

(15:12-16). Uncertainty about leaving Canaan may also have been a serious concern on the basis of Abraham's experience when he migrated to Egypt, (12:10-20), and God's instructions to Isaac not to migrate to Egypt in time of famine, (26:2).

At Beersheba, the point of leaving Canaan, Jacob offered sacrifices. These may have been sacrifices of petition in which Jacob sought divine guidance and approval for going to Egypt.<sup>7</sup> Making the offerings to the "God of his father Isaac" he may have been particularly concerned about reaffirmation of the promise God had made to Isaac at Beersheba (26:23-24).

God's response came to Jacob in a vision at night. Jacob was instructed to go to Egypt with the confirmation that he would be made "into a great nation there," that God would be with him, and that his descendants would be brought back to the land of Canaan.

With this confirmation of the patriarchal promise at the occasion of these sacrifices in Beersheba Jacob moved on to Egypt. The promise that the Israelites would return to Canaan was imparted to Joseph. Before his death Joseph exacted a vow from his sons that they would transfer his bones to the land of Canaan when the fulfilment of this promise became a reality.

### **Offerings by the Israelites**

The divine-human relationship that was established with the patriarchs was extended in the book of Exodus to the entire nation of Israel. Whereas in the former God primarily revealed himself to individuals who were representatives of their families, in the latter God related to the elders and the entire community of Israel through Moses as spokesman. In Exodus 12:3 Israel as a community meeting for a religious purpose was identified by the Hebrew word *קָהָל* its first use in scripture.<sup>8</sup>

God's purpose in calling Moses was to fulfill the promise made to the patriarchs to redeem Israel and through them bless all the nations of the earth. This was explicitly stated when God revealed himself to them at Mount Sinai asserting that "you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" as God's treasured possession in the whole earth (Exod 19:56). In this progressive revelation during the Exodus as God displayed his mighty acts on behalf of Israel and through the spoken word provided interpretation of these miraculous events. It is interesting to ascertain the meaning and significance of sacrifices and offerings for the Israelites.

The basic issue in the God-Israel relationship was uniquely stated to Moses when God called him to challenge the pharaoh of Egypt:

Then say to Pharaoh, "This is what the Lord says: 'Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me." But you refused to let him go: so I will kill your firstborn son (Exod 4:22-23).'"

This relationship between God and Israel was verbally communicated to Israel through Moses. God was going to redeem the Israelites so that they may worship him. This was also announced to the pharaoh who risked the loss of his firstborn if he refused to release the Israelites.