

THE FATE CHANGER



THE WAR BETWEEN
FATE AND CHOICE
I

1st BOOK

THE WAR BETWEEN FATE AND CHOICE



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ISBN: 978-605-89307-

Kaderi Deęiřtiren 1

Bu kitabın Trkiye’deki yayın hakları Telif Hakları Kanunu gereęince İstiridye Medya’ya aittir.

Print and Binding: Anadolu Ofset
Davutpařa Cd. Emintař Kazım Dinęol San. Sit.
No: 81/87 Topkapı - İSTANBUL
Tel: (0212) 567 8993 www.anadoluofset.net

Publishing Date: řubat 2014

Kutsal Kitap [KK] alıntılarının kaynaęı:
Kutsal Kitap © The Bible Society in Turkey (Kitabı Mukaddes řirketi) & The Translation Trust / Yeni Yařam Yayınları, 2001,
2008

Eski eviri alıntılarının kaynaęı:
Kitabı Mukaddes [KM], Kitabı Mukaddes řirketi, İstanbul.

Kutsal İncil [Kİ] alıntılarının kaynaęı
Kutsal İncil, Ltuf Yayıncılık, İstanbul.

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HOW CAN THESE BOOKS BE USED?

This book is designed for self-study, family study, and small groups.

If you are studying alone, read one chapter a day, think deeply about its main topic, and answer the questions at the end of each chapter.

If you are studying as a family, find a convenient time at least once a week to read a chapter, talk about it, and answer the discussion questions at the end of each chapter. A perfect time would be after dinner.

If you are studying in a small group, meet at least once a week for 1.5 hours, read two chapters by taking turns reading one page at a time, ask questions for comprehension, and answer the discussion questions at the end of each chapter.

It is strongly suggested to start each chapter with a prayer. Open your heart and speak to God as a friend, ask Him to be with you, to open your mind for understanding, and to change the way you think. It would also be good to pray again after answering the discussion questions to thank God, and ask for His help in applying to your own life the principles you learn in each chapter.

This book series is an essential first step towards psychological, physical, and moral improvement. In order for the series to have the full strength of positive good, regular reading and a forward determination to complete them is necessary. Thus, you are strongly encouraged to follow the instructions above.

This book series is the key to unlocking the secrets of your fate, life, and future. It will be a long journey, you will be challenged, and you will learn many new things.

Welcome to the adventure of a lifetime that will last forever!

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ALTERING YOUR FATE IN A DANGEROUS WORLD

Nobody doubts that we live in a dangerous world. On August 17, 1999 more than 40,000 of our citizens were suddenly buried beneath concrete and steel in a horrible earthquake. Even after more than a decade many people who lost loved ones in that tragedy are trying to cope with depression and have turned to prescription medicines. It seems like every day there are reports on the news of terrorism and we see the crying fathers and fainting mothers of those who are killed. On the radio, we hear reports of traffic accidents and the numbers of dead and wounded. It is true that death shows no respect for age or social class. But it just doesn't seem fair when babies die in a bus accident. We struggle to find a reason why the innocent should fall victim to the errors of another. All the while we wonder how or if all of this could be prevented. Is it all just a matter of fate?

Only about 7% of Turks believe that there is no God. This small minority would tell you that everything happens by chance, and that random evolutionary forces drove mankind's progress from single-cell organisms to advanced intelligent beings. Atheists, as they like to call themselves, often have confidence that one day mankind will discover the scientific secret that can overcome the ultimate fate of all – death.

In contrast to the previous group, the vast majority of Turks believe in God. Some believe that God made the world by an instantaneous miracle. While others believe that God used evolution to create our world. Additionally, some people believe in fate - a concept that is difficult to define but based upon the idea that everything is pre-determined. They believe He has written everything down and this is what will happen. There are no exceptions. At the same time, people who believe in God generally believe that God is good and loving. But the contrast between those beliefs seems illogical and raises some serious questions.

Did God create those 40,000 people to die in an earthquake and leave their loved ones in depression for more than a decade? That doesn't sound like a loving God. Does God ordain by fate that our youth be blown up by mines planted in the road by terrorists? Could a loving God be pleased that fate is accomplished when a boy falls into a ditch and dies in front of his mother's eyes? If God really is loving, how can we accept His implication in the terrible things we just mentioned? It just doesn't make sense! Perhaps that is why some people try to alter their fate.

There are many ways that people try to know and alter their fate. Some look at horoscopes, coffee grinds, and tarot cards. While others take a more religious approach. They pray and go on pilgrimages thinking that God will listen and change the course of human history. They think that their good works will please God enough that He will change their lives for the better.

“Perhaps if we sacrifice an animal God will find favor toward us and change our fate,” they think.

But can you really alter your fate? And if so, where would you start? What can you depend on in an uncertain and dangerous world? Is there anything that you can really believe in?

Let's start by looking at the world from the atheists' perspective. What can atheists really believe in? Well, atheists can believe in

what they can see, hear, touch, taste and smell. They believe that what exists is only what can be measured scientifically. Therefore, in their minds fate (if it even exists) can only be altered by using science to change our environment and conditions. Death seems to be everyone's "fate", so scientists are working to overcome death by learning what causes life and death. They hope to find a cure for death through medical science. But the atheist viewpoint also has some serious flaws.

In 1500 AD we could not measure or understand the existence of microwaves. And yet, 500 years later even little kids use cell phones in Istanbul to talk to their grandparents in Mardin. Microwaves were always in our universe. But we just didn't know it nor could we imagine it then. We couldn't see, hear, or smell them. Right now we can't see God or prove scientifically that He exists. But that does not mean He doesn't exist. It means that we simply cannot measure Him. It is always possible that God exists in a realm that we cannot measure. A person, who uses science as their basis for not believing in God, can't actually be an atheist. He/she must admittedly be and agnostic according to their own rules. They must admit that they simply do not know if God exists or not.

An engineering student, at a local university, had to take a class in philosophy as an elective. As a very practical person he was frustrated at having to read philosophy and he did not hide his disdain for it. One day a passage from his philosophy book was read in class. René Descartes, a famous philosopher said,

"I think, therefore I am."

The student shouted,

"What a bunch of nonsense! How stupid can you get? The philosopher is wondering if he really exists!"

Despite the impatience of the student at what was obvious to him, the philosopher put his finger on a basic question. How do we understand our universe and even our own existence? One way is

by simply observing nature. But we have already seen that simple observation can't account for or answer all of life's questions. Thus, the approach of the atheist to understand the world and fate is flawed at the very foundation.

Like the atheist, a majority of those who believe in God also study nature. If it is within their power, they also attempt to change the things that are changeable. A perfect example is the use of science to find cures for sickness. But there is one other thing they do that the atheist does not do.

Believers study the Creator and His character to understand the things that God will and will not alter. Through prayer and deep study, they can learn what is fixed and what is changeable. Because it is impossible to study the Creator directly, they work to understand Him through the things He has made and the revelations given to His prophets in the holy books. Like atheists, those who believe in God (imanlılar) believe in what they can see, touch, taste, smell and hear. But their belief about the physical universe is based upon the belief that the universe was made by God, not random chance. Moreover, a God that is both knowable and still involved with His creation.

Whether you are an atheist, a believer, or just simply curious, if you want to know the greatest secrets of the universe, the truth about fate, and the true character of God we invite you to keep reading.

1 WAS THERE EVIL IN THE BEGINNING?

If we want to alter our fate, we need to understand what controls our fate.

Can we really understand the Creator better by studying the things that He has made? Let's consider an illustrative story, as we will do in these lessons, to help shed some light on that subject.

Senem Hanim took her kindergarten class to the garden and sat the children down under a large fig tree. The tree provided good shade from the late spring sunshine.

“O.K. children” she said, “we are going to play a little game. As you know, yesterday I asked each of you to give me the pictures and toys that you made last week in class. Today we are going to put each of the pictures and toys in front of the group. But I won't tell you who made them. You are going to guess who made them.”

“Teacher.” said Ömer raising his hand impatiently. “Teacher!”

“Yes, Ömer,” Senem Hanim said. “Are you wanting to ask something?”

“How in the world can we guess who made a picture or something? We would just be guessing.”

“That's a good question Ömer. But as you shall see, you can learn a lot about someone by the things that they make. For example, here is a toy made from our building-block set. Who do you think made it?”

Ömer shrugged his shoulders.

“How should I know?”

“Well, let’s look at it.” Senem Hanim said. “What is it?”

Ayşe raised her hand.

“It is a truck.”

“That’s right!” said their teacher. “What does that tell you about the person who made it?”

“It’s a boy.” Elif said laughing.

“That may be.” said Senem Hanim. “Why do you think so?”

“Because boys like trucks and girls like dolls,” said Nurcan matter-of-factly.

“We can’t be 100% sure, but that is a very good guess, isn’t it children? What else can we say about the person who made this?” the teacher added.

“Maybe he likes to build things,” added Engin.

“Why do you say that Engin?” Senem Hanim asked.

“Because he didn’t make a picture. A picture is more... well... flat. A truck is well... a real toy.”

“Hmm” replied his teacher, “You may be right about that. What else can we say?”

“He wanted his truck to be very strong. It is not easy to break the truck. It is very strong.”

“That is right, Birgül. He made the truck very strong,” her teacher added.

“He sits on the right side of the class,” said Mustafa.

Senem Hanım was a little shocked at this observation. How could someone understand what side of the class the truck-maker sat on?

“Why did you say that Mustafa?”

“Because he painted it with that color green. I worked on the left side of the class and we don’t have that color green in our paint set.”

“That is a very good observation Mustafa, congratulations.”

“I know who made it,” said Sevim. “Sefa.”

“Oh really?” said Senem Hanım. “And how do you know that?”

“Two reasons. First, it has a sticker of a lion on the back window. Sefa has lots of animal stickers. Second, he is smiling!”

The children could understand some things about who made the truck by examining the truck. As we get older we can understand even more things about people by what they make and do. Can we understand the Creator better by examining the things He has created? Yes. Lets read what the prophet David thought as he contemplated the great works of God in Psalm chapter 8 verse 3 and 4:

3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars which You have ordained, 4 what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you visit him?

When the prophet David considered how vast and incredible the universe is he marveled at the loving character of God to pay attention to such a small creature like himself. The creation revealed something to the prophet David about the Creator. So let’s take a look at Creation as recorded by God’s prophets in the Holy Books.

We can begin by looking at what Muslims, Jews and Christians have believed for centuries to be the clearest and most detailed record revealed by God about the creation. This record is found in

a collection of sacred writings called by many the Kitabı Mukkades (Holy Bible). The Kitabı Mukkades contains the Tevrat (OT), Zebur (Psalms) and Incil (NT). One modern translation of this collection is called Kutsal Kitap. The quotations we are using largely come from this modern translation. Let's start in the first book called Genesis chapter 1 verses 1-5:

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. 4 And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.

In the Kitabı Mukkades or Kutsal Kitap (Holy Bible) it says that God created the heavens and the earth. The scriptures do not try to prove God's existence. The scriptures assert it as a fact. The scriptures also say that God creates by speaking. He said a simple sentence and light appeared, much like turning on a light switch. There is no record of a mixing of gases, a spark, or even a big explosion from which light emanated. Yes, the Holy Bible says that when God speaks, His Word has creative power to bring matter into existence. If you want to alter your future for the good, wouldn't it be good to be in connection with One who can create something out of nothing?

Some people want to interpret the word of Moses' "day" to mean "an indefinite period of time". But in other parts of the Holy Bible they want the word "day" to mean "a 24 hr period of time". Let's look at the scriptures in a consistent way. After all, if a being can create matter by speaking, why would it be hard for Him to make the world in a short time? Let's continue in chapter 1 by reading verses 6-8:

6 Then God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." 7 Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. 8 And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day.

Here again we see that God, on the second day of creation and through His spoken word, formed what we call the sky. The Bible paints us a clear picture of what the earth would have looked like. There was water on the surface of the earth, a clear expanse of air and a layer of water above the sky. It is believed that this layer of water was like a thick cloud, which filtered the sun's harmful rays, and enabled creatures to live longer and grow larger. It is amazing that God knew what He wanted to do down to the smallest detail. Let's look at some more details in verses 9-13:

9 Then God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so. 10 And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And God saw that it was good. 11 Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth"; and it was so. 12 And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 13 So the evening and the morning were the third day.

So on the third day, God separated the water by forming land and filled the land with plants. There is an interesting observation we can make here. Up to this point, the Bible makes no mention of God creating any animals. In fact, He has only made plants. But we know from observing nature, that many plants need insects and birds to survive. Their flowers need to be pollinated and it is the work of bees, hummingbirds, and other insects that make much of this pollination possible. Evolution says that millions of years are

required to develop animal life. If evolution were true, how were the first plants pollinated and where did the first bee come from? Could it have been a queen bee, a drone, or a worker bee? A queen bee needs a drone to reproduce and drones need a queen to reproduce. And as for worker bees, they cannot reproduce themselves. It makes clear sense that all three types of bees came into existence at the same time with their various qualities working interactively. It wouldn't work otherwise. The plants need the animals and the animals need the plants for survival. Did they all evolve exactly at the same time just ready for one another? No, the statistics against that render the likelihood impossible. This leaves us with the only plausible reality that God created everything the way it is and in an instant. But the story doesn't end there. Let's see what happened in Genesis chapter 1 verses 14-19:

14 Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; 15 "and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. 16 Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. 17 God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, 18 and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 So the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

If the sun and moon were made after the plants, then it must have occurred very quickly because plants need the sun to survive. The first, second, third and fourth days could not have lasted eons and eons of time. No, the “days” mentioned here in the Bible are literal 24 hour days, the same that we experience today. Thus the words of the Prophet Moses are both logical and accurate. This brings us to the fifth and sixth days, which can be found in verses 20-31:

20 Then God said, "Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the

face of the firmament of the heavens." 21 So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." 23 So the evening and the morning were the fifth day. 24 Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind"; and it was so. 25 And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." 29 And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. 30 "Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food"; and it was so. 31 Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

In many books you have to read several pages before the story unfolds and becomes interesting. But right here in the beginning of the sacred writings of the Prophet Moses we learn many fascinating things. We have read that God created everything through the power of His Word and in a mere six days. At the end of his creative work He declared everything to be very good, not just mediocre or okay.

Humans were made to be vegetarian as well as all living animals and thus there was no death. **God did not create us to die.** He created a paradise for man and animals to live together eternally. That is what we would expect if God is love and all-powerful.

But those who teach evolution tell us a different story. According to their account, death has always been a fundamental part of the evolutionary process. They say that death of weaker species paves the way to stronger and more efficient life forms. But it is interesting to note that instead of witnessing the birth of new species, we are actually seeing their decline. Things naturally go from a state of order to disorder, not the other way around. We are born, and then we die. If God used evolution to create the world, then God would have intentionally created death and everyone agrees that death isn't good. If God created death, then we would have to ask the fundamental question: Is God good? But if God did not create death, where did death come from? And why is our planet so different from the one God originally created? (We will discover the answer to these questions in a future lesson.)

Scientists like to flaunt the idea that evolution is extremely efficient in selecting which animals continue to exist and how they reproduce. However, all of the animal creation, with very few exceptions, requires a male and female to reproduce. This is a complex system of reproduction. A more efficient and streamlined approach would be auto reproduction. That is, organisms would be able to reproduce on their own and without the need of a partner. But we see very little of it. Why? The reason is because God designed animals to reproduce in twos, not by chance and evolution. The very complexity of the system points to a Designer who systematically created every component of our universe. Now the creation story continues with what that Designer did on the seventh day. Let's look at Genesis chapter 2 verses 1-3 for that description:

1 Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. 2 And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work

which He had done. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

God ended His creation on the sixth day and He did not work on the seventh day. Instead, he made the seventh day of the week a holy day, a day of rest from labor. Have you ever wondered where the week came from? One day is the time it takes for the earth to revolve one time on its axis. One month is the time for the moon to make one revolution around the earth. One year is the time for the earth to revolve around the sun. Where does the seven-day week come from? It comes from the fact that God created the world in six days and He rested on the seventh day. And He not only blessed it, but He made it a holy day. That is not evolution, that is creation!

Some people put their trust in uranium and carbon dating systems to evaluate the words of the Bible. It is claimed that those scientific methods prove evolution. But there is a fundamental problem with that approach. Those methods are based only on what we see now.

Once a man was going from Burdur to Antalya but he had no money and no car. So he began to walk hoping to hitch a ride. Along the way someone saw him, took pity on him and drove him almost the whole way to Antalya. But because the driver was going somewhere else, the man had to get out and walk the remaining few kilometers to town. Shortly thereafter, the Jandarma who were looking for a man who had stolen someone's purse stopped him. They began to question him,

“Where are you coming from and where are you going?” they asked.

“I started walking to Antalya this morning from Burdur,” the man replied.

“That is impossible” the soldier said, “You can't walk here from Burdur in one morning. You are lying.”

“I am not lying,” said the man, “you are simply judging the whole event by what you see now.”

People judge the history of the world by what they see now. Just as the Jandarma didn't see the man getting a car ride for much of the trip, so evolutionists do not see God speaking matter into existence in front of their eyes and so they think it never happened. Instead they base their ideas on methods that merely evaluate what we see now. And based on what we have read, it is clear that the world God created and the world we live in now are not the same. Something happened and the world changed! It became more dangerous.

So how can you alter your fate in a dangerous world? Many people believe that science can find the answer. But if science is limited in that it can only study current conditions, how will it ever find a solution that will return our planet to its original condition? Moreover, can our planet be returned to its original state or did something happen that can't be reversed? If you are willing to put all your faith in that type of science, then you might be waiting a long time. Countless explorers and scientists have been searching for a remedy to the greatest fate of all – death. But they still haven't found a way to alter that one. What are you going to do in the meantime, wait to die like the millions before you?

The other option is that you can explore the possibility of altering your fate in a dangerous world through a relationship with the One who created you. By learning about the Creator we can understand what He will and will not alter in our lives. We can see what is and is not fate.

When we looked at the creation of our world as recorded in the sacred writings, what did we learn about our Creator? We learned that He has all power to change anything and everything by speaking! We learned that He made everything very good. There was no sickness, death, or killing. We saw that God is not only powerful, but a lover of all that is good. Doesn't that make you want to get to know Him better?

Now if we had only the natural world to examine, where animals eat other animals, where buildings fall on innocent people in earthquakes, where terrorists kill, we could come to wrong conclusions. We see death and sickness on every side and some people say,

“If God made this, He is not good. I choose not to believe in God.”

But we learned in our illustration that what we see now is not necessarily what has been. Our world has not existed continuously as it is now with thorns and viruses, but rather a change has occurred that we did not see. We learned about how the world used to be from the scriptures, not from science.

We need both science and the scriptures together to come to right conclusions. Together they form a more complete picture of our Creator. With a more complete picture of our Creator, we can understand what God will and will not alter in our lives. We can learn the roles that faith, prayer, and sacrifice play in our relationship with God.

To do this, we need to study the Creator not only in nature, but also in His actions in past history; a history that has been recorded by his holy prophets. The creation reveals things about the Creator. But the actions of the Creator reveal even more about His character. Do you want to know about altering your fate in a dangerous world? Yes, of course you do! In your hands you hold a key to unlock your destiny. Will you turn it and open the door?

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. When Charles Darwin proposed his ideas about origins of species and evolution, he thought that single cell organisms were very simple. But modern science has revealed them to be so complex it takes the world's biggest computers to map their organization! What does that say to you about creation and the Creator?
2. If we want to alter our fate, we need to understand what controls our fate. What do you think controls your fate?
3. What steps did we learn in this lesson that will be helpful in our quest to altering our fate in this dangerous world?
4. Go back and reread God's words in creating our world. Note how many times He says, "It was good." Do you think God takes pleasure in perfection? If so, how might he feel about the world in its present condition?

2 AM I IMPORTANT?

Since God thinks you are valuable doesn't that mean you really are valuable?

In our first lesson, we learned that if we want to change our fate, it is necessary for us to understand who and what controls our fate. Essentially, there are two options: God or science. For those who don't believe in God, science is the only way to change fate. But it has its limits. It can't control fate or hinder death and it can only measure that which is measurable. In life, especially in the spiritual world, this approach is inadequate and will not result in success because there are many things that can't be measured.

This brings us to the idea that the only, and best way, to find an answer to the question of fate is to research God. We can accomplish this by looking at His creation and the revelations that He gave to the prophets. This doesn't mean there isn't a place for science. On the contrary, we can learn a lot about the Creator by examining nature in a scientific way. We can see that the universe is more complex and detailed than what the scientists of old would have ever guessed. Moreover, we can see that there is an intelligence behind creation that even with the most modern computers and microscopes we can't begin to comprehend. But our work does not end here because our world, in spite of it appearing good sometimes, is not in the same condition as it was when it was first created (i.e., full of death, sin and destruction.) So, let's look at God's Holy Word to solve some of the secrets of creation and unanswered questions. Let's attempt to

learn about the Creator and His plans for your life by pulling back the curtain of time.

In your opinion what will find if we examine the most important facet of creation, humans? Have you ever thought about the concern that God showed when He created humans? Look at how amazing the human body was created! When we look at athletes bodies sculpted like a statue, it is possible to see symmetry, art, and power. It is for this reason that the artists of antiquity loved to imitate it in pictures, paintings, and statues. Did this happen as a result of several failed attempts or an act of love. Let's first look at the example of a potter.

