

# Illustrated Bible Life

## Climbing Mount Sinai

**I**n Exodus 19, Moses met with God on top of Mount Sinai. After receiving instructions to take to the Israelites, Moses descended the mountain to meet with the people. In the same chapter but a few days later, Moses again ascended the mountain and returned after speaking with God.

Most of us think of mountain climbing as an all-day, or even multi-day, activity. However, not all mountains are difficult to climb. I thought it might be interesting this quarter to provide a photographic tour of what it is like for those wishing to climb Mount Sinai today. In all but one of the sessions, you'll find a photo showing some aspect of the ascent and descent. The rest of this editorial will take you on a mini-tour of the journey!

The traditional site of Mount Sinai is on the Sinai Peninsula in southeastern Egypt (see photos on pages 4, 10, 27). The mountain we call Mount Sinai is locally known as Jebel Musa (or the mountain of Moses). It is 7,497 feet tall. The Sinai range is composed of granite in a desert climate, exposed to high winds and sun with little rainfall, so few plants are able to grow there. Although the tall granite peaks of this range look intimidating, centuries of pilgrimage to the top of this mountain have made for an easy trail climb (pages 10, 11, 34). Tourists typically take about two and a half hours to reach the top.

Most tourists are awakened by their guides before dawn, and they hike in the dark to reach the summit just as the sky is lightening from the rising sun (cover, pages 4, 31). Although not a difficult ascent, there are camels available for a small fee for the first hour or so of the journey (pages 19, 35). About halfway up the mountain, a small shop run by local Bedouins has strong coffee, stout tea, and water bottles for sale.

At the top, there are two small buildings. One is the Greek Orthodox chapel built in 1934 atop the remains of a 16th-century structure (page 23). Legend says it was built on the rock from which the stone tablets for the Ten Commandments were cut. The other building is a mosque still used for worship.

After watching the sunrise, tourists are led back down the mountain to the Monastery of St. Catherine, which was built in the sixth century, and is one of the oldest working Christian monasteries in the world (pages 15, 39, 47). Inside is a library considered to be the world's oldest continually-operating library. It houses an impressive collection of scrolls and books dating back to the fourth century AD, including the Syriac Sinaiticus, and, until 1859, the Codex Sinaiticus (today, most of it is in the British Library in London).

The Codex Sinaiticus (page 52) is a historical treasure, valued by biblical scholars as one of the best Greek texts of the New Testament. In addition to the complete New Testament, it contains about half of the Greek Old Testament (or Septuagint) and several important apocryphal and early Christian works.

The final photo (page 55) shows the sun setting on the Sinai range.