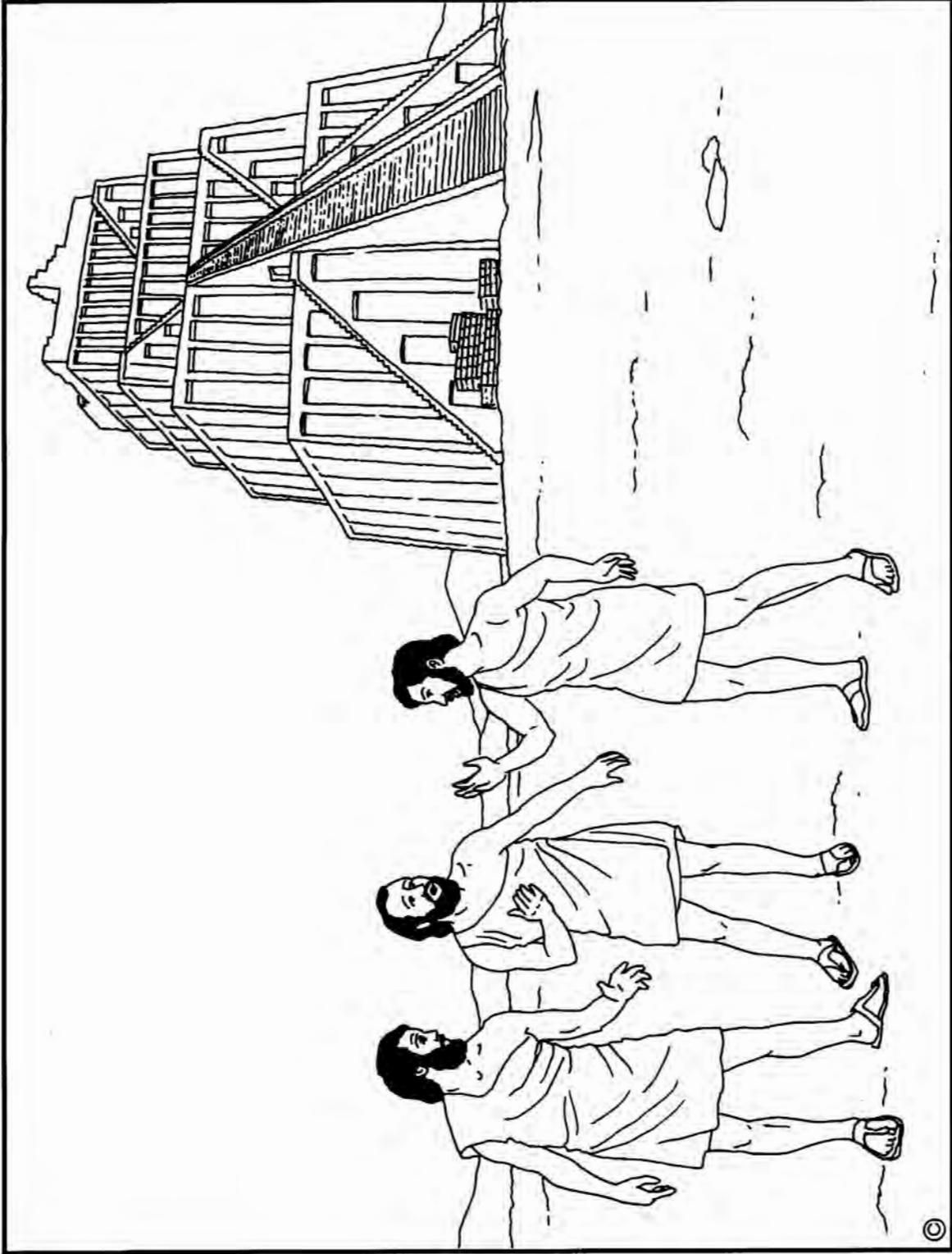
Then the flood came. A great ring of water which was around the earth came crashing down. It rained for forty days and forty nights until it completely covered the ground. Even the mountains were covered! The ark floated for many months while Noah and his family waited for the water to dry up.

After eight months, Noah finally saw the tops of the mountains. He waited several more weeks and took one of the doves and let it out of the window. It came back because it had found nowhere to land. Seven days later he sent the dove out again. This time it came back to the ark with a green leaf from an olive tree in its beak. Then Noah knew the land was drying up and in seven more days he sent out the dove again and this time it did not come back at all. The water had receded so much that it wasn't long until the ark rested on the ground. It had landed on a mountain called Ararat. One year after they had first gone into the ark, God's angel came and opened the door for them and Noah and his family were able to come out of the ark.

Noah was very happy that God had been so good to him and his family, so he built an altar of stones to make an offering, which pleased God very much. He told Noah that never, never again would he let it rain on the earth that much. He placed a colorful rainbow in the sky and told Noah that it was a sign that he would never again let it rain until all the land was covered with water. What a beautiful promise!



Noah's Sacrifice and the Rainbow: Genesis 8:20, 9:13



The Tower of Babel: Genesis 11:7-9

Chapter Five

The Tower of Babel

Many, many years ago all the people in the world spoke the same language and they all understood each other. Of course, there weren't as many people in the world then as there are now, because the great flood had destroyed nearly everyone.

Only eight people survived the flood — Noah and his family. After the flood Noah's sons and their wives wanted to start their families and they had children of their own. Those children grew up to be men and women, and they also had children. The population began to grow and after a while there were quite a lot of people in the world.

One of Noah's sons, Ham, had a son named Cush, and Cush had a son named Nimrod. So Noah was Nimrod's great-grandfather. Nimrod was an expert hunter and the people thought he was a great man because he was so strong and brave and hunted wild animals. They thought it would be a good idea for him to be their king and rule over them. Nimrod's kingdom was called Babel, a name which came to mean "confusion." This how it happened.

The people of Babel decided to work together and build a big city, and a great, tall tower that could be seen many miles away. They wanted the tower to be very strong, so they made bricks and they stuck them together with mortar. They planned to build the tower so high into the sky that it would reach heaven.

God was not at all happy to see the people build such a big tower. He did not want all the people to stay in one place where they could see this tower. Instead, God wanted them to spread out and live in many different parts of the earth. So, he did something incredible!

God caused everyone to start speaking different languages. Instead of talking together in one language and making plans to build the tower higher and higher, suddenly they could no longer understand one another.

It would not have been a good idea for all of them to live in one place since they could not understand each other when they talked. So they started to move away. Some went in one direction, and some went in another. A few of them could talk to each other, and those who could went away together in one group, while another group who spoke a different language went somewhere else. That is why there are so many languages in the world today. And that is why Babel means "confusion."

Eventually, everyone in the world will be able to speak the same language again. Wherever a person is in the world, he will know how to talk to the people who live there and they will understand him.

The best thing about it is that when all the people learn how to talk to one another they will also learn about God. They will learn how awesome God is, and what great things he will do for them when they learn to obey him.

Chapter Six

Abraham, the Friend of God

Long ago, God had a very special friend whose name was Abraham. Abraham did not have many children, but God told him that one day his children would be so many they would be like the stars of heaven and the sand on the seashore. The Bible tells us that some day all the people who have ever lived on the earth will have a chance to know and love God, and they will become Abraham's family.

It was a long time after Noah had built the ark and the earth was flooded that Abram (as he was then called) was born in a city called Ur, which was in Chaldea. In that country there weren't very many people who believed in the true God, but Abram did and he had faith in the things God said. That is why he was a friend of God.

Abram's father Terah took Abram and his wife Sarai, and his grandson Lot and moved them to Haran. It was in the country of Mesopotamia where the Garden of Eden used to be. Terah died there at the age of 205. People lived a lot longer back then than they do now.

When Abram was seventy-five years old, God sent him a message that he wanted him to move away from Haran and go to a place called Canaan many miles away. It was not an easy thing for Abram to do. Back then there were no cars or trains or airplanes for traveling. Walking or riding a camel or donkey such a long distance was very tiring, but that is what they had to do.

Abram and Sarai didn't have any children but God made them an incredible promise — if they would do what God asked, they would have a son.

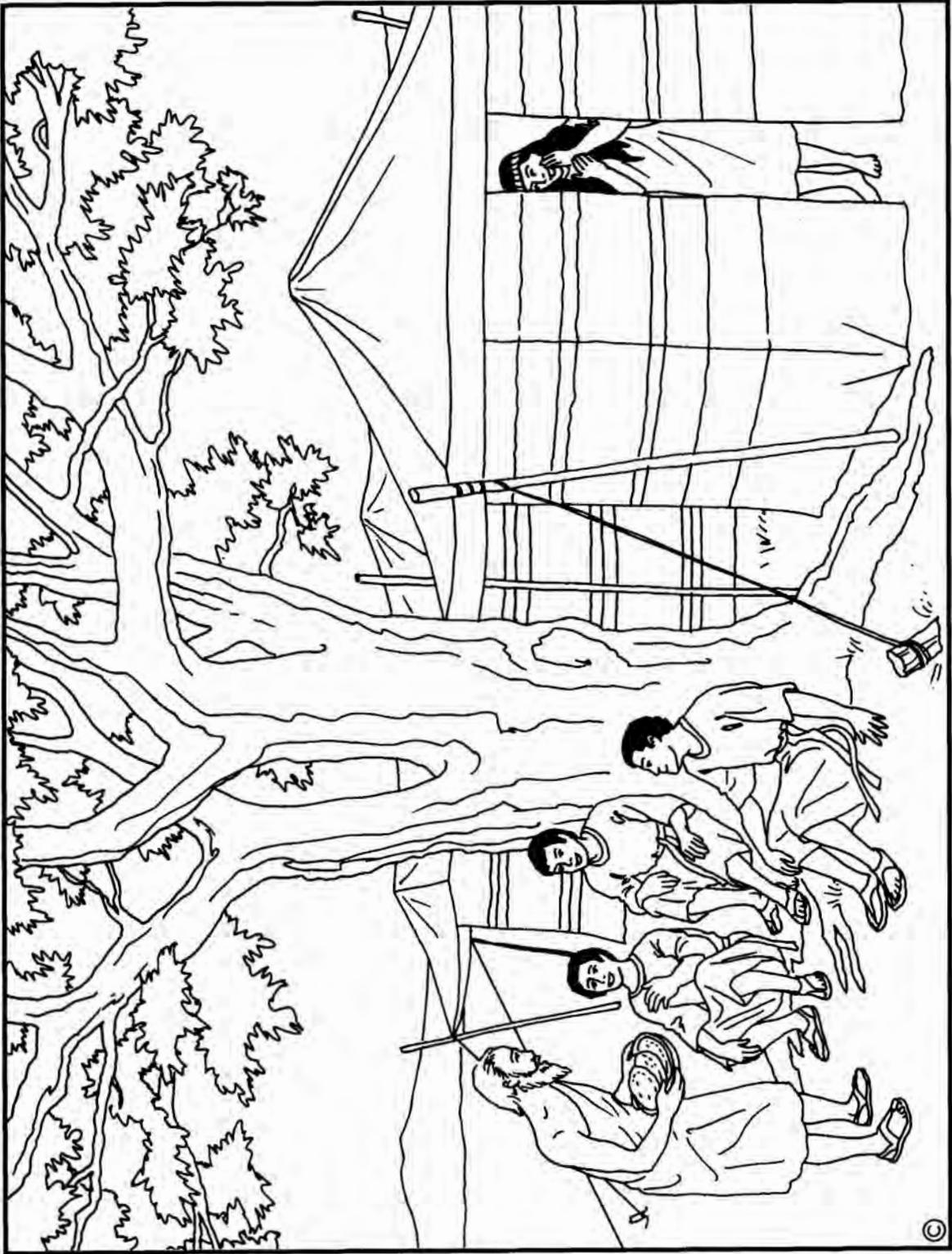
Abram's nephew Lot went with them on their journey. They brought with them all their cattle and sheep, and everything they owned. The Bible tells us that they lived in tents. That meant that toward the end of each day they would have to find a place where they could set up their tents and stay overnight. They must have been very tired and hungry after traveling all day.

Abram was not taking this journey as a vacation. In fact, he wasn't even sure where he was going. All he knew was that God promised to show him where to go, and he trusted God. He knew that God would show him how to get to that promised land. And he did!

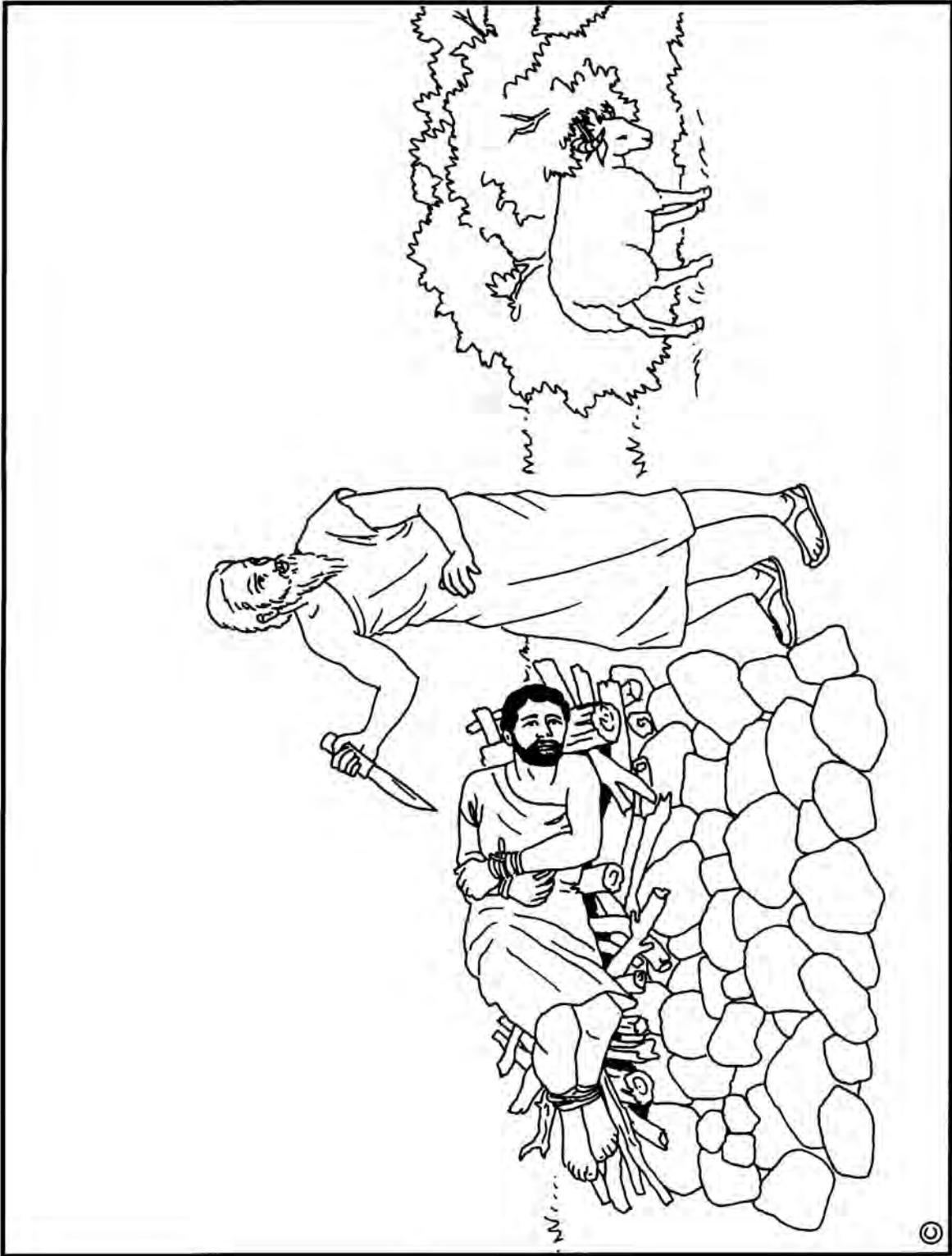
Remember that God had told Abram that he and Sarai would have a son, but they were getting older and didn't think it was possible. So far he had not given them any children but God does not always do right away what he says he will do. Yet you can be sure that if God promises to do something, he will do it when he knows the time is right.

Sarai felt sure they could not have a child so she asked Abram to have a child with her handmaid Hagar. Hagar and Abraham had a baby boy and named him Ishmael. But he was not the son that God had promised.

When Abram was 99 years old, God told him that he would become the father of



Abraham, Sarah, and Their Heavenly Visitors: Genesis 18:8-10



Abraham Offers Isaac: Genesis 22:9-13

many nations, and promised that the land of Canaan would belong to him and all of his descendants. It was then that God changed Abram's name to Abraham, and Sarai's name to Sarah.

One day three angels visited Abraham. He didn't know they were angels. He thought they were travelers who were passing through the country and just happened to go by his tent. Abraham invited the strangers to stay for a meal. His servants prepared a roast for them, and Sarah baked some bread. The food was brought out under a big tree.

In those days, wives did not usually sit down to eat with the family when they had company, so Sarah just stood in the door of the tent and waited until they had finished eating. She was listening, though, and when she heard the angels tell Abraham that he was going to have a son, and that she would be the mother, she laughed! She thought she was too old to have a baby.

Nothing is impossible with God, so when God's time came, the promised son was born. The name given to this little boy was Isaac, which means "laughter." God had told them to name the baby Isaac because it would remind them of the wonderful promise which he had made to them. That promise was that through the children of Abraham, God would bless all the people of the earth, even those who had lived before the flood.

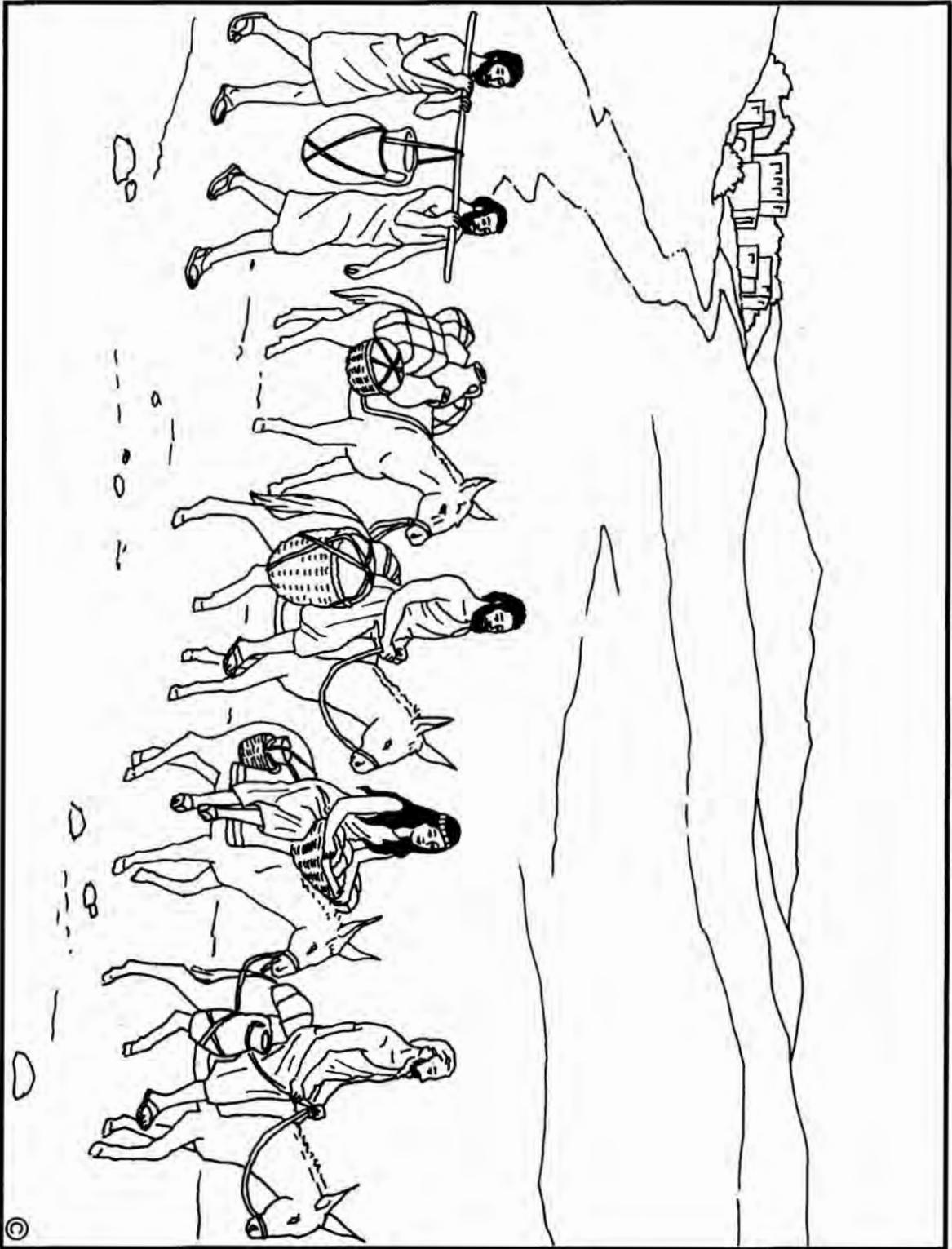
Abraham and Sarah loved Isaac very much, and they loved God all the more because he had blessed them with their wonderful son. When Isaac was a young man, something very unexpected happened — God spoke to Abraham and said he wanted him to take his son and offer him as a sacrifice! To be sacrificed, Isaac would first have to be killed, then put on an altar to be burned.

Poor Abraham felt so bad he thought his heart would break, and he could not bear to tell Isaac what God had told him to do. When they were getting ready to leave, Isaac asked his father where the lamb was for the sacrifice. Abraham said sadly, "God will provide a lamb, my son." Isaac must have known what his father planned, but did not ask any more questions. If he had wanted to, he could have run away. He was young and strong and his father was an old man; but Isaac trusted God too, and loved him and wanted to do what he had asked.

When they reached the top of Mount Moriah, Abraham stopped and said, "This is the place." Isaac laid down the wood he was carrying and helped his father gather stones to make an altar. Isaac loved his father very much and knew how terrible he was feeling, so he probably told Abraham not to worry, but to do what God had told him. He let his father tie his hands and feet and put him on the altar, ready to be sacrificed.

God wanted to prove whether or not Abraham was loyal to him. Would Abraham obey him even though he could not understand at all why God would ask him to do such a terrible thing?

Before Abraham could kill Isaac, something amazing happened. God sent an angel to stop him. The angel told Abraham to look around, and when he did, there in the bushes was a ram that God had sent for Abraham to use in place of Isaac — so he didn't have to sacrifice his son after all.



Leaving Haran: Genesis 12:1-5

Abraham and Isaac knelt there together and thanked God for his goodness, and God said, "Because of what you have done, and because you have trusted me, I promise that I will bless you and I will make of you a great nation. And through you I will bless all the families of the earth." It's a wonderful promise and we know it will come true!

Chapter Seven

A Bride is Chosen

Isaac was born because God kept his promise to Abraham that he would have a child. That meant that Isaac was a very special child. God wanted him to be born, and wanted to use him and his children to bring great joy to all the people of the world.

When Isaac was old enough to get married, his father thought that it was important for him to have a good wife; someone sweet and kind, and a girl who came from their own family. Abraham wished he could talk this all over with Sarah, but she had died and he missed her very much. Instead, he called on his oldest servant, Eliezer, who was in charge of everything he had.

Abraham had journeyed a long, long way from his home country to the place where he was living when Isaac was born. Of course God wanted him to live in this new country, because it was the land he had promised would be his. It was the land of Canaan. That land is now called Israel, and it is still called the Promised Land by many people. The people living there at that time were strangers to Abraham, and he knew God would not want Isaac to marry a stranger.

Eliezer was Abraham's best and most trusted servant, so he asked him to go back to the land they had come from and find Abraham's family. From that family he was to choose a nice girl and bring her to Canaan to be Isaac's wife.

Eliezer thought this would be too difficult for him to do. He was afraid that the girl he would choose would not want to come back with him. But Abraham was sure that this was the way God wanted Isaac to get a wife. He told Eliezer that if the girl he picked did not want to come with him, he would not be blamed. So Eliezer said he would do the best he could.

Abraham told him that God would send one of his angels to lead him as he looked for the wife he was to bring back to Isaac. Abraham knew that the LORD God of heaven, having promised to bless his children and the whole world, would make sure that everything went as planned.

Eliezer got ready for the long trip back to Abraham's home country. He brought ten camels with him. It was a very long journey, and Eliezer had to take food and water, as well as tents to sleep in at night, so the camels were needed to carry all these things. When he had everything ready, he started off to find a wife for Isaac.

It was a very long trip, but he finally came to Mesopotamia and stopped at a well of water. As it was almost evening time he knew that before long someone would come out from the city to get water from the well. At that time the women were the ones who carried the water.

Eliezer had great faith in God so, while he was waiting at the well, he prayed and asked God to help him with this very important matter. Eliezer's plan was that when a young lady came to draw water from the well he would ask her for a drink of water from her pitcher. If she gave him water, and also said that she would like to give water to his camels, then he would know that this was the right person.

It wasn't long before a beautiful young lady named Rebekah, with her water pitcher on her shoulder, came to the well. After she had filled her pitcher, Eliezer went to her and asked for a drink of water. She was very friendly and not only did she give him a drink, but she also offered to get water for his camels.

Eliezer was quite surprised that the very first young lady to come out to the well should be so willing to give him water, and also to offer water for the camels. He had asked the LORD to let it be that way, yet he wanted to make very sure that Rebekah was really the right one to be Isaac's wife. He asked her, "Whose daughter are you?" She replied, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, who is the son of Milcah, and the grandchild of Nahor."

Nahor was one of Abraham's brothers so Eliezer knew he was in the right place to find Isaac's wife. He was almost certain that Rebekah was the young lady to become that wife. Eliezer had brought with him a large gold earring, and two beautiful gold bracelets which he gave to Rebekah. Then he asked her if there was room in her father's house for him to stay that night.

When Rebekah's brother Laban heard of Eliezer's visit, he ran out to the well and invited him to come into their home. They fixed up the house for company, and arranged a place for the camels. Rebekah's family was very kind and generous. They prepared a delicious meal for Eliezer but he would not eat anything until he told them why he had come.

They were very eager to know why he had made such a long journey, and they asked him to tell them all about it. So Eliezer told the wonderful story about his master, Abraham. The relatives of Abraham had wondered how he had been getting along since he left home so many years before. They were very interested to hear Eliezer's story, telling them how good the LORD had been to Abraham. He explained that God had given Abraham cattle and sheep, silver and gold, and many menservants and maidservants to help him. He also had lots of camels and other valuable possessions.

He told them about Abraham's son, Isaac — what a fine young man he was and that he would someday have all of Abraham's possessions. He explained that Abraham wanted Isaac to have a wife from among his own people. He had been sent to Mesopotamia to get acquainted with the family and to choose a wife for Isaac and take her back to him.

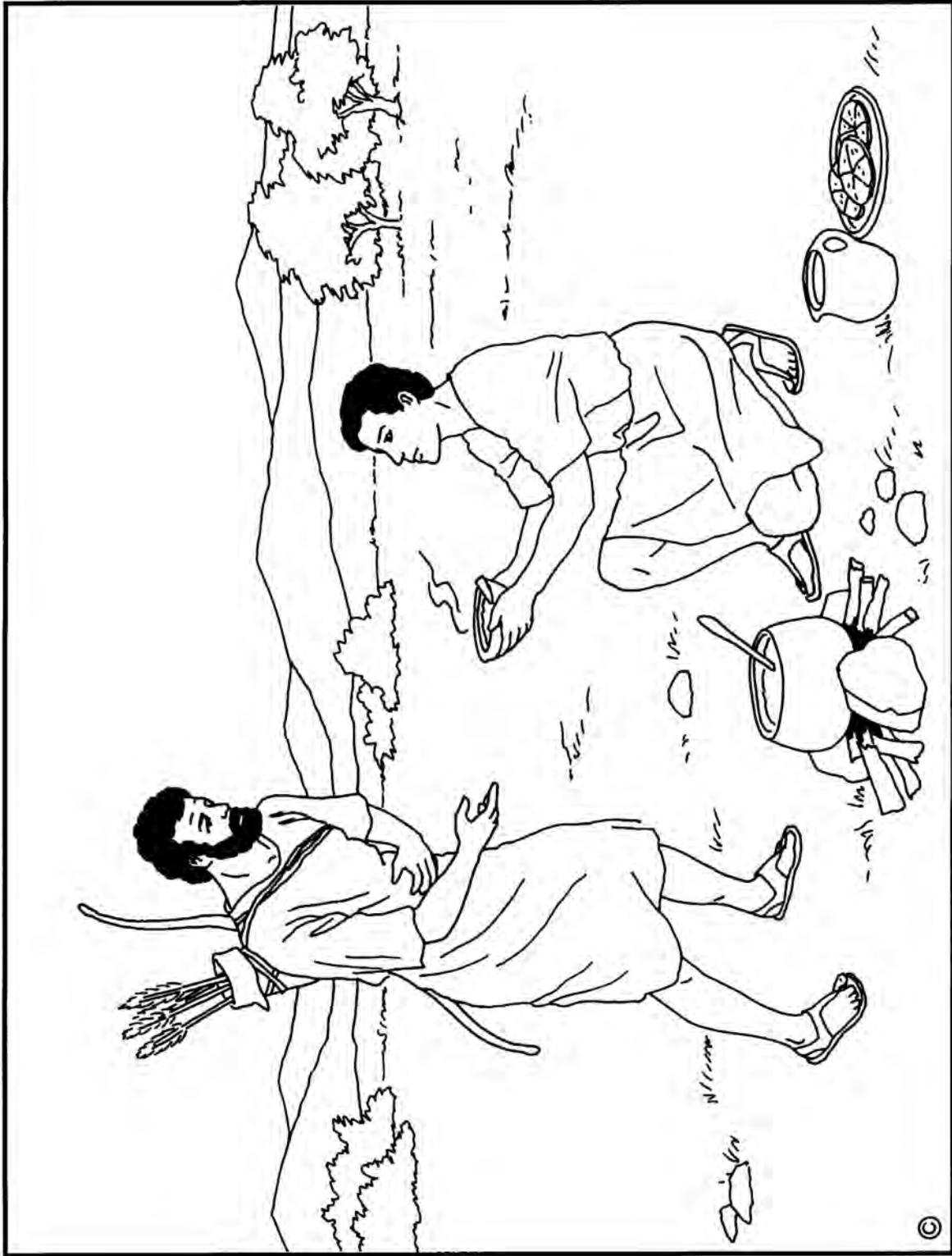
Then he told them how he met Rebekah at the well, and how kind she had been in giving him water, not only for himself but also for the camels. He knew from this that Rebekah was the one whom God had chosen to be Isaac's bride. When he had finished telling this exciting story, Rebekah's father and her brother agreed and they said to him, "Here is Rebekah, take her, and let her be Isaac's wife as the LORD has said."

Abraham was a very rich man, and when he sent Eliezer to find a wife for Isaac he gave him a large supply of beautiful jewelry and fine clothing to take with him. Eliezer gave a lot of this to Rebekah and he also gave presents to her mother and her brother.

Early the next morning Eliezer wanted to start back home, but it was all so sudden for the family that they wanted Rebekah to stay home with them for at least ten days. That meant that Eliezer would have to stay also. He did not agree to this, and said that he wanted to return at once because Abraham was old and needed him. The family said that whatever Rebekah decided would be all right with them. They asked Rebekah if she wanted to leave right way, or if she would rather wait awhile. She answered that she was ready to go. So her family said good-bye and told her how much they would miss her. They sent along her childhood nurse to go with her.

One evening, Isaac went out into the field where he could be alone to think about God and all the amazing things he had done for him. As he was sitting there thinking, he looked up and saw the camels bringing his bride coming.

At just about the same time Rebekah saw Isaac and she asked Eliezer who he was. He told her that it was Isaac, the man she had come all the way from Mesopotamia to marry. She got down off her camel, covered her face with a veil, and went to meet her future husband. The Bible says that they loved each other very much. They were so happy that God had blessed Eliezer in finding Rebekah to be Isaac's bride!



Jacob Trades Esau His Birthright: Genesis 25:29-34

Chapter Eight

Twin Boys

When Isaac and Rebekah had been married twenty years, they had twin sons and named them Jacob and Esau. Like their father, Isaac, and their grandfather, Abraham, these boys were very important in the sight of God, because he had promised great things concerning Abraham's family.

One thing about these twin boys that was different from many twins was that they did not look alike. Esau's body was covered with red hair. When he grew up to be a man he liked to be outside. He spent a lot of his time hunting, and he became very skillful at it. Jacob lived a quieter life and was content to be at home. Isaac loved Esau very much, but Rebekah loved Jacob more than Esau.

God had let Rebekah know that Jacob was to be the one he would specially bless. Perhaps that is the reason she loved Jacob more than Esau. Jacob was the one most loved by God because he believed that God's promises would come true.

The promise made by God to Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, and to his father, Isaac, was very dear to Jacob. He wanted to do everything he could so that the promise would belong to him. This promise was called the "birthright," and it was a great privilege.

Esau was actually entitled to the birthright because he was born first and therefore the older of the two boys. Nevertheless, God had explained to their mother that he wanted Jacob to be the one to receive the promise.

One day Esau had been hunting and by the time he got home he was famished. Jacob had cooked a delicious stew made with meat and vegetables and Esau could smell it when he walked in the door. He told Jacob how hungry he was and asked Jacob for a bowl of the yummy stew. Jacob told Esau that he could have some if he would let him have the promised birthright.

To Esau this seemed like a good bargain, because he did not have as much faith as Jacob did in God's promises. So he agreed to sell the birthright to Jacob in order to have something to eat. Of course Esau was sorry later for what he had done, but he had sold his birthright to Jacob and it was too late to do anything about it. It now belonged to Jacob, not only because God wanted him to have it, but also because he had bought it from Esau.

Years after this, when the boys' father was very old and did not expect to live much longer, he wanted to give his blessing to the son to whom the birthright belonged. At that time it was the custom, when a father became old, to call his family together and give them his good wishes and remind them of the promises God had made to him and to his children. When a blessing was given to a son by his father it could not be changed.

Their father did not know that Esau had sold his birthright to Jacob, so he asked Esau to go out into the fields and bring him some meat for supper. He told Esau that he wished to bestow his blessing upon him before he died.

Rebekah heard Isaac telling this to Esau, and she knew that the blessing Isaac was planning to give Esau really belonged to Jacob. Esau was not being fair — he had sold the birthright to Jacob and now, without explaining to his father, he wanted to get it back for himself!

Rebekah knew that God wanted Jacob to have the birthright, so she arranged with Jacob to get the blessing from Isaac before Esau returned from hunting. She told Jacob to kill a young goat and she would prepare it for him to take to his father.

Isaac was now very old and blind so he was not able to see whether it was Esau or Jacob who brought him his supper. Besides, Rebekah had fastened some hair of a young goat onto the back of Jacob's hands. This made his hands feel just like Esau's, and Isaac was fooled into thinking that it really was Esau, so he gave him the blessing.

In this way Jacob received the birthright from his father which he had bought from Esau. From that day on, all the promises that God had made to Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, and to his father, Isaac, belonged to him. Now he was to be the one whom the LORD God would use in his wonderful plan to make his promises come true.

Chapter Nine

A Boy Who Dreamed

A long time ago God used to give dreams to some of the people that he especially loved. Those dreams had very important meanings. One young man was given two of those kinds of dreams and in both of them God showed him some of the things that would happen to him when he was older.

The young man was Joseph, son of Jacob and Rachel. Jacob, you will remember, was the one who bought the birthright from Esau, his twin brother. That had made Esau extremely angry with Jacob, who had to run away for his life! He went into the land that his grandfather, Abraham, and his mother, Rebekah, had come from. There he found his uncle Laban's home.

Jacob stayed with Laban for many years. He married two of Laban's daughters and had twelve sons and a daughter, Dinah. When the sons grew up they became herdsmen, or keepers of cattle and sheep. Jacob's next to youngest son was named Joseph.

Joseph was a gentle, forgiving, and unselfish young man who loved God and God's promises. Jacob especially loved Joseph and made him a spectacular coat that had lots of colors in it to show his love for him. That made the other boys jealous of Joseph. It was jealousy that caused Cain to kill his brother, Abel, and now these ten older brothers of Joseph actually became so jealous of him they wanted to get rid of him.

It was just about that time that Joseph had his first dream from God. He dreamed that he and his brothers were out in the field gathering grain and each of them had gathered up a bundle. Joseph's bundle of grain stood straight up and all the other bundles bowed down toward it.

Perhaps Joseph should have kept the dream to himself, but he was so excited about it that he told his brothers. They understood it to mean that some day they would all bow down to him. That made them more jealous than ever, and they hated him even more!

A little while later Joseph had another dream. In that dream, which was even more impressive than the first one, Joseph saw the sun and the moon and stars all bow down to him. Again Joseph told the dream to his brothers, and also to his father.

His father was just a little angry about it because it seemed to mean that even he would have to bow down to his son. Joseph's brothers were angrier than ever!

Not long after that, Joseph's brothers went to a part of the country called Shechem to find better fields for their flocks. They were too far away from home to go back each night, so after they had been gone awhile, Jacob wondered how his sons and their flocks were getting along.

Joseph was too young to work in the fields with his brothers, so he had stayed at home. His father asked him to go and find his brothers, and see how they were doing. Joseph was willing to do this for his father and he went on his way, but when he got to Shechem, he learned that his brothers had moved on to a place called Dothan. So Joseph went to find his brothers and their flocks there.

His brothers saw him a long way off, walking toward them. They knew it would be a while before Joseph would catch up with them, so they started to make some plans. They decided to kill him. Jealousy can lead people into doing terrible things!

They called their brother a dreamer. They grabbed him and were ready to take his life, but Reuben, the oldest brother, didn't like that idea and pleaded with the others not to kill Joseph. Reuben convinced them to throw Joseph into a pit. Secretly he planned to go back later and rescue him so he could go home to his father.

Reuben's brothers thought it was a good idea to put him in the pit, but just after they put him there, they noticed some people traveling nearby. They were storekeepers from the country of Midian. All the brothers except Reuben decided to sell Joseph to them. The Midianites were on their way to Egypt and the brothers knew that in Egypt rich people bought slaves. Reuben was very upset when he found out what the others had done because now he wouldn't be able to return Joseph to their father.

The brothers then took Joseph's coat of many colors and dipped it in the blood of a goat, and returned it to their father. When Jacob saw the coat he thought that Joseph

had been killed by a wild beast. He cried and cried because he thought his son that was so dear to him was dead. He was so sad that no one could comfort him and he said he would never stop missing Joseph.

There was one thing the brothers did not know — those incredible dreams were given to Joseph by God, and God would be sure to make them come true.

Chapter Ten

A Slave Becomes a Ruler

Joseph, who had been so truly loved by his father Jacob, was now in Egypt. It must have been very hard for him to be there among strangers. He was probably homesick. But Joseph was not alone, because God was with him.

The merchants who bought Joseph from his brothers sold him to a man named Potiphar. Potiphar was a very rich man, and he was also an officer of the king. In Egypt kings were called Pharaohs. Even though he was a slave, Joseph knew that God would want him to do his best. So Joseph was considered to be a very good slave.

Since Joseph was such a good worker, and so willing to please, his master was very happy with him. It was not long before he gave Joseph the job of managing all his business for him. Potiphar did not have to take care of anything because God helped Joseph to be an excellent worker, and a good manager.

One day Potiphar's wife became angry with Joseph because he would not do something that was wrong, so she told a lie about Joseph. Her husband believed it, and it made him so angry with Joseph that he had him put into jail. Even when he was in jail, Joseph still trusted God and tried to do everything as well as he could, and God blessed him there, too.

Before long the jail keeper saw what a good man Joseph really was, and gave him charge over all the other prisoners.

Two of Pharaoh's officers, the chief butler and the chief baker, did something that Pharaoh did not like, which made him very angry, and he had them both put in jail. One night the butler and the baker each had a dream, and when Joseph saw them the next morning, he saw that they were very sad.

When he asked them why they were so sad, they told him about their dreams, and said that no one could explain what they meant. Because Joseph had the experience of having two dreams given him by God, he knew a lot about them. So he asked the butler and the baker to tell him their dreams, which they did.

The butler's dream had been a good one, and Joseph told him it meant that in three days he would be out of jail, and would again be Pharaoh's chief butler.

The baker's dream was not a good one. Joseph explained to the baker that his dream meant he was to be killed within three days. Joseph knew this was not a very good dream, but he told the truth about it. God was blessing Joseph by helping him to understand dreams.

When the butler left the jail Joseph asked him to speak to Pharaoh about him to see if something could be done to get him out of jail. The butler promised he would do this, but he forgot all about it and did not remember Joseph for two years until Pharaoh himself had two dreams.

At that time kings and rich men hired people to explain their dreams for them. Pharaoh sent for those men, but they were not able to tell him the meaning of his dreams. That worried Pharaoh, and it made him sad.

The butler knew from talking to Pharaoh just how worried he was about his dreams. Then the butler remembered Joseph and how correctly he had explained his dream. He remembered, too, that he had promised to speak to Pharaoh about Joseph, and now felt very sorry that he had forgotten to do so. He told Pharaoh about Joseph, and Pharaoh sent for Joseph right away.

