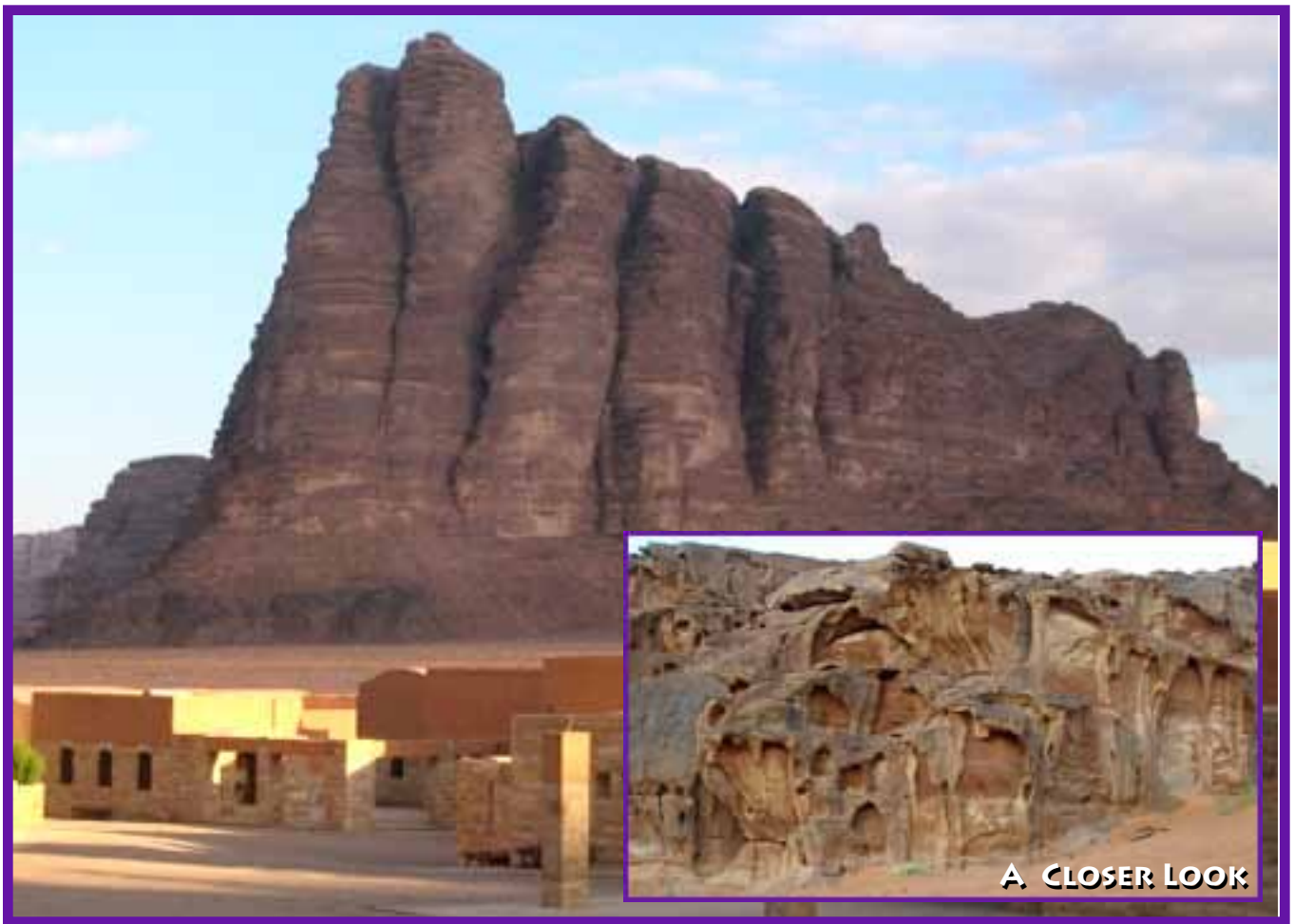


# Tour of the Holy Lands - Petra

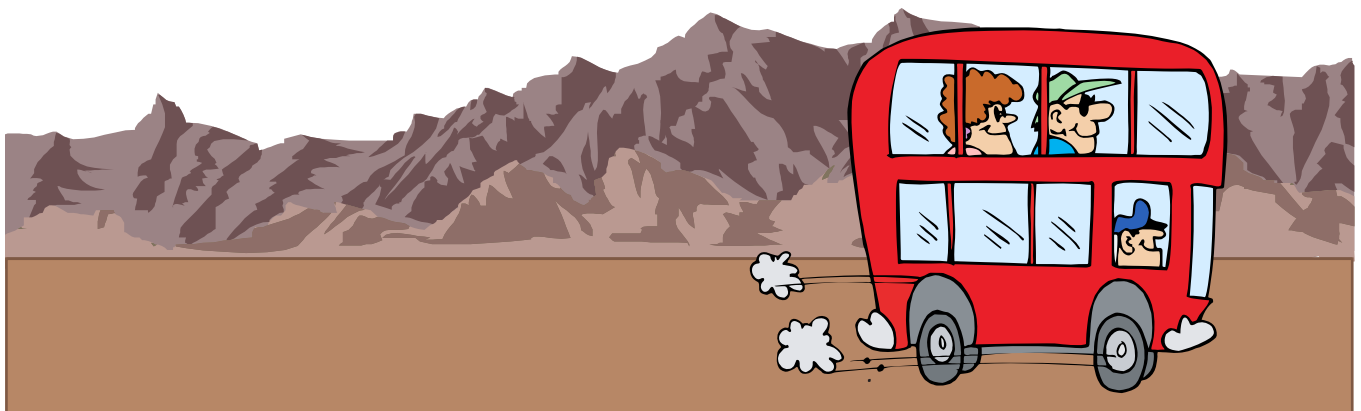


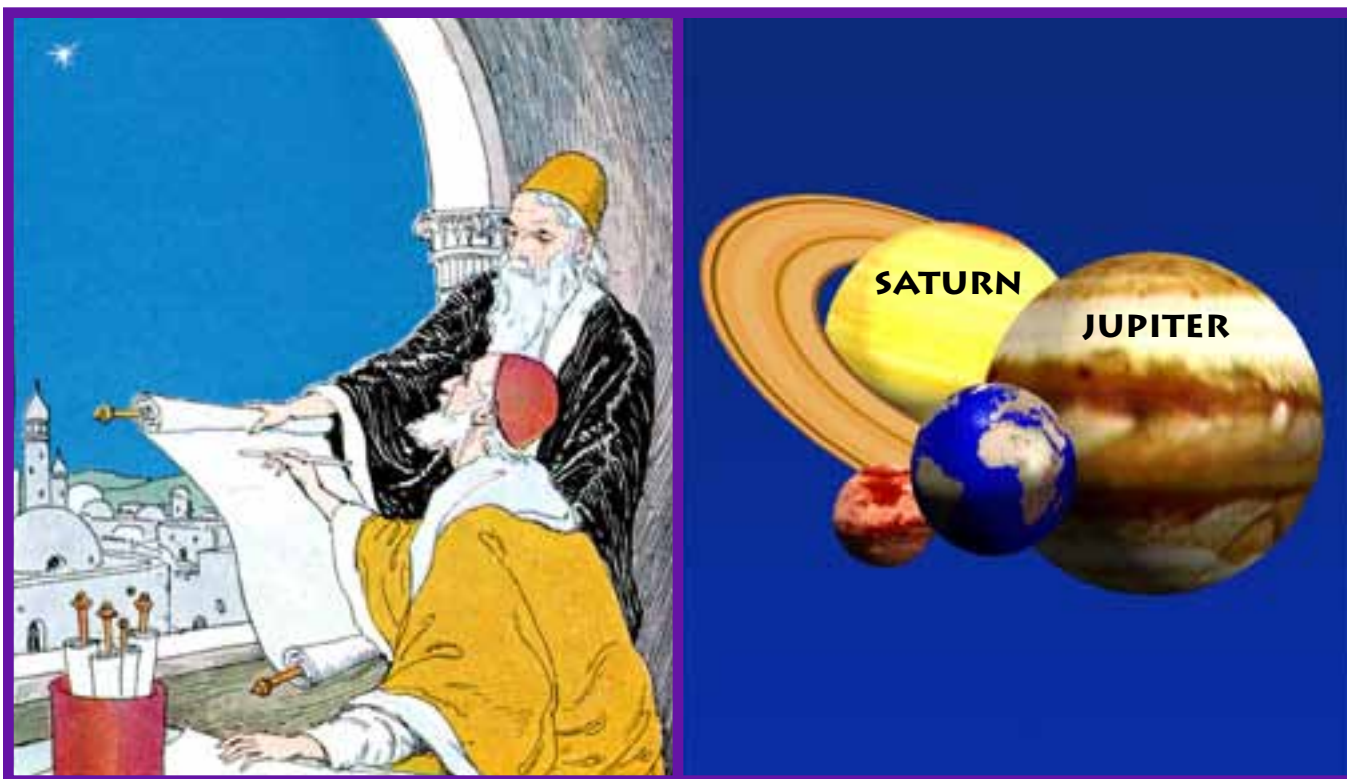
As the sun goes down we head to a spot called “Wadi Rum” for a camp-out. The last bit of sun is peeking through the clouds. We can see outlines of giant rock formations against the sky. Imagine! We look forward to daybreak so we can see it all. After tucking our backpacks into our tents - 2 kids to a tent - we eat and join the line dancing with the local Arabs. It’s pitch black now, but before crawling into our bunks, our guide says, “Turn off your flashlights and look up.” “Oooooooo!,” we reply. For there in the sky are more stars than we’ve ever seen at once – even shooting stars. Our guide then says, “Now, pretend we’re in Bible times and somewhere in these tents are wise men resting, as they travel through this land, following a star to find a new king. Think about that as you fall asleep tonight and we’ll talk about them tomorrow.” (Matthew 2:1-11)





Some of us are up at dawn. Who can sleep with so much to see and learn? We eat and take pick-up trucks to those rock formations for a closer look. We scramble down, run and climb as high as we can go. They're so grand! We can see forever! We could stay all day. But with even more climbing a few miles away, it's time for everyone to head back to the bus and on to Petra!





