



Royal Vision

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THE PLACE OF SAFETY:

RIVERS IN
THE DESERT

ROYAL VISION

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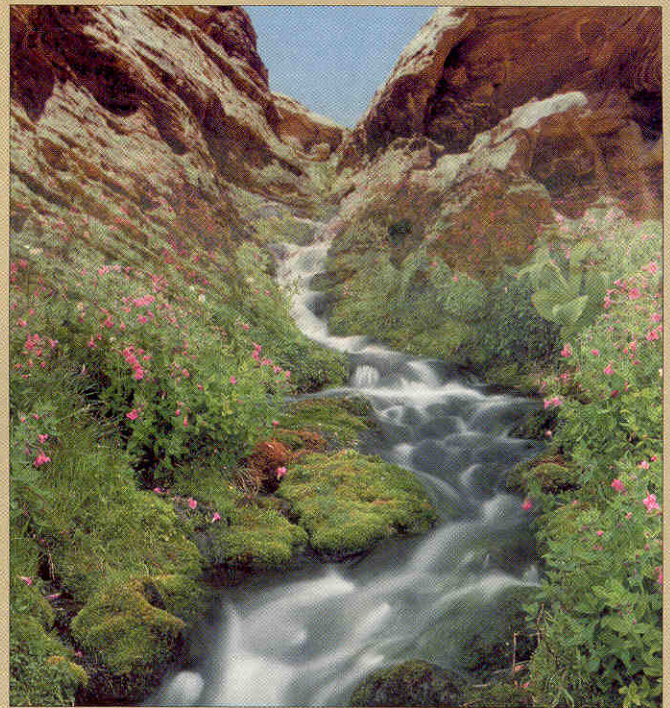
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About our Cover In the three-and-a-half years God's people are in the place of safety, He plans to make a garden of Eden out of a barren wilderness to prepare the way for the Millennium. (Ryan Malone/Corbis)

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THE PLACE OF SAFETY

The World Tomorrow in Embryo!

by Gerald Flurry

GREAT LEADERS LIKE WINSTON Churchill and Douglas MacArthur have made statements about how we must solve the problem of nuclear power if we are to survive. Jesus Christ also prophesied that there would be serious nuclear problems in this end time, that it would get so bad that no flesh would live unless He intervened and personally stopped it.

Jesus Christ made a promise to His very elect that He would protect them from this terrible crisis, this holocaust, if they would heed His Word and do what He said.

A Vision From the Wilderness

If you knew God's people were to be in a place of safety, what would you think they would be doing? God has a great plan wherever He has His people, and He always has a tremendous Work for them to do. This place of safety will not be an exception.

During the Great Tribulation, many people will be hopeless, suffering as never before—and *they're going to need hope*. God has a plan to give them this hope, certainly when He begins the Millennium, but also, *even during the Tribulation*. God has a vision for this world, and the people in the place of safety during the Tribulation will be developing this vision like it has never been developed before on this earth. It will cause the whole world to look and see how to build and beautify this earth—to make it blossom as a rose. This will all begin while God has His people in a place of safety.

"And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God" (Rev. 12:6). The Church has a place in the wilderness that will be prepared by God Himself. God can't lie. If He makes a promise, He'll fulfill it. If He tells you there is going to be a nuclear holocaust that would destroy every man, woman and child if He didn't stop it, you can stake your life on His word. Notice verse 12: "*Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea!*" Woe to the *whole earth*. Revelation 3:10 states, "*I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*"

"And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent" (v. 14). God says He will nourish His people; He will protect them and *work* with them. All this has been prepared by God, because there will be a work. There is always a work with God and His people. People can scoff if they want, and a lot of people certainly do. But they are scoffing at Jesus Christ!

Praise in the Islands

One thing we know about the place of safety just from reading Revelation is that it's in the *wilderness*.

Isaiah was written so we could understand this book in these latter days (Isa. 30:8). Notice this prophecy: "Let the wilderness of the cities thereof lift up their voice, the villages that

Kedar does inhabit let the inhabitants of the *rock* sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory unto the Lord, and declare his praise in the islands" (Isa. 42:11-12). *Kedar* refers to the Bedouin Arabs. "Rock" in the Hebrew is *Sela*, meaning a great rocky fortress. *Sela* translated into Greek is *Petra*.

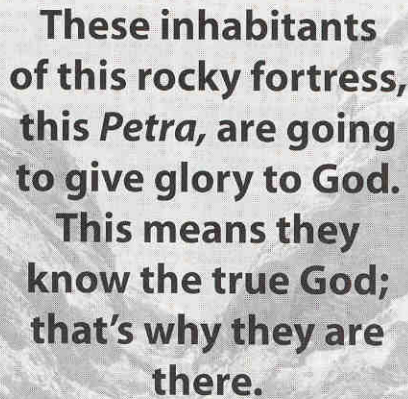
This passage in Isaiah goes on to talk about the return of Christ. There is a chronology here. God says there is going to be a work going on in this great rocky fortress—this place of safety. His people are in a wilderness where there are Bedouin Arabs. The inhabitants of this rocky fortress are going to give glory to God. This means they know the true God; that's why they are there. They trusted the true God to take them there, and they are singing and shouting to Him.