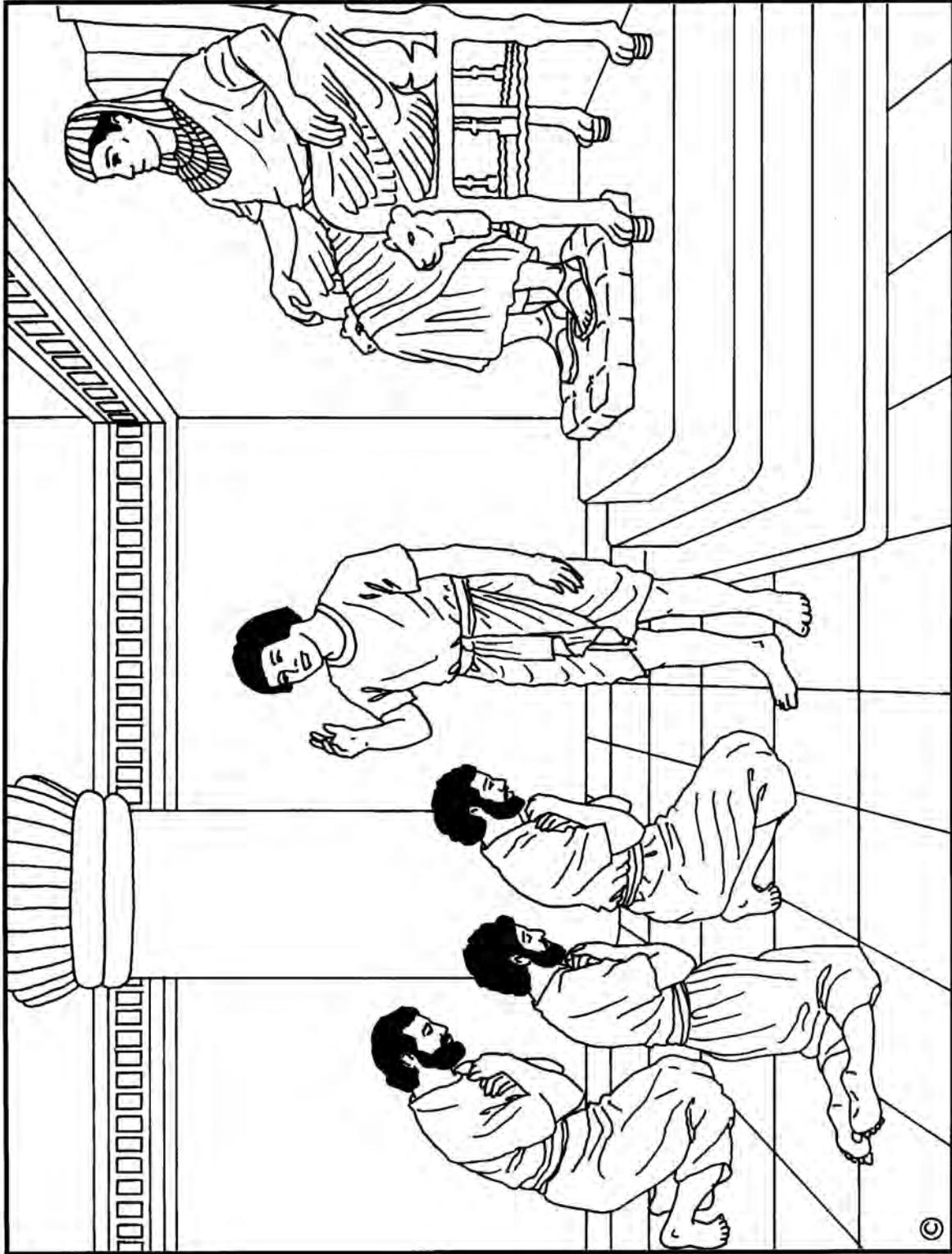
Pharaoh told Joseph his dreams, which he thought were very strange. In his first dream Pharaoh saw seven fat cows come up out of the water. They were nice looking and healthy. Then he saw seven lean, ugly cows come up out of the water and those seven lean cows ate up the seven fat cows.

Pharaoh's second dream was just as odd. In this dream the king saw seven very plump ears of corn and seven ears of corn which were thin and scorched by the sun. The seven thin ears of corn ate up the other seven, just as the lean cows had eaten up the fat cows.

Joseph was a very wise young man because God was with him and helped him to understand dreams. So Joseph knew what these dreams meant.

He explained that there were to be seven years when everything on the farms would grow very well because there would be plenty of rain. After that, there would be seven years when nothing would grow. He told Pharaoh that the thing to do during the seven years of plenty was to store all the grain and food they possibly could. Then, during the seven years when nothing would grow, everyone would have plenty to eat.

Pharaoh was very pleased that Joseph could explain his dreams because then he knew ahead of time about the seven good years, and could take Joseph's advice so no one would go hungry in the seven lean years. The king was so happy with Joseph that he had him released from prison and made him a ruler over all Egypt.



Joseph's Brothers Bow Before Him: Genesis 42:6,7

Except for the king, no one in Egypt was more important than Joseph. He made all the arrangements to take care of the food which would be so plentiful during those first seven years.

Chapter Eleven

When Dreams Come True

Pharaoh's dreams came true just as Joseph had explained them. There was a great famine in all of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, the land that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Joseph's father Jacob and his eleven brothers who had sold him to be a slave in Egypt, were running short of food because of the famine. So Jacob sent ten of his sons all the way to Egypt to see if they could buy food. They had heard that even though there was also a famine in Egypt, the people there had food for themselves and for others. They did not know, of course, that Joseph was the one who had made provision for the food supplies of Egypt. In fact, Joseph's father thought that he was dead.

Benjamin was Jacob's youngest son whom he loved very much. Jacob would not let him go to Egypt with his other ten sons. He was afraid that something would happen to him, even as something had happened to Joseph years before.

When Jacob's sons arrived in Egypt and asked if they could buy grain, they were taken to see Joseph. They had not seen him for many years and they, too, probably thought he was dead. They were brought to Joseph because he was the ruler of Egypt and had charge of all the food. No one could buy food and take it out of Egypt unless Joseph said they could.

When the brothers explained that they had come from Canaan and their father was very old and needed food, Joseph knew they were his brothers. Joseph remembered the dreams that God had given him when he was a young man. The dreams had shown that Joseph's brothers would one day bow down before him and, sure enough, here they were, bowing down before him and pleading for something to eat.

They did not know they were talking to the brother they had sold into slavery. Joseph was much older and was dressed like an Egyptian. They wondered why this official was asking so many questions about their father and their younger brother Benjamin. But, it's

no wonder Joseph asked questions! He loved his father and he loved his brothers and was eager to find out all that had happened to them.

Joseph wanted to see Benjamin so he made a plan for his brothers to bring him with them the next time they came for food. Joseph made his brothers think that he was not sure they were telling him the truth. He told them he thought they were spies. Of course they felt badly about it and insisted it was not true.

Joseph said there was something they could do if they wanted him to believe them. He said that he would keep one of the brothers with him until they came back with Benjamin. If they did not come back with their youngest brother, this would prove to Joseph that they were not telling the truth. So Simeon stayed in Egypt and the others went back to Canaan.

Joseph gave them a supply of grain; each brother received a full sack. After the sacks were filled and the brothers paid for the grain, Joseph told his servant to put their money back in their sacks. He really did not want to take their money.

When they got home and told Jacob what Joseph had said, Jacob was still afraid to let Benjamin go to Egypt because he thought something could happen to him and he might never see him again.

The famine went on and the people were very hungry — Jacob and his family needed food badly! Finally, Jacob let Benjamin go with his brothers back to Egypt for more food.

When Joseph saw Benjamin, his younger brother whom he had been closest to, he had to hide his tears. Joseph did not want them to know yet who he was. He was not ready to let them know that he was their very own brother whom they had sold such a long time ago.

Joseph told his servants to get dinner ready, and then they all ate together. The brothers thought Joseph was an Egyptian, and it was against the law for an Egyptian to eat at the same table with people of other nations, especially with Hebrews. So Joseph arranged to have a table by himself.

That must have been an exciting dinner! The brothers would have been wondering what would happen to them next, and why the food administrator of Egypt was serving them such a delicious meal. And Joseph must have had many thoughts going through his mind as he remembered all of his experiences since his brothers had sold him into slavery.

The next morning another supply of grain was prepared for the brothers to take back to Canaan. Again, each one was given a sackful, but this time Joseph told a servant to take his own silver cup and put it in the top of Benjamin's sack.

They had not traveled very far when Joseph's servants came hurrying after them and asked about the cup. The brothers were quite sure that none of them were guilty, so they were willing to take the bags of grain off the donkey's backs and open them up to prove that they had not stolen Joseph's cup.

When they came to Benjamin's sack, there was the cup! They were so surprised and felt very badly about it, for they had promised their father so faithfully that they would bring Benjamin back. And now they thought he would be kept in jail in Egypt.

Then Judah, one of the older brothers, explained to Joseph how terribly hard it would be for their poor, old father if Benjamin should be kept in Egypt. He felt that Jacob would die of a broken heart. Judah was so anxious about it that he offered to stay in Egypt to take Benjamin's place. This showed he had a lot of love in his heart for his youngest brother and their father, and that he was very sorry for his part in selling Joseph.

When Joseph was alone with his brothers, he broke down and cried before them, and told them that he was Joseph, their brother! Joseph told them not to be afraid, he did not want them to blame themselves for having sold him into Egypt. God had wanted him to come to Egypt. He wanted Joseph to be in charge of the food supply so that all the brothers and their families would have food to eat during the seven years of famine.

Joseph's brothers had been jealous of him, but he was not angry with them. He didn't want to punish them for what they had done. He told them to go back to Canaan and bring their father, and their families, and all their flocks and herds down to Egypt. He promised he would give them a large section of land in a part of the country called Goshen, where they could live.

In this way Joseph's dreams had finally come true. He was now ruler over his father and his brothers and in a very real way was their savior. Joseph loved God with his whole heart and because he did, God helped him. He had been able to provide food for his whole family.

In some ways, Joseph was like Jesus. Jesus came here to earth just as Joseph went into Egypt. Joseph was put in prison after coming to Egypt. Jesus, after coming to earth, was also put in prison — the grave, the great prison-house of death.

Just as Joseph was freed from prison and made a ruler, so Jesus was freed from death and he will become a great ruler, too. He will rule over all the earth! And just as Joseph provided food to keep his people alive, Jesus will provide the Word of God which will give life to everybody on the earth and they will be able to live forever!

Chapter Twelve

The Baby in the Bulrushes

Many years after Joseph had brought his family to Egypt during the famine, the Egyptians began to think there were too many of the Hebrews. It worried them that the Israelites might become mightier than themselves.

There was a different Pharaoh, or king, ruling Egypt now who did not know Joseph, and was not nearly as kind as the one Joseph had known. He ordered all the Hebrew boy babies to be drowned in the Nile River as soon as they were born!

An Israelite couple, Amram and Jochebed, had two children — a son named Aaron and a daughter named Miriam. Later they had another baby boy. Jochebed hid him for three months to keep him from being drowned in the river.

When she knew she could not keep the baby hidden much longer, Jochebed wove a little basket of bulrushes, making it watertight with tar and pitch. She put the baby in it and hid it among the grasses that grew up at the edge of the river. She told Miriam, the baby's sister, to stay nearby to see what would happen.

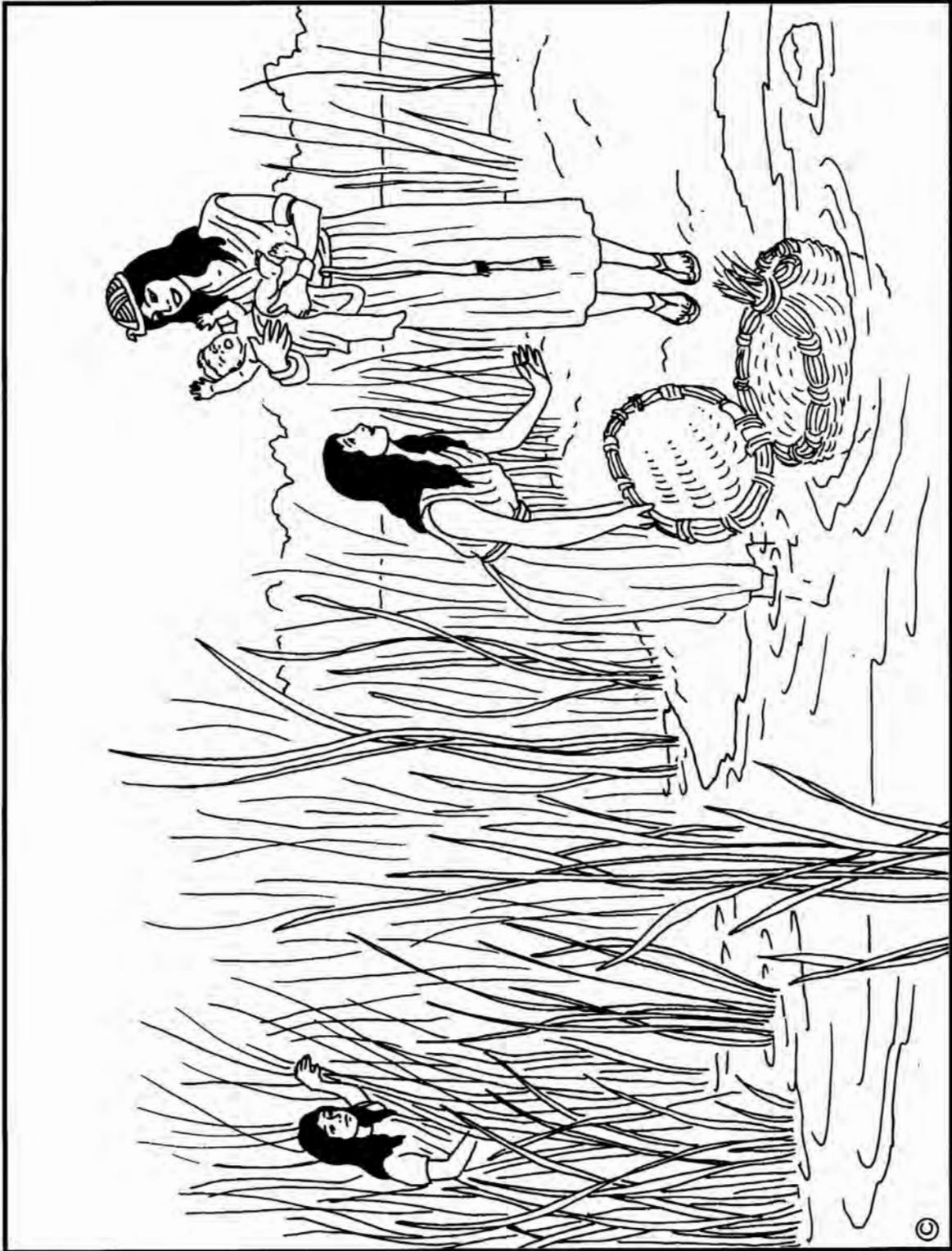
One of the daughters of the Pharaoh came to the river to bathe. Several of her handmaidens came along to help her. Pharaoh's daughter saw the little basket snuggled among the reeds and rushes by the water's edge, and she asked the servants to find out what was in it.

When they opened the basket, there was a beautiful baby. The king's daughter knew that it was a Hebrew baby. She knew, too, that all Hebrew babies were supposed to be drowned. But she was kindhearted and couldn't bear to see such a precious little boy killed. She decided that she would adopt him and call him her own.

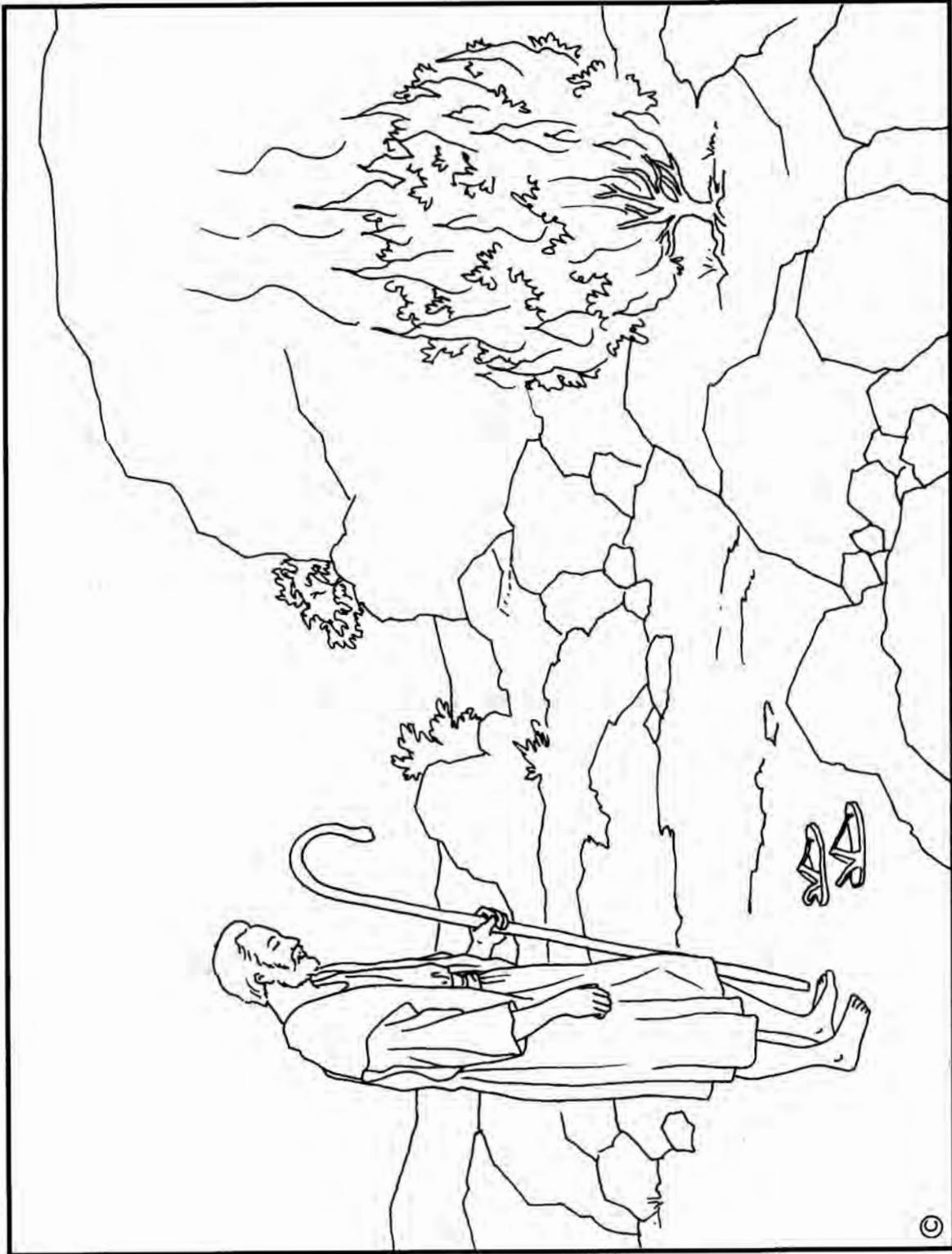
The king's daughter did not understand very much about taking care of babies, so Miriam came to her and offered to get a nurse to take care of the baby. The king's daughter thought that was a very good idea, so Miriam went home and brought back their mother. Now Jochebed had her own baby to nurse under the protection of the daughter of the king.

The princess named the baby Moses, which means "drawn out," because she had drawn him out of the water. Moses grew up with privileges he would not have had as an Israelite. His own mother taught him about the Israelite culture and the Egyptian princess taught him about the Egyptian culture. God was watching over Moses and directed his life because he knew that when Moses became a man, he would have a great work for him to do.

So Moses was not in danger for his life. He grew up in Pharaoh's palace and was very well educated. But he could not forget his people because he knew that they were suffering. They were working very, very hard as slaves for Pharaoh.



Baby Moses Rescued: Exodus 2:1-10



The Burning Bush: Exodus 3:1-12

Chapter Thirteen

God Speaks to Moses

God was watching over Moses and taking care of him because he had a great work for him to do. Just because Pharaoh decided that all the Hebrew baby boys should be killed, it did not mean that God couldn't take care of Moses. Nothing can harm anyone whom God protects.

Egypt was not the country God had promised to the Hebrew people, the children of Abraham. They were in Egypt because many years before, Joseph, one of Jacob's twelve sons, was sold by his brothers as a slave and taken there. Later, Joseph became a great ruler over the Egyptian people.

Then, when there was a famine in Canaan, which was the real home of the Hebrews, the rest of the family also went to Egypt and there they were cared for by Joseph.

Now the Hebrew people were having a very hard time in Egypt. They had become slaves. God wanted to take them away from their taskmasters and let them go back to the land of Canaan. God knew that when Moses became a man he would be just the right person to lead all the Israelites (Hebrews) out of Egypt.

God knew that Pharaoh would not want to let the Israelites leave the country. They were doing a lot of hard work for the Egyptians, and if they left, the Egyptians would have to do the work themselves. You can be sure that Pharaoh did all he could to keep them in Egypt.

God knew that whoever was to lead his people out of Egypt would need to know how to talk to the king, because he would have to appear before him to ask permission for the Hebrews to leave. It's exciting to see how God had arranged for Moses to learn all he needed to know so that he was prepared for the job.

There was someone who spent more time with Moses than anyone else in the palace, and that was his own mother. Over the years she told Moses about the many amazing things God had done for their people, and what he promised to do for them in the future. She told him all about Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and about the promise God had made to them of a time coming when he would bless all the people of the world, and that the one to do this would come from the Hebrew people.

The Israelites believed God would raise up a man from among them to be a great leader, and that through him all of God's promises would come true. Their name for this leader was "Messiah." The other nations didn't believe God's promises, though, and they thought the Hebrews were foolish to believe in a coming Messiah.

One day Moses was out walking and saw an Egyptian man beating one of the Hebrews. Moses loved God, and because he did, he also loved God's people. He just couldn't stand to see one of God's people being beaten, so he killed the Egyptian! Moses then buried the Egyptian in the sand, hoping no one would find out about it.

The next day, however, Moses discovered that someone had seen what he had done. Moses knew then that he was really in trouble. When the king heard about what Moses had done, he decided that he should be killed.

But God still loved Moses, and helped him to escape from Egypt. When he fled out of Egypt to save his life, he went into the land of Midian. He was a stranger there and probably wondered just how God would guide him. He sat down by a large well and watched the shepherds as they brought their flocks to the well for water.

As he sat there, seven young maidens came to water their father's flock. The shepherds who were watering their own flocks didn't want these young women to get water, so they chased them away. Moses did not like that at all, so he stood up to the men until the young maidens got some water, and then he helped them water their flock.

When the young women returned to the home of their father and told him what this nice young man had done, their father sent for Moses. Their father's name was Jethro, and he liked Moses very much. Later he offered him his daughter, Zipporah, in marriage and Moses became one of the family. Moses and Zipporah had a son and they named him Gershom.

Moses worked for Jethro, taking care of his sheep for forty years. Moses was now eighty years old, but he was still strong and healthy, and able to do the great work God had in mind for him.

Then an amazing thing happened! One day as Moses was watching the sheep, he noticed a bush which seemed to be on fire. He went closer to it and saw that, while flames were leaping up from it, the bush itself was not being destroyed by the fire. Moses could see that this was not an ordinary fire. Then he heard a voice speaking to him, telling him to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground.

Moses soon realized who was speaking to him — it was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jochebed, Moses' mother, had told him about this awesome God.

God said to Moses that the time had come for the Israelites to be delivered from their slavery, and that he was the one to lead the people out of Egypt. Moses told God he was not good at speaking and didn't think he would be able to do what God was asking of him.

God told Moses he would have his brother Aaron go with him when he appeared before Pharaoh. Aaron was an excellent speaker and would speak for Moses. So Moses agreed to do his very best, and he and Aaron went to the palace to talk to Pharaoh.

Chapter Fourteen

God Delivers His People

When God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, Moses was afraid he wouldn't be able to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt. And he was right, but God was planning to help him. Moses had a rod in his hand and God told him to throw it down on the ground. When he did, the rod turned into a snake!

Moses was afraid and started to run away, but God told him to take hold of the serpent's tail, and when he did, it became a rod again. God told Moses that when he would come before Pharaoh to ask for the release of the Israelites, the same thing was to be done with the rod. This gave Moses the courage he needed and he was confident that God would help him.

Then God spoke to Aaron, who was living in Egypt with the other Israelites, and told him where he could find his brother Moses. Moses shared with Aaron what God was expecting them to do.

They decided that the first thing they should do was to meet with the elders of Israel. The elders would let all the Israelites know that God was planning to deliver them from their slavery in Egypt.

Then Moses and Aaron met with Pharaoh. They told him that God wanted the Hebrews to leave Egypt so they could worship and serve God. Of course, God knew that Pharaoh was very selfish and would not want to let the Hebrews go. Pharaoh wanted to know who this God was and why he should obey him.

When Pharaoh asked Moses and Aaron about God, Aaron showed God's power by throwing his rod down on the floor and it became a serpent. In Egypt there were magicians and fortune tellers who tried to imitate what God could do. They managed to cause some snakes to wiggle around on the floor, but the snake that God had made out of Moses' rod swallowed all the other serpents!

Pharaoh was impressed, but was still not willing to let the Hebrews go. Instead, he gave orders to the slave drivers that they should make them work even harder than before. It made the Hebrews wish that nothing had ever been said about their leaving Egypt.

When Moses heard how badly the people felt, he was almost sorry himself. Nevertheless, God wanted the Hebrews to realize how much better it would be for them when they finally got free from Egyptian bondage.

Moses and Aaron again asked Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go. Aaron, of course, did the talking, but Moses told him what to say. Again Pharaoh said no!

Then Moses held up his rod over the river — the river Nile from which the king's daughter had rescued him when he was a baby. Now all the water in the great, wide river turned into blood! Because of this, the fish in the river died. Not only the water in the river, but the water in the pans and bowls and other dishes of the Egyptians turned into blood.

Finally there just wasn't any water for the Egyptians to drink so they dug wells near the river, but still no fresh water was found. This was certainly a great plague upon Egypt. But when the river went back to normal, Pharaoh was still not willing to give the Hebrews their freedom. He probably thought there would be no more trouble.

But Pharaoh was mistaken! Other plagues soon followed. The river was filled with frogs and there were so many of them that they came up onto the land, and even into the people's houses. The frogs became so thick that they crawled into the dough when the women were making bread. Who would want to eat bread with frogs baked in it?

Pharaoh began to think things over. He sent for Moses and Aaron, and agreed to let the Hebrews go if they would just get rid of the frogs. But when the frogs were gone, he changed his mind again.

Then followed the third plague from God. The ground in Egypt is very sandy and when Moses stretched out his rod over the ground the sand became filled with lice. The lice crawled around everywhere and onto everything. Life for the Egyptians must have been almost unbearable while the plague of lice lasted.

But, when the plague of lice was removed, Pharaoh hardened his heart against the Israelites even more.

Next God brought a plague of flies. The good thing about this plague was that the flies did not go into that part of the country where the Hebrews lived. This seemed to make Pharaoh realize that God was helping the Hebrews. He sent for Moses and Aaron again and told them to take their people out of the country, but not to take them very far away. Yet when the plague of flies stopped, Pharaoh changed his mind once again and would not let them go.

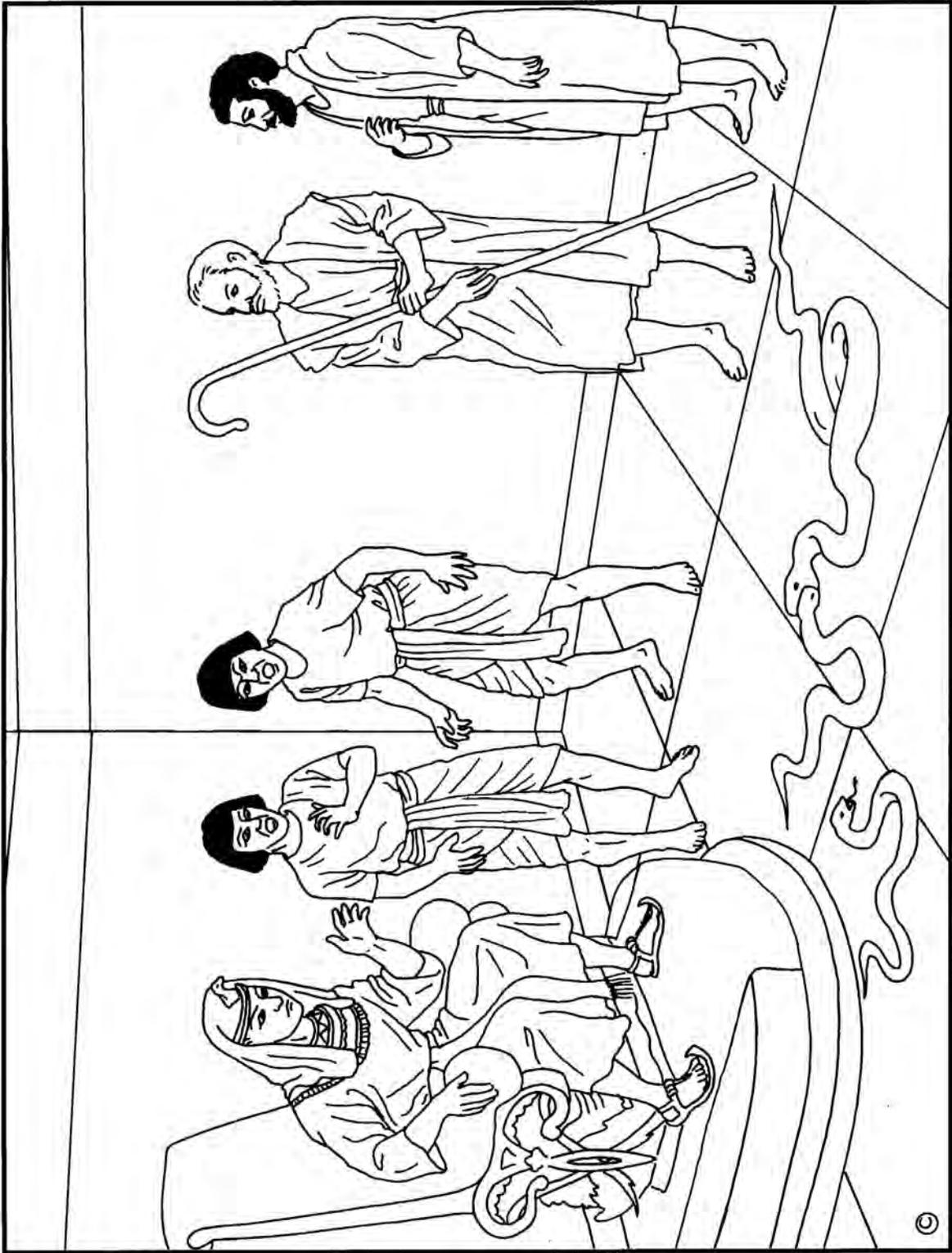
Then a great plague came upon all the cattle of the Egyptians, causing them to die. That was the fifth plague.

Following that, the Egyptians broke out with boils. Then there was a plague of hail. After that came the eighth plague — the whole land was filled with locusts. Locusts are big insects, a little larger than grasshoppers. They ate every green thing in sight so that the land became bare.

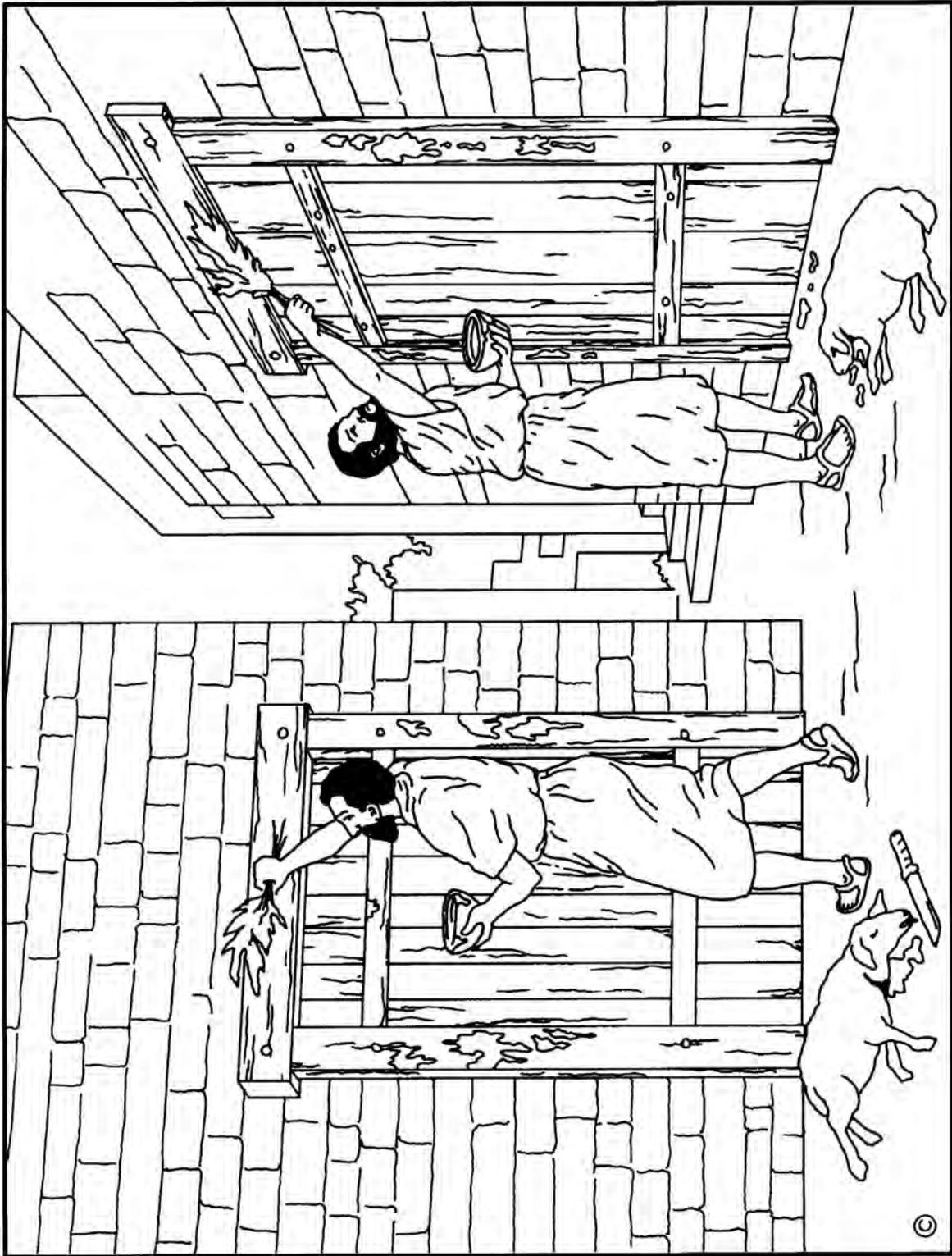
By this time, surely Pharaoh should have been glad to let the Hebrews go, but he wasn't! With each plague he made Moses think he would let them go, but when the plague was taken away, he would change his mind.

The ninth was a plague of darkness. There was no light in Egypt, not even in the daytime. It was just as dark in the middle of the day as it was in the middle of the night. It stayed that way for three whole days so that the people could not do anything. It wasn't that way, though, where the Hebrew people lived.

Pharaoh continued to harden his heart, until finally it became necessary for God to send another plague — the tenth and worst plague — the firstborn child in every Egyptian family died. The firstborn of the cattle also died. Even Pharaoh's own firstborn son died. That made him finally think he had better change his mind about letting the Israelites go — and he did!



Moses, Aaron, and the Magicians in Front of Pharaoh: Exodus 7:11,12



Passover Blood Applied to the Doorposts: Exodus 12:1-7

He sent for Moses and Aaron again, and told them to take their people out of Egypt as quickly as possible. Pharaoh had had enough trouble! He and all the Egyptians became afraid that they would die if he still would not let God's people go. So Pharaoh told Moses and Aaron that the Hebrews could go, and could take their cattle and other belongings with them.

The Egyptians were so eager for them to leave that they gave them all the help they could. They even gave them jewels of gold and silver and beautiful clothing when the Israelites asked for them. Moses and Aaron believed more than ever that God was with them.

Chapter Fifteen

The Last Night in Egypt

The wicked king, Pharaoh, was glad to have the Hebrews finally leave his country. That was because his oldest son had died suddenly, just like the oldest, or the firstborn children, in every family of Egypt. Pharaoh knew that this terrible disaster came upon the Egyptians because he was refusing to let the Hebrews leave the land.

God had told Moses earlier what he intended to do. He told him what the Hebrews would need to do so that their firstborn would not be destroyed as were the Egyptians' firstborn. What God was going to tell them to do was so important that he told them to make it the beginning of their year from then on.

The first month of the Jewish year is in the springtime and it is called Nisan. On the tenth day of Nisan, every family of the Hebrews was to take a young lamb, and keep it until the fourteenth day. Just as the sun was going down on the fourteenth day they would have to kill those lambs. The blood of the lamb was then sprinkled on the door posts of their houses and over the lintels (tops of the doors). That night they were supposed to roast the lambs, and the families were to eat them in a hurry during the night.

If a family was small and couldn't eat a whole lamb in one night, then the family next door could be their guests so that one lamb would do for two families. None of the lamb was to be left until the morning. If they could not eat all of it, they had to burn what was left over.

While they were eating the lamb, the Hebrews were to be dressed, have their sandals on, their staffs in their hands and be ready to leave Egypt. God knew that the next morning Pharaoh would insist that they leave right away!

That night an angel of God destroyed all the firstborn of Egypt, but wherever the blood of the lamb was found on the door posts of the houses, the firstborn child in that house was not destroyed. In that way, all the Hebrews were saved!

There was another reason God made these arrangements for the Hebrews. Remember the story of Cain and Abel? God had been so pleased when Abel brought a lamb for a sacrifice because the lamb was a picture, or illustration, of Jesus. Jesus is the Lamb of God that will take away the sin of the world. People die because there is sin in the world, but when Jesus takes all sin away they won't have to die any more. God sent Jesus as his Lamb to do this great work!

At different times God has asked his people to sacrifice lambs to illustrate what he had planned. Abraham was even asked to sacrifice his son, but God gave him a lamb to sacrifice in place of Isaac.

God had told Abraham that he plans to bless everybody some day, but before he can do that, the sins of the people must be taken away. This means that God's Lamb would have to die. That is why God asked the Hebrews to sacrifice lambs on the night before they left Egypt.

The sacrificial lambs are called Passover lambs because when the angel of death went through Egypt that night taking the life of the firstborn in every family, he would "pass over" those houses where he saw the blood on the door posts, and the firstborn of those families would be saved.



The Crossing of the Red Sea: Exodus 14:13-22

Chapter Sixteen

Crossing the Red Sea

It was God's mighty power that delivered the Israelites from being slaves in Egypt, and God continued to do wonderful things for them. When they left Egypt there were two ways they could have traveled in order to reach Canaan, the land that God had promised them. One way seemed quite easy and would have been quicker, but God did not want them to go that way. He led his people the difficult way, and he had a very good reason for it. He wanted the Israelites, his special people, to understand his power so that they would always trust in him.

As Moses and the Israelites left Egypt, God went before them during the daytime in a pillar of cloud to lead their way. At night he led them by a pillar of fire, giving them light. That way they could travel by day or by night. They traveled for some time until they reached the edge of a large body of water called the Red Sea.

Now Pharaoh was beginning to feel sorry that he had let the Hebrews leave. He knew that they would have to stop when they reached the sea, so he got his army together and went out after the Israelites to bring them back into slavery. Pharaoh's heart was very hard! He had already forgotten about all the plagues God sent to Egypt that had caused him to finally let the Israelites go.

Pharaoh had six hundred chariots. A chariot was a little wagon with two wheels, pulled by horses, that the soldiers rode in. Pharaoh had a very great army and plenty of chariots. He was proud and was sure he would have no difficulty in capturing the Israelites because they had no army and no chariots.

The Israelites were terrified when they saw Pharaoh and the Egyptian army coming after them. They were forgetting how powerful God was and that he would take care of them. They told Moses they wished they had never left Egypt! That made Moses feel very bad, but he told them not to worry because the LORD God would fight for them.

God told Moses to tell the people to go forward. They thought that was a strange thing to say since the Red Sea was right in front of them — but then a remarkable thing happened! The cloud which God used to guide them came between them and the Egyptian army. Then God told Moses to hold his rod over the sea, and when he did, a strong wind began to blow over the water. It blew all night until, incredibly, the water was blown aside far enough to make a pathway of dry ground over which the Israelites could walk. They marched right through to the other side!

The Egyptians soon found out what had happened and decided that if the Hebrews could cross over that way, so could they, but they were badly mistaken. As soon as the Hebrews were safely on the other side, the LORD caused the wind to stop blowing, and the water rushed back into place. All the soldiers and horses in the entire Egyptian army that had followed the Israelites were drowned. That was how God delivered his people from their former masters.

Once again God had taken care of his people!

Then Moses and all the children of Israel, the Hebrews, sang a wonderful song of praise to God. Here is part of it: "The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him."

Chapter Seventeen

God Gives Laws to His People

Now that the Hebrews were out of the land of Egypt and separated from other people, it was necessary for them to know what was right and what was wrong for them to do. So God gave them his Law. He told them just how they should behave as his proper servants.