Before taking a tour of the pottery shop, the tourists gathered in an underground room in Avanos to see a demonstration of pottery making. They sat down on the wood benches lining the wall in the room and listened to their tour-guide.

"Pottery is an ancient craft," she said. "The Hittites were making pottery in this area as early as 2000 B.C. By the 14th century, Selcuks were making ceramic tiles in Anatolia and during the Ottoman period this art form developed and increased around Iznik. Turkish pottery is world-famous, sometimes being called Cappadocia Pottery. Today you will see one of our expert potters practice his craft right before your eyes."

The tourists watched expectantly as the potter took his seat at the potter's wheel. He reached to one side and picked up a handful of red clay from the Kızılırmak River and slapped it onto the potter's wheel. Then with a few swift kicks, the wheel began to spin. Round and round it turned, slowly at first and then faster.

When the wheel had reached the appropriate speed, the potter put his hands into the moist clay and began to shape it. He pressed his thumb in the middle and the center started to become hollow. As the clump turned, the combination of the potter's hand pressure, centrifugal force and gravity added more volume to the object. How symmetrical it was forming! It was important that the clay

not become to dry, so he would periodically add a little more water as he worked. The craftsman always moved his hands slowly and carefully.

“How long have you been doing this?” one tourist asked.

“I have been making pottery for over 18 years” he said.

The potter made a circular tube shaped piece and then put it to one side. Then he got another piece of clay and made the base of the pitcher. After this he had to make a spout. He formed the shape with the clay and then cut an opening in the first circular shaped piece, attached the spout and smoothed out the edges of the joint. With still another piece of clay he made the handle. When he was done the tourists applauded and marveled at its perfect shape.

“How long did it take you to learn how to do it?” they asked.

“It is very easy,” he said. “You can learn very quickly. Come and try.”

One brave woman put on a şalvar and a vest and went to the wheel. The potter put a lump of clay on the board and waited for the tourist to start spinning the wheel. She could not make it go fast enough so the craftsman began to make the wheel spin faster with his foot. When the tourist put her hands in the clay, at first it seemed to be going well, but then the balance was lost and it began to spin wildly out of control. All the people burst out laughing.

“It isn’t as easy as it looks” the tourist said with a smile. “Your hands have to be very steady and everything has to be balanced. It’s really hard. I can appreciate better now how much care and attention you give to each pot and pitcher.”

Then the potter took the group to another room. The tourist that tried to make the pitcher said to her friend,

"If I hadn't have tried it myself I probably wouldn't have understood. But not only is the potter good, he puts a lot of time

and personal care into what he creates. Let's see if we can find something at a good price."

When the tourists all gathered into the other room, there were several women painting the pitchers, tiles and cups with a fine brush. It was amazing how many paintbrush strokes it took to make some of the designs. And the colors were so beautiful. Some pieces were painted turquoise and white. While others had a combination of green, yellow, red, blue, and purple.

The potter took one vase in his hand that had a particularly interesting dark turquoise color. One of the tourists asked,

"How much is that one?"

"This one is on sale today for this group and is only 3500 Euro." The potter said.

"I don't want to touch it, I am afraid it would break!" she replied.

The potter took his finger and tapped the side of the vase and a beautiful clean sound came out.

"It may not be as fragile as you think, but it is definitely very valuable. But don't let the price tag fool you; regardless of its price every piece is valuable to me. So, please be very careful as you walk through the gallery."

"Every piece is valuable to me." That is a very powerful and important statement. When a potter makes something, it is valuable to him. He invests his time, energy, and effort into creating something that is not only beautiful but also useful. And just as the pitcher, plate, or bowl is valuable to the potter; we too are valuable to God because He made us. In our last lesson, we read that God made mankind on the 6th day of the creation week. Let's review it quickly by reading Genesis chapter 1 verses 26 and 27:

26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea,

over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

We see that God created man in his own image and he did not leave the formation of our first parents to the chance forces of nature. What care He must have applied in creating something that would resemble Himself. Genesis chapter one ends without giving us much detail about how God created mankind. But God didn't want us to be like tourists wandering around a pottery shop wondering how everything was made. So, just as the potter explained to the tourists, God explains to us in Genesis chapter 2 verses 4-8:

4 This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, 5 before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; 6 but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground. 7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. 8 The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed.

It is very popular these days to think that God used evolution to create humans. But the Kitabi Mukkades does not say that man developed from a lower creature. It says that God Himself formed Adam out of the ground, in his own image, and breathed the breath of life into him. Just pause and ponder the scene for a moment. Recall the actions of the potter in the shop. God, just like the potter, took some clay and began to form it. He pressed, shaped, and molded. And after he breathed into that lump of clay, it became a living man. A product more precious than a pitcher and more valuable than a bowl. If a potter takes great pride and care in what he makes and places great value on every piece, imagine how God views his greatest

masterpiece. The value of the human body and creativity of God isn't found in the combination of hydrogen, oxygen, and carbon. But rather in the great care that God took in making our nervous system and giving us the ability to see, feel, love and communicate. Yes, God used the same ingredients that he used for everything, but **he only made humans in his image**. Let's continue with verses 18-25:

18 And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." 19 Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. 20 So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. 21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. 22 Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. 23 And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

We see also the personal work of God in the formation of Eve. God took the rib from Adam and formed Eve Himself. She did not come from a lower creature, or even from the ground but from Adam's side. She was not formed completely as a separate creature but as a part of Adam himself. As the potter treasures the works that he has made and takes care of them, so God takes care of the things that He has worked carefully to create.

Imagine if the potter took that 3500 Euro vase, threw it to the ground, and all that was left were thousands of shattered pieces. All the tourists would be shocked.

“What did you do that for?” they would shout. “Are you crazy!”

What if the potter said, “I am the potter. I have the right to do whatever I want with these pots. Some I choose to destroy and others I choose to keep!”

Everyone would think that the potter was crazy and had lost his mind. And yet, a lot of people want to view God as some crazy potter. **God has made you!** He formed you in the womb of your mother and caused the cells of your body to divide and grow. He gave you breath moment by moment and causes you to mature and grow into an adult. Why would anyone ever think that after all that work, God would be so careless and un-thoughtful? Why would they think that He wouldn't be concerned with whether you live or die? No, God is not like that. **He has made us, values us, and desires good things for us.**

Yes God took great care when He formed you in the womb. **He cares for you and loves you more than a potter loves the vase that he makes. He does not want you to be destroyed, nor does he want to destroy you. He wants to save you.** If you want to learn about a God that loves you and cares for you, the Kitabi Mukkades tells all about Him.

The Holy Scriptures describe the activities of God. In His activities we can see His love, power and desire for your goodness. But we also know that in the future there will be a judgment and a destruction for those who are against God. Therefore, it is vital for you to learn how to change your fate with the help of God and to avoid being against Him. These courses were created for that purpose.

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. If you spent hours and hours making a perfect clay pot would you then take it and throw it to the ground and break it? Do you think that God is like that?
2. Because God made us and keeps us alive moment by moment, is it possible that He is at the same time cruel and indifferent to our suffering?
3. If God thinks you are valuable doesn't that mean you really are valuable?
4. Do you think it hurts God when a person doesn't listen to him and rebels?

3 THE PROBLEM OF HUMANITY

Is it possible that people have genetically inherited an inclination to sin from their parents?

In our first two lessons, we decided to learn about God through the things He created and did as explained in the Holy Scriptures. By working to understand God better, we are hoping to learn what He will and will not change in our lives. We are hoping to know what He can and can't change about our fate. We all want a better future. We want to be safe from the evils and dangers that lie in wait behind the curtain of our future. Is there a better way than by examining the events of the past? We saw that in the beginning God created a perfect world. There wasn't death, sadness, or pain. We expect this from a loving God. But many people are perplexed at the evil they see in the world and wonder where it came from. Everyday the newspapers print stories about kids killing their parents and themselves. Men and women are having affairs and killing each other over it. People in an effort to sidestep rules or take advantage of their positions, offer and accept bribes. Not to mention, the standard practice of not reporting income to the government and using fake receipts to counter high taxes. Perhaps some of us think that a lie is okay if you get away with whatever you are trying to cover up. But a lie is not the truth and we all think the truth is good, right? If so, why are so many people doing bad things? Some people think that the answer to the world's problems can be found in government.

"Perhaps if we put all the power in the hand of one person and do what they say, our towns, cities, and country will be better," they thought.

But it wasn't long before they realized that kings and queens couldn't solve their problems because they were just as corrupt as them.

"If we change the government we will solve all the problems of the world" they said.

So they dabbled in communism, socialism, and democracy. But they soon found that the politburo, the state, and the elected officials were also corrupt. The idea that they could actually check their desire for power and prestige at the door was just that, an idea!

"Isn't anybody honest anymore?" they asked one another.

Some people think the answer to the problem of evil is education.

"If we educate the people, they will be good," they say.

But you don't have to search long before you notice that some of the biggest thieves in the world are educated. Yes, people are still stealing purses on the streets. But there is just as much stealing going on by those who went to university and wear fancy suits. They steal all the money from corporations by using offshore banking practices, investing in fake businesses, and giving themselves million dollar bonuses. And of course there are the hackers who break into banks and credit card companies with their computer knowledge. They too are very educated; educated sinners and thieves.

Have you ever watched two three-year-olds playing together? Sometimes they will grab for things, hit each other, and almost never want to share. Who taught them to do those things? No one, they do it naturally. But as a parent it is your responsibility to intervene because you know it is wrong. We don't typically think of children as evil because they do not understand what is right and wrong. But why don't they do the right thing naturally? Did God make human

beings with some defect that makes them do bad things? **Perhaps the problem of sin and corruption is deeper than we thought!**

If we want to understand our fate, God's actions in the world, and what is happening around us, we must first know where sin came from. We must understand its nature and how it affects every human being. If we can't understand this basic principle, we will never be able to change our fate. Maybe the experience of a farmer can shed a little light on the subject.

There once was a farmer who was visited by a man from the Ministry of Agriculture. The representative from the ministry said to the farmer,

“If you use these organic beans and natural pesticides, when I come next year I will purchase your crop. But if you don't use these, we won't buy any of them.”

Shortly thereafter, another man came to the farmer and said,

“Listen, if you use these genetically enhanced seeds and this chemical pesticide you will get more yield from your fields and the government will never know. Just think of all the money you will make with the extra crops.”

The farmer believed the second man, bought the genetically altered seeds and sowed his fields with them. He watered the crops all summer and kept the weeds down. He continually broke the soil and applied the pesticides. He was excited when he saw how good those beans were growing. However, when it came time to harvest the beans he noticed that although they looked good, they were tasteless and had a different shape. The farmer had a lot riding on this crop and so he hoped that the representative would still be interested in buying it. But when the representative came from the Ministry of Agriculture, he did not accept the farmer's crop and just like he said, he did not buy one bean. The farmer said to himself,

“Perhaps if I take these beans and plant them again, they will give a good crop the next year.”

So the farmer planted the beans again, but the result was the same. The beans were terrible! Not only did the government official know that he used the wrong seeds, he didn't buy his crop and the farmer went bankrupt. No matter how hard he tried, the farmer couldn't fix the problem because the seeds were corrupt. **According to the Holy Scriptures, the same problem exists with humans.** But it wasn't always that way.

We know from the first creation story, that God created everything in an orderly manner and in six days. And when he was finished, he said that everything was very good. The animals ate the grass of the fields and fruit of the trees. There was no killing, death, or sin. In short, Adam and Eve were a perfect people living in a perfect earth and in perfect communion with a perfect God.

But their lives weren't filled with idleness and joy seeking. They had been given the responsibility to tend the garden and specific instructions regarding what they could and couldn't do. And if they lived according to God's instructions, they would live forever. Let's start by reading Genesis chapter 2 verses 16 and 17:

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Compared to the lives we live, Adam and Eve's lives were very simple. They lived in a beautiful garden and only had to follow one rule. But if they broke that rule, the penalty would be death. We don't know how much time passed, but later, the serpent who was the most cunning of the animals came to Eve in the garden. We can read about it in Genesis chapter 3 verses 1-5:

1 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has

God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; 3 "but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' " 4 Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Who does the snake remind us of in the story about the farmer? Undoubtedly, he reminds us of the salesman who was selling his genetically altered seed. And while they both used lies to deceive, the serpent went one step further by claiming that God was a liar! Furthermore, he enticed Eve by claiming that she could be just like God. But rather than walk away, Eve, just like the farmer, made a huge mistake. She stayed there, contemplated what the snake said, and acted. Let's continue with verses 6-8:

6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. 8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Adam and Eve believed the serpent and ate the forbidden fruit. What started as a suggestion in their minds developed into a lust for something they were told to avoid; a lust that caused them to distrust the God who created them and rebel against His word and authority. Ashamed of their rebellion, they covered themselves and hid in the bushes. We can see what happened in verses 9-12:

9 But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, Where are you? 10 And he said, I heard the sound of you in the garden,

and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself. 11 He said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? 12 The man said, The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.

We see some dramatic changes taking place in Adam. Before Adam sinned he had no reason to feel fear, shame, or accuse others. But after he sinned, his attitude about God changed and he feared the One who use to walk with him in the Garden. We also see that he was ashamed of his nakedness and no longer felt able to stand in the presence of God. And the woman who was to be his companion, was now the source or blame for his sin. It is interesting that guilty people tend to blame others for their errors. But the reality is that no one wants to pay the consequences for their wrongdoings. How would God respond to their rebellion, knowing that he had promised death? Let us return to the Bible and read verses 13-24:

13 And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." 14 So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, You are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. 15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel." 16 To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you." 17 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. 18 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. 19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken;

For dust you are, And to dust you shall return." 20 And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. 21 Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them. 22 Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" 23 Therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. 24 So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Life as they knew it was over! Adam and Eve were forced to leave the Garden and without having access to the tree of life they would eventually die. God could have executed the death sentence immediately, but He didn't. He knew the snake was to blame and that is why he said the it would be destroyed. But what did this mean? And who would do it?

Just as the farmer transferred his loyalty from the government to the seed salesman; so too Adam and Eve transferred their loyalties from God to the serpent. There is an old saying, **"You are the servant of the one who rules you."** When Adam and Eve chose to listen to the serpent, they essentially became his slave and it brought consequences. For Adam and Eve there were changes in their bodies, attitudes, and in the world they lived in. **These same changes were passed down from generation to generation. This is how death, hardship, toil, sickness, and sin became the norm.**

All of us die, children included. When sin came into our world life changed. Human nature changed for the worse. And like genetically altered seeds, the seeds of sin and death have passed to us from Adam and Eve. What can be done to fix the sentence of death that is upon us? If our nature is like genetically altered seeds that can't produce good fruit, how can God ever accept us?

One day a four-year-old child was brushing his teeth by his mother's side. Suddenly he dropped the toothbrush and the toothbrush bounced off the sink and went right into the toilet. The child said to his mother,

“Mom, before I use that toothbrush again we need to clean it real good don't we?”

His mother said to him, “Son you can never clean that toothbrush sufficiently to put it back into your mouth. It is dirty forever.” Sin changed humanity in a way that makes all our efforts to correct the world in vain. We are defiled before God and we cannot fix it. We cannot come into His presence. Just as Adam and Eve were driven from the garden and have no access to the tree of life, **we also are unclean and cannot enter there.** We die just like Adam and Eve, so will our children. **The genetic make up of our being changed with sin.** Is there any hope for this situation? Is this a part of fate that can't be changed?

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Why do you think the snake lied about God and wanted Adam and Eve to sin? If the snake was a symbol, who or what could it be?
2. Children who have alcoholic parents or parents with AIDS can sometimes be born with alcohol addiction or AIDS. Is it possible that people have genetically inherited an inclination to sin from their parents?
3. God said that Adam and Eve would die if they sinned? Why does a child who does not know right from wrong die like older people who know what is right and wrong?
4. Our attitudes, actions, and even our bodies are defiled before God. When could our bodies, our attitudes, or our world be cleansed and who could cleanse them?
5. If we human beings are so sinful that they cannot stay in God's presence, then we must be defiled by sin. Is it possible that doing regular prayers can cleanse us from this defilement? How can a prayer cleanse from the defilement of sin? If prayer cleansed us from the defilement of sin why aren't we perfect here on earth? Why can't we endure God's presence now?

4

FATE AND CHOICE

Was Cain born to be a murderer and Abel to be a victim?

We live in a complex world and we live complex lives. Every second, minute, hour, and day we make choices that not only have an immediate effect on the day's events, but our entire lives. It is easy to notice how certain decisions produce specific outcomes. But sometimes, when life is spinning out of control or something happens that doesn't seem to fit into our plans, we often write it off as fate. However, when we assign a bad event to fate we are at the same time placing the blame or responsibility on someone else, namely God. After all, it is only Him who is all knowing and in control. But as we saw in the previous lesson, **bad things don't come from God**. Let's look at the lives of two people who struggled with this very issue.

As Begüm descended the stairs of her parent's apartment, her mind was spinning like a top. The feeling of shame and disappointment was so strong she had to sit down. The events from the last two months played over and over in her mind.

"I thought we were in love. He told me that he wanted to be with me the rest of his life. My friends said that sex would bring us closer. Why? Why now? Why me?" she thought with tears rolling down her cheeks.

Two days ago, Begüm thought she knew what her future held: graduation, starting a new job, and maybe getting married. After

getting married and when their finances were secure, maybe they would have a child. In this day and age, it always makes more sense to be financially prepared before having children because they come with a lot of expenses. At least that is what everyone says. But there won't be any time for that, those thoughts will remain a dream.

Exams were only a few months away, so graduation was still a possibility. But how will she be able to spend time looking for a job and who would hire someone about to have a baby. And marriage, it is nearly impossible for a single mother to find a husband, especially when she became pregnant out of wedlock. So many questions were running through her mind, and she had no answers for them. Perhaps they would come in time, but until then she needed to get up and leave. She didn't want to risk meeting her father again, especially after he ordered her to leave the house and never come back.

Begüm left the building and boarded a dolmuş. She decided to get help from the only people left in her life, her friends; even though these were the same friends who encouraged her to "live free". As she sat on the dolmuş, the thoughts came back. No matter how hard she tried to think about something else, the same word kept repeating in her head "Why, Why, Why?" Maybe her friends could give her some advice or help her understand what was happening.

She stepped off the dolmuş and pulled the heavy bag onto her shoulder. You could put another 5 kilos in that bag and it still wouldn't feel as heavy as the burden of shame on her heart. Unfortunately for Begüm, she would carry this shame for a very long time, maybe her whole life. She wanted to compose herself and calm down a little before seeking support from her friends. Although she wanted their advice, she mostly needed a place to stay for a while. So she dropped her burden next to a park bench and sat down. Her head was throbbing, her hands were shaking, and her mind was all mixed up. "Breathe, breathe" she muttered. She tried to organize all the events that led up to this moment.

She thought about the move from Sarıgöl almost five years ago and the first few weeks that the family spent together getting used to this new city; breakfast on the balcony, pide in the park, and the smell of green pepper, onions, and chicken cooking on the grill during picnics in Kaynaklar. Images of her father, proud at every exam she passed, flashed in her mind. She hoped the memories of the gleam in his eye would outlast the expression of disgust she had just witnessed. “Ayşe, oh Ayşe” she moaned. Her little sister had always looked up to her, always wanted to be just like her. But not like this, she wondered how Ayşe’s life would turn out. The thought of letting down her sister almost made her forget about the pregnancy. But her memories shifted towards her mother. She had always worked so hard teaching Begüm and Ayşe how to run a home, how to be modest yet graceful, and it wasn’t just her words. Her example stood out more than anything. She was a simple village girl, married at a young age, and never able to live out her dreams. She never said it, but one day while making gözleme she looked deep into her mother’s eyes and could just sense it. When their eyes met, her mother just smiled. At that moment, Begüm realized that she probably wouldn’t see that smile again. At that exact moment, Begüm realized that she too might never live out her dreams.

Now that she had relaxed a little, she felt ready to talk with her friends. At first, they were a bit perplexed as to why Begüm was carrying a duffle bag. But as she began to tell them the day’s events, everything became crystal clear. Fortunate for Begüm, her friends had an extra room and they gladly allowed her to move in. At least now she could concentrate on finishing her classes, taking her exams, and graduating. That night, Begüm spent some quality time talking with Necla. They shared their problems with one another, hugged, and cried. As the conversation ended, Necla, as she was walking to her room, said something that struck a chord in Begüm’s heart.

“It’s just fate!”

“It’s just fate!” She had heard this many times throughout her life, but never given it much thought.

“Does fate really happen? Is it really that simple? I mean, has my life already been written out and are the last several weeks just pages from a book?” she thought. “What if I would have listened to my father? What if I had ignored the pressure of my friends and Murat? Was it even possible for me to resist? Right now, everything is terrible. Does God really want this for me? If so, I don’t know if I can accept a God like that.”

Begüm just wanted the day to be over, so she got up from the couch and walked to her room. After she got in bed, pulled the covers up, and turned off the light, she fell asleep to “It was fate!” ringing in her ears.