On the way, we hear about the wise men. The Bible says they were from the “east,” which usually means Mesopotamia 400 miles away, maybe Arabia. It says they were “wise,” which meant they may have been teachers of philosophy, medicine or science. “Wise” in Greek, the original language of the New Testament, is “magi,” which means they may have been magicians or priests. Most say they were astronomers, which means they studied the stars and gave advice to kings. It says they were looking for a King and had seen his star in the east. Since the star was brighter than all others, some say it wasn’t a star at all. Every 805 years, two large planets, Jupiter and Saturn, cross paths, which makes them look twice as bright. Scientists figure this must have happened in 7 B.C. or BCE, just at the time Jesus was born. The wisemen believed that a new star meant that a divine announcement was being made.





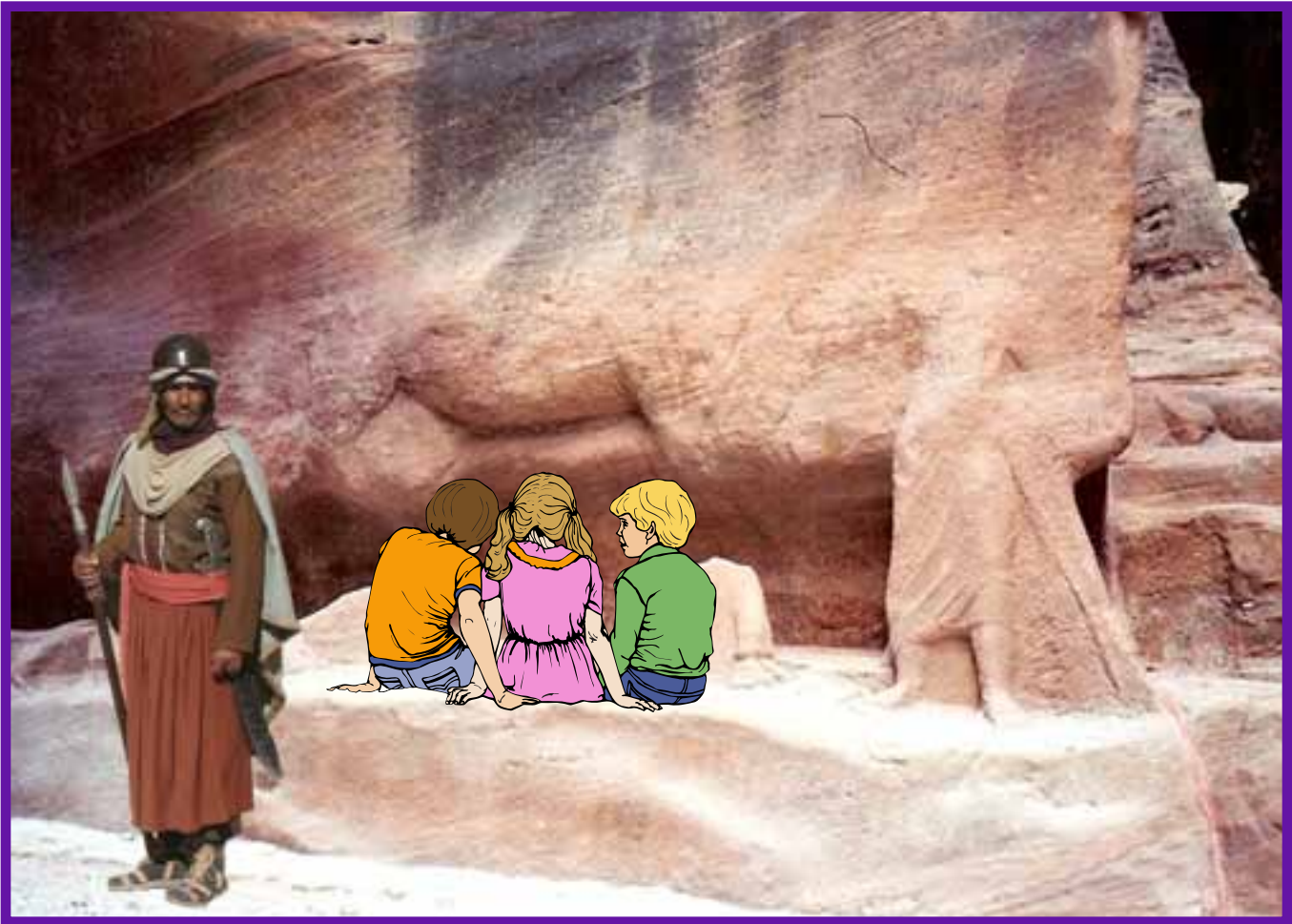
How many wise men were there? Three, of course. But maybe not. The Bible doesn't really tell us. Why are we fooled? Because of the 3 gifts - gold, frankincense and myrrh. They had to bring presents. No one visited a king without presents.