In this place of safety, this great rocky fortress, God's people "declare his praise in the islands." There certainly are no islands in the wilderness areas of the Middle East—especially in the area of Jordan. So there's some kind of a work going on *from* the wilderness, something more than just what the two witnesses are doing during the Great Tribulation (Rev. 11:3-12). God has a message and these people are declaring it, probably via satellite and other technological means. A powerful Work will be done somehow.

There will be a famine of the word of God in the nations of Israel (Amos 8:11). But prophecies in Daniel and Revelation show that the Beast power has iron mixed with miry clay, or Israel mixed with Gentiles. There should be no doubt that God would want to warn those people of Israel first of all, and then also the Gentiles, of what lies in store for them.

Isaiah 41:1 mentions "islands" as well. Verse 8 shows that they are Israel—those islands in northwestern Europe, essentially the democratic parts of Europe; after all, there are 12 nations of Israel. God is undoubtedly going to warn those people through His very elect even at that time because they need to be warned. The European power needs to be warned too, because they will be destroyed by the powers out of the north and the east—the Russians and Chinese (Dan. 11:44).

Just think: a great many more people are going to be listening to the message because of the intense problems—*worse than ever before on this earth in all of man's history*. That is what Christ



**These inhabitants
of this rocky fortress,
this *Petra*, are going
to give glory to God.
This means they
know the true God;
that's why they are
there.**

says; if people want to scoff at that, let them scoff. But virtually every time Christ talks about the worst time of suffering, in the same context He talks about a little group of people going to a place of safety. Nobody is going to stop these prophecies from being fulfilled.

Now *who* will declare His praise in the islands? The Bedouin Arabs? No. God's Laodicean Church? Of course not. They are spewed out and will go through the Tribulation because of their rebellion toward God and because they were overthrown in the spiritual wilderness as ancient Israel was physically. They had the truth and then they lost it.

God says, "Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honor me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, *to give drink to my people, my chosen*. This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise" (Isa. 43:19-20). In context, you'll see this is during a time of great suffering. God is giving drink to His chosen, and He is making the desert blossom as a rose, even before the Millennium.

"But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel" (v. 22). Jacob was Israel's name before he was converted. "Jacob" is referring to Israelites who have never been converted; "Israel" is referring to God's own Church—spiritual Israel which grew weary of God. You can't grow weary of God if you never knew Him.

God is talking about a single wilderness and a single desert, and about "*my*

chosen"—in the context of the rest of Israel, with whom He is not happy. So this cannot be during the Millennium; it must be in a place of safety, where God is going to start a "mini-Millennium." There will be a message going out from the place of safety, and there will be miracles in that place, and the desert will blossom as a rose. There will be a message of hope to this world which will have very little hope—especially those who will have been victims of the Beast power.

There are three groups of people here—God's very elect doing His Work; Jacob, or the Israelites who have never really known God; and then, of course, spiritual Israel who grew weary of God. You see, it is the same old story; the Israelites were overthrown in the wilderness, and most of God's own people have been overthrown in this end time because they grew weary of God.

But there is a positive side to it: there is a very elect and God is making their habitation like a Millennium. With this, they are giving the world great hope—a *physical* vision of hope, because that is what the world needs. There is always hope for those people who respond—*always*. Verse 21 says, "they show forth my praise." In the Revised Standard Version, it says that they are going to *declare* God's glory to people. One Bible dictionary says "declare" means "to speak, to utter words, to narrate; like a military scribe." So there is a message involved here. A message and a work has to be done.

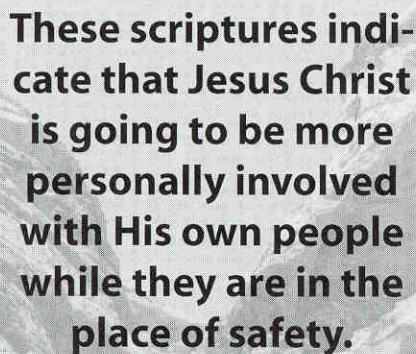
Dwelling on High

Isaiah says the ambassadors of peace are going to weep bitterly (Isa. 33:7). It is in the context of the Great Tribulation, and again, this is an end-time prophecy. "The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the *hypocrites*. Who among us shall dwell with the *devouring fire*? who among us shall dwell with *everlasting burnings*?" (v. 14). God's own hypocritical Laodiceans in Zion are going to have to live through the devastation of devouring nuclear fire because they grew weary of God. And fifty percent of them are going to lose their eternal lives because they refused to repent.

But there are two different groups here: those who are hypocrites in Zion, and those who did exactly what God said. This very elect group receives a reward. "He that walketh righteously,

and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; *HE SHALL DWELL ON HIGH*" (vv. 15-16). These righteous people will dwell *on high*, physically and spiritually.