In Genesis chapter 3 we read the story of Adam and Eve being banished from the Garden of Eden. When they left, angels and a flaming sword were placed at the entrance so they wouldn’t be able to return. Without access to the tree of life, they would one day die. But even worse, every day they lived was a day filled with shame and disappointment, tears and pain.

We can be sure that as Adam and Eve slowly walked away from the home they once lived in and the garden they cared for, they experienced emotions that they didn’t even know existed. This once perfect couple probably looked back and wondered how life could have been. But like Begüm, there was no turning back time. And as they got used to the daily toil of surviving, new challenges arrived, namely parenthood.

At some point after their banishment, Adam and Eve had their first child and named him Cain. Shortly thereafter they had another son and his name was Abel. The Bible doesn’t specifically say how their lives were. But I think we can safely say that Adam and Eve taught them many things about God and life, mistakes and obedience. Let’s start by reading from Genesis chapter 4 verses 3-6:

3 In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel also brought of the firstborn of

his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, 5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. 6 The LORD said to Cain, Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?

In these verses, we read that Cain became a farmer, while Abel was a shepherd. In keeping with what God taught Adam and Eve, and in turn they their sons, Cain and Abel both brought offerings to God. But just as the word implies, an offering must be accepted and it is clear that Abel's offering is accepted, while Cain's isn't. Now it doesn't exactly say why Cain's offering wasn't accepted, but we can assume that it didn't meet God's standards because later on in the Bible we will see that God has some very clear expectations when it comes to offerings and sacrifices. Nonetheless, Cain wasn't very happy. But Cain wasn't left alone to sulk in his grief and anger. **God was right there with him** and asked him why he was angry. In other words, he wasn't indifferent when he refused Cain's offering. Instead he showed great concern for him. Let's read verse 7:

7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.

God always gives good counsel and that which he gave to Cain was also good! In summary, do what I tell you and everything will work out, you will be accepted. But if you don't do good, sin is waiting to destroy you. People often like to say how unclear or confusing the Bible is, but in this verse it is very clear what wants to destroy us, namely **sin**. Unfortunately Cain decided not to listen to God's advice, just like Begüm didn't listen to her father's. But Cain did something even worse than ignore God! We can read about it in verses 8 and 9:

8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. 9 Then the LORD said to Cain, Where is Abel your brother? He said, I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"

What an unthinkable question! An older brother who shows no remorse, much less care for his younger brother. Sadly, this is the first mention of murder in the Bible, and it didn't happen between enemies. An aġabey killed his younger brother. The very one who should have protected him, took his life. As the oldest, Cain had a responsibility to guide and be a mentor to his sibling. But instead of fulfilling this responsibility he succumbed to feelings of jealousy. When he said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" he made it clear that he had shunned the responsibility that God had given him. Let's finish the story by reading verses 10-16:

10 And the LORD said, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. 11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth. 13 Cain said to the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear. 14 Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me. 15 Then the LORD said to him, Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. 16 Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Just as God said, sin was waiting to destroy Cain. He was cast out from his family to dwell alone. The earth, which once provided food for him, would no longer be productive. Can we honestly say for Cain "it was fate"? Is this what God had planned for him all along? Was Cain born to be a murderer and Abel to be a victim? Did Eve give birth to two sons, just to have one die and one banished? Was this all written in a book beforehand and simply played out on the big screen called Earth?

According to what we read, that doesn't appear to be the case. God warned Cain and advised him to do right. You could say that God was trying to keep Cain on the right track. It wasn't God's fault that Cain didn't listen and it definitely wasn't God's plan for Cain to sin because he warned him against it. Cain's situation was the same as his parents. They too were warned, but they chose not to listen and sin, that is death, was waiting at the door. Let's look at a famous fable that illustrates the same idea.

One day a goat saw some tasty grass and wandered from the herd. While he was eating, a wolf spotted him all alone. "Ah, I won't let this opportunity get away. He will be so tasty in my mouth!" he said. As the wolf approached, the goat saw that he was in danger and realizing he had no chance to flee he spoke to the wolf, "There isn't anything I can do. Our fates have crossed! Seeing that I am about to die, can you play the flute and make me happy? Then I will forget myself and die." The wolf decided to grant his wish, found a flute, and began to play. The wolf played and the goat danced. In the distance, a pack of dogs heard the flute and started running towards it. The wolf realized that they were coming for him and before he fled he said to the goat, "It isn't your fault, but mine. I ruined a wonderful feast by playing the flute!"

Just as the wolf said, the fault was his to bear. **It wasn't fate that did him in, but his choice.** Cain, just like his parents, the wolf, and Begüm, made a choice and it is a choice he would live with the rest of his life. There is a not so famous song whose lyrics are very pertinent to this lesson. The chorus says, "we are creatures of fate and victims of destiny, which we create." Is it possible that a majority of what we call fate is actually the result of the choices we make? If so, **our choices play an important role in changing our fate!** What choices have you made lately?

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Have you ever felt bound and regretful about something that someone did to you? Or maybe what you did to someone else? How did you respond?
2. What evidence from scripture shows us that Cain could have chosen not to kill his brother?
3. How must have Adam and Eve felt to find their son dead in the field?
4. Review again the events of Gen. 2 and 3. How were the choices of Adam and Eve partially responsible for the act of Cain?

5

THE RESULTS OF
WICKEDNESS

*What are the results when the imaginations of the world
are evil continually?*

There is no doubt that we are living in troubled times. One only need to open a newspaper, watch the news, or turn on the television to see that our neighborhoods, cities, country, and world is in chaos. So it is no wonder that we hear a lot about the end of the world. Some say aliens will come and destroy us. Others say that an asteroid will strike the earth and cause all life to become extinct, just as one did millions of years ago. But the most common idea is that human induced global warming will cause the ocean's water levels to rise and flood the most important cities of the planet. Yes, according to the Bible, **the end of the world is near and the judgment of God is at hand.** But the problem isn't the burning of fossil fuels as much as it is the human heart!

For two days, Hamza Bey couldn't sleep well. He didn't understand how his daughter Begüm could do this to the family. He had sacrificed everything for her. He wanted to make her dream of going to university a reality, so they moved to the city. Jobs in Izmir are hard to find and he wanted her to have every opportunity to focus on her studies, so he gave her spending money. He even gave her more freedom than she was entitled to. And this is how she repaid him! He couldn't believe that she would shame the whole family by getting pregnant out of wedlock. To top it off, the stress wasn't just affecting his sleep; he was finding himself unable to concentrate at work.

The afternoon hours passed in what seemed like an eternity, he left work, and boarded the minibus (dolmuş). As he stared out the window his thoughts wandered, but it wasn't long before he came to himself. In the row directly behind him, he overheard two ladies speaking.

"Times are changing. Everyone is behaving badly. For example the other day after I boarded the dolmuş, I had to stand for 10 minutes. Two young men didn't even give me their seats."

"Gülümser, you don't need to tell me! Last month two of my neighbor's had everything stolen. Everyday our neighborhood is becoming worse. We use to leave our doors unlocked, but now we are all putting iron bars on our doors and windows. I don't even want to talk about the things I have been hearing on the news" the other woman sighed.

Hamza Bey couldn't help but think they were right. In spite of not being perfect, he loved his country, his people, and his family. But the fact that the things he held so close to his heart were not immune to the rest of the world's problems caused him great pain. He unlocked the apartment's heavy, steel door, walked up the stairs, took off his shoes, and entered his home. He quietly ate dinner with his wife and younger daughter Ayşe. After dinner, he decided to go for a walk and visit some friends. Maybe some çay and a few games of ok or cards would ease his mind.

"Selam aleküm!" Hamza said.

"Aleküm selam" a few men replied.

Hamza sat down at a table and waited for some friends to come. After he finished his first glass of tea, Huseyin, Ibo and Salih arrived. After the usual greetings and small talk they began to play ok.

It didn't take long for the men to realize that Hamza wasn't his normal self. He was an excellent ok player and liked to move fast. But tonight his mind was somewhere else.

“Hamza what's wrong with you? You are acting strange tonight! Where is your head? Let's go, it is your turn.” Huseyin said.

“I'm sorry, you are right my mind is all mixed up. Today, while I was on the dolmus, I was listening to two women speaking. They were complaining about the condition of our world. According to them, people are getting worse. The youth don't want to keep our traditions and people aren't concerned with neighborliness. There are thieves, etc. Husbands are killing their wives and children are killing their parents. Everything is all messed up.” Hamza said.

“They're right, everything is changing.” Salih said.

“In my opinion, the experts know what they are talking about. The world is warming up and the weather is changing. According to them, the ice sheets and glaciers are melting and the coastal cities will be flooded. Maybe it is the end of time.” Ibo added.

But Huseyin wasn't so sure.

“Whatever happens will happen, but I don't believe what the experts are saying. That is, I believe the world's weather is changing. But if I am not mistaken, the world won't end with a flood. I can't remember where I heard this, but I think it will be different.”

“Let's go fellas, who cares! Let's play! Hamza it is your turn again.” Ibo interjected.

Unfortunately, that seems to be the attitude of a lot people. "Who cares" they say, "Life is short, eat, drink, and be happy!" It is a motto that has been chanted for thousands of years. It is hard to imagine, but there was a time when people lived just as bad, maybe even worse than they do now. They didn't want to answer to anyone and they thought that life would never end. They were not only desensitized to the sin they were committing, they were ignoring

the message that God was giving them. A message that would have saved their lives.

After Adam and Eve were forced to leave the Garden and started having children, it became quite clear that the future would be different. The peaceful days of the garden and the opportunity to live forever were replaced with toil, murder, and sorrow. It wasn't long before humanity split into two groups. Those who chose to follow God were called the sons of God, while those who didn't were called the sons of man. Even without access to the tree of life, people lived a long time. But rather than using those years to benefit others; they found ways to satisfy their own lusts and desires. Men became unsatisfied with their wives, began to sleep with other women, and used violence to obtain that which they wanted. The Bible tells us that several generations had passed since Adam and Eve and as the influence and numbers of the sons of God diminished, so to did the hope that life would ever resemble what God had intended. Let's continue the story in Genesis chapter 6 verses 5-7:

5 The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. 7 So the LORD said, I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.

The culmination of God's creation, that which had been declared very good, had become something worse than bad. It had become wicked and evil. Humanity was no longer interested in the things of God, but rather self-gratification. God, much like Hamza Bey, reflected on all that had transpired and was heart-broken. He had already punished Adam and Eve for their sin, and yet He found himself in the same situation. Humans had not learned their lesson and the problem of sin was a like an infection that spread from person to person and no antibiotic could kill. Humanity as a whole needed to be punished and they left God no other recourse than to

destroy all that he had created. Fortunately for us, among the sons of God, there was a man named Noah who found favor, or grace, in God's eyes. Let's continue in Genesis chapter 6 verses 9-22:

9 These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. 10 And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. 11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. 13 And God said to Noah, I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. 14 Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. 15 This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark 300 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits. 16 Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above, and set the door of the ark in its side. Make it with lower, second, and third decks. 17 For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. 18 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. 19 And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. 20 Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground, according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you to keep them alive. 21 Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up. It shall serve as food for you and for them. 22 Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

Noah was righteous and blameless. He was one of the few who knew God and lived according to his commandments; a man who didn't follow the practices of a corrupt society. God, in his mercy, spoke to Noah and told him that he was going to destroy the wicked.

But, he would provide a way of escape for those who would heed the warning. God ordered Noah to build a large vessel that would be a safe-haven from the coming storm. It was built according to precise measurements, covered with a roof, had three floors and is still the largest wooden ship ever built.

Before God gave these instructions to Noah, he had declared that mankind would only have 120 more years. So during those 120 years, Noah, his sons, and the other sons of God built the ark. Imagine the ridicule that was heaped upon the builders by those who didn't believe the world would be destroyed. They probably yelled insults and laughed at them for building a boat when it had never even rained before. The water had always descended as a mist and bubbled up from the ground into springs. These were the natural laws of the earth, why would they change? But Noah and his sons ignored the wicked and did all that the Lord commanded. They knew that the time would come when even the wicked would call upon the name of God to be saved. Unfortunately for the wicked, it would be too late. The story continues in verse 7. Let's read verses 1-10:

1 Then the LORD said to Noah, Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. 2 Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate, and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate, 3 and seven pairs of the birds of the heavens also, male and female, to keep their offspring alive on the face of all the earth. 4 For in seven days I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground. 5 And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him. 6 Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth. 7 And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood. 8 Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, 9 two and two, male and

female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah. 10 And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth.

As Noah and his family entered the ark, the animals followed. It has been observed that animals have a sixth sense regarding natural disasters. They are known to run, hide, and climb to higher ground just before a cataclysmic event. Perhaps it is an instinct that stems from this very event because the Bible says that two of every animal and seven of all the clean ones entered the ark. Rows of animals and flocks of birds marching towards the ark must have been an amazing sight. It must have been peculiar to the wicked that animals would behave this way; after all it was against their natural habits. But even this extraordinary event couldn't convince them.

One week later the rains began to fall and the springs of the earth burst forth like a ruptured water line. One only need to witness the force of a geyser or heavy storm to imagine the scene. Trees were knocked over, the ground shook, houses were destroyed, and the gently flowing springs became raging rivers. There must have been a mad rush by the wicked to board the ark, but it was sealed shut and no human hand could open it's door. No matter how hard they pounded or scratched at it's tar covered boards, they would never get inside. The very thing that God had foretold happened. The rains continued for forty days and every living thing, not inside the ark, was destroyed. The Bible says that the waters prevailed for 150 days and as far as the eye could see, there was only water. The once green fields and hills were submerged and forever forgotten. But God didn't forget about Noah, his family, and the animals on the ark. How could He forget the one that he called righteous and who chose to follow God instead of the ways of the world? Let's read Genesis chapter 8 verses 1-5:

1 But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided. 2 The fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the

rain from the heavens was restrained, 3 and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of 150 days the waters had abated, 4 and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. 5 And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

The earth that Noah was about to encounter would be completely different than the one he knew before and he needed to be sure that it was inhabitable. So he released a raven, but all it did was circle in the air. He then released a dove, but it returned because there was no place to land. He waited another week and released the dove again; this time he returned with an olive leaf. God had given him a sign that the waters had dried up. One week later, Noah again released the dove but it didn't return. The time had come to exit the ark.

The first thing Noah did after exiting the ark was to build an altar and offer up burnt sacrifices. He used some of the clean animals and birds that God had provided and when God saw Noah's appreciation and praise he was pleased. He blessed Noah and his family, told them to scatter across the lands, and gave them the responsibility to repopulate the whole planet. God not only wanted to give humanity a second chance, he made a covenant to never flood the entire earth again. We can read the end of the story in chapter 9 verses 8-17:

8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. 11 I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. 12 And God said, This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13 I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and

the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth. 17 God said to Noah, This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.

God's culling of the wicked and preservation of the righteous during the flood is like a grape grower who wants to produce the best grapes. Every year he tenderly digs around the base of the vines, adds manure, and gives them plenty of water. If he sees something threatening his vines (e.g., fungus, bugs, etc.), he eliminates the threat. God knew the hearts of all the people living on the earth in Noah's time and he knew that only Noah's family would respond to the second chance he would provide. Just like the grape grower and his vineyards, if God didn't do something to save Noah and his family, they too would have been destroyed. So **He eliminated the wicked to preserve the righteous**. Huseyin was right; although the end is near God will not use a flood to destroy the world again. But one question remains, are there any modern-day Noahs worth saving? If there are, what will God do to make their fate different from everyone else's?

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Some people think that God is wrong to punish, while others wonder why God doesn't punish more often. Why do you think he allows bad things to happen?
2. When God judges can he do it with love? If so, can you find love in the story of the flood?
3. Is it possible that there can only be two groups of people on the earth, those who follow God and those who don't? If so, how should those who follow God relate to those who don't?
4. How can you be like Noah in our time?

6 WHY IS THERE STILL EVIL?

If the flood cleaned the earth, why is there still evil?

Have you ever felt like you couldn't get your life together? That you weren't able to do the good things that you wanted to and the things you wanted to avoid, you ended up doing? Why is it easier to quit a diet than to keep it going? Is there something in us that wars against our good resolutions? Let's look at two stories that seem to answer these very questions.

Ali and Burcu waited a long time to have a baby. They wanted to make sure that everything would be perfect. After they had worked a while, saved enough money, and felt their jobs were secure they decided the time was right. During the pregnancy they went to the doctor regularly, bought the baby furniture, and painted the apartment. They had made all the preparations and not a moment too soon because the baby was born a week earlier than expected. They knew it was going to be a boy and had already given him the name Zafer.

The first year wasn't too hard. Zafer needed to be fed, dressed, and his diaper changed. He slept well at night and when he woke up Burcu would wrap him tightly, lay him in her legs, and rock him back and forth. Even though everyone called him ugly and dirty, they all knew he was cute. He did all the normal things that babies do, he started to sit up, crawl, stand, and eventually walk. As far as

they were concerned, Zafer was the best baby in the world and they didn't think there would be any problems.

As Zafer approached 18 months, the doctor told them what to expect. He would start to get a character of his own, communicate his needs more clearly, and maybe even need some punishment. As they left the office, they spoke to one another.

“Zafer won't ever give us any problems! Our son is perfect and he's always behaving well.” Ali resounded.

But Burcu felt a little differently. Ali was always at work and she was the one who was with him a majority of the time. One day when she was in the salon, she told Zafer to not play with the DVD player and moved him to another part of the room. Zafer got up, walked over to the DVD player, stopped, looked at his mother, and then started touching it. She didn't understand how he could blatantly disobey her. She tried it again and he did the same thing. It was only after she bribed him with a toy that he stopped. And it broke her heart when the disobedience got worse. He would nod his head no when she wanted him to do something, he would scream when he didn't get his way or hit her, and when she asked him to come to her he would run in the opposite direction. Burcu knew it wasn't a matter of not understanding because if she had a new toy or candy in her hand when she called him, he would come right away. It wasn't long before Ali started noticing the same things. They were shocked and didn't understand how their cute little boy, whom they showered with love and affection, could act this way. He showed no appreciation for all that they had done and it was as if he wanted to be the ruler of the house!

It is very interesting that over 4000 years ago, the prophet Noah witnessed the same thing.

After Noah and his sons left the ark, the Bible says that Ham, Shem, and Japheth had children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. As the earth's population grew, surely the descendants of Noah and

his sons would learn a lesson from the flood. They would look to their ancestor Noah and long to be just like him, the man who was called righteous by God. They would avoid the sinful behaviors that destroyed those who lived before the flood and follow God's commandments. If they worked hard enough, maybe the earth could be even better than before. But, as we continue to read the Biblical account we will see that wasn't the case.

In Genesis 10:8, we read that Cush (a son of Ham) had a son named Nimrod. He was the first on the Earth to be considered a mighty man, a hunter before the Lord. Interestingly, Nimrod's name means rebel and his actions show that the object of his rebellion was God. Remember, God told Noah and his sons to spread out and repopulate the Earth. But Nimrod, instead of encouraging people to spread out began building cities for them to dwell in. It says in Genesis 10:10 that the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh which were all in the Land of Shinar. These cities were in the area of modern day Iraq. In verse 11, we also learn that he built other cities. You can't have a kingdom without a king, so who do you think the king of those cities was? You got it, Nimrod! Let's continue the story in Genesis chapter 11 verses 1-4:

1 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. 2 And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 And they said to one another, Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. 4 Then they said, Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.

What do these verses reveal to us? At that time, there was only one language on the whole earth, but more importantly the sons of man (i.e., those who didn't follow God) wanted to build a city and tower for two reasons. They wanted to make a name for themselves and they didn't want to be dispersed over the whole earth. Does it sound like these people wanted to follow God's command to spread

out? Oddly enough it had only been 71 years since God destroyed the earth with a flood and gave humanity a second chance through Noah and his sons. But within two generations they were already ignoring God. But no matter how hard you try, **God is and he can't be ignored.** We can continue by reading verses 5-7:

5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. 6 And the LORD said, Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.

Once again we see God personally involved with the events of this planet. The Bible says he came down to see this city and tower and was displeased. He, who knows the beginning from the end, saw what the sons of man were up to. If they continued down this path, they would be worse than before. They would accomplish everything they set their hearts to. And God already knew not only what they would do, but also what drove them to do those things. He knew that the sons of man were no different than those who lived before the flood and the result of their godless lives would only produce wickedness, violence, perversion, and lawlessness. In other words, **they would do that which was in their nature.** Let's see what God did in verses 8 and 9:

8 So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

The sons of man needed to be stopped. God had already made a promise to not destroy the Earth with a flood, so he took away the very thing that enabled them to work together, the ability to communicate. As the order for more bricks descended from the

highest floors, confusion set in. The Bible doesn't give any details of what it must have been like for the workers, but we can take a guess. It was probably like trying to pass a message to your friend on the other side of the stadium during a Fenerbahçe match. After a couple of tries, you just give up. As the people laid down their tools and listened to the foreign languages echoing through the city streets, they probably gathered with the ones they could understand and made a plan to leave. Regardless of whether they wanted to or not, the Bible says they began to disperse. Perhaps the following story can give us better insight as to what these verses are telling us.