Where would they find the most precious items in the world? Traders traveled the world in camel caravans. The wise men could have bought their gifts from them. They may even have joined a caravan themselves to be safe from robbers. Camel caravans always stopped at Petra since it was the most important trade center around.

Now we can tell we're getting close to Petra. The flat desert at Wadi Rum has changed to a rocky surface. One thing we know for sure: we could never find our way by ourselves.

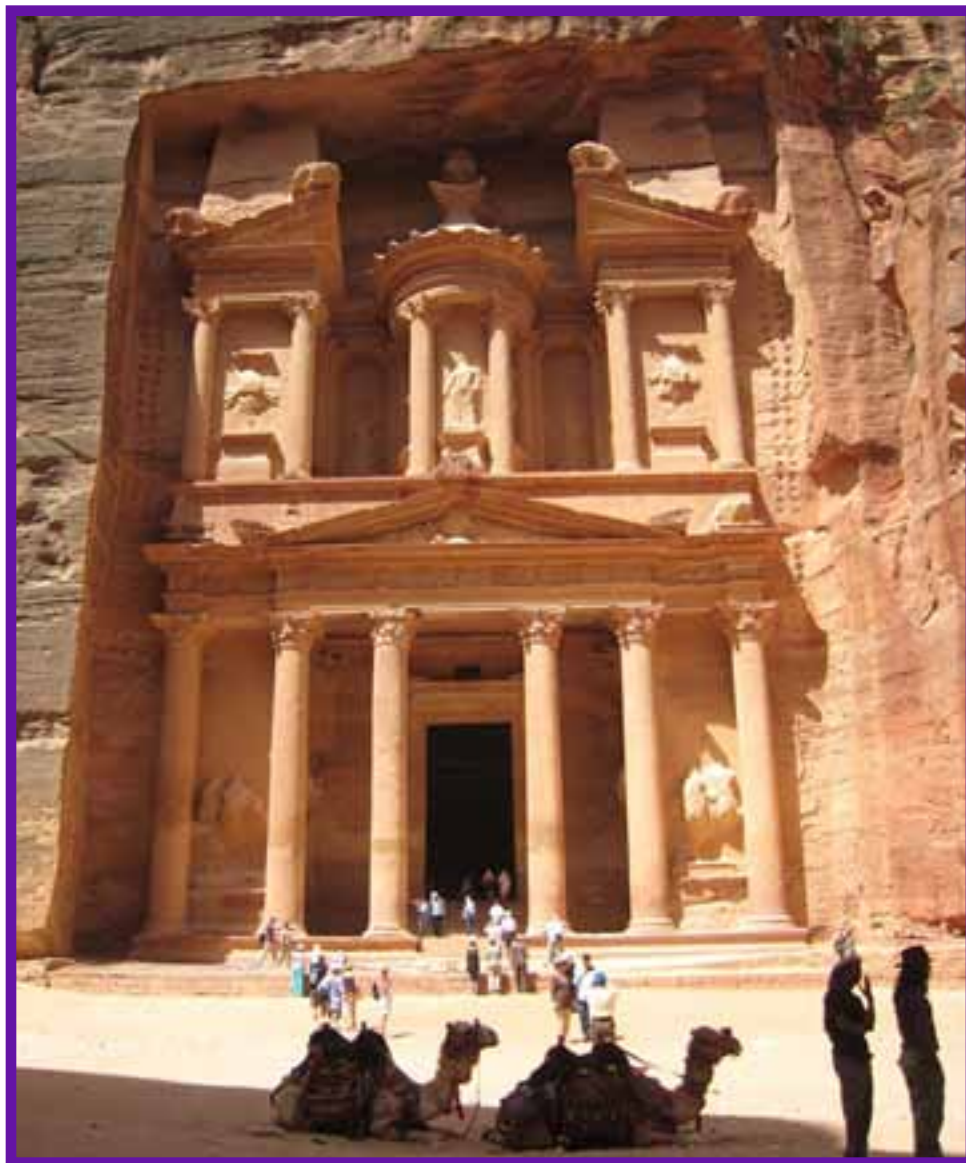


As we get out of the bus we wish our parents could be here. Petra, called “Sela” in the Bible, is one of the New 7 Wonders of the World. We mount horses for a short ride to the city. Leaving them by the gate, we walk into a huge split in the rocks, called the “Siq,” (pronounced “seek”). It’s a long winding walk. It hasn’t changed much since Bible times. It’s so high that it keeps out much of the sun. We picture the caravan and our three wise men moving with us. The clip clop of the huge animals on the Roman road echo against the walls. Many different languages chatter away.