"His place of defence shall be the *munitions of rocks*: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure" (v. 16). The Hebrew word for "munitions" means a *stronghold, castle or a fort*. And Sela (or Petra) is just that. "Munitions of rocks" means *strongholds of Sela*. And to these people, God says, bread shall be given. This is about supernaturally receiving bread and water from the great God. There is a wilderness where



These scriptures indicate that Jesus Christ is going to be more personally involved with His own people while they are in the place of safety.

God will provide for His people, and it will serve as a place of safety. Can God do that? Of course. All we have to do is believe Him and be obedient.

Verse 17 completes the picture, and notice this inspiring picture: "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off." On a clear day in Petra you can see Palestine. These people are in an area where they can *see* the Holy Land. So the place of safety has to be up high, and it has to be where you can see Palestine. It is all so breathtaking and inspiring! These people will experience all of this in that great rocky fortress—and how many of those places are there in the barren Middle East within sight of the Holy Land? Such places are rare, and you can't find *any* like Petra. This scripture really does narrow it down.

If men really wanted to know the meaning of these verses and would put them together, they would understand. But men really do not want to under-

stand. However, you *can* put them together, and you *can* understand this: the place of safety has to be near Palestine. This is not difficult to figure out.

The statement "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty" is dual. God will be there, *maybe* in a fiery cloud, which will hover over the place of safety, as it did over the children of Israel as they wandered through the wilderness. Ancient Israel was in Petra, and so was that fiery cloud.

But these scriptures also indicate that Jesus Christ is going to be more *personally* involved with His people while they are in the place of safety.

HERBERT ARMSTRONG USED TO SAY THAT THE PLACE OF SAFETY WOULD BE AN EMBRYO OF THE WORLD TOMORROW. And it may be more of an embryo than even he realized, because of the work God is going to do in the place of safety which will give the whole world a vision. He is going to use this small group, a very elect, to usher in the wonderful World Tomorrow—a beautiful paradise where *all* the world and *all* the deserts will blossom as a rose. There will be hope like this world has never even dreamed. The word *paradise* doesn't describe it. It is *far more* than just a paradise: it's a glorious vision!

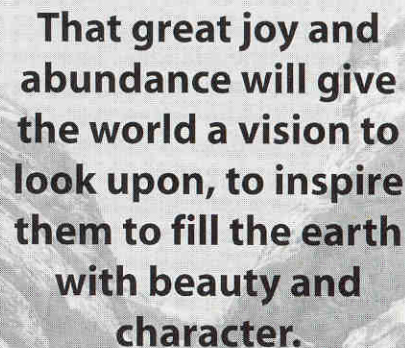
This vision ought to mean so much in this wretched world of suffering, if people would just *believe*. This is GOD talking! This is the fiery cloud! The God that made rivers flow out of rocks and gave manna to eat. The God that created all of us. And yet man has chosen not to believe Him. Certainly, there is bad news. But look at the good news—at the *hope*. If only man would see what God wants to do with this world and quit *fighting* Him and *rebelling* against Him. Even His own people fight against Him! How rebellious! What a great and dreadful wilderness it is when God's people rebel against Him.

Embryo of the Millennium

There should not be a chapter break to Isaiah 34. Verse 2 shows that this is still in the context of the Tribulation. And notice what God says: "Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: *let the earth hear*" (v. 1). This is a message for the whole earth: "let the earth hear." He doesn't mean just hear the two witnesses. It will be bigger than that. There will be a message emanating from the place of safety to this entire earth. *God will continue to do a Work during a time of great slaughter.*

We do not set dates, but if you want an idea about the time period, look at Isaiah 34:8. "For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the *controversy of Zion*." Is there a controversy in Zion today, in God's own Church? What a controversy there is, indeed! It is so bad that God will have to send most of His own people into the Great Tribulation.

Only a little group is going to escape. That group will make the desert blossom as a rose, as it says in chapter 35. That will begin in the place of safety even before the Millennium. God's people will beautify the earth just as they will in the Millennium. They will do it because they are in subjection to the fiery cloud, that spiritual Rock we must listen to. What a beauti-



That great joy and abundance will give the world a vision to look upon, to inspire them to fill the earth with beauty and character.

ful picture it is!

And again, the embryo of the World Tomorrow will be established in the place of safety. Great joy and abundance will be given in the place of safety, and *then* THE WORLD will have a vision to look upon and inspire them to fill the earth with the same kind of beauty and character. "For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody" (Isa. 51:3). Think about the *WHOLE EARTH* filled with that kind of joy. Of course this has a spiritual application, but it also has a *physical* application: There will be a Garden of Eden in the place of safety and God's people will make it that way.

"O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years [crisis years—the time God's Church is in the

place of safety] in the midst of the years make known; in *wrath* remember *mercy*" (Hab. 3:2). God's wrath will be seen in the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, and we will be telling the world that God *has mercy* and is about to show His mercy. And we will give them a *picture* of it—we will *tell* and *show* God's mercy to them in the place of safety.