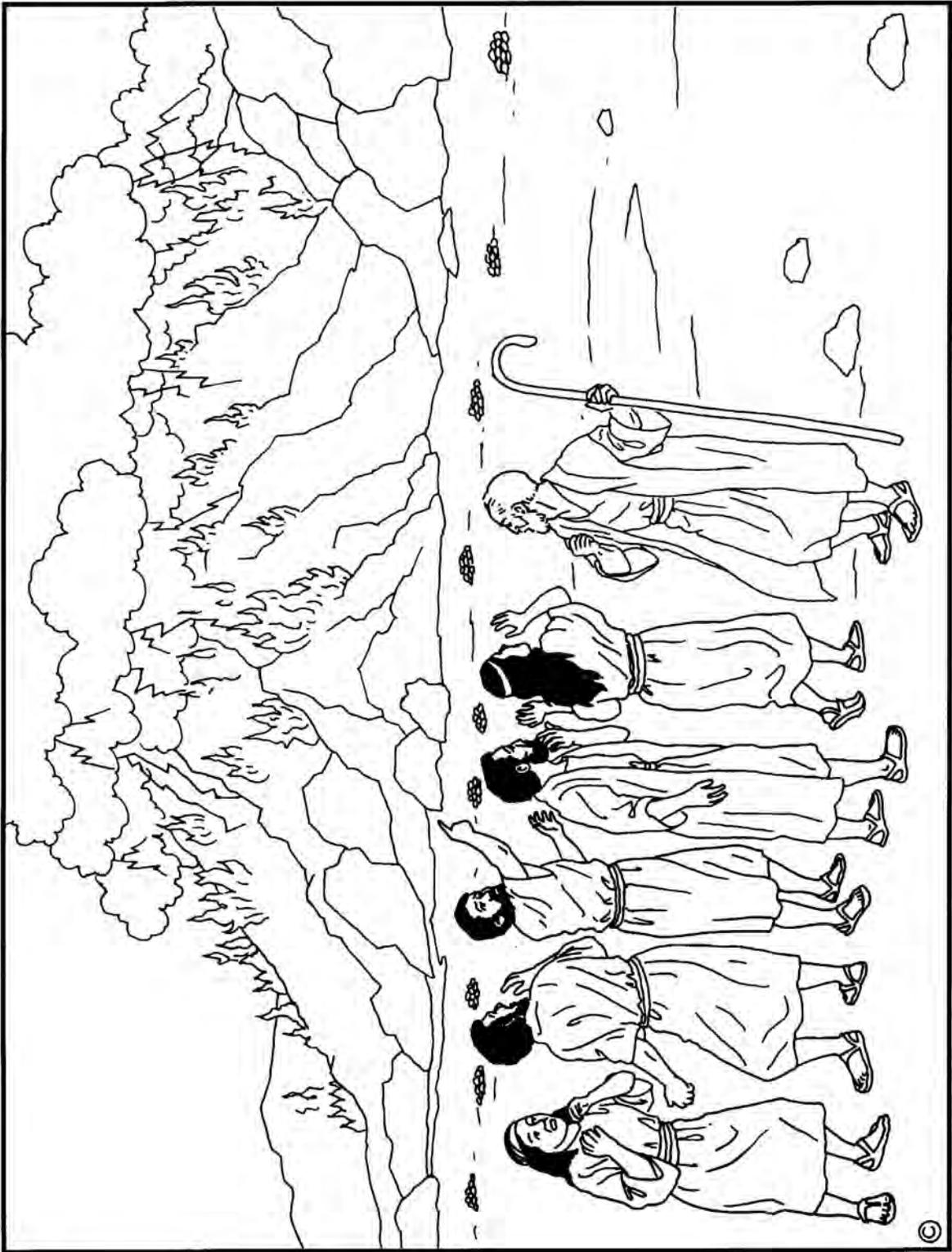
After they crossed the Red Sea they went into a desert. There were only certain places where they could find water, and there was no food. In one place they found water but it was bitter, and, oh, how they complained to Moses. Then God told Moses to find a certain kind of shrub to put into the water and it made the water sweet and pure enough for them to drink.

It seems that every time things didn't go exactly to suit the Hebrews they blamed Moses for it and grumbled against him. They would forget that it was God who was guiding them and who used Moses to bring them out of slavery in Egypt.

The Israelites had brought some food with them from Egypt, but soon that food was gone. Again they blamed Moses, but he was very patient and he would always find out from God what to do. And God always knew just what to do.

God loved his people and didn't want them to go hungry, so imagine what he did — he caused food to drop down right out of the sky! The people called it manna. It came in little white lumps, something like big snowflakes, it was sweet like honey and tasted very good. The people had to gather the manna every day. If they tried to save it for the following day it would spoil. Although at the end of the week they could gather enough for two days to last through the Sabbath—the day of rest.

God wanted to give the Hebrews a Law which would tell them just what to do, and how to get along with each other so they would be happy and he could bless them. He gave them this Law at Mount Sinai, or Mount Horeb as it is sometimes called. It was a wonderful, perfect Law. Moses received it from God up in the mountain, and when he



God's Holy Mountain: Exodus 19:12-25

told the people about it, they were excited and said they would obey it.

These are the Ten Commandments given to Moses for the Israelites:

1) "You shall have no other gods before me." This commandment was very important because the Israelites would be meeting people who did serve other gods. Some people think the sun is a god, and others think the moon is a god. Some have fish gods and some have gods of wood, or stone — but these are not gods at all.

The great almighty God who made the sun and moon and stars, the God who made us, is the only real God, and we should not worship any other gods but him. He is the God who gave such wonderful promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

2) "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below." The Israelites were not supposed to make, bow down to, or worship any image of a god, such as birds, snakes, or other humans. Almighty God is not like any such things and should have first place in human hearts.

3) "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God." This means that they needed to honor the name of God and not to use it lightly or in swearing. They were to use his name reverently and with great respect. They should not be called God's people without acting like it. We should have that same kind of respect for God.

4) "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." It was a day to rest, that is, to stop their work and take time to consider God's blessings. They could work for six days and rest on the seventh day, the Sabbath.

5) "Honor your father and your mother." This commandment can be meant for children, but it can also be for adults. We should continue to honor our parents no matter how old we get.

6) "You shall not murder." Human life is precious and it is wrong to take another's life unless it is demanded by God's Law.

7) "You shall not commit adultery." When two people get married, they should always appreciate, love and be faithful to each other.

8) "You shall not steal." No one has a right to take what belongs to someone else no matter how badly they may want it.

9) "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." That meant they were not supposed to lie, or even gossip about people. We, too, should be honest in all that we say and do.

10) "You shall not covet...anything that belongs to your neighbor." To covet is to have a strong desire for things that belong to other people.

Even though these commandments, or laws, were given to the Israelites a long time ago, they are good for us to try to live by as well. Let us always remember that our LORD God wants us to obey him, not only because it is good for us to do so, but also because it makes him very happy when we try our best to do things which please him!

Chapter Eighteen

Building a House for God

The Law that God gave to Moses was written by him on two flat pieces of stone. They were written by God's finger! Moses brought these stone tablets with the Ten Commandments down from Mount Sinai and the people agreed to do what God instructed them to do. Later, Moses went up into the mountain again. This time God told Moses to build a tabernacle — a special tent in which the people would worship God. It was a very special tent, so God told Moses exactly how to build it.

The Tabernacle was not like our houses, it was not built with bricks or stone. It didn't have any floor at all. The sides of the tabernacle were made of wide wooden boards which were placed on end in heavy silver sockets that held them up. They were entirely covered with gold, which was very thin and covered the boards so completely that they looked like they were solid gold. They were used to form the walls of the tabernacle. There were two rooms in the tabernacle. The front room was called the Holy and the room in back was called the Most Holy. The Holy was twice as big as the Most Holy.

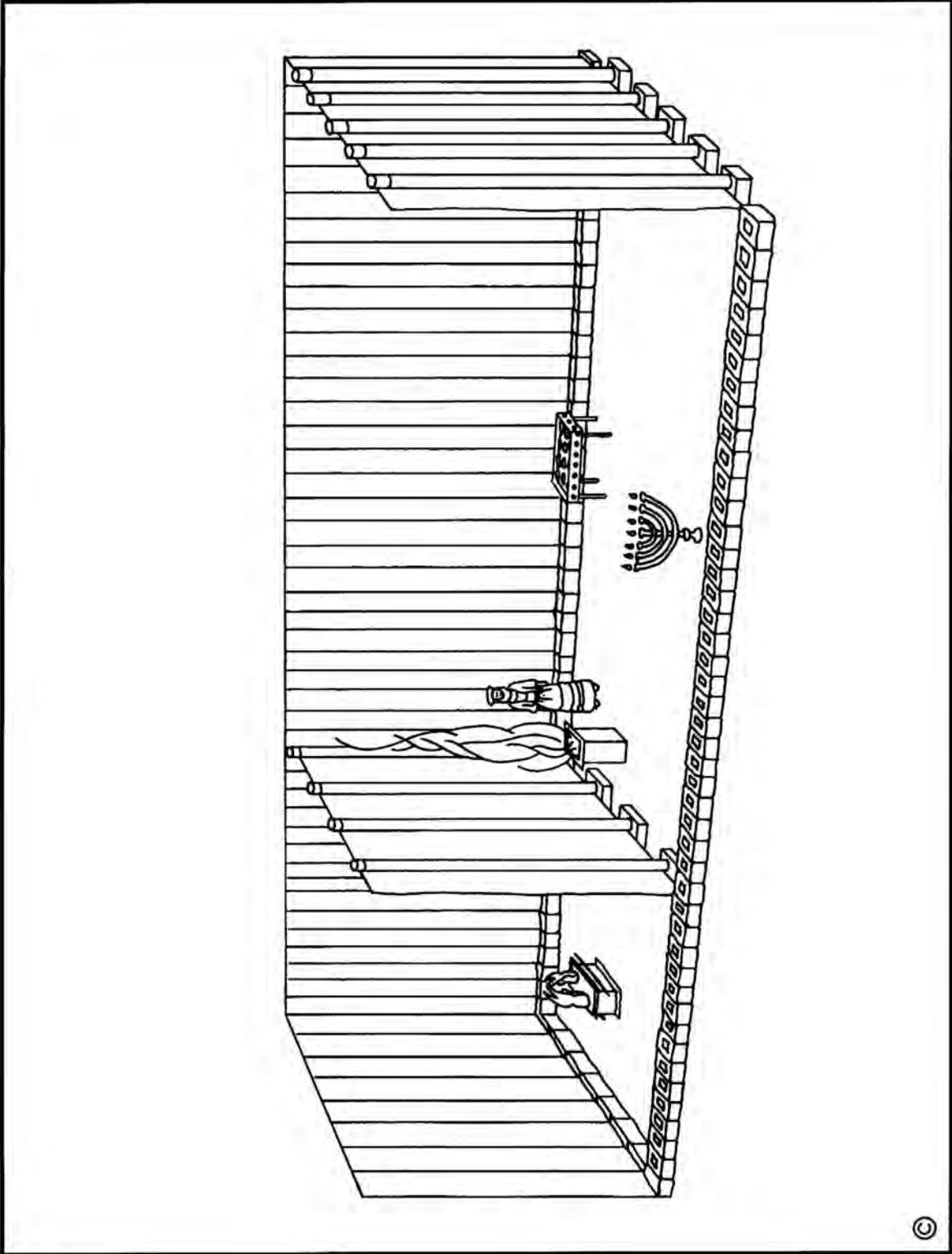
The Tabernacle was forty-five feet long, fifteen feet wide, and fifteen feet high. The curtain covering the entrance from the outside was called the first veil, or door. The two rooms were divided by a large, beautiful curtain which was called the second veil. These veils were made of white linen with blue, scarlet, and purple embroidery.

The Tabernacle's roof was not made of boards or shingles or anything like that. Instead, they used very large curtains which were thrown over the top of the tabernacle. There were four of these curtains. The first one was made of white cloth with beautiful embroidered designs. The second was of cloth made from goats' hair. Over that was a covering made from sheep skins that had been dyed red, and over them all was a covering of seal skins. The curtains not only covered the top of the tabernacle, but also hung down over the sides, covering the gold boards. That meant that when the Tabernacle was finished the only way to see the gold boards, which formed the walls, was to look at them from the inside. Only the Levites and priests were allowed to do that.

God told Moses to stretch a long white curtain all around the tabernacle to form a big yard, or open space. This space was called the court. It was 150 feet long and seventy five feet wide. The Tabernacle was placed toward the back part of the court with the opening, or first veil, facing the entrance. At the entrance to the court was the gate and it was also a beautiful linen curtain of white with blue, scarlet, and purple embroidery.

In the court there were two articles of furniture. Near the gate in the court was a brazen altar. This was the place where sacrifices were offered to God. It was made of boards covered with sheets of copper.

The second article in the court was a large water basin, called a laver, which was made of polished copper and stood between the brazen altar and the Tabernacle door. There was water in the laver and those who served in the Tabernacle used it to wash their hands and feet, which they did before they could go into the Tabernacle to appear before the LORD.



©

Components of the Tabernacle; Exodus 36 and 40

Father in heaven, loves us all so much that he gave his own son, Jesus, to be sacrificed for the whole world! This is a lesson that all mankind will eventually learn.

There were many sacrifices made at the Tabernacle, but the most important one was offered once every year on the Day of Atonement. This is the way it was done:

First, Aaron took a young calf, called a bullock, and killed it. Then certain parts of it, like the heart, liver, and the fat, were burned on the brazen altar in the court. The main carcass of the animal was burned outside of the court. The blood of the bullock was taken by Aaron into the Most Holy and sprinkled on the Mercy Seat.

On his way to the Most Holy, the priest stopped at the golden altar to make an offering of incense. Incense is a sort of powdered perfume which the priest sprinkled upon coals of fire causing a sweet-smelling smoke to drift into the Most Holy ahead of the priest.

After the bullock was offered, Aaron killed a young goat and did the very same thing with it as he had done with the bullock.

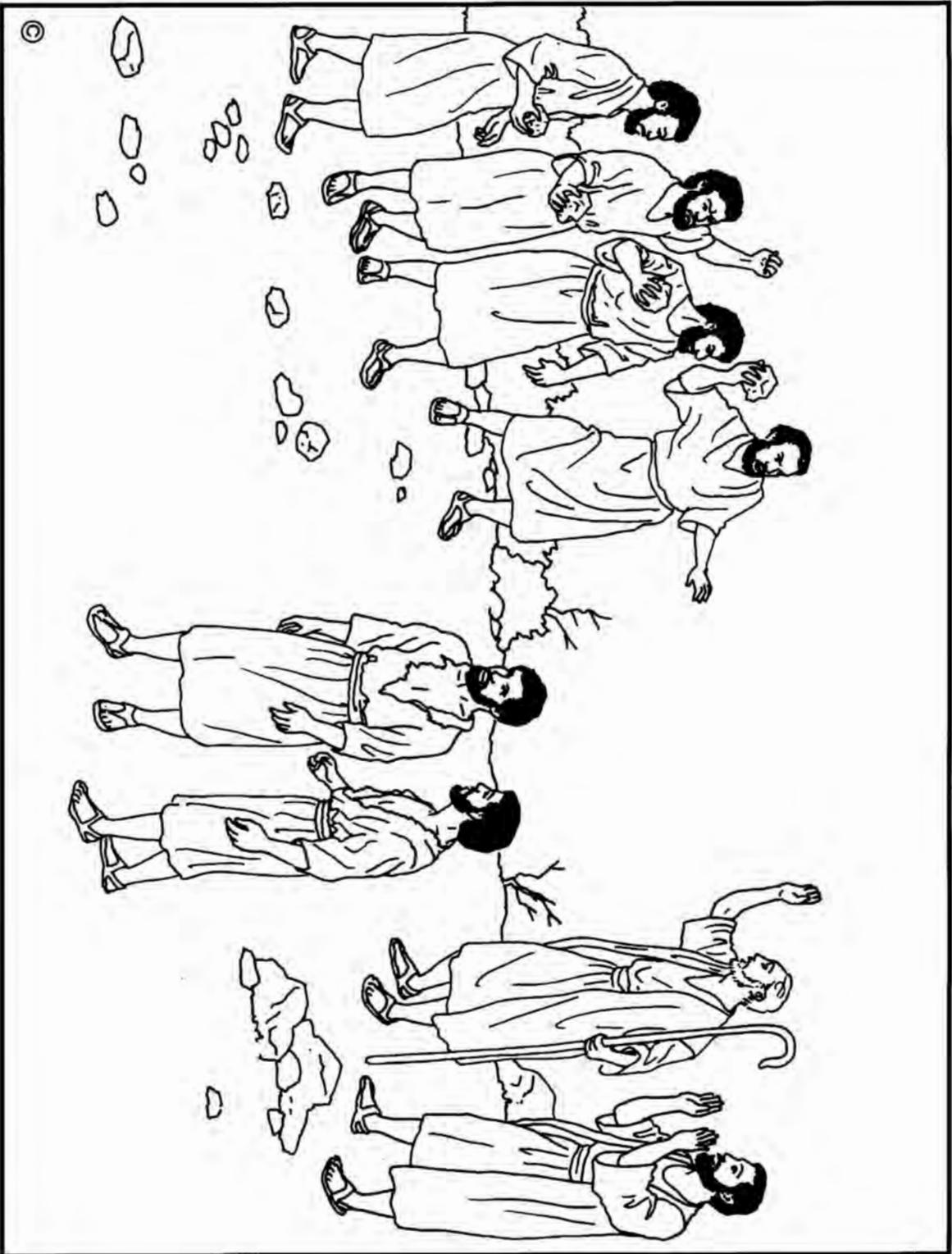
All this is a lesson to teach us about something much greater than the offering of bullocks and goats. The Most Holy of the Tabernacle represents heaven itself, which is God's real home.

When Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead, he entered into heaven. God was satisfied with the sacrifice he had made. Now when we pray to God in the name of Jesus, God hears us and gives us his blessings.

The Mercy Seat teaches us that, because Jesus shed his blood for us, God in his mercy will bless us and give us everlasting life. God has always loved us all and he wants us to know that there is only this one way that we can be blessed and that is through Jesus.

God had made the amazing promise to Abraham that he intended to bless all the people of the world! The lessons of the Tabernacle and its sacrifices are to remind us that these blessings which God has promised will come through Jesus. They will come true because Jesus died for us.

The reason the priest sacrificed two animals was because God planned to offer some of his human family an opportunity to sacrifice their lives, just as Jesus did. Everyone who accepts that offer, and are faithful, will be able to help others in the kingdom to receive life and blessings. The bullock represents Jesus and the goat represents those who faithfully follow Jesus' teachings and try to copy his example.



Joshua and Caleb: Numbers 14:2-10

Chapter Nineteen

Spying Out the Land

The children of Israel stayed near Mount Sinai for some time while the Tabernacle was being built. Then God caused a cloud to float over the Tabernacle, which let the Israelites know he would protect them as they continued their journey to the Promised Land of Canaan. It also told them it was time for them to start because the cloud would move in the direction God wanted the people to go. The Tabernacle was built in such a way that it could easily be taken apart and moved.

The cloud kept moving day by day until it led the children of Israel very near the border of Canaan, to a place called Kadesh-barnea. There the cloud stopped and the people knew that God wanted them to stay there for awhile.

Then God told Moses to choose twelve chief men, or rulers, from among the people and send them into the land of Canaan to find out what kind of country it was, and what the people were like. So Moses selected a ruler from each of the tribes and sent them into Canaan to spy out the land.

The land of Canaan really belonged to the Israelites, but during the long time they had been slaves in Egypt other people had moved into it. It was necessary for the Israelites to conquer those people in order to get the land that belonged to them. It seemed very wise to send the spies into the country to get all the information they possibly could.

When the spies were ready to return to the Israelites with their report, they picked a cluster of grapes in Canaan, and it was so large that it needed two of them to carry it. You can imagine how surprised the Israelites must have been to see this large cluster of grapes.

The spies all agreed that Canaan was a wonderful country, and that it would be a great place for the Israelites to live, but all except two of them were afraid of the Canaanites. They told Moses and the Israelites that the people who lived there were very powerful — that they were mighty warriors. They said some of them were giants, and they were afraid of them.

Those ten spies told Moses that the Israelites should not even try to enter the land because they would certainly be defeated. They were sure that all the men of Israel would be killed and the women and children would again become slaves.

There were two of the twelve spies, though, who did not agree with this advice. They were Joshua and Caleb. They had great faith in God, and believed God would help them conquer the people of Canaan. So they told the Israelites not to be afraid, but to go in and take the land.

Most of the Israelites didn't really have much faith in God even though they knew that God had done wonderful things for them. They knew how he had saved them from the plagues in Egypt. They remembered the incredible way he had brought them through the Red Sea and destroyed the Egyptian army. They knew that he sent them bread from

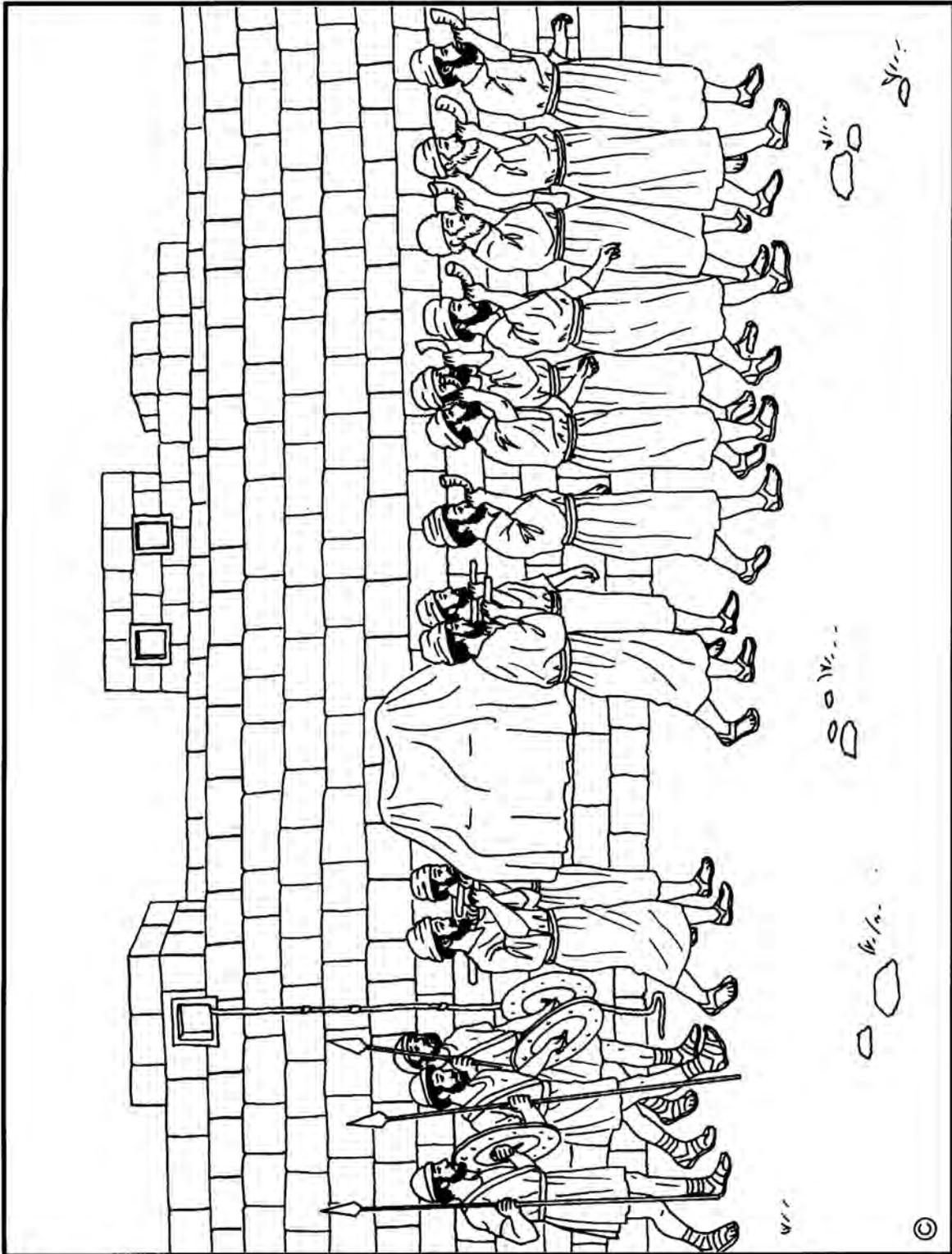
heaven which they called manna. Yet they didn't believe God would be able to help them conquer the people of Canaan. So they decided not to follow the advice of the two spies who trusted God.

The Bible tells us that the Israelites were a "stiff-necked" people, which means they were stubborn and disobedient to God. Now here they were, safely at the border of the Promised Land, and they were afraid to move in. Not only that, but they wanted to go back to Egypt!

Although the Israelites had been very disobedient to God, he loved them and would not let them go back to Egypt. That night God spoke to Moses, telling him that the Israelites would have to stay in the wilderness for forty years. Just as the spies had spent forty days spying out the land of Canaan, so now God's people would have to stay in the wilderness one year for every day — forty years. God told Moses that during those forty years all the Israelites who were then twenty years old or more would die. They were the ones who rebelled against God, so he didn't want them to enter the Promised Land at all.

God told Moses there were only two men of all the Israelites who were then twenty years old or more who would still be living at the close of the forty years in the wilderness — Joshua and Caleb. They were the two spies who told the people to trust God. They believed that God would have helped them to conquer the people of Canaan and take possession of the land.

When Moses told the Israelites that God had decided they would have to remain in the wilderness, they changed their minds and wanted to go right into Canaan. They tried to do it, but because God did not help them, the Canaanites were able to defeat the Israelites and drive them back. This really frightened them, so they settled down for their long stay in the wilderness.



The Fall of Jericho: Joshua 6

Chapter Twenty

Crossing the River Jordan

Moses had a good life. God had saved him from the Nile river when he was just a baby and he lived in the king's palace for forty years. There he received a very good education which helped him when the time came to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

Later, he went to the land of Midian where he lived the life of a shepherd, taking care of sheep for his wife's father. At the end of forty years in Midian, God spoke to Moses from a burning bush, and asked him to lead the Hebrews out of Egyptian bondage. At that time Moses was eighty years old. Next there were forty years of wandering in the wilderness with the people of Israel. Now Moses was a hundred and twenty years old.

The time had come when God wanted the Israelites to cross over the river Jordan into the Promised Land, Canaan, the land that he had promised to Abraham hundreds of years before. Moses was a faithful servant of God, but once, in anger, he forgot to honor God. As a result, he did not have the privilege of entering the Promised Land, though he would be allowed to see it.

God asked Moses to tell the Israelites that it was time for them to enter the land, but that a long time afterward they would be driven out of the land again, and scattered all over the earth. That is why there are Israelites, or Jews, all over the world today. And that is why Israel, which is the Promised Land, has not, until recently, been owned by the Jewish people.

Before Moses died God permitted him to climb up on a very high mountain called Nebo, to Pisgah, one of its highest peaks. From that height he looked across the river Jordan and saw the beautiful land of Promise on the other side. He saw a lot of the land which God had promised the Israelites.

Before Moses went up on the mountain, where he died, he appointed a new leader to take his place. The new leader was Joshua, who was one of the spies who went into the Promised Land and told the Israelites that they could conquer the people of Canaan.

The Israelites could not possibly enter the Promised Land unless the LORD helped them. Between the place where they were camping and the land which God had promised was the river Jordan. It was quite a large river. There were no bridges over it, and no boats or rafts to use in getting across. But God helped them just as he had helped them to cross the Red Sea forty years before.

God told Joshua to have the priests carry the Ark of the Covenant down to the edge of the river. Now that the Israelites were about to move, the Tabernacle was taken apart and made ready to be carried with them. The priests were to lead the way, and carry the Ark.

God told Joshua that he would make a path right through the river, but the people would need a lot of faith to believe that a deep, wide river would open up and let them cross through on dry ground.

When the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark touched the water, it stopped flowing from up the river. Below where they stood, the water kept on flowing so it wasn't long before the river bed was drained dry directly in front of them and they were able to cross over. When the priests reached the center of the river bed, they stopped and stood there while all the rest of the Israelites crossed over into the Promised Land ahead of them.

God also told Joshua to select one strong man from each of the twelve tribes of Israel to take a large stone from the middle of the river bed and carry it over to the Promised Land as a memorial of the amazing miracle God performed for them that day. Twelve stones were also placed in the center of the river bed where the priests stood while the Israelites crossed over.

After forty long years of wandering in the wilderness and living in tents, the Israelites were finally in the Promised Land. They found plenty of grain and other things to eat. They did not need the manna from heaven anymore, so it stopped falling.

Everything was not to be easy for them, though, just because they were in the Promised Land, for there were many strong people living there who did not belong on the land. They were enemies of the Israelites and they had to be conquered.

Right in front of the Israelites as they crossed over the Jordan River was Jericho, one of the largest cities in the land. It was protected all around by very high walls. As soon as the people of Jericho learned how the God of the Israelites had helped them cross over the river Jordan, they were very afraid. Their soldiers would not even come out of the city to fight. All the people of the city — soldiers and civilians — hurried inside the walls and closed all the gates. They thought this would keep them from being captured by the Israelites.

In the meantime, Joshua was trying to think of a way to capture the city. As he looked up, he saw a man dressed like a soldier. Joshua asked him if he was a friend or an enemy. The man said he was a friend, that he was the captain of the LORD's army, and that under his leadership the city of Jericho would fall into the hands of the Israelites. The man was actually not a man at all but an angel sent by God to tell Joshua how to capture that city.

Again the priests were to carry the Ark, and the people were to follow them. They were to march completely around the city once each day for six days. Trumpets were to be blown by the priests, but otherwise they were to do nothing but walk around the city and then return to their places in the camp. This must have seemed odd to the people of Jericho. They didn't know what the Israelites were going to do next.

The Israelites marched once around the city each day for six days and then, as the angel had told Joshua, on the seventh day they marched around the city seven times and the priests blew their trumpets and the Israelites shouted as loudly as they could. All that caused the walls of Jericho to fall down in front of them and the Israelites marched right into the city and captured it!

Chapter Twenty One

An Army That Was Too Large

God was the Commander in Chief of Israel's army. Under his leadership the children of Israel, by fighting hard, finally conquered most of their enemies in the land of Canaan. There were still some enemies in the land, but not enough of them to cause the Israelites too much trouble. For the next forty years the Hebrews had rest from their enemies.

God's people could have had rest and peace all the time if they had been faithful to God, but they were not. They forgot the awesome God who had done so many great things for them and they started to serve other gods.

Because they were unfaithful to God, he allowed them to be oppressed by enemy nations. When God saw that his people had been punished enough for their wrongdoing, he selected Gideon as his general to deliver them from their enemies.

Gideon's father was a leader in the worship of a false god called Baal. He had built an altar on his own land where sacrifices were offered to Baal. Altars on which sacrifices were made were usually built under the protection of groves of trees.

God called Gideon into his service, and the first thing he asked him to do was to cut down the grove of trees on his father's land and destroy the altar of Baal. Gideon had to be very brave to do this, but he trusted God. Gideon got ten of his servants to help him and in the morning the neighbors were shocked to discover that the grove had been cut down and the altar destroyed!

The neighbors worshiped Baal and were very angry when they discovered what Gideon had done. So they asked Gideon's father to kill his son and those who had helped him. But Gideon's father was a wise man. He told the neighbors that if Baal was a real god with a lot of power, he could take care of himself. Baal did not do anything about it, of course, because he couldn't! When the Israelites learned about this, they were eager to serve the true God again.

There was more trouble brewing for the people of Israel from their enemies — a very large army of Midianites was encamped nearby ready to conquer them. But since Gideon had shown his courage in destroying the grove and altar of Baal, God asked him to lead an army against this mighty host of the Midianites.

Although Gideon was brave, he wanted to be sure that God really wanted him to do this, and that God would help him. So he did something very unusual. One night he put a piece of fleece, sheep's wool, out on the ground and told God that if the dew fell upon the wool and didn't fall upon the ground around the wool, then he would know that he was to fight the Midianites. The next morning he found the fleece soaking wet. So much dew had fallen upon it that he could wring the water out of it, but the ground all around the wool was absolutely dry.

Gideon then asked God to be patient with him and said he would like to make

another test. That night he put another piece of fleece on the ground and told God that if the dew fell upon the ground and not upon the wool, he would know for sure what he was to do. When Gideon went out the next morning, the ground all around the wool was wet with dew, but the fleece was perfectly dry. So Gideon was now certain that God really wanted him to raise an army to fight the Midianites.

He sent out a call for men, and thirty-two thousand Israelites answered his call. When God saw this large army, although it was much smaller than the army of the Midianites, he told Gideon that it was far too large. God wanted to let the Israelites know that he could help them if they put their trust in him. If the Midianites were defeated by a very small army, they would know God did it!

General Gideon obeyed the orders of the Commander in Chief and told all in the army who had any fears, and those who would like to go home, to do so. Twenty-two thousand men left Gideon's army. But God said there were still too many and he told Gideon to have the remaining ten thousand go down to the water to drink, and to be sure to notice how they drank.

All those who put their lips right down into the water were to be sent home. All those who scooped the water up in their hands and drank it out of their hands were to stay in the army. Only three hundred drank this way so General Gideon's army was reduced to three hundred men. If this small army won the battle with the Midianites, then all Israel would surely know that they had won by the wisdom and power of God!

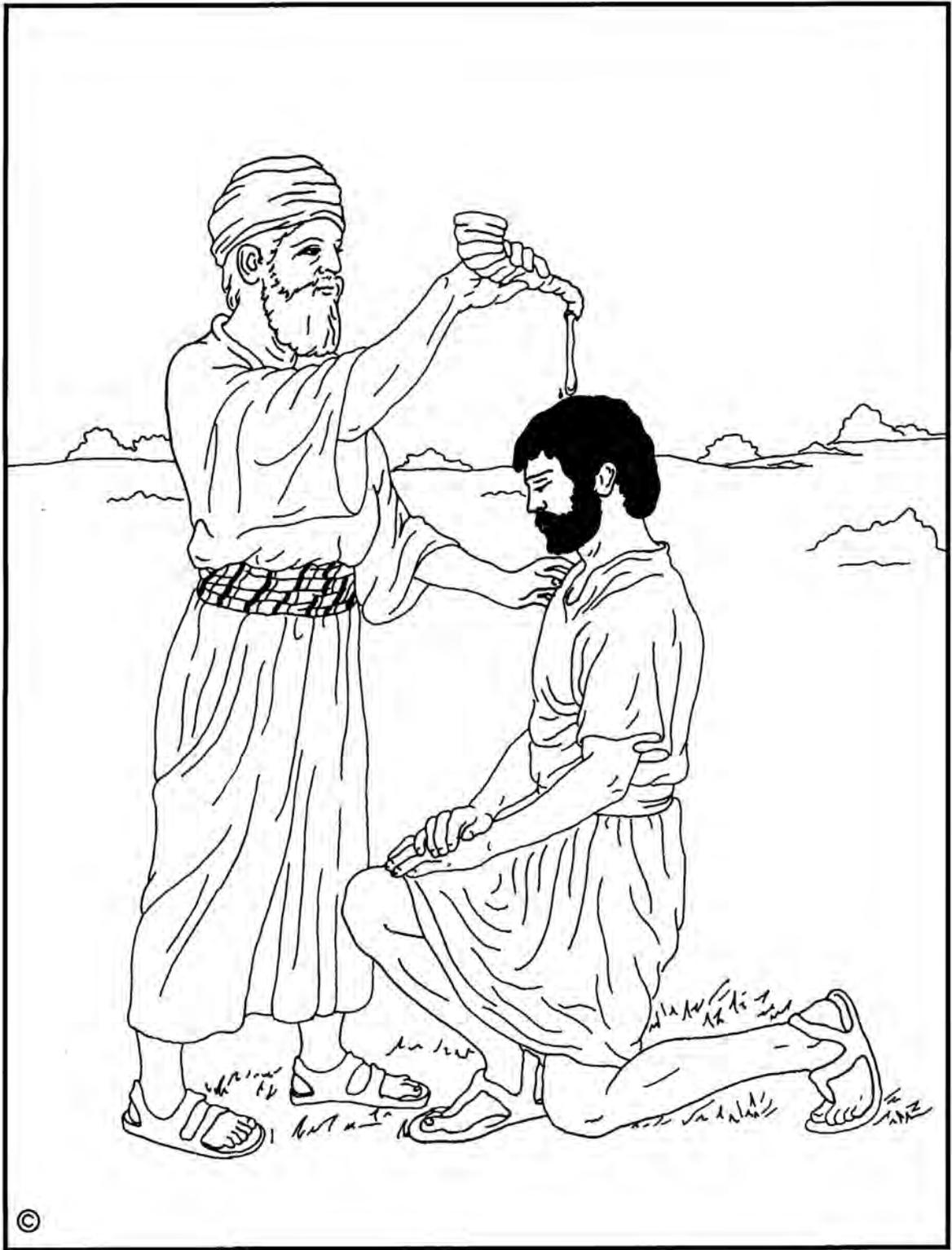
Armies at that time would generally go out to war with swords and spears to kill their enemies. Gideon's army had very unusual weapons. Each man was given a torch, a clay pitcher to hold over the torch, and a ram's horn which was to be used as a trumpet.

The Midianites were camped in a valley. God told Gideon to take his servant, Purah, and sneak down in the darkness to the Midianite camp. They crept up to one of the tents just as a man inside awakened from a bad dream and was telling his friend about it. "I had the strangest dream," he was saying, "there was a huge loaf of barley bread that came tumbling down into our camp. It hit our tent and knocked it flat!" The other soldier said, "your dream can mean only one thing — Gideon is going to come and kill us all!" This gave Gideon the courage he needed, and he knew the Lord would lead him to victory over the Midianites that night.

That night after dark, Gideon's army separated themselves into several small groups and spread out over the sides of the hills around the valley where the Midianites were camped. Gideon told them all to do just as he did.

They all knew where Gideon was standing and they watched. Suddenly Gideon broke the clay pitcher that was hiding the lighted torch. Then he blew the trumpet and cried, "The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon!" All the men in his company did the same, and then all those in the other companies who were scattered over the sides of the hills also broke their pitchers and blew their rams' horns.

Usually only the captains of an army would be sounding trumpets and carrying torches. When the Midianites heard the trumpets and saw three hundred torches flickering all over the sides of the hills, and heard the shouting from so many different



Samuel Anoints Saul

directions, they thought that they were surrounded by a mighty army much larger than their own. They were filled with fear, became excited and confused, and instead of fighting that small army of three hundred Israelites, they started to fight each other! Many of them were killed in this way and the rest of them ran home in terror.

Gideon was one of the most humble and able statesman of the Bible. He thought of himself as the least of his father's house. When he was told to use "The sword of Gideon" as a battle cry, Gideon added the LORD's name and put it first — "The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon."

Gideon, knowing now that the Midianites were running away, went after them until they were driven completely away and were no longer a danger to Israel's peace and happiness.

Chapter Twenty Two

A Boy Who Was Given to God

There was a very good Hebrew woman who loved God and wanted to serve him, but she was unhappy because she had no children. Her name was Hannah. She and her husband, Elkanah, lived in a town called Ramathaim-zophim. Every year they went to a place called Shiloh to offer a sacrifice to God. The Tabernacle was there and their sacrifices were brought to the priests.

While in Shiloh one year, Hannah was feeling very sad about not having children so she prayed a special prayer to God about it. The high priest, Eli, saw Hannah praying, and when he learned what she was praying for, he told her that God would answer her prayer and she would be given a son. Hannah was so thankful and happy! She promised that when God gave her a son she would give the child back to God to be used in his service.

After a while God gave Hannah the son Eli had promised, and she named him Samuel. While Samuel was still a little boy his mother took him to Shiloh and gave him to Eli to be used in the service of God, as she had promised, and she returned to her home. God was very pleased with Hannah.

Eli was now an old man, so there were many ways in which Samuel could help him do God's work. When the priests of Israel were serving God in the Tabernacle they wore

white linen garments and Samuel was given white clothes so he wouldn't look out of place. Hannah came to see him every year, and each year she brought him a new white coat because each year he had grown enough to need a larger coat.

Samuel was very faithful in working for Eli the priest. He even slept near the priest's bedroom so he would be able to give him any help he might need during the night. One night he heard a voice calling, "Samuel, Samuel." The boy answered, "Here I am, what do you want?" He thought, of course, that Eli needed help so he ran to his bedside only to find out that Eli had not called.

Although Samuel was puzzled, he went back to bed. He had been in bed only a little while when again he heard the voice saying, "Samuel, Samuel!" So he hurried to Eli's bedside saying, "Here I am, what do you need?" But the priest had not called. Samuel was more puzzled than ever and wondered if he had been dreaming. He went back to bed only to have the same experience a third time!

When Samuel came to Eli the third time, the priest decided it must be that God was speaking to the boy. He told Samuel to go back to bed and if he heard his name called again, to answer, saying, "Speak, Lord; for your servant is listening."

Samuel went back to bed as Eli suggested, and again he heard the voice calling, "Samuel, Samuel." This time, instead of hurrying to Eli's bedside, Samuel replied, "Speak, for your servant is listening," and sure enough, God did have a message for his young servant.

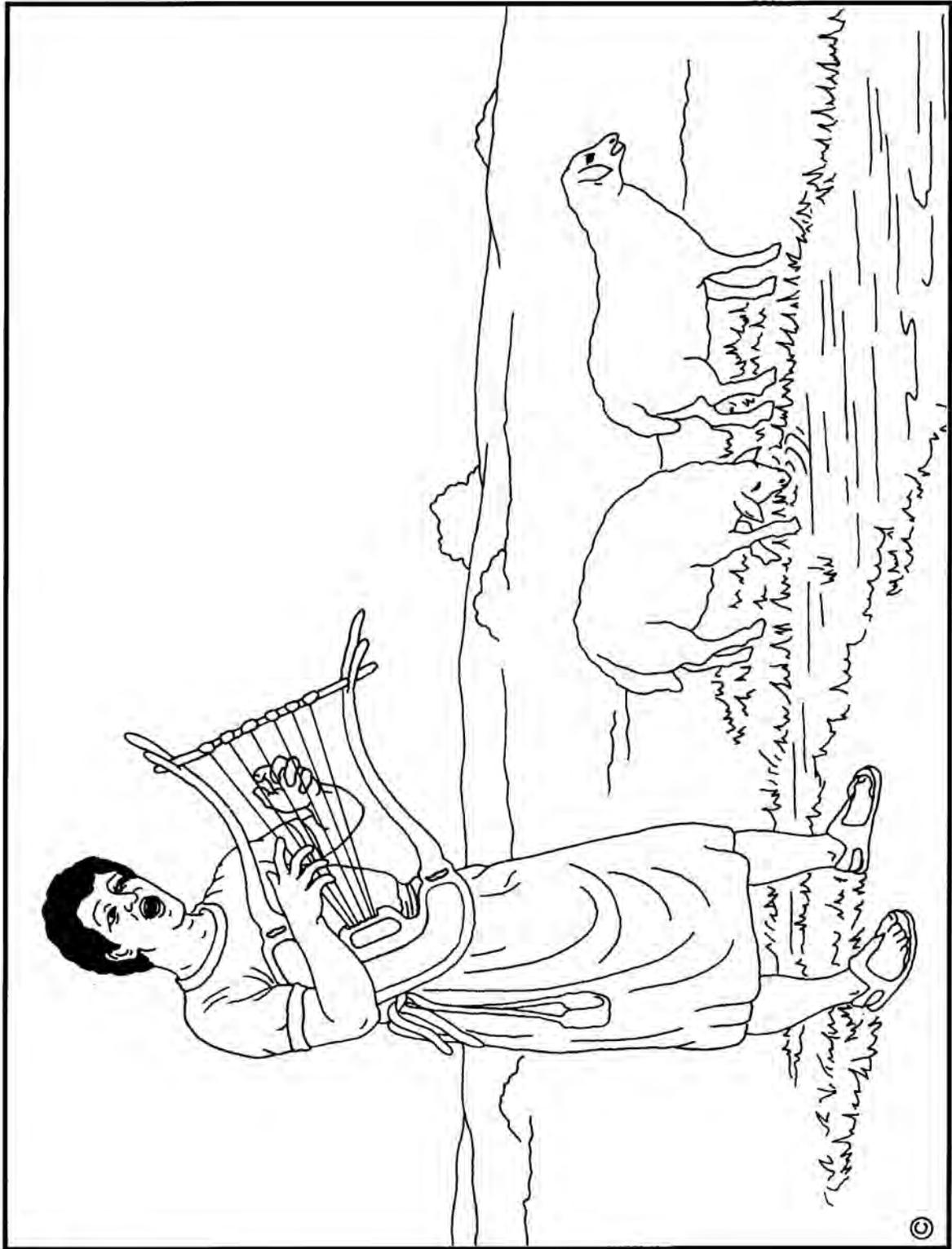
Eli loved God and wanted to serve him faithfully, but he had two sons who were wicked and did not respect God. Their father told them to stop sinning against the LORD, but they did not listen to him. Eli knew what his sons were doing and should have punished them for being so wicked, but he didn't. God said that he would honor those who honored him, but hate those who did not honor him.