One day, a scorpion looked around and decided that he wanted a change. So he set out on a journey through the forests and hills. He climbed over rocks and under vines until he reached a river. The river was wide and swift, and the scorpion couldn't see any way across. So he ran upriver and then checked downriver, all the while thinking that he might have to turn back. Suddenly, he saw a frog sitting in the rushes on the bank of the stream. He decided to ask the frog for help getting across the stream.

"Hello Mr. Frog!" called the scorpion across the water, "Would you be so kind as to give me a ride on your back across the river?"

"Well now, Mr. Scorpion! How do I know that if I help you, you won't try to kill me?" asked the frog hesitantly.

"Because," the scorpion replied, "If I try to kill you, then I would die too. Everyone knows that scorpions can't swim!"

Now this seemed to make sense to the frog. But he asked. "What about when I get close to the bank? You could still try to kill me and get back to the shore!"

"This is true," agreed the scorpion, "But then I wouldn't be able to get to the other side of the river!"

"Alright then...how do I know you won't wait until we get to the other side and then kill me?" said the frog.

"Ahh..." crooned the scorpion, "Because you see, once you've taken me to the other side of this river, I will be so grateful for your help, that it would hardly be fair to reward you with death, now would it?"

So the frog agreed to take the scorpion across the river. He swam over to the bank and settled himself near the mud to pick up his passenger. The scorpion crawled onto the frog's back and the frog slid into the river. The muddy water swirled around them, but the frog stayed near the surface so the scorpion would not drown. He kicked strongly through the first half of the stream, his flippers paddling wildly against the current.

Halfway across the river, the frog suddenly felt a sharp sting and, out of the corner of his eye, saw the scorpion remove his stinger from the frog's back. A deadening numbness began to creep into his limbs.

"You fool!" croaked the frog, "Now we will both die! Why on earth did you do that?"

As they began to sink, the scorpion shrugged and said, "I couldn't help myself, **it's my nature.**"

One would think that righteous children would come from a righteous man. And one would think that those children would know how to act and obey God. Instead, the grandchildren of Noah were no better than the people who drowned in the flood only 71 years earlier. They too had a seed of rebellion. We know that Noah, his sons, and all the animals and birds were on the ark. But it seems that **there was something else, an inclination towards selfishness, pride, vanity, and rebellion.** A lust for all that is not of God and a displeasure for that which is. **After 4000 more years, has anything changed?** There was another question we asked and we will ask it again. Is this an aspect of our fate that can't be changed? Of course to find the answer we will need to continue searching.

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Why do children disobey their parents?
2. Why do people disobey God?
3. The flood cleaned the earth of evil people, but it seems evil was still around. How did it resurface and where was it hiding?
4. If everything that we do is rooted in selfishness, pride, and vanity, how can we ever please God?
5. Günümüzde birisi bize Allah'ın buyruklarını yerine getirmek yerine kendi isteklerimizin ardından gitmemizi söylerse, ne yapmalıyız?

7 THE GREATEST LIE EVER TOLD

For thousands of years, people have been deceived by the biggest lie of all. What is that lie?

Some people say that you have to lie a little just to get by in life. Perhaps they think that a lie is okay as long as it doesn't hurt anyone and you get away with whatever you lied about. But the problem is that a lie is based on deception and no one likes to be deceived. Have you ever had someone tell a lie about you? Worse than having a lie spread about you, is having others believe that lie! For thousands of years, people have been deceived by the biggest lie of all. What is that lie? Well read on and find out.

One day a curtain storeowner named Sedat was surprised when an American wandered into his shop. The American had recently moved to Turkey for business and after a short visit the two quickly became friends. Sedat liked Tom because he was witty and intelligent. But most of all he liked Tom's honesty, non-judgmental attitude and faithfulness to his wife. Sedat made it his goal to teach Tom about Turkish life. He took him to the hamam, the pazar, and even invited him home for a Ramazan evening meal. And in the springtime their families would often picnic together in the hillsides outside the city.

Sedat also liked that Tom accepted him as an intelligent man and respected him regardless of the fact that he was a curtain maker. So the two would drink tea together, laugh and talk about life. But their friendship faced some opposition from Sedat's uncle, who owned a

liquor store. Perhaps the uncle didn't like Tom because he refused to drink alcohol. Regardless, he would always say to Sedat,

“You only spend time with that American because he has money.”

Sometimes while Tom was sitting with Sedat in the curtain shop, his uncle would come. He would turn to Sedat, as if Tom couldn't understand any Turkish, and say

“You just want something from this American, don't you?”

It was obvious from the look in Sedat's eyes that he was hurt and ashamed. He was hurt because he knew their friendship was real and ashamed that his uncle would treat a guest this way.

When times are good, friendships are easy to maintain. But it is during the times of trouble that a friendship is really tested. After four years of friendship, Sedat fell onto some hard times. First, his little boy became very ill with an unusual spine disease. And shortly thereafter, the landlord sold the building that Sedat rented for his shop. The new landlord wanted to use the building for something else and after he was kicked out, Sedat had no income for nearly a year. It was under these circumstances that the validity of their friendship would be tested.

Sedat was a man of integrity and honor. He knew that Tom was his friend and he could have easily asked for financial help, but he never asked Tom for money. And the same faithfulness that Tom showed to his wife carried over into their friendship. Every week for nearly a year, Tom came to the hospital, sat down beside Sedat's boy's bed and told him stories. An act that Sedat's uncle didn't even do once.

Many years after Sedat's troubles had long passed, Tom had a chance to return to Turkey. Sedat met Tom at the airport, took him to his new shop, and they sat down to drink some tea beneath a grape vine. After some small talk, Tom brought up the subject of Sedat's previous troubles. He looked into his friend's eyes and confessed,

“Sedat, you will never know how much I wanted to give you \$3000 at that time to help you set up a new shop. But I remembered the accusation of your uncle. I didn't want to dishonor you or our friendship by giving that lying man a story to tell. As much hardship as I saw you go through, I decided not to give you that money so that no one would ever say I bought your friendship.”

Sedat replied with a tear.

“I knew you cared for my family and that you would give me anything you owned. But by not giving me the money, you really showed me you loved our friendship. Honestly, for the same reason of proving my uncle wrong, I too was hoping you wouldn't give me anything. You made a difficult and wise choice.”

Tom inquired about the uncle and Sedat said,

“He died alone and friendless. You know I thought about this a lot since you left, and my uncle died, and I have come to a conclusion. A friendless man will always attack true friendship because he can never understand two things: loyalty or love.”

Stretching back to the earliest annals of history, possibly to the invention of writing, we find the story of the prophet Job! His story is one of the most fascinating in the Bible because Job, a contemporary of Abraham, went through a great tribulation. But he didn't suffer because he was bad; on the contrary it was because he was good! Job, like Sedat, had a friendship that someone wanted to tarnish. But the similarities end there because Job's friend, and enemy, were both greater than any man. Yes, Job's friend was God and the slanderer was none other than Satan himself.

In the Hebrew language, Satan means “accuser.” And as we continue our studies through the Bible, we will see that this name is very appropriate for him. It was he, disguised as a snake in the Garden of Eden, who accused God of hiding the truth from Adam and Eve. It was also him who tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God. Some may say that Satan is a passive force of evil or just doing his job. But

the Holy Bible makes it very clear that **he is a sinister, intelligent being, diligently trying to discredit God and destroy human lives.** And it just so happens that Job is one of those he wants to destroy.

In the book of Job, we get a glimpse into Job's life. He is happy, prosperous and probably living somewhere in what is modern day Iraq. He had thousands of animals, a large family, and the good pleasure of enjoying all the delicacies of the Middle East - dates, grapes, figs, honey, and cream. He had a wonderful life. But even better, the Bible says that he was devoted to God and showed kindness to orphans, widows, and elders.

With this in mind, let's start reading the story in Job chapter 1 verses 6 and 7:

*6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.
7 The LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."*

It seems that there is a great counsel in heaven and the entire heavenly host is in the presence of God. Among those present was Satan and it is clear from the text that he spends a lot of time wandering on the earth. Well what could he be doing and why would he come before God? Although the details are not provided, we can deduce from the next verse that he is looking for people to deceive.

Now listen closely to the conversation between God and Satan in verse 8:

8 And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?"

God in holiness is boasting about his man Job. He knew that Job was his friend and that he could trust him. Satan, unable to accuse Job

of anything bad, begins to cunningly slander the friendship between God and Job. Let's listen to his claims in verses 9-11:

9 Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? 10 Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face."

What exactly is Satan saying here? Quite simply, and similar to Sedat's uncle, he is saying that Job's friendship with God is a lie and based entirely on personal gain. In essence, Satan is saying to God, "Job only likes you because you are rich and powerful. It isn't a real friendship. It's fake. If he didn't have your blessings, there would be no reason to have a relationship with you." Those are low hits Satan is making. Let's see how God responds in verses 12-22:

12 And the LORD said to Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand. So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. 13 Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 14 and there came a messenger to Job and said, The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, 15 and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you. 16 While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you. 17 While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you. 18 While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 19 and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house,

and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you. 20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. 21 And he said, Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. 22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

There are a few things that we can notice from these verses. First, all of these things happened as a result of Satan's evil work. **He was the source of all these calamities.** Second, Job didn't use this situation to fall into sin. He remained upright and devoted to God. Third, he didn't blame God with any wrongdoing. Lastly, in spite of losing everything Job's relationship with God remained intact. Do you know someone who has given up on God because something bad happened? Or cast blame on Him for something that Satan did? Maybe you should tell them who the real enemy is!

In the second chapter of Job, Satan continues his attack by claiming that the friendship is based on God providing Job with good health. Let's continue reading the story in Job chapter 2 verses 3-7:

3 And the LORD said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason. 4 Then Satan answered the LORD and said, Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. 5 But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face. 6 And the LORD said to Satan, Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life. 7 So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

Once again, Satan is the cause of Job's affliction. If God hadn't restrained Satan's attack, we can be sure that Satan would have killed Job. But God wasn't about to let that happen. It was Satan's

hope that Job would buckle under pressure and reject God, blaming Him for his misfortunes. But in spite of the intense pain he was experiencing, Job made the difficult choice to hold onto his belief that God was good. Unfortunately, Job's wife did not his faith. As if it wasn't bad enough to have one slanderer, Job's wife joined in. We can read their conversation in verses 9 and 10:

9 Then his wife said to him, Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die. 10 But he said to her, You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Job's wife insinuated that a relationship with God was only worth it if something good came of it. This is often called a "fair weather friend". But Job's wife, like Sedat's uncle and Satan himself, misunderstood true friendship. She thought Job was helping others in order to get benefits from God. Her reasoning was, "No benefits, no relationship." She didn't see that Job loved God for who he was, not for what he received.

NO! Those who only see a friend as a way to get something else miss the joy of what friendship really is. And those who see God as a way to get to heaven have missed the point of His friendship, and likely the very door to heaven as well. They are false friends who think that friendship can be bought by bribes, gifts, and artful words. But God isn't tricked, bribed, bought or persuaded. Nor does he accept false friendship.

Here is a true story of a modern hero.

Nasuh Mahruki is a true Turk, a son of Istanbul. He was the first Turk to successfully climb Mount Everest and his prowess in the high mountains earned him the nickname of "Snow Leopard."

What many don't know is that Nasuh Mahruki knows what it is to be slandered. A year after Mahruki became the first Turk to climb Everest, a climber named Greg Childs wrote an article about him

in *Outside* magazine. In the magazine, Childs wrote about how he had saved the life of a Romanian climber named Constantine. In the description Greg made errors concerning details of Mahruki's climb up Everest. He not only wrongly described Mahruki using oxygen through his entire ascent of Everest, (a belittling remark for a great climber) but also claimed Mahruki took hours longer than he really did to get to the summit. Fortunately for Mahruki, about 15 eyewitnesses, testifying that Childs was inaccurate, proved these details wrong. But the slander continued and Childs published a book describing Nasuh Mahruki as having a "wanton disregard for preparation, a blatant me-first attitude, and an utter lack of respect for the mountain and the sport."

That is slander on a personal level with a global audience! At that point Mahruki had a choice. He could slander Childs back and scheme a course of revenge or he could live in such a way that no one would believe what Child's wrote. Nasuh Mahruki chose the second course of action. Instead of living a bitter life after the public accusation, Mahruki has gone on to bring honor to Turkey not only through his sports achievements but also through his continued work in rescue and relief. Whether earthquake, flood or tsunami, AKUT (Arama Kurtarma Derneği) and Mahruki have been there lending with strong hands to help.

Job, like Mahruki, chose to hold onto his integrity through all the slanderous lies and to not blame God for his misfortunes. In the end, Satan lost the battle and Job's possessions and position were restored. From Job's story we learned that Satan is not an impersonal force, but rather a sinister liar calculating how to drive a wedge between God and men. He would like nothing more than to make humans blame God for every misfortune, and ultimately paint God as being unreliable and untrustworthy. But it is obvious that he is the one who can't be trusted and knows not the meaning of love or loyalty.

Next time something bad happens to you and you are tempted to think God has brought misfortune upon you, **let Job's story remind you who is really to blame!** If God can change what appeared to be Job's fate, he can also change yours.

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. Have you ever had someone tell a lie about you? What was the situation? How did you feel?
2. Describe the importance of trust in a good friendship. How did God show trust toward Job? How did Job show trust toward God?
3. What was Satan's motive in all of this?
4. According to the Bible, what was Job's response to his wife?

8

THE POWER OF FAITH

How does my fate pivot on the oldest recorded story of Abraham?

Has anyone ever sent you on a special mission that caused you to go far away? How did you feel? Were you happy to go? Was it an adventure or a hard task? Were you ever sent to tell someone a special message? Was it happy news or sad news? How did they receive the news? Today we will look at some people who were sent on a special mission to help a lot of people.

Halil was a farmer in the village of Erzincan. After World War II, he got married and had several children. In 1965, his oldest son, Savaş, was 20 years old and newly married. Halil, knowing his son was a hard worker, called him to his side one day to speak with him.

“Savaş, I have something very important I want you to do. It is a task that will involve tremendous personal sacrifice on your part. It is a job that will take you far from here, far from me, your mother and your brothers and sisters. You will face hardships. But you must endure and be faithful to what I have called you to do. What I am asking you to do will be an honor to me and a blessing to your family and to your nation. I am sending you to Germany to find work in a factory or business. You can make a lot of money there and we need you to send a portion of it to us. We will use the money for your brothers and sisters and your wife’s siblings. If you do this, we will be able to send them to the best schools. They will have to

opportunity to attend university, work for the government, and start businesses. Son, I am putting all my hopes in you”

Savaş was perplexed. He did not want to move away from his family. They were as precious to him as life. How could he go to another country? He would need to learn German. He would need to adapt to a new culture. Everything would be so different. And he would have to do it all by himself. There would be no family to rely on and only his wife would be by his side. What would she say? Would she resist the whole idea and make life very hard? Would they be happy there?

“I will talk to Nurhan and I will give you an answer in a few days father,” Savaş said.

When Savaş told his wife Nurhan about the request, she was very thoughtful and serious.

“Savaş, this is a huge thing your father is asking of us. When will I see my father and my mother? When will we see our brothers and sisters? It is so far. What if we can’t learn German? What if the German people don’t accept us? How will we get used to their culture? I would miss Turkey so much. I don’t know. Let me think about it.”

Nurhan thought about the difficulties but also the benefits. Her siblings would have a chance at an education and in turn they too could provide more things for the family. At last she agreed to go with her husband to Germany and begin a new life.

When they first landed in Germany, they realized how much cooler it was. But after a short time, the Germans accepted Savaş and Nurhan well. They made friends and learned the language. Savaş found a job at a tool factory and began to earn good money. As agreed, he sent the money back to Erzincan. His brothers and sisters and his wife’s siblings were able to go to good schools and they were successful. One became a teacher, another an officer in the army and still another a doctor. Everyone in the family was very proud of Savaş and Nurhan. They knew that their success had been

in part due to his sacrifice in going away from home and making money in Germany. Savaş understood that his coming to Germany was a blessing to his family and an honor to his father. But it was his father's comment about being a blessing to Turkey that most puzzled him.

One day Savaş and Nurhan decided to visit their family in Erzincan. As they were driving in the car toward the village it was like a dream. "Did it really happen?" he thought to himself. So many years had passed. Everything looked so different. When they got to the field where he had helped his father plow with an ox, he saw a big shiny red tractor. Savaş knew that if he had not gone to Germany that tractor would not be there. And the sight of his smiling father on top of that tractor made it all worth it. He almost jumped out of the car before it stopped, ran to his father, kissed his hand and hugged him as if he would never let go.

As they continued together toward the village, Savaş told his father all about Germany, his job and his home. They also talked about the family. Unlike before, there was no dust coming up from the road because now it was paved. There were new buildings painted red, green and yellow, made from concrete, not stone and wood. There were so many cars in the village.

Savaş read the banner as they entered: Welcome home Savaş and Nurhan. A drummer and a pipe player (zurnacı) were there to greet them. It was like they were celebrities. Everyone was happy to see them and Savaş and Nurhan could not have imagined how much they missed their home.

Savaş saw his brothers and sisters. One was a teacher and another an officer in the army. Nurhan's brother was a banker and her sister a doctor. And their children were going to well-equipped schools.

Savaş turned to his father and said,

"Father, I know that I didn't pay for all this but I know that I played a part in it. I didn't understand what you meant when

you said that I would be a blessing to Turkey. But I do now. I know that neither I, nor even my brothers or sisters alone can accomplish what needs to be done for our nation. But by sacrificing, by being an example, our children and our children's children and their children can realize a stronger Turkey. One person can really affect a multitude of others."

Halil turned to his son and said,

"I am proud of you son. Not only for what you did for us, but for thousands who will never know you, only the influence that you have left through others."

There is a story in the Bible of someone who is very well known and whose influence has spanned the whole planet. He too, like Savas, was asked to go to a far-away place. The one who did the calling was God himself. His journey started from the city of Ur in what is modern day Iraq and his name was originally Abram. His father's name was Terah and he had two brothers. After his brother Nahor died and Abram married Sarai, the whole family left Ur and moved to Haran. The commonly believed site of Haran is in the southeastern part of Turkey about 40 kilometers from Şanlı Urfa. Haran was an important junction on the trade route from northern Mesopotamia and the center of an important moon cult. It is in Haran that Abram's father died and God first speaks to him. Let's continue the story in Genesis chapter 12 verses 1-3.

1 Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. 2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

It must have been a struggle for Abram to think about leaving his family and going to a far-away place. Perhaps like Savaş he might have thought, "How can I be apart from the family I love? What

will happen to me in this new place? Will I be able to speak the language and will the culture there be different from my own? And what did God really mean when He said that all the families of the earth would be blessed in me? What could I do that would effect the whole world? Or what will my descendents do?" But the questions and doubts didn't linger long. Abram believed God and set out. Let's continue with verses 4-9:

4 So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. 6 Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land. 7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. 8 And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. 9 So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South.

Perhaps you know how hard it is to pack up and move even with professional movers and trucks. Imagine what it was like to travel on foot with your goods on camels. The dust from the road is in your hair and in your clothes and you are sweating from the hot sun. When evening comes you are exhausted from walking all day but you have to make camp and prepare meals and bedding. There is no provision for a bath and yet you have to get up the next day and travel again. They probably wondered when they would arrive and as they climbed every hill they hoped it would be the last. And yet while it was hard, what a blessing it must have been to have the God of the universe as a guide. God had made a covenant with Abram and promised that He would bless the whole world through him and

give the land of Canaan, that is modern day Israel and Palestine, to Abram's descendants. Outside of God's word, Abram had no guarantee that he would ever see this land and to some his journey was deemed foolish. But he continued to give thanks and push on. Let's look at verses 10-20:

10 Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land. 11 And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. 12 "Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 "Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you." 14 So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful. 15 The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house. 16 He treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels. 17 But the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. 18 And Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 19 "Why did you say, 'She is my sister'? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way." 20 So Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had.

Although this story is short and squeezed into the greater narrative of Abram's journey, it reveals a few things to us. First, Abram was always in constant danger from enemies and elements of nature. To meet these obstacles, Abram had to have great faith in God. Second, although Abram had a special relationship with God he was still a normal man. He had feelings, worries, and doubts. God had led him thus far and yet Abram seems to have forgotten about God's

protection. Third, even the pagan Egyptians knew that lying was bad and so they scolded Abram for his deceit. Fourth, the plan that he devised to save his own life could have ruined the covenant he had made with God. But God interceded and prevented the Pharaoh from taking Abram's wife to be his own. So why did God allow all of this to happen? Perhaps He was testing Abram and this incident revealed that Abram needed to trust God more. But one thing is sure, God protected the promise that He had just made with Abram that his descendants would possess Canaan and be a blessing to the whole earth. Let's finish by reading the first few verses in Genesis chapter 13:

1 So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb. 2 Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. 3 And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, 4 to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the LORD.

While in Germany, Savaş did not fully understand how his life would impact his family or the nation of Turkey. He could not imagine his influence extending to many generations. Did Abram understand what value his life had? Did he understand just how God would bless the world through him? Probably not, but later in the scriptures we will see how God fulfilled the promise he made to Abram.

There once was a very rebellious group of people in the far corner of the empire. The Sultan could have sent the army to oppress the people, after all it was the Sultan's kingdom and he had all the right to do so. Instead of the army the Sultan sent a good ambassador. What? Do you send an ambassador to your own people? But that is what he did.