"God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Sela. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise" (v. 3). *Paran* is the wilderness where Petra is located. God comes from here because that is where His people are, in a place of safety. All this is in the context of *reviving the Work of God*. Wherever God's people are, wherever the power of God is, wherever that fiery cloud is, God is always *reviving His Work*. His very elect know this. He is not appearing in Jerusalem at this time; this is *before* He returns to Jerusalem at His Second Coming. The place of safety, wherever it is, is where God's Work will be revived!

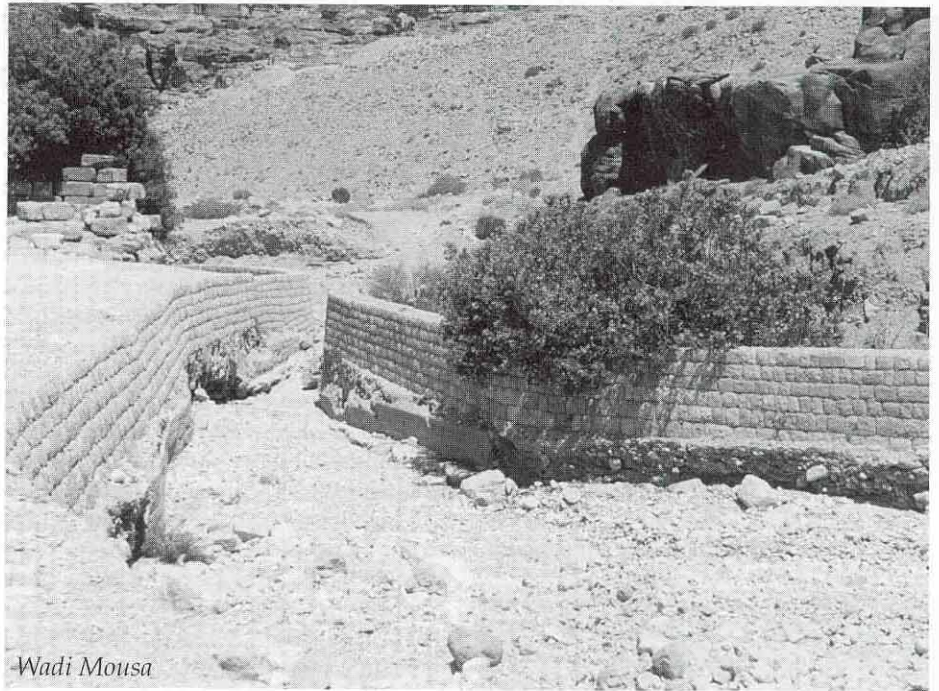
"And this is the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. And he said, The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them" (Deut. 33:1-2). Seir is the mountain range where Petra is located. And these 10,000 coming from there with Christ are people who learned that God's law—His Ten Commandments—applied to *them*, and they heeded the government of God based on that fiery law. They heeded the God who spoke out of that fire as He did to ancient Israel.

Christ will come from Paran. There will be a Work in this mountain range of Seir, and God's saints will be involved in it. The expression "shine forth from Mount Paran" also means God will shine forth *through His Work*. After all, these people are declaring His glory. And look at the context of all of this: CHRIST IS APPEARING IN THAT PLACE OF SAFETY.

This place of safety is the EMBRYO of the World Tomorrow—it is what the World Tomorrow will be like in character, physical beauty, joy and abundance. And then, following these three and a half years, Christ will return and restore this kind of beauty to the whole earth! ❖

Behind the Work in PETRA

by Stephen Flurry



Wadi Mousa

THE BEST TIME TO VIEW THE FAMOUS entrance to Petra from high above the small Wadi Mousa community is at daybreak, when light first begins to spill over the canyon walls. Petra is situated snugly in a valley between two large barrier ranges. It is open at the northern and southern ends. The popular belief that there is only one entrance is untrue. Actually, there are many. But most enter through the famous gorge called the Siq.

The Siq is the natural gorge used anciently as the main entrance to the city of Petra. Over the centuries, this great rock chasm has been a natural reservoir for dirt and gravel. Recently, with funding from the Swiss government, an organization called Petra National Trust (PNT) excavated and restored the Siq to its original cobblestone road, built by either the Romans or the Nabataeans. In some places, the PNT had bulldozers remove up to ten feet of dirt to uncover the road.

The entrance to the Siq is not nearly

as striking as many of the monuments inside Petra. But 100 years ago, that may have been different. Explorers in the 19th century all made mention of the Monumental Arch which originally spanned the gorge. But that collapsed in 1896. Today, you can still see evidence of this arch on each side of the gorge entrance.

The Siq itself is one mile long. It's the result of a natural fault which runs right through the mountain. Even today, rock strata can be seen to stop abruptly on one side of the chasm and pick up again on the other side. The contrasts between light and shade are startling. There are even places where the gorge opens up enough for a little green oasis of trees and oleander.