A man dressed as a guard from ancient times stands at attention. There's a huge carving which the weather has worn away over the centuries, but if we look closely, we can make out a man leading a camel. Can you see the camel's feet, his hump, his head?





Our destination is near. We walk slowly. Our eyes are hit by a bright light and there in front of us is a giant rose-colored building. They tell us it's a tomb, but everyone calls it the Treasury. Ancient artists carved its beautiful columns and statues out of a stone wall. Inside, the rooms are simple, but its natural rock walls look as if they are painted in colorful stripes. These have remained unchanged for 2000 years.



We won't find the 3 wise men's gifts at Petra. But we'll find lots of beaded necklaces for our own gifts.

Each of the wise men's gifts symbolized a quality. The first gift of the magi was gold. When giving gold to a person, you were wishing them purity, divinity and long life. Because of its beauty, people believed gold had healing powers. So, long ago they wore it around their necks, rubbed themselves with it, made it into a powder and drank it. A pound of gold was worth about \$600. Gold is found in the Bible hundreds of times, as pure gold, fine gold, choice gold, and others.







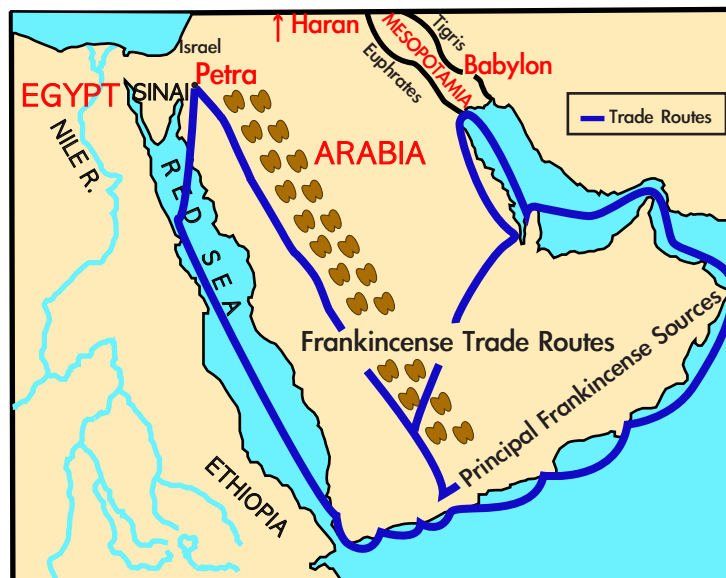
We remember that while Moses was on Mount Sinai, the children of Israel melted down their jewelry and made a golden calf. Then they bowed down and worshiped it. (Exodus 32:1-4) The most popular source of gold was Ophir, which is not on our maps of today. Scholars have guessed that Ophir was Somalia or Sudan or southern Arabia.

## 2nd Gift Frankincense

Lovely and  
Agreeable Qualities



The second gift of the magi was frankincense. Frankincense is a glittering brittle yellow resin which comes from the gum of a tree that grows in Arabia and Somalia. Workers scrape away a piece of bark and milky tears seep out. After hardening into a golden color, they are collected. One tree yields 10 pounds of frankincense. One pound used to cost \$500. In Jesus time, 3,000 tons a year were carried on camels hundreds of miles along the Frankincense trail on the coast of Arabia. The world begged for it as a fragrance and medicine. They drank it and chewed it. It stands for lovely and agreeable qualities. Its lovely fragrance in the temple hid unpleasant odors. Its rising smoke symbolized prayer. Because it was used for holy purposes, the Hebrews were forbidden to use it for perfume. The trade flourished for 2,000 years.





Let's imagine as we walk, that we pass a tent of bedouins. They scoop hot coals from their fire into a small brass bowl. In it they sprinkle a few beads of frankincense. It sizzles and melts. They pass it around and fan the white smoke over their heads and clothes. What pleasant smells are coming from that tent!