The time came when God decided he would have to put a stop to their wrongdoing. The message God had given to Samuel was that Eli and his two wicked sons would die, and that he would raise up a new prophet, one who would serve him faithfully.

That was a very important message to give to such a young servant. Samuel told Eli all about it the next morning. It couldn't have been easy for Eli to hear, but he received it well and said that God would do what was best.

Things happened just as the LORD had told Samuel, and when the people learned about it they were sure that Samuel was God's prophet. From that very time Samuel was loved by the people of Israel and they obeyed him because they knew that God was with him.

Now, more than four hundred years had passed since Joshua died. During all that time there had been no one who really ruled and guided the people, as Moses and Joshua had done. They had "judges," who advised the Israelites about how to follow the laws and how to get along with each other, and sometimes they served as leaders of Israel's army. Gideon had been one of those judges. Samuel was also a judge in addition to being a prophet and was, in fact, the last of Israel's judges.



Writer of the Psalms

Samuel served the Israelites faithfully for many years. After a while he had two sons of his own but when they grew up, sadly, they sinned against God just as Eli's sons had. They took bribes and they didn't uphold the laws. The people loved Samuel so much that they trusted his sons, that is, until they found out about their wicked ways. So the elders of Israel went to Samuel and told him what his sons were doing. Then they demanded that a king be chosen to rule over them instead of Samuel. They were tired of being ruled by judges, and besides, they said they wanted to be like other nations who were ruled by kings. They even asked Samuel to select the right person to be their king.

Poor Samuel! He felt so bad about it, but God comforted him and told him that the Israelites were not really rejecting him. "They are rejecting me," God told Samuel. Under the judges, God was the real ruler of the people because the judges only represented him. Nevertheless, God told Samuel to appoint a king to rule over the Israelites. God instructed Samuel, though, to make it plain to the people that things would not necessarily go smoothly and that their kings would probably get them into a lot more trouble than they'd had under the judges.

Samuel gave the message to the people, but they still wanted a king to rule over them. When he realized how determined the Israelites were, he asked God to help him choose a good king. God did help Samuel, and an Israelite by the name of Saul was chosen to be the first king. Saul was a very tall, handsome man, and the people were happy to have him as their king, and they shouted, "long live the king!"

Chapter Twenty Three

A Shepherd Boy is Made King

This story is about a young man who took care of sheep for his father and later became a great king to rule over the children of Israel. His name was David and he became ruler after King Saul.

King Saul was a good king in the beginning of his reign, but he did not remain faithful to God. After a while, when King Saul continued to behave wickedly, God spoke to the Prophet Samuel and told him to appoint a new king to rule over the Israelites. Samuel felt very bad because he loved Saul, and was sorry that Saul did not continue to do what God wanted him to do.

God told Samuel that he had selected a new king from among the eight sons of a man named Jesse who lived in Bethlehem. He asked the prophet to go to Bethlehem and get acquainted with Jesse and his sons, and said that he would let Samuel know which of them was to be the new king.

Jesse had a fine family of boys. They were all healthy and good looking, and the first one that Samuel saw was such an ideal young man that the prophet was sure he must be the one God had chosen to be king, yet God said he was not the one.

Then Samuel asked to see the other sons, so Jesse had them all appear before the prophet, one after the other. As Samuel looked at each of them, he was surprised that God said none of them was the right one. Samuel was wondering what God wanted him to do, so he asked Jesse if he had seen them all. Jesse said that he had another son, and that he was out in the field taking care of the sheep. He said it as though the youngest son was not important, and that it didn't matter if Samuel saw him.

Samuel then told Jesse that he wanted to see the boy who was caring for the sheep, so Jesse sent for his youngest son, David. As soon as Samuel saw him God told the prophet that this was the one to be appointed king. Samuel then anointed David to be the king of Israel by pouring a very special, sweet-smelling oil on David's head. However, King Saul was still living, and it wouldn't be good to have two kings at the same time, so David did not become king right away. He wisely waited for the time to come when God would show him he could begin his duties as king.

Meanwhile, King Saul continued to disobey God. He had a very bad temper, and sometimes he became so angry that he lost control of himself. His friends learned that one of the best things to help Saul when he was so terribly upset was to let him hear beautiful music.

David played the harp and was a wonderful musician. King Saul sent for him to bring his harp and play for him. It did a lot of good for Saul right away. Then David was given a very important position in his army — he was made Saul's armor bearer.

At that time the Philistine army was causing the Israelites a lot of trouble. Saul's army was out in the field preparing for a battle with them. Three of David's brothers were in the army, so their father sent David to bring them supplies of food and to find out how they were getting along with the battle. Just as he arrived on the battlefield, one of the Philistine soldiers ran out where he could be seen and defied the entire army of Israelites.

The Israelite army was afraid, because this Philistine soldier was a giant named Goliath. He was well protected with a heavy metal armor and he carried a huge sword. He looked very fierce and dangerous, but David was not afraid. He hadn't been sent to the battlefield to fight, but he kept thinking that if he were only given a chance, with God's help, he could deal with that giant. When Saul learned about it he sent for David. David told Saul that he felt sure he could destroy Goliath, and asked permission to go back onto the battlefield.

King Saul was very surprised at David's courage, but advised him against trying it. He told David that he was too young and too small to fight against the mighty giant, but David pleaded with the king. He told Saul that he had once killed a lion that had attacked his father's sheep. Also, he had killed a big bear that tried to steal one of the sheep.

Finally, Saul was so impressed with David's courage and earnestness that he told him that he could go. First, though, Saul wanted David to put on his armor for protection. David tried it on, but it did not fit very well, and he wasn't used to wearing armor, so he told Saul he thought he would be better off without it.

David got his slingshot and picked up five nice, smooth stones from a nearby stream and put them in his bag. Armed only with his shepherd's staff and slingshot, David walked toward Goliath.

When David reached the battlefield, he dared Goliath to show himself. The giant came out of his tent, and when he saw the young boy who was so small and didn't look very strong, he was mad! He was insulted that such a young man, without a sword or armor, should even think of fighting against him!

David was calm. He told Goliath he was not afraid of his threats, because he knew that God was on his side. Then David saw his chance and with that little slingshot he hurled a stone at the giant.

The very first stone hit Goliath in the forehead and that was the end of him. This mighty champion fighter of the whole Philistine army had been killed by young David! When the Philistines heard of it they all became afraid and ran away. So God helped David to deliver the Israelites from their enemy.

David was loyal to King Saul, and after having killed the giant, he reported to the king what had happened. At first Saul was very pleased and he took David into his palace and made him a member of the family.

King Saul had a son named Jonathan and he and David became very good friends. That was a good thing for David because Saul was getting very jealous of him. It got so bad that he would have killed David if he had been able to do so. God helped David by giving him Jonathan to be a very righteous and trusted friend. He also protected him in other ways.

The people loved David very much because he had slain the giant and delivered them from the Philistine army. David was in the victory parade with Saul, and as they marched through the streets the people came out of their houses and shouted praises to Saul and David, but — they praised David more than Saul. They said Saul had killed thousands but that David had killed tens of thousands! This meant that they thought David was a much better soldier and leader than Saul. When King Saul heard this he became even more jealous.

David behaved wisely and obeyed King Saul and did everything he could to please him. David knew that God had chosen him to be king, but he was willing to wait for God's time to become king of Israel. Once, while David was playing the harp for Saul, the king suddenly became angry and threw a spear at him. David jumped out of the way of the spear and escaped being killed.

Finally David realized he would have to leave the palace because Saul was determined to kill him. Jonathan helped David make plans to escape. This was very hard for both Jonathan and David because they had become such close friends. Their parting was very sweet. They asked God to watch over them both and to guide and protect them.

After David and Jonathan had said goodbye to each other and Saul learned that David had escaped, Saul was very angry, and for the rest of his life he did all he could to find David and kill him. However, God was with David and protected him. David tried to be like God, so he was very kind to Saul. He didn't hate Saul even though Saul wanted to kill him.

One time when Saul and his soldiers were hunting for David they spent the night sleeping at the entrance of a cave in the side of a mountain. David and his friends were hiding in the cave, and while Saul slept, David crept up and cut a piece off of Saul's cloak to show that he could have had his friends go out and kill him, but he would not do it. He allowed Saul to finish his sleep and move on unharmed. That is one reason God loved David so much.

Finally, Saul died and then it was time for David to be made king of Israel. Not all the people knew David, and some of them wanted another king, so again David waited patiently for God to show the people who their real king was to be. David had put his trust in the LORD God, just as sheep put their trust in their shepherd. He knew God wanted him to be the king, and that God would make him king when the time was right. So he waited for God, and finally he became the beloved king of all the Hebrew people.

Chapter Twenty Four

A King is Fooled

Before David became the king of Israel, we know that King Saul was behaving wickedly. So God allowed the army of the Philistines to attack the Israelite army again. This was some time after David had killed Goliath the giant.

King Saul got together a huge army to fight back, but he was afraid. Even a small army could have driven away the Philistines if God had helped the Israelites — but he didn't help them and Saul was worried.

Saul did something which caused God to be very unhappy with him. He tried to get advice from the Prophet Samuel — but Samuel was already dead. While Samuel lived he did the best he could to help Saul by warning him not to continue doing things which were so displeasing to God. But Saul paid no attention to his warnings. Now Saul wanted his help!

When a person dies he cannot talk to anyone, because he is asleep in death. He or she can only be awakened by the power of God. Satan, however, tries to make people believe that dead people are not really dead. The Bible tells us that Satan is the “father of lies.”

Satan and other wicked angels who work with him are able to deceive people by making them think they can talk with their friends and family members who have died. God knew this, and when he gave his Law to the Israelites, one of the things he did not allow them to do was to have contact with spirits or spirit mediums.

In those days Satan was able to get some women to work for him in his wicked schemes of deceiving people. They were called “witches.” It was Saul who, during the time when he was trying to please God, had ordered that all witches be driven out of the land of Israel so they could not deceive the Israelites.

Now Saul wondered if he could get any help from God, and he thought of his old friend Samuel who had died. He wondered if, after all, it might be possible to talk to him. So he gave orders to some of his trusted men to find one of the condemned witches so he could visit her and see if she could get Samuel to talk with him. They found a witch who was hiding in a cave near a place called Endor.

The witch was scared when she was visited by the Israelites because she knew King Saul had ordered all witches to be destroyed. She was more afraid than ever when she found out that it was Saul himself who was now visiting her.

The wicked king told her not to be afraid because he would protect her. Satan is very powerful and deceptive and he made the witch believe that she could see spirits coming right up out of the earth. Then she described one of these spirits and Saul believed it was Samuel.

Satan was able to make them believe that Samuel was actually talking with them. It was all a trick of Satan, and the wicked king was deceived by it. Saul thought he had actually talked with Samuel, but Samuel was dead and could not talk with anyone.

Pretending that it was Samuel speaking, Satan had the witch tell Saul that the army of the Israelites would lose their battle with the Philistines the next day, and that Saul would be with Samuel. Saul understood this to mean that he would die the next day.

When the Philistines attacked the Israelites, Saul was wounded and he killed himself rather than be captured. That was the end of a man who started out to be a good king but who did not continue to obey God.

Chapter Twenty Five

The Wisest Man and a King

Another king who ruled over Israel was made very wise by God. The name of this king was Solomon. He was the son of David, the shepherd boy who became king of Israel after Saul. When David grew very old and knew that he would not live much longer, he gave orders that his son Solomon should be the king. He knew he was too old to be king and he wanted the Israelites to have someone who would look after them. David was not a bit jealous.

David had ruled over Israel for forty years and during that time he had lots of trouble. Enemies fought against Israel during most of his reign. Poor David had a very stormy time while he was king. Solomon didn't have all that trouble during the time he was king. In all the time Solomon was king, the enemies of Israel did not fight against them. So Solomon was a king of peace, while David had been a king of war.

After Solomon became king he had a dream. In this dream God said he could make a request for something that he would really like to have. He could have decided to ask for lots of money, or a powerful army to protect the Israelites against their enemies. Instead, he decided that what he wanted most of all was wisdom, so he asked God to make him wise.

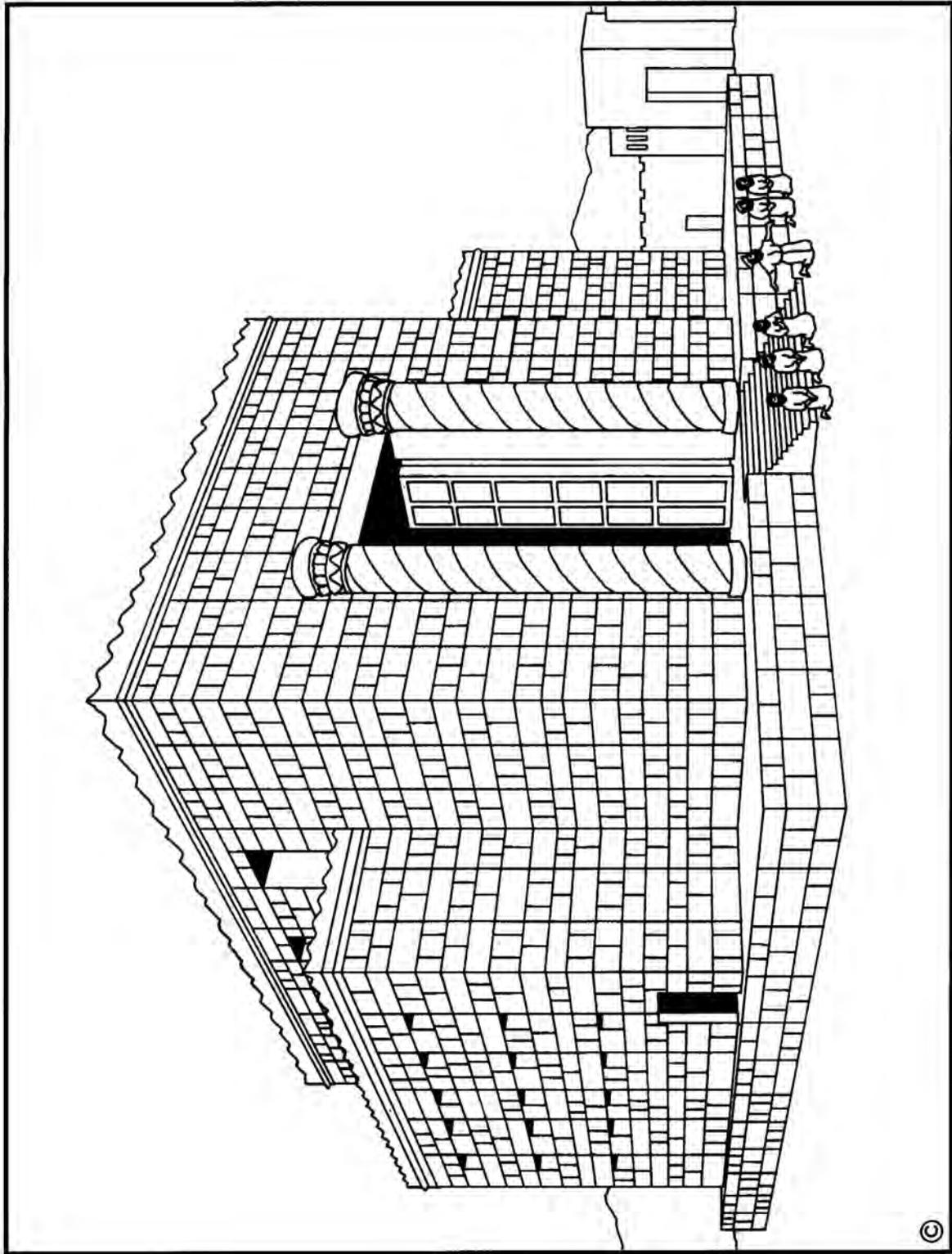
God was so glad that Solomon had asked for wisdom instead of gold that he gave him both wisdom and riches. Solomon wanted to be wise in order to be a good ruler and to rule over God's people in the best way. God was very happy with this request, so he made Solomon the wisest of all the kings who had ever ruled over Israel.

Solomon used some of his riches to build a temple. The temple was to take the place of the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was God's house because it was there that he gave his blessings to the priests, and the priests then blessed the people.

Remember that the Tabernacle was built in a very special way so that it could be taken apart and moved from place to place. At the time it was built, the Israelites were wandering around in the desert.

Now the Israelites were no longer wandering in the wilderness. They were in the Promised Land and had been there for a long time, but they were still using the Tabernacle. King David decided that the LORD should have a permanent house instead of the one that could be moved. God was glad that David felt that way about it, but he told David that his son, King Solomon, would build it since he would be a king of peace.

The new house was called the Temple and was very strong and so firmly put together that it would not be possible to move it from place to place in the way the Tabernacle had been moved. The Tabernacle was like a tent and the Temple was like a house. First, there were stone walls. Next, the inside walls, ceiling beams, and floor joists, all of which were covered over with cedar boards. Then the cedar boards were covered with gold, and the floor boards were covered with gold, too! It took seven years to build this beautiful temple.



Solomon's Temple

Solomon loved God and wanted him to have the very best of everything. We, too, should do our very best in everything that we do for God.

When the Temple was complete and the priests had put all its furnishings in place, the Temple was suddenly filled with smoke. The Temple was not on fire, but God had caused the smoke to fill the temple. It was his way of saying to the priests, and to Solomon, and to all the Israelites that he was pleased with what had been done for him. The smoke showed the glory of God.

Then King Solomon said a long prayer to God, and in the prayer he said many wonderful things. One thing he said was that God did not really need this new house at all. He said that all the heavens which are above us are not large enough for God to use as a house, and that we could not expect God to live in a house we might build for him, no matter how beautiful and expensive it would be.

Solomon was right! God didn't need that temple, but the Israelites did — they needed God's blessings. The Tabernacle and the Temple were the places where God gave his blessings to them. God was pleased with the Temple because it showed how in due time he will give his blessings to the whole world, but through a temple made of people, the Church, not of stones and boards and gold.

The whole nation of Israel became very rich during the time that Solomon reigned. He built a navy and also had merchant vessels that brought gold from a place called Ophir. They also brought spices, horses and mules, and even monkeys and peacocks from distant places.

The Queen of Sheba heard of the great riches and wisdom of Solomon, but thought it was too incredible to be true. So she decided to visit Solomon to find out for herself. She was thrilled to find out that everything was just as she had heard.

That's the way some people think about the Bible — they just aren't sure they can believe all the wonderful promises written in it. But we can trust them and be sure that everything God has promised in his word, the Bible, will come true!

Chapter Twenty Six

A Prophet's Prayers Answered

All of God's prophets were his faithful servants. One of those prophets was a wonderful man named Elijah. Elijah lived very close to God, and God heard his prayers and answered them.

Elijah lived at a time when there was a very wicked king ruling over Israel. That made it a difficult time for a prophet of God. Elijah had to tell the king he was wrong and try to make him do what was right. A powerful king would certainly not want to be told that he was wrong about anything!

When he first became a prophet, God asked him to tell King Ahab that, because of his evil ways, there would not be any rain for a long, long time. The king had followed the advice of his wife, Jezebel, who was a wicked woman, and allowed the priests of the false god, Baal, to start idol worship among the children of Israel. That was against the law of God! There was only the one true God that they were supposed to worship, so it was wrong for their king to allow them to worship any other god.

God sent Elijah to warn the king, and to tell him that there would be no more rain until he said so. King Ahab was so mad at Elijah that he had to run away and hide or else he would have been killed.

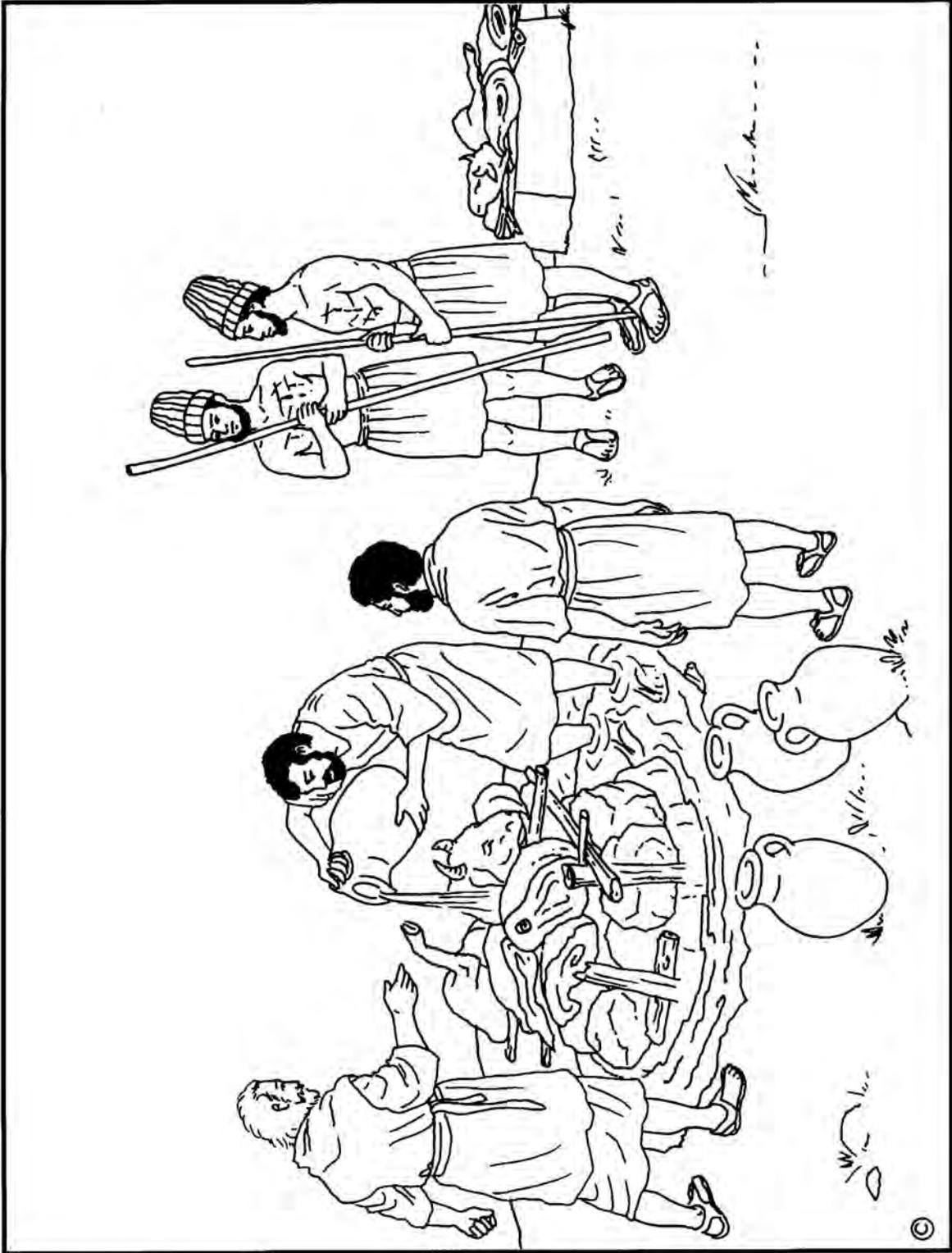
God was watching out for Elijah and guided him to a nice quiet place by the side of a brook named Cherith. It was in a cool, sheltered place in the woods where Elijah could hide. While he was there God took care of him in a most unusual way. He sent ravens to Elijah morning and night with a supply of food and, of course, he had all the water he needed from the brook.

After a while the brook dried up but again, God took care of Elijah. He told the prophet to move to another place called Zarephath where he would find a widow woman who would take good care of him.

The dry weather had also caused a famine where the widow lived and she was nearly out of food. All she had left was enough flour and a little olive oil to make one small cake. Elijah asked this poor woman for that very last bit of food that she had. He did not do this because he was selfish. No, he did it because he was putting his trust in God and he knew that God would fulfill his promise.

The widow did as Elijah asked her to do and because she did, the supply of flour and oil never ran out! She kept the oil in a pitcher called a cruse and every time she used oil from the cruse, she found more oil there to take its place. It was the same way with the flour, so day after day both the widow and the prophet were supplied with food.

The widow had a very dear son, just a young boy. One day her son became very sick and died. She was absolutely heartbroken. At first she blamed it on Elijah even though he had nothing to do with it. Elijah carried the boy upstairs and laid him down on the bed. He stretched himself over the boy three times and prayed to the LORD and the boy



Elijah and the Prophets of Baal: 1 Kings 18:16-39

came to life again! It was God who gave life again to the boy because Elijah couldn't do that by himself.

How happy that mother was to have her son alive again! And this is just a sample of how it will be in the kingdom when all who have died will come back to life again.

It was now three years since it had rained in the land of Israel, and the people were becoming quite worried. It was then that God told Elijah to go and show himself to King Ahab. Ahab was angry with the prophet because he blamed him for the lack of rain. Elijah told the king very plainly that it was his own wickedness in allowing the worship of the false god Baal that had caused the drought.

Then the prophet told the king what needed to be done. By this time the king was so worried that he was willing to do anything that Elijah suggested. Elijah said that all the people were to be invited to get together on a mountain called Carmel. The priests of Baal, the false god, were also invited to come up onto the mountain. There were four hundred and fifty priests of Baal, but Elijah was the only prophet of the true God. Thousands of people traveled up Mount Carmel, slowly making their way over the rocky, dusty trails as they moved to get as near to Elijah as they could.

Meanwhile, Elijah was preparing the people for a great demonstration to prove who was the one and only true God. First he told the priests of Baal to prepare a sacrifice to their god, and then call upon him to send fire from heaven to burn the sacrifice. So they tried it, but there was no answer to their prayer. They kept shouting to Baal as loudly as they could all day long. Elijah mocked them saying, "cry a little louder!" He said that perhaps Baal was asleep or maybe he had gone on a journey!

Finally, as the evening drew near and the people were gathered where they could see and hear, Elijah's turn came to show what the true God could do. He had an altar built and a sacrifice placed upon it. He gave orders to dig a ditch all around the altar and to fill the ditch with water. Then he asked his helpers to pour water over the altar and the sacrifice. Of course, wet things do not burn easily, so this would make a very great demonstration of God's power.

When everything was prepared, the prophet prayed to God and asked him to accept the sacrifice of the young bullock that was being offered to him. If God was satisfied with the sacrifice he would show his acceptance by causing fire to come down and burn it up.

What followed was a marvelous display of God's power. Flames of fire appeared, which not only burned the bullock, but also licked up the water that was in the ditch around the altar. When the people saw this there arose a great shout of rejoicing, proclaiming that Israel's God was the true God.

From then on things changed. To complete the work of restoring the worship of God in Israel, all the priests of Baal were killed. Shortly after that Elijah prayed for rain in Israel, and the rains came.

Elijah had many more amazing experiences and he continued to be a faithful prophet of God. When the time came for his life to end, God took him in a very special way. One day, as he was standing by the side of the Jordan River, there suddenly came a mighty whirlwind and a chariot and horses of fire. The chariot and the whirlwind lifted him up from the earth, and he was seen no more.

Chapter Twenty Seven

A Child Brought Back to Life

There was a very kind woman who lived in Shunem, a small city in the land of Israel. The Bible does not tell us her name but it tells us she was very kind to Elisha, one of God's prophets. Elisha had been the servant of the Prophet Elijah and when Elijah died, God made Elisha a prophet to take his place.

While going from place to place to do the work God gave him to do, Elisha and his servant often walked past the house where the Shunammite woman lived. The woman decided that it would be very nice to ask Elisha to stop and have dinner with her and her husband. Elisha must have been very glad to have a delicious, home cooked meal. The woman and her husband enjoyed Elisha's company, and several times she asked him to stop in to eat with them.

Elisha talked about God while he was eating dinner and the woman realized that he was one of God's prophets. She told her husband about this and said she thought it would be a good idea if they furnished a comfortable bedroom where he could rest any time he came by to visit. The woman loved God and wanted to serve him by doing something for Elisha.

Elisha was very thankful to the woman and one day the thought came to him that perhaps there was something he could do for her. So he talked it over with his servant and the servant told him that the woman didn't have any children, but would very much like to be the mother of a child.

Elisha knew that if he asked God to give this good woman a child God would do so. When Elisha told her that God would give her a child, she could hardly believe it! She was very happy — God had surely rewarded her for being so kind to his prophet.

The child was a boy, and when he was old enough he did what he could to help his father. One very hot day he went out in the field where reaping was being done and suddenly he felt a terrible pain in his head. "Oh, my head, my head! Father, my head hurts," he exclaimed! His father ran over to him, but by that time the boy had fallen down and was unconscious.

The father had one of the strong young men pick up the boy and carry him back to the house, and his mother held him in her lap for quite a long time hoping he would get better, but he didn't. He stayed unconscious, and after several hours, he died. The poor mother was heartbroken. It seemed so strange that God would give her a child and then allow him to die.

We see that what the Shunammite woman did next was just the right thing— she thought of Elisha, the man of God. If God would give her a son because Elisha asked him to, perhaps God would make her boy alive again if Elisha prayed to him about it.

The boy's mother didn't send someone to get Elisha. She thought it was too important to trust anyone else to take such a message to God's prophet, so she went herself.

She had to travel all the way to Mount Carmel to find Elisha. When she found him, she insisted that he return with her to her home.

Elisha told his servant to hurry back to her house where he was to lay his staff across the face of the child. The servant came back and told them that the child was still dead. But Elisha had great faith in God.

When they arrived home, Elisha went upstairs to the boy's room where the mother had laid him on his bed. He laid on top of the boy, and prayed to God for help. After a while the child's body became warm. Then the boy sneezed seven times and sat up on the bed and was just as much alive as ever! While this is a wonderful, true story, the best story of all is that God will, by and by, use his power to make all people who have died live again.

Chapter Twenty Eight

A King Who Ate Grass

Saul was the first king to rule over the children of Israel. Next was King David, who was very good. Then there was Solomon, the wise and rich king. More kings followed, some who were good and some who were bad, including the wicked King Ahab, who allowed the people to worship false gods. The last king of Israel was King Zedekiah.

Zedekiah was another very wicked king, and many of the Israelites were also wicked. So God allowed the enemies of the Israelites to capture Zedekiah, and all the people became captives and were taken away into a strange country called Babylon. At that time a man named Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon. The people of Babylon were all heathen, which means that they did not serve the true God, the God of the Israelites.

About the time Nebuchadnezzar captured Zedekiah, he had a dream, but when he woke up, he could not remember what it was about. So he sent for some of his "wise men," who were trained to be able to interpret dreams. Unfortunately, most of them were not really wise men, they were just called wise men. Nebuchadnezzar asked them to tell him what it was that he dreamed and then to explain the meaning of the dream.

The wise men told the king that if he could remember the dream and tell them what it was about, they could explain its meaning. But the king could not remember, so they

were not able to help him. That made the king so furious that he ordered all the wise men in Babylon to be killed.

In the king's household, there were four young Israelites who were being trained to be "wise men." One of these was Daniel. When he heard that the king was mad and wanted all the wise men killed, he asked if he might have a chance to try to tell the king his dream. Nebuchadnezzar agreed to let Daniel try.

God gave Daniel a vision about Nebuchadnezzar's dream so that he was able to tell the king what it was. He told King Nebuchadnezzar that in his dream he saw an enormous statue in the shape, or image, of a man. It had shoulders, arms, legs, and feet. The head was made of pure gold, the arms and chest of silver, the belly and hips of brass, and the legs of iron. The feet were a mixture of iron and clay.

As the dream went on, a big stone separated itself from the side of a mountain and fell on the feet of the statue which caused it to fall and break into pieces. The wind blew the pieces away. Then it got even more odd — the stone began to grow, and it grew until it was so big that it filled the whole earth.

Daniel explained to the king that the golden head of the statue stood for him, the king of Babylon. The other parts of the statue represented strong nations which would rule over the Israelites, and the whole world, later, after Babylon became weak and was defeated by its enemies.

The dream meant that the Israelites would be ruled by Gentiles, that is, people who are not Israelites, for hundreds of years. And it happened just that way. Looking back we can see that God had helped Daniel explain the history of the world many hundreds of years before it happened.

Daniel said that the Gentile nations would rule until God sends his King. The stone that broke the statue to pieces and became a great mountain which filled the whole earth pictured God's kingdom. Jesus will be the king of that kingdom and it will fill the whole earth. We can be sure that it will happen, just like we know that everything God promises will happen.

Now Nebuchadnezzar could not rule over the Israelites and over the whole world unless God allowed him to do so. He forgot that, and became very proud. He tried to make the people think that he was a great king and that they should worship him. He had the foolish idea that he could be a wise and mighty king without any help from God.

Then Nebuchadnezzar had another dream. In this dream God told him that he would lose his mind for seven years and would go out into the field and eat grass just like the cows. That really did happen — he crawled around on the ground eating grass. His hair grew long and coarse, and his fingernails became like the claws of animals.

Finally, after seven years, Nebuchadnezzar's mind and reason returned to him. When he found out what he had done he was ashamed of himself. But, he learned by the experience that he was not as wise and powerful as he had thought. Learning that, he gave praise to God for allowing him to be the ruler.

Chapter Twenty Nine

In a Fiery Furnace

When the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, captured Israel, there were four young Hebrew men who were especially favored by him. They were from royal families, they were handsome and intelligent. The king had them brought into the palace so they could learn the language and be trained to serve with the king's advisers, who were called "wise men."

Daniel was one of those young men from Israel. The other three were Shadrach, Mesach, and Abednego.

Their training lasted for three years. At the beginning they were given the same special, rich food and wine that was prepared for the king. Daniel asked if he and his friends might have more simple meals like they were used to for ten days and see how good their health was at the end of that time. The official was afraid the king would be angry if he let them eat anything else, but the guard who had charge over them agreed to let them try it. At the end of the ten days the four young Hebrews looked and felt better than any of the others who were in training with them.

It was Daniel who had explained the king's dream for him — that dream in which he saw a statue like a man made of gold, silver, brass, iron and clay. The king was so impressed with what Daniel did for him that he made him the chief ruler in Babylon and he worked in the royal court.

Daniel was truly a loyal friend. When the king gave him such a high position in the nation, Daniel thought of his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They had also been trained to be wise men. He told the king about them, and the king appointed them to be administrators in Babylon.

When Nebuchadnezzar was told that he was a mighty and powerful ruler in the world, he became proud and thought of himself as better than he was. He didn't respect the God of the Hebrews, Daniel's God. He commanded that a very large golden idol should be made of himself. It stood 90 feet high. Then King Nebuchadnezzar ordered all the rulers, wise men, and court officials to worship it.

When the rulers heard about the king's command, all of them — except the three Hebrews — bowed down before the huge idol which Nebuchadnezzar had set up in the place of God.

It took a lot of courage for those young men to stand up to the king of Babylon. When he heard about it he was furious! In those days kings could be very cruel to anyone who did not obey them. Nebuchadnezzar gave orders that any of the rulers who refused to bow down and worship the idol should be cast into a furnace of fire.

Of course Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew that was what the king had ordered, but they decided that no matter how much they suffered they would not

worship the idol. They trusted in God and worshipped only him. They knew that it would be wrong for them to worship an idol.

When the king learned that the young Hebrews had refused to obey him he was angry, but he was willing to give them another chance. Again, they refused. Then he told his servants to heat the furnace seven times hotter than usual, and to tie up the three disobedient Hebrews and throw them into the furnace.

Believe it or not, those young men were not afraid! They had told Nebuchadnezzar that they believed God could help them, but even if he chose not to, they would never worship the king's image. The fire was so hot and so fierce that the men who carried the Hebrews to the furnace were burned up by the flames which leaped out of it.

The king thought to himself, "Who is their God anyway, that I should pay any attention to him?" He thought about it for a while, and was feeling very proud of himself that he was so wise and powerful. He decided he would go to the edge of the fiery furnace and check on the three Hebrews. What a surprise! Instead of being burned up, they were alive and walking around in the fire! And instead of three, Nebuchadnezzar saw four men in the fire! He said the fourth one looked like the Son of God.

The king was scared because he was smart enough to know that a power much greater than he could understand was protecting the three Hebrews. Now he knew, too, that it was the power of their God. He called to the Hebrews to come out of the fire, and they did. They hadn't been hurt at all. In fact, when they were examined it was found that not even their clothing had been singed by the fire. Only the ropes that bound them had been burned.

King Nebuchadnezzar gave orders throughout the country that no one should say anything against the God of the three Hebrews. He also gave the brave young men better jobs than they had before.

Chapter Thirty

In a Den of Lions

Daniel always tried to live his life in a way that would please God, even though he knew there was always a possibility he could get killed because of it. Because of his example of strength and courage there is a saying that we use today, "Dare to be a Daniel." It means always trying to stand up for what is right no matter how much it may cost you.

Daniel gave all the credit to God for helping him to explain Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The king was so happy with Daniel that he gave him a very powerful position in the Babylon government. Daniel was also ruler over all the other wise men.

God blessed Daniel and he ruled in Babylon for a very long time. He ruled until Nebuchadnezzar died and another man became king of Babylon. The new king, Belshazzar, also liked Daniel, but he didn't reign very long. The king of the Medes captured Babylon and killed Belshazzar. Daniel was such a good ruler over the people that the king of the Medes, Darius, made Daniel his chief ruler.

Daniel loved the LORD and served him obediently. He had an honest heart and treated the people kindly. Because of that, the people liked him and always tried to obey him.

There were less important rulers in the country who had to take orders from Daniel and they did not like that at all. They were jealous and wanted the high position which the king had given to Daniel. They were clever as well as evil. They tried to find some way in which Daniel was being disobedient so they could report it to King Darius, but Daniel was a good man, so they couldn't find anything to report.

Then they thought they might find fault with Daniel in the way that he served God. They knew he was very faithful and prayed to God every day. Daniel had a special place where he prayed, directly in front of a window in his home, and those hateful men knew about it.

They went to King Darius and suggested to him that it would be a good idea if he made a law that no one was to ask a favor of any god or any man, except the king, for thirty days. This pleased the king's pride. He thought he could make all the people think about him more often and he would be a more powerful ruler over them. Then the men who were plotting against Daniel told the king that he should make a law that anyone who disobeyed this command should be thrown into a den of lions. The king thought that was also a good idea.

So King Darius made the law, had it written, and signed it. Now if Daniel continued to pray every day as he had been doing, he would break the king's command and would be thrown into a den of hungry lions.

Daniel wanted to make the king happy whenever he could, but he was determined to please God even if the king was not pleased, so he continued to pray.

Those bad men who had thought of this plot against Daniel spied on him and when they found him praying they reported it to the king. Then King Darius realized what a clever and wicked trick they had played on him. The king was not angry with Daniel, and he did not want him to be put into a den of lions, but he could not change the law he had made.

Why couldn't the king change the law which he had made? It was because of a rule of the Medes that any command given by the king was unchangeable. So King Darius could do nothing about it.

Daniel was not afraid because he trusted God.

God had taken care of Daniel all his life. Daniel knew that whatever God wanted to do now, he was well able to do it. When the king found that there was no possible way to save Daniel, he gave his permission to have him thrown to the lions. They put him in with the fierce, hungry lions and then rolled a large stone over the den to keep him from escaping.