Toward the end of the Siq, it becomes very narrow, deep and dark, except for the thin, vertical strip of brilliance illuminating the end of the gorge—a light at the end of a tunnel.

The Treasury, over 40 meters tall, is the first monument tourists gaze upon



The famous Amphitheater

Theater, perhaps a hundred yards, the Outer Siq opens into the wide central valley of Petra which is divided in half by the Colonnaded Street running east-west. During Roman times, this was the heart of Petra. Although the valley appears to be quite desolate on both sides of the street today, at the height of the city's prosperity centuries ago, these wide open hillsides were packed with buildings of one kind or another. Recent excavations have uncovered some of this buried history.

Those unfamiliar with Petra and on a tight schedule may venture to the end of the Colonnaded Street, get a snack, and then leave without ever discovering the many hidden wonders of Petra. In fact, the whole area of Petra is estimated to be 12 square miles.

Petra's Biblical History

Though Petra might not be "half as old as time," as one explorer wrote long ago, its fascinating history dates back to some of the earliest accounts in the Bible.

During the days of Moses, when the children of Israel fled Egypt with an upper hand, there were three peoples, primarily, on the eastern side of the Jordan River—the children of Ammon, Moab and Edom. The Edomites were the ones most closely associated with Petra.

Toward the end of their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites crossed paths with each of these peoples. And, as we shall see, they crossed through Petra on several occasions, prior to their entrance into the Promised Land.

The children of Edom were descendants of Esau, Isaac's son, and brother of Jacob. So there is a close relationship, though not always friendly, between Israel and Edom.

The Edomites settled in the region that extends from the southern tip of the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba. Even today it retains its biblical name: the Wadi, or valley, of Arabah. The land of Edom also included the rocky crags of Seir, east of the Arabah. Seir means "hairy," which is how God described Esau when he was born. Seir is practically synonymous with Edom. Within the mountain range of Seir is the rocky fortress of Sela, or Petra, as it is called today.

Most people, despite abundant proof, are ignorant of the fact that the Israelites, in their 40-year wanderings, spent considerable time in this rocky

after leaving the Siq. It's Petra's most famous and possibly most beautiful monument. It's also the only monument that can truly be called "rose red." The best time to view the Treasury is at 11 a.m., when it's in full view of the sun. But in the shade it's easier to see the different colors of rose and peach. The Treasury has stood the test of time better than any other mon-

ument in Petra because it was cut deeply into the rock, sheltering it from the elements.

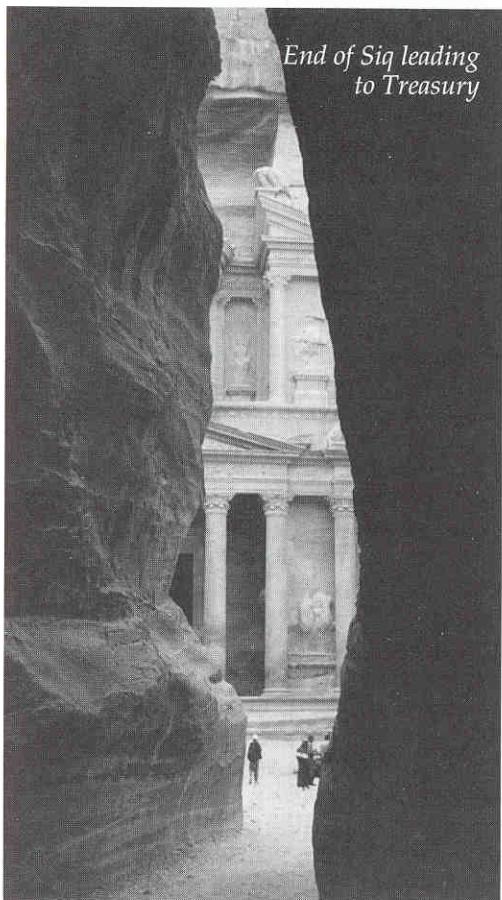
There is much debate about the origin of the Treasury. Some think it is of Roman design. Others place its creation much earlier, during Old Testament times. The uncertainty of its origin is heightened by the fact that, aside from the other monuments in Petra, its design is without parallel anywhere else in the world.

It has been called Pharaoh's Treasury because of the large urn on top, which, legend says, was packed full of precious stones and wealth long ago by an ancient Egyptian pharaoh.

In actuality, the structure more closely resembles a temple. There is an outer court, or porch, at the entrance. The inner court is a large 40-foot square chamber you step into from the porch. Three steps at the back of the inner chamber lead to the sanctuary—a small room, approximately ten feet square.

Upon leaving the Siq and reaching the open area in front of the Treasury, you are now in what is called the Outer Siq. It is relatively narrow to begin with, but quickly widens, revealing many more carved facades and perhaps the second most famous attraction in Petra—the Theater. Of a Roman standard, the Theater may have been reconstructed by the Romans in 106 A.D., from an earlier design. The pink sandstone was carved to create seating for up to 8,000 spectators. Some give higher estimates.

