

SUPREME GRAND ROYAL ARCH CHAPTER
OF
NEW ZEALAND

HAURAKI DISTRICT

*SOME
PERSONALITIES
OF THE
DEGREES
UNDER
GRAND CHAPTER*

Prepared for the use of the Companions by
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Introduction

I firmly believe that a knowledge of the people and the events upon which many of our Masonic ceremonies are based is necessary for a full appreciation of the message each ceremony delivers.

This booklet is intended to provide a fairly full knowledge of the principal characters one comes across in the ceremonies within the jurisdiction of the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of New Zealand

The “biographical” details herein have been somewhat expanded to provide interesting information surrounding principal events of their lives. This should make the Masonic “events” in which they feature even more illuminating.

The ceremonies treated are:

The Mark degree, The Excellent degree, The Royal Arch degree, The Royal Master degree, The Select Master degree and the Super Excellent degree.

The information herein is derived from the book *Who's Who in the Old Testament* by Joan Comay. Published by Hodder & Stoughton

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Cyrus

More correctly Cyrus II, King of the Medes and the Persians. Son of Cambyses I, King of Anshan and of Mandane, daughter of King Astyges of the Medes. He succeeded to the throne in 559 BC and rapidly gained control of the surrounding peoples. In 539 he defeated the Babylonian army and became ruler of the largest empire the world had seen till then. Cyrus was a generous conqueror especially remembered for his friendship toward the Jews.

“The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia and he gave the Jews permission to return to Jerusalem there to rebuild the Temple of Solomon. It was Cyrus who suggested that those Jews who were not returning should support the returning Jews with gold, silver, goods and animals to pay for the work.

Cyrus also gave orders that the thousands of vessels of the House of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought from Jerusalem be handed back to the Jews for restoration into the rebuilt Temple.

Zerubbabel

Heb. 'seed of Babylon') c. 6 century BC. Judean prince associated with the return from the Babylonian exile.

Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel (called 'son of Pedaiah' in the First Book of Chronicles) was a member of the royal house of King Jehoiachin of Judah who was carried off into captivity to Babylon in 598 BC. Forty years after the fall of Jerusalem, Babylon was captured by Cyrus king of Persia, and Judah became part of the Persian empire.

The following year, in 538 BC, Cyrus issued an edict permitting the Judean exiles to return to their homeland if they wished, and to rebuild the Temple. Those who remained behind were to assist the repatriates with money and goods, and to give them voluntary donations for the Temple.

A total of 42,360 Jews gathered together for the return, under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, also of the Judean royal dynasty. In listing the other prominent persons going on the journey, Zerubbabel's name is the first one mentioned. (Some scholars believe that he and Sheshbazzar were the same person.) When everything was ready, the caravan moved off slowly on the six-hundred-mile trek across the desert.

The two men who shared authority over the settler community were Zerubbabel and Jeshua the high priest. They now started to organise the rebuilding of the Temple. Masons and carpenters were gathered, and set to work under the supervision of the Levites. Cedar logs from Phoenicia (Lebanon) were imported by sea to Joppa, and paid for in foodstuffs and olive oil - as Solomon had done with the building of the First Temple more than four centuries earlier.

When the foundations had been laid, a celebration took place. The priests were robed in their vestments, trumpets and cymbals were sounded, and prayers of thanksgiving loudly chanted. The shouts of joy mingled with the weeping of the old men who remembered the First Temple before it had been destroyed.

Before the work could proceed beyond the foundations, it was interrupted by the Samaritans. They were the mixed offspring of the Hebrews who had survived the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel a century and a half earlier and the deportees brought in from other parts of the Assyrian empire. At first some of them

claimed the right to help rebuild the Temple. But Zerubbabel bluntly refused: 'You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God.' (Ezra 4:3)

After this rebuff, the Samaritans harassed and disrupted the work. Rehum the local governor of Samaria wrote a letter to the king of Persia. He contended the archives would show that Jerusalem had always been a trouble spot, and would be so again if it was restored: 'and learn that this city is a rebellious city, hurtful to kings and provinces'. (Ezra 4:15). The palace accepted this plea, and orders were given that the work was to be suspended.

Eighteen years later, after King Darius I had mounted the Persian throne, Zerubbabel and Jeshua called the leading citizens together and initiated another effort to resume the building of the Temple. This was done under strong moral pressure from two Jerusalem prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. Again complaints were made to higher authority. This time Tattenai the satrap (regional governor) came with his staff from Damascus to investigate the dispute personally.

Tattenai's report to King Darius was objective. The Jewish settlers claimed, he wrote, that King Cyrus had expressly given authority to reconstruct the Temple that had stood on the site, and he asked for confirmation that this was true.

The reply from the king stated that Cyrus's permission was confirmed by a copy of a memorandum found at Ecbatana (the summer capital in Media of the Persian kings). Darius ordered that the building was to proceed and be paid for out of the revenue of the satrapy. What was more, the animals and supplies that would be needed for the sacrifices were to be provided from official sources. In return, prayers were to be offered for the welfare of the king and the royal family. Anybody who disobeyed these orders would be severely punished.

After the work was resumed, Zerubbabel seems to have disappeared and his end is unknown.

Moses (Heb. 'to draw out') c. 13 century BC. The great Hebrew leader and lawgiver. Moses is the most majestic figure in the Old Testament. His role was so central that the Pentateuch was called the Five Books of Moses, and the code of religious laws, the Law of Moses. To Jews he has remained for all time *Moshe Rabbenu* 'Moses our Teacher'. No one else in the Old Testament had the same close relationship with God, As it was written, 'the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend' (Exod. 33:11).

The story opens in Egypt. Jacob and his family had settled as a pastoral clan in the land of Goshen in the north-east corner of the Nile delta. Here their descendants lived and prospered for four centuries, till 'there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph' (Exod. _ 1:8). (This was possibly the Pharaoh Rameses ii, in the 13th century BC - the greatest builder in Egyptian history.)

He decided that the Children of Israel had become too numerous and strong. He turned them into slave labourers, and put them to work under Egyptian taskmasters on the construction of two treasure cities, Pithom and Rameses, 'And made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick,, and in all kinds of work in the field.' (Exod. 1:14)

When this did not reduce their numbers, Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill every male infant at birth. The midwives evaded this decree on the pretext that 'the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and are

delivered before the midwife comes to them.' (Exod. 1:19) The frustrated ruler then charged his people to throw the male babies into the river, and drown them.

Amram and Jochebed, the parents of Moses, were of the priestly house of Levi. When the child was born, his mother kept him hidden for three months. She then enclosed him in a basket woven of rushes and sealed with pitch, and concealed him among the reeds at the river's edge.

Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe at this spot and when she saw the basket she sent a maid to fetch it. On opening it, the baby started crying and the princess felt pity for it, realising that it was one of the Hebrew children her father had ordered killed.

Moses's elder sister Miriam had been posted a little distance away to watch. She approached the princess and offered to find a Hebrew nurse to suckle the child. This was agreed, and she ran off to fetch Moses's mother. When he was older, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and gave him the name of Moses, 'Because I drew him out of the water.' (Exod. 2:10) (The Hebrew form, *Moshe*, means 'to draw out'.)

The boy grew up at the royal court but remained aware of his Hebrew origin. One day Moses, now a grown man, went off alone to find out what was happening to his kinsmen. He saw an Egyptian overseer flogging an Israelite slave. Thinking himself unobserved, Moses slew the Egyptian and buried his body in the sand. Next day he intervened in a fight between two Israelites and was alarmed when one of them said pointedly: 'Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?' (Exod. 2:14)

Report of his deed reached Pharaoh, and he had to flee for his life eastward into the Sinai desert.

Pausing to rest at a well, Moses assisted some young women to water their flocks. When they told their father Jethro (or Reuel) about the helpful stranger at the well, he invited Moses to eat with them. Jethro was the priest of a tribe of desert nomads from Midian. Moses remained with him and married one of his seven daughters, Zipporah. She bore him a son whom he called Gershom, since Moses was a stranger (Heb. *ger*) in a strange land.

Moving deep into the desert in search of pasture for his father-in-law's flocks, Moses came to the mountain of Horeb (or Sinai). He turned aside to examine a strange sight: a bush that was burning without being consumed. God's voice came out of the bush commanding him to halt and remove his shoes, as he was on holy ground.

Moses was told that he had been chosen to lead his brethren out of their oppression and bring them to the Promised Land. Moses shrank from this task, saying: 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?' (Exod. 3:11) To reassure him, the name of the Lord ('Jehovah') was revealed to Moses, and he was given certain magic signs to impress Pharaoh and the Israelites: turning his staff into a snake, making his hand white with leprosy and turning water into blood. Still reluctant, Moses pointed out that 'I am slow of speech and of tongue'. (Exod. 4:10) The Lord became impatient with him, and replied that his brother Aaron could be his spokesman.

Moses took leave of Jethro and set out with his wife, his eldest son Gershom and his newly-born second son Eliezer. Along the way Moses became ill, and Zipporah circumcised the infant with a sharp flint in the belief that her husband would die if the

rite were neglected.

Let My People Go

Aaron came to meet Moses and was told what the Lord required of them.

They called together the Israelite elders, and in Moses's presence Aaron conveyed the Lord's message and performed the magic signs. The people were convinced that God was about to liberate them and sank down in worship.

Moses and Aaron then gained an audience with the reigning Pharaoh (probably the successor of the ruler from whom Moses had fled). In the name of the God of Israel they requested him to 'Let my people go' (Exod. 5:1). They did not dare suggest that the Israelites would leave the country for good. Instead, they claimed that sacrifices had to be made to their God at a place three days') journey into the wilderness.

Pharaoh bluntly rejected the request. He charged the Israelites with laziness, and issued instructions that they should no longer be supplied with straw for making bricks. They would have to seek their own straw, without lowering their daily output. The people reproached Moses for having added to their hardships, and Moses complained to the Lord that his mission had only done harm. 'For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he has done evil to this people, and thou hast not delivered thy people at all.' (Exod. 5:23) The Lord declared that he had hardened Pharaoh's heart in order that 'the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them' (Exod. 7:5).

The whole of Egypt now experienced a series of plagues, except for the land of Goshen where the Israelites lived. As each plague became intolerable Pharaoh agreed to let Moses's people go, but changed his mind when the affliction stopped.

First, Aaron and Moses smote the water of the Nile with the rod and it turned to blood before the eyes of Pharaoh and his court. 'And the fish in the Nile died; and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.' (Exod. 7:21)

When Pharaoh refused to give way, frogs came swarming out of the river and spread everywhere, as Moses had warned Pharaoh they would, crawling 'into your house, and into your bedchamber and on your bed, and into the house of your servants and of your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls.' (Exod. 8:3)

The third plague was one of lice which sprang from the dust and infected man and beast alike. There followed swarms of flies; cattle disease; an epidemic of boils; a fierce hailstorm-n that smashed the trees and flattened the crops; vast clouds of locusts that devoured all growing things; and three days of pitch darkness.

The tenth calamity was the most dreadful of all - the slaying of the first-born.

The Lord commanded Moses and Aaron that on the fourteenth day of the month, at dusk, each Israelite family should slaughter a lamb or kid and roast its flesh for a sacrificial meal. 'In this manner you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's passover.' (Exod. 12:11) Blood from the slaughtered animal was to be daubed on the lintel and doorposts so that the Lord would recognise and pass over Hebrew homes,

while smiting the Egyptians.

At midnight the first-born died in every Egyptian family, and even among the domestic animals. There was grief and panic throughout the country. That same night Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron and begged them to leave at once with their people, together with all their herds, flocks and possessions. The Egyptians handed over to them jewels and other valuables to speed their departure. They set out at once from the city of Rameses that their forced labour had helped to build.

In fulfilment of an ancient promise, the remains of Joseph were carried with them for burial in Canaan.

'Four hundred and thirty years', says the Bible (Exod. 12:41), had passed since their ancestor Jacob had first come to live in Egypt.

Forty years of wandering lay ahead of them before they would reach their journey's end. Moses was at this time eighty years old and his brother Aaron eighty-three.