The ambassador was kind to the people and listened to their complaints. He helped them in the affairs of their lives. He told the

people that the Sultan was desiring good for them and would protect them from enemies. The people listened as the ambassador shared the benefits of remaining loyal to the empire and the Sultan.

Some of the people believed the ambassador, many did not. When the ambassador died, his son took his place and continued the policy of helping the people. This continued for several generations. Then the enemies attacked the people. One of the descendants of the first ambassador led the battle against the invaders. The ambassador himself was killed, but the people were saved.

So what is God doing with Abram? Why did God come to Abram with a promise of being a blessing to the whole world? Let's take a step back and review what has happened up until this point. **God promised that a descendant of Eve would crush the serpent's head and evil would be destroyed.** But this didn't happen right away. The world was filled with wickedness and God was forced to destroy almost the entire human race. He would not allow sin to continue to grow at that rate, but he needed to preserve someone for the sake of His original promise. So He chose Noah. Was Noah the promised one who would crush the serpent's head? No. After the flood people gathered at Babel and defied God. So God fought against evil by scattering the people to the four corners of the earth. **But God did not forsake the people of the world and he still intended to keep his promise. He had a plan to destroy evil and bless the world through one man.**

He then chose Abram, told him to leave his homeland and guided him to a foreign country. God promised Abram three things: to give the land of Canaan to Abram's descendants, to make them a great nation, and to bless the whole world through them. So we see that although God scattered the nations because of their evil deeds, He also had a plan to bless the people of the world in righteousness through Abram and through his descendants. In essence, Abraham became an ambassador to the world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you knew that God was sending you on a special mission would you go? What if it meant you had to leave your family and friends?
2. Would you sacrifice your career for your family? What about for a stranger?
3. Was Abram the one who would crush the serpent's head and bring an end to evil or should we expect another who would come and do that?
4. Why would God make a covenant with a human being? He certainly doesn't have to promise anything to anyone, and yet He does. Why do you think He does that?

9 THE BENEFIT OF SHOWING RESPECT

Why did the Prophet Abraham kiss this king's hand?

Have you ever noticed who receives the most coverage in magazines and newspapers? Although politicians make a close second for public honor, it is usually movie stars, pop singers, and sports stars. When men and women of power and fame arrive as visitors, flags wave and luxurious hotels roll out the red carpet and open their doors. Business leaders like Bill Gates and Rahmi Koç are saluted for their business savvy. And despite all the newspaper focus, it is on the other end of society that Ataturk chose to point his honor. He said, "Teachers are the one and only people who save nations." To be great and still honor others is the grace of humility. Let's explore this concept of honoring others in today's lesson.

Mehmet and Ayşe were an honest village couple. They lived in a farming village of about five hundred people, outside of Ankara. Mehmet worked hard raising olives for a living. Every spring he and his horse would plow up the ground so that the soil could receive all the benefit of the rains. The olive trees produced well for him and brought in sufficient income for his family, and many of his relatives. The land they worked had been in the family for many generations. Perhaps clear back to Selcuk times. The ground they owned was a beautiful piece of land that was partially forested with 100-year-old pine trees. There was a strong flowing spring with clean ice-cold water. It flowed into a valley that watered their sizable garden and entire farm. Around the çeşme it was green year round and there

were some giant trees that must have been 300 years old. It was a beautiful peaceful spot.

One day a city man, dressed in a suit, black pointy shoes and a tie came to Mehmet's barn where he was working. The man said he was a government surveyor and that they were investigating widening the road. He said they needed Mehmet's signature to begin surveying the land. Mehmet was busy milking the cow and gave them his approval and signature.

About a month later a large truck pulling a bulldozer on a trailer pulled up. They began walking across Mehmet's olive orchards and marking trees to cut. Mehmet asked what all this was about. The men said the land had been sold and their were plans to build a 100 room five star health resort!

Mehmet and Ayşe were shocked. They immediately called the Jandarma. But the men with the trucks and bulldozers showed the Jandarma several documents. Right there on the papers, signed by Mehmet, it clearly stated that Mehmet's properties were theirs. Mehmet's heart felt weak. "What had they fallen into? And how could they ever get out of it."

The villagers were all shocked and angry. They begged the Jandarma to do something. But the Jandarma only had the authority to make the bulldozers stop for three days. In the meantime, the officers told Ayşe and Mehmet to get a good lawyer.

The problem for Mehmet and Ayşe was that they were villagers. How would they get a lawyer and where would they start looking? They had no connections, no network to powerful friends or even people in the city, much less to lawyers.

The only university trained person Ayşe knew was a woman doctor who had helped her sister to have a special surgery several years before. Ayşe knew it was a long shot. But the doctor had been so kind to her sister. Maybe she would know of an honest lawyer who could help them save their land.

Ayşe called her sister and she soon found Dr. Gül's number. Immediately Dr. Gül remembered Ayşe and was pleasant toward her. Though the doctor was an older woman she was full of life and the love of life. Enthusiasm for her patients was her trademark. Ayşe anxiously described the situation to the doctor, finishing her passionate and tearful story with these words,

“Doctor we are uneducated farmers and we just don't know the right people to talk to about the mess we are in. Would you know anyone who might be able to help us?”

Dr. Gül responded instantly with a smile in her voice,

“Ayşe, I go to lunch about every other day with a woman who is a Supreme Court judge! She's my friend and believe me she is connected.” Then she added confidently, “Your problem is as good as solved.”

The next day in the village, the villagers were as excited as bees buzzing around a picnic batch of baklava! The trucks were loading the big machinery up and leaving. Ayşe and Mehmet had told everyone about their call to Dr. Gül and of course Dr. Gül's friend.

At about two o'clock to their surprise Dr. Gül drove into the village. Mehmet, Ayşe, Dr. Gül and the family all sat down to drink tea and eat fresh borek. Mehmet began to tear up with appreciation as he described the events of the last several days. Of course Dr. Gül was elated with the news about the trucks leaving and took great delight in all the gifts the villagers heaped on her. She tried to refuse, but thought it best to let the family do as they liked. Mehmet loaded the doctor's car with ten liters of village olive oil, a bucket of fresh figs, two buckets of garden tomatoes, bags of peppers, eggplant, four melons, lot's and lot's of pears and a squash that filled her back seat.

The next day Dr. Gül paid a visit to her influential friend. Her friend was in court, so the judge's secretary allowed Dr. Gül and a worker to enter her office. They proceeded to pile a table high with watermelon, garden tomatoes, two jugs of olive oil, a pan of fresh

borek and other village gifts. After the pile was completed, the judge came into the office. Looking about she immediately took in the situation and began to laugh.

“Well, I put a little pressure in the right place I see.” she said.

Her friend, Dr. Gül, said,

“Yes, and may honor be given to the one whom honor is due.”

Then Dr. Gül went over to the judge and took her hand and though the judge would ordinarily pull her hand away, she let the theater play out. With the worker and secretary watching Dr. Gül kissed her friends hand and put it to her forehead three times saying,

“That is from the village elders, and that is from Mehmet and Ayşe” and kissing it one last time, she said “and this is from me. Thank you.”

The Bible tells us about a time when Lot, the prophet Abram's nephew, and his family found themselves in the middle of trouble. Trouble not too dissimilar from what Mehmet and Ayşe had found themselves up against. According to the Bible, Lot had chosen to live in the city of Sodom. Five kings invaded the city, and Lot and his family were taken captive. It seemed as if Lot and his family were destined to become slaves. Fortunately, Lot had “connections.” His connection was someone who cared for him deeply and was willing to risk his life to secure Lot's freedom.

One of the men who was captured, escaped and ran to tell Abram. When the prophet Abram heard the news, he immediately took action. Let's read the account in Genesis chapter 14 verses 14-16:

14 When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15 And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. 16 Then he brought

back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people.

The prophet Abram was a daring warrior! Can you imagine how overjoyed Lot would have been with his hands in ropes to see Abram fighting for him? Can you imagine his gratitude, and how he would have kissed his uncle?

But the story of Lot's rescue doesn't end there. Abram had some unfinished business to conduct. In addition, an influential and mysterious character enters the scene of action, one whom even the prophet Abram chose to honor. Yes, even a hand that Abram likely kissed and put to his forehead. Let's continue by reading verses 17-20:

17 After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) 19 And he blessed him and said, Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand! And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

It says that Melchizedek was a king and priest of God Most High. That is a very interesting role, a king who is at the same time a priest. For most of the ancient characters of the Holy Scripture we are given at least some background, but with Melchizedek we are told very little. His father and mother aren't mentioned and we are only given his name. But it is clear from his name that he was not an ordinary person. Melchizedek, in ancient Hebrew, has two meanings: "King of righteousness" and "King of Peace." Though the role of priest has been misused and misunderstood by false religions and throughout history, God did ordain the role of priest in ancient times. A priest of God was to be a holy man, consecrated to the service of God. He not only served as a mediator between God and man, but also had the responsibility of drawing people closer

to God. Melchizedek's additional title of "King of Peace" was also very fitting because it is God's desire that their be peace. He had clearly authored peace in the Garden of Eden, again after the flood, and finally in the promised seed through Abram. Yes, Melchizedek was a true representative of God.

After Melchizedek blessed Abram and gave glory to God for Abram's victory, Prophet Abram returned the honor by giving Melchizedek 10% of everything he had. If he had 100 pieces of gold, he gave 10. If he had 1000 sheep, he gave 100. It seems like a lot to give up, but Abram had a covenant with God and all that he was blessed with came from God. So in actuality, 10% was very small.

But why did Abram honor Melchizedek? Was it because he was a king? Was this some sort of tax? Actually, we know for certain that the answer is no. The scripture tells us of a second king who was also on the scene. To this second King, Abram would give no honor and would not allow himself to be honored by him. The story continues in Geneses 14 verses 21-24:

21 And the king of Sodom said to Abram, Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself. 22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, 23 that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich. 24 I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share.

Abram was standing before the King of Salem and the King of Sodom. To Melchizedek, a follower and priest of God Most High, Abram gave honor and a tenth of his earnings. But to the king of Sodom, a pagan leader and immoral man, Abram wouldn't even take a penny! It seems that the distinction of kingship wasn't as important as the character of the man and the title of priest. Only a great man can recognize the superiority of others and the need to honor someone other than themselves! A man who would serve, rather than wait to

be served! Prophet Abram showed himself worthy of God's honor by honoring King Melchizedek above himself.

A story is told of a man named Paedaretos who lived in ancient Sparta. A group of 300 men were to be chosen to govern Sparta. Though Paedaretos was a candidate, his name was not on the final list. Some of his friends sought to console him, but he simply replied, "I am glad that in Sparta there are 300 men better than I am." He became a legend because of his willingness to stand aside while others took the places of glory and honor. He was humble enough to value the contribution of others.

Humility is the path to discovery. Pride is the path to ruin.

In the summer of 1986, two ships collided in the Black Sea traveling between Turkey and Russia. Hundreds of passengers died as they were hurled into the icy waters below. News of the disaster was further darkened when an investigation revealed the cause of the accident. It wasn't a technology problem like radar malfunction--or even thick fog. The cause was human stubbornness. Each captain was aware of the other ship's presence nearby. Both could have steered clear, but according to news reports, neither captain wanted to give way to the other. Each was too proud of his position as 'captain' to yield first. By the time they came to their senses, it was too late.

Don't allow pride to shipwreck your life! Instead, humble yourself and acknowledge those who are worthy of honor. In Abram's life, there was a "Priest/King" who deserved honor and so Abram honored him. Let us not forget to honor those who are worthy of honor.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever needed help from someone important? What was the situation? How did you get yourself out of it?
2. Do you think God gave Abram special strength to fight against five kings and come away with the victory? Does God still give people special help in time of need?
3. According to the Scriptures, Melchizedek and Abram shared bread and grape juice together. How does eating and drinking together bring people closer together?
4. Abram is a well-known prophet and he gave honor to a man greater than himself. What do we learn from this?
5. How can we be more humble?

10 A FAITH THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

What righteous thing did the Prophet Abraham do to receive God's favor?

Have you ever believed something so much that it changed your life or even the way people looked at you? For example, maybe you worked hard and went to university because a teacher complimented and challenged you. Sometimes we forget the power of belief, but it is what makes the world go round. Beliefs are the foundation of politics and all the world's religions. Beliefs establish countries and tear them down. And for the lives of two individuals in this lesson, the simple act of believing changed the way they were forever remembered.

Adil was a 15-year-old boy from a poor village in the eastern part of Turkey. He was the son of a shepherd and didn't even know how to read or write. But he was very well respected in the village for his honesty and humbleness.

Life was very simple for Adil. Every day he woke up early, milked the family cow and ate breakfast. After eating, he would take the sheep out into the fields. During the dry season, he had to walk long distances just to find food for them. Sometimes he even had to sleep outside under the stars. Shepherding can be very lonely work, but Adil had friends who would sometimes walk with him and it helped pass the time. When his friends weren't around, it was their previous conversations and his own thoughts that kept him company. Because Adil wasn't a particularly brave boy, some of

those nights seemed like they would last forever and the sounds of insects and howling wolves kept him awake all night. If it weren't for the light of the stars, he might not have been able to bear the loneliness.

It was 1914 and as the hot days of summer began to cool and fall set in, Adil began making preparations for a long winter. There were always rumors in this part of the country because it was far removed from the royal courts of Istanbul and real news just never travelled that far. But lately the rumors had been growing more frequent and they weren't all coming from the west.

“The empire is in trouble. The Sultan has lost his grip on the government. The war isn't being fought in other countries anymore and if we don't act fast, we may lose the very soil that we live on. They say Turkey is a “sick man”.”

Although the rumors were disturbing, Adil didn't think that the Ottoman Empire would ever collapse much less that his life would change. In fact, it probably hadn't changed much since the Turks originally came here.

“Why would anyone be worried about or interested in our area? There is nothing here, just a few dilapidated buildings. In fact, there are more sheep than people.” He thought to himself.

But it wasn't long before his doubts would turn to worry. The first sign that things weren't right was when two families stumbled into town. All they had was loaded into a donkey cart and they looked tired and hungry. They said that their village had been raided and that they fled for their lives. Although they didn't provide any details, it was obvious that they had witnessed something terrible and it wasn't long before more families and individuals passed through the village.

These families rarely stayed long and didn't ask for much, but their visits had a toll on the village. The germs and illnesses they brought from war-ravaged areas began to infect the residents. First, Adil's

mother became ill and after fighting to hold on to her very life, she passed away. Adil's father was heart broken but he knew that he had to stay strong for his son. Unfortunately, Adil's father also got sick and without the care of a doctor or modern medicines his time was cut short. Knowing that he had very little time left, he called Adil to his bedside.

“Son, you have already lost your mother and my time on this earth is running out. I have taught you everything that I know. From now on, you will no longer be considered a boy. They say you are never a man until your parents die, and short of a miracle, that time has come.”

“Father, please don't talk like this. I can't make it on my own. I am just a boy and all I have is you. What will I do?”

“Son, there comes a time in every person's life when they must grow up. You are the son of a shepherd and you know your trade well. But I want you to do something else. I didn't tell you this before because I didn't want you to worry. But, the rumors about our great empire are true. The war is pressing upon our borders and there is a great need for brave young men to fight. I want you to join the fight and bring honor to our family and people. You are brave and just as you faced those lonely nights in the mountains and hills, you can also face this. I believe in you son!”

“Father, if only I had your belief. As much as my heart wants to, in my mind I know it isn't true. Most of those nights I sat trembling and waiting for the sun to rise. The thoughts of wolves and wild animals tearing me to pieces kept me awake. I am not brave father. I am a coward. I couldn't even sleep in peace.”

“Adil, you are brave and never forget it. When the fear closes in on you, believe this simple truth and it shall set you free from fear.”

As his father said these final words, his breathing began to fade. Adil squeezed his father's hand tighter in the hope that he could

hold onto him longer. But with the words, “You are brave, you are brave,” hanging on his lips, he died. Adil fell to the floor and sobbed.

As hard as it was for Adil, he honored his father’s wishes and left his village. He didn’t know where to go, so he started travelling west until he found himself outside of Istanbul. He couldn’t believe his eyes. He had never seen a place like this before. But he had no time for sightseeing. He needed to enlist in the army. After signing up, he was outfitted with meager supplies, a weapon, and a uniform. He was placed in a division and given some training.

Adil’s division was moved to Canakkale and rumors of an invasion forced them to dig trenches and make preparations. From the outside, Adil appeared brave and strong. But on the inside he still felt like a scared little boy. However, when he realized that the other soldiers, both young and old, were also scared, it made him feel better. They were all lonely and had little or no contact with their families. The nights were cold and the rags that they called clothes barely kept them warm. But as every day passed, Adil began to believe his father’s words. He had left his village, travelled farther than anyone he knew, joined the army, and was now preparing to fight an enemy that came from a place he had never even heard of.

Adil prayed that an attack wouldn’t happen, but the bombardment shattered his hopes. He was never close enough to the shore to see the enemies approach. But it was only a matter of time before they would come face to face. There was almost no ammunition, food was scarce, and Adil didn’t want to die. As he took his place at the lip of the trench and held his unloaded rifle, the fear became overwhelming. As the order to charge was given and he crawled out of the trench, his father’s words flashed across his mind. He leapt from the trench and began to run. Men were falling all around him and before he made it to the next trench he felt a burning sensation in his stomach. He was lying on his back, looking at the sky, and repeating the words “I am brave, I am brave, I am brave.” He had been telling himself those words since his father’s death and he died believing them. Adil’s belief in what his father said not only

changed the way he viewed himself, but the momentum of the war. Belief is a powerful thing!

Prophet Abram was like Adil in many ways. He was a shepherd from the east of Turkey who left his homeland. He felt the pains of death that separated him from his father and travelled long distances to fulfill a special task. But what made Abram so unique was his belief. And God, who knows everything and from whom nothing goes unseen, not only recognized his belief; he rewarded him for it. Let's start reading the story in Genesis chapter 15 verses 1-3:

1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great. 2 But Abram said, O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus? 3 And Abram said, Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.

The Bible tells us that after these things: Abram's call, traveling to Egypt, rescuing Lot, and honoring Melchizedek; God appeared to Abram in a vision and promised him a great reward. Abram's response was simple, "What shall you give me?" We know from previous stories that Abram had a beautiful wife, bravery, fortune, and the blessings of God. This would be enough to satisfy just about every man on the planet. But there was one thing he didn't have, an heir. He had lived his whole life without knowing the pride, privilege, and joy of holding his own child. In his old age, and outside of a miracle, he knew that his chance was gone. But God had a plan! Let's look at what happened in verses 4 and 5:

4 And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir. 5 And he brought him outside and said, Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them. Then he said to him, So shall your offspring be.

Have you ever sat outside in the dark and looked up at the stars? During the darkest nights, away from the city lights, an innumerable amount of specks bring light to a dark world and create shapes in a shapeless horizon. I am sure all of us at some point in our lives have stood in wonder gazing into the night sky or maybe even tried to count those stars like Abram. In Abram's time, the lack of smog, city lights, and air pollution rendered the sky even cleaner than the one we see today. In fact, the sky of Abram's time was probably not much different than Adil's. Knowing how hard it is for us to count the stars in our day, imagine what it was like for Abram when he was standing in the desert looking up at the clear night sky. But it wasn't the number of the stars that was impressive. Rather it was the fact that God was promising Abram an heir and offspring as vast as the stars. God had already told this to Abram likening his offspring to the dust of the earth, but as time went on and Abram grew older, God wanted to remind Abram that he had not forgotten him. Perhaps for some of us, the idea of that many offspring makes us quiver. But for Abram, who had no children and in a time when children were of great value, the prospect of being a father, grandfather, and great-grandfather must have been exciting; especially at the age of 85 and after waiting his whole life. But what was to happen next was even more exciting than having a child because it has eternal implications. Let's read verse 6:

6 And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Let's pause here for a moment and think about this. God doesn't say, "Abram you have been very good and now you will be called righteous;" nor "Abram I am pleased with your sacrifices and so I am declaring you righteous." No, **the Bible simply says that Abram believed and God counted it to him as righteousness.** For many of us, this may be hard to understand. How can God consider someone righteous simply because they believe Him? Well, we will need to wait for the answer to that question because it isn't written here, but as we study through the Bible it will become clearer. For

now, the most important point is that the simple act of believing God is what made Abram to be considered righteous! People sometimes forget that the beginning of every major change in our personal lives or the whole world starts with an idea or belief. For Adil it was the belief that he really was brave and after convincing himself, he became known as a hero. But Abram's belief was not in himself or in his own abilities, rather it was that God would keep His word. And Abram's righteousness was not the result of convincing himself. On the contrary, **it was the result of God declaring him to be righteous.**

But this lesson doesn't just apply to Abram. The most exciting aspect of this story is that God places before us the reality that a person can obtain something greater than bravery, fame, or even prestige. That **if we simply believe Him, we too can be righteous.** What an amazing and life altering truth!