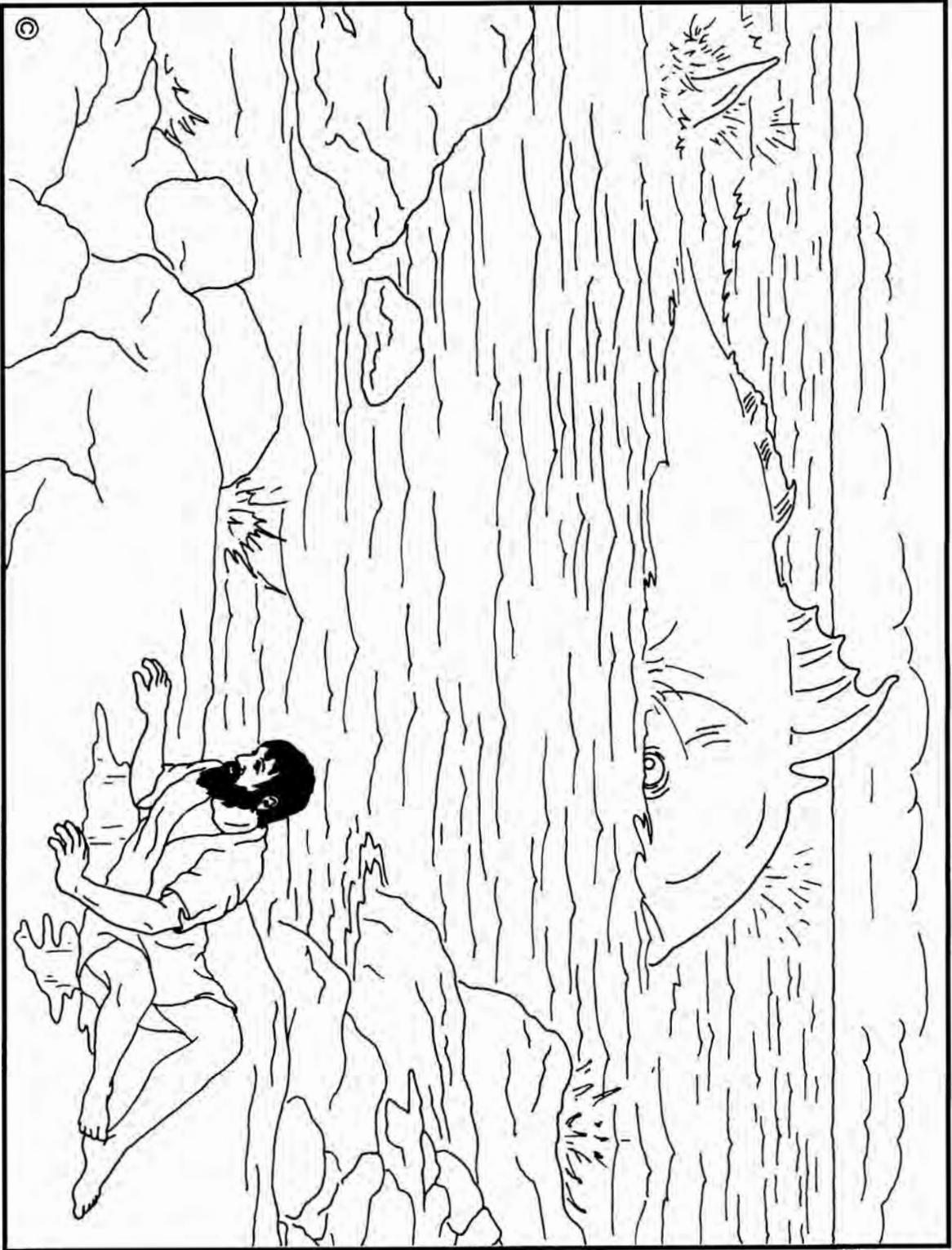
The king could not sleep! He tossed and turned on his bed the whole night long. He knew that Daniel had a wonderful God, and he hoped that Daniel's God would deliver him, but the king wasn't sure that he would. He didn't know much about God and that is why he was so worried.

Early the next morning the king dressed himself and went straight to the lions' den. He called to Daniel, half hoping that the good man of God would be alive and answer him.

The king called out and asked Daniel if his God had been able to deliver him from the lions. Imagine how excited the king must have been when he heard Daniel's voice saying that God had sent his angel to shut the lions' mouths. He had not been hurt!

Daniel had done nothing wrong, but he was not angry with the king. He knew King Darius had been deceived into making a law that had caused this trouble. He made the king very happy by not blaming him for being thrown into a den of lions. Darius then ordered all those men who wanted Daniel out of the way to be thrown into the den of lions. This time there were no angels sent by God to shut the mouths of the lions.

The king sent out a command that the people should worship the God of Daniel. He explained that Daniel's God was the only living God who was able to care for his people and rule over the nations. God is so powerful that he is able to make all his promises come true, and, when all of his promises do come true, the people of every nation will worship and serve him. Then this will be a truly wonderful world!



Jonah and the Huge Fish: Jonah 2:10

Chapter Thirty One

In the Stomach of a Fish

Jonah was a servant of God who was a righteous man. He loved God, but not well enough to obey him as he should. When God asked him to do something that he didn't want to do, he tried to run away so he wouldn't have to do it.

Jonah was one of God's prophets. A prophet is someone who tells people about God, and what they should do. A prophet also tells people when they are doing the wrong things, and that they will have trouble if they keep on doing those things. And a prophet predicts things that will happen long before they actually take place. Jonah, being one of God's prophets, was asked to go to a very wicked city called Nineveh and tell the people that they were all to be destroyed because of their wickedness.

Jonah didn't want to go, and decided that he would run away instead of doing what God had asked him to do. He went to a seaport called Joppa and boarded a ship that was sailing for Tarshish. Jonah was sure that he would land far away from Nineveh.

Well, Jonah was wrong. The ship didn't go to Nineveh, but Jonah did!

A short time after the ship left Joppa, God caused a huge storm to arise. The wind whipped the sea so terribly that the waves were breaking right over the ship, and all the sailors were sure it would be wrecked. The sailors were heathens and didn't believe in the true God. They were scared, so they prayed to their own gods. But their gods were not really gods at all, so of course they could do nothing to help them.

In the meantime, Jonah had crawled under the deck of the ship and was sound asleep. The captain of the ship missed Jonah and started to look for him. When he found him, the captain asked him to pray to his God to save the ship. The sailors didn't know that God's prophet was on board and that the ship was in God's hands. God was taking care of everything.

Before Jonah had a chance to say anything, the sailors cast lots to see if they could find out who had brought such a terrible storm upon them. They had decided that someone on the ship had done something bad and was being punished.

When they cast their lots they decided that it was because Jonah was on the ship that the fierce storm had arisen. They went to Jonah and demanded to know why this calamity had struck them. Jonah knew he had done the wrong thing by trying to run away from God, so he confessed.

Jonah was a thoughtful man and did not want all the sailors to be drowned just because he was running away. The sailors asked Jonah what they should do so that the sea would become calm again and Jonah told them to throw him into the sea.

Jonah was willing to be drowned in order to save the lives of the heathen sailors. They did as Jonah asked, and as soon as he was out of the ship and in the water, the storm died down and the sea became calm. The ship was safe.

Poor Jonah! He wouldn't be able to live for very long in the water, but God helped him.

God had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. Some people think that it was a whale, but the throat of a whale is way too small to swallow a man. There are huge fish, though, that do have throats large enough to swallow a man, so it would have been one of those that God prepared to swallow Jonah.

Jonah was in the stomach of the fish for three days. Of course God took good care of him there or he would have been digested. While Jonah was trapped in there, he prayed to God. His prayer was heard, and God delivered him. The prophet found himself out of the fish and on the beach, safe and sound.

He landed on the beach not very far from Nineveh, the very city God had told him to visit.

Jonah knew then that there was no use in trying to run away from God and from delivering the message to the people of Nineveh. So he walked to Nineveh and gave the people God's message. He told them that they were very wicked and that God would destroy their city in forty days.

What do you think the people of Nineveh did? Did they try to kill Jonah because he brought them such bad news?

No! In fact, they were very sorry about the way they had been behaving and the king of Nineveh sent word to the people that they should repent. Because of that, God did not destroy their city.

You would think that would have made Jonah very happy, but it didn't. Jonah thought God was unfair since he did not do what he had said he would do. Jonah was proud and did not want the people to think that he had made a mistake. So instead of being happy, Jonah was angry that God did not destroy them, and he pouted and sulked.

God showed him that he loved the people of Nineveh, and was glad they wanted to do better, and that Jonah should also want what was best for them. Jonah really was a good man, so he got over being angry.

Chapter Thirty Two

The Story of God's Book

Part One

This chapter will help you understand more about the Bible and how fantastic it is. The whole Bible is a book, but it is made up of many parts and each of these parts of the Bible is also called a “book.” Each one of these books is divided into chapters, and the chapters are divided into verses.

The stories in this book so far are all found in the first part of the Bible called the Old Testament.

Here is something about each of the books in the Old Testament:

GENESIS The name Genesis means “origin, or beginning.” It tells of the creation of the earth, the sun and the moon, and all the other things that God and the Logos (Jesus, before he came to earth) made. It tells the story of Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, and explains that because they did not obey God they died, and all their children also died. That is why people still die to this day.

One of the most awesome promises our loving God has made is found in Genesis 22:18 (New International Version). It was given to Abraham, and reads: “And through your offspring all nations of the earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.” The word offspring means children, or grandchildren, and so on.

EXODUS The name Exodus means “going out.” This second book of the Bible tells about the children of Israel going out of Egypt. It begins by telling of the birth of Moses, and how his mother hid him in a basket and floated it in the waters of the River Nile. Exodus also tells about the laws that God gave to the Hebrews and how God’s house, the tabernacle, was built.

LEVITICUS This book tells about the family of Levi. There were twelve families or tribes of the Israelites and the family of Levi was the one which God selected to do his work for him. It is called Leviticus because it tells about the correct way the family of Levi and the priests were supposed to serve God. It also explains how they taught all the other Israelites to serve God.

NUMBERS Numbers is a good name for this book because it tells of the numbering, or counting, of the people of Israel. This is a history book. Here we are told of the experiences of the children of Israel from the time they left Egypt until they were ready to cross over the Jordan River into the Promised Land — a period of forty years.

DEUTERONOMY This book got its name because it means “giving the law the second time.” There are three wonderful sermons by Moses included in this book. They were preached just a short while before Moses died. In them Moses reminded the children of Israel about the Law which God had given to them, and how important it was for them to obey that Law. The closing chapter tells about the death of Moses.

JOSHUA This is a history of what Joshua did when he was the leader of the children of Israel. He led the Israelites across the river Jordan, and he conquered Canaan, the Promised Land.

JUDGES This is a history of the Israelites during a period of four hundred and fifty years when they were ruled by Judges, before they had kings. In it are the stories of Deborah, Gideon and Samson, among others.

RUTH This book starts by telling about an Israelite woman named Naomi and her husband and how they left Israel because there was a famine there, and moved to the land of Moab. They had two sons who married Moabite women. One of those women was Ruth. Sadly, Naomi's husband and both her sons died. She was very lonely, and decided to return to the land of Israel. Ruth loved Naomi and went with her. When they arrived in Israel, Ruth went to work in a harvest field belonging to Boaz, a relative of Naomi. After awhile Ruth married Boaz. They had a son, who was an ancestor of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

SAMUEL 1 and 2 There are two books in the Bible named after Samuel the prophet. They tell about his birth and life. He was the one who chose Saul to be Israel's first king. He later appointed David as king to take the place of Saul. These books also tell the stories of both Saul and David up to the time Saul died and David became the king of Israel.

KINGS 1 and 2 These two books give the history of Israel during the time that kings reigned over them, beginning with David, and ending with Zedekiah. It was Zedekiah who was captured by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and taken to Babylon as a prisoner. The Bible says that he would not see Babylon, and he didn't because he was blinded by the soldiers who captured him. These books also tell the experiences of Elijah and Elisha.

CHRONICLES 1 and 2 Like the two books of Kings, contain stories about some of the Israelites' experiences. The first chapters tell us the names of all the fathers from Adam to David. They are also Israel's history books down to the time when Zedekiah was taken to Babylon. The last verses of 2 Chronicles tell us how King Cyrus of Persia overthrew Babylon and let the captive Israelites return to Palestine, their homeland.

EZRA This book is named after the priest who served the Israelites during the time they were captives in Babylon, and tells more of the history of the Israelites after the capture of their last king. After the Israelites had been in Babylon for seventy years they were allowed to go back to their land, and Ezra was a very important leader among them at that time. Ezra was appointed to have the house of God, the temple, rebuilt in Jerusalem.

NEHEMIAH This book is named for God's servant Nehemiah, who wrote nearly all of it. It is about Israel during and after the time they returned to their land following their captivity in Babylon, and tells how Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of the city after the Israelites returned to Jerusalem.

ESTHER This book records the experiences of Esther, a Jewess who became the wife of a king of the Medes and Persians. This was during the time the Israelites were held captive in Babylon. One of the king's chief servants, Haman, was jealous of

Esther's cousin and foster father, Mordecai, and was a bitter enemy of all the Jewish people. He coaxed the king to issue a permit for all the Jews to be killed. Esther, the queen, used her influence with the king so that he changed his mind, and the Jews were saved. Later Haman was put to death as an enemy of the king.

JOB This is the life story of one of God's faithful servants. Satan, God's enemy, said that Job was loyal to God only because he was always rewarded for it. Satan also claimed that if God allowed Job to suffer, he would no longer do what God asked him to do.

The story explains that God permitted Satan to bring trouble upon Job to test him. His children were all killed in a storm and all his cattle died. Then he became ill, and boils broke out all over him. Finally, Job's wife turned against him.

Job still trusted God and continued to love and obey him. Then Job's health returned. His wife fell in love with him again and they had more children. The LORD gave him all the cattle he needed so that he was richer than ever before. Job pictures Adam and Eve who also lost everything. They, too, will receive it all back — and more!

PSALMS The beautiful writings of King David and other servants of God are contained here. Psalms means "hymns." David was a musician who played the harp. He was also a poet. David expresses his love for God, and thanks him for all the great things God did for him.

One of the most beautiful of the Psalms is the twenty-third. David was a shepherd boy who took care for his father's sheep. When he wrote Psalm 23, he was thinking of God as his shepherd, and of how tenderly God cared for him.

As a prophet, God caused David to write about many exciting things that will be done for the people when Jesus becomes king. In Psalms 46, David tells about the time that is coming when there will be no more wars.

David wrote about King Jesus, saying that he will rule from sea to sea and to the ends of the earth.

PROVERBS Most of the wise sayings in this book were written by King Solomon. He was so wise because God gave him wisdom. In Proverbs 3:5 (King James Version), King Solomon wrote, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths."

ECCLESIASTES The name of this book means "the preacher." It is believed to have been written by Solomon. Like the book of Proverbs, it contains a lot of good advice. One of the wisest things that Solomon reminds us of in this book is to always remember our Creator. Our powerful God made everything — the sun and the moon, the stars, the earth, and he made us. So we should think about him, and love and appreciate him all of our lives.

THE SONG OF SOLOMON This is another book of the Bible which was written by King Solomon. Canticles is another name for it. It is a story of love; the love of a husband for his wife. It is a very good lesson to show God's love for us, and the love Jesus has for those who serve him.

ISAIAH God inspired the prophet Isaiah to write a warning that he would punish the people for their wrongdoings. He also inspired Isaiah to write the many wonderful promises of God which tell of his kingdom and of the good things he plans to do for all the people of the world.

Isaiah 11:6, 7 (NIV) says, "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox." Isaiah explains that the time will come when all the animals will be tame again, and they will obey people just as they did in the Garden of Eden when Adam gave names to all of them.

Isaiah 35:5, 6 (NIV) is another blessed promise of God: "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert." This promise will come true when King Jesus rules the world.

JEREMIAH This book has the name of another of God's prophets. God asked Jeremiah to write many things about the sins of the people of Israel, and also to warn them that they would be punished for their sins. God had given them his Laws but they did not obey them very well. Because of that, they finally did not have a king of their own to rule over them and they were taken into captivity.

Jeremiah also writes of the time when God would give them a new Law, also called a "new covenant." Although their unfaithfulness would cause them to be scattered throughout the earth for hundreds of years and kept out of the land which God had given to them, God told the Prophet Jeremiah that the time would come when he would bring them back to their land and forgive their sins.

LAMENTATIONS The name of this book means "mourning" or feeling very sad. It was written by the Prophet Jeremiah, and he tells of all the trouble that had come upon the people of Israel because they had not done a good job of serving God. The prophet trusted God and knew that in due time God would bless the Israelites as well as all other people in the world.

EZEKIEL Ezekiel is the name of another of God's prophets, and he recorded many great things that God asked him to write about. He told the Jews that the time would come when they would be driven out of their Promised Land and would have to find homes in different places all over the earth. God also told Ezekiel to write that the Israelites would, after a very long time, be brought back into the Promised Land, Israel, and now we can see this coming true.

DANIEL This book was written by the Prophet Daniel. It tells about Nebuchadnezzar's dream in which he saw a big statue that looked like a man. It also tells the story of the three Hebrews who were put into a fiery furnace, but were not burned to death because God protected them. The story of Daniel in the lion's den is also recorded here. It also contains many prophecies about the history of the world up to the present day.

God inspired Daniel to write that in these days in which we are now living, knowledge would be increased. What Daniel wrote back then is now coming true. There are schools to attend, libraries, computers, and lots of other ways of learning things. Years ago when Daniel wrote those words, they didn't have any of those things.

HOSEA This book of the Bible is named after the Prophet Hosea. He wrote that the time is coming when God will destroy death. When this promise comes true, no one will get sick and die anymore.

JOEL Joel was a man who loved the LORD, and did what he asked of him. In the book which is named for him he told the people about awful wars which were coming, and that the nations would be fighting each other. What God told Joel to say is all coming true. Joel also wrote that God will cause the nations to stop fighting after a time, and that then the people will have everything they need and will be happy.

AMOS God inspired this prophet to write that a time would come when the Jewish people would be brought back to the Promised Land. Amos also wrote that if we try to do good, God will bless us.

OBADIAH There is only one chapter in this book and it was written by the prophet Obadiah. He explains that a time is coming when the holy people of God, called "saviors," with Jesus Christ as the leading one, will be rulers over all the world.

JONAH The experiences of the Prophet Jonah are recorded here. It tells about how he was thrown overboard from a ship and swallowed by a great fish and what happened to him.

MICAH God promised the people, through the prophet Micah, that a time will come when the nations of the earth will not fight each other any more. They will not even learn how to fight! At this time every person will have his own "vine and fig tree." That means that everyone will have enough food to eat, and no one will ever again need to be afraid of anything.

NAHUM God helped his prophet Nahum to write about automobiles hundreds of years before they were even invented. Nahum called them chariots and because of their bright headlights at night, he said they would look like torches. Now we have ways of traveling that are faster, better made, and even go into space!

HABAKKUK This was another prophet who loved God and wrote many amazing things. In Habakkuk 2:14 (NIV) we read, "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." That tells us that some day in the future ALL people will get the chance to know and love and obey the LORD. What an exciting time to look forward to.

ZEPHANIAH In this book the Prophet Zephaniah explains that a time is coming when everyone in the whole world will worship God and serve him just the way he wants them to. At that time there will be just one religion for everyone, and they will know then how good God really is because he will make all his promises come true. God said in chapter three, verse nine, "For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD to serve him with one consent."

HAGGAI As is true of all God's prophets, God helped Haggai to write about events long before they happened. Haggai told about a time of distress and trouble that was to come upon all the nations of the earth. He wrote that God would "shake all nations."

However, the prophet also wrote that after the trouble was over, "the desire of all nations shall come." That means that a time is coming when there will be no more wars.

Then the people will have what they really want, which is life and peace and happiness.

ZECHARIAH This book, named after the prophet who wrote it, tells us a lot about the trouble that would come upon the Israelites, and also about a happy time coming when the Israelites and all other nations, which then obey God, will be blessed.

MALACHI This is the last book in the first part of the Bible, the Old Testament, and is named for the one who wrote it. God directed Malachi in what he wrote. The whole Bible is God's book and because it is God's book, we know it is true.

God told Malachi to write that unless the people would change from their wicked ways and serve him, a terrible time of trouble would come upon the nations. We see a lot of that trouble happening now in the time in which we are living. Thankfully, Malachi also wrote that following the trouble a wonderful time of blessing would come to the people.

In the Old Testament God promised to send someone to the earth who would become a great king and give everyone the opportunity to be happy and healthy. This one was to be an offspring, or come from, the family of Abraham, which means that he would be an Israelite. He is the one who will make all of God's promises come true.

God told the Prophet Isaiah to promise that this great one would be born as a baby and that he would grow up to become the Prince of Peace. The next stories will be about him. His name is Jesus.

It was after Jesus was born that God's servants began to write the second part of the Bible, called the New Testament. In the Old Testament God makes many promises, and in the New Testament some of these promises begin to come true. We can trust that all the others will come true in due time.

Chapter Thirty Three

The Most Important Baby

Jesus was the most important baby ever born. No baby born before and no baby born since has been as important as Jesus. His birth meant that many of God's promises had come true, and that all the rest of his promises are sure to come true in the future.

Jesus' mother and foster father, Mary and Joseph, lived in the town of Nazareth in Israel. The people of Israel no longer had a king of their own but were being ruled by the Romans. Because the Roman government was getting ready to tax all the people, Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem to sign their names in the Roman tax books.

There were many people visiting Bethlehem at that time, and when Jesus' parents arrived, there were no rooms in which they could stay. All the hotels were filled, and a barn was the only place they could find to stay in overnight — and that is where Jesus was born.

An incredible thing happened on the night Jesus was born. A group of shepherds was out in the fields near Bethlehem, caring for their sheep, when suddenly they heard the most beautiful music they had ever heard before and it seemed to be coming from the sky. They looked up and saw that the sky was very bright. It was so unusual that it frightened them. Then an angel appeared and told them not to be afraid because he had good news for them. Joyfully, the angel told the shepherds that Jesus, God's son, had been born that night.

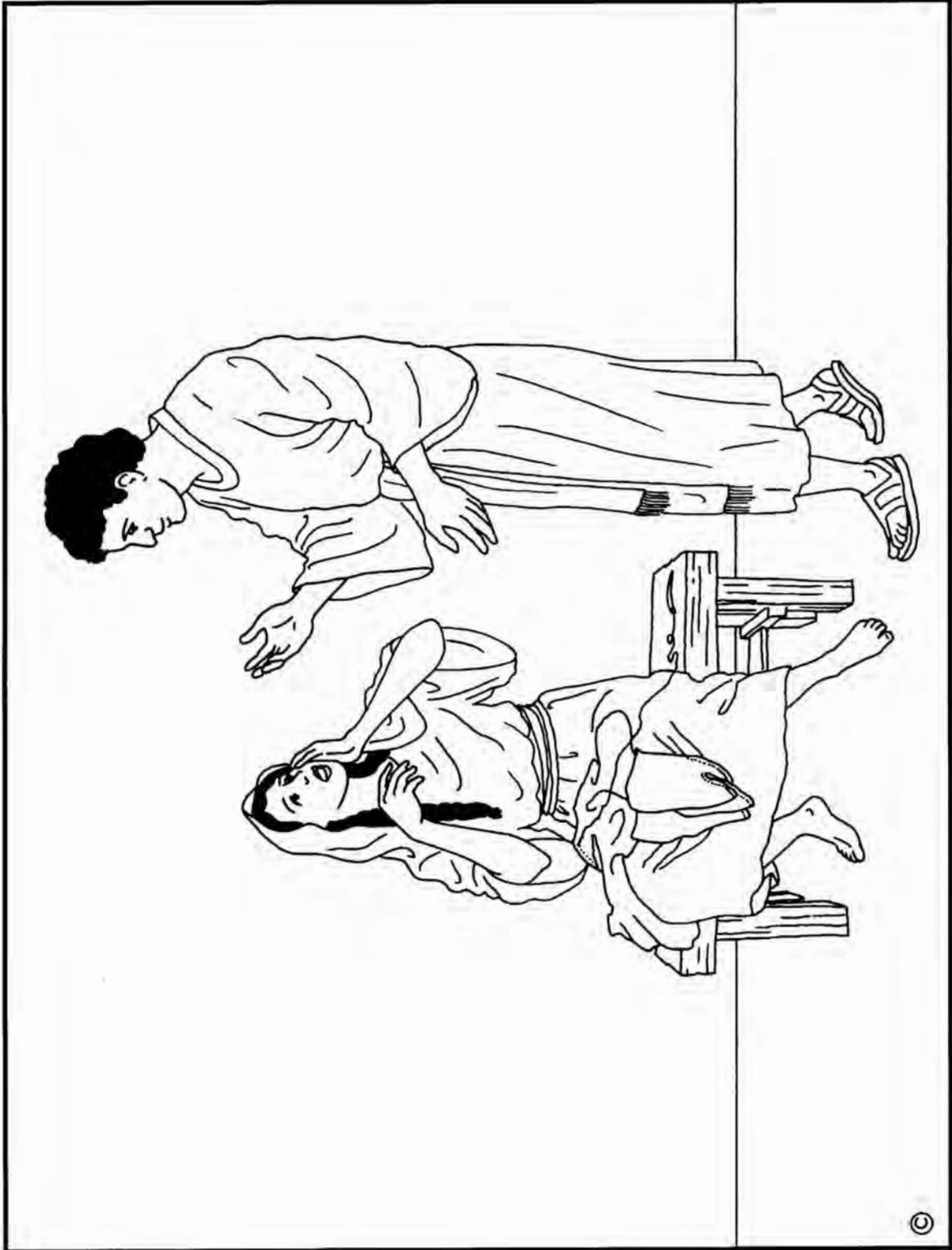
For hundreds of years God had promised to send Christ Jesus, the Messiah, who would save the people of Israel from their sins. God promised also that because of Messiah, the Savior, everyone who has ever lived will also be saved. Now the angel was telling the shepherds that he was born as a little baby that very night. He told them they would find him in a stable in Bethlehem wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger.

After the angel told the shepherds this good news, more angels began to sing, too. Their song was full of praises to God. They sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!"

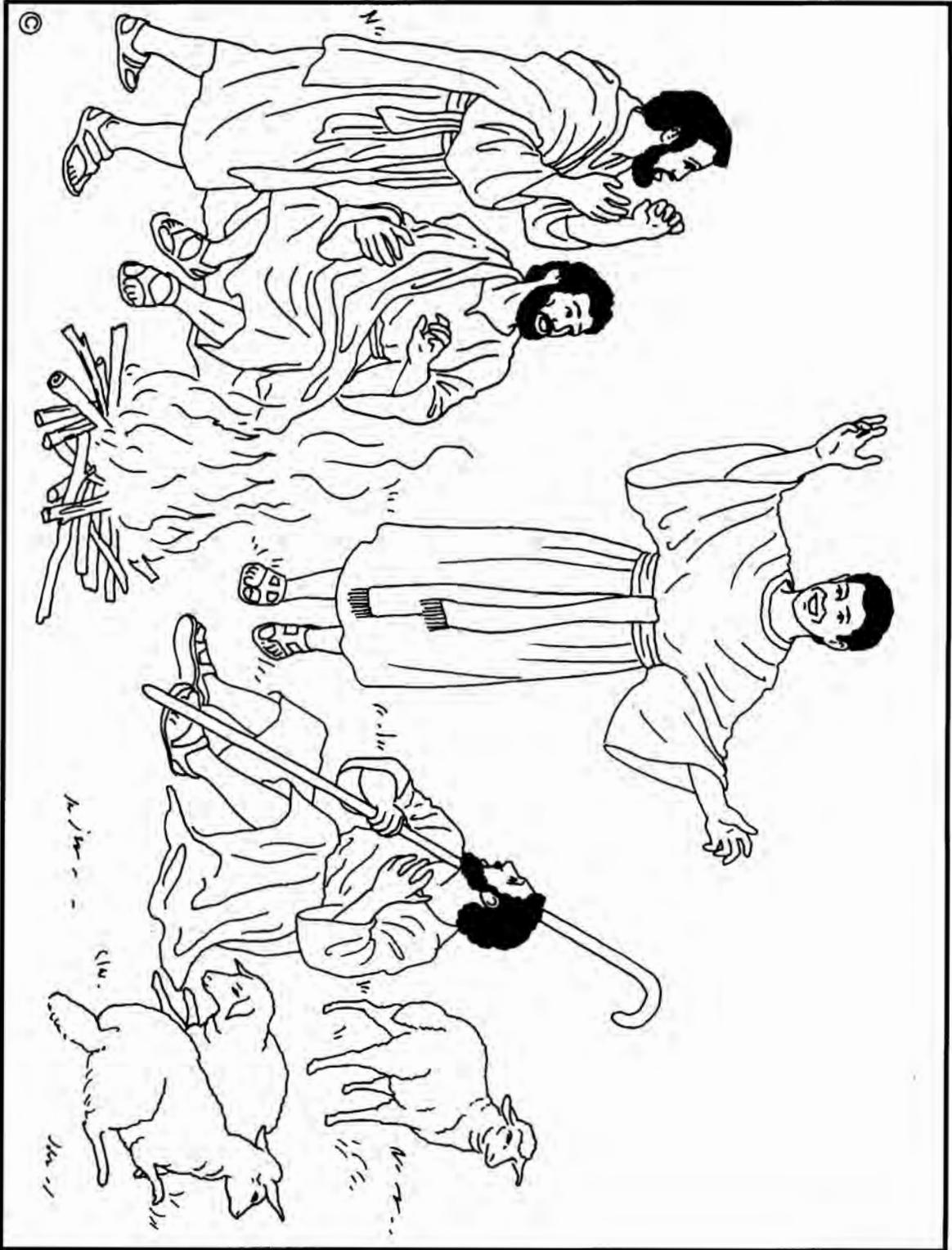
The shepherds went to Bethlehem and found the baby there. Imagine their excitement when they saw the beautiful baby whom God had sent. They worshiped the child and gave thanks to God because his promises were starting to come true. God has promised that Jesus will become a great king to rule over the whole earth.

In a faraway country, east of Israel, there were wise men, also called magi, who studied the stars. They knew from prophecies that this was about the time that Messiah would be born. When they saw the brightest star that had ever shone in the sky, they knew it was a sign that the Son of God had been born. They wanted to worship the newborn king so they decided to travel to Israel and find him.

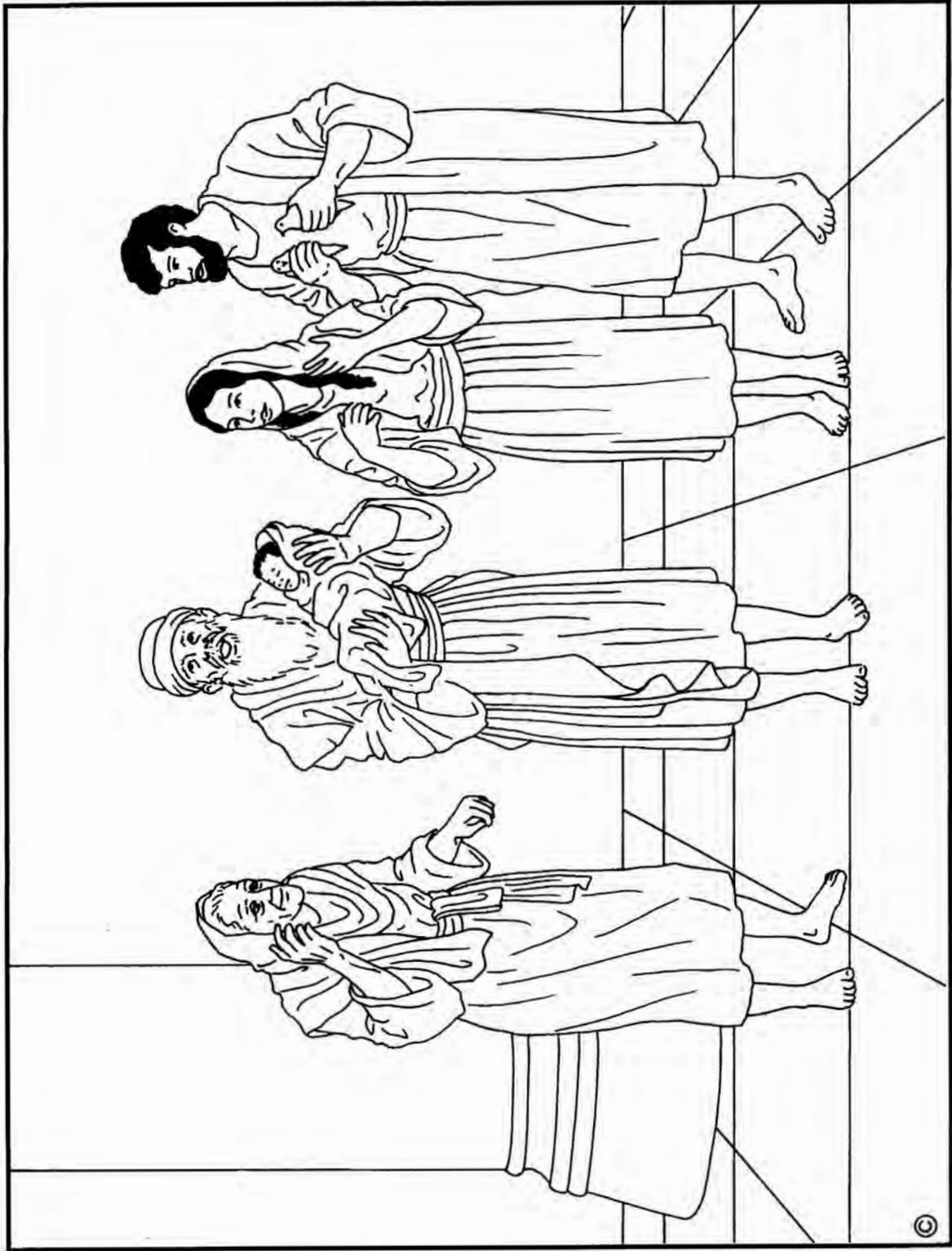
When these wise men arrived in Israel, they went first to visit Herod, who was then the ruler. They told Herod about Jesus' birth and that he would grow up to be a great king.



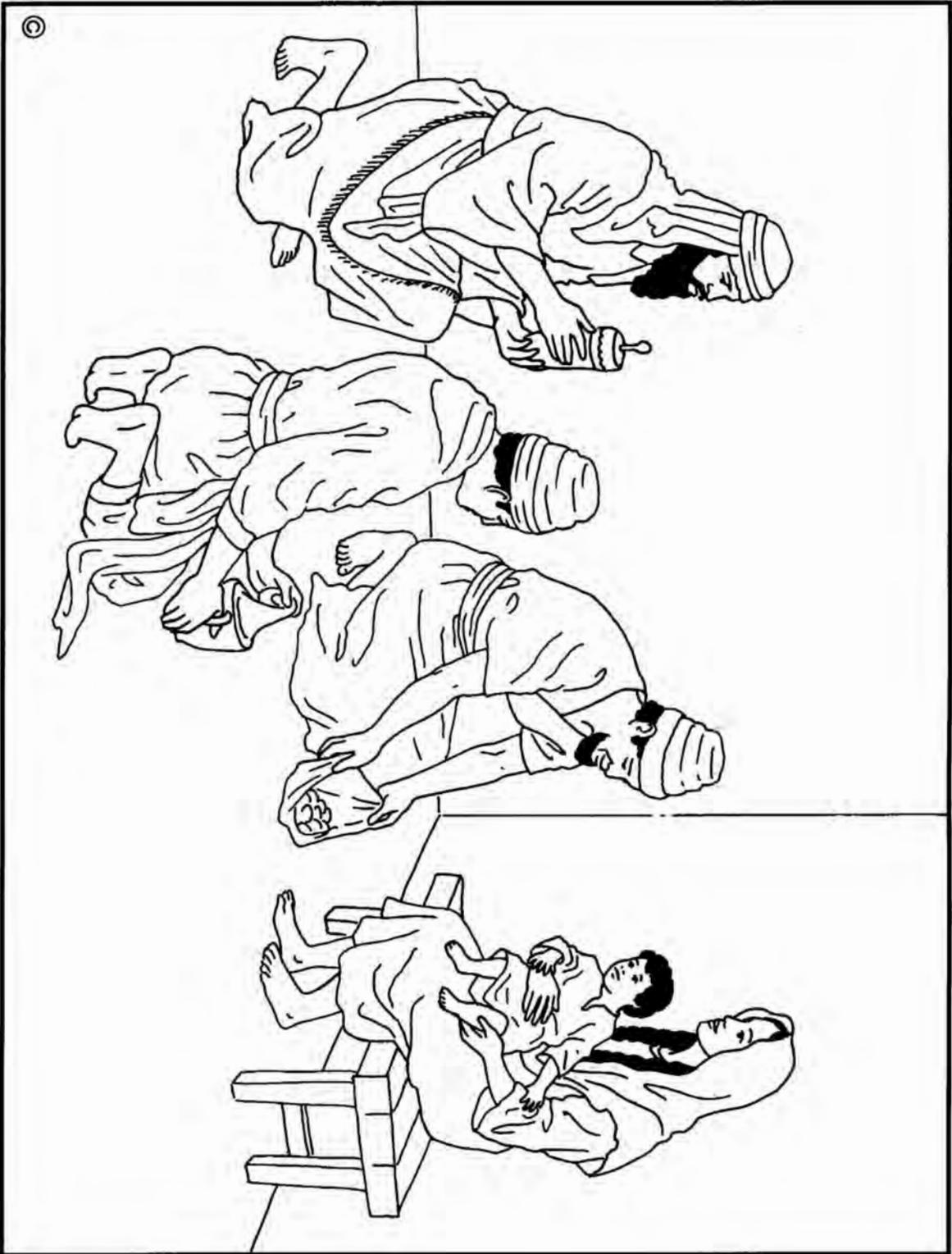
Gabriel Appears to Mary: Luke 1:26-38



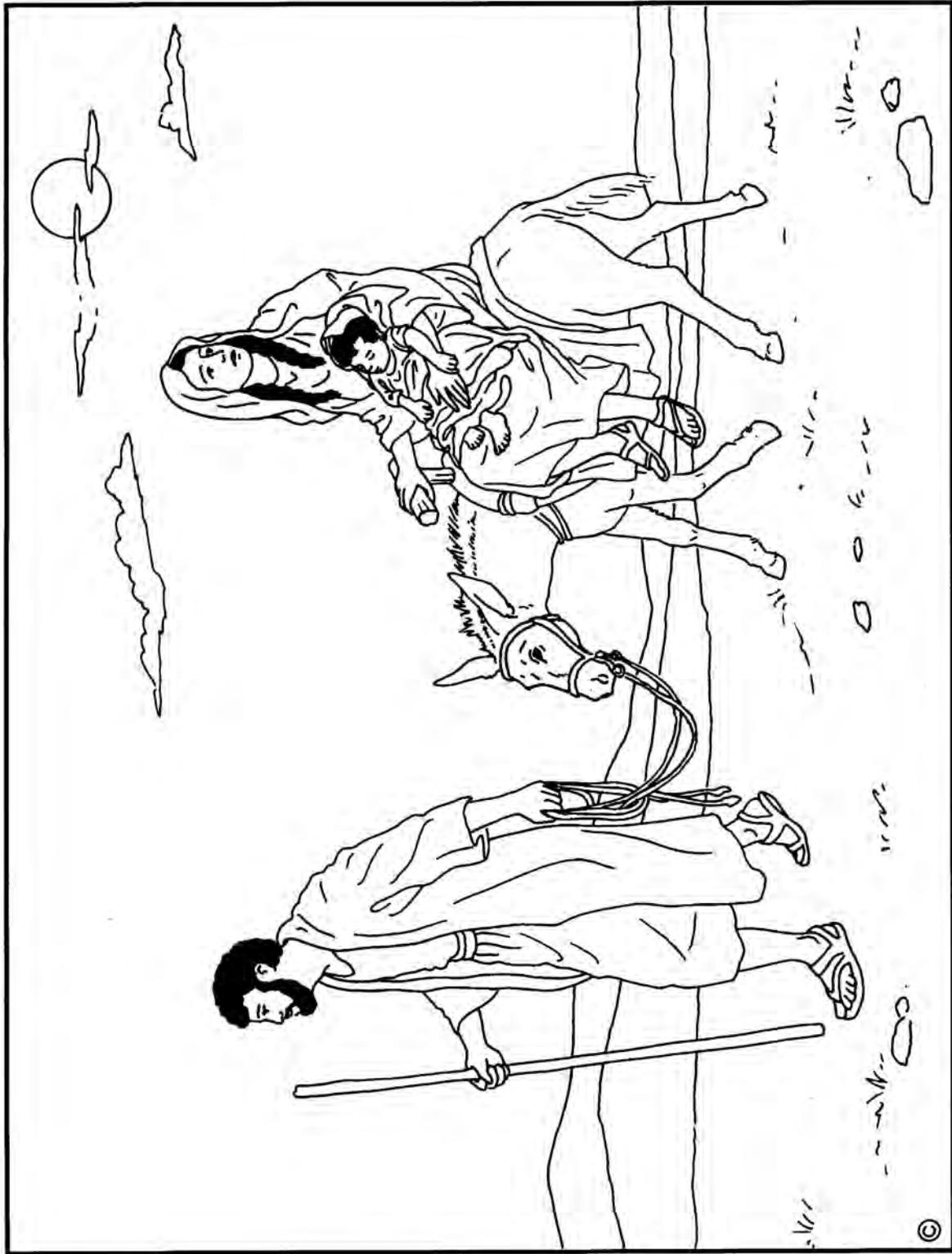
The Shepherds: Luke 2:8-18



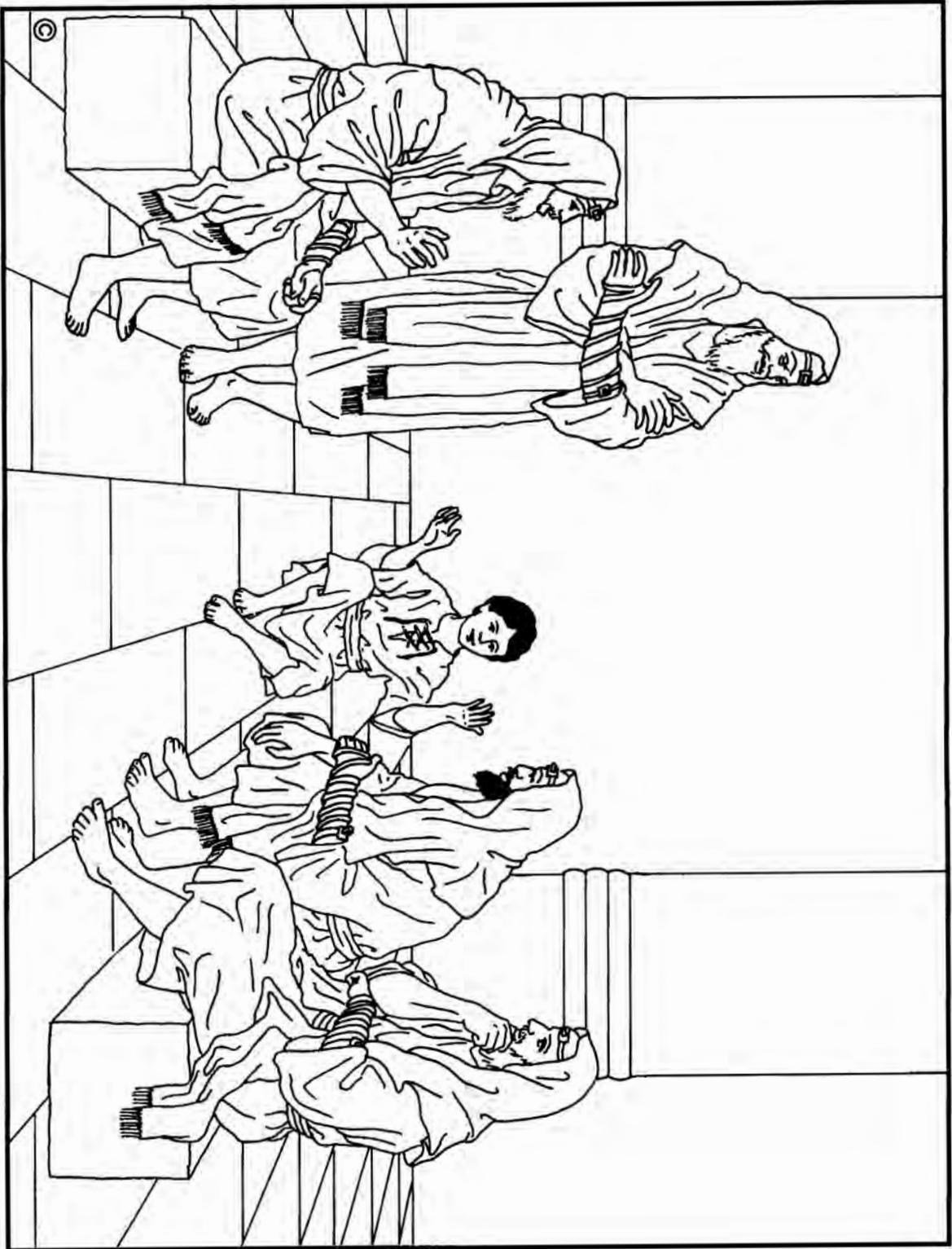
Jesus Presented in the Temple: Luke 2:21-39



The Wise Men: Matthew 2:1-12



The Flight to Egypt: Matthew 2:13-15



The Boy Jesus in the Temple: Luke 2:39-52

Herod did not like that one bit! King Herod decided he would have that baby killed.

