

## CHAPTER 10

# Great Things Happen on the Way to the Promised Land

### **Bread from Heaven**

On the way to the Promised Land, the Jewish people wandered for a long time in the desert and they often ran into difficulties. Through all the preceding events, God was preparing the chosen people for very great and important revelations. God always provided for them, but still they did not trust him enough. Every time something went wrong, they would complain about how they never should have followed Moses and Aaron.

The day came when all the food that they had brought with them ran out. The next morning, God sent a heavy dew to cover the ground. And when the dew evaporated, it left behind white flaky bread that tasted of honey; they called it “manna”. What is more, God provided fresh manna each morning for the rest of the time that the Hebrews were in the desert.

### **The Ten Commandments**

After three months the Hebrews arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai. God called to Moses from the mountain saying, “Tell the people of Israel, ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’

wings and brought you to myself. Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession. You shall be a kingdom of priests and a consecrated nation.’ ”

When Moses spoke these words to the people everyone answered, “All that Yahweh has said, we will do.”

Then Moses climbed to the top of the mountain. A dense cloud covered it. Yahweh descended in the form of fire and spoke to him. The whole mountain shook violently. The people were not allowed to go near, but they saw lightning flashes on Mount Sinai and heard peals of thunder and loud trumpet blasts, and they trembled. To their eyes the glory of Yahweh seemed like a great fire on the mountaintop. Moses was gone for forty days and forty nights.

Then, one of the most important events in the history of the world took place. God gave Moses the Ten Commandments carved on stone tablets.

### **The Golden Calf**

Meanwhile God’s stubborn people became impatient and again doubted him. They went to Aaron and said, “Make us a god who will



lead us. Moses is gone. We do not know what has become of him.”

And so Aaron had their gold jewelry melted down and made into a statue of a calf.

“Tomorrow will be a feast in honor of the Lord”, Aaron announced.

The next day, the people worshipped and sacrificed to the golden calf. God was angry to see that these people, for whom he had done so much, could forget him so quickly. He told Moses to go down from the mountain.

When Moses saw the people singing and dancing before the calf, he was so angry that he hurled down the tablets with the Ten Commandments that God had given his people, and the stone was shattered. He rebuked Aaron for letting the people get carried away. The golden calf was melted down and the people were punished for their sin, which was a grave sin of idolatry. Moses then wanted to make atonement for their sins, and he begged God to forgive them.

### **The Covenant Is Renewed**

Once more, Moses climbed Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments on stone

tablets. He ate and drank nothing for forty days. This time God renewed the covenant that he had made so long ago with the descendants of Abraham. He said, “Go to the land that I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that I would give to their descendants. I will send an angel on ahead of you.” God also gave the people of Israel many other laws to protect them and to be a sign that they were his chosen people.

When Moses finally came down the mountain, his face was radiant. It was shining so brightly from having spoken to God that he had to put a veil over it because people did not dare go near him. The mystery of God’s greatness is impenetrable and his majesty is a thing of awe.

### **The Ark of the Covenant**

Under God’s instructions, the people made a chest of fine wood called an ark. It was covered both inside and out with pure gold, and it had golden poles so that it could be carried. And inside the ark, they placed the stone tablets containing God’s Ten Commandments. They called it the Ark of the Covenant.

The people also made a portable tent, and

inside it, a tabernacle. This was where their priests would offer sacrifices to God for them, and it would also be a sign of God's presence among them. Finally, they made a beautiful altar for the sacrifices and fine clothing for the priests.

The ark, the tabernacle, the vestments, and the altar were very carefully made following the instructions Moses received from God. These were all sacred. God also told Moses the exact way in which the holy ritual of sacrifice was to be performed. An animal victim was to be offered on the altar as an atonement for sins. Only Aaron and his descendants, the Levites, were allowed to be priests. They were especially chosen and consecrated for this.

The people of Israel continued travelling through the desert toward Canaan. The men carrying the Ark led the way, following a cloud which guided them.

“The law of the Lord is perfect;  
it revives the soul.  
The rule of the Lord is to be trusted;  
it gives wisdom to the simple.  
The precepts of the Lord are right,  
they gladden the heart.  
The command of the Lord is clear,  
it gives light to the eyes.”

(Psalm 19:8–9)

## Forty Years in the Desert

Finally one day, the Hebrews came to the edge of Canaan, the Promised Land. Moses sent out scouts on a secret mission. They were to see what Canaan looked like and who was living there.

The scouts came back with the report that the countryside was full of good fruits and

vegetables. It really *was* a beautiful land. But the people living there, the Canaanites, were strong and fierce. Again, the people grumbled. “Let us get someone to lead us back to Egypt”, they said.

God was so displeased with them that he decided that not one of these grumblers would enter the Promised Land. The people would wander in the desert for forty years until the last of them was dead, and then their children would enter Canaan. So for forty years the Jews remained in the desert and could not enter Canaan, the land that had so long ago been promised to the descendants of Abraham.

## The Death of Moses

One day, God called to Moses, “Climb up into these mountains and look at the land I am going to give to the children of Israel. And after you have looked at it, you will die.”

So Moses went up and looked at the Promised Land. And then he died up there on the mountain. Although the Hebrews had so often complained about him, they really loved him and they were very sad that he had left them. They cried for a month.

Moses was a very great prophet. A prophet is someone whom God uses to speak to his people. Moses was very close to God, and God worked great miracles through him. Dramatic new revelations of God and the moral law were given through Moses to the Jewish people.

## Words to Know:

prophet    manna    revelation  
golden calf    Ten Commandments  
Ark of the Covenant    tabernacle  
sacred    consecrated