Each year Jews commemorate the Exodus in the seven-day spring festival of Passover, as enjoined in Exod. 10. They eat 'matzot' (flat cakes of unleavened bread) to recall the haste with which their ancestors departed. At the 'Seder' or ceremonial meal, bitter herbs are the symbol of the bondage in Egypt, and a roasted shank-bone represents the paschal lamb eaten that fateful night.

In the Wilderness

The great highway from Egypt to Canaan and beyond lay along the Mediterranean coast of the Sinai desert. From the edge of the Nile delta to Gaza it was but a week's march for armies or trading caravans. But that direct and well-travelled route was the most dangerous for the Israelites; and the coastal plain of Canaan to which it led was held by hostile inhabitants.

A mob of runaway slaves would not have been able to fight its way through to the Promised Land. So Moses turned away from the coastal road 'lest the people repent when they see war, and return to Egypt' (Exod. 13:17). Instead, they headed south-east, towards the open desert.

The first halt was at Succoth, thirty-two miles from the city of Rameses, and the next at Etham on the edge of the desert. They were trying to move as fast as they could, fearing that Pharaoh would pursue them. 'And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and night.' (Exod. 13:21)

Their haste was warranted. Pharaoh's courtiers said to him, 'What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?' (Exod. 14:5) He set out in pursuit with a mobile force that included six hundred chariots. When the Israelites saw them coming, they trembled with fear and cried out to Moses, 'Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?' (Exod. 14:11)

They were at this time at the edge of the Reed Sea (incorrectly translated into English as the 'Red Sea'). Nothing but a miracle could save them. At the Lord's behest, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and a strong east wind pushed the water aside, so that the Children of Israel were able to cross dry-shod to the other side.

Dashing after them, Pharaoh's chariots were engulfed for 'the waters returned' (Exod. 14:28), and men and horses were drowned. (This may have happened in the area of the Bitter Lakes, through which the Suez Canal now passes.)

When the Israelites 'saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore' (Exod. 14:30), they sang a song of thankfulness to the Lord, while Moses's sister Miriam played on a timbrel (tambourine) and led the women in dance.

The elation of their new-found freedom was short-lived. They now entered the wilderness of Shur in the Sinai peninsula - a wasteland of sand and gravel, intersected with limestone ridges and dry watercourses, in the beds of which a little sparse scrub could be found for the flocks. The sun scorched them by day and the cold was sharp at night.

The chief problem was water. After trekking for three days, they reached a spring of brackish water at Marah (which means 'bitter'). Moses threw a certain bush into the water which made it drinkable. A day's march further on they were able to camp in the oasis of Elim, 'where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees' (Exod. 15:27).

Soon they ran out of food and railed at Moses and Aaron for taking them away from the 'flesh pots' (Exod. 16:3) of Egypt. The Lord would come to the rescue, Moses promised, and would provide 'in the evening flesh to eat and in the morning bread to the full' (Exod. 16:8). Flocks of migrating quails sank down to rest among the scrub at night and could easily be snared (as the desert Arabs do today).

In the early morning, when the dew vanished, the ground was strewn with manna, and 'it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.' (Exod. 6:31) Moses told them the manna was bread from the Lord. They were to gather and prepare just enough to satisfy their hunger, for what was not eaten would go bad in the heat of the day.

On the sixth day a double portion could be gathered, and would remain fresh over the Sabbath. (It has been suggested that the manna may have been the resin-like substance that is exuded by the tamarisk trees in the desert, and drops on the ground when dry.)

The Israelites moved deeper into the southern part of the Sinai desert and came to Rephidim. Once more they were without water, and complained loudly. Moses was told by the Lord to gather the elders together and in their presence smite a rock. He did so and fresh water gushed out. Moses called the place 'Massah and Meribah' ('testing and contention') (Exod. 17:7).

They now faced a human threat, being attacked by a party of Amalekites, fierce desert raiders. The Israelites were not yet organised or trained to fight. Moses sent for Joshua the son of Nun, a young Ephraimite, and told him to select and lead a group of Israelite defenders. Moses himself climbed to the top of a hill together with Aaron and Hur (traditionally Moses's brother-in-law); and from here they witnessed the battle.

While Moses held up his hands with the sacred rod, the Israelites gained, but they were pushed back when his arms dropped from weariness. His two companions seated him on a stone and, standing on either side of him, held his arms raised in the air until nightfall, when the battle was won and the Amalekites routed. Moses built an altar to the Lord.

In the third month after leaving Egypt, the Israelites reached the wild and rugged terrain of the wilderness of Sinai. In its centre a cluster of gaunt granite peaks of a dark-red colour rose to a height of eight thousand feet, with deep canyons around them. The Israelites camped on the open ground before a peak called Mount Sinai or Mount Horeb. It was here that Moses had heard the voice of the Lord from the burning bush many years before. Jethro now came to see Moses, bringing Zipporah and their two sons, who had been on a visit to her family.

Moses welcomed the old man warmly, and they sat for a long time in the tent talking about all the wondrous things that had happened since Moses had gone back to Egypt. The Midianite priest exclaimed: 'Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods.' (Exod. 18:11) Jethro offered a sacrifice on the Hebrew altar and Moses invited the elders to a feast in his honour.

Jethro was present next day while Moses gave judgment in the disputes and claims brought before him. In the evening Jethro offered his son-in-law some sage advice. It was too burdensome for Moses to deal personally with every trivial matter, while scores of people stood around awaiting their turn. Why should Moses not delegate authority to able men, and put each in charge of a fixed number of persons?

Moses agreed, and appointed 'rulers of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And they judged the people at all times; hard cases they brought to Moses.' (Exod. 18:25, 26) Moses charged them to 'judge righteously between a man and his brother or the alien that is with him. You shall not be partial in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike; you shall not be afraid of the face of man, for the judgment is God's. 'Deut. 1:16-17)

Having instigated this system of administration, Jethro took his leave and returned to his own land.

The Ten Commandments

It was timely for Moses to be relieved of routine duties, for the Lord was about to call on him to fulfil a loftier purpose. The stage was set for one of the most awesome moments in human history: the handing down of the Law on Mount Sinai.

God called Moses up to the mountain and instructed him to tell the Children of Israel that if they would keep his covenant 'you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation' (Exod. 19:6). They were ordered to wash and purify themselves for two days, and on the third day they gathered before the mountain that was covered with a thick cloud.

Out of it came thunder, lightning and the loud blasts of a trumpet. 'And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly.' (Exod. 19:18) Then the voice of God rolled forth, solemnly pronouncing the Ten Commandments:

1. 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself a graven image.
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
4. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God.

5.'Honour your father and your mother.

6.'You shall not kill.

7.'You shall not commit adultery.

8.'You shall not steal.

9.'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

10.'You shall not covet your neighbour's house or anything that is your neighbour's. ' Exod. 20:2-17)

A number of other laws were then made known to Moses. He built a stone altar with twelve pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel and instructed young men to sacrifice oxen on it. Moses read out ' the book of the covenant' (Exod. 24:7) and sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices on the people as 'the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words' (Exod. 24:8).

He then left Aaron and Hur in charge of the encampment and disappeared into the cloud that still covered the mountain. There he remained for forty days and forty nights, communing with the Lord ' At the end of that time God gave him two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God' (Exod. 31:18).

Down in the camp, the Israelites had lost faith when Moses failed to reappear. They came in a body to Aaron and said, 'Up, make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' (Exod. 32:1) Aaron felt obliged to appease them. He asked for all the gold earrings worn by the men and women, melted them down, and moulded a golden calf. The people made burnt-offerings to it, and they sang, feasted and danced naked around it.

On the mountain the Lord told Moses what his 'stiff-necked people' (Exod. 32:9) were doing, and threatened to destroy them. Moses pleaded for them, and the Lord relented. But when Moses came down and saw the spectacle with his own eyes, he was seized with rage and dashed the two stone tablets to the ground, breaking them.

Moses threw the golden calf into the fire, ground it up, mixed it with water and made the Israelites swallow it. He upbraided Aaron, who tried to defend himself, saying, 'you know the people, that they are set on evil' (Exod. 32:22). Moses felt a drastic purge was needed. He rallied round him the men from the priestly tribe of Levi (to which he and Aaron belonged) and ordered them to put to the sword a large number of the idol-worshippers.

This painful experience left Moses with a sense of failure, and he asked the Lord to relieve him of the leadership. The reply was that the journey to the Promised Land should continue as before. Moses again ascended the sacred mountain, carrying two stone tablets he had hewed to replace those smashed. Once more he stayed there forty days and nights without food or water.

When he returned with 'the words of the covenant, the ten commandments' (Exod. 34:28) engraved on the tablets for the second time, Aaron and the Israelites observed that his face shone with such light that 'they were afraid to come near him' (Exod. 34:30).

The Lord had given Moses precise instructions for the construction of an Ark of acacia wood covered with gold, and a Tabernacle with an open-air altar. They were to form a portable temple for the Israelites' wandering life.

The Ark containing the tablets of the Law was placed in the Tabernacle, which was consecrated by Moses in the presence of all the people. As long as the pillar of cloud or of fire stood still over the Tabernacle, it was a sign that the Israelites should remain at that spot until the pillar moved forward again.

Before the Israelites set out once more, Moses adopted two measures to increase their cohesion and their selfdefence: a military census and a marching order. The census covered men of military age from twenty upwards, 'all in Israel who are able to go forth to war' (Num. 1:3), except for the Levites who were exempted because of their religious duties. The order in which Moses organised the tribes for travel gave each family clan its fixed position. The Levites were in the centre of a square, carrying the Ark, the Tabernacle and other sacred objects. On each of the four sides a group of three tribes formed up around a standard. The start of the march was marked by a series of trumpet blasts.

Moses prevailed on his Midianite brother-in-law Hobab to come with the Israelites as guide, since he was born and bred in the desert and familiar with it: 'for you know how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and you will serve as eyes for us.' (Num. 10:31)

From Sinai to Kadesh

In the second month of the second year the Children of Israel moved northward from Mount Sinai towards the wilderness of Paran, in the central plateau of the Sinai peninsula. Soon trouble broke out again, this time over the monotonous diet of manna.

As refugees are apt to do, they became nostalgic for the land they had fled. Tearfully they asked, 'O that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.' (Num. 11:4, 5)

Moses felt weary of leading the discontented community he had brought out of slavery. He said to the Lord: 'I am not able to carry all this people along, the burden is too heavy for me. If thou wilt deal thus with me, kill me now.' (Num. 11:14,15). At this cry of distress, the Lord saw that Moses needed help in carrying the burden.

He had Moses summon seventy elders to the Tabernacle, and inspired them, so that they would serve as a council to share responsibility with him. As for the people's demand for flesh, the Lord taught them a lesson. Huge flocks of quail were blown inland from the sea and piled up all round the camp. For two days the Israelites gorged themselves on the meat of the birds until they fell violently ill and a number of them died.

At their next camping place Aaron and Miriam started speaking against Moses, of whom they had become jealous. The Lord was angry at this attack, and Miriam was stricken with leprosy. Moses prayed that she be forgiven, and she recovered after seven days of isolation in the desert outside the camp. Oddly enough Aaron was not punished - perhaps because of his priestly role.

The Israelites resumed their journey northward, and came to rest at Kadesh-barnea, a green and well watered oasis some fifty miles south of Beersheba. They were now nearing the southern rim of Canaan, but it was for them unknown country. Moses decided to send into it a scouting party of twelve picked men, one from each tribe to 'see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are -strong or

weak, whether they are few or many' (Num. 13:18) - also, whether the inhabitants lived in fortified towns or in tents, and whether the soil was fertile.

The spies crossed the Negev, passed Arad on the plateau above the Dead Sea, and travelled through the central hill-country of Canaan. The party reached Kadesh safely after a forty-day trip and reported that Canaan was truly a land flowing with milk and honey. Nevertheless 'the people who dwell in the land are strong and the cities are fortified and very large; and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there.' (Num. 13:28) (*Anak* is Hebrew for 'giant'.)