Herod did not tell the wise men what he planned to do. Instead, he deceived them. He told them to go and find the child and come back and let him know where Jesus was so that he could also go and worship the newborn king.

The wise men followed the star until it seemed to stop right over Bethlehem. They were thrilled when they saw the young child and his mother. Then they gave Jesus the presents they had brought; gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And they bowed down and worshiped him.

That night the wise men were warned in a dream that they should not go back to tell Herod where he could find Jesus. They obeyed what God told them in the dream, so Herod's terrible plan to find the child and kill him failed.

When Herod found out that the wise men had returned to their country in the east by another way, he was very, very angry. He knew they had outwitted him, and now he did not know where to find Jesus. All he knew was that a future king had been born and he wanted to make sure that he would never take the throne. Herod then did a dreadful thing. He gave orders that all the Jewish baby boys, age two and under, should be killed. He thought for sure that Jesus would be among them and be killed also.

Nevertheless, God had everything under control. An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him he needed to take his family to Egypt right away. They did go to Egypt and Jesus escaped being killed.

The Bible doesn't tell us any more about Jesus until he was twelve years old. By that time Herod was dead so it was safe for Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to return to their home in Nazareth.

Every year they went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When Jesus was twelve he went to the temple to talk with the teachers. When his parents were on their way home, they assumed that Jesus was with someone from their group and would return home with them. But Mary and Joseph could not find him among their friends and relatives, so they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple sitting with the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed!

Jesus' mother scolded him for causing them to worry, but Jesus said that he was there doing what his Father would want him to be doing. He was talking about his Father in Heaven. Jesus knew, even when he was so young, that his Father had a great work for him to do.

In the Law that God gave to Moses there was a rule that said anyone who wanted to work for God as one of his priests or prophets must be at least thirty years of age. So Jesus had to wait a while before he could start preaching about his Heavenly Father and his plan.

In the meantime, Jesus was obedient to his parents, and grew in wisdom and ability.

Chapter Thirty Four

Preparing the Way for Jesus

The time had come when the people of Israel were to have a greater experience than ever before.

The Israelite people were the offspring, or family, of Abraham. God had promised Abraham that one of his family members was going to be a great king who would rule over all the earth. Many hundreds of years had gone by since Abraham received that promise, and the birth of Jesus was the beginning of its coming true.

God knew that many of the people of Israel would not be ready for this promised king. Some of them had forgotten about God. They needed to be told about him and reminded of the great miracles he had done for their people, the Israelites, through the years. There had to be someone to do that.

John was the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth and was born when they were very old. They didn't think they would be able to have children and they praised God when their son was born. Elizabeth was the cousin of Mary, Jesus' mother. John was six months older than Jesus. God's spirit, or power, was with John because he had a very important work to do. John had the job of telling the Israelites about their God.

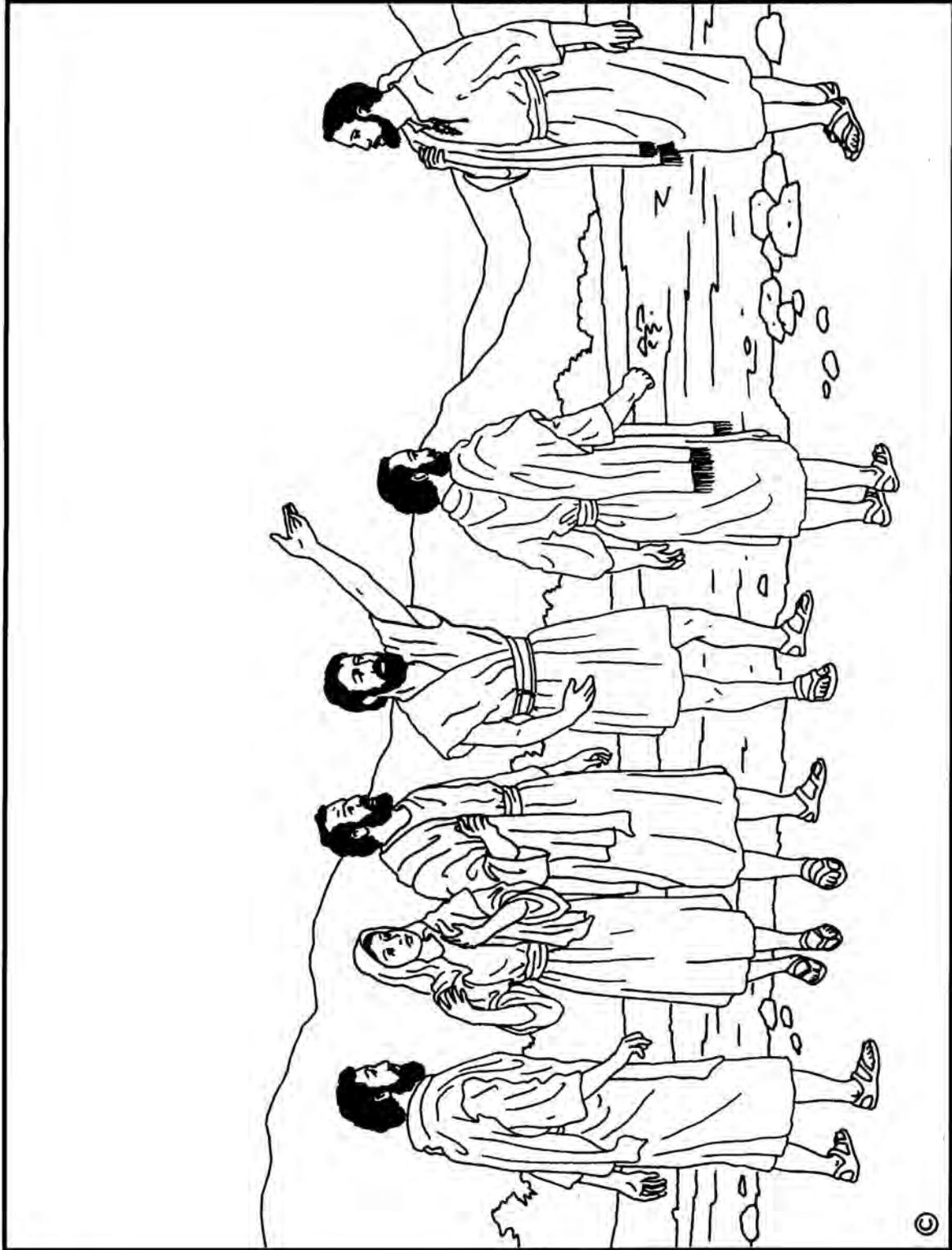
Some of the Israelites were expecting their Savior to be born about this time. When they heard John's message they were sorry they had forgotten about God and they wanted to get to know him again and try to do his will. John baptized them in the river Jordan, and that is why he was called John the Baptist.

It was as if he washed away their sins in the water. Of course, the water did not really wash away their sins, because sins are not something on the outside of our bodies that can be washed away with water. Baptism is a picture, or symbol, of taking away sins. That is what John was doing for all the Israelites who confessed their sins.

John explained to the Israelites that he was not Christ, but that he was just the one to tell them about Christ, their Messiah. He said that he was preparing the way for Christ Jesus and that they should repent of their sins. He was very humble and expressed that he was not fit to even carry Jesus' sandals.

John led a very simple life. He wore plain clothes made of camel's hair and he ate locusts and wild honey. John did not preach in the cities, but went out into the countryside. A lot of people followed him there because they wanted to hear what the LORD told him to say to them, and they were eager to learn more about their Savior.

After John had been preaching God's message to the people for several months, Jesus came out from the city one day and met John by the edge of the river. Jesus asked John to baptize him. John did not want to do it because he knew very well that Jesus didn't have any sins to confess and did not need to be washed clean. The only people John had been baptizing were those who had not been obeying God and wanted



John the Baptist Tells the People That Jesus Is the Lamb of God:
Matthew 3:11-17; John 1:29-34

forgiveness and to start a new relationship with him.

Jesus assured John that he wanted to be baptized. What happened next was extraordinary! As Jesus came up out of the water, John saw a beautiful dove come down from the sky and perch right on Jesus' head. John understood that to mean that God's spirit had come upon Jesus. Then they heard a voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Jesus was now thirty years old and it was time for him to start doing the work that God, his father in heaven, had planned for him.

Chapter Thirty Five

Jesus Wouldn't Do Wrong

Jesus loved his Father in heaven and was always obedient to him. But Satan tried to talk Jesus into doing things that God did not want him to do. Remember the story of Adam and Eve? They took Satan's advice and ended up losing their beautiful home in the Garden of Eden.

Now Jesus had come into the world to make sure that everyone will have the chance for perfect life again. Satan wanted to try to keep that from happening so he tempted Jesus to commit sins. He thought if he could do that, he could keep God's promises from coming true — but it didn't work!

When Jesus was baptized, the power of God came upon him. From then on he knew he could do lots of incredible things that he could not have done before. Jesus could now perform miracles.

Jesus was happy to serve his Heavenly Father, and was only interested in doing his will. He went into the wilderness so he could be alone to pray and think about what his Father's plan was for him. He didn't even eat anything for forty days. He got very hungry! Satan tried to coax him into using the power of God to make bread out of the stones so he would have something to eat. But Jesus knew it would be wrong to use God's power that way just to satisfy his hunger. He preferred to go hungry for a little while longer rather than to do what Satan suggested. Jesus knew that the power he had been blessed with was to be used to do things for other people.

Satan then told Jesus to jump off the roof of the temple in Jerusalem. He said that it

would prove that he was really the son of God. Satan also quoted a scripture from the Old Testament, saying that the angels would come and protect him and not let him be hurt. But Jesus told him that he would not be foolish and test God that way.

Finally, Satan took Jesus up to the top of a very high mountain and showed him the nations of the world and said they could all belong to Jesus if he would just bow down and worship him. There was no way Jesus was going to do that and he told Satan to go away. He told Satan that the scriptures say to worship only the LORD God. So Satan went away. Then the angels came and took care of Jesus.

Jesus now had power and wanted to use it the way God wanted him to. Our Heavenly Father wants us to also be unselfish and to think of other people before ourselves.

Just think of all the wonderful things God has promised to do for his human family. In the kingdom they will learn all about Jesus and will want to be like him, so everyone will be loving toward everyone else.

Chapter Thirty Six

The Mighty Works of Jesus

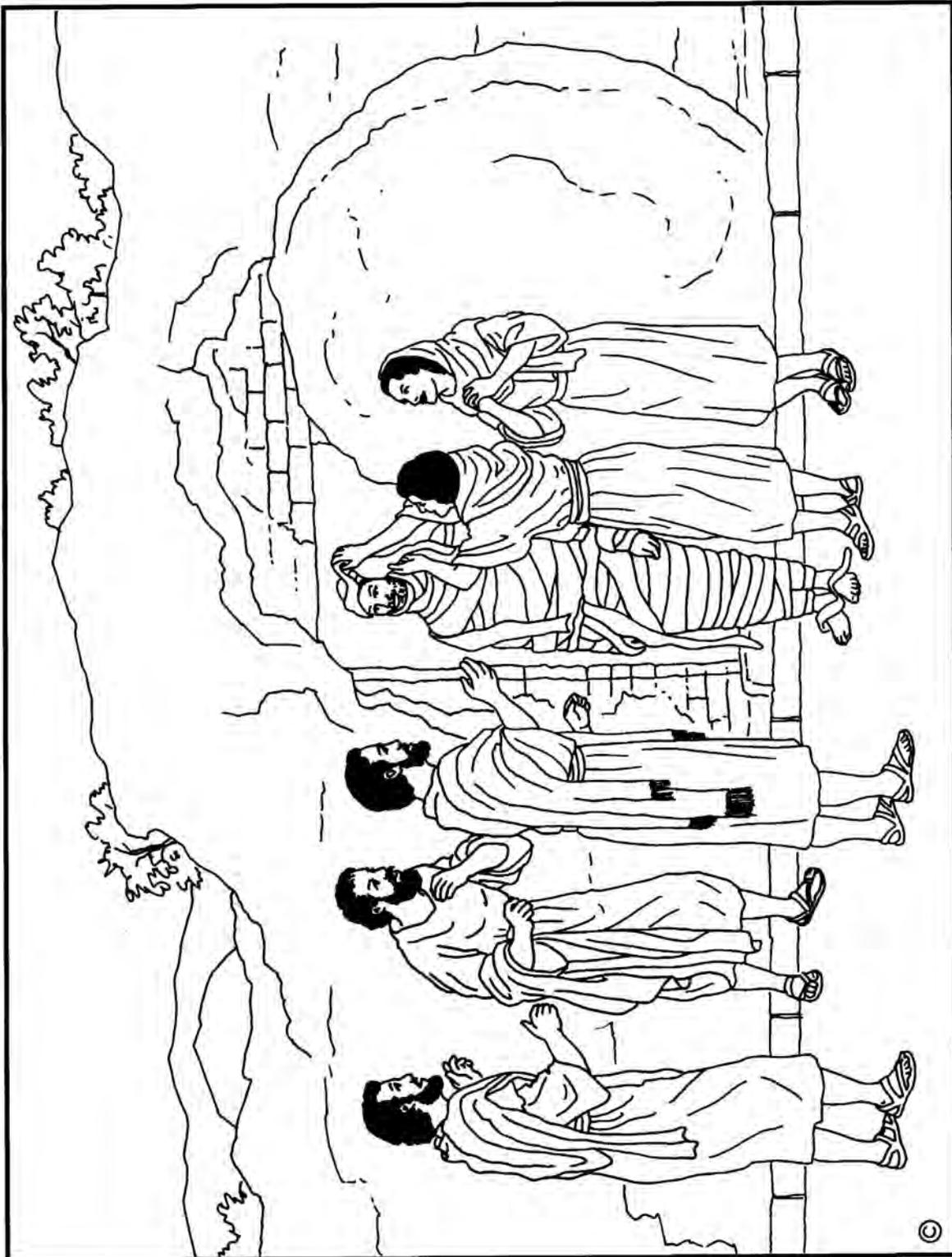
The power of God had come upon Jesus, and God's power can do amazing things. Jesus was able to make blind people see, he could bring hearing to people who had been deaf, and he healed those who were lame so they could walk. Those are just some of some of the things that Jesus did because he had the power to do so.

Of course Jesus didn't open all the blind eyes, and he didn't make all the sick people well, but those were some examples of what he will do for everyone when his kingdom is here on earth. In Jesus' kingdom, deaf people will be able to hear, the blind will be able to see, those who were crippled will be able to walk and run, and people who had been mute will be able to speak.

There was something that Jesus did that was even more wonderful than healing the sick!

There was a family of two sisters, Mary and Martha, and their brother, Lazarus who lived in Bethany, a town in Israel. They were all good friends of Jesus and he often visited their home.

Once when Jesus was traveling and was far away from Bethany, Lazarus became very sick. His sisters knew that Jesus would be able to heal their brother so they sent a message to let him know what was going on. Jesus received the message, but the strange thing is he did not go to Bethany right away to see his friend.



Resurrection of Lazarus: John 11:1-48

After a few days, Jesus told his disciples that Lazarus was sleeping and that he was going to Bethany to wake him up. Sleep is usually helpful to those who are sick, so the disciples wondered why Jesus wouldn't just let him sleep. Jesus then spoke very clearly and told them that Lazarus had died.

When Jesus said that Lazarus was sleeping and that he would awaken him, he meant that he would wake him up from the sleep of death. Death is something like being asleep — when you are sleeping you do not know what is going on around you.

When you go to bed at night you know that you will wake up in the morning, rested and ready to enjoy another day. God has planned that, in the kingdom, everyone who dies will wake up, just like waking up after a night of sleep.

So Jesus went to Bethany, and when he got close to the home of the sisters, Martha ran out to meet him. She was very sad and was crying, but she almost felt like scolding Jesus for not coming right away. She was sure that the Lord could have made her brother well, but now he was dead.

But Jesus assured her that Lazarus would live again. She knew of God's plan that some day all who had died would be made alive again, and she thought that was probably what Jesus meant. But that was not what he was talking about. Jesus meant that he would make Lazarus alive right then through the power of God!

Mary and Martha took Jesus to the grave where Lazarus' body had been taken. It was a cave with a large stone covering the entrance. After Jesus had prayed to his Heavenly Father, he called to Lazarus, "Come out!" And Lazarus got up and walked right out of the tomb. God's power can perform miracles!

When Jesus began the work of preaching about the kingdom, many people in Israel, like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus loved what he had to say and they became his footstep followers, or disciples. There are still many disciples of Jesus in the world today. Among the disciples were also twelve special men that Jesus appointed to help him with his work and they were called apostles.

Another miracle happened one evening when Jesus and his apostles were in a boat together sailing across the Sea of Galilee. Jesus lay down and fell asleep. Suddenly a terrible storm came up and the men became very frightened. They woke Jesus up and found that he was not a bit afraid. He spoke to the storm saying, "Peace, be still," and then the storm was over, and the sea became calm.

These stories help us to know that there is nothing too hard for Jesus to do. We can trust that in his kingdom he will perform such miracles, and many more, with the power God has given him.

Chapter Thirty Seven

The Lamb of God

John the Baptist came to the people of Israel just before Jesus to tell them that the great king whom God had promised was now with them. He told the people that Jesus was the lamb of God that would take away the sin of the world.

Why did John say that Jesus was a lamb? In the Old Testament of the Bible we read about lambs being sacrificed for the sins of the Israelites. Those sacrifices were a picture, or example, of something better that would happen later. Jesus was sacrificed like the lambs, but his sacrifice was to pay for the sins of the whole world of mankind. Because he did that, the time is coming when everyone can learn all about God, and no one will have to die anymore.

Jesus was a wonderful man. He was always doing good things for people. He was kind to everyone and he especially loved children. One time his friends thought some kids were annoying him and they tried to make them go away. But Jesus told his friends to leave the children alone because he liked being with them. He told them that some day everyone will have to become humble and sweet like children before they can enjoy themselves in his kingdom.

You would think that all the people of Israel would have loved Jesus just as he loved them, but they didn't. The religious leaders of that day, called scribes and Pharisees, were jealous of him. They were afraid the people would listen to Jesus instead of to them so they decided to kill him. Jealousy is a terrible thing!

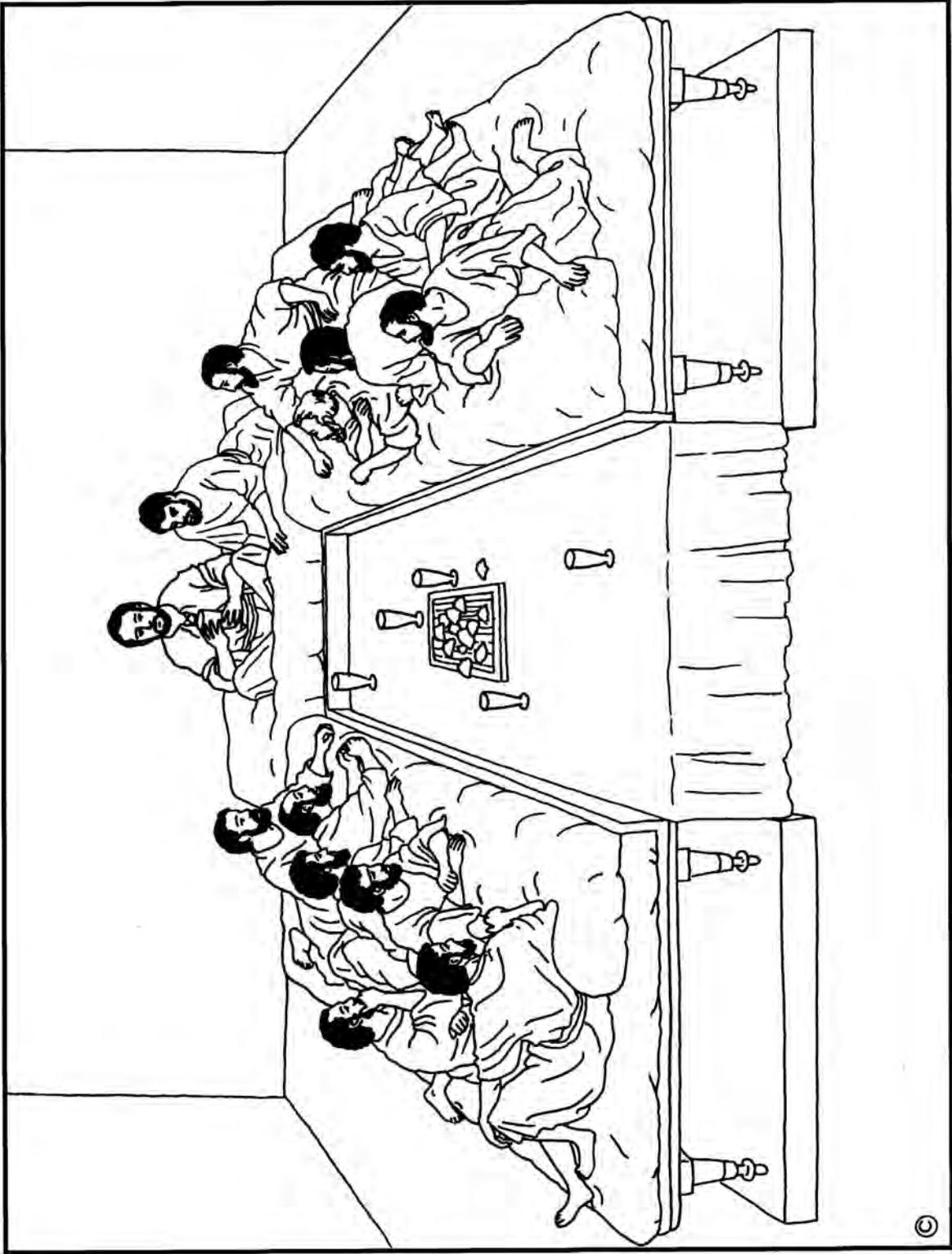
Jerusalem was the capital city in Israel and the rulers who were most jealous of Jesus lived there. Jesus knew they wanted to kill him, but he made plans to go to Jerusalem anyway.

Among the twelve apostles Jesus had selected to be his helpers was one called Peter. Peter loved his Lord Jesus with all his heart and did not want him to be killed, so he told Jesus it would not be a good idea to visit Jerusalem. Jesus did not take Peter's advice because he knew something Peter did not know — God wanted him to go, so he wasn't afraid to go to Jerusalem.

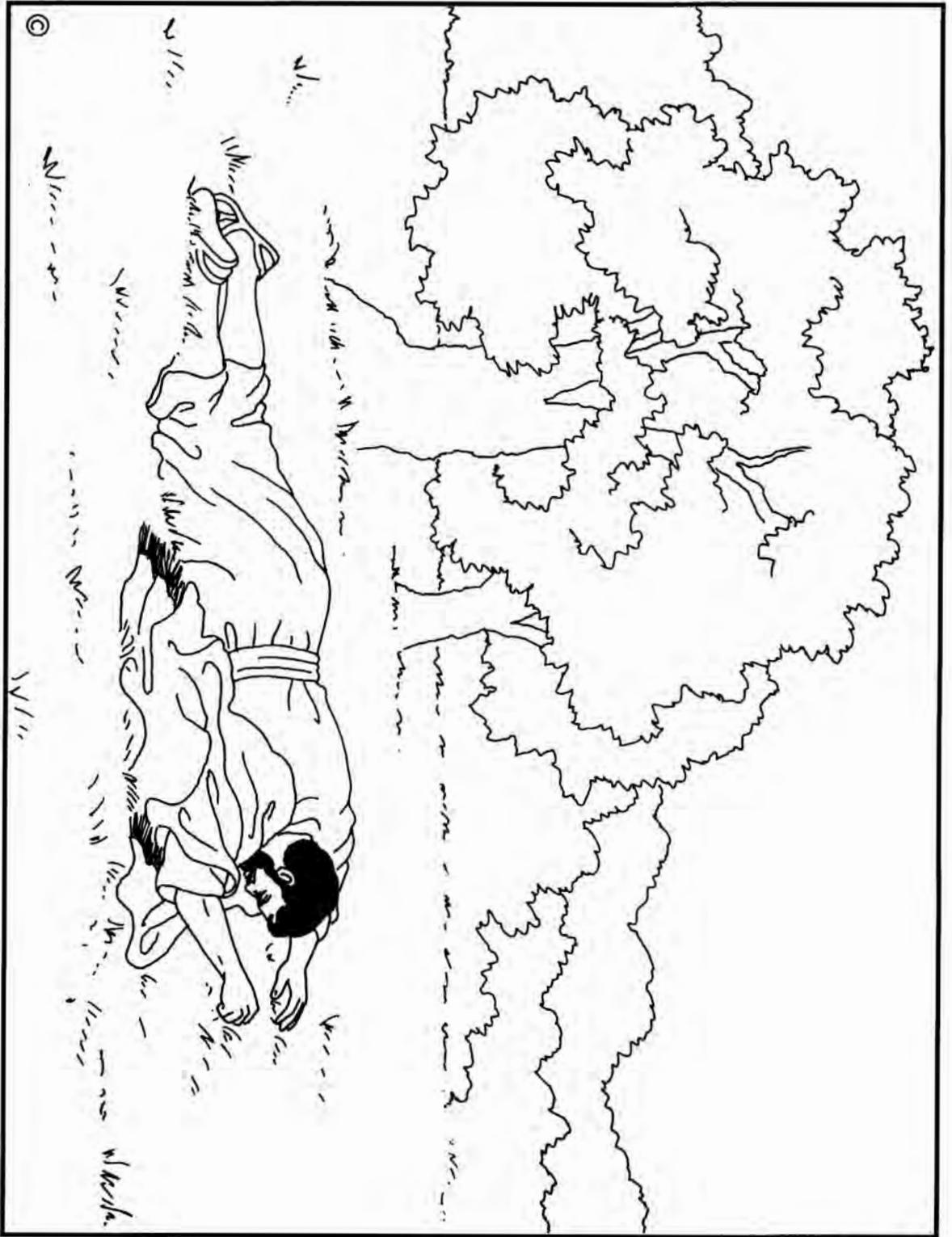
One night Jesus and his apostles had a very special supper together. It was called the "Passover supper." We talked about the Passover in chapter fifteen. You will remember that the angel passed over the houses where the blood of the lamb was sprinkled on the door posts.

Anyway, while they were eating together Jesus surprised his apostles by saying that one of them would betray him and turn him over to his enemies that very night. It was Judas, and Jesus knew he was going to let them know which one was Jesus by kissing him on the cheek. The worst thing about it was Judas said he loved Jesus, but he took money for betraying him. He really loved money more.

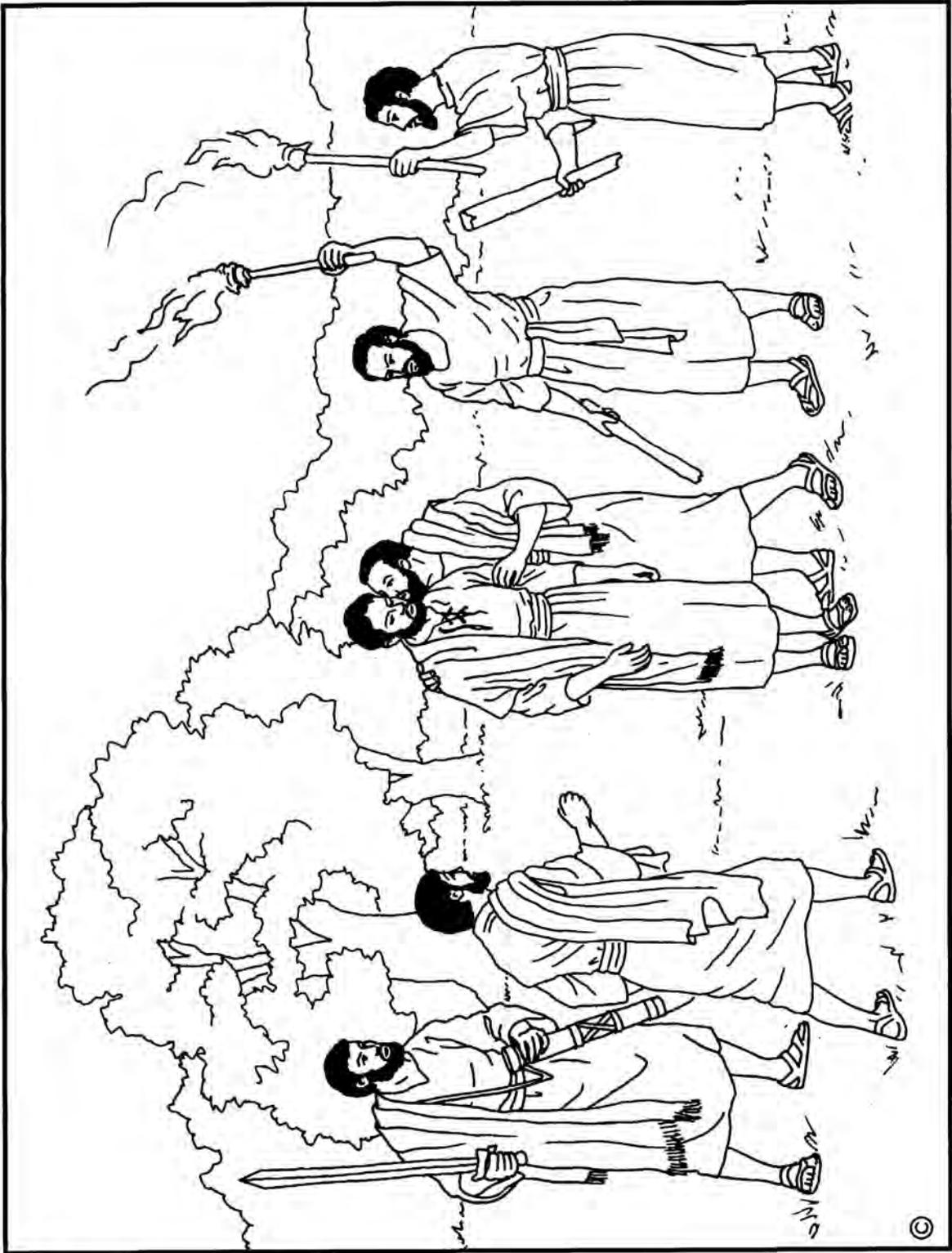
After the Passover supper, Jesus and eleven of his apostles walked outside to the



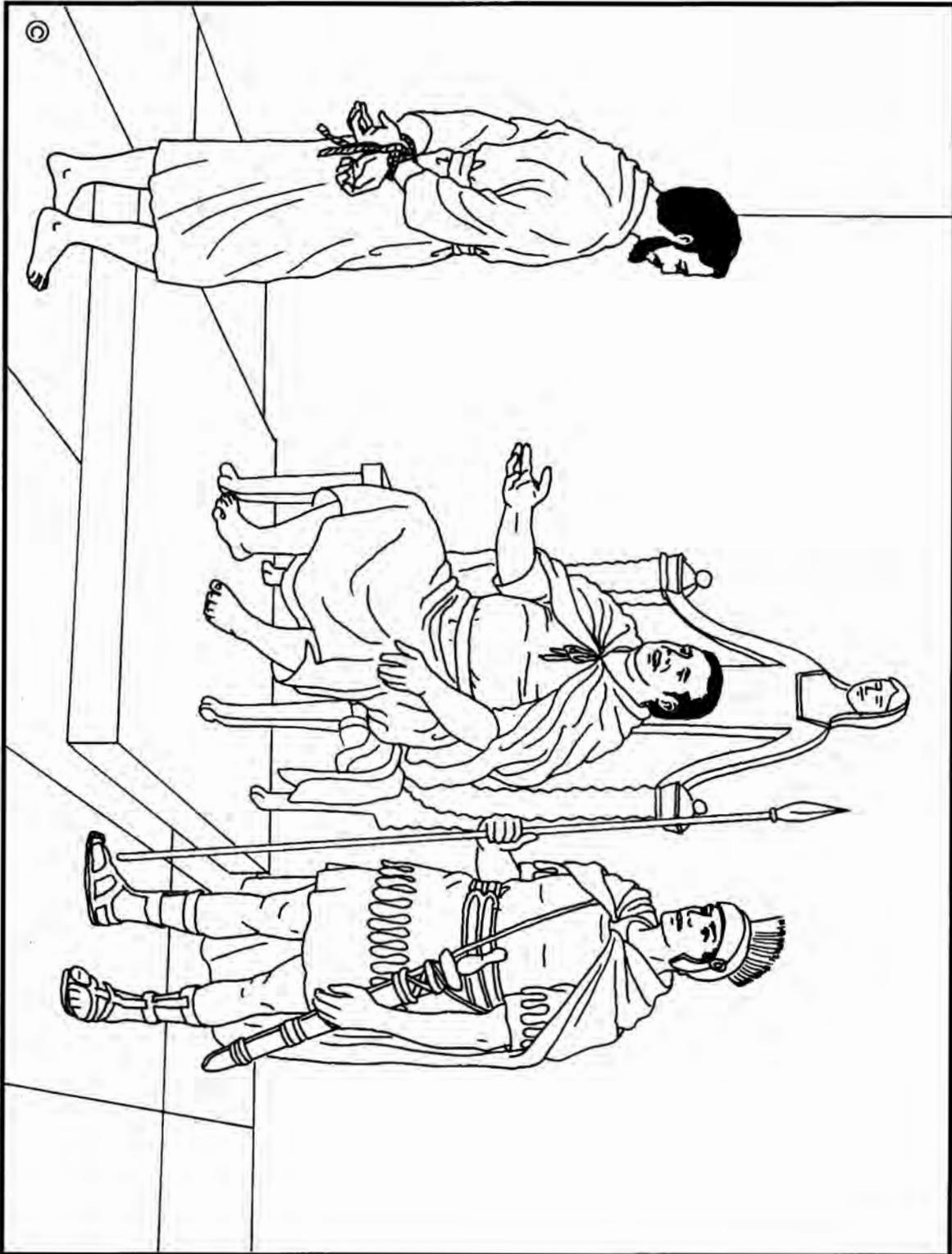
The Lord's Supper: Mark 14:1,2,10-31



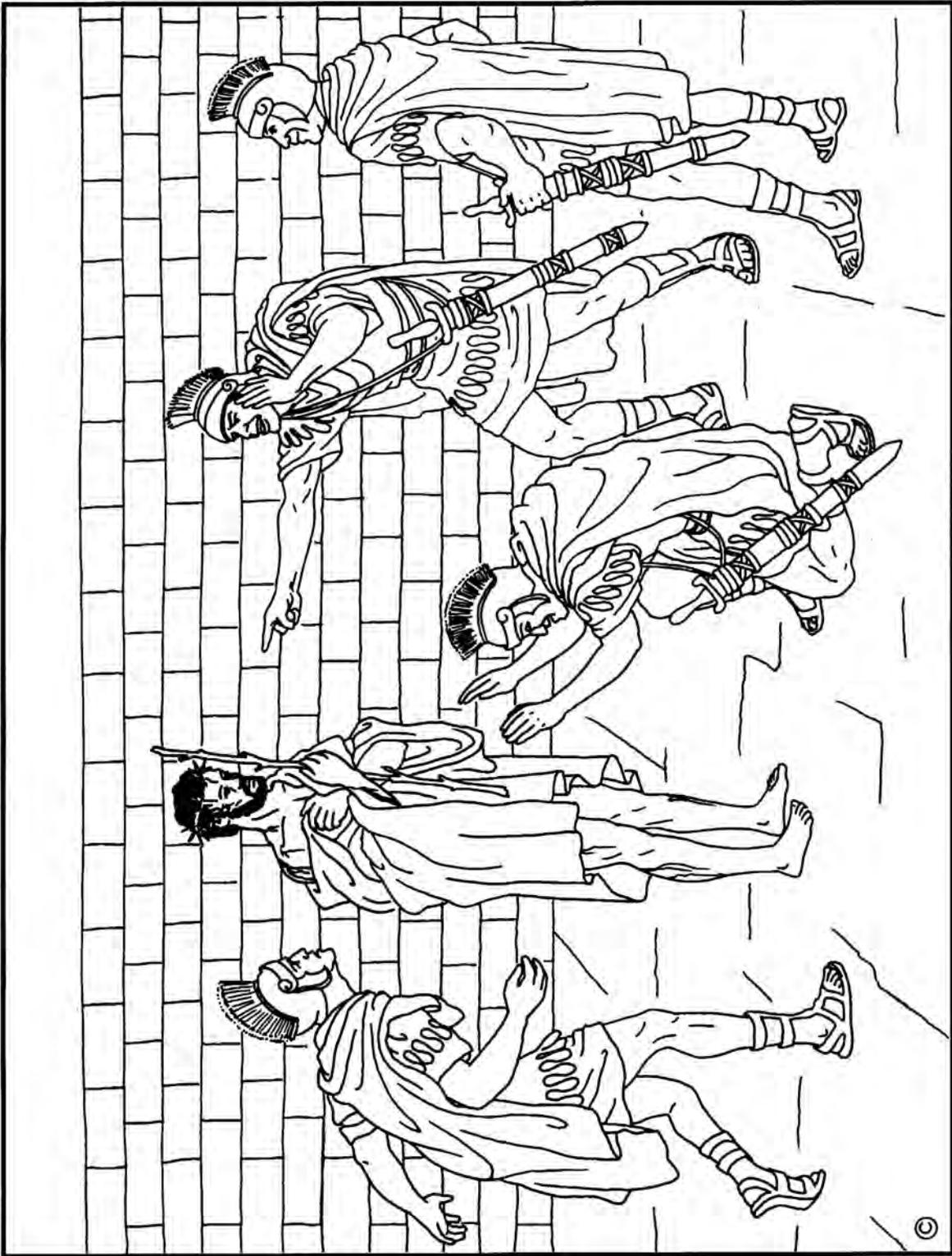
Jesus Praying: Mark 14:32-41



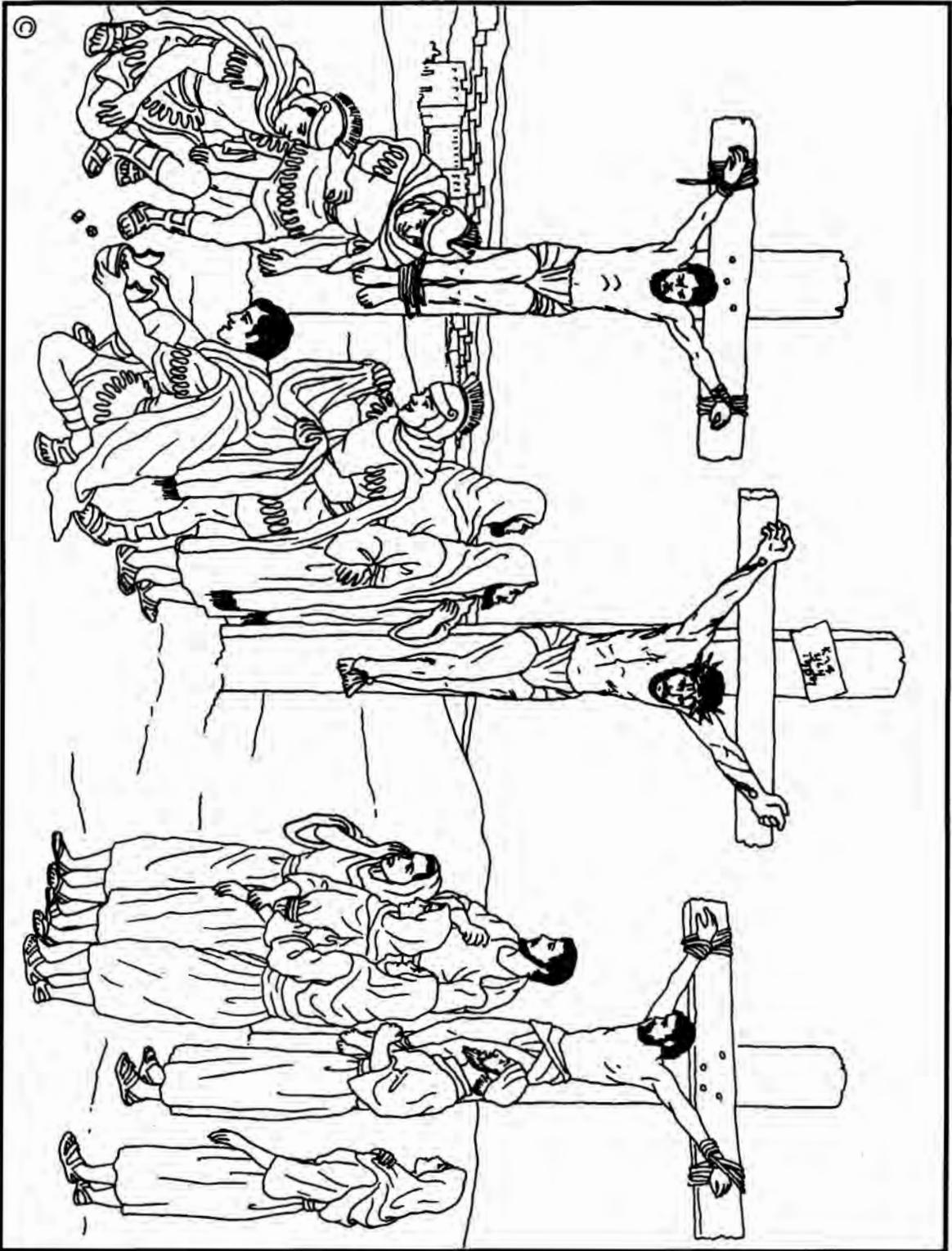
Jesus Arrested: Mark 14:32-72



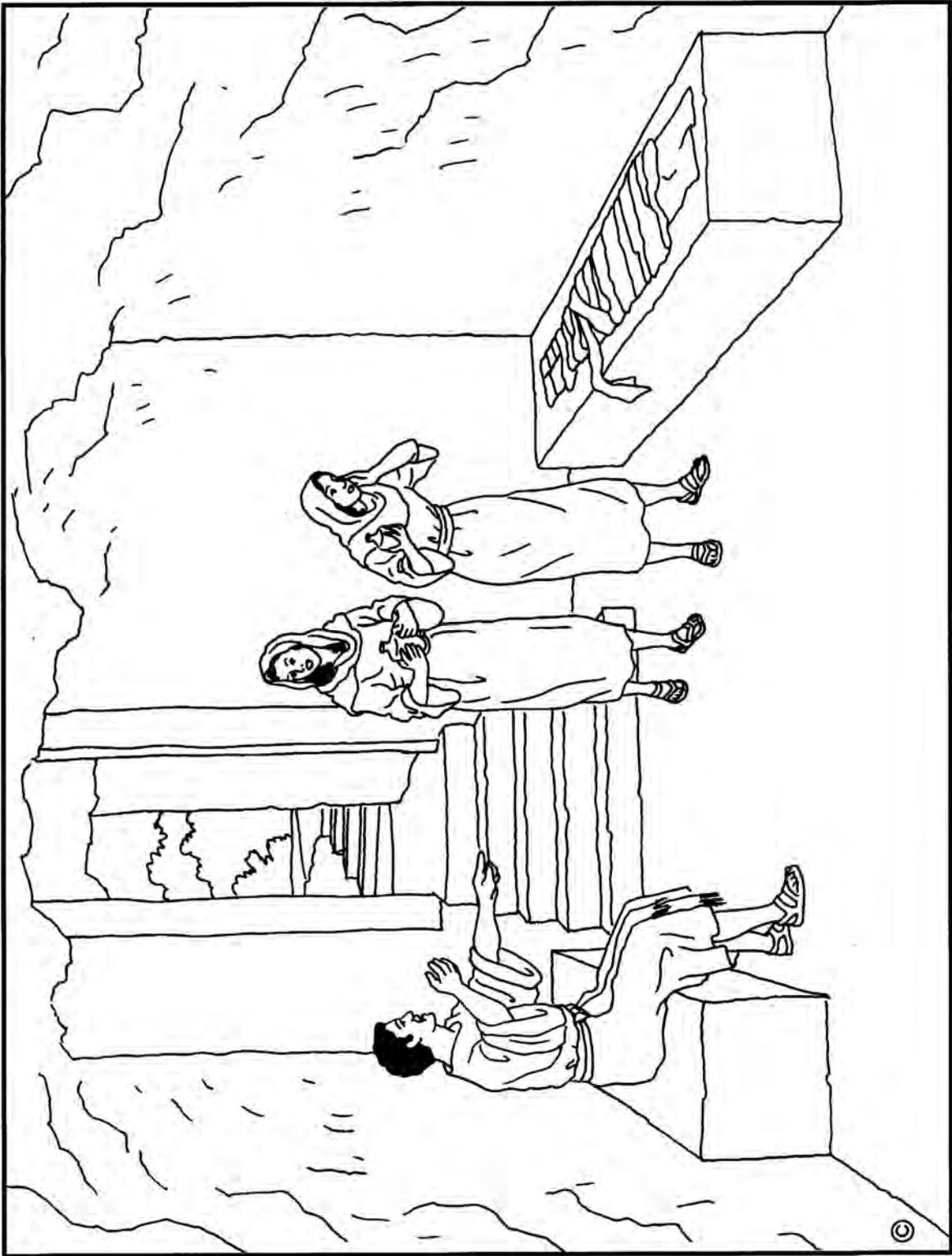
Jesus Before Pilate: Mark 15:1-15



The Soldiers Mock Jesus: Mark 15:16-20



The Crucifixion: Mark 15:21-41



The Resurrection: Mark 16:1-8

Garden of Gethsemane. Judas had left the room before the others, and had gone to meet the enemies of Jesus to tell them where they could find him. It was a nice, clear night and the apostles were used to spending evenings with Jesus in the moonlight of the garden. This time, however, something seemed different!