Abram listened to what God said, recognized that in human terms what He was proposing was impossible, and believed that God could fulfill that which he claimed. It was that simple and it is from this story that Abram became known as the Father of Faith. But if this is true, that is that belief leads to righteousness, would not the reverse also be true? If you disbelieve what God is telling you, it can make you unrighteous. Furthermore, how do you know what God is telling you; is there a way to judge between what is coming from God and Satan? Of course and as we journey through the Bible, God's message will become clearer and clearer. But, let's get back to the story because it doesn't end there and before the night is over, Abram's belief or faith will be tested! In fact, his faith will continue to be tested, tried, and proven for the rest of his life! Let's continue the story in verses 7-11:

7 And he said to him, I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess. 8 But he said, O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it? 9 He said to him, Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young

pigeon. 10 And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. 11 And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

Abram, following in the footsteps of his patriarchs and as a symbol of his covenant with God, made a sacrifice. It is interesting to note that Abel, Noah, and now Abram all used sacrifice to thank, pay homage to, and covenant with God. It seems like every major occurrence or display of God's power and mercy is sealed with sacrifice. But will Abram be able to uphold his end of the covenant? Will he still believe if times get hard? Let's look at verses 12-16:

12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. 13 Then the LORD said to Abram, Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. 14 But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. 16 And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.

How would you respond to this vision? God has promised you a land and an heir, called you righteous for believing in Him, but then you find out that your descendants will not be free. They will be forced to live in a strange land, work as servants, and be afflicted for 400 years. This doesn't sound like the story line for a righteous man. God said that his seed would be a great nation and that he would be a blessing to all nations. How can you have a great nation filled with servants and slaves? Surely, if this were the outcome for a righteous man, what would compel anyone to desire the title of righteous? Not to mention that any ordinary man would stumble and lose faith after hearing this kind of news. But not Abram! God had already brought him too far and he wasn't about to give up. He isn't called the Father of Faith for no reason. Let's finish the story by reading verses 17-21:

17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, 19 the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.

In spite of all that will transpire, God reassured Abram that He is in control. Abram's faith will not be forgotten and the promise will be fulfilled.

When Adil and the other Turkish soldiers went to war, they believed in what they were fighting for. They believed that the future of Turkey depended on their willingness to die. As brave as they were and as indebted as we are to them, Abram shows us a belief that we not only want to die with, but live with! A complete trust and belief in God. Adil's belief changed a country, but **Abram's changed the world**. Adil's changed the way he thought of himself, but **Abram's changed the way God thought of him**.

What is your belief changing?

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. How does it make you feel to have a teacher, parent, or employee trust you to accomplish something?
2. Why did Abraham believe God? Why do you believe God?
3. Not including what others have taught you, what do you think is the most important thing to believe about God?
4. How does believing in God change the way you live, eat, and find entertainment?

11

THE RESULT OF
IMPATIENCE

How does cause and effect alter fate?

Have you ever been impatient and by doing something too soon you really messed things up? Sometimes if we are not patient we can really cause serious harm. Consider the following story adapted from a real event.

Once there was a construction company building a concrete structure just like the ones you see in your own neighborhood. Each day the construction workers would arrange the wood forms for the concrete to be poured into. There were a lot of wood supports holding up that wood form because concrete is heavy and needs a lot of support before it sets up. After a floor of concrete is poured, the supports for that floor need to remain in place for a minimum of 28 days for the concrete to reach 98% of its maximum strength. If you remove the form supports early, the building could collapse because the concrete isn't strong enough.

According to this rule, the workers could build about three floors a month. This meant that at any one time, three floors needed to be supported while the concrete was curing. Perhaps you have driven by a construction site and seen the concrete floors being supported by a lot of wood or steel supports.

Well one day the workers were setting up the timbers for a new concrete floor. The boss of the crew, Irfan, said to one of his workers,

“Go down and get more timbers to make these form supports.”

The worker, Hafiz, went down and got some timbers. Can you guess where he got them? That’s right, he took them from a lower floor that was still curing. He didn’t bother or didn’t know to go down and get unused ones from the ground level. Maybe, you have already figured out what happened.

Irfan, assuming Hafiz had gotten the supports from the ones on the ground level, ordered his men to prepare forms and supports for the next floor. So they made the forms, attached the supports and prepared the iron framework. Everything was looking good and the men were prepared to pour the concrete. But when that heavy, wet concrete began to settle into the forms, the unsupported floor below couldn’t hold it. The whole building came crashing down. What seemed like a quick solution turned into a big problem!

Yes, sometimes we have to wait and if we don’t wait it is a disaster. Unfortunately all of us, at least occasionally, look for quick solutions to our problems. We think that faster is better. But that is not always so. How would you relate to the man who took the timbers from the wrong place? Was it his fault or the fault of the boss? Hafiz was not trying to cause an accident. But he did the wrong thing and there were negative results.

There is a natural law in life called cause and effect. When you do something or make a decision, something happens. Usually, if we do something bad it has negative results. This is a reality we live with on a daily basis. But sometimes bad things happen because we didn’t think through the problem or we made a hasty decision. Even though we didn’t want the situation to end the way it did, it happened and we need to live with it, sometimes for the rest of our lives. But how does God behave toward us when we do the wrong thing or make a wrong decision? Fortunately for us, we can once again look at the life of Prophet Abram to get an answer! Do you remember when God promised Abram a son and that he and his descendants would be a blessing to the whole world? Well shortly

after that Abram made a decision that had negative effects and he would have to live with that for the rest of his life. Let's pick up the story reading verses 1-6 in Genesis chapter 16:

1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. 2 So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. 3 Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. 4 So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "My wrong be upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The LORD judge between you and me." 6 So Abram said to Sarai, "Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please." And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence.

When God created Adam and Eve He created one woman for one man. He blessed their union and told them to be fruitful and multiply. But after sin entered the world through Adam and Eve's disobedience, marrying and sleeping with multiple women became a common practice. But it must be emphasized that this behavior was directly linked to and a result of sin. God did not ordain it. **So just because something is common does not mean it is good.** To have the flu in Istanbul in the winter is common but it is not good. And perhaps photographs of scantily dressed women in the daily newspaper are common, but that doesn't mean they are good either.

Yes God shows us His plan of one wife for one man. He shows us the sacredness of the marriage relation and we have record in the scriptures of what happens when this wise arrangement is broken. There is bitterness and jealousy, something definitely not in God's plan. Now let us return to Hagar who has to run from her mistress.

We can read this in verses 7-16:

7 Now the Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. 8 And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai." 9 The Angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand." 10 Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude." 11 And the Angel of the LORD said to her: "Behold, you are with child, And you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, Because the LORD has heard your affliction. 12 He shall be a wild man; His hand shall be against every man, And every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." 13 Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me" 14 Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; observe, it is between Kadesh and Bered. 15 So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

We notice something very special here. In spite of Abram and Sarai violating their marriage bond by bringing Hagar in as a mistress, God shows mercy to them all. It wasn't Hagar's fault, as a servant she was just doing what she was told. But Hagar was wrong when she began to despise or look down upon Sarai. God could have easily scolded each one of them for their sins and abandoned them. But He overlooked their impatience, pronounced a blessing upon Hagar, and said that her descendants would be innumerable. This story shows us that **God deals with us like a faithful parent deals with a child.**

There once was a woman who was going to make yogurt. She cooked the milk, wrapped the pot in a towel and set it aside to let the milk curdle.

“Let this sit here until morning” she told her young daughter.

The young girl wanted to please her mother by putting the yogurt in the refrigerator to cool down. But unfortunately, she did not wait long enough for the milk to become yogurt and when she moved the pot into the refrigerator the milk did not curd. When her mother saw the pot in the refrigerator just before bedtime, she said to her daughter,

“Look what you have done! I told you to leave the yogurt until morning, why didn't you listen to me?”

“I am sorry mother, I thought if I put it in the refrigerator it would cool quicker and make your job easier” the girl said.

The mother just smiled,

“O.K. my daughter, I forgive you. But just remember, some things require patience and time to work out. Yogurt is one of those things and you can't take short-cuts while making it.”

Sometimes, taking shortcuts doesn't work out so well. And in the case of God's promises, taking shortcuts always makes a mess that only He can clean up. Abram and Sarai became impatient and didn't want to wait for God to fulfill the promise in his own way and time. That impatience proved to be a mistake that brought extreme tension and unhappiness in the home. And yet God did not abandon His servants because of the mistakes they made. Isn't that encouraging for you and me? **Yes we too make mistakes in life.** We too can be impatient and not wait for God's promises to be fulfilled in the way He has designed. And we often suffer the results of that. But we can also know that as parents deal with their children in mercy so our **God deals faithfully with us when we err.**

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. God did not reprimand Abram for being impatient and trying to fulfill God's promise in his own way. Why not?
2. When the angel of the Lord addressed Hagar, why did He call her Sarai's maid and not Abram's wife?
3. Why did God tell Hagar what kind of person Ishmael would be?
4. Have you ever felt like you were trying to do something for yourself that you should really be letting God do for you? What was it? Selecting a spouse maybe?

12 AN UNEXPECTED PROMISE

What was the mystery Abraham couldn't understand?

Have you ever planned a surprise party for someone? Sometimes it is difficult to keep a secret. It isn't easy to look someone in the eyes and talk with them, knowing that you are hiding something. Particularly when that secret knowledge is something good! In this lesson we will learn about a time when God talked to Abraham, but couldn't tell him everything he was planning for him. He gave Abraham mysterious instructions that left him baffled. What was the mystery Abraham couldn't understand? Let's start with another story first.

During the Korean War and after months of taking brutal attacks by the North Koreans, the combined forces planned a strategic counter assault. The assault was so successful that a whole section of the North Korean army was isolated and the freedom of tens of thousands of Koreans was secured.

Lieutenant Colonel Müftüoğlu (a pseudonym) was one of those who planned the attack. He was a fair and honest man who commanded the respect of all those under him. The Korean War needed more men like him, and the Americans were simply lucky to have the help of such a brilliant strategist and commander. In his Battalion were 700 Turks with a fierce reputation. One of those who belonged to their ranks was Sergeant Major Mehmet Çakmak, a soldier who gave the Turkish army its good reputation. Although a little impulsive, he

was also faithful, fearless, followed commands and knew how to give them.

After meeting with the international coalition, Lieutenant Colonel Müftüoğlu called his trusted friend Sergeant Major Çakmak for an emergency meeting.

"Çakmak, we will attack the North Koreans tomorrow and you have the responsibility of destroying a key bridge. This is an incredibly important assignment, and I have chosen you specifically for it. I want you to take private Umut with you as your assistant."

The last sentence caught Sergeant Major Çakmak by surprise.

"Sir, Private Umut?"

Lieutenant Colonel Müftüoğlu calmly replied,

"Yes, I have specifically selected him as your helper. He is my promise to you of a safe return."

The words seemed odd and so Sergeant Major Çakmak spoke his mind.

"Sir, may I share a thought? I have a man in my platoon, Sergeant Levent, who is like a son to me. He is a good man, he fears nothing and I believe he will serve me well in the mission you are sending my team on."

Lieutenant Colonel Müftüoğlu in a calm, kind way simply said.

"No. Use the private. Sergeant Levent can't do what Private Umut can do for you. He is your man for this mission. I have other plans for Sergeant Levent. As I said, Private Umut is my word for your safe return. You will obey my orders."

Sergeant Major Çakmak snapped to and saluted his officer. And that was the end of the matter. Çakmak rallied his team and made

preparations for the daring assignment to destroy the bridge behind enemy lines.

In the dark of night the team of sixteen men stealthily moved through the mountain trails to the bridge. Because the bridge was guarded heavily on either end, the plan was for the men to swim down-river and climb up beneath the bridge to set the dynamite. All went as planned. Private Umut performed his duties skillfully, but all the while Sergeant Major Çakmak couldn't help but think,

"Certainly Sergeant Levent would have done just as well or better. What was my commander's motive?"

The Turkish soldiers retreated far enough to detonate. With a burst of brilliant orange against the night sky the bridge went down.

As Sergeant Major Çakmak and his demolition team were escaping the scene, they came across four North Korean soldiers. It was obvious these men were scared out of their minds to meet UN soldiers. They fled into the forest, but not before spraying one blast of machine gun fire. It was then that Sergeant Major Çakmak got hit.

The bullet had smashed through his right shoulder. The men made a stretcher from two tree branches and a sheet. They raced the Sergeant Major as quickly as they could through the forest. But the going was difficult at night and their commander was losing blood rapidly. They finally saw the glowing lights of a Red Cross medic outpost.

The soldiers truly cared for their dear leader and woke the doctors for immediate help. The doctors took one look at the mangled shoulder and at the pale face of the man and said,

"This man needs blood immediately."

The Sergeant Major in his now weak voice said,

"Leave me for dead. I am an O negative blood type. You'll never find it."

Just then Private Umut stepped forward,

"I too am O negative sir. You may have my blood."

It was then that Sergeant Major Çakmak remembered his Lieutenant Colonel's words.

"I have specially selected him. He can do what Sergeant Levent can't do. He is your promise."

The Lieutenant Colonel had done his homework. One man in the Battalion could save his life and the Lieutenant Colonel had foreseen it all. The Corporal closed his eyes, and rested in the good hands of the doctors as Emet's blood flowed into his veins. He lived to thank the Lieutenant Colonel personally and never again questioned his decision-making skills. From that day on, Çakmak knew that the right solution wasn't always the one that seemed so obvious.

Prophet Abram also learned this lesson. There was a time when he thought he new how the future would play out, but God had a different plan. At the time, God's decision didn't make any sense to the Prophet. But by faith he accepted it, and only years later, did the whole mystery become clear. God knew something that Abram didn't. Let's read now from the scriptures starting with Genesis chapter 17 verses 1-6:

1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, 2 that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly. 3 Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, 4 Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.

Those are the actual words that God spoke to Abram the father of faith nearly four thousand years ago! It was a covenant that God made with him and is written down in Genesis 17 of the Tevrat. There is also a reoccurring theme in God's proclamation. He keeps reminding Abram that he would be great and remembered through his offspring. You can imagine how embarrassing it must have been for a man who had no children to be called "Great Father" for so many years! But now Abram at the ripe age of 99, with just one son, Ishmael, age 13, receives a new name. He would no longer be known as Abram, which means "Great Father" but Abraham the "father of many nations". **Yes, Abram is the prophet Abraham!**

Let us continue reading the story in Genesis chapter 17 verses 7-10:

7 And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. 8 And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God. 9 And God said to Abraham, As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. 10 This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.

Here the covenant symbol of circumcision was given to Abraham and all of his heritage as an "everlasting covenant." As a groom might give his bride gold at a wedding, God gave Abraham a special gift that would forever stand as a testimony of a promise that heaven had made with him. **The symbol of this covenant was circumcision.** Abraham's heritage was to be different than the pagans. He was to be clean outwardly and holy inwardly. Later, God would say to those who wanted to deeply follow him that they needed their hearts to be circumcised!

The covenant was confirmed by blood. God gave his Word, while men bled, healed, and ever after carried a reminder in their body of

God's promise. The scriptures tell us in Genesis chapter 17 verses 24 and 25:

24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 25 And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

Now something else very special happened on that Sunnet day. Beyond the Sunnet covenant, God whispered a promise to Abraham. Let's read about it in chapter 17 verses 15-22:

15 And God said to Abraham, As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her. 17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child? 18 And Abraham said to God, Oh that Ishmael might live before you! 19 God said, No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. 20 As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. 21 But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year. 22 When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

Of course God loved Abraham's first-born son, Ishmael. So that very day a promise was made about Ishmael that he would become great, and be blessed. God promised to make him a great nation. God even foretold his future and said 12 princes would come from him. This wasn't enough for Abraham and he asked God,

"Why do I need another son? Can't you carry out the "everlasting covenant" through my son Ishmael?"

But God was firm in what he said. So there is a mystery here. Although Ishmael was part of the everlasting covenant because he was Abraham's son and circumcised, there is something that Isaac, and only Isaac, will do in the establishment of that covenant. But God does not reveal what that is. Basically, "I have plans for Ishmael. But I know something about the boy Isaac, that you don't know." God's words exactly are:

20 As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. 21 But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year.

And that was the end of the conversation. Just as Lieutenant Colonel Müftüoğlu knew something that Çakmak didn't, so God knew something that Abraham didn't. Consider the following story.

Once there was a poor retired elementary teacher in Istanbul who went looking for a second hand dining table with his wife. Every kuruş mattered to this couple, as they were trying to help their daughter through university. They took 200 TL and went from spot shop to spot shop hoping to find a good deal. They were having trouble because the wife kept complaining that the chairs were all wobbly. Finally in one spot shop the wife found a table she liked. While she was testing each chair the husband began to rummage through some carpets that were rolled up in the back. The husband asked the price of the rugs. They ranged in price from 70 TL to 100 TL. The wife meanwhile was quite proud of herself for bargaining the price of the table and seven chairs (the 8th had fallen apart) down to 180 TL. She asked the husband for the 200 TL. The husband however, handed the shopkeeper 100 TL and said, "I will take this old rug." The wife was upset! She didn't even hold her tongue, in front of the shopkeeper; she began to shout at him!

"What? We don't need a carpet! We came table shopping. You have promised me a table for nearly a year, and you spend this

money like it was scrap paper! You are giving him his asking price! What are you a crazy man?"

The storeowner was embarrassed for the man, but what could he do? The old woman kept it up and sat down in one of the seven chairs.

"I won't leave this store with that flea infested old rug. Buy me this table, or I'm not coming home."

Finally, the husband put the rug on his shoulder, said farewell to the shopkeeper, went outside and waited at the corner for his wife. He knew his wife. After 15 minutes she came out of the store looking for him. She started to nag him more. The two of them and the rug boarded a bus and the wife pestered the old teacher the whole ride. The man just kept his mouth shut through the barrage of missiles his wife sent at him. They boarded a dolmuş and the wife continued her assault. They entered their 4th floor house and the husband unrolled the carpet on their floor. The edges were worn away, the tassels were frayed. One bare spot on one corner. The wife really let her husband hear her thoughts!

All the while the retired elementary teacher was talking to himself softly admiring the carpet, and walking around and around it, he whispered, "Look at the medallion, the leaf design and the tulips." Then he rolled up the carpet and left with his wife still shouting from the doorway. The old teacher was gone for two days!

The wife, now repentant for her behavior was frantic that he might have left her for good. But on the third day the husband came back. He was dressed in a new suit and new shoes. He gave his wife a golden bracelet and made this announcement.

"My wife of 40 years -- you should know that they are delivering to you today a new table and chairs -- but you will need to go to our new home on the sea to dine at that table. The rug, my dear, was a Palace rug, the work of Hamza from the time of Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror."

As the story goes, though they lived the remainder of their years in wealth, the husband refused to buy his wife more than seven chairs for their dining table -- just as a reminder never to question her husband again.

Just as the wise Hoja, stayed to his secret plan, even at the begging of his wife. So God had a plan. So often there is just one piece of information that we don't know. One detail that if we were to know it, suddenly God's plans would make perfect sense. Now prophet Abraham was better mannered than that wife! Though he didn't understand God's actions he kept his calm, and followed God's lead.

Abraham and Ishmael were circumcised that day. I wonder if they let Ishmael and old father Abraham ride on a horse? Was there dancing and music? Did Sarah and Hagar prepare rice, nohut and lamb? Or was the first sunnet a quiet private moment? We don't know. But one thing we can be sure, as Abraham lay their healing, he had to think to himself:

"Another son will be born to me. A miracle boy. Why God? What is your plan?"

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. People rarely think of Sunnet as a "signature of a contract with God." Do you think it would be good for young men to think of Sunnet in this light?
2. Contracts and agreements are often broken, people divorce, people make dishonest trades and contracts are cancelled. Does God ever break contracts? If so under what conditions?
3. In this lesson God knows something that Abraham doesn't, and Abraham has to blindly believe. Abraham has to simply sigh and say, "God knows what's best." How does this apply in your life?
4. Could trusting God be another way to change your fate in a dangerous world?
5. Was it unfair for God not to use Ishmael for this special task? What could some of his reasons have been?

13

THE POWER OF
INTERCESSION

How can you intercede for people today, like Abraham did in old times?

Have you ever had a friend or sibling in trouble and you stepped in to help them? Maybe they were about to receive a punishment from a teacher or parent and you convinced the punisher to forgive them or lighten the penalty. Or better yet, maybe someone has done that for you. Ask any boy these questions and he can probably tell you a story or two! Intervening to help others, also known as intercession, is one of the most powerful concepts to think about. Moreover, it is one of the most powerful and life altering acts to perform! Let's explore the stories of two people who interceded on behalf of someone else.

Hamza Bey thought that drinking çay and playing a few games of ok would calm his nerves. But he still had a knot in his stomach. He knew that as the father of the household he had to take a stand. And after Begüm disgraced the family by becoming pregnant out of wedlock, he knew that she needed to be banished from the family. But deep down inside, he was troubled by the thought of his daughter all alone. He wondered where she was and what might happen to her.

When he first heard the news from Begüm's own mouth, he couldn't control his emotions. But after the initial shock wore off, he was desperately confused. Although he wouldn't admit it to anyone, his heart was torn in two. On one side, what was done was done. Life

could never be the same. After all, what would the family think, not to mention the neighbors? But on the other hand, it was only a matter of time before the family would know something happened. He so desperately wanted to forgive Begüm and work to find a solution to this problem, but he felt the pressure of his people, religion, and pride pushing down his shoulders.