They also reported on the Amalekites who dwelt in the and south of Canaan, and the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites and other peoples in the settled areas further north. As Moses had requested, they brought back specimens of the fruit they had seen: figs, pomegranates and a bunch of grapes so large that it had to be carried on a pole slung between two men. They had picked it near Hebron at the brook of Eshcol, a name which means 'grape-cluster'.

One of the scouts, Caleb of the tribe of Judah, proposed that in spite of the dangers they should advance into the country without delay and trust the Lord to help them overcome resistance. He was supported only by Joshua from the tribe of Ephraim. The other ten were much more discouraging. They submitted 'an evil report of the land ... that devours its inhabitants; all the people that we saw in it are men of great stature ... and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers.' (Num. 13:32, 33)

The gathering that listened to the report was cast into gloom. What was the good of bringing them to the Promised Land, they said, in order to be slain in it? It would be better to find a new leader who would take them back to Egypt. A wrathful Lord decreed that for their lack of belief in Him, they would stay wandering in the desert for forty years, till that generation had died out, except for Joshua and Caleb.

The Children of Israel now settled down for some decades to the life of nomad shepherds and cattle-herders roaming the wilderness of Zin, with their base at the oasis. 'So you remained at Kadesh many days.' (Deut. 1:46) During this period Moses developed the religious code and the rituals of worship. The stern discipline with which observance was enforced was illustrated by the case of the man who gathered sticks for firewood on the Sabbath and was ordered to be stoned to death.

The leadership of Moses and Aaron was challenged by a revolt -all the more serious because it started with their own tribe of Levi, which was dedicated to priestly duties. It was led by the Levite Korah the son of Izhar, together with two Reubenite brothers, Dathan and Abiram, and they were supported by two hundred and fifty respected men.

Punishment was swift. The earth split open and swallowed up the three rebel leaders with their households. The two hundred and fifty supporters were consumed by fire from the Lord. Moses felt the need of some act to bolster the status of Aaron and the priests. He collected and placed in the Tabernacle a staff from each of the tribes, with the Levites represented by Aaron's own rod. When they were taken out and shown to the people next morning, it was seen that Aaron's staff had sprouted with blossom and borne almonds.

Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, died at Kadesh and was buried there.

Onward to Canaan

After nearly forty years had gone by, most of them spent at Kadesh, the time had come to resume the march towards the Promised Land. Unable to penetrate Canaan from the south, the Israelites now set out on a lengthy detour in order to enter from the east, across the Jordan river. The route northward into Transjordan lay along the ancient caravan route known as the King's Highway.

Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom, to say, 'Now let us pass through your land. We will not pass through field or vineyard, neither will we drink water from a well; we will go along the King's Highway, we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left, until we have passed through your territory.' (Num. 20:17) The king refused, and Moses thought it prudent to bypass Edom from the west, travelling up the great rift of Wadi Araba towards the Dead Sea. On the way, Aaron died on top of Mount Hor where he had been taken by Moses and by Aaron's son Eleazar, who succeeded him as high priest.

The Israelites now had a taste of the warfare that lay ahead. They were attacked and a number of them killed and captured by Canaanites from Arad, that lies on the plateau west of the Dead Sea. Further on, they passed through a region infested with venomous snakes and some of them were bitten. Moses stuck a brass serpent on a pole, and looking at it served as a magic cure for snake bite.

From the southern end of the Dead Sea, they turned eastward into the mountains, through the precipitous valley of Zered that divided Edom from Moab. They emerged on the plateau and skirted round Moab to the deep gorge of the river Amon that entered the Dead Sea from the east.

The country north of the Amon had recently been conquered by the Amorites under King Sihon. He also refused the Israelites passage and attacked them. He was defeated and his capital Heshbon occupied. The advance continued northward into the fertile land of Gilead, up to the Yarmuk river. Og, the giant king of Bashan (the Golan Heights) gave them battle and was repulsed. Thus ended the first phase of the Israelite invasion.

The Israelites started to cohabit with Moabite women, and were drawn into the cult of the local deity, the Baal of Peor. The Lord smote them with a plague but was mollified by the act of an outraged priest called Phinehas, son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron. He seized a javelin, rushed into a tent where an Israelite was lying with a Midianite woman and with one blow transfixed them both.

The camel-riding Midianites in the region seem to have been involved in this Israelite immorality. An Israelite expedition was sent against them, with a thousand men from each tribe. They wiped out the Midianite encampments with religious zeal, sparing only the young girls. Moses ruled on the division of the captured livestock: half to the fighting men and half to the rest of the community, with special shares for the priesthood.

Another census was taken and showed that none of the men of the Exodus was left alive, except for Joshua, Caleb and Moses himself. A new breed of Israelites had grown up as free men, hardened by the rigours of desert life and disciplined by the laws Moses had taught them.

Out of the craven and unruly bondsmen that had emerged from Egypt, Moses had in forty years moulded a small but stalwart nation, ready to meet its destiny in the Promised Land. He was not to share that destiny; his own task was nearly done.

The Death of Moses

In three farewell addresses, recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses recalled for the Israelites the story of their wandering; expanded their religious and legal code; and instructed them about their coming settlement in Canaan. He climaxed his religious exhortations with the 'Shema Yisrael' - 'Hear, O Israel' - which has remained to this day the most celebrated prayer in the Jewish liturgy.

To a desert-weary people Moses painted a pleasant picture of the country they were about to enter:

'For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks, of water, of fountains and springs and flowing forth in valleys and hills, a river land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. '(Deut. 8:7-9)

Moses composed a song of praise to God, whom he had served so humbly and faithfully, and gave his blessing to each of the tribes in turn.

He asked the Lord to appoint a new leader to whom he could hand over his charge 'that the congregation of the desert Lord may not be as sheep which have no shepherd' (Num. 27:17). It was indicated that Moses's successor would be Joshua the son of Nun, 'a man in whom is the spirit' (Num. 27:18).

At a solemn ceremony in the Tabernacle before Eleazar the High Priest and all the congregation, with the presence of the Lord in a pillar of cloud over the door, Moses laid his hands upon Joshua and said, 'Be strong and of good courage; for you shall go with this people into the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them; and you shall put them in possession of it.' (Deut. 31:7)

The men of Reuben and Gad asked whether they could remain in the territory east of the river. They were herdsmen, and these rolling uplands would give good grazing for their cattle and sheep. Moses rebuked them: 'Shall your brethren go to the war while you sit here? Why will you discourage the heart of the people of Israel from going over into the land which the Lord has given them? Thus did your fathers, when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land.' (Num. 32:6-8)

A compromise was reached. They would establish their families and herds in Transjordan, cross the river with the other tribes to fight their way into Canaan, and return when it had been subdued. Part of the tribe of Manasseh joined in this arrangement, as they were attracted by the wooded ridges and fertile dales of Gilead, and wanted to settle there.

Before he died, Moses was given a distant view of the Promised Land from 'Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho' (Deut. 34:1). On a height jutting out from the great escarpment, Moses stood with his back to the Moab plateau, stretching away to the empty desert beyond the eastern horizon. Before him a tremendous panorama unfolded.

Thousands of feet below glittered the Dead Sea, the lowest body of water on the earth's surface. Beyond it rose the dun-coloured rampart of the Judean desert, with Jerusalem and Hebron and other Canaanite cities hidden behind its rim. To the right, the Jordan river looped snake-like through lush green banks. And the Lord said: 'I

have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there.' (Deut. 34:4)

After this single view Moses died and was buried by the Lord 'in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor; but no man knows the place of his burial to this day' (Deut. 34:6). At his death he was a hundred and twenty years old, but 'his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated' (Deut, 34:7). For thirty days the Children of Israel wept and mourned for the great leader and teacher they had lost, 'And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.' (Deut. 34:10). There are references to Moses throughout the Old Testament. His history is given: Exod. 2-40; Book of Numbers; Deut. 1-34.1

The Law of Moses

The body of Hebrew legislation in the Pentateuch was developed over many centuries from many sources, and constituted a unique code. Whatever similarities of detail there might have been with other ancient codes, such as that of Hammurabi in Babylon, the Law of Moses had nothing in common with them in its religious beliefs or in its humanism.

The central message is the mono theism which the Hebrew people were the first to expound - the worship of one single, invisible and just God, and the rejection of every form of idolatry and paganism.

The first and most important of the Ten Commandments was:

'You shall have no other gods before me.' (Exod. 20:3)

But the Mosaic Code goes far beyond religious observance in the narrow sense. It deals with political, social and family affairs in a progressive spirit well in advance of its period.

For example: there must be no arbitrary exercise of power; even a king must fear God and obey the law, 'that his heart may not be lifted up above his brethren, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left' (Deut. 17:20).

Justice must be impartially administered, for rich and poor alike:

'You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns which the Lord your God gives you, according to your tribes; and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment.

'You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality; and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise, and subverts the cause of the righteous.' (Deut. 16:18-19)

Special protection is extended to the needy and the under-privileged, to fugitive slaves, debtors, hired servants, orphans, widows and foreigners.

Women must be respected, and a slander against the chastity of a wife is a crime. Even the ox may not be muzzled while it is treading the grain on the threshing floor, and the mother bird must be spared if eggs are collected from her nest. There must be fair practices in commerce - 'a full and just weight you shall have, a full and just measure you shall have' (Deut. 25:15).

Men shall be exempted from military service if they have recently built a house, planted a vineyard or betrothed a wife, or are faint-hearted. Always, in his dealings with others, the Hebrew must say to himself: 'Love the sojourner therefore; for you

were sojourners in the land of Egypt.' (Deut. 10:19)

For century after century, the Jewish rabbis and sages discussed and refined the Laws of Moses. Their commentaries were gathered together in the huge tomes of the Talmud, which a learned man might study all his life without exhausting them. In this fashion was shaped the distinctive outlook and way of life which the Jewish people carried with them to all the countries of their dispersion.

Through Christianity, the Hebrew code profoundly influenced the civilisation of the Western world.

Jethro

(meaning "excellence") circa. 13 century BC. Father-in-law of Moses. Jethro was a priest, and leader of a Midianite tribe known as Kenites, who lived in the Sinai desert.

When Moses fled from Egypt after killing Pharaoh's overseer, he lived with Jethro, married his daughter Zipporah, and tended his sheep.

Years later, when Moses was again in the Sinai desert leading the Children of Israel, his father-in-law came to visit him at the Rephidim camp. Moses was delighted to see Jethro and told him how the Lord had delivered them out of the hands of the Egyptians. Jethro said, 'Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods.' (Exod. 18:11) Jethro offered a burnt sacrifice to God, and Aaron and all the elders came to have a meal with him.

Jethro advised Moses to appoint judges to whom he would teach the Laws and delegate some of the work, leaving only the difficult cases for himself. 'Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way to his own country.' (Exod. 18:27). Some scholars have suggested that Jethro, also known as Hobab or Reuel, acted as a guide to Moses in the Sinai desert. Others think that Hobab was Jethro's son.

Abraham

(Heb. 'father is exalted') c. 18-16 centuries BC. First patriarch, Abraham was the founder of the Hebrew nation. In Jewish, Christian and Moslem tradition, he emerges as a father-figure - dignified, firm in his faith, humane, respected by the local rulers wherever he went. He moves slowly and majestically across the Near Eastern world of nearly four thousand years ago, from Mesopotamia to Egypt. The main setting for his story is the central hill-country in the Land of Canaan promised to him and his seed by God.

Abram (as he was first called) came originally from 'Ur of the Chaldeans' (Gen. 11:28), a Sumerian city in the Euphrates valley, near the head of the Persian Gulf. With his father Terah, his wife Sarai (later Sarah) and his nephew Lot, he moved up the river till they came to rest in Haran, a trading centre in northern Aram (as Syria was then called). The family settled in this area, and here Terah died.

At Haran the Lord appeared to Abram and told him to leave for 'the land that I will show you' (Gen. 12:1) where he would make of Abram's great nation' (Gen. 12:2).