After they came to the garden, Jesus left his disciples to watch while he went aside to pray privately to his Father in heaven. He knew that the time had come for him to die as the sacrificial lamb and he prayed for God's will to be done.

As they were leaving, Jesus and the apostles saw that a crowd of people had come out from the city to find them. They were Jesus' enemies and Judas was with them. He had shown them where to find Jesus, and now they came to capture him and put him to death. Jesus asked who they were looking for and they answered, "Jesus." Then Jesus replied that he was the one they were looking for. And so they could be absolutely sure that it was really him, Judas stepped out from the crowd, walked up to Jesus and kissed him on the cheek.

When Jesus' enemies took hold of him, Peter struck one of the men with a sword and cut off his ear. Peter and many others were willing to fight for Jesus. Then the Lord said something that seemed odd to them. He told Peter to put down the sword and not to use it anymore. Next, using the power of God, he healed the man's ear and put it right back on again. His apostles and everyone there must have been shocked, but what a good example of loving people who treat us badly.

Peter had been willing to help Jesus escape from being killed, but Jesus wouldn't let him. He said that God would send angels to help him if he asked him to, but he did not ask because he knew God did not want him to.

Jesus did appreciate what Peter tried to do for him, but he wanted Peter and the other apostles, and his enemies — and us — to know that there is a better way of doing things than to fight with swords. Jesus loved his enemies and wants us to love ours, too. It wouldn't be right to fight with and kill people God wants us to love.

God wanted Jesus to leave himself in the hands of his enemies, even though they were going to kill him. Jesus was God's lamb and he was going to be killed just like the Passover lamb was killed as a sacrifice. That was God's plan long before Jesus was even born as a human on earth.

After capturing Jesus, they took him back to Jerusalem and brought him to the Jewish high priest. Jesus' enemies got some people to lie about things Jesus said or did to make him look like a bad person, but their stories didn't match each other. The high priest then asked Jesus if he was the Son of God. The Jews thought it was a terrible thing for anyone to claim to be the Son of God. They called it blasphemy, which means to be disrespectful toward God.

When the high priest heard Jesus say he actually was the Son of God, it was decided he was so wicked that he must be put to death. However, the Israelites had no authority to put Jesus to death. Only the Romans could do that because they were in charge of Israel at that time.

The Jews did not have a government of their own so they took Jesus to a Roman

governor whose name was Pilate. He had the right to decide whether or not people would be punished. Pilate worked for Caesar who was king of the whole Roman empire. One of the things Pilate had to watch for was that no one else would try to take over being the king. If they did, then it was Pilate's duty to make sure that person was put to death.

The Israelites knew that, so they told Pilate that Jesus said he was going to be a great king. Pilate did not believe it just because they said it was so. Instead, he asked Jesus if it were true. To Pilate's surprise Jesus explained to him that it was, in fact, the very reason he had come into the world.

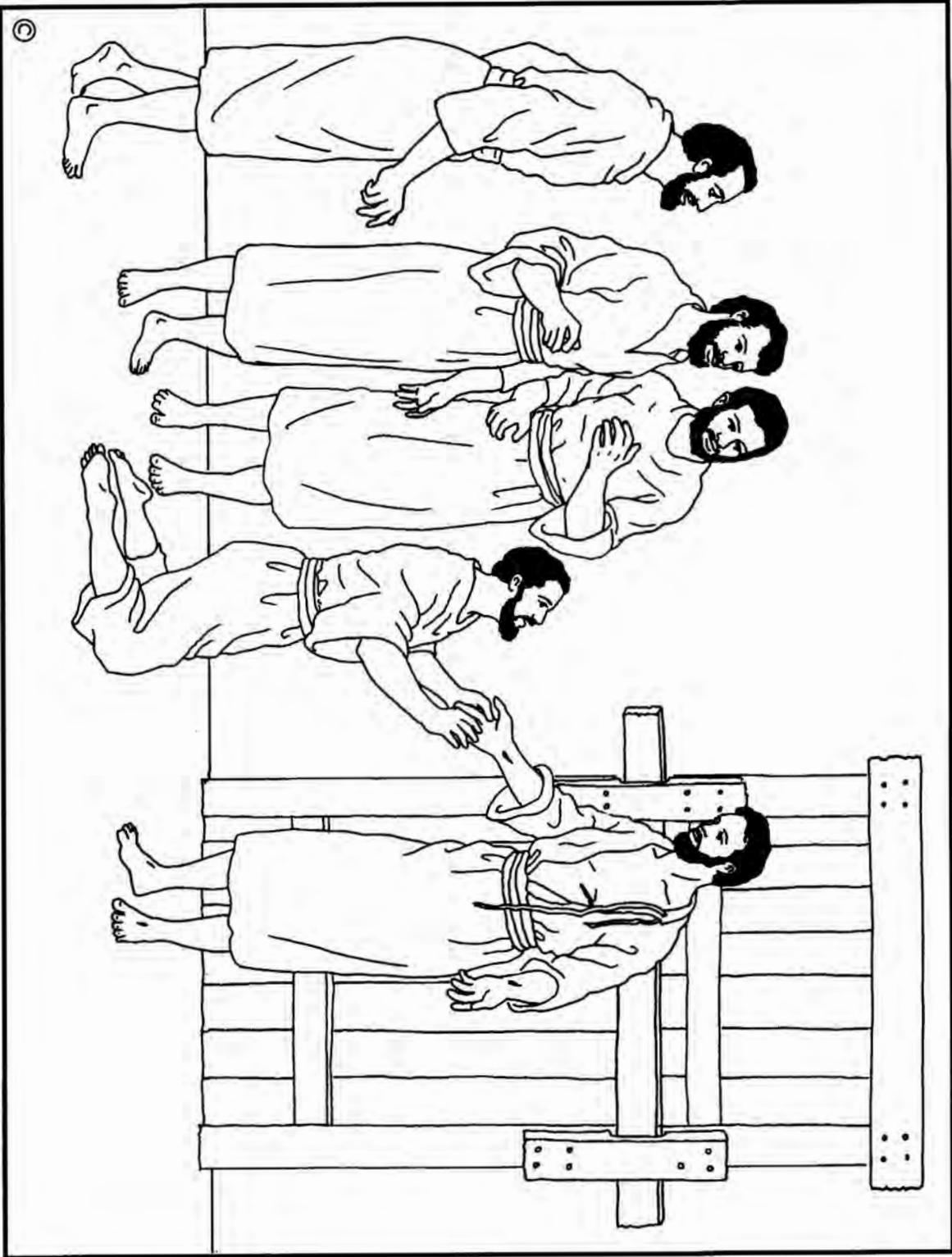
Jesus, of course, will one day be the most powerful king who has ever lived. He is to be the ruler over the whole world. He won't have armies with swords and tanks and guns, but the people will do what he wants them to because they will come to love and respect him. There will be no more wars and the people will be happy. Then the people will also learn to love and respect each other.

Pilate seemed to understand that even though Jesus said he came to be a king, he wasn't really doing anything wrong, so he didn't see any reason to put him to death. Pilate evidently thought there was no danger that Jesus would ever take the place of Caesar. The Jews insisted that Pilate should condemn Jesus to death because he admitted that he expected to be a king. So, according to Roman law, Pilate was not allowed to set him free.

The soldiers were very cruel to Jesus. They took the clothes off his back and beat him. A crown of thorns was placed on his head. He was taken outside the city to a hill called Golgotha, nailed to a cross, and allowed to hang there till he died.

Jesus volunteered to give up his life to do his Father's will because he loved everyone so much and wanted to give them a chance to live forever.

Jesus was that great man whom God had promised would be king of the whole world. He spent his life doing good things for people, preaching about his coming kingdom, performing miracles, healing the sick — and now he was dead.



Jesus Appears to Thomas

Chapter Thirty Eight

The Great Victory

It was dawn on the first day of the week. Mary and some of the other women who were Jesus' good friends went to visit the tomb where their Master had been laid to rest three days before. They went there to sprinkle sweet-smelling perfume on his body according to their custom.

The tomb in which they laid Jesus was like a cave in the side of a huge rock and a stone had been placed in front of the doorway. As those early morning visitors came near to the tomb, they noticed that the stone had been rolled away. They probably thought someone else had arrived there before them. They went into the tomb where Jesus had been laid, but saw that he was not there.

At first they thought maybe some of Jesus' enemies had stolen his body. Then they saw a young man who told them that Jesus was not there because he was alive. He had risen from the grave!

This young man was really not a man at all — he was an angel. The women were very excited but also a little bit afraid. Then the angel told them to hurry away and tell the apostles that their Master was no longer dead. The Heavenly Father had used his mighty power to bring Jesus back to life!

As soon as Peter and another apostle named John heard that Jesus was alive, they ran to the tomb as fast as they could. Maybe they thought they would find him there, or perhaps they could not believe what they were hearing and wanted to prove it to themselves. They too found the tomb empty. Jesus was not there because he was no longer dead. God had given him a great victory — victory over death.

The tomb where Jesus' body had been placed was in a beautiful garden. Mary was standing by the tomb, weeping, when she saw a man who she thought was the caretaker of the garden and asked him where they had laid Jesus. No one had seen Jesus since he had been resurrected.

Then the man spoke her name, "Mary." He said her name in such a way that she knew it was her precious Lord speaking to her. Yes, this was Jesus, she was sure, but he looked so different from the way he had been before.

Later in the day two of Jesus' disciples were walking along the road to Emmaus, talking about him. They hadn't heard yet that Jesus had been resurrected, so they were still feeling downhearted. A stranger came up to them and asked why they were so sad. They told the stranger about Jesus, and that they had thought he would be a great king to rule over the people of Israel and the whole world, but now he was dead.

The stranger reminded the two disciples what God had told his prophets to write about Jesus, telling how he would be like a lamb that would be killed. He told them it was necessary for Jesus to die before he could be the great king they expected him to be. The stranger walked with them all the way to Emmaus, where they were going, and there they ate supper together.

When Jesus said the prayer of thanksgiving for the meal, they realized who he was. As soon as they understood this, Jesus disappeared and they couldn't see him. How excited they must have been! They immediately went back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples the awesome news.

The two men found the apostles who were gathered together in an upstairs room. They were telling them about how they had seen the Lord, but one of them would not believe that Jesus was alive again. His name was Thomas.

All of a sudden they looked up and were startled to see that Jesus was right there with them! They were so surprised because all the doors were locked. At first they were afraid, but Jesus calmed them with the words, "Peace be with you." Jesus told them not to be afraid and assured them that it was really him. He reminded them of the things he had taught them.

Then Jesus spoke to Thomas and asked why he had doubted that he had come back to life. He urged him to touch his hands and feet and told him to have faith. Then Thomas knew that it was his beloved Lord Jesus.

Jesus talked with his disciples a few moments more and then, without the door being opened, he was gone.

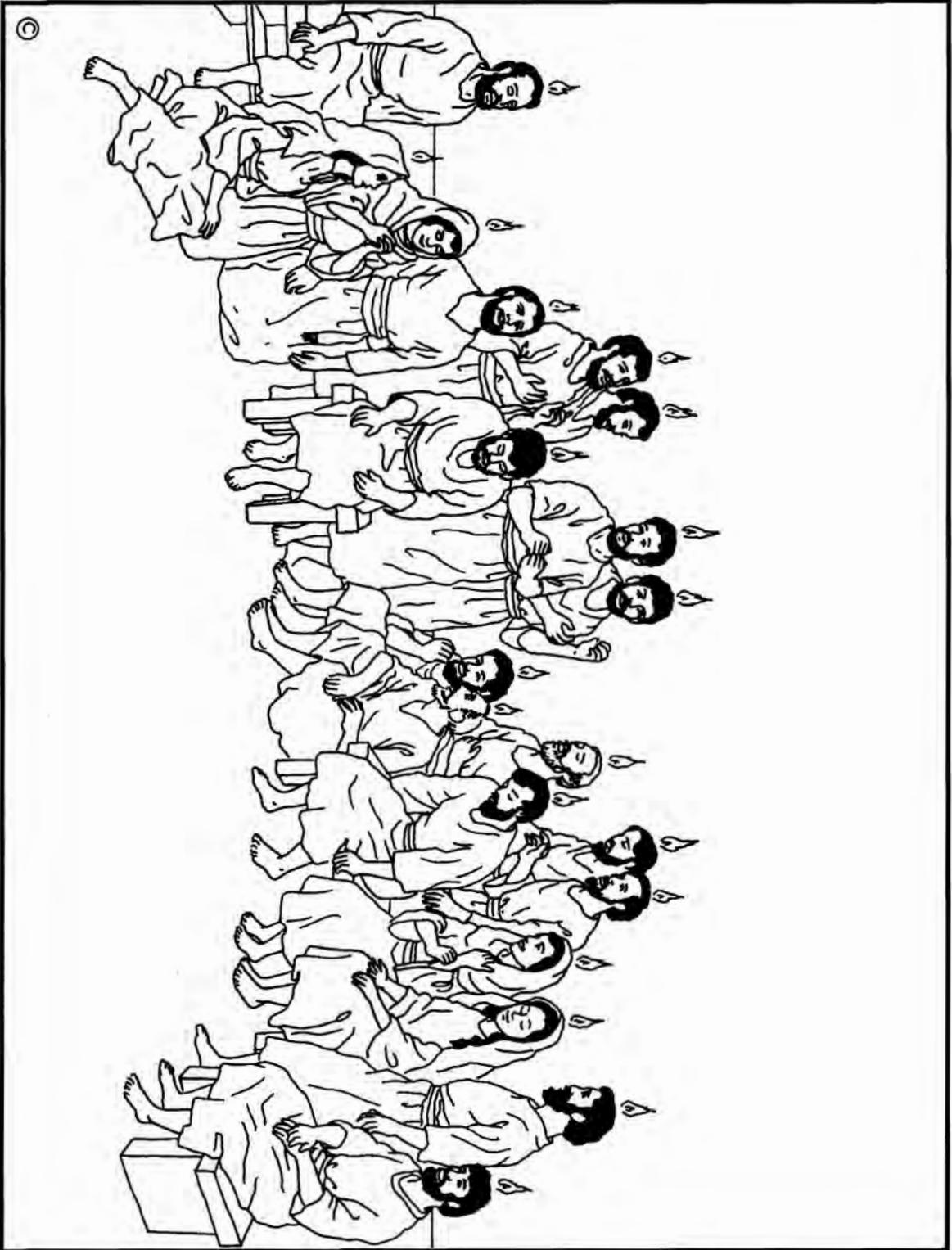
After Jesus had been resurrected he became a spirit-being like God. He was given a spirit body that could come and go like the wind. Our human eyes are not able to see God, and so the apostles could not see Jesus either, unless he made himself look like a man. He did that a few times, but only during the forty days after his resurrection so the disciples would know for sure that he had been resurrected.

Once, on the beach of the Sea of Galilee, he cooked breakfast for his dear apostles. They had been out in a boat fishing all night but hadn't caught anything. They were fishing with a big net which they held over the edge of the boat. Jesus shouted from the beach and told them to throw their net over the other side of the boat and they would find fish. When they did, the net was soon filled with fish. There were so many fish that the net wouldn't even hold them all. Then the apostles knew it was Jesus who had spoken to them and they hurried to shore just as fast as they could.

They enjoyed a nice visit with Jesus that morning. Peter told Jesus that he loved him very much, and Jesus replied, "Feed my sheep." Jesus' sheep are his footstep followers who love him and want to be like him.

The last time the apostles saw Jesus, he instructed them to go all over the world and tell the people in all countries about God's plan and the gospel — good news — that a time is coming when everyone will have the chance to be happy. Then Jesus left them and went back to his home in heaven to be with his Father.

Even though we can't see Jesus like the disciples did, we believe their report. We have faith that Jesus lives and is real, and that he is very powerful. One day, when he is king over the whole earth, everyone will know how powerful he is.



The Day of Pentecost: Acts 2:1-13

Chapter Thirty Nine

God's Power Comes

Just before Jesus left his apostles and returned to his heavenly home, he told them to wait in Jerusalem until they were given power from God. God's power is the Holy Spirit and can be used in different ways. In this case it gave the apostles the ability to have special powers, like Jesus had. God's power had come upon Jesus when he was baptized by John the Baptist in the River Jordan, and now his apostles were going to do God's work, so they needed his power, too.

So they waited in Jerusalem for some time. One day while they were praying together and talking about Jesus and their Heavenly Father, they suddenly heard something that sounded like a strong, forceful wind. Then, what seemed like streaks of fire appeared right over the heads of each one of them. The power of God's Holy Spirit had come upon them.

The day the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles was called Pentecost, which means fiftieth, and was fifty days after Jesus had been resurrected. It was also called the Feast of Harvest. It was a festival that took place in Israel every year. Many people from different countries came to Jerusalem for the Feast.

When the Holy Spirit came upon them, the apostles were able to talk in different languages. The Bible calls this gift, "speaking in tongues." They started talking to the people who had come to Jerusalem from other countries, and they could all understand what the apostles were saying in their own language. It was necessary for the apostles to speak in different languages so that everyone they talked to about the story of Jesus could understand, no matter what language they spoke.

Peter preached a wonderful sermon that day to a crowd of people that had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost. He explained that Jesus was the Savior whom the prophets of God had said would come. Peter also told them that Jesus had already been made alive again and had returned to heaven to be with his Father. Peter said that was why the Holy Spirit had come upon them.

Many of the Israelites felt sorry that they had helped to kill Jesus, and they asked Peter what they should do. He told them to repent, which means to be sorry for your sins and make a change for the better, and that then they should be baptized. Peter explained that if they did that it would show they wanted to please God, and wanted to be Jesus' followers.

Many people that day decided they wanted to be Jesus' footstep followers and receive the special gift of the Holy Spirit. People are still making that decision today!

Chapter Forty

A Lame Man Made Well

Peter was a goodhearted man and was always ready to do what God wanted. A short time after the Holy Spirit had come upon Peter and the others, he went to God's temple. There he saw a man who was not able to walk sitting at the gate of the temple which was called "Beautiful."

The man was begging. Peter didn't have any money to give this poor crippled man, but he did something for him which was even better. He used the power of God to make the man's legs well so he could walk.

Now that Peter had the Holy Spirit he could make sick people well and bring dead people back to life, just like Jesus had done.

Many people saw what Peter did and it made them very curious. So Peter told them about Jesus, and what the prophets of God had written about him in the scriptures. He said that Jesus' enemies had put him to death, but that God had brought him to life again. Then Peter explained that the power which God had given to Jesus and had now given to the apostles had made this lame man able to walk. Peter did not take any credit for himself.

The man certainly must have been very happy when he found that his legs were strong and he could walk and run and jump.

In the Book of Isaiah we learn that in the kingdom all people who were lame will walk again, and anyone who was blind will get their sight back, deaf people will be able to hear, and everyone who was sick will be healed. It will be a very happy time! Peter called it, "times of restitution." Another word for restitution is restoration and means that all people will have life and health given back to them, just like Adam and Eve had in the Garden of Eden before they sinned. What an excellent promise!

Chapter Forty One

The Sin of Lying

Peter and another disciple, John, were working together preaching the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. Once when they were in Jerusalem, in the temple of God, the religious rulers of Israel became jealous of them, just as they had been of Jesus, because they had heard about the miracle of Peter healing the disabled man. They told them they would have to stop preaching about Jesus, but those two faithful disciples believed that it was their duty to obey God. They had been told to preach the Gospel in Jerusalem, and wherever they could throughout the whole world.

Peter and John were brought in and questioned by the leaders and asked who had given them the authority to preach. They exclaimed that they spoke in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

The religious rulers of the people were really afraid to punish Peter and John, because so many people in Jerusalem believed that they were servants of God. The good news about the man who had been healed by Peter caused the people to think very highly of them. In fact, the man who had been healed was there when the leaders were questioning Peter and John.

Thousands of people believed the story of Jesus, and decided that they would become his disciples too. Those people were all very enthusiastic and they wanted to do all they could to tell others about Jesus. In order to do that, they decided among themselves that they would put all their belongings together just as though they were one big family. That way they could use everything they owned in the service of God. Those who owned land or had other valuable belongings sold what they had and put all the money into the one common treasury. Then that money was used to buy food and clothing for all the disciples, so they could be free to preach the Gospel of Jesus.

A man named Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, learned about the arrangement of the disciples to sell everything and use the money in the service of God. They sold a valuable possession, and kept back part of the money for themselves. It was their possession and they could have kept the money if they wished, but they pretended that they had given it all just as the other believers had done. They lied about it! It was Peter who discovered that they had been dishonest.

No one told Peter that they had lied, but the power of God helped him to know that Ananias and Sapphira were deceiving him. The Bible says that Satan filled their hearts and caused them to lie to Peter. Satan tries to get people to lie whenever he can, probably because he lies so much himself.

God had told Adam and Eve that if they ate the fruit of a certain tree in the Garden of Eden, which he told them not to eat, they would die. But Satan lied about it and told them that they would not die. Of course they did die, as we know, and that is why everybody dies now. It was because Ananias and his wife lied to Peter that God caused them to die suddenly so that everybody knew that telling lies was wrong.

Then, more than ever, the people knew that God was blessing Peter and John. The religious rulers became even more jealous of them, and they had them put into prison, but that night one of God's angels opened the prison doors and set them free. The angel told them to return to the temple and continue to preach about Jesus. They did, and even more people believed.

Again the religious rulers arrested Peter and John. But that time the chief ruler among them advised that it wouldn't be very smart of them to keep interfering with the disciples of Jesus because they might be working against God. The others agreed, so after giving Peter and John a severe beating, they set them free. So God protected the apostles, and they were able to continue preaching the good news.

Chapter Forty Two

A Young Believer Stoned

More and more of the Jews believed that Jesus was the Messiah whom God had sent to make all his promises come true. One of them was a young man named Stephen. He was made a deacon among the believers. A deacon was someone who helped serve the other disciples by putting food on the tables when they ate their meals, and made sure everyone got enough. It was very important to have someone do that kind of helpful work for the brethren.

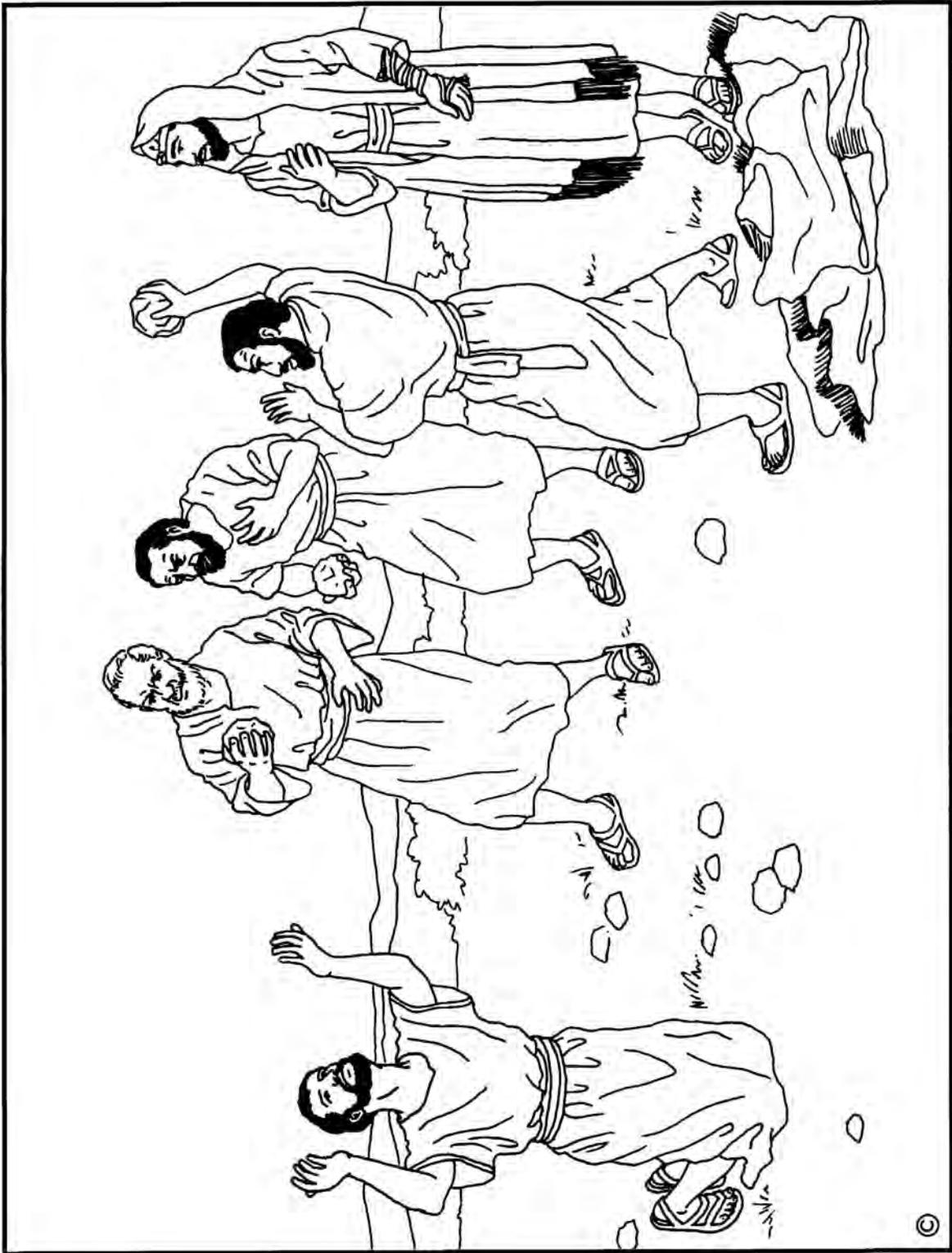
Any work that we do in God's service is important too, and whatever we do for him should be done with love and to the best of our ability.

Stephen was very faithful in serving God in other ways also. Whenever he could, he told the people of Israel about Jesus and the blessings the Heavenly Father would give to them by and by, through him. The people liked listening to Stephen so much that the religious leaders became jealous of him, just as they had of Jesus, and Peter and John. Jealousy can cause people to have terribly bitter feelings and do awful things.

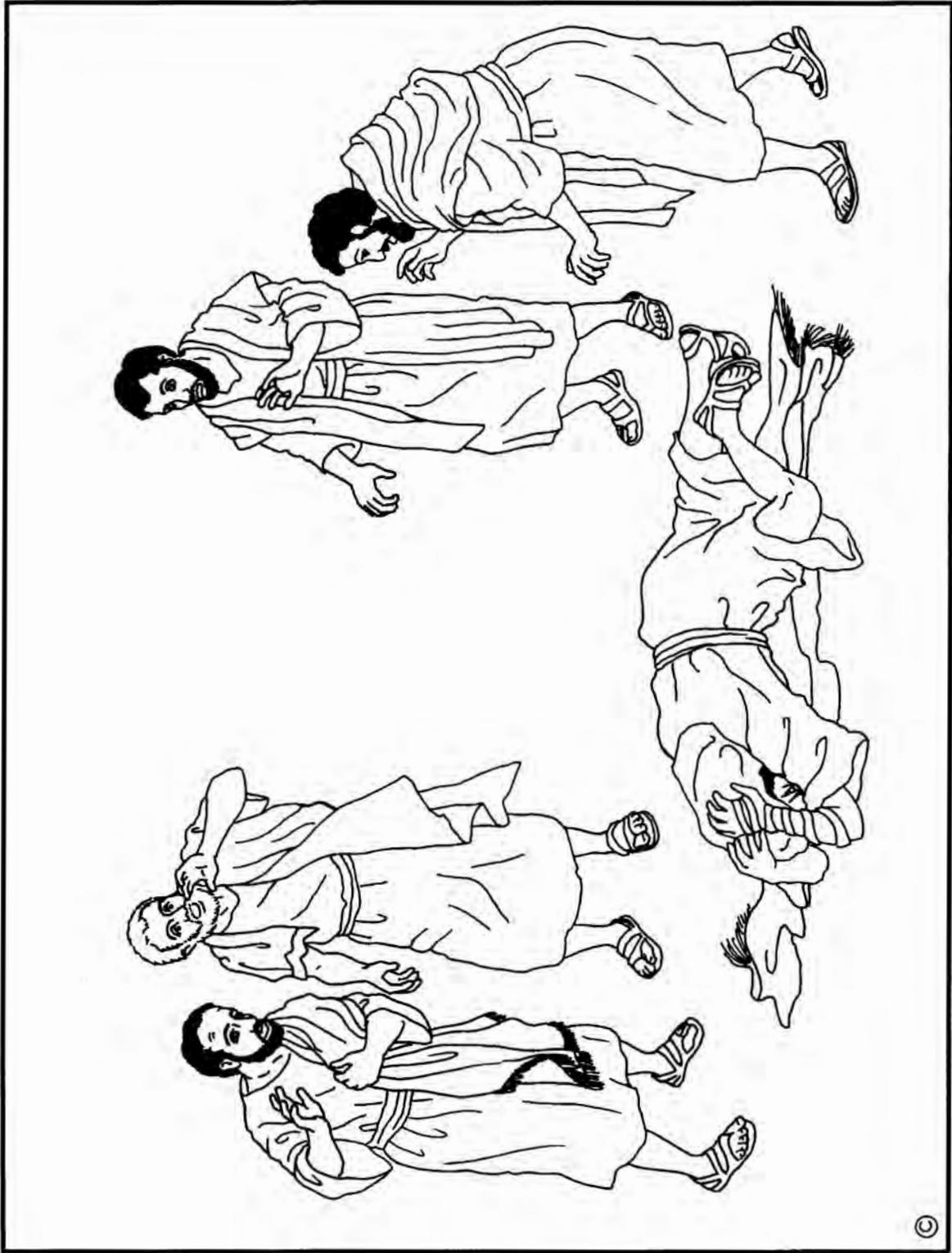
They had Stephen arrested and put on trial.

Now clearly Stephen had an excellent knowledge of God's promises. He was full of faith and the Holy Spirit and did great miracles among the people. He understood the Truth so well that his enemies could not win arguments by using logic. So they tried deceit.

They got some men to lie about Stephen, saying that he was a blasphemer and that



Stephen Put to Death: Acts 7:54-60



The Conversion of Saul: Acts 9:1-9

he was speaking against the temple of God. When he was given a chance to answer for himself, he told the wonderful story about the promises of God, and how Jesus was the one who will make those promises come true.

Stephen reminded them of Abraham and the promise God made to him, that through his offspring all the families of the earth will be blessed. He talked about Isaac and Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons. He also talked about Joseph and how he was sold as a slave into Egypt. Then he reminded his accusers of Moses, the great leader of the children of Israel, who led them out of slavery in Egypt.

He told the religious rulers that it was people just like them who had persecuted all of God's servants — and that now they were doing the same thing again. Stephen even told them that they weren't as good as they wanted people to think. He told them the truth and it made them even more furious.

Stephen was telling the truth about their attitudes and how they treated God's people, and that they didn't keep God's laws. They hated Stephen for that.

The Jews believed that the temple represented God's presence so they were mad when he reminded them that the Old Testament says God does not live in a temple made with hands. Solomon himself said God doesn't live in a man-made temple, but they didn't want to hear that.

At that point Stephen could have just stayed quiet and would probably have been beaten and released, but he chose to die instead of go against what he knew was right. He kept talking, and what he said next determined what would happen to him — he said that he had seen heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

They thought that was the very worst blasphemy a Jew could possibly say. Stephen claimed to see God, the God who had once told Moses that no man could look upon his face and live. How dare he say he saw God! Besides, they thought God lived in the temple, not up there in the sky.

An angry mob rushed at Stephen and dragged him out of the city and stoned him, and a man named Saul held the coats of the men who stoned Stephen. In doing so, Saul gave his approval of what they were doing.

As Stephen was dying, he called for the Lord to receive his spirit and also cried loudly, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" After he said that, he fell asleep in death.

Stephen was the first disciple who was put to death because he believed and taught that Jesus was the Messiah. It was a great honor to die for that reason! God took care of Jesus, but he let him die, because it was necessary for Jesus to die in order for others to live. Now others were to have the privilege of dying as Jesus died, because God plans to use them to work with Jesus in making his promises come true.

All those who die serving God will be made alive just as Jesus was. And, just as Jesus will be a king, so they, too, will be kings, and will work in his kingdom with him. That doesn't mean that all the disciples of Jesus have to be stoned to death in order to be resurrected with him. If they spend their lives serving God and others, however Jesus' disciples die, they all die "like Jesus."

Chapter Forty Three

A Pharisee Changes His Mind

The scribes and Pharisees were the religious rulers of the Israelites, many of whom were jealous of Jesus and Stephen, and caused them to be put to death. They were the ones who put Peter and John in prison, and said that they would have to stop telling the people about Jesus. Of course Peter and John kept right on preaching about Jesus because that was what God wanted them to do.

Not all of the scribes (secretaries), and Pharisees were jealous and self-righteous men. Some were sincere. They persecuted God's people because they honestly thought Jesus and his disciples were actually disrespecting God — but those well-meaning men were wrong.

One of those sincere rulers was Saul, who lived in the city of Tarsus. Saul was one of the Pharisees who decided that Stephen should be stoned to death. Saul didn't throw any stones at Stephen, but he held the coats of those who did. He didn't do it because he was jealous of Stephen. No, Saul thought Stephen was one of God's enemies and that he should be killed.

Many others besides Stephen were made to suffer by Saul, not only in Jerusalem but in other cities as well. While he was in Jerusalem, Saul visited the high priest of Israel who gave him letters of authority to arrest the disciples wherever he could find them and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished. So Saul set out to find as many of Jesus' disciples as he could.

He was on his way to Damascus when, without warning, a very bright light shined all around him. The light was even brighter than sunshine. The Bible tells us it was a light from heaven.

When Saul saw this bright light shining all around him he fell down on the ground — he was scared! Then he heard a voice speaking to him, saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Saul couldn't imagine who was speaking to him so he asked, "Who are you, Lord?" He knew the voice he heard was not the voice of a man. The word "Lord" means "mighty one," so Saul thought he had heard the voice of one of God's mighty angels. But the voice Saul heard was that of someone much greater than an angel. Saul asked again who was speaking to him.

This time the voice answered, "I am Jesus, the one you have persecuted."

Saul was amazed — Jesus was speaking to him from heaven! He had been arresting Jesus' disciples and putting them in prison, and had even agreed to the stoning of Stephen. Now Jesus was speaking to him, and he knew it meant that he had been doing the wrong thing in causing Jesus' followers to suffer.

When Jesus was resurrected after he had been crucified, the scribes and Pharisees

spread a false story that someone had stolen his body from the tomb, and that he had not been brought back to life at all. Saul believed the story, but now he knew that he had believed a lie because he heard Jesus' voice speaking to him from heaven.

Saul was a good man, but he had been deceived. Now that Saul knew he had been deceived, he wanted to work just as hard for Jesus as he had been working against him. So he asked the Master what he wanted him to do. Jesus answered and instructed him to go into the city and he would then be told what to do.

When Saul got up from the ground he discovered that he was blind. The bright light from heaven was more than his eyes could stand and it had blinded him. There were other people traveling with Saul, and when they noticed he had suddenly gone blind, they led him into the city of Damascus. There he was taken to the home of one of Jesus' followers named Judas where he stayed for three days. During that time he did not eat or drink anything.

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord had spoken to him in a vision and told him to go the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for Saul of Tarsus. Ananias had heard about Saul and knew that he had been causing the disciples a lot of pain. That made Ananias a little afraid to visit him.

But the Lord assured him that Saul would be glad to see him. He said that Saul had seen a vision and now believed in Jesus and wanted to serve him. So Ananias went to the home of Judas. He understood that Saul, the Pharisee, had changed his mind about Jesus and now believed he was the Savior whom God had promised to send to bless the people. So, when he spoke to him he called him Brother Saul. Ananias put his hands on Saul's eyes and he could see again!

The disciples spent some time with Saul, teaching him all about Jesus Christ. Then Saul was baptized and was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Ananias then explained to Saul what he was supposed to do in the Lord's service. Now that Saul had learned the truth, he went to work telling the Jews about Jesus, and about how he had performed many miracles because of the power he was given by his Heavenly Father.

Chapter Forty Four

Peter's Strange Dream

God loved Peter very much because he knew he tried so hard to please him. Peter was happy to be working in the Lord's service. He went from place to place telling the people that God loves them, and that a better time is coming because Jesus had died for them.

In Joppa there was a woman named Dorcas who was always doing nice things for people and helping the poor. She became very sick and died. Her friends were so sad. They knew the Apostle Peter was in Lydda, a town nearby, so they sent for him, hoping he would be able to do something — and he did. With God's mighty power, Peter brought Dorcas back to life again.

When the people of Joppa learned that Dorcas was alive again, many of them believed in God and had faith that Jesus was his son, and they became his disciples. One of those men was Simon. His business was to tan leather so he had the nickname "Simon the Tanner."

Simon the Tanner lived in a house by the edge of the sea. He invited Peter to live with him while he was in Joppa. Peter was very happy to have such a nice home in which to stay.

Most of the houses in those days had flat roofs, which were sometimes used as resting places. One afternoon Peter was tired so he went up on the roof of Simon's house to pray while he was waiting for dinner.