"Why can't things be like they were in the old days? When I was a child, life was so much easier. People kept their traditions. A boy and girl would never have betrayed their family. But these times are different. They want to think for themselves. Sometimes I just don't understand this generation." Hamza thought to himself.

After another long day at work, Hamza returned to his quiet home. While he was sitting at the table and eating his dinner, it wasn't hard to notice the empty seat to his right. And although his other daughter Ayşe was on his left side, it was like she wasn't even there. Instead of giggling and asking everyone about their day, she just sat there quietly. As dinner came to an end and his wife, Yasemin, started to clean up, Hamza sat down to watch some television. He could tell by the look in his wife's eyes that she wanted to talk.

In a worldly way, Yasemin wasn't very educated. She never finished high school (lise), but one would be hard pressed to find a more dignified woman. She was full of hospitality, love, and compassion. Unlike some people she knew who disliked the idea of serving others, Yasemin enjoyed it. She didn't let a day go by without visiting an elderly neighbor, feeding the local dogs, or checking in on her friends. But just like Hamza, the last week had been very difficult for her. She knew life couldn't continue this way. So she decided to ask Hamza if Begüm could return home. She nervously prepared the çay and sat down in the living room with Hamza.

"I wonder what Begüm is doing right now? I wonder if she has eaten or not?" Yasemin said.

"So this is our only problem? It's not even a worry of mine! (Tek derdimiz bu mu şimdi? Umurumda bile değil!)" Hamza said.

"You're lying! You haven't been sleeping for days. And you have eaten almost nothing for five."

"Come on! Why are you bringing this up (Ne diye üsteleyip duruyorsun?)? I'm just a little sick!" Hamza said.

"Hamza! Shame on you (Ne yazık!) Look at me and tell me the truth. You can't fool me. You are worried about Begüm too. What shall we do?"

"What is done is done. There is nothing else to do!" Hamza retorted.

"Hamza, Begüm is our daughter. After she was born, we held her in our arms and cleaned her. When she was sick we laid with her all night. And the baby growing in her womb is our grandchild! While we were young, we made lots of mistakes. Tabii this situation is different and harder. But if Begüm stays on the street alone, maybe something worse could happen. Yani, she could bring more shame to us. Besides, if she returns home we can help her."

Hamza sat there silently and listened to his wife. She made a strong case and he knew what she said was true. But Hamza never made a hasty decision and he needed some time to think. Yasemin collected the çay glasses and left Hamza alone.

As we read through the Bible, we will notice many fascinating characteristics of God's prophets. Perhaps Yasemin didn't know this or maybe she did, but one of their key roles was that of intercessor or mediator. When God's people strayed or God was about to inflict judgment on those who didn't follow him, these prophets would go to God and plead for mercy and forgiveness. One of the first prophets to intercede for others was Abraham.

From the time Abraham was 85 years old until about 99 years old, his life was filled with one event after the other. Much like Hamza Bey, he too was having family problems. God had come to him and promised him a child. Shortly thereafter, Sarai in her old age and hoping that God's promise could be fulfilled, convinced Abraham to have a child with her servant. But what seemed so wise in their eyes became nothing more than a mistake. The tension between the wives became so great that Hagar fled. But God, who is always in control and able to clean up the messes we make, sent Hagar back and God once again reminded Abraham of their covenant. The Lord told Abraham that he would have a child, the promised one of 13 years prior, and that the child would come from Sarai's womb. Abraham was to name the child Isaac and God promised that he would make a covenant with him and his offspring.

Shortly thereafter, Abraham was sitting at the door of his tent when God appeared to him. In the distance he saw three men approaching. Abraham, much like Yasemin from our story, saw an opportunity to serve. So he walked out to greet the men and invited them to wash up, rest, and eat. As Sara baked some bread, Abraham chose a choice calf and had it prepared. Let's pick up the story in Genesis chapter 18 verses 8-15:

8 Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate. 9 They said to him, Where is Sarah your wife? And he said, She is in the tent. 10 The LORD said, I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son. And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure? 13 The LORD said to Abraham, Why did Sarah laugh and say, Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old? 14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a

son. 15 But Sarah denied it, saying, I did not laugh, for she was afraid. He said, No, but you did laugh.

It is clear from the text that this message of hope is from God. He had made a promise to Abraham and he intended to keep it. In spite of their age, God would bless them with a child. But God didn't visit him just to deliver this message. As we will read in verses 16-21, He came for another reason.

16 Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. 17 The LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, 18 seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? 19 For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him. 20 Then the LORD said, Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, 21 I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know.

Just like the Tower of Babel, God wanted to investigate the condition of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Bible says that the outcry of these cities' sins had come to his attention and before He would make a judgment, He needed to know if it was true. Moreover, God wanted to reveal to Abraham what he was about to do. So God sent his two companions to Sodom, the very city that Lot and his family were living in, and stayed behind to speak with Abraham. The following dialogue reveals a lot about Abraham's love and prophet hood, and God's righteous judgment. Let's read about it in verses 22-33:

22 So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. 23 Then Abraham drew near and said, Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city.

Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just? 26 And the LORD said, If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake. 27 Abraham answered and said, Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. 28 Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five? And he said, I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there. 29 Again he spoke to him and said, Suppose forty are found there. He answered, For the sake of forty I will not do it. 30 Then he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there. He answered, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. 31 He said, Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there. He answered, For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it. 32 Then he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there. He answered, For the sake of ten I will not destroy it. 33 And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

Just like Yasemin did with Hamza, Abraham took it upon himself to plead with God on behalf of someone else. Invoking God's holiness and righteous judgment, he asked that the inhabitants of Sodom be spared for the sake of the righteous. God agreed that if there were at least 10 righteous people he would not destroy the cities. It is almost unfathomable to think that God was in human form talking with Abraham. Reason can't explain it and theology can't explain it away. **But the Bible says it happened, so it must be true!**

Unfortunately for the inhabitants of Sodom, there weren't 10 righteous people living within its walls. After the two men arrived at the city gate and met Lot, they went to his house. It didn't take long for the Sodomites to reveal their wicked characters and evil

intentions. They surrounded Lot's house and commanded him to turn over his guests. They were a perverse people and after Lot refused, they threatened his very life. It was at this point that the men pulled Lot inside and revealed their true identities. These were not ordinary men! They were angels and they blinded the wicked men who were trying to hurt Lot's family. After an awesome display of power, they ordered Lot to take his family from the city. The sins of the people would be punished and it was important that Lot's family not be there when it happened. The story continues in chapter 19:

15 As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city. 16 But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. 17 And as they brought them out, one said, Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away.

Lot pleaded with the angels, but it was in vain. God had seen the people's wickedness and knew what needed to be done. How many times would this have to happen before the wicked will learn a lesson? How many times until they would repent and turn from their sins? Lot was fortunate that his uncle Abraham was there once again to save his life. As they fled from the city they were told not to look back.

23 The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. 24 Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven. 25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. 26 But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. 27 And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. 28 And he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and he looked and, behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace. 29 So it was that,

when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.

Sodom and Gomorrah were no more. When Abraham looked down upon that plain it was as if a giant oven was spitting out flames and smoke. God had kept his promise to Abraham and although he wasn't able to spare the cities, he did spare Lot's family.

Every week when we go to the pazar to shop, we want to buy the highest quality goods at the best price. We walk up and down the street looking for the best deals. We haggle with the sellers so they will lower the prices of apples, tomatoes, peppers, and eggs. **But there is something more important than apples, tomatoes, and shirts. Other people's lives!**

Even though Abraham knew that there were bad people living in Sodom and Gomorrah, he understood the value of life and interceded for them. He knew that once judgment was cast, they would never have another chance to repent. Oh that we all would have the love and desire to intercede for others as Abraham did for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Why do you think God told Abraham in advance that he would destroy Sodom?
2. What does this story show us about God's care for those who follow him?
3. How can you intercede for people today, like Abraham did in old times?
4. Review what the men of Sodom wanted to do with the Lot's guests (Genesis 19:4-11). Do you think their homosexuality had anything to do with God's destroying the city?

14 FULFILLMENT OF THE PROMISE

God's Promises are better than gold in the bank!

Has anyone ever made a promise to you and they didn't keep it? Older people tell us about a time when you could trust people more. If they shook hands over a deal then you knew that their word was good. They would keep their promise. But in our day, that type of agreement seems dead. Have you ever given money to a friend or relative only to have them not pay you back? Or maybe someone promised to buy something from you, but after finding a better price they never returned. There is so much lying, backstabbing, and thievery in this world that we wonder if we can trust anyone. And that brings us to the main point of this lesson. During our brief life on this planet, whom can we trust? Who keeps their promises without fail? Lets start by reading a story about a man who kept his promise even though he could have saved a lot of money.

There once was a factory owner named Sezgin Bey. His factory made furniture like hide-away sofas and chairs (cekyat). There was a lot of machinery in the factory that ran on electricity. One day there was a problem with the electrical system and some of the equipment shut down temporarily. Eventually it came back on, but after that day sometimes it would work and sometimes it wouldn't. Sezgin Bey said,

“I will look into the problem myself, everyone else get back to work as they are able.”

So everyone went back to work and Sezgin called a friend of his in the construction business.

“I’ve got a problem at the factory and I need a good electrician, an honest man that won’t cheat me. I don’t know anything about electricity and the electrician could easily deceive me.”

His friend made a recommendation, Sezgin Bey called the electrician and he came to the factory. After the electrician made his inspection, he reported to Sezgin Bey.

“You’ve got some wires in the transformers that are burned and very thin. When the machines are working the hardest that point in the system gets very hot and the breakers trip. After the system cools down you can reset the breakers, but the same thing will continue to happen. I will need to shut down the whole system and replace those wires. It will take quite a bit of time. It would be best for me to do it on Sunday when the factory is closed or at night.”

Sezgin Bey believed that the electrician was telling the truth. They negotiated a price. “You’ve got the job,” Sezgin said. The electrician would begin that night after the factory closed down.

Sezgin Bey didn’t know it, but his factory manager Mustafa also called an electrician. He wanted to impress his boss with his ability to manage the situation and so he called someone he knew. This electrician also did an inspection and accompanied by Mustafa he came to Sezgin Bey with a report.

“Sezgin Bey, if you have a few minutes, I have made an arrangement with this electrician and we have located the problem. It will require rewiring in the transformer after work shuts down today. But this electrician can do the job and I have negotiated a price for it” Mustafa said.

Sezgin Bey wanted to be careful here. He knew he had a good employee in Mustafa and he didn't want to crush his desire to be a proactive, problem solver.

"Mustafa, I am glad you took the effort to find a solution to this problem. I am sure that the electrician you have made arrangements with is a good man. Unfortunately I have already made an arrangement with another electrician."

Mustafa said, "Well, we could call the other electrician and tell him not to come, we could say that we didn't need his help after all."

Sezgin Bey looked thoughtfully at Mustafa and said, "I am afraid that is not possible. I have given my word."

Mustafa still was trying to make his efforts work out.

"Well I am sure that this electrician can do the job as well as the other one and he is here and the other electrician will have to make another trip. Let's compare prices."

They compared prices and Mustafa's electrician was 200 lira cheaper.

"Look, my electrician is even cheaper!"

"That is true Mustafa but there is one problem."

"What is that?" Mustafa asked fearing what it was that he did not know about.

"I have promised the work to another and I will keep my promise. By using the electrician that I have hired I am not saying that the one you selected is inferior. He may be, he may not be inferior. But I have made a promise and I will keep my word."

Those last words were stinging but it meant that the discussion was over. The boss had made his decision and that was the way it was going to be. Sezgin Bey had made a promise and he had every

intention of keeping it. Even if it meant spending more money and turning another man away.

In previous lessons, we have looked at a very important promise that God made. And as we will see, he had every intention to keep it. He promised Abraham a child and through this child Abraham's descendants would not only become innumerable, but the whole world would be blessed. Do you remember what happened as Abraham grew older and the promise was not realized? Sarah convinced Abraham to have a child with her servant Hagar. But was that really what God meant when He promised to give Abraham a son? The obvious answer is no, because we saw in the last lesson that God wanted the child to come from Sarah. But what would happen to the son that Abraham already had and why would God not bless the world through him? Lets find out by reading the Bible starting in Genesis chapter 21 verses 1-11:

1 And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. 2 For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. 3 And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him -- whom Sarah bore to him -- Isaac. 4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." 7 She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age." 8 So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned. 9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. 10 Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac." 11 And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because of his son.

At a time when Abraham should have been celebrating and enjoying the birth of his second son, he found himself in a terrible situation. He was dealing with two angry and jealous women. Do you remember how this happened? By trying to realize God's promise without his blessing and through human effort. What seemed like a good idea at the time, turned out to be a source of stress for all involved. Abraham and Sarah's mistake of breaking the marriage bond to have a child with Hagar had brought bitterness and jealousy into the home. Now there home was anything but happy and Abraham had the unpleasant task of mediating between the two women. But even worse, Abraham was asked to cast out Hagar and his son Ishmael. A boy, who Abraham loved, had taught and invested everything in. He was a teenager now and if Abraham died, he would be in charge. Although there is no written record of this, it is easy to think that Abraham called out to God and said,

"What has come upon me? Surely You have a better solution than Sarah's to this problem that is plaguing my household. I know you told me that the covenant would continue with Isaac and that Ishmael would become a great nation. But must I cast out my son Ishmael to never see him again?"

As hard as it is to imagine, we can learn a great lesson from this story. **We can never obtain by work what God says He will give by promise.** Lets continue by reading verses 12 and 13:

12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. 13 "Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed."

God comforted Abraham and reminded him that the covenant would be passed on to Isaac. But what did God mean when He said, "in Isaac your seed shall be called." Did that mean that God did not consider Ishmael Abraham's son? Definitely not! God made it very clear that Ishmael was the son of Abraham and that he would also become a

great nation. When Sezgin Bey didn't use Mustafa's electrician did it make him any less of an electrician? Of course not! Well the same thing is happening here. Ishmael would always be Abraham's son and God said that He would bless him. God is simply choosing to use Isaac just as he chose to use Noah and Abraham in their days.

So what did God mean when He said: "In Isaac your seed shall be called" and "in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Abraham and Sarah received Isaac through faith by believing God's promise. God had promised a child to them when it was physically impossible for Sarah to have a child because she was old. Isaac came into the world by way of a miracle. It was nothing that Abraham and Sarah could boast about. Therefore Isaac can be considered a symbol of faith. Could it be that the ones who accept God's promises by faith just as Abraham did are considered the real children of Abraham? Perhaps, there is a message here that focuses more on a spiritual aspect of lineage instead of the physical. Is that what it means to be a child of Abraham and is that how the world can be blessed? Why would God choose to do it this way? Well, although there are answers to these questions, we won't find them in this story. But God is the boss and that is the way it is. He made a promise to Abraham and He will keep His word. Let's finish by reading verses 14-21:

14 So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba. 15 And the water in the skin was used up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. 16 Then she went and sat down across from him at a distance of about a bowshot; for she said to herself, "Let me not see the death of the boy." So she sat opposite him, and lifted her voice and wept. 17 And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, "What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. 18

"Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation." 19 Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink. 20 So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. 21 He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

God kept his promises! Abraham and Sarah had a son, God protected Ishmael, and now Abraham would be the father of two nations. One coming from Ishmael and the other from Isaac. In a world where promises are constantly broken, we can believe and know that God will keep His!

There once was a young man named Cemal who fell in love with an attractive girl named Nurhan. In time he won Nurhan's love and she desired to marry him. She made her decision just before he was scheduled to go to his military service. There was no time to make wedding arrangements or anything. Cemal said to Nurhan,

"When I come back I want to marry you."

"I will wait for you" Nurhan promised.

"But you are beautiful and you come from a good family. When I am gone, many attractive men will come and desire to marry you. Will you wait for me?" asked Cemal.

"I will wait," she said.

For Cemal it seemed like an eternity waiting for his military service to be done. Would Nurhan keep her promise to wait for him? He knew what a special woman she was. Just as the young soldier predicted, many young men came around to try to win Nurhan's heart.

But in each case she said, "I have promised myself to another."

While they did not have a formal engagement together, Nurhan kept her word to Cemal. At last he came and they were married. It took a long time for the promises to be fulfilled. But it was worth the wait.

The power of a kept promise is immeasurable. It is even more powerful when the promise comes from God. God made a promise to Abraham and Sarah that they would have a child in their old age. Even though it was scientifically impossible, God worked a miracle. But before God fulfilled the promise, they thought they could make it come true by their own efforts. But **human effort will never accomplish what only God can and he will do it in His own time.** If we can be patient and allow God to work, we can be sure that great blessings will come. Just as Cemal and Nurhan were blessed by waiting, Abraham and Sarah were blessed when God's promise was fulfilled. But the best part was still to come!

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. In an uncertain world where it seems no one keeps his or her word, do you think you can trust God to keep His word? Why?
2. Do you think patiently waiting for God's promises can play a role in changing your fate?
3. Why do you think God waited so long to keep His promise to give a child to Sarah and Abraham?
4. Why did God agree with Sarah that Hagar must leave?
5. Can you think of a time when you were chosen to do something that others were perfectly capable of doing? Why do you think you were chosen?

15 A SHOW OF OBEDIENCE

How do you measure love and test its strength and power?

How can you know if love is real? In a world where one out of two marriages ends in divorce, how can you know how strongly someone else trusts you? There is an old proverb that says, “The fierce fire reveals the true gold.” So many times in life it is only in situations of crisis that one can learn the strength of love. The love that endures through a moment of testing shines like true gold. Now listen to today’s powerful lesson entitled: The Test.

Yahya Kara stood up from the bench, straightened his army uniform, and studied the crowd of people making their way through the Istanbul train station. He looked for the girl whose heart he knew, but whose face he had never seen. The girl holding the rose.

His interest in her had begun over a year before in Marmara University library. Taking a book off the shelf he found himself intrigued, not with the words of the book, but with the notes penciled in the margin. The soft handwriting reflected a thoughtful soul and an insightful mind. As was the case before the computer age, in the front of the book, he discovered the previous users name, Ayşe Ender.

With time and effort Yahya located her address. She lived on the Asian side of Istanbul in Kadıköy. He wrote her a letter introducing himself and invited her to correspond. The next day he began his military service and was shipped to the east to fight against the PKK.

During the eighteen months of their correspondence the two grew to know each other through the mail. Each letter was a seed falling on a fertile heart. A romance was budding. Yahya requested a photograph but Miss Ender refused. She felt that if he really cared, it wouldn't matter what she looked like. So the letters continued to be sent.

When the day finally came for him to return from the east, they scheduled their first meeting - 7:00 p.m. at the Istanbul train station. "You'll recognize me," she wrote, "by the red rose I'll be wearing on my dress." So at 7:00 p.m. he was in the train station looking for a girl who he loved but whose face he had never seen.

Let's listen to Yahya tell what happened next:

"A young woman was coming toward me, her figure was long and slim. Her jet black hair lay in curls around her delicate face, her eyes were dark as olives. Her lips and chin had a gentle firmness, and in her bright green dress she was like springtime come alive. I started toward her, entirely forgetting to notice that she was not wearing a rose. As I moved a small provocative smile curved her lips. "Going my way soldier?" She said quietly. Almost uncontrollably I made one step toward her and then I saw Aye Ender, complete with red rose pinned to her dress.

She was standing almost directly behind the girl. A woman well past 40, she had graying hair tucked under a scarf that covered her head. She was more than plump, her thick-ankled feet wedged into low-heeled shoes. The girl in the green suit was walking away quickly and my heart was torn in two. I wanted so much to follow her, but the deep longing that I felt for Ayşe, whose written words in all those letters upheld me through so many trials while I was in the east, compelled me to stay. And so there I stood, looking at my pen pal, an aging woman. Her pale plump face was gentle and sensible; her eyes had a warm and gracious twinkle. She reminded me of my village aunt. I did not want to hesitate any longer, so I gripped the small, worn, blue leather copy of the book that was to identify me to her and

stepped towards her. I decided in that instant that even though this would not be romance, it would be something precious, something perhaps better than love -- a friendship with a kind, intelligent older woman. A friendship for which I had been and must always be grateful.

I squared my shoulders, saluted and then held the book out to her. I won't lie, while I spoke I felt choked by the bitterness of my disappointment.

"I'm Second Lieutenant Yahya Kara, and you must be Ayşe Hanım. I'm so glad you could meet me, may I take you to dinner?"

The woman's face broadened into a tolerant smile.

"I don't know what this is about, son," she answered "but the young lady in the green dress who just went by begged me to wear this rose on my coat. She said if, and only if, you asked me out to dinner, I should tell you that she's in the İskender restaurant across the street waiting for you. She said something about it being some kind of test!"

A test to know if love is real!

How do you measure love and test its strength and power? This is a question that deserves an answer. After all, who wants a relationship that is secretly about money, outer beauty, or quietly has hidden motives of gain or profit? Who wants a relationship that is plagued with doubts, or fears? Who wants a marriage that is only a rehearsal of duty?

The only way to know if love is real is to put it to the test. Did you know that God is interested in real love and real faith? If He had to, what kind of test would God give to measure the quality of a man's faith? We have been looking at the life of Prophet Abraham and it is during his life that we are told about such a test, a test designed by God to reveal the extent of Abraham's love for his Creator.