With Sarai and Lot he travelled to Canaan, and reached Shechem (the modern Nablus). Abram built an altar there, and another near Bethel (a little north of Jerusalem). The Lord again appeared to him and said: 'To your descendants I will give this land.' (Gen. 12:7) This promise was repeated during Abram's lifetime.

There was a famine in the land, and Abram's party continued to the southwest

until they arrived in Egypt, then the granary of the region.

Sarai was a beautiful woman and Abram passed her off as his sister for fear that he might otherwise be killed because of her. Reports of her looks reached Pharaoh, who had her brought into his household, generously compensating her 'brother' with servants and livestock. The Lord intervened with plagues, and when Pharaoh learnt the truth he reproachfully returned Sarai to her husband and urged them to leave. (Later, Abram had a similar experience with Abimelech, king of Gerar, a Philistine city, near Gaza.)

They returned from Egypt to the hills north of Jerusalem. Both Abram and Lot had by this time acquired large herds of cattle, and there was strife between their herdsmen over the limited grazing. Uncle and nephew agreed to part amicably and Lot, given the choice by Abram, headed eastward to the 'Jordan valley' (Gen. 13:10), where stood the two cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abram himself settled in the plain of Mamre outside Hebron.

The Lord revealed to Abram that he intended to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abram pleaded with Him to spare the cities for the sake of the good men who might be among the inhabitants, and after some bargaining, the required minimum number of righteous men was fixed at ten. But in the end even this number was not found. Abram knew that his compassionate pleas had not helped when he saw the smoke rising from the stricken cities.

Sodom and Gomorrah were attacked by four kings from the north, and Lot was among those taken captive. Setting out in pursuit, Abram carried out a night assault near Dan, chased the enemy to a point near Damascus, and returned with the liberated captives. He restored the plunder to the king of Sodom, refusing to accept any of it for himself. Abram was a man of peace and this rescue of Lot was his only recorded martial exploit.

Isaac and Ishmael

As Abram and Sarai had remained without issue, she proposed that he should have a child with her Egyptian maid Hagar, who bore him a son called Ishmael. When Abram was ninety-nine and Sarai ninety, the Lord appeared to him again and said that henceforth his name would be Abraham, 'for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations' (Gen. 17:5). Sarai's name was changed to Sarah princess').

As a physical token of Abraham's covenant with him, the Lord instructed him to circumcise himself and all members of his household, and thereafter every male infant when he was eight days old. (The 'brith millah' - covenant of the circumcision - has been religiously observed by Jews to this day.)

When the Lord told the aged Abraham that Sarah would give birth to a son, he 'fell on his face and laughed' (Gen. 17:17). One hot day Abraham sat in the doorway of his tent at Mamre and saw three strangers approaching. He went forward to offer them hospitality. They were angels who told him once more that Sarah would bear him a son. Sarah overheard this from within the tent, and she too laughed as she was well past child-bearing age. But in due course Isaac (meaning he laughed') was born, as had been foretold.

Abraham gave a great feast when the infant was weaned. Sarah was stung by the mockery of Hagar and her son Ishmael, and demanded that Abraham cast them out. Being a kindly man he was greatly troubled, but the Lord told him to do as Sarah

had asked, at the same time reassuring him that his descendants through Ishmael would also be a great nation. Abraham provided Hagar with a supply of bread and water and she left with the boy.

Abraham journeyed southward again, into the territory of Abimelech, the Philistine king of Gerar. Trouble over a well (a vital matter in this and area) brought the two men together in a pact of friendship, consecrated by a solemn swearing ceremony. The place where this happened was named Beersheba (the Well of the Swearing').

Abraham's obedience to God was now put to an agonising test. He was commanded to slay his beloved son Isaac at a distant mountain top as a burnt-offering to the Lord. Abraham set out on his ass, taking with him Isaac, two young servants and some firewood.

On the third day they neared the place. Abraham left the two servants with the ass, and continued on foot with Isaac. On the way the puzzled lad said to his father 'Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' (Gen. 22:7) The old man evaded the question by saying the Lord would provide the lamb.

When they reached the indicated spot Abraham built an altar, placed the bound boy upon the firewood, and took up the knife. At this dread moment the voice of an angel was heard saying: 'Do not lay your hand on the lad ... for now I know that you fear God.' (Gen. 22:12)

In a nearby thicket Abraham saw a ram caught by the horns, and the animal was sacrificed instead of the boy. This episode also served to symbolise the rejection in the Hebrew faith of child-sacrifice practised by pagan cults.

When Sarah died at Hebron at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven, Abraham sought a family burying place and purchased from Ephron the Hittite the Cave of Machpelah and the field in which it stood, for four hundred shekels of silver. Here Sarah was laid to rest.

Abraham, now an aged man, concerned himself with finding a wife for Isaac. He sent for the trusted old retainer who managed his household, and confided in him that he did not want Isaac to marry a local Canaanite girl. The servant was instructed to travel to the Haran area from which Abraham had come to Canaan, and to seek a bride for Isaac among his kindred there. He returned with Rebekah, the young granddaughter of one of Abraham's brothers.

Abraham took another wife, Keturah, and had a number of children by her. He appointed Isaac the heir of his possessions, while making provision for his other children, including the sons of his concubines whom he sent to dwell further to the east in order to protect Isaac. Abraham died at the age of one hundred and seventy-five and was buried with Sarah in the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron.

For Jews, the story of Abraham is of national importance, for it marks their transitional beginning as a people and their divine charter to the Land of Israel. In the religious sense, it also symbolises the break with pagan idolatry and the commitment to monotheism.

In the New Testament, Abraham is held up as the example of the godfearing and righteous man. Abraham is more revered by Moslems than any other biblical personage, and is known in the Koran as El Khalil, the Friend of God. The Arabs still

call Hebron 'El Khalil', and the Cave of Machpelah is sacred to the Moslems as well.

The Jaffa Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem, from which the road to Hebron started, is inscribed with a verse from the Koran: 'There is no God but Allah, and Abraham is beloved of Him.' [Gen. 11:26-25:10]

The Cave of Machpelah and the Oak of Mamre

The traditional Cave of Machpelah in Hebron is marked by a huge fort-like structure which was built by King Herod in the 1st century BC. Its outer walls are of great stone blocks rising to a height of more than forty feet. Several additions were made during the Byzantine, Mameluke and Ottoman periods, for this Jewish burial shrine later became holy also to Christians and Moslems. The crenellated battlements and two square corner minarets are Mameluke.

The southern part of the enclosure is now a mosque. It was formerly a 12th century Crusader church, and before that a Byzantine basilica. Six cenotaphs with embroidered silk coverings are said to stand exactly above the burial places in the cave beneath that of the patriarchs and their wives: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah. A seventh is held by some to mark the resting place of Joseph. Through a grating in the floor may be glimpsed the original cave. There are fine examples of stained glass windows from the 12th century AD made of the famous Hebron glass.

A mile away from Machpelah, along a road running off the Bethlehem Hebron highway, is an old oak tree, barely alive, its branches supported by iron stakes. It has been known since the 12th century AD as Abraham's Oak or the Oak of Mamre. After leaving Lot near Bethel, Abraham came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron; and there he built an altar unto the Lord' (Gen. 13:18). The oak stands in the grounds of the Russian Holy Trinity Church, monastery and hospice, built at the end of the last century.

Isaac

(Heb. 'he laughed') c. 18-16 centuries BC. The second patriarch son of Abraham.

Abraham was ninety-nine years old when the Lord told him that his barren wife Sarah would bear him a son. According to the account in Genesis, Abraham laughed in his heart, and Sarah was also bitterly amused because she was ninety and long past child-bearing age. The son was called Isaac (Hebrew *Yitzchak*) meaning 'he laughed'.

When Isaac was a young lad, Abraham's obedience to God was put to a fearful test. He was told to take the boy to a distant mountain top and sacrifice him to the Lord. They set out with two young servants and a load of firewood. When they neared the place, the servants and the ass were left behind and father and son went forward on foot. Isaac asked, 'Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' (Gen. 22:7) Abraham replied evasively that the Lord would provide the lamb.

At the spot for the sacrifice, Abraham erected an altar, arranged the wood on it, and laid the bound boy on top. When he stretched his hand for the knife an angel of the Lord intervened, and a ram that was seen in a nearby thicket was sacrificed instead of Isaac.

Stricken in years, Abraham concerned himself with finding a wife for Isaac, then forty years old. Abraham did not want him to marry a local Canaanite girl, so he sent a trusted servant to his own kinsmen in Haran (northern Syria). The servant returned with Rebekah, the daughter of Abraham's nephew.

One evening Isaac was strolling through the fields when he saw the camel caravan approaching. Rebekah modestly veiled herself and alighted to greet him. 'Then Isaac brought her into the tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.' (Gen. 24:67)

Nearing the end of his days, Abraham declared that Isaac would be the heir to his estate. To avoid trouble later, Abraham gave gifts to the sons he had had by concubines and sent them to live further east. Abraham died and was buried next to Sarah in the Cave of Machpelah by Isaac and his half-brother Ishmael, the son of Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian slave-maid.

At first Rebekah was barren but after Isaac had appealed to the Lord, she gave birth to twins. The first to be born was Esau, covered with red hair, and then Jacob, clutching his brother's heel.

There was a famine in the land and Isaac started moving with his flocks and herds towards Egypt, as his father Abraham had done in an earlier famine. He reached Gerar, ruled over by his father's friend (or his friend's namesake) Abimelech. Here the Lord appeared to him and told him not to go down to Egypt but to stay in that area. The Lord recalled his covenant with Abraham and repeated to Isaac the promise that he would be blessed and multiply and the land would belong to his seed. So Isaac remained in Gerar.

As Abraham had done with Sarah, Isaac passed Rebekah off as his sister. for fear that he might be killed for her sake, as she too was fair to look upon. Looking through a window Abimelech saw Isaac and Rebekah together and realised they were husband and wife. He was angry at first at the deception but gave orders that anyone who molested them would be put to death.

Isaac re-opened the wells that Abraham had dug in this area and that had been filled in again. He reaped good crops from his sowing; his herds and flocks multiplied and he became wealthy and important. This aroused local envy. At Abimelech's suggestion, Isaac moved further away, though remaining in the region of Gerar and Beersheba. Again he located and restored some of Abraham's wells.

There was friction with local shepherds over two of these watering places, but at the third, Rehoboth, they were left in peace. Isaac said, 'For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.' (Gen. 26:99) Isaac built an altar at Beersheba as his father had done.

Isaac's Blessing

Being aged and practically blind, Isaac sent for his favourite son Esau who was a skilled hunter. He asked him to take his quiver and bow, shoot a deer and prepare some of the venison he loved. He would then bless him before he died. Rebekah overheard this, and determined to secure the blessing for Jacob whom she loved more.

She told Jacob to slaughter two young goats, made a savoury stew of the meat, and sent it in to Isaac with Jacob pretending to be Esau. To make the deception more

effective, she covered Jacob's smooth hands and neck with bits of the fleece of the slain kids (for Esau was a hairy man) and she put Esau's garment on Jacob.

Isaac was suspicious at first, saying, 'The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.' (Gen. 27:9?) But when he asked Jacob to come near and kiss him, the smell of the fields clinging to Esau's garment convinced him. He then gave Jacob his blessing, declaring that he would be the head of the family when Isaac died and his brethren would serve him.

Esau came in with the venison he had prepared for his father, and Isaac realised he had been deceived. But he could not now take back the blessing bestowed on Jacob. Esau, wailing with anger and grief, pressed Isaac to bless him as well. The old man replied that Esau would have to serve Jacob, but he too would prosper and become independent.

Fearing that Esau would kill Jacob in revenge, Rebekah persuaded Isaac to send Jacob to her brother Laban in Haran so that he too should marry someone of his own kin.

Isaac died at the age of one hundred and eighty and was buried by his twin sons Esau and Jacob in the Cave of Machpelah at Hebron, with his father and mother and his wife Rebekah.