A short distance beyond the



End of Siq leading to Treasury

fortress. Moses, Aaron, Miriam, the children of Israel—all journeyed through Petra.

Numbers 10 reveals that after the Israelites left Mount Sinai, they went into the wilderness of Paran, which is another name for the region in and around Petra. From this wilderness, the Israelites sent the 12 men to spy out the land of Palestine. After 40 days, the spies came back to the wilderness of Paran and to the city of Kadesh, later called Kadesh-barnea. Most maps in the back of a Bible incorrectly place Kadesh in the Sinai Peninsula. This is not the city which Moses describes, but the Kadesh of Joshua 15:23—another place altogether.

The Kadesh God told Moses to lead the Israelites to after Mount Sinai, according to Deuteronomy 1, was located in the Amorite hill-country. From there, they would enter the Promised Land from east of the Jordan River.

But Israel refused to trust God in the wilderness. So He refused them entry into the Promised Land. The Israelites rebelled and tried to go in anyway. But en route to the land flowing with milk and honey they were crushed by the Amorites in the land of Seir. So Israel returned to Kadesh and dwelled there for many days.

But God did not let them remain in Kadesh. Instead of entering into the land of Canaan, "then we turned," Moses wrote, "and took our journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea, as the Lord spake unto me" (Deut. 2:1). They spent nearly 37-and-a-half years wandering in the Sinai Peninsula wilderness.

It wasn't until the last year of their wanderings that Israel returned to Kadesh. "Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there" (Num. 20:1). Jewish historian Josephus says that Miriam's "sepulchre is still extant near Petra, the old capital city of Arabia Petraea, at this day; as also that of Aaron, not far off."

Numbers 20 also tells the story of Moses striking the rock for water. This incident occurred in Petra. God told him to speak to the rock. But out of anger and frustration, he smote it twice. And God spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, "Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not

bring this congregation into the land which I have given them" (v. 12).

After four months in Kadesh, the children of Israel then journeyed to Mount Hor at the edge of the land of Edom.

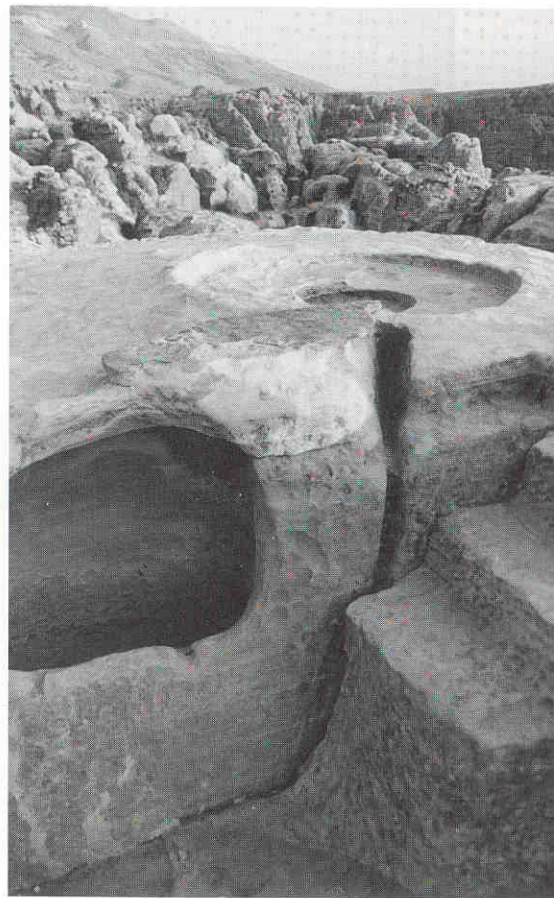
"And Aaron the priest went up into mount Hor at the commandment of the Lord, and died there, in the fortieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the first day of the fifth month" (Num. 33:38). Josephus, who wrote that Aaron's tomb was close to Miriam's, elsewhere noted that Aaron died on one of the "high mountains" which encompasses Petra. Today, that 4,800-foot mountain, just southwest of Petra, is called Jabal Harun by the Arabs—meaning, "Mount of the Prophet Aaron."

Upon leaving Mount Hor, the children of Israel journeyed north and eventually pitched their tents in the plains of Moab, at the foot of Mount Nebo, where Moses died.