Prophet Abraham was now an old man and both his sons had grown. According to the scriptures, Ishmael had moved east and begun his own strong clan. While Isaac was still with his father, taking care of the flocks and learning all the things that Ishmael had learned before him. God had kept his promise and Abraham in due time would be the father of many nations.

Abraham loved Isaac and took great effort in raising him to be man of God. And rightly so because God willed that the boy would be heir to the covenant of faith made with Abraham. He was named Isaac because it means "laughter" and Abraham and Sarah both laughed when they found out that he would be born. You can only imagine the laughter that the tiny baby brought into that elderly couples home! Tickling his little toes they must have happily drank in every smile. Oh the pleasure in kissing a baby's neck and naked belly and making him giggle with delight! The boy must have seen Abraham's pride, as he carried that little promise boy with him everywhere he went. And as Isaac grew older he surely became a helper to his father. When Abraham prayed you could imagine, this young man kneeling right there with him.

When it came time to sacrifice a lamb, Isaac would watch his father carefully. And Abraham would gently explain,

“This is a symbol God gave for the removal of our sins and defilement and fear.”

The young man strived to be just like his father and loved him very much. Then one day a strange command came to Abraham. Lets start reading about it in Genesis chapter 22 verses 1 and 2:

1 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham! And he said, Here am I. 2 He said, Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

What went through Abraham's mind? Could this really be the request of the God of heaven who had so many times appeared to him and given him courage and help? It had been God who had promised that through this boy all nations would be blessed! Now was he really telling him to sacrifice his loved boy named Laughter?

Here was a test, a supreme test. But Abraham didn't know it was only a test. All he knew was that the God he loved had asked him to sacrifice the boy he loved. It's doubtful whether Abraham slept at all that night. And it was certainly unlikely that he told his wife his plans! Lets continue by reading verse 3:

3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

Abraham's faith and trust in God compelled him to immediately obey God. It must have been extremely hard! He knew the voice of God so well and had learned that God's ways are always best, even when they don't make sense. And yet here he was doing something that made no sense at all! How could the covenant be passed to Isaac if he was dead? How would Abraham be a blessing to the whole world? Let's read verses 4 and 5 to see what happened next:

4 On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. 5 Then Abraham said to his young men, Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.

Three days is a long time to walk toward the sacrifice of one's own son! Three days Abraham walked through the countryside with the boy he loved and this strange command ringing in his ears. With every step, the knife on his belt must have felt like an enemy as it rubbed against his thigh. At such a moment, a man might question his own sanity? What could have gone through Abraham's mind?

Perhaps he recited to himself, “Is not this the special boy God sent his angel to give me?”

And it certainly would have been easy for Abraham to turn around and go home! But he didn't, he continued to move forward in faith.

Did you notice Abraham's words in vs. 5: “We will worship and then we will come back to you.” Perhaps Abraham, even though his mind was distressed, reasoned that God was able to solve this problem. Maybe, he thought that the boy given by a miracle could also be raised back to life by a miracle. Regardless of his thoughts he continued to follow God's command. Let's read verses 6 and 7:

6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. 7 And Isaac said to his father Abraham, My father! And he said, Here am I, my son. He said, Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

Abraham and Isaac had gone up to the mountains numerous times before to make a sacrifice. But Abraham, now in his old age, was not strong enough to carry the wood. So he secures it on his son's strong back and they begin to walk. Can you hear the young voice asking after a while, “Where's the animal father?” The boy's question must have struck Abraham's heart like a dart, but Abraham, steadied by God's promise, answered him with hope. Let's read it in verse 8:

8 God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son. So they went both of them together.

As Abraham and Isaac walked that last 200 meters to the top of mount Moriah, perhaps it began to dawn on the young man that he was to be the sacrifice. In verse 9 we are told this magnificent description of a son's obedience and simple trust in his father. Let's read verse 9:

9 When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Yes Abraham had raised a boy who had grown into a young man and who had the same faith as his father. He allowed his hands to be tied and knowing his father wasn't strong enough to lift him, he laid down on the altar. Isaac was willingly to give his life and a father was willing to take it just to obey God. Has God ever asked you to give or do something that even comes close to this? We can continue with verse 10:

10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.

Can you imagine Abraham crying and the tears running down his cheeks and filling his grey beard? He had deep love for Isaac. This gift from God was his friend and helper. He was a good, honest and devoted young man. Abraham could see the image of his own self in that boy. Now the faith he had instilled in his son made Isaac willing to climb on the altar for his father without fight. Abraham must have looked into his son's eyes; perhaps kissed his cheek and then said a short prayer. With every ounce of determination he grabbed the knife that lay next to him and with only milliseconds between that moment and the bloody death of the boy a thunderous voice erupted from heaven. A voice of rescue, a voice of a friend. Let's read about this in verses 11 and 12:

11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham! And he said, Here am I. 12 He said, Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.

Salvation! Salvation had come from heaven! Let's finish with verses 13-18:

13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called the name of that place, The LORD will provide; as it is said to this day, On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided. 15 And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven 16 and said, By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, 18 and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.

Blood mixed with tears must have flowed that day on the altar of sacrifice. Abraham and his boy had passed the test. A father had shown that his love for God was greater than his love for his son. A son had shown that his love for his father and God was greater than his love for his own life.

In Turkey's history there have been few military leaders like Osman Pasha. The soldiers under his command said of him,

“Osman Pasha is more than a great general. He is a great leader of men. When he orders an attack, he does not say 'go' to his soldiers. He says 'come, follow me.'”

Pasha was willing to sacrifice his own life, and it made his men love him and be willing to do anything for him.

It has been said, “There is no greater love than that a man will lay down his life for a friend.”

Isaac had done this for his father, and Abraham was willing to offer his son to God. He passed the test and God knew that Abraham could be trusted with the covenant that would bless the whole world.

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. Who do you love the most in your life?
2. Who loves you the most? Do you think they would lay down their life for you?
3. Why do you think God tested Abraham this way?
4. Does God still send tests? If so why?

16 WHO CAN WE TRUST?

Can God be trusted to keep his agreements?

In a sense, you could say that agreements are the backbone of society. Businesses, relationships, and even religions are founded upon agreements. On a daily basis we agree to buy things at a specific price, work out our problems with other people, and live according to certain rules. But sometimes people and countries break agreements. A broken agreement can end a friendship and start a war. Have you ever made an agreement with somebody, but later found out that they had lied? Would you still honor the agreement? And could you ever forgive someone who deceived and stole from you? For most of us, these questions would be answered with a resounding “NO”. But from God, it wouldn’t be shocking for the answer to be “YES”. First, let’s take a look at how humans would deal with this kind of situation.

Some of the world’s most famous companies have been operating in Turkey for over 80 years. They have a good working relationship with Turks and highly value their relationship with this country. Several years ago, a company was looking for a new plant manager for one of their factories in Bursa. After an extensive advertising campaign and sifting through the many applicants, they decided to interview several candidates.

The committee of seven executives spent one week interviewing, taking notes, and asking questions about each applicant. Just like

any company looking to fill an important position, they wanted the new employee to have certain qualities. At the top of the list were competency, technical knowledge, and good communication skills. But the most important thing was that the new plant manager had to be trustworthy. When visitors, inspectors, government agents, and potential customers came to the plant, it was the plant manager's responsibility to represent the company in a positive manner. Upper management needed to know that the manager could be trusted to do all these things.

The committee narrowed the list of prospective employees down to two: Ahmet and Yilmaz. They found both applicants to be very well qualified and were having a hard time choosing one. They were unable to base their decision solely on the resumes and interviews, so they began to contact each of the four references they had provided. However, the committee was only able to contact a few of them. Based on their conversations and the need to hire someone within the week, they were tentatively leaning towards hiring Ahmet. They decided to contact him and give him the news.

"Hello Ahmet Bey. How are you?"

"I am fine thank you. How are things at the plant?"

"We are getting by, but it is very important that we hire someone soon. We wanted to fill you in on where things are. We were really impressed with your interview and the information provided on your resume was more than sufficient. Unfortunately, we haven't heard back from all of your references."

"I assure you that all my references are good. My work record is spotless and I have never been in the wrong," declared Ahmet.

"That is good to hear. Ahmet, we will give them one more week to contact us; but at this point we can't find any reason not to move forward. We would like you to come in next Tuesday for a final interview. In short, we would like to offer you the job and discuss salary and benefits."

Ahmet was pleased to hear the news and excited to start a new job.

Unfortunately, the afternoon before the interview, the last two of Ahmet's references called and did not give good feedback. They said that while Ahmet was working for them, the company went through some major changes and he was unable to adapt to the new work environment. Furthermore, one month before he left the company "something strange happened". Apparently some funds were misallocated and the company lost a major contract. After a complete investigation, there was inconclusive proof that Ahmet was to blame. But suspicions remained high that Ahmet, if not directly involved, played a key role in trying to cover up the situation.

The committee wasn't about to gamble the factories future and reputation on a man who had a questionable background. And they knew that Yilmaz was very capable of performing at a high level. But how would they handle this situation? They had already told Ahmet that they were going to hire him. If they didn't hire him it would appear like they broke a verbal agreement. The committee decided to give Ahmet a chance to explain what happened.

When Ahmet arrived they filled him in on the most recent developments and told him that they wanted to ask him a few more questions. During the interview, Ahmet became very defensive and began to berate his former company. It seemed that he had an excuse for everything that happened and in his eyes all the blame rested on their shoulders. It became very clear to the committee that Ahmet was not their man. They thanked him for coming in and told him that they were hiring someone else.

"But the job is mine. You said we were going to negotiate salary and benefits! You agreed to hire me and I agreed to work. Are you breaking our agreement?" He proclaimed.

"Ahmet Bey, the only agreement that was broken occurred the moment you withheld this information from us. At that time, you gave us your word and agreed to uphold the integrity of

our company. Right now you are not handling yourself in a way that makes us comfortable. How do we know this won't happen again? Our company has a reputation and our integrity is our biggest asset. Have a good day!"

It is very clear from this story that the company had no obligation to hire Ahmet. He engaged in deceptive behavior and couldn't be trusted. It makes sense that they would choose to work with someone else. At that point it was clear to the management team that Yilmaz would be the new plant manager.

As we have seen in previous stories, Abraham was God's man. He was chosen because of his belief and willingness to follow God at all costs. God had made a covenant, or agreement, with Abraham and promised to transfer that covenant to his descendants if they lived according to specific guidelines. It was important to God, just like the company, that his representative be upright and trustworthy. And he always had the right to end the agreement if conditions weren't met.

After Abraham and Isaac were tested by God and succeeded, Isaac came of age and it was time for him to marry. It was very important that he marry someone of like mind and religious convictions; a woman who would fulfill her role in the continuing covenant with God. He found that woman in Rebekah the daughter of his uncle Nahor. Unfortunately, and like Sarah had been, Rebekah was unable to have children. So Isaac prayed for her and God, remembering his covenant with both Abraham and Isaac, answered him.

As Rebekah's pregnancy progressed, she found herself in great distress. It seemed like the baby was moving too much. So she also went to the Lord in prayer. In our day, we tend to run to the doctor when we have a problem. But maybe sometimes **we should be more patient and seek counsel, like Isaac and Rebekah, from the One who created us.** Let's pick up the story in Genesis 25 verses 23-26:

23 And the LORD said to her, two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger. 24 When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. 25 The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. 26 Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

Rebekah probably wasn't expecting the news she received! She wasn't suffering from illness nor was she going to die. In fact, she was blessed to be having two children. But with the good news came something disturbing. For some reason, the younger of the two would be more important. It is apparent from the text that the boys were not identical twins and as we continue to read we will see that they also were not identical in character! Let's see what kind of men they became in verses 27 and 28:

27 When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. 28 Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

As time passed the older boy, Esau, became a man of the field, a strong hunter; while the youngest, Jacob, chose to stay closer to home and accompany the flocks. It also became apparent that Jacob was more interested with spiritual things. He spent a lot of time protecting and caring for the livestock. He probably spent the quiet hours of the day contemplating the lessons that his father Isaac had taught him and the stories of his grandfather Abraham. And he knew the importance of his family's covenant with God. Esau, on the other hand, was mesmerized by the excitement and adventure of the chase. He had grown accustomed to depending on his own skills and abilities. It is clear that from a physical standpoint, Esau had the upper hand. But Esau's impatience would eventually get the better of him. Let's see what happened next in verses 29-34:

29 Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. 30 And Esau said to Jacob, Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted! (Therefore his name was called Edom.) 31 Jacob said, Sell me your birthright now. 32 Esau said, I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me? 33 Jacob said, Swear to me now. So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Jacob, much like little brothers tend to do, seized the moment and used this opportunity to get the very thing that he desired. He asked Esau to trade his birthright for the stew. Esau, overcome by the emptiness in his stomach and overlooking the importance of his birthright, agreed to the trade. But the birthright was not some trivial thing. Let us not forget that the birthright in those days held both spiritual and temporal importance. God had made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants. That same covenant was renewed with Isaac and would pass to one of his children. It makes sense that Esau would be next in line, but his disregard for spiritual things and the lightheartedness he felt towards the covenant caused him to make a hasty decision.

Perhaps Esau could have recognized his folly, changed his ways, and fulfilled his role as the elder sibling and heir apparent. But he sealed his decision by breaking another stipulation of the covenant. He married two Hittite women. The Bible says that these marriages caused great distress to Isaac and Rebekah because they knew what types of cultural and spiritual problems Esau would face. These two actions showed that Esau was not interested in living the same life as that of his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham. Esau, just like Ahmet, forfeited his right to the covenant by consistently ignoring it and engaging in behavior that didn't conform to God's standard. And just like the company giving the job to Yilmaz because of his qualifications, God was left no other recourse than to let the covenant pass to Jacob. But the story doesn't end there! Isaac was old and

nearly blind; and before he died he wanted to bless his two boys. Jacob, after being urged by his mother, disguised himself as Esau and approached his father. Isaac, unable to differentiate between the two young men and thinking Jacob was Esau, placed his hands on his head and blessed him. When Esau found out, he was irate and wanted to kill his brother Jacob. Rebekah knew this, so she advised him to go stay with his uncle Laban and find a wife.

Now Jacob had received both the birthright and the blessing, but at the cost of dividing his family. It is after all these events that Jacob leaves on his own journey. Albeit filled with remorse, regret, and shame. He knew God didn't like deceit and treachery. And yet it was through those two things that he obtained what God could have given him rightfully. Jacob was probably despondent and had no doubt that God would reject him too. He must have asked himself,

"Why would God want to renew the covenant with a liar and thief?"

Let's move ahead to Genesis chapter 28 verses 10-15:

10 Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11 And he came to a certain of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. 12 And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! 13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. 14 Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

It is so good that God doesn't think or act like we do! If He did, Jacob would probably be punished or killed. We can't explain away Jacob's deception, nor will we attempt to contemplate what God thought. We can only assume that God knew what the future held for both Jacob and Esau. And that He knew Jacob's faith was strong and that he was regretful for what he had done. Jacob wasn't the man he needed to be at the moment, but with time and God's help one day he could be. By speaking to Jacob in this dream, God reassured him that the covenant would continue and he would never be left alone. The very ground that he laid on would be his and given to his offspring.

But what about this dream, what did it mean? It must have related to the covenant! And what of this ladder that bridged the gulf between heaven and earth, what did it represent? Could it be a symbol of the blessing that God continually spoke of? What will Jacob's future be like, will he ever find a wife, and what will happen if he meets his brother again? We can be sure that the answer to these mysteries, just like many others, will be revealed as we continue our journey through the Bible. Let's return to the story in Genesis chapter 28 verses 16-22:

16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it. 17 And he was afraid and said, How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. 18 So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. 19 He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, 21 so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, 22 and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you.

God made a promise to Jacob and Jacob responded with a vow; the covenant was established and an agreement had been made. God agreed to guide Jacob and Jacob agreed to follow him. Jacob also agreed to give a tenth of all his blessings back to the Lord, just as his grandfather Abraham gave a tenth to Melchizedek.

Perhaps our own stories, at least in principle, aren't very much different than Jacob's. There have been times when we have disappointed our parents, not lived up to their expectations, and even disgraced them. But they are always there for us! They make sure we have food, clothes, and an education. They work hard to provide us with the things they never had. In short, they keep their promises and love us regardless of whether or not we "earn" their love. **God is the same way; He is always there and willing to forgive us when we show remorse for our wrongdoing.** And when He makes a promise, He will always keep it! In a dangerous world, God is just the kind of friend we need. Wouldn't you agree?

Based solely on their behavior, neither Jacob nor Esau deserved the covenant; and God had a right to render it null and void. But God, in his mercy and grace, allowed the covenant to continue. If he could forgive a sinner like Jacob and continue the covenant, **we know that God is able to show us the same grace.** We simply need a willing a heart.

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. If a fortune 500 company had made the decision regarding Jacob and Esau, what do you think they would have done?
2. Why do you think Jacob deserved the covenant more than Esau?
3. Do you see yourself more like Esau or Jacob?
4. Is there anything you have done or are doing that you think God can't forgive?
5. In your opinion, if God says that one boy will rule over another boy before they are even born, do you think it means that God already wrote their fates or that God simply knows everything that will eventually happen?
6. Pertaining to fate, was happened to Esau the result of fate or choice?

17 CONFESSION IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL

What happens when we admit our mistakes?

Have you ever thought about the importance of your name? In some places a name is just a name and it has no meaning or the meaning was lost. But in Turkey most people's names have a meaning. The name conveys some message or characteristic of the person. Or maybe it describes the type of person your parents wanted you to be. How important is your name to you and do you try to live up to it's meaning?

On June 21, 1934 the Turkish Parliament passed the Surname Law. According to this law every Turkish citizen was required to have a surname. Before this law, the lack of official surnames made business and social interactions were very confusing. Instead of a last name, people were using their father's name, the name of their hometown, their occupation, or a nickname. For example, Demirci Ali or Mehmet Osmanoğlu. You can only imagine how many Osmanoğlus there were! If you had lived back then, what surname would you have chosen? Perhaps a conversation might have gone like this:

“Ismail, what surname will you choose for yourself?”

“I don't know. I've been thinking about it. I haven't come up with one yet. What do you think my surname should be?”

“I think your surname should be tea-drinker because that is all you ever do!”

Ismail threw a sugar cube at his friend Emin and laughed.

“Yeah, well what are you doing over there with that teaspoon, chopping wood?”

Actually the law said that the last name could not be funny or comical. Furthermore, it stated that a person’s rank or government position, foreign last names, and last names that indicated a foreign nationality would not be accepted. The last name had to be Turkish.

“Ismail,” Emin became more serious and said, “Why don’t you call yourself Yılmaz? You were very brave in the war. You were always at the front line in the battles. You aren’t afraid of anything. Do you remember when that wild pig came into your garden and you charged towards it? That thing was so scared of you it turned and ran off. Your name should be Yılmaz.”

Yes, a name can convey a deep meaning about our character and our personality. It can also carry significance about something we have done.

On November 24, 1934 another law was passed in Turkey. It also had to do with a last name, but this time it was an honorary last name. In commemoration for all that he had done for his country, Gazi Mustafa Kemal Paşa was given the last name Atatürk. He had freed his people from the threats of colonialism and became the father of a new nation. He himself said that his greatest accomplishment was the foundation of the Republic.

In another law that same year, the expressions and titles of the old society “Ağa, Hacı, Hafız, Hoca, Molla, Efendi, Paşa” were forbidden. It was also decided that except for medals given for the Independence War, the use of Ottoman ranks and honors would cease to be used. The Turkish people had begun a new era and the old era was to be left behind. Turkey was a new nation on a new

path. Everything was going to be different and the new names and titles demonstrated the change that had taken place. And that brings us to our story in the Bible.

Abraham's grandson Jacob also had an interesting name. If you recall from an earlier lesson, he was the second born of twins. When he came out of the womb his hand was holding on to the heel of his older brother Esau. Just as Emin wanted to give the name Yilmaz to Ismail because of his bravery, Jacob was given his name because he was "grasping the heel" of his brother. But, in addition to "grasping the heel", his name also has a figurative meaning. Jacob also means "supplanter", that is one who takes another's office or position by scheming, force or strategy. And unfortunately, Jacob lived up to this figurative meaning. If you will recall in the previous lesson, we read how Jacob deceived his father and received the blessing instead of his older brother. He literally became a schemer and a usurper.

After this deceptive act, Jacob fled from his brother Esau and went to the home of his uncle Laban in Haran. The traditional site of Haran is south of Şanlıurfa in present-day Turkey. He must have repented from his unrighteous actions because one night the Lord spoke to Jacob in a dream and assured him that he would never be left alone. But more importantly, God honored the covenant he had made with Abraham and Isaac and renewed it with Jacob.

To say that Jacob's life was carefree and easy going after he arrived at his relative's house would not be true. There is a saying in life, "you reap what you sow." Well Jacob sowed deception and he ended up reaping it. Jacob wanted to marry Rachel, the younger of Laban's two daughters. But after working 7 years for her dowry, Laban tricked him into marrying the oldest. Jacob was enraged but Laban conceded and allowed Jacob to marry the youngest as well. But he had to work an additional 7 years for her dowry too. Over the years and in spite of Laban continually trying to deceive Jacob in their business affairs, God continued to bless Jacob. He had