Of the three patriarchs, Isaac is a less striking figure than either his father Abraham or his son Jacob.

In the dramatic episode of the sacrifice, he shows a touching faith and docility towards his father. In his later life, moving through the Southland with his flocks, he stays in his father's footsteps, re-digging Abraham's abandoned wells. As soon as there is friction with the local inhabitants, he chooses to move elsewhere.

In his old age, he is not only deceived by his wife and his son Jacob, but seems helpless to undo the wrong done to the first-born son Esau, cheated of the paternal blessing.

The character that emerges from the story is not strong, but benign, pious and gentle. [Gen. 17-28]

Bezaleel

Was of the tribe of Judah and his name means "in the shadow of God" He was a very clever craftsman and designer, charged by God to execute various works of art required for the Tabernacle in the wilderness. As well as a highly skilled artisan, he was also an exceptionally good teacher. His skills lay mainly in working with metal, wood and stone. He was grandson of Hur who is known to us from the second degree. He together with Aaron, held up the hands of Moses during the battle of Rephidim. He and Aaron were also left in charge when Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. His father was Uri, a name which means "Flaming Fire", who was gatekeeper at the Temple.

Aholiab

"Aholiab" means "father's tent" and he was from the tribe of Dan. His name signifies protection or safety. His skills lay mainly in working with cloths of various grades and colours but he was also an engraver and an artisan in woodwork.

Both Aholiab and Bezaleel would have learned their skills as slaves from the Egyptians before the Exodus. Their greatest attributes were their teaching skills. To

build the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle that house it in strict accordance with God's instructions required more craftsmen than just these two. That their completed work survived generations of wandering turmoil, war, capture and repatriation is strong evidence of their craftsman ship. Their work was the centre of religious life and nationality of the Israelites.

Ammi Ruhamah

These two words are derived from the Book of Hosea, chapter 1.

The Lord instructed Hosea to marry and have children. When his first son was born God said "call him Jezreel".

The next child was a daughter and God said "call her Lo-Ruhama" which signifies "not pitied". The second son was born and God said "call him Lo Ammi" which means "not of My people" for the people had drifted away from God's laws. Later God changed their names and speaking to Jezreel, the eldest son, said 'Call your brother Ammi (My People) and call your sister Ruhamah (she has obtained mercy) The two together mean "My people have obtained mercy".

Ezra (Heb. 'help')

The first Ezra: 6 century BC. A leading priest who returned with Zerubbabel to Judah from exile in Babylon. [Neh. 12:11

The second Ezra: 5 century BC. Hebrew priest and scribe. Ezra was a Hebrew priest and scribe who played a notable role in the restoration of Judea by exiles returning from Babylonia.

The first Judean deportees, including the young King Jehoiachin, had been taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 598 BC. Their number was swelled in 587 BC when Jerusalem was destroyed and the kingdom of Judah came to an end.

In 539 BC Babylon was captured by King Cyrus of Persia, who then became the master of the Near East. Cyrus issued a decree in 538 BC permitting the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild it. Some forty thousand of them did so, and the Temple was restored on the original site in Jerusalem.

The community of exiles who remained in Babylon seems to have prospered under the benign Persian rule, and some of its members gained influential positions. However, they clung to their own faith and traditions encouraged by notable prophets like Ezekiel, as well as by such scholars and teachers as Ezra. They also kept in touch with their brethren in Judea, collected funds to help them and felt themselves involved with the progress of the restoration.

Ezra resolved to go to Jerusalem, investigate the conditions there, and reform the religious life of the settlers. There is reason to believe that he had attained an official position at the Persian court, as a commissioner for the affairs of the Jewish minority. At any rate, he was able to obtain palace sponsorship and aid for his trip. The time was 458 BC in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes I and eighty years after the edict of Cyrus had started the movement back to the Holy Land.

The Hebrew Bible quotes in Aramaic the royal document authorising Ezra's mission. It states that he is being sent by the king and his seven counsellors '... to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God, which is in your hand' (Ezra 7:14). Any of the Israelites in the kingdom, including priests and Levites, who wish to accompany Ezra may do so. With the official money grant, as

well as voluntary offerings by Ezra's fellow-Jews, he is to buy animals to sacrifice in the Jerusalem Temple on behalf of the king. Any funds left over may be spent at Ezra's discretion. For whatever else may be necessary for the Temple, Ezra is authorised to draw on the royal treasury.

The treasures of the beyond-the-river region (west of the Euphrates) are commanded to supply Ezra with stated amounts of money, wheat, wine, oil and salt for the Temple. The priests and staff of the Temple are to be exempt from taxes. Ezra is to appoint scribes and judges to administer and teach the Jewish Law. 'Whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed upon him, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of his goods or for imprisonment. ' Ezra 7:26)

In the diary contained in Chapters 7 to 9, Ezra records that the number of persons who gathered together to accompany him numbered some fifteen hundred men, or about five thousand souls in all, divided into twelve family clans.

Ezra assembled the whole party on the banks of a river, where they camped for three days. In reviewing his mixed contingent of settlers, Ezra realised that though it included a group of priests, there were no Levites, the traditional Temple staff. He sent a deputation to Iddo, the head priest of the Jewish shrine at Casiphia, who recruited several Levite families for the expedition. Ezra chose twelve of the priests to serve as trustees of the gold and silver Temple vessels and the money donations for the Temple. They were to be responsible for handing them over at the journey's end in accordance with the inventory.

The Jerusalem Mission

On arrival in Jerusalem they rested for three days. After that the treasure was delivered at the Temple, the sacrifices were offered that the king had commanded, and Ezra's royal letter of instructions was handed over to the local authorities.

Ezra now set about promoting the central purpose of the mission - to restore strict religious observance and revive the national identity of the repatriated congregation, which had been weakened in the decades since the original Return. The most immediate and sensitive issue was that of the mixed marriages between the leading Jewish families, including priests, and the 'foreign women ' belonging to other local ethnic groups.

Ezra was determined to break these unions and to restore the exclusiveness of the Hebrews.

Using the powers vested in him, Ezra ordered all the men of Jerusalem and the Judean towns to attend a mass meeting in the Temple compound within three days, on pain of exclusion from the community and confiscation of property. The gathering shivered with apprehension - and also from the heavy rain and cold. Ezra addressed them sternly, 'You have transgressed and married foreign women.... Now then make confession... separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.' (Ezra 10:10, 11) The people sadly agreed to this drastic measure. A commission of two priests and two Levites was set up to supervise the multiple divorce proceedings which lasted for two months.

Nothing more is recorded of Ezra's actions for the next thirteen years. In the meantime a new Jewish governor, Nehemiah, had been sent to Jerusalem from the Persian court to administer what was now the province of 'Yahud'. He was an able

and energetic man, who restored the fortifications of the city and increased its population by drawing on the smaller Judean towns and villages.

The time had come for Ezra to establish the religious Law more firmly as the basis of daily life. He had brought with him from Babylon the codified Scriptures. On the first day of the seventh month the whole community gathered in the square at the water-gate, while Ezra, standing on a wooden dais, and in the presence of Nehemiah, the governor, read out to them the sacred book, and they wept with emotion. He called to them not to weep but to eat, drink and be glad of heart 'for this day is holy to our Lord; do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength' (Neh. 8: 10).

The next day Ezra continued the study of the Law together with the Levites and heads of families. When they read that 'the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month' (Neh. 8:14), it was decided immediately to revive the festival of Succoth (Tabernacles), commemorating the time when their ancestors were led out of Egypt by Moses and wandered for forty years in the wilderness. (In the cycle of the agricultural year this was the autumn harvest festival.)

From every Judean town the menfolk went out to collect branches of olive, pine, myrtle and palm for constructing booths on the flat roof-tops and in the courtyards and public squares. The festival lasted seven days and on the eighth day another solemn assembly was held.

Ezra consolidated the religious and legal code of the small Jewish community in the Holy Land, and thereby laid the foundations for the later development of Judaism as a creed and a way of life.

Ezra and Nehemiah

The precise date of Ezra's mission to Jerusalem is problematical - in particular, whether it took place before, during or after Nehemiah's governorship, that started in 446 BC.

Ezra states that he made his journey in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes, but this date creates difficulties in the sequence of events. Two other theories have been put forward: that the word 'seventh' is a corruption for 'thirty-seventh', so that the date of Ezra's return would be 428 and not 458 BC; or that the monarch referred to is not Artaxerxes I Longimanus (465-24 BC) but Artaxerxes II Mnemon (404-358 BC), which would give 397 BC as the date for Ezra.

In their respective personal memoirs Ezra and Nehemiah do not refer to each other at all. In the third person narrative in the Book of Nehemiah, describing the reading of the Law by Ezra, Nehemiah's name appears as being present, but this could have been inserted by a later chronicler.

There is reason to believe that Ezra-Nehemiah originally formed a single Book, continuing the Book of Chronicles and compiled by the same chronicler. That is the way it appeared in the Greek and Latin Bibles. However, Ezra and Nehemiah were later split into two Books in the Hebrew Bible, and consequently in the Protestant versions.

This division is an unsatisfactory one, as the most important part of Ezra's work - the reading of the Book of the Law and the religious reforms which followed it remain in Chapters 8, 9 and 10 of the Book of Nehemiah. [Books of Ezra and Nehemiah]

Nehemiah (Heb. 'God has consoled')

The first Nehemiah: 6 century BC. A leader of Judah who returned with Zerubbabel from Babylon. [Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:7]

The second Nehemiah: 5 century BC. Son of Azbuk, he helped rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in the days of Nehemiah. [Neh. 3:161 3. c. 5 century BC. Jewish governor of Judea.

Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah was a member of the Judean exile community in Babylonia that came into existence at the time of the fall of Jerusalem. After Babylon had been conquered by the Persians in 539 BC, the Jewish minority was well treated and prospered. Nehemiah was appointed the royal cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I in Susa (Shushan) the capital. This was a position of honour and trust which brought Nehemiah into daily contact with the monarch.

Nearly a century earlier, the Persian king Cyrus had issued a decree permitting the Jewish exiles to return to Judea. Nehemiah relates in his personal memoirs how his kinsman Hanani arrived with some companions from Jerusalem and came to see him. He asked how the settlers in Judea were faring and was told: 'The survivors there in the province who escaped exile are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.' (Neh. 1:3)

Nehemiah was deeply affected by this report. A devout man, he fasted and prayed, recalling the Lord's promise to Moses to redeem the Children of Israel. That was in 445 BC, the twentieth year of the reign of his master Artaxerxes.

The resolve took shape in Nehemiah's mind to go to Jerusalem himself. A short while later, he was serving wine at the royal table when the king asked him why he looked so downcast. He replied: 'why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lies waste (Neh. 2:3) Nehemiah asked for permission to make a trip to Jerusalem, which was granted.

The sympathetic ruler also gave him letters to the provincial governors along the route, an instruction to the keeper of the royal parks to provide him with any timber he might need for construction work in Jerusalem, and an an-armed escort for the journey of over a thousand miles across mountains, rivers and deserts.

On his arrival in Jerusalem, Nehemiah did not make himself known at once to the authorities. He rested three days, then got up at night and with a few men made a secret moonlight inspection tour of the ruined walls and gates of the city. Nehemiah then called together the Jewish leaders, and proposed that the work of rebuilding the fortifications be put in hand at once. They responded eagerly: 'Let us rise up and build.' (Neh. 2:18)

The project was organised on a voluntary basis, with specific parts of it allocated to some of the surrounding towns and to guilds such as the goldsmiths and perfume makers. Each of the leading merchants and priests undertook to be responsible for the section of the wall opposite his own home.'

There were leaders in neighbouring territories who objected to the shattered fortifications of Jerusalem being restored. One was Sanballat the provincial governor of Samaria, who claimed general authority over the Judean district as well. The Samaritans had been hostile to the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon and at an earlier stage had succeeded for a long time in holding up the reconstruction of the

Temple.

Sanballat's opposition was supported by Geshem, ruler of the Edomites who had occupied the southern part of Judah; and by Tobiah, head of a wealthy feudal family of Jews in Transjordan, with relatives among the Jerusalem notables.