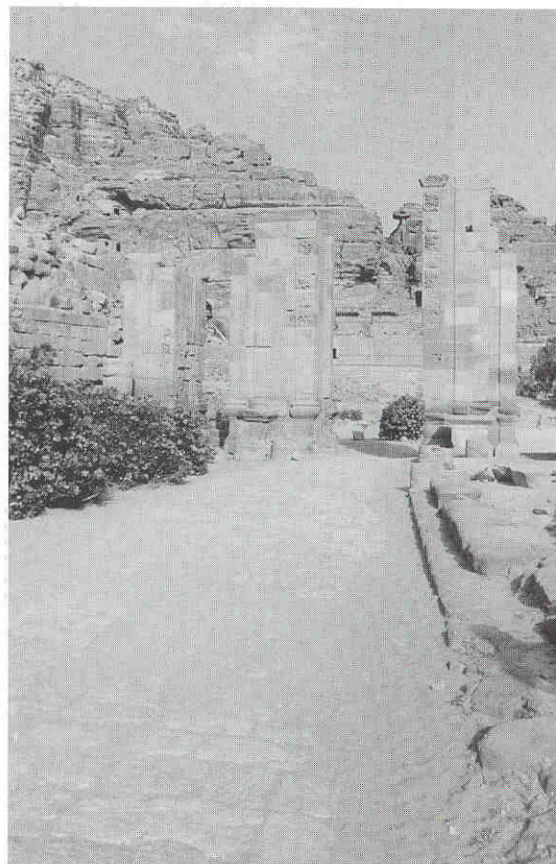
But even after entering the Promised Land, Petra remained a stronghold for the children of Israel. Deuteronomy 1 says that God gave the land of Kadesh-barnea and the mountain of the Amorites to the children of Israel. When the Israelites settled in Canaan, Joshua 15 reveals that the tribe of Judah was given a portion of land which extended to the southern side of Kadesh-barnea. Petra was in fact the gate by which Israel controlled their Edomite enemies. Indeed, Israel had a long and storied history with the rose-red city of Petra.

There is one notable historical reference to Israel's heavy influence over the land of Petra. It was recorded in the 13th century, when an Egyptian Sultan traveled to the region known as Jordan today to put down an insurrection at Kerak. On the way, the Sultan passed through Petra. This is what his biographer recorded as he crossed the Petra Valley and entered into the outer Siq: "And he descended through the gorge of Ruba'i which windeth through the mountains of the Cities of the Children of Israel, amidst most marvellous caves. Those are houses adorned with columns and gates; the facades are sculptured into the very rock face by carving of chisels, all fretted and friezed into decorative living forms as though they were dwellings for people."

For God's people today, Petra may have more significance than just histor-



Above: The sacrificial altar at the High Place. Below: The famous Roman Colonnaded Street.



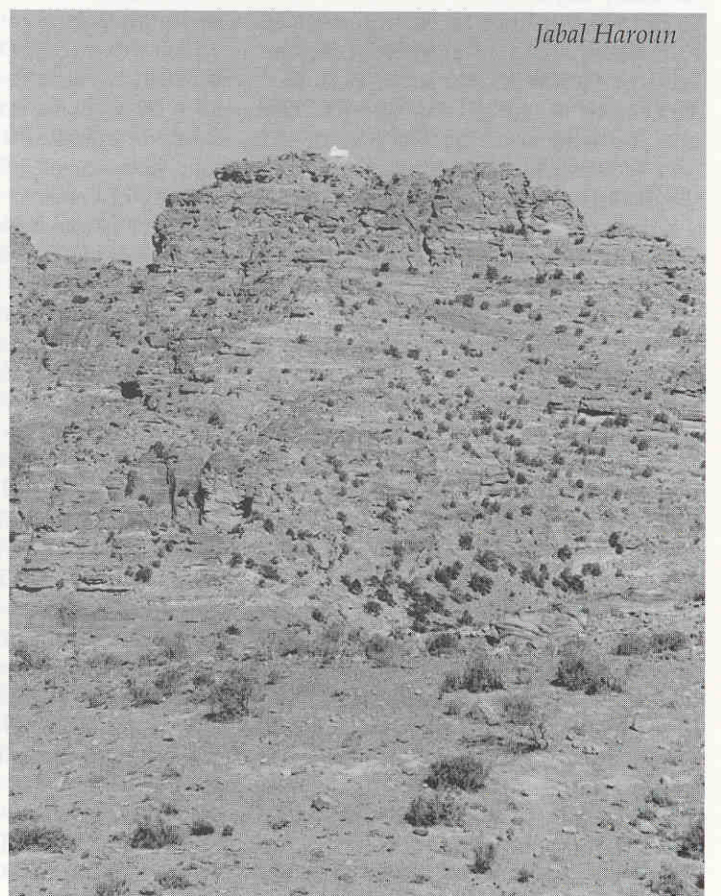
Petra panorama



Monastery at Al-Deir



Jabal Haroun



ical. As the apostle Paul wrote, these scriptures are profitable for our instruction—for our example.

Under Moses, Petra was the station from which the Promised Land could have been entered. In like manner, somewhere on this earth today, God is preparing a place for His people as one final stop before they enter into the Kingdom of God.

Our Tour Continues

Just north of the Colonnaded Street in the Outer Siq is Um Seyhoun, where a small community of Bdoul Arabs live. These are the Bedouins who, up until 1985, had lived in the caves of Petra. But at the government's behest, they were moved out and given this small permanent dwelling place on a hill overlooking the heart of Petra.