## 3rd Gift Myrrh



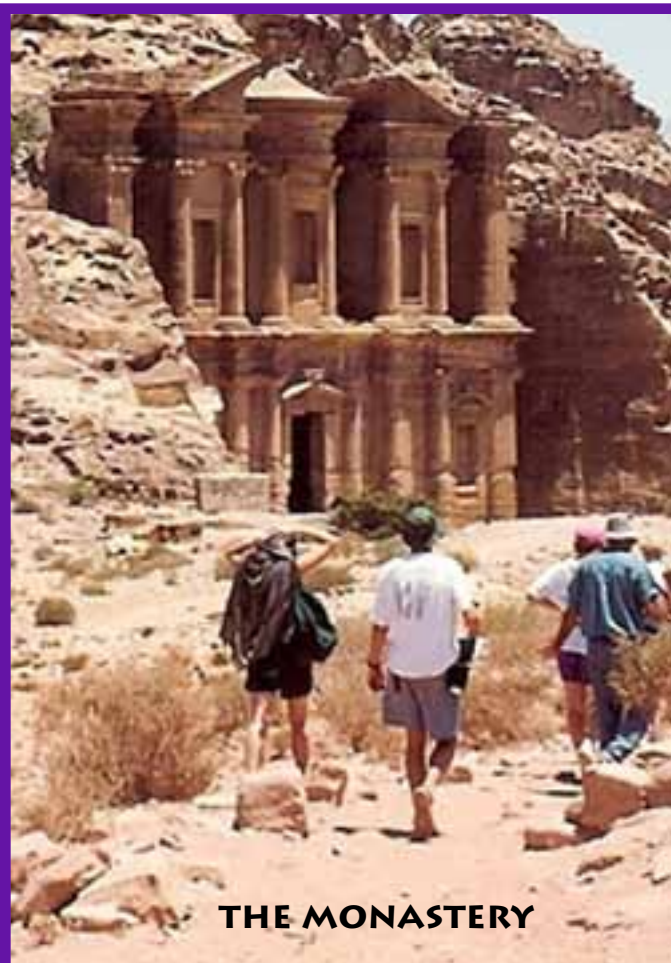
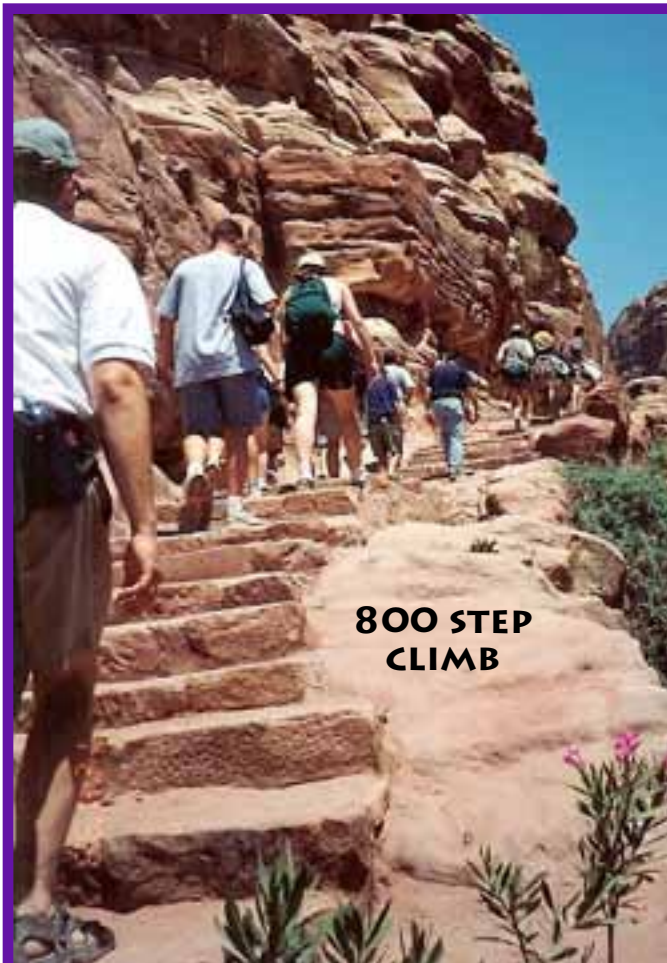
Used in Beauty  
Treatments