At first the three of them tried to kill the project by ridicule: 'they 'derided us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" ' (Neh. 2:19) Nehemiah answered stoutly that the building would go on, and that 'you have no portion or right or memorial in Jerusalem.' (Neh. 2:20) Sanballat continued to mock them, and asked whether these 'feeble Jews' really wanted to 'revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?' (Neh. 4:2) Tobiah added that even a fox would be able to break down their stone wall.

But when the wall reached midheight and the builders were getting tired and discouraged, their opponents threatened to stop them by force. Nehemiah made security arrangements for the work to continue. He posted an armed militia day and night, and also made each of the workers carry a weapon. 'And each of the builders had his sword girded at his side while he built.' (Neh. 4:18)

Since the working parties were strung out in different sectors at some distance from each other, he commanded that they should all rally when they heard the trumpet sound. At night they remained within the walls. Nehemiah records that during this period neither he nor the members of his family nor his bodyguard took off their clothes except for washing.

These vigorous precautions had their effect, and the idea of armed intervention was dropped. Instead, his enemies resorted to various intrigues. They invited Nehemiah to meet them for a parley, but he distrusted them and declined. Sanballat then sent Nehemiah a letter, suggesting that the walls were being erected because Nehemiah planned to rebel against the Persian rulers and proclaim himself king.

These rumours, the letter stated, would no doubt reach the Persian court, and Nehemiah had better come and discuss matters. Nehemiah replied that the rumours were unfounded, and a figment of Sanballat's imagination.

At this point Shemaiah, the high priest, urged Nehemiah to take sanctuary in the Temple and hide there, as his life was in danger. Nehemiah answered sharply that he had no intention of running away. He notes in his memoirs that the priest was no doubt in the pay of Tobiah, and that they were trying to frighten him.

In spite of every obstacle, the walls and gates were completed. On the appointed day the solemn dedication took place. After the purification ceremonies, two processions marched round the walls in opposite directions, each headed by priests and notables. They met at the Temple, where the thanksgiving service was followed by a feast.

Nehemiah appointed gate-keepers and sentries for the gates. He put his kinsman Hanani in charge of the city with instructions to see that all the gates were to be shut before sundown and reopened in the morning.

With the city secure behind its reconstructed walls, Nehemiah gave thought to increasing its population. He had a census taken of the inhabitants, and compared the results with the original lists of returnees from Babylon. He then invited the

leading men of other Judean towns to move to Jerusalem, 'the Holy City'. From the rest of the Judean population, one person selected by lot out of every ten came to settle in the capital.

The list of the towns outside Jerusalem indicates areas of Jewish settlement which were not part of the Jerusalem district at an earlier period of the Return. It is probable that these were border areas of Hebrew settlement in the Negev, the Shephelah and to the north of Jerusalem that remained intact at the time of the fall of the city and the deportations to Babylon. If so, they became integrated again into Judea in Nehemiah's time.

In 433 BC, after twelve years in Jerusalem, Nehemiah returned to Persia and presented himself again to his royal master. During his absence the standards of religious observance declined in Judea and abuses crept in.

Some time later Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem and carried out a series of sweeping reforms. They corresponded to the written covenant which the leading citizens had signed in a formal ceremony, probably under the supervision of Ezra the scribe.

On his return Nehemiah was horrified to find that the high priest Eliashib had placed at the disposal of Tobiah, a wealthy Jewish landowner, a room in the Temple court used for keeping sacrificial food, incense and vessels. Nehemiah ordered the furnishings to be flung out and the room restored to its proper use.

Most of the Levites and cantors in the service of the Temple had gone back to their villages and fields because the dues from the worshippers had not been paid. Nehemiah strongly reprimanded all concerned; the Temple staff returned to work, and the tithes were promptly paid into the storehouses in the form of corn, oil and wine. Nehemiah placed four trustworthy officials in charge of gathering and distributing these dues.

He next clamped down on the desecration of the Sabbath. Farmers were bringing their produce into the city market on the holy day, and Phoenician traders were selling fish brought up from the coast. Nehemiah ordered the gates of the city to be shut before the Sabbath started and reopened only after the Sabbath was over. Traders who came and bivouacked next to the walls on the Sabbath were chased away.

Nehemiah denounced the practice of intermarriage with the surrounding peoples. In many cases, the children could only speak the foreign tongue and not Hebrew. To set an example, he expelled from Jerusalem Jehoiada the high priest's son, for having married the daughter of Sanballat the Samaritan leader.

Nehemiah was anxious to get due credit with the Lord for his diligence in restoring the purity of religion and in preserving the identity of the Jews. His memoir ends with the words: 'Remember me, O my God, for good.' (Neh. 13:31) [Book of Nehemiah]

Haggai (Heb. 'festal') 6 century BC. Post-exilic Hebrew prophet who played a part in the life of Jerusalem after the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity in the time of Cyrus, king of Persia.

In the summer of 520 BC Haggai and his fellow-prophet Zechariah succeeded by their moral pressure in getting work resumed on the destroyed Temple. Haggai linked

the struggles of the community to the fact that the Lord's house still remained a ruin. It was for that reason that their harvests were poor, and their fields drought-stricken. If they wanted prosperity to be restored, he told them, 'Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house' (Hag. 1:8).

In the short Book bearing his name, Haggai's thoughts went beyond the immediate aim of reconstructing the Temple. He predicted the coming of a day of divine judgment - 'and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations and overthrow the chariots and their riders; and the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his fellow.' (Hag. 2:22)

When that liberation came, the Jews would again be an independent nation, and perhaps Zerubbabel the leader of the returnees would be their king. The new Temple would then shine with a glory greater than that of Solomon's Temple. [Ezra 5:1; Book of Haggai]

Jeshua (Heb. 'saviour')

1. 6 century BC Head of a family descended from Pahathmoab who returned with Zerubbabel from exile in Babylon. [Ezra 2:6; Neh. 7:11]

2. 6th century BC. Head of a family of priests who returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel. [Ezra 2:36; Neh. 7:39]

3. 6th century BC. Head of a family Of Levites who returned with Zerubbabel from Babylon. [Ezra 2:40; Neh. 12:81]

4. 6th century BC. The son of Jozadak, he was high priest in the time of Zerubbabel, and is symbolically crowned in the Book of Zechariah.

Also known as Joshua. [Ezra 3:2; 10:18; Hag. 1:1, 12, 14; 2:2,4;]

Jacob (Heb. 'supplanted') c. 16 century BC. Third patriarch.

After years of childlessness, Isaac's wife Rebekah had twin sons. While still in their mother's womb 'The children struggled together' (Gen. 25:22). Esau, the first-born, was at birth covered with red hair. He grew up to be a hunter and the favourite of his father. Jacob was born clutching his brother's heel. (The Hebrew name *Ya'acov* is derived from *eket*, 'the heel of the foot'.) He became a herdsman and cultivator and his mother loved him more than she did Esau.

One day Esau came back from hunting, faint with hunger. In exchange for a meal of bread and red lentil soup, Jacob obtained from Esau his birthright, that is, his rights as the eldest son.

When Isaac was old and practically blind, he sent for Esau and asked him to go hunting, and to prepare a dish of venison, which Isaac loved. He would then bestow the paternal blessing on Esau. Rebekah overheard this, and decided to obtain the blessing for Jacob instead. She sent Jacob to select two kids from the flock, cooked them to taste like venison and told Jacob to take them into his father, pretending to be Esau. Jacob demurred, pointing out that 'My brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man.' (Gen. 27:11) To overcome this difficulty Rebekah wrapped pieces of the fleece of the kids over his hands and the back of his neck and dressed him in Esau's garments.

Even after Isaac had touched Jacob, he was still suspicious and said, 'The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.' (Gen. 27:22) But the smell of

the field clinging to Esau's clothes satisfied Isaac and he blessed Jacob saying: 'Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers.' (Gen. 27:29) Esau hated Jacob because of the stolen blessing and threatened to kill him after Isaac's death. Rebekah felt it would be prudent to get Jacob out of the way. She persuaded Isaac to send the young man to her brother Laban in Haran (northern Syria) where he would find a bride among Laban's daughters, instead of marrying a Canaanite girl as Esau had already done.

On his way northward from Beersheba to his uncle Laban, the weary Jacob sank down on the ground to sleep at night, with his head against a stone. Here he dreamt he saw a ladder rising up to heaven, with angels going up and down on it. The Lord stood at the top and spoke to him, reaffirming the promise made to Abraham that his seed would multiply. 'Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land.' (Gen. 28:15)

Jacob woke from this dream and said with awe, 'Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' (Gen. 28:16, 17) Early next morning he set up and anointed with oil the stone that had served as his pillow and called the place Bethel ('the House of the Lord'). It was the same spot where Abraham had earlier made a sacrifice to the Lord. Bethel remained a holy place for the Israelites. The site is some twelve miles north of Jerusalem off the main highway.

The Stay in Haran

Jacob went on his way and reached Haran. He stopped at a well where flocks of sheep were waiting to be watered. In answer to his question the shepherds said they knew Laban and pointed out his daughter Rachel approaching with her father's sheep. Jacob introduced himself, kissed his cousin and helped her draw water for the sheep. Rachel ran and told Laban, who came out to embrace this kinsman from a distant land.

Jacob fell in love with Rachel who was 'beautiful and lovely' (Gen. 29:17); but he was told he would have to work for seven years for her father before he could marry her. At the end of that time Laban arranged a wedding feast. Jacob spent the wedding night with his bride and was shocked to find next morning that Laban had substituted for Rachel her older and plainer sister, Leah.

When reproached, Laban claimed that by the custom of his country the elder daughter should be wedded first. Jacob was allowed to marry Rachel as well a week later, on undertaking to work another seven years for his father-in-law.

When that period had gone by, Jacob continued to serve Laban. As payment he asked to be allowed to keep for himself all the speckled and streaked goats, and all the dark-coloured sheep. Laban agreed to these terms but that day sent off with his sons all the animals marked in such a way. Jacob cut wands of poplar, hazel and chestnut trees, peeled white streaks in them and stuck them at the watering troughs.

As a result of the visual suggestion, the goats conceived at the trough were born speckled or streaked. Jacob used this device to breed from the stronger animals, leaving the offspring of the weaker ones to Laban. After several years, Jacob owned large flocks of his own and acquired his own servants, camels and asses. It was not surprising that Laban and his sons resented the fact that Jacob had gained so much of the family wealth.

By now twenty years had gone by since Jacob had first met Rachel at the well, and he decided the time had come to return to his own country. He departed quietly when Laban was away sheep-shearing and moved southward towards Canaan with his two wives, his two concubines (the handmaids of his wives) and his children mounted on camels, and his flocks.

At this time Jacob had eleven sons and one daughter. The children of Leah were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun and Dinah; Leah's maid Zilpah bore Gad and Asher; the two sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maid, were Dan and Naphtali; Rachel herself gave birth to Joseph, after she had been childless for many years.

When Laban discovered that Jacob had gone, he and his kinsmen set out in pursuit. They caught up with Jacob's caravan seven days later in the mountains of Gilead, east of the Jordan river. Laban protested against the surreptitious way Jacob had gone off with his daughters and his grandchildren. He also accused Jacob of stealing the 'teraphim', the images of his household gods. Jacob indignantly denied this charge and invited Laban to go through his tents. He 'did not know that the images had been taken by Rachel, who hid them in the saddlebag of her camel and sat upon them while her father searched in vain. Rachel and Leah had felt cheated of their dowries by their father: 'Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us.' (Gen. 31:15)

Jacob and Laban agreed to part in peace, and in accordance with custom, sealed their pact by assembling a heap of stones, and partaking of food together upon them. Jacob called the place Galeed ('the heap of witness'), which explains the name of Gilead given to that region.

