

Cindy Bassett

The Bible Corner



A church in the desert

Aaron hesitated for several minutes outside his brother's tent, wondering whether he should enter. It had been nearly a week since he had last seen Moses. Finally, he could bear it no longer, so he entered the tent.

"Moses," he began, "I've come to ask your forgiveness for my foolishness."

Moses turned to face Aaron. His face was expressionless, giving Aaron no clue to his reaction to the statement. Moses merely waited for Aaron to continue.

"I don't blame you for being angry," Aaron stammered. "It's just that I wanted so much to prove that I could do something to help. All I did was bring disaster on our people."

"Yes," Moses agreed. "The whole incident was very unfortunate. But why are you here asking for my forgiveness? It was God against whom you sinned."

Aaron lowered his head so he didn't have to look directly at Moses. "Sometimes God seems very far away," Aaron said. "He is hidden beneath the mantle of the cloud high up on Mount Sinai."

"Don't look so unhappy, Aaron," Moses answered. "Our God is merciful and you are forgiven. And soon He shall live in the midst of the Hebrew camp. You and your sons have been chosen for a special job, despite your weakness."

"Moses, you mock me," Aaron replied. "Of course not," Moses said, smiling warmly. "We are going to construct a place

of worship for God out here in the wilderness. You and your sons will serve as priests to minister to the people."

"Perhaps I am not the right person for such a job," Aaron said, still not convinced. "I've failed before."

"You'll make a fine priest, Aaron," Moses maintained, "if you don't forget that God wants more than sacrifices and the outward signs of worship. He desires an obedient heart above all else."

Later that day, Moses called the people together for a meeting. As he stood before them, he announced, "God is always with us as we journey to the land He has promised us. As a sign of His presence, the Lord has given me instructions that we must build a special place where we can all come together and worship. It will be known as the Tent of the Lord's Presence, and it will help us remember that God never leaves us."

"I ask everyone who wants to help to bring an offering from their households," Moses said. "I also need skilled craftsmen to help."

The Hebrews went back to their tents, returning soon afterward with many offerings for the Lord. Some brought fine linens and goatskins. Others offered gifts of spices, olive oil and incense. Every household made at least one offering, and when Moses saw how generous they were, he was very pleased.

Early the next morning, volunteer builders assembled before Moses, and the construction began.

The Tent of the Lord's Presence was

made of beautiful colored linen over a framework of fine wood. Because of the tent's design, the Hebrews could easily transport it as they journeyed through the desert. The Hebrews called the tent a Tabernacle.

A curtain inside the Tabernacle separated an area known as the Most Holy Place from the rest of the tent. Only priests could enter the Most Holy Place, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept.

The Ark of the Covenant was a wooden chest the size of an average table. Poles could be inserted through rings attached to the outside corners of the chest, so that the priests could carry it. The inside of the ark was covered with pure gold, to symbolize the Lord's presence in the Tabernacle.

God told Moses to put the stone tablets bearing the Ten Commandments inside the Ark. Moses also was instructed that the Tabernacle should house a jar filled with manna, the food God had given to the Hebrews when they were wandering in the desert after leaving Egypt. The manna never spoiled.

The Tent of the Lord's Presence was also to contain a special table for bread offerings and an altar for animal sacrifices. Every morning and evening the priests would offer sacrifices on this altar.

Another duty of the priests was to tend to the special Tabernacle lamps, which burned continuously with an eternal flame.

The priests — Aaron and his sons — wore special garments made by skilled tailors who had offered their services. Two onyx stones, which had been engraved with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel, were woven into Aaron's robe.

At last, all of the preparations for the Tent of the Lord's Presence had been completed, in accordance with the instructions God had given to Moses.

Moses called the Hebrews together in front of the Tabernacle and offered the

very first sacrifice to God. They gave thanks for their blessings and for their safe journey through the wilderness. It had been two years since they had left Egypt and their bondage as Pharaoh's slaves.

After Moses completed the service, a huge cloud covered the Tabernacle. It was just like the cloud the people had seen on the top of Mount Sinai, and they believed with all their hearts that God had truly come to live among them.

Whenever the cloud lifted, it was a sign from the Lord that the Hebrews should pack up their camp and continue their journey. When the cloud stopped moving, the Hebrews also stopped. At night, a pillar of fire could be seen within the cloud.

The Hebrews continued to live this way throughout the 40 years it took them to complete their journey to Canaan, the Promised Land.

For discussion:

- 1) Why did Aaron feel that God was so far away?
- 2) What did Moses say God wanted from Aaron more than anything else?
- 3) How does the Tent of the Lord's Presence compare to our churches today? Do you see any similarities in the Hebrews' offerings, their priests, the Tabernacle lamps, the priests' special garments and the altar?
- 4) Do we need a church to have God in our midst?

For further reading:

- 1) God gave Moses very specific instructions for the building of the Tabernacle and the duties of the priests in Exodus, Chapters 25 through 32.
- 2) In Matthew 18:19-21, Jesus told His followers that if two or more of them came together and prayed, He would be there with them.

National music competition set to mark upcoming anniversary

In 1989, the Catholic Church in the United States will mark the 200th anniversary of the founding of the hierarchy in our country. In light of the forthcoming anniversary, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops has appointed an episcopal bicentennial committee to formulate plans for this historic

observance.

The bicentennial committee plans to commission the composition of a special Mass to highlight the anniversary. Bishop Eugene Marino, auxiliary bishop of Washington, D.C., is the chairman of the music committee.

Each diocese will invite entrants and select one representative as its provincial candidate. The province will then designate its

composer for consideration by a panel of nationally recognized authorities on church music, who will make the final selection. A cash award will be given to the winning composer. The competition is open to all.

The program will be coordinated in the Diocese of Rochester through the Office of Liturgy.

For information, contact John Kubiniec at (716)328-3210.

Retreat weekend scheduled

Parishioners from St. Gregory's in Marion and St. Ann's in Palmyra are planning an annual retreat weekend February 20, 21 and 22 at Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua.

For more information, contact Jim Sapienza (St. Ann's) at (315)597-6073, or Lester Spencer (St. Gregory's) at (315)926-4219.

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