Used in Perfume

Used as Medicine



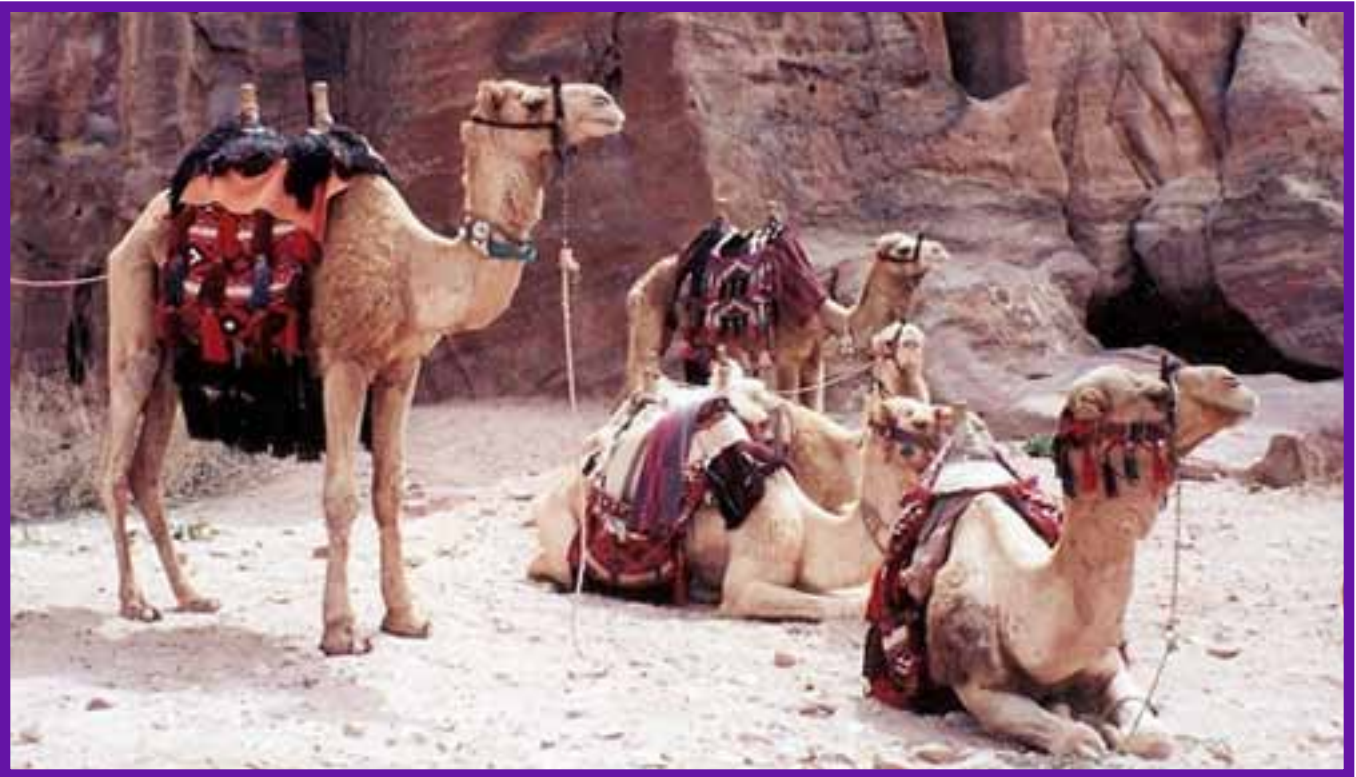
The third gift of the magi was myrrh, a dark bitter resin, also from the bark of a tree. A pound of myrrh would have cost \$4,000. Just a drop of its oil could double the price of perfume. It was used in beauty treatments. Joseph was taken to Egypt in a camel caravan selling myrrh and other spices. (Genesis 37:25) It was used as medicine for a long list of problems. It was given to Jesus in a drink to ease pain at the crucifixion. He refused it. (Mark 15:23) The air in King Tut's tomb was thick with the rich smell of myrrh. Nicodemus spread it between the linens to wrap Jesus' body for burial. (John 19:39,40) Myrrh was a gift which made a very good impression. In Bible times, they say if your medicine chest held gold, frankincense and myrrh, you could treat everything. You might say that the three wise men were bearing healing gifts fit for a king. But this King never used these gifts to heal. He healed spiritually.



The guide says, “Who’s ready to climb 800 steps?” We all shout, “We are!” And so we begin. We head to a famous high place, called “The Monastery,” where pagans and then early Christians once worshiped. Every hundred steps or so, a donkey stands waiting. For a price, we could ride him and let the donkey do the walking. We pat the heads of each of our little four-legged friends and keep going. We all reach the top without help.

What a view! We can see rugged mountain tops for miles and miles. Some say that among these mountains Moses struck a rock and water came forth. (Numbers 20:10,11) On one distant mountain called Mount Hor is the tomb of Aaron, the brother of Moses. (Numbers 20:22-29) We love being up so high. Walking down is much easier than climbing up.