Laban and his party turned back, and Jacob continued southward. He had a vision of a host of angels welcoming him and called the place Mahanaim ('hosts' or 'camps'). Jacob's party descended from the plateau of Gilead into the deep gorge of the Jabbok river, a tributary flowing into the lower Jordan. His family and retainers crossed at the ford before sundown, but Jacob lingered behind and suddenly found himself wrestling in the dark with a mysterious stranger. The struggle continued until daybreak, when the other tried to get away, but Jacob held on to him until he obtained his blessing. The stranger said to Jacob that henceforth he would be known as Israel ('who prevails with God') 'for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed' (Gen. 32:28). During the fight Jacob's adversary had struck the inside of his thigh, causing the sinew to shrink. (Since then Jews are forbidden to eat that sinew in animals.) Jacob called the place Peniel ('the face of God').

This strange experience at the ford is related by some scholars to the primitive legends of river gods that accost travelers, but that, like all spirits, must vanish again before dawn.

Jacob's twin brother Esau had settled in the land of Seir, the rugged, semi arid country of Edom to the east and south of the Dead Sea. Jacob sent messengers to inform Esau that he had returned, and suggesting that they meet. The messengers came back to report that Esau was advancing towards him with four hundred men, and Jacob was afraid that his wronged brother was seeking revenge. He turned to the Lord for protection; but also sent ahead a large number of choice sheep, goats, cattle and camels to placate Esau. Jacob divided his servants and the rest of his flock into two groups, so that if Esau attacked one group, the other might escape.

His fears proved groundless. When Esau arrived, Jacob bowed down to the ground before him: 'But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.' (Gen. 33:4) After Jacob had presented his women and children, Esau courteously declined the gift of livestock, saying he already had enough animals of his own. Jacob insisted that he keep them as a mark of goodwill.

Return to Canaan

Esau invited his brother to return with him to Seir but Jacob pleaded that he had to travel slowly because of his young children and the lambs. Esau rode ahead, but Jacob did not follow, continuing instead on his way to Canaan. He lived for some while at Succoth ('booths'), at the edge of the Jordan valley; then he moved across the river to Shalem, near the town of Shechem (present-day Nablus) in the hills of Samaria. Here he bought a parcel of land from Hamor, the leader of the local Hivite clan, and erected an altar on it.

Jacob's daughter Dinah became friendly with the local girls and was seen by Hamor's son Shechem, who seized and raped her. Hamor sought permission from Jacob for Shechem to marry Dinah, and further proposed that his clan and Jacob's should intermarry and merge with each other. Concealing their rage at Dinah's seduction, her brothers pretended to agree to Hamor's proposal provided that he, Shechem and all the other males of their clan would first be circumcised, as the Israelites were. This was done, but before the men had recovered from the painful operation, Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi killed them all and despoiled the town.

Jacob bitterly reproached his two sons for this bloody act of vengeance, and was afraid it would arouse the population of the surrounding area against them. He decided to move to the sanctuary at Bethel, twelve miles further south. But first he insisted that all the members of his household should purify themselves, change their clothes, and surrender to him their idolatrous images and magic amulets, which he buried under an oak tree at Shechem. To his relief, the local inhabitants did not pursue or attack him during this anxious journey perhaps because word of the killing at Shechem had already spread, and they were afraid. At Bethel, Jacob restored the altar he had erected twenty years previously, after his dream of the ladder ascending to heaven.

They proceeded on their way towards Hebron, where the aged Isaac, Jacob's father, was still alive. Near Bethlehem, Rachel died in giving birth to a boy, whom Jacob named Benjamin ('son of my right hand'). Rachel was buried there, and Jacob erected a pillar as a monument over her grave.

Soon after, Isaac died at the age of a hundred and eighty and his two sons, Jacob and Esau, buried him in the Cave of Machpelah, the family tomb. This was the last time the twin brothers saw each other.

Jacob's favourite son was Joseph, born in his old age of his beloved Rachel, and the youngest of the twelve brothers except for the baby Benjamin. His father pampered him and dressed him in a coat of many colours; but he incurred the envy and dislike of his brothers.

When Joseph was seventeen, Jacob sent him to find his brothers, who had trekked northwards with the flocks in search of pasture. They sold the youth to a passing caravan, stained his coat with the blood of a slaughtered kid and produced it

to Jacob, saying they had found it in the fields. Jacob assumed that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast, and mourned him in deep grief.

Many years later, during a famine, Jacob sent his ten sons to Egypt to buy wheat, keeping at home young Benjamin. Pharaoh's powerful governor allowed them to buy the wheat only on the undertaking that they would return with their younger brother.

Simeon was held in Egypt as a hostage. They had no inkling that the governor was their long-lost brother Joseph. Jacob refused to part with Benjamin. However, when they had consumed the food brought from Egypt and the famine continued, his sons prevailed upon him to yield. This time Joseph revealed his identity to the brothers, and there was a tearful reunion. Joseph proposed they should fetch Jacob and the rest of the family from Canaan and settle in the fertile Egyptian province of Goshen, in the eastern corner of the Nile delta. He would then be able to care for them in the five years of famine which he knew were still to come. Pharaoh gave his approval, and ordered that wagons should be provided for the purpose.

Jacob at first refused to believe that the youth thought slain so long ago had suddenly reappeared in Egypt. Persuaded by the sight of the wagons and the lavish gifts of food Joseph had sent, the old man said simply, 'It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive; I will go and see him before I die.' (Gen. 45:28)

Three generations of Jacob's family, numbering seventy souls, set out from Hebron together with his servants, flocks, herds and household goods. They stopped at Beersheba where Jacob's father Isaac had dwelt, and here he offered parting sacrifices to God before leaving the land of Canaan. The Lord renewed to him the promise first made to his grandfather Abraham, saying: '. . . do not be afraid to go down to Egypt; for I will there make of you a great nation. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again.' (Gen. 46:3, 4) (This promise of a return was to be redeemed some four centuries later in the time of Moses.)

They crossed the Sinai desert and reached Goshen. Judah was sent to inform Joseph, who came by chariot to meet them and flung himself weeping on his father's neck. Joseph presented his father and five of his brothers to Pharaoh, on whom Jacob bestowed a blessing. Pharaoh was told that Joseph's family had been shepherds and cattle-men for generations, and suggested that they might take charge of the royal flocks.

Jacob dwelt for seventeen years in Goshen. Having heard that his father was failing, Joseph went to see him, and took with him his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim. Jacob adopted the boys as his own.

On his deathbed Jacob gathered all his sons around him and charged them to bury him with his forefathers in Canaan. The celebrated blessing attributed to him is composed of vivid poetic similes, and refers to the qualities in each of his twelve sons that would distinguish the Israelite tribe named after him:

Reuben, the first born, was dignified but unstable as water.

Simeon and Levi were cruel and angry men.

Judah was a lion's whelp and would rule.

Zebulun would dwell on the coast and be a seafarer.

Issachar was strong as an ass and would serve others.

Dan would judge his people.

Gad would be overcome but would win in the end.

Asher would be a successful tiller of the soil.

Naphtali was a hind let loose (a venturesome spirit).

Joseph was a fruitful bough, blessed by the Almighty.

Benjamin would be as aggressive as a wolf.

Jacob died at the age of one hundred and forty-seven, and Joseph arranged to have his body embalmed by Egyptian physicians. An impressive funeral caravan wound its way out of Egypt and included all Jacob's sons and, as a special mark of respect, members of Pharaoh's household and other leading Egyptians. It reached Hebron where Jacob was interred in the Cave of Machpelah, together with Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob's first wife Leah. Joseph returned to Pharaoh's court and his brothers to their homes in Goshen.

The Character of Jacob

Jacob belongs to the patriarchal, pastoral society from which the Hebrew people originated two thousand years before the Christian era. Like his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac, he was a tent-dwelling nomad who moved slowly in search of grazing and water, with his wives and concubines, his many children, his servants, flocks and herds.

Later writers - including the learned rabbis of the Talmud - were hard put to explain the contradictions in Jacob's character. By the standards of a later age, it was embarrassing that so respected a patriarch should in his youth have outwitted his brother, his father and his uncle for his own gain. But the ancient chroniclers of the Old Testament made no attempt to idealise their forefathers. The deviousness of the young Jacob did not seem wicked to the nomad world in which he lived, nor did it detract from his stature or his many virtues,

The Bible calls Jacob an 'ish tam' -a plain or quiet man. In all his long life he was peaceable and never resorted to violence - on the contrary he was fearful lest his aggrieved and more turbulent brother Esau might attack him. He submitted to Laban's substitution of Leah for Rachel, and agreed to work another seven years for the latter. His diligence and skill in tending his father-in-law's flocks greatly increased their numbers and value. To his wives and children Jacob was kind and affectionate, with a tender love for Rachel and for Joseph and Benjamin, the two sons she bore him in his old age.

Above all, Jacob inherited from Abraham and Isaac their intimate communion with God, and the promise that Canaan would belong to their seed. With Jacob this covenant was singularly marked by his dream at Bethel, and by his wrestling with the angel at the ford of Jabbok. Jacob's devotion to God made him spurn the household images and magic amulets to which members of his family clung.

Jacob has a pivotal role in the Hebrew saga. The twelve Israelite tribes that occupied Canaan from Joshua's conquest traced their descent and their names back to his sons. The Hebrews were referred to collectively as the House of Jacob or the Children of Israel. The name of the biblical kingdom of Israel was adopted for the newly-proclaimed state of Israel in 1948. [Gen. 25; 27-37; 42; 45-50]

Zedekiah

(Heb. 'God is [my] righteousness') Twentieth and last king of Judah after the monarchy split, he reigned 598-87 BC The son of King Josiah and Hamutal, daughter of a certain Jeremiah from Libnah. Zedekiah (called Mattaniah till he mounted the throne) was appointed to the throne by the Babylonians when his nephew King Jehoiachin surrendered Jerusalem and was carried off into captivity. Zedekiah was then twenty-one years old.

A Babylonian inscription from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, referring to these events, states that ' he captured the city and took the king prisoner. A king of his own choice was set up in his midst.' The Babylonians stripped away much of the territory held by Judah, and carried on a harsh indirect rule of the country. In 589 BC, when Zedekiah had been a puppet king for nine years, he revolted against the Babylonian overlords, together with two neighbouring states, Tyre and Ammon, with Egyptian encouragement.

For the second time Nebuchadnezzar advanced on Jerusalem with a large army. This time the city did not surrender and was kept under tight siege for two years. In the year 587, in the heat of midsummer, the northern wall of the starving city was breached by battering rams, and further resistance became hopeless.

That night, under cover of darkness, the king and some of his fighting men escaped through a gateway next to the royal garden and fled eastwards. They were pursued and captured on the Jericho plain. Zedekiah was brought before Nebuchadnezzar and forced to witness the slaying of his children. His eyes were then put out and he was hauled off in chains to Babylon, where he died.

The city was sacked, the Temple destroyed and most of the inhabitants taken off into captivity. The independence of Judah had come to an end.

Gedaliah

(Heb. 'God is great') 1. 10 century BC. Son of Jeduthun, one of King David's chief musicians. Gedaliah and his brothers took the second turn of service in the Tabernacle under their father's direction. [1 Chr. 25:3, 91 2. c. 7 century BC. Grandfather of the prophet Zephaniah. [Zeph. 1:1] 3. c. 6 century BC. Governor of Judah.

On the fall of Jerusalem in the summer of 587 BC and the capture of King Zedekiah, the Babylonians appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam as governor. Some of the surviving Judean officers and their men came to see him at Mizpah, just north of Jerusalem, and he urged them to cooperate with the conquerors: 'Do not be afraid because of the Chaldean officials; dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you.' (2 Kings. 25:24) This advice went unheeded.

Soon after a small group of political exiles assassinated Gedaliah and fled to Egypt.

Nebuchadnezzar

Ass. 'Nabu protects my boundary stone') King of Babylon, 604-562 BC. The fall of Nineveh in 612 BC marked the end of the mighty Assyrian empire and its replacement by Babylonia as the dominant power of the Near East. In 605 BC a Babylonian army commanded by Nebuchadnezzar, the crown prince, marched into the area and decisively defeated the Egyptians at the battle of Carcemish. He

advanced towards Egypt but turned back to assume the throne of Babylon when his father died. Judah became a vassal of Babylon.