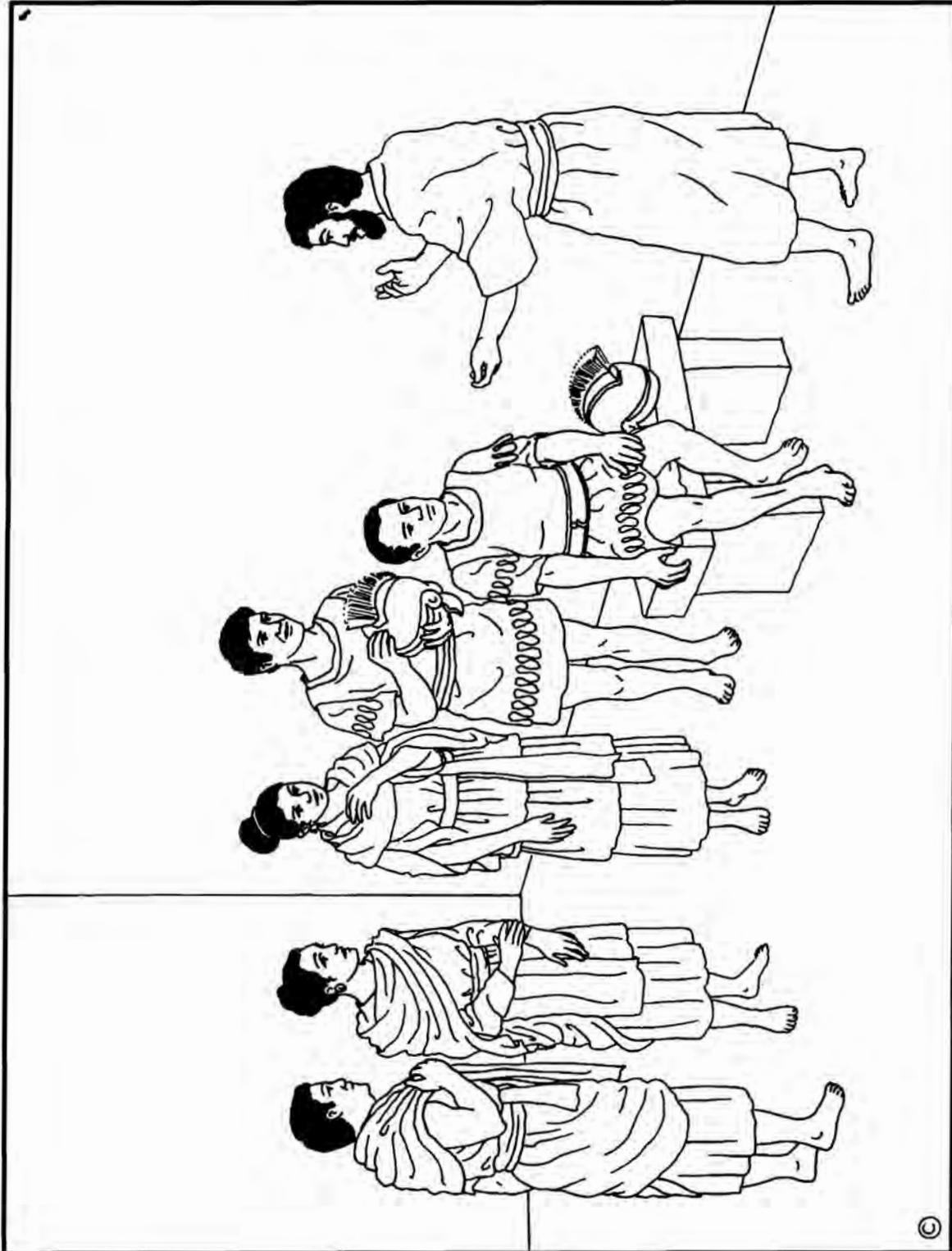
In a little while he fell asleep, and had a very strange dream. In his dream he saw an odd sort of basket that seemed to come right down out of the sky. The basket looked like a sheet with the four corners fastened together. But even stranger than the basket itself was what Peter saw in it. It was filled with all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.

As Peter watched the basket, he heard a voice telling him to kill some of the animals and eat them. Peter would not do it because God had told the people of Israel, the Jews, that there were certain kinds of animals which they were not supposed to eat. Those animals were called "unclean." It was all right for them to eat the meat of cattle and sheep, but not the meat of the animals which Peter saw in his dream.

The basket full of unclean animals was lowered the second time, and again Peter was told to eat. Three times Peter saw the same thing, and three times he was urged to eat of these animals, but he continued to say no.

Finally, Peter woke up from his dream and, naturally, he wondered what it could possibly mean. Just then God, through the Holy Spirit, let Peter know that some men had come to see him and were waiting to speak to him.

Peter went downstairs to see who they were. The men had come from Caesarea to



Cornelius: Acts 10:23-48

invite him to go back with them to visit their master, whose name was Cornelius. They explained to Peter that an angel had spoken to Cornelius and told him to send for Peter because he would have something very important to tell him.

Cornelius was a Gentile, which means that he was not of the Jewish race or faith. God has always loved the Gentiles but he had never asked any of them to be his special people. Now Peter was being instructed to tell Cornelius that God loved them and wanted them to be his special people too. When he arrived, Cornelius bowed down to worship him as though he was the Lord, but Peter was humble and told Cornelius to stand up because he was just a man.

At the home of Cornelius he found the whole family waiting for him. Some of the neighbors, who were also Gentiles, had been invited to come and hear Peter talk to them.

At first Peter felt a little strange about being in the home of Gentiles. Cornelius explained to Peter that God had told him to invite Peter to visit him. Then Peter remembered his dream in which he saw unclean animals, and that in this dream he was told that God had made the animals clean. Now he knew what the dream meant!

The dream meant that Gentiles could now have a relationship with God, just as the Jews had for many years. God wanted Peter to tell them about Jesus, and to tell them the good news of the kingdom which will bring blessings to everyone — both Jews and Gentiles.

Peter had the right understanding of the dream, and he told the Gentiles about Jesus, the Savior. Then the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and everyone that was there. They were very excited and wanted to be baptized right away!

Chapter Forty Five

Paul Preaches on Mars' Hill

After Saul of Tarsus became one of Jesus' disciples he changed his name from Saul to Paul. The name Saul means "asked," possibly because King Saul in the Old Testament was asked by the nation of Israel to be their first king. But Saul of Tarsus was so ashamed of himself for having caused the disciples of Jesus to suffer that he no longer felt important, so he changed his name to Paul, which means "small," or "little."

It is always a good idea to consider ourselves small and unimportant, just as Paul did. However, Paul was actually a very important servant of God and a faithful disciple of Jesus.

It was a great joy to Paul when he had an opportunity to tell the story of Jesus and of God's wonderful plan for blessing the whole world through him. Just such an opportunity came to Paul while he was in Athens, a city in Greece, waiting for two of his companions to join him. Those friends were Silas and Timothy.

There were some Israelites living in Athens at the time Paul visited the city, but most of the people were Greek. Paul mingled with the people in the market places and also visited the Jews in their synagogues. Wherever he went he told the story of Jesus. He explained that the Heavenly Father had resurrected him from the dead and that, by and by, he will bring all mankind back to life again.

The people of Athens had never heard that message before and they wanted to find out exactly what he was talking about. So they took him to a place called Mars' Hill, which overlooked the city. They told him that he had brought a strange idea to them and they wanted him to explain more about it.

On Mars' Hill was a large outdoor theater called Areopagus. The people were in the habit of gathering there to hear speeches and attend trials, so no doubt Paul was heard by a lot of people that day. He told them many great things about Jesus and about the plan of God.

The people of Athens were heathen and worshiped idols. Paul found many idols there and they all had names of false gods — except one. On that one idol the people had written, "To the unknown god."

They seemed to understand that there was a God whom they did not know. They wanted to make very sure they were not overlooking some other god unknown to them.

When Paul began to preach he reminded the people of their idol to the unknown god. He said that this was the God he wanted to tell them about. He said that they had been worshipping an unknown god ignorantly, but that he would make it clear to them who exactly that God was.

So Paul explained that the true God had created the world, and everything in the

world. He told them that God is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made with human hands. Paul also stated that God had created the first man, Adam, and that he and Eve were the first parents of everyone who lives on the earth. Adam and Eve received life from God, which means that all the people who came from them have also received life from God.

The people of Athens had never heard about the true God, so were not to be blamed for not worshiping him. However, Paul told them a time is coming when they will be expected to worship the true God, because they will then know about him. They will no longer be ignorant about him. Paul referred to that time as a day in which God will judge the world with justice.

To judge means to try, or test. God tested Adam and Eve while they were in the Garden of Eden, but they did not pass the test. They were disobedient. Because of that they died, and everyone else dies too.

But the good news is that Jesus died for Adam, as well as all the rest of the people. That means they are to be made alive again and will have another trial, or chance, to live on the earth. Everyone who has ever lived and died, after they are resurrected, will then be judged.

That is what Paul meant when he told the people of Athens that a day is coming in which God will judge the world. Paul also said that God proved to us that the judgment day is coming when he brought Jesus back to life after he had died on the cross. Jesus has been appointed by God to be the great judge of the world.

When the people heard what Paul said about their being made alive again, some of them laughed at him — it was more than they could believe. Others said they wanted to hear more about it. But there were some who believed what Paul told them and they were very happy about it.

Those people of Athens died hundreds and hundreds of years ago, but they will be made alive again and then they will have a chance to know and obey God. If they do, they will be able to live forever in peace in God's wonderful kingdom.

Chapter Forty Six

From Jerusalem to Rome

Paul was a faithful servant of God, and a true disciple of Jesus. He traveled to many places telling the people about the wonderful things God was planning to do for them when Jesus is king.

At one point God let Paul know that he should visit Jerusalem, so Paul started to travel in that direction. Travel was very different in those days. To go to different places, Paul sometimes walked and sometimes he traveled by boat. On his way to Jerusalem he visited the disciples in many towns and cities and, when it was possible, he preached to them.

In a place called Troas the disciples of Jesus met together, and Paul preached to them — all night! One young man named Eutychus, who was sitting on a window sill, went to sleep while Paul was preaching and fell out of the third floor window. When they picked him up, he was dead, but Paul used the power of God to bring him back to life.

Some of his friends advised him not to go to Jerusalem. They told him that when he arrived there he would be tied up and put in prison, but Paul did not take their advice. He knew that it was God's will for him to go to Jerusalem and he was not afraid.

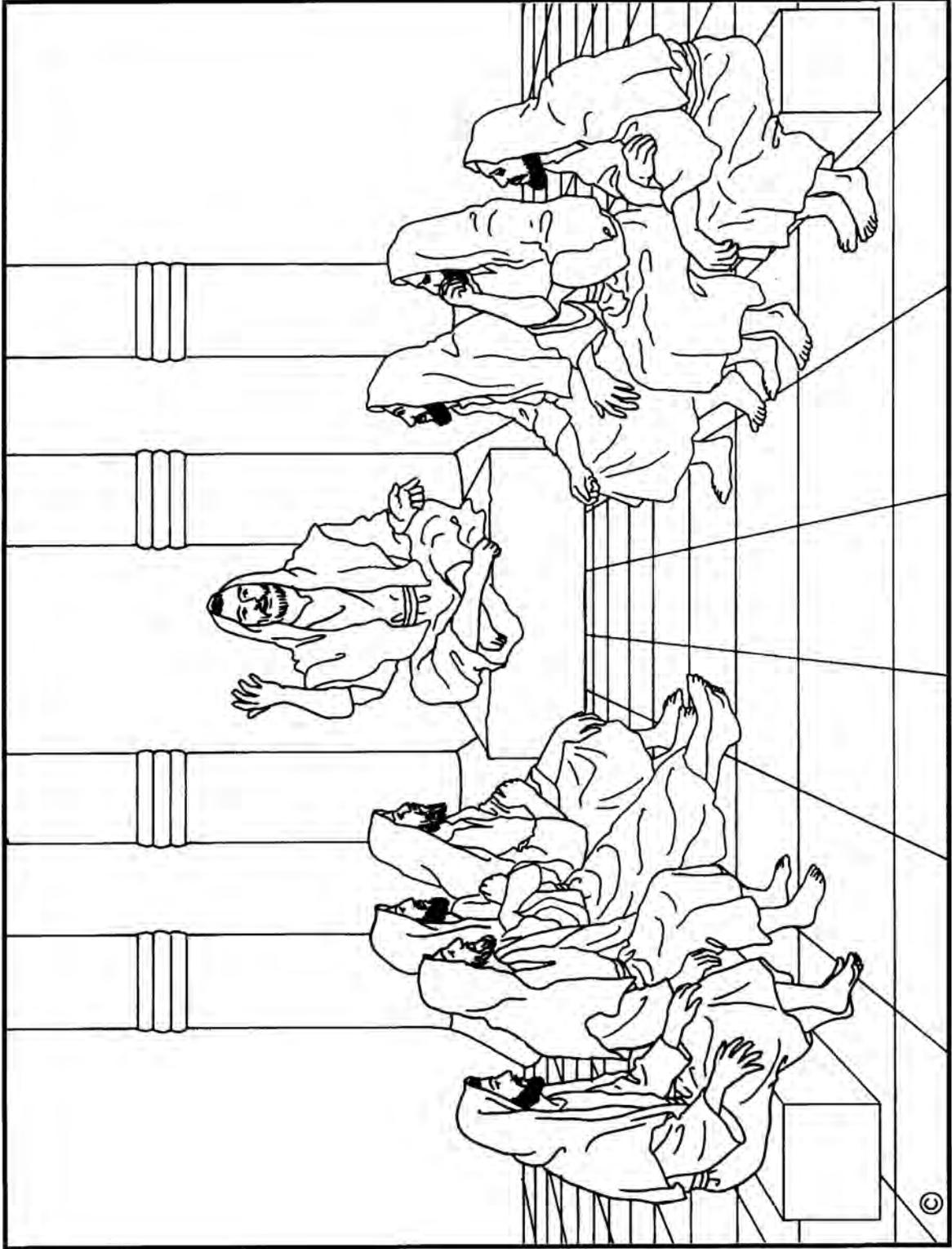
As soon as Paul and his companions reached Jerusalem, they went to the home of James where they met several of Jesus' disciples. Paul told them all about the many experiences he had enjoyed while telling people about Jesus — but when he visited the temple he was arrested.

The ones who had him arrested were the same kind of people who caused Jesus and Stephen to be killed. Now they wanted to kill Paul. They thought Paul was an enemy of God. Paul himself at one time thought that Jesus and Stephen were enemies of God, but now he understood better. Now he knew that Jesus was the Lamb of God who had died in order that all mankind will be able to have life.

The Israelites were not the real rulers of the government in Jerusalem. The city was under the rule of the Romans, and when the Roman chief of police heard that the Jews had seized Paul and were beating him and intended to kill him, he sent soldiers to rescue him. That Roman officer supposed that Paul had committed some terrible crime, so he had his soldiers put chains on him and take him to their headquarters where he could be questioned.

The soldiers had to carry Paul to keep him from the angry mob. As they were carrying him up the stairs, Paul asked if he could speak to the crowd of people who were crying out against him, and they gave him permission to do so. He waved to them with his hand and they stopped their shouting. Paul confessed that he had been just like them and that he, too, had thought that everyone who believed in Jesus was God's enemy, and that Christians should be put to death.

Paul then told the crowd — those people who wanted to kill him — about the incredible



Paul Preaches in the Synagogues: Acts 13:5

experience he had when Jesus spoke to him while he was on the way to Damascus to arrest the disciples who lived there. He explained that it was right then and there that he learned how wrong he had been. Then he knew that Jesus was actually the son of God who had come into the world to die for the people.

Finally, the people wouldn't listen anymore and they cried out that he didn't deserve to live. Paul was a very brave man. He told his enemies the truth, but they wanted to kill him.

After that, the chief of police gave orders for Paul to be beaten to make him tell the truth about the crime he was supposed to have committed. Of course, Paul hadn't done anything wrong, but the chief of police did not know that. He didn't realize that the people could be that full of hate and rage toward Paul just because he was a disciple of Jesus.

Although Paul's parents were Jewish, he had been born a Roman citizen. That was a good thing because it meant that the Roman soldiers had to protect him. Paul asked the guard if it was lawful to beat a Roman citizen who had not been tried and condemned. The guard was very surprised to learn that Paul was a Roman citizen and he quickly reported it to his chief. So they arranged to hold a trial to find out just what the Jews were accusing Paul of doing.

Paul spoke before the council, saying that he was on trial because he believed in the resurrection of the dead. That caused an argument between the Pharisees and Sadducees — The Pharisees believed in the resurrection, but the Sadducees did not.

Since the Pharisees also believed in angels, they thought maybe an angel, and not Jesus, had spoken to Paul when he was going to Damascus. It made them afraid to do anything that would hurt him. The Sadducees did not believe in angels, so that was something else which caused them to argue.

They not only argued but started to fight one another. The chief of police was afraid that Paul would be badly hurt, so he ordered his soldiers to take him back to headquarters where he would be safe.

The next night the Lord stood by Paul and told him to have courage. He said that Paul would need to travel to Rome and testify about him there just as he had in Jerusalem.

Now Paul knew what to expect. He was sure that he would be delivered from the Jews in Jerusalem and that he would go to Rome, in Italy, to tell the people about Jesus and about the resurrection.

The way in which Paul got to Rome was very unusual.

The next day a group of more than forty Jews agreed that they would not eat or drink until they had killed Paul. They told the chief priests and elders about it and demanded that they ask the chief of police to bring Paul before them for further questioning. They explained that it would give them an opportunity to seize Paul and kill him.

Their plan didn't work because Paul had a nephew who lived in Jerusalem and he overheard the plans that were made by these wicked men to kill his Uncle Paul. The young man hurried to headquarters to warn the chief of police of the plot.

Claudius Lysias, the chief of police, decided to send Paul out of the city to a Roman governor in Caesarea whose name was Felix. That night he arranged for two hundred soldiers, seventy cavalrymen, and two hundred spearmen to take Paul out of the city.

Claudius sent a letter to Felix explaining what he knew about Paul and the charges against him, and that he was sending him to Felix to be tried because he was a Roman citizen. Five days later a committee of Jews came from Jerusalem to accuse Paul before Felix. They told the governor that Paul was the ringleader of Jesus' disciples and was causing riots everywhere he went.

Felix was a clever man and could see that Paul had committed no crime, so he sent those men back to Jerusalem. He told them he would examine the case at a later time. Then he told the guard to give Paul as much freedom as possible, and to allow his friends to visit him. Paul stayed in prison for more than two years.

Then another Roman officer, Festus, took the place of Felix, and Paul was tried again before him. At that trial, Paul, who knew that God wanted him to go to Rome, requested that Caesar hear his case. Rome was the capital of the Roman Empire, and Caesar was the ruler. Because Paul was a Roman citizen, his request was honored and he was taken as a prisoner to Rome.

Before starting his journey to Rome, it was arranged by Festus that Paul should be tried again before a Roman king, Agrippa. King Agrippa was very interested in what Paul told him, and said he was almost convinced that he should be a disciple of Jesus too! Paul had preached a beautiful sermon to King Agrippa, telling him about Jesus and that he had been resurrected from the dead and that all who had died would also be resurrected some day.

The king and the governor discussed Paul's situation and agreed that he shouldn't be in prison, and certainly didn't deserve to be killed. They said that Paul could have been set free if only he had not asked to be tried by Caesar. But God had told Paul he wanted him to go to Rome, and Paul was very determined to do what God wanted whether he was set free or not.

Later on, arrangements were completed for Paul to leave by ship, together with other prisoners, on the long journey to Rome. An officer named Julius was in charge. None of the ships sailed directly to Rome, but they sailed from place to place, changing from one ship to another several times until they reached Alexandria in Egypt. There they boarded a ship going to Italy, but they didn't get there.



Paul Imprisoned: Acts 24:27, 28:16

Chapter Forty Seven

Shipwreck

Paul was being sent as a prisoner to Rome for trial. In those days the quickest and easiest way to travel was by ship. So Paul was sailing to Rome together with other prisoners in the custody of an officer named Julius. After an already long voyage, the ship was preparing to leave Alexandria in Egypt, but winter weather was coming.

The winds were picking up and were making it difficult to keep the ship on course. They sailed along the coast and came to a place called Fair Havens. It was now very late in the fall of the year, and Paul advised the captain of the ship to stay in Fair Havens for the winter. But there were two hundred and seventy-six people onboard, all very anxious to get to Rome, so it was decided to set sail and not listen to Paul's advice.

It turned out that Paul was right. A heavy storm as strong as a hurricane arose, and it seemed certain that the ship would be wrecked. The passengers were very frightened, so Paul delivered an encouraging message to them. He shared with them that God's angel had spoken to him and assured him that not one of them would die but that they would land on an island.

The sailors steered the ship as best they could toward land, and it went aground a little distance off shore. Some passengers swam and others broke pieces off the ship to use to float to shore. Finally they all managed to get to dry land and to safety. They had landed on an island called Malta. The people who lived there were very kind to the shipwrecked travelers. It was rainy and cold so they built a fire to warm them.

Paul helped to build the fire, and as he was putting wood on it a poisonous snake called a viper bit him on the hand. The people of the island as well as the passengers knew that anyone bitten by a viper was almost certain to die, yet Paul shook the snake off into the fire and was not hurt at all. God was taking care of him!

The name of the ruler of the island was Publius and his father was very sick. Paul healed him and then healed other sick people who lived there. The people of Malta were very grateful.

They stayed on the island for three months. By that time the worst of the winter was over. Another ship from Alexandria had remained at Malta for the winter and when it was ready to sail Paul got onboard to complete his trip. After two more stops along the way, Paul finally arrived in Italy.

The Roman officers knew that Paul had not committed any crime so they did not put him in prison but let him have a house for himself. However, he was not free because he was kept chained to a soldier all the time, day and night. For two years Paul lived that way.

The first thing Paul did when he got to Rome was send for the leaders of the Jews of Rome to come and see him. He told them about Jesus and the resurrection. Some believed him, others did not. After that, various Gentiles visited him.

Later on Paul was set free, then arrested again and brought back to Rome where he was put to death. Like Jesus, Paul was not put to death because he had done anything wrong. He was killed because the rulers did not want him to tell people about King Jesus. It will be wonderful when everyone loves Jesus, and will be glad that he is their king!

Chapter Forty Eight John Sees Trees of Life

In the second chapter of this book, called “At Home in a Garden,” we learned about Adam and Eve. They were the first man and woman who ever lived on earth. They did not obey God and, because of that, they were not allowed to stay in that beautiful Garden of Eden which God had planted for them. That was so sad because everything they needed to live forever was in that garden. If they hadn’t listened to Satan, they could have lived there without ever getting sick or growing old or dying.

God’s enemy, Satan, lied to Eve. He told her that she would not die even if she did what God had told her not to do. What a terrible lie that was! Satan has been deceiving people ever since then. However, the time will come when all people will be allowed to return to the garden, and then it will be a much larger and better garden. This is what God has promised!

We have already learned about many of God’s promises. Now we will learn about some more of them, written by the Apostle John in the last book of the Bible, called Revelation.

The Apostle John was one of Jesus’ very dear friends. Jesus loved all his disciples — in fact he loves everyone — but he had a very special love for John. Our Heavenly Father wants us to love everybody too, but, like Jesus, we have our favorite friends. Jesus and John knew each other very well because John always stayed as close as he could to his Master. He wanted to learn all he could from Jesus, and he wanted to be nearby to help him whenever he might need it. Jesus really appreciated that about John.

Many years after Jesus was crucified and resurrected, John, who continued to be his faithful disciple, was sent as a prisoner to a small island called Patmos. John had a unique experience while he was there. He had what is called a “vision.”

A vision is like a dream, only it is not an ordinary dream. It is one in which God tells his servants what he wants them to know. Many of God's servants in the past were given visions.

In this vision, John heard the voice of his beloved Master Jesus making remarkable promises for his people. Angels also spoke to John and explained the meaning of many of the incredible things he saw.

One of the visions he saw while on the island of Patmos was about the trees of life. The Bible tells us that all the people will return one day to the Garden of Eden. That means that the whole earth will be made like the Garden of Eden, because the small garden in which Adam and Eve lived would not be large enough for everybody.

John tells us that the trees of life were growing on both sides of a beautiful river. He said it was the river of the water of life, clear as crystal. The trees had twelve kinds of fruit, one kind for each month of the year. Those who eat the fruit from the trees of life will never die.

John also tells us that the leaves of those trees were for the healing of the nations. Just as God has promised, all people will be blessed by the trees of life. Of course, John didn't see a real river and real trees, just a picture of them.

Another great thing about the river in John's vision was that it flowed from underneath the throne of God and of the Lamb. Most rivers flow from mountains and hills. But the river of the water of life is different, it flows from a throne.

When the Bible tells us about God's throne, it means that he is the ruler. We can understand why John saw the river flowing from underneath God's throne. It is God's way of explaining to us that all those who want to live forever will need to know that God has the right to tell people what they should do and what they should not do. They will need to learn to obey God. And because God is the ruler, all the people will be healed and blessed.

Jesus taught his disciples a beautiful prayer in which he prayed for God's kingdom to come and for his will to be done on the earth as it is in heaven. It is called, "The Lord's Prayer."

Jesus was called the "Lamb of God." In the Old Testament we read that God was pleased with Abel's gift of a lamb for his sacrifice because it was a picture of Jesus. Then God provided a lamb for Abraham to offer as a sacrifice instead of his son Isaac. That lamb was a picture of Jesus as well. There was also a lamb that was killed at the time the Israelites left Egypt, called the Passover lamb. Jesus is the real Passover lamb, and because he died, all the world is going to be brought back to life again.

Jesus will be the ruler over the earth for a thousand years, and he will be a great king, to teach people to do the will of God. We can be sure he will be a very loving teacher. Those who want to live forever will have to do what Jesus tells them to do.

As John watched the river flowing and the trees of life on the river banks bearing a lot of fruit, he heard the Spirit and the bride say, "Come...and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."

The Spirit is God's power. And who is the bride? "She" is made up of all the followers of Jesus, those who live and die serving him, and love him more than anyone else. They will be with him when he is reigning over the people. They, too, will be kings, and because they will be with Jesus, and live in his home in heaven, they are called his bride. The Bible tells us about some of them like Peter, and Paul, and John — in fact, all the apostles. Jesus' bride will help to make God's promises come true!

Remember the promise God made to Abraham? He said he would use one of his offspring, or children, also called his "seed," to bless all the people of the world. But Abraham died and in all that time since, people have continued to die without receiving the blessing which God promised.

Our great Heavenly Father hasn't forgotten that promise. Instead, he has been getting ready all these years to make that promise, and all his other promises, come true. That is the reason he sent Jesus into the world as his Lamb to die for the people. And that is why Jesus, doing what God asked him to do, chose his twelve apostles and disciples to work with him. In fact, he is still choosing disciples to this day. Jesus and all his faithful followers are the offspring which God spoke of in that promise to Abraham.

The followers of Jesus will be the first to be made alive and they will then be with Jesus in heaven. They will have the great joy of helping to give life to all the rest of mankind who will live here on earth in peace and happiness forever.

John saw in the vision that a time was coming when there would be no more death. How exciting! People will not get sick and die, nor will they grow old and die. There will be no wars to kill people. And God will be able to do all that he has promised to do.

Let us, then, trust God and do the things which please him. We can look forward to the time of peace and joy there will be all over the earth when all of God's promises come true!

Chapter Forty Nine

The Story of God's Book

Part Two

This chapter will help you understand the second part of the Bible, called the New Testament. In it are stories of Jesus' birth and life, as well as his death and resurrection. It also tells us about the work of some of Jesus' apostles and about how the Church grew.

The word testament means agreement, or promise. The Old Testament tells of many of God's promises and the New Testament tells of even more. It also explains how and why all of those promises will come true.

The New Testament, just like the Old Testament, is made up of many parts, called books. The first book of the New Testament is called Matthew.

MATTHEW The full name of this book is, "The Gospel According to Matthew." The word gospel means "good news." Matthew was one of Jesus' disciples and he wrote about the greatest story that has ever been told — the story of Jesus, and how he became the world's Savior.

This book also tells about the wise men who came to see Jesus when he was a very young child, and how the wicked King Herod wanted Jesus put to death because he was afraid Jesus would grow up to be a king. Jesus really is a king and someday will rule over the whole earth.

We find a wonderful sermon that Jesus preached to a crowd of people as he stood on the side of a small mountain. It is called, "The Sermon on the Mount." In the same chapter there are several verses called the Beatitudes, which means "words of blessedness." Jesus also explains the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer in these verses.

MARK This second book of the New Testament is called, "The Gospel According to Mark." Mark was another faithful disciple, and the book he wrote tells about many of the exciting works of Jesus.

Mark records that mothers brought their children to Jesus so he could bless them. Jesus loved children and said that everyone who will be in the kingdom with him, to help him bless the people, will have to be like little children who are obedient to their parents and are gentle and kind. God is our Heavenly Father and he wants us all to be his obedient children.

LUKE Also called, "The Gospel According to Luke," includes one of the most important stories in the Bible — the story of the angel who told the shepherds that Jesus had been born. The shepherds were afraid because everything around them was shining brightly with the glory of the Lord. But the angel told them not to be afraid because he

was bringing them the good news that the Savior had been born in Bethlehem.

Luke also tells us of a promise Jesus made to his disciples about God's care for his people. Jesus said to them that even the hairs of their heads were numbered by God. The Lord explained that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without God knowing about it, so he can surely be depended upon to care for all the needs of his people.

JOHN This book is called, "The Gospel According to John." Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were the disciples of Jesus who wrote about their Master's life. Because John wrote his book last, he talks about things that are not written in any of the other gospel books.

In chapter one we read that God created a magnificent being, his son, and one of his names was Logos. It is a Greek word and means "Word." John says that, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," and he was the one God used to help him create everything else.

John also records in detail the events of the last supper, Jesus' final instructions to his disciples, and the words of his prayer for them on the night he was betrayed.

ACTS The full title is, "The Acts of the Apostles," and was written by the same Luke who wrote the Gospel. It is the story of what the apostles did and said after Jesus returned to heaven. Luke also tells us about the Holy Spirit, or power of God, coming upon the disciples at the time of Pentecost.

Jesus was a schoolmaster, or teacher, for the disciples. He had many things to teach them before he had to leave. Jesus knew that the apostles were not able to understand his teachings very clearly until the Spirit of Truth came upon them. He promised them that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth, and that it would help them remember the things he had taught them.

ROMANS This book is also called, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans." It was written to the followers of Jesus only, not to all the people who lived in Rome.

Paul was taken to Rome as a prisoner and lived there for a long time. There had been disciples in Rome before Paul lived there, and it was to them that he sent this letter. One of the things he wrote was, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

CORINTHIANS 1 and 2 Paul wrote two letters to Jesus' disciples who lived in Corinth, Greece. He was very interested in the brethren who lived there because he had taught them about God's plan.

When he first got to Corinth he met a man named Aquila and his wife Priscilla. Paul was a tentmaker. He never collected any money for preaching, so he earned money to buy his own food by making tents and sewing canvas together for sails to be used on sailboats. Aquila and Priscilla were also tentmakers, so Paul lived and worked with them for a year and a half. They also worked together telling the people about Jesus and his kingdom which was coming to earth.

At first Paul preached only to the Israelites. Then he began to preach to the Gentiles,

and after a year and a half there were many in Corinth who had become footstep followers of the Lord Jesus.

Paul left there and went to Syria, but he didn't forget his friends in Corinth who now believed in Jesus, and he kept in touch by writing letters. He gave them good advice, and reminded them of many of God's promises.

In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul wrote about love and how important it is that we have love in our hearts for everybody. We should never hate anyone, not even those who are unkind to us. We can, however, hate the things they do. We should try to be like Jesus who loved even those people who put him to death.

In the fifteenth chapter, Paul wrote about the resurrection of Jesus and explains that some day everyone will be resurrected.

GALATIANS This is another letter written by the Apostle Paul. It was written to the disciples who lived in Galatia, a Roman province. Paul sent it to all the disciples who lived there. It was then sent from place to place so that each one who lived in that area had a chance to read it.

In the third chapter, Paul wrote about the promise God made to Abraham. God told Abraham that he will bless all the families of the earth. Paul then explained that Jesus and his faithful disciples are the ones God will use to make that promise come true.

EPHESIANS Another of the Apostle Paul's letters, this one was written to the brethren in Ephesus many years after Paul had visited there. At that time it was the second largest city in the world.

Nearly all the people in Ephesus worshipped the false god, Diana. There was even a huge temple in the city called the "Temple of Diana." There were also fortune tellers and others who fooled the people so they could get money from them.

Paul had stayed in Ephesus for a while and healed many sick people. Many of the fortune tellers and other dishonest people knew what they were doing was wrong. After they heard Paul preaching they felt bad about what they had been doing so they brought their instruction books into the public square and burned them. That caused a lot of excitement.

There were men who made images of Diana, the false goddess, and sold them at high prices and got very rich. After Paul started preaching they soon began to notice that many people were beginning to believe in Jesus instead of Diana. They knew that if the people believed in Jesus, they would no longer want to buy their statues and they would lose money. So they started to speak out against Paul. It wasn't long before they had the people of Ephesus in a uproar.

The Apostle Paul had quite an exciting time at Ephesus! While he was there, some became disciples of Jesus, and it was to them that he wrote in his letter, "Be followers of God, as dear children."

PHILIPPIANS This is letter that Paul wrote. It was sent to the disciples who lived in Philippi, a city in Macedonia. After Paul had been traveling a long time, he had a dream.

In the dream he heard a voice saying to him, "Come over into Macedonia and help us." Paul knew that message was from the Heavenly Father. So Paul, and his friends who were traveling with him, obeyed the call and went to Macedonia. Philippi was the first city they visited there.

Soon after they arrived they heard about a place of prayer just outside of the city where many good people went when they wanted to pray together. Paul thought that would be a very good place to preach about Jesus.

There he found lots of people who were glad to listen to the gospel. Several of them believed and became disciples. One of them was a good woman named Lydia. She was a business woman — a "seller of purple." That probably means she sold purple dyes, or possibly purple cloth. Lydia had a nice home and she invited Paul and his friends to live there. They also held meetings with the brethren there.

Paul had some serious trouble in Philippi. Some men had a woman working for them who was a fortune teller. There was an evil spirit in her, and it was that evil spirit who helped her to tell the people things about the future. The evil spirit caused the woman to cry out to the people that Paul was a servant of God, and that he was able to tell them the truth about God. Paul knew it was wrong to let an evil spirit be telling the truth that way, and that no good would come of it. So he put a stop to it by causing the evil spirit to come out of the woman.

That meant that she was no longer able to earn money for the men she was working for. They became angry and complained to the rulers of the city about Paul and his fellow-worker, Silas. So Paul and Silas were put in prison. They were cruelly beaten and put in chains — but Paul and Silas did not get discouraged.

No doubt their backs were sore from the beatings, and perhaps they couldn't sleep very well, but instead of complaining about it, they sang hymns. Then something unexpected happened — there was a big earthquake which shook the very foundations of the prison building and the doors of the prison were thrown wide open! Even the prisoners' chains were broken loose!

The prison keeper was really scared, not of the earthquake, but because he thought all the prisoners would escape and he would be blamed for not looking after them properly. He was so frightened he wanted to kill himself, but Paul called out to him and told him not to hurt himself because they were still there.

The prison keeper was so happy that Paul and Silas had not run away that he was willing to listen to their message. He believed what they told him and he and his family were all baptized.

The morning after the earthquake Paul and Silas were released from prison and told to leave the city. Before they left they arranged for all the disciples to meet together in Lydia's home. There they had a good time talking about all the many things God had done for them.

Many years later, while he was a prisoner in Rome, Paul wrote this letter to his dear friends in Philippi. He told them to be sure to continue serving God and to always rejoice in the Lord.

COLOSSIANS Another of Paul's letters was sent to the disciples who lived in Colosse, a city in Asia Minor. The Bible does not tell us much about the brethren there, but Paul knew them and wrote them a beautiful letter. One important thing he said was, "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord."

THESSALONIANS 1 and 2 The city of Thessalonica was in the country of Macedonia. Both of these letters to the Thessalonians were written by the Apostle Paul. He was the first to preach the gospel there, and two other disciples, Timothy and Silas, worked in the city with him .

The first place they visited in Thessalonica was a synagogue, which is a Jewish church. There they found some people who were glad to listen to them. Besides the Jewish believers, quite a number of Gentiles also became Christians. But there were many in those days who did not like to hear about Jesus. Several of them got together and tried to cause problems for Paul.

Those troublemakers went to the home of Jason because they expected to find Paul and Silas there, but they were not there at the time. So they seized Jason and the other disciples and took them before the city rulers. They asked the rulers to punish them. They shouted out that they had caused trouble all over the world. Nevertheless, the rulers decided not to punish Jason and the other disciples who were arrested with him.

Paul's friends thought it would be best if he didn't stay in Thessalonica. They told him to leave, so he left that very night. After he had been gone a long while, he wrote the letters to them.

Paul had heard that the Christians in Thessalonica were working hard to tell as many people as they could about Jesus, and that made him very happy. In his second letter he urged them to never get tired of doing what's right.

TIMOTHY 1 and 2 The Apostle I wrote both of these letters to one of Jesus' faithful disciples named Timothy. He and his mother, Eunice, had learned about Jesus from Paul and became disciples while Timothy was a very young man. Later he joined Paul in many of his journeys and worked with him. Paul loved this young man dearly and even called him his son.

Paul's second letter to Timothy was written while the apostle was a prisoner in Rome, and only a little while before he died. In that letter he told Timothy about his trial before the wicked Nero, the emperor of Rome. He said that none of the disciples stood with him during that trial except Luke, but that the Lord had helped him.

In those days many Roman prisoners were given to lions to be killed, but God allowed Paul to escape having that horrible experience. Because so many of the disciples did not come to help Paul in his time of need, he asked Timothy to come to Rome and visit him.

TITUS This book is yet another letter by the Apostle Paul. It was written to Titus and named for him. Titus traveled and worked with Paul for quite a long time. He was with him in Jerusalem and Ephesus, and in a number of other places. Titus was on the island of Crete when this letter was sent to him. Paul explains how to do the Lord's work among the brethren who lived on the island.

PHILEMON This book is named for Philemon, a faithful disciple who lived in Colosse. The Colossian brethren got together in his house to hold their meetings. Philemon had many servants. In those days they were called slaves. One of them was Onesimus. He ran away from Philemon, which he shouldn't have done.

Onesimus went to Rome and was there at the same time as Paul. Although Paul was a prisoner, he was allowed to live in his own house where Onesimus visited him. Paul told him the good news about Jesus and he believed it. That was how Onesimus became a disciple, just like his former master, Philemon. Now that Onesimus was following in Jesus' footsteps he felt it was not right to have run away. It was really hard for him to go back to work for Philemon, but he did.

Paul wrote the letter to Philemon, explaining that his former slave had become a disciple of Jesus and was now returning to him. He asked Philemon to be kind to Onesimus and treat him as a brother, and not as a servant. When Onesimus returned to Philemon, he took the letter with him.

HEBREWS In the Bible, Hebrews is another word for Israelites, or Jews, and that is who the Apostle Paul was writing to in this letter. Paul was a smart man, and he knew there were some things which the Hebrew disciples needed especially to learn, so he wrote the letter to them for that purpose. He wanted them to understand that the sacrifices of the Tabernacle and all of their feasts really represented Jesus and the great sacrifice he would make for all the world.

Although the letter was written to Hebrew disciples, it's good for all of us to understand how God developed his plan throughout the ages. In fact, all the letters recorded in the Bible are for all of us to read and think about, not just the people to whom they were sent.

JAMES This is a letter that James wrote to all the disciples of Jesus, especially those who were Israelites. James had known Jesus personally. He lived in Jerusalem. He gave good advice that we can all appreciate, for instance, that we should always be ready to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.

PETER 1 and 2 These two books of the New Testament are called the general epistles, or letters, of Peter. Before Peter became a faithful disciple of Jesus he was a fisherman. He made his living by catching fish and selling them. When Jesus called Peter to be an apostle, he said to him, "Follow me and I will make you a fisher of men." Jesus said that to other disciples as well and it meant that he wanted them to do all they could to spread the good news of his kingdom.

Peter wrote many letters to strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. These two letters are in the Bible and are read by people all over the world.

JOHN 1, 2, and 3 In addition to his Gospel, John wrote three epistles to the disciples. John is the only one of the disciples who wrote a record of Jesus' life as well as letters to the church.

In his last letter John wrote, "I have no greater joy than to know my children walk in truth."

When he wrote the last letter John was probably about sixty years old. He had been a faithful footstep follower for many years. He was happy to know that his “children,” as he called his brethren, were doing the things they should do. He called it, “walking in the truth.” John also encouraged us to imitate good examples, and not bad ones.

JUDE The full title of this book is, “The General Epistle of Jude,” which means that it was written to all the disciples of Jesus. It is not a very long letter, but it has many important lessons in it. He mentions the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and that the people who lived there had disobeyed God and were punished. They did not know God and how to live the right way, but when they are resurrected in the kingdom, they will have the chance to learn about our amazing God and know how to keep themselves in his love.

REVELATION This is the last book of the Bible and was written by the Apostle John. He was told by Jesus to write down the exciting things he would show him in a vision, or dream. Revelation is a book of symbols — things that stand for something else. John describes things for us by using illustrations like beasts and horses and many other things. What John saw were pictures, or symbols, of something else that is real.

Mount Zion is one of the pictures in the book of Revelation of that great kingdom in which Jesus will be the ruler. John says he saw many people with God's Lamb on Mount Zion. God's Lamb is a picture of Jesus, and the people with him are Jesus' faithful disciples, who will also be kings, or rulers, in the kingdom.

In another part of the vision, John saw God and the Lamb together, and everybody on the earth, and all the angels in heaven were praising them. Today there are many, many people in the world who do not know enough about God to praise him, but when all his promises come true, they will all know God's love and they will want to praise him.

We can be so thankful that God has given us the Bible and that he has told us over and over again of his love for all mankind.

We can also be glad that Jesus loves us, and died on the cross so that everyone will be made alive again. We are happy he is to be king over the whole earth, and that then there will be no wars and no sickness and people will not have to die any more.

Yes, all of these wonderful things have been promised, and we know that **GOD'S PROMISES COME TRUE!**