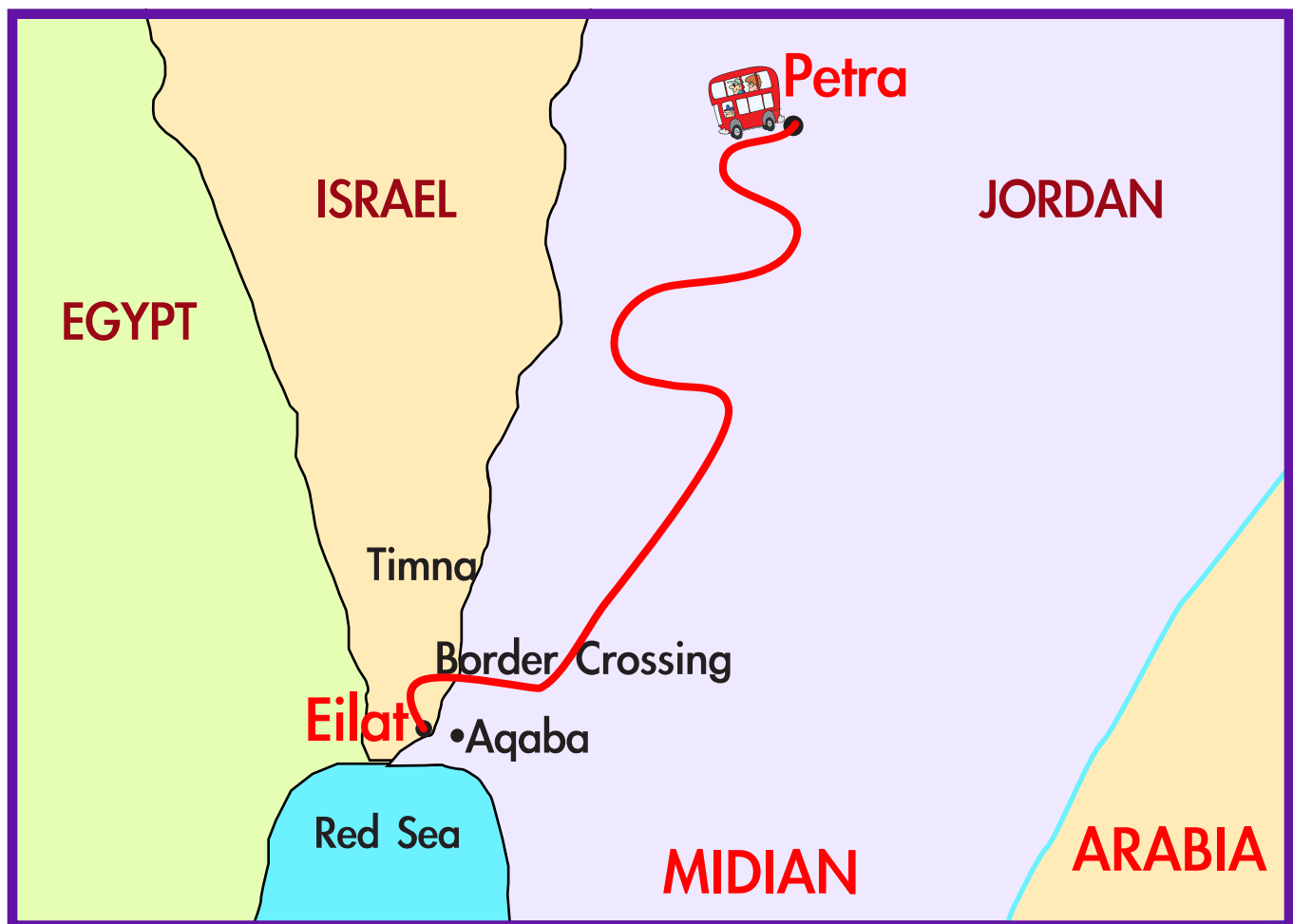


Now it's about time we rode camels. Our guide is bargaining with the handlers to get us a good price. They swing each of us up onto the colorful blankets and tie the camels together. The animals know where to go. In the Bible, owning camels showed the world you were rich. Abraham had camels. (Genesis 24:10) Jacob's wives rode upon them. (Genesis 31:17) Joseph was taken to be sold in Egypt in a camel caravan selling myrrh and spices. (Genesis 37:25,27,28) Midianites on camels stole food from the children of Israel. (Judges 6:3-6) The Queen of Sheba had "a very great train" of camels carrying spices, gold, and precious stones for King Solomon. (I Kings 10:1,2) These are just a few of the camel stories in the Bible.





We rock back and forth. We pass by ruins of temples and towers, gates and markets. There's a theater carved out of the rock. The camels' necks are soft. Arabs gallop by on their Arabian horses. Other travelers ride low on donkeys. But we're riding close to heaven.



Back at the Treasury, we dismount from the camels and retrace our steps through the Siq. We sing songs and hear them bounce off those high walls. Our horses are waiting to take us back to the exit. And then it's on to the bus. We think it's been a full day, but our guide has one more surprise. We drive south to the border, say "goodbye" to Jordan, get our Passport stamped and say "hello" again to Israel.

But what could be the surprise? We drive to our hotel in the city of Eilat. We're on the beach this time, but it's not just any beach. It's the Red Sea! Aha! We're pretty far from where Moses parted the Red Sea, but we don't mind. We run up to our rooms and change so we can swim. We wonder if the wise men came to Eilat. What a treat for them after traveling in the desert for so long!



Not far from Eilat is the port where King Solomon sent his fleet of ships to Ophir to find gold. He sent them every three years. We try to imagine the Red Sea filled with ancient trader ships from all parts of the world. This port could easily be bringing gold, frankincense and myrrh. After dinner we all clap. It's been a wonderful day!