In 598 BC Judah attempted to throw off the yoke of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar advanced on Jerusalem and occupied it. He carried off the young King Jehoiachin and appointed his uncle Zedekiah to the throne.

Nine years later, in 587 BC, Zedekiah was drawn into a rebellion, against the advice of the prophet Jeremiah. Again Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, which held out for two years and then fell. The city was destroyed, including the demolition of the Temple, the palace and the walls. Most of the inhabitants were carried off to exile in Babylon. Judah was annexed as a Babylonian province.

Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful and energetic ruler of the new Babylonian empire. His capital, Babylon, became the greatest centre of trade, architecture, art and astronomy of the time.

The terraced roof gardens on top of his palace, the 'hanging gardens of Babylon', were listed by the Greeks as one of the seven wonders of the world.

Also called Nebuchadrezzar.

Jeremiah (Heb. 'God will elevate')

7-6 century BC Hebrew prophet. Jeremiah and Isaiah were the two giants of Hebrew prophecy, next to Moses himself. They lived in Jerusalem a century apart, in the turbulent period that saw the two small Hebrew kingdoms wiped out with the fall of Samaria in 721 BC and that of Jerusalem in 587 BC. Both men were caught up in the political events of their time.

Like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah before him, Jeremiah was a God driven man, fearlessly denouncing the religious laxity and social ills of the nation, and warning of the disasters that would follow. With no other prophet, however, has the inner conflict behind the stem message been so revealed.

Jeremiah was born in the village of Anathoth, in the territory of Benjamin, three miles north-east of Jerusalem. This was one of the towns set aside for the priestly tribe of the Levites in the time of Joshua. Jeremiah's father Hilkiah was also a priest, and the boy was no doubt reared in a devout and quiet home. At about eighteen, he felt the call to follow the vocation of a prophet:

'Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. " "See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." Jer. 1:9, 10)

This took place about 627 BC, in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign. Josiah carried out a sweeping religious reformation, stamping out idolatry and restoring the Temple in Jerusalem as the central sanctuary of the nation. In 622 BC a 'book of the law' was discovered in the Temple (probably an early version of the Book of Deuteronomy), and it became the focus of the reform movement. Curiously, Jeremiah seemed hardly involved in this development. The forms and rituals of organised worship meant little to him - 'the false pen of the scribes has made it into a lie' Jer. 8:8). For Jeremiah, faith was an intensely personal matter, and God would judge each man by what was in his heart: 'I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.' Jer.

The Outspoken Preacher

In 609 BC the good King Josiah was killed in battle against an Egyptian army at the pass of Megiddo. He was succeeded by his son Jehoahaz, whom the Egyptian Pharaoh Neco deposed a few months later in favour of Jehoiakim, another son of Josiah.

For some years the kingdom remained subservient to Egypt, while it slid back into religious and moral laxity. Jeremiah's outspoken criticisms brought him into continual trouble with the authorities.

Soon after the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign, Jeremiah planted himself in the courtyard of the Temple and addressed the crowd of worshippers that had gathered from all over the country. He shocked them by a diatribe in which he swore that if they did not mend their ways, God would destroy the very sanctuary itself. 'Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, "We are delivered!" - only to go on doing all these abominations?' Jer. 7:9, 10)

The crowd swarmed round him, and some of the priests and people seized hold of him shouting, 'Thou shalt surely die.' Hearing the excitement, some of the king's officials immediately came over from the palace and sat down at the Temple gate to conduct an enquiry. Jeremiah's eloquence persuaded the officials that he had conveyed a message from God calling for repentance while there was yet time.

The elders who were present started invoking precedents one way or the other. Some recalled that in the reign of Hezekiah a century earlier, the prophet Micah had made similar predictions which had led to repentance rather than punishment of the prophet. But others spoke of Uriah, another prophet who had recently been put to death by King Jehoiakim for similar statements. Jeremiah might have suffered the same fate but for the protection of an important man of the court, Ahikam, whose father had been the royal scribe at the time of Josiah's reforms.

Before a crowd of priests and citizens in the valley of Hinnom, Jeremiah denounced their pagan practices, and dramatically smashed an earthenware jar crying out, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: So will I break this people and this city as one breaks a potter's vessel, so it can never be mended.' Jer. 19:11)

Jeremiah returned to the city, stood in the court of the Temple and addressed the crowd, shouting out in God's name: 'Behold, I am bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their neck, refusing to hear my words.' Jer. 19:15)

The angry priest Pashhur had the prophet beaten and then put in the stocks which were at the upper gate of the Temple. Next day, when Pashhur released him, Jeremiah was totally unrepentant. He repeated that the city would be destroyed and plundered and all its inhabitants carried off to Babylon. 'And you, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house, shall go into captivity; to Babylon you shall go; and there you shall die, and there you shall be buried, you and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely.' Jer. 20:6)

Pressure from Babylon

For centuries the Near East had been dominated by the imperial might of Assyria. That period was now coming to an end. In 612 BC the great capital city of Nineveh was captured by the Babylonians. In 605 BC Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon defeated the Egyptian army of Neco at Carchemish, and became the new overlord of Judah and its neighbours.

Jeremiah's preaching acquired a new note of urgency. For twenty-three years he had called for repentance and prophesied disaster without any effect. With the advent of Babylon, he saw this threat as imminent. Before the citizens of Jerusalem he proclaimed: 'This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.' Jer. 25:11)

Jeremiah had acquired a devoted disciple and scribe, Baruch, the son of Neriah. He sent for Baruch and dictated a scroll containing his discourses and oracles from the beginning of his ministry. Soon after, there was a special fast day on which people gathered from near and far for prayers in the Temple. Since Jeremiah had been banned from the Temple area (probably after the quarrel with the priest Pashhur), he sent Baruch to read out the scroll to the crowd of worshippers, in the hope that the grim prophecies in it would cause the hearers to repent.

Baruch did this, and then found himself summoned to the palace to read the book again before a meeting of the palace officials. Disturbed at its contents, they advised Baruch to take his master and go into hiding. They then informed the king, who was in his chamber keeping himself warm in front of a brazier. He ordered his Secretary Jehudi to read the document to him. Each time a few columns had been read, he hacked that piece off in a rage with the scribe's knife and threw it on the fire until the whole scroll was burned. He then ordered Jeremiah and Baruch to be arrested, but they were not to be found. At the Lord's command Jeremiah dictated the scroll over again to Baruch, with additions.

Some two years later in 602 BC, Jehoiakim joined in a revolt of several vassal kingdoms against the rule of Babylon. At first Nebuchadnezzar tried to quell it with local levies from the subject kingdoms east of the Jordan. When this did not succeed he marched with a Babylonian army against Judah.

The Rechabite community had taken refuge in Jerusalem from the Babylonian troops. They were a fundamentalist sect of desert nomads, living by the injunctions of an ancestor jonadab, the son of Rehab, that they should not live in houses, fill the soil or touch wine. Jeremiah tested them by bringing them into a chamber of the Temple and offering them glasses of wine which were rejected. He then held them up as an example of fidelity to tradition, as opposed to the lax ways of the jerusalemites.

Jeremiah lashed out at the spendthrift and impious king who had brought calamity upon his people and said, 'With the burial of an ass he shall be buried, dragged and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.' Jer. 22:19) In poignant terms, the prophet described the horrors of war and siege that would attend the decline and fall of Judah.

By the time the Babylonians reached Jerusalem, Jehoiakim was dead and succeeded by his son Jehoiachin (598 BC). The young king surrendered the city and was carried off into captivity in Babylon together with the queen mother, the royal household and three thousand leading citizens of the kingdom. The king's uncle

Zedekiah was appointed as ruler by Nebuchadnezzar.

A spirit of revolt against the colonial rule of Babylon continued to simmer under the surface in Judah and the other states in the region. Jeremiah was opposed to the militants, and urged submission until the Lord in his own good time should break the hold of Babylon and bring back their captured brothers. Given to the use of dramatic symbols in his preaching, he walked about with a wooden yoke on his neck. He not only addressed his message to the people but also to the rulers of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon, through their ambassadors in Jerusalem, warning that armed resistance would lead to the destruction of their countries.

A leading priest and prophet, Hananiah, the son of Azzur, proclaimed that within two years the Lord would smash Babylon and restore the captives, together with all the sacred vessels that had been removed from the Temple by order of Nebuchadnezzar. He too illustrated his point by a symbolic act. He smashed Jeremiah's yoke and proclaimed in God's name: 'Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations . . .' (Jer. 28:11). Jeremiah predicted that this false prophet would be dead within the year. Two months later this came to pass.

About this time King Zedekiah sent an official delegation to Babylon. Two of its members were friends of Jeremiah, and he sent with them a remarkable letter to the small community of Israelites that had been brought there as captives together with the young King Jehoiachin. Jeremiah begged them to be patient, and not to be deluded by the false prophets among them who were promising them a speedy return home. He repeated that their exile would last seventy years, but in the end God would bring them back in peace.

Meanwhile, they should settle down, lead constructive lives and try to be on good terms with the authorities. 'Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.' (Jer. 29:5, 6, 7) As for those who remained behind in Jerusalem, their evil-doing would be punished by the 'sword, famine, and pestilence' (Jer. 29:17).

This specific counsel drew a sharp reaction from one of the priests in Babylon called Shemaiah. He wrote a letter of protest to Zephaniah, the chief priest of the Temple in Jerusalem, demanding that Jeremiah should be severely disciplined. When Jeremiah was called in and had the protest read to him, he retorted that because Shemaiah had prophesied falsely, God would not let him or his family take part in the return of the exiles to Jerusalem.

The Fall of Jerusalem

In 589 BC King Zedekiah took the step that Jeremiah had so gravely feared. He joined in an uprising against Babylon. Once more Nebuchadnezzar invaded the country and laid siege to Jerusalem. The king sent priests to Jeremiah, asking him to intercede with the Lord for the safety of the city. The prophet's answer was a grim one. God had decided that the faithless city would fall to the enemy. The only way its inhabitants could save themselves was to surrender.

With the enemy at the gate, the king and the well-to-do citizens had made a

solemn covenant in the Temple to free all their Hebrew slaves. They now broke their word and enslaved them again, at which Jeremiah expressed great indignation.

During this break in the siege, Jeremiah came to be regarded as a pacifist and a quisling, who should be suppressed in the public interest. When he tried to leave the city to attend to some family property in his native village, he was arrested as a deserter by the sentry at the gate and flung into an underground cell, where he remained for a long period of time.

The king sent for him and asked anxiously whether he had received any message from God. Jeremiah answered: 'There is.' Then he said, 'You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon.' Moreover: 'What wrong have I done to you or your servants or this people, that you have put me in prison?' Uer. 37:17, 18)

The king gave orders he should be moved to the court of the guard and be brought a fresh loaf of bread each day from the 'bakers' street'. But pressure was brought on the king by senior officials and priests on the ground that Jeremiah's words were undermining the morale of the army. The prophet was handed over to them and lowered into a muddy cistern and left to die. He was rescued by one of the palace eunuchs, Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian, who ran to tell the king what had happened to the prophet and was given three servants to help him pull Jeremiah out with ropes. For this act, the Lord promised that Ebed-melech would be saved from the Babylonians.

The siege was renewed and nearly two years later, in the summer of 587 BC, the starving city fell. A month later the Babylonian commander had the Temple, the palace and most of the buildings razed. The inhabitants were either killed or rounded up and deported to Babylon. King Zedekiah escaped with some of his soldiers, but was captured and killed.

Nebuchadnezzar had given orders that Jeremiah should be spared and treated well. The Babylonian commander located him among the shackled prisoners awaiting deportation and had him released, and gave him permission to go to Babylon or to remain anywhere in the country. Jeremiah went to Mizpah, to his friend Gedaliah, whom the Babylonians had appointed as governor of Judah.

Little is known about the last period of the prophet's life in Egypt. There is a dubious tradition that Jeremiah met his end by being stoned to death.