From the Outer Siq, next to the Theater, there is a staircase which leads to a place called Jabal Madhbah, otherwise known as the High Place of Sacrifice. You can also climb to this peak from behind the mountain, beginning from the valley that runs through Petra.

From the High Place, you can see a panorama of the Petra valley. You can see the entrance to Petra from the Siq and how the ancient city was guarded to the east and to the west by mountain ranges.

Aside from the breathtaking view, the High Place is best known for the sacrificial altar that has been carved into the rock at the mountain's peak.

Before the altar, on the High Place, is a sunken courtyard, in the middle of which is a small platform five inches high much like the shewbread table on which the bloodless offerings were laid in Israelite temples. The altar itself, approached by three steps, is where the priest cut the throats of the sacrificial beasts. Specially cut channels were also carved out so the blood could properly drain when sacrificing.

In his book about Petra, Iain Browning acknowledges the "implicit relationship" between this supposed Nabataean altar at the High Place and the sacrificial altars of ancient Israel. Considering Israel's early encampments at Petra, it is not far-fetched to assume that they sacrificed at this very spot, even if they may not have been the ones to carve the altar you see today.

East of the High Place, across the valley that runs through Petra, you can see Umm Al-Biyara, standing erect like

a giant rock table. Viewing it from the High Place, its walls appear to be so steep it would seem impossible to climb. It can be scaled from behind, however, going up the southwest corner.

Biblical scholars speculate that this 1100-foot cliff might be where Amaziah of ancient Judah cast 10,000 Edomites to their deaths (II Chron. 25). No matter where you happen to be in the center of Petra, it's as if Umm Al-Biyara commands your attention. Among the many mountains in the region, this one has the most unique look.

Up the hill on the south side of the Colonnaded Street is the Great Temple of Dushara, an excavated Roman church. From here you can also see the menacing cliffs of Umm Al-Biyara.

On the west side of the Petra valley, parallel to Umm Al-Biyara, but further north, is the mountain of Al-Deir. The 762-step path up the mountain is strenuous, but well worth the challenge; particularly since there are several places to stop and enjoy the picturesque scenery and the rock-carved monuments. The Lion Tomb is perhaps 150 steps up, named from the two lion-heads which flank its entry gate. Erosion has stunted the ferocity of these two carvings.

Approaching the summit at Al-Deir, the view is increasingly breathtaking. Toward the end of the stairs, the rock path reaches its narrowest point before finally opening into a vast platform, with the imposing facade of the Al-Deir monumental structure protruding on the right, inserted between two gigantic cliff walls.

Those who identify Petra merely with the Treasury are in for quite a revelation once they reach the 762nd stair at Al-Deir. Besides the Treasury, this is the best preserved monument in Petra. Some who have never been to Petra confuse pictures of the monastery with the Treasury. The monastery is about the same height as the Treasury, but almost twice as wide.

In front of the monastery is a great circular court. Until recently, Bedouins used the plateau to grow a little grain for their stock. We can only assume that anciently the court accommodated great congregations.

From the circular court, it is only a short walk up to the edge of the plateau which overlooks the Wadi Arabah, the valley separating the Petra mountain range from the Promised

Land.

The Israelites traversed the Wadi Arabah north, around the Dead Sea on its eastern shores, between Edom and Moab, before they finally crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land. On a clear day, you can sit atop the peak at Al-Deir and meditate for hours about the history of the great land you behold in every direction.

The last great site can be seen from just about anywhere in Petra, for it is the highest peak in the region, the near 5,000-foot Jabal Haroun—where the prophet Aaron died, before Israel entered the Promised Land. The site is still revered by the locals, evidenced by the tiny spec of white you can see on the summit from afar—a Moslem mosque.

Heading west, around the left side of Um Al-Biyara, you can get a good look at the best pasture land in the Petra valley. It's not hard to imagine, given proper care and a bit of divinely bestowed rainfall, lush crops of wheat and corn or a grove of fruit trees, as in the Jordan Valley.

Looking at Jabal Haroun from the heart of Petra, it looks like an imposing climb. But like Um Al-Biyara, it's not nearly as intimidating from the back side. In fact there is a well worn and heavily marked path most of the way up.

At the top, you can see the entire 12-mile square region of Petra.

An Unfinished House

Though Petra can at times be hot, dry and windy, it remains a remarkable natural wonder. Petra's many sandstone monuments are left as a monument of a city which was once a desert oasis of fountains, verdant gardens, olive groves and vineyards.

Today, it is like a strong, sturdy frame of an unfinished house without water, lights and interior decorating. The Siq restoration is just the first step to finishing the "house." Reconstructing the water system will slow the rate of erosion and restore the plumbing.

Add to that many skillful laborers in Christ. Add to that the many wonders and benefits that come from obeying the God of this perfectly designed universe, who says He will make the desert blossom as the rose—and you can envision this great rocky fortress being transformed into a living archaeological park—a thriving cultural metropolis, a spiritual light—to the whole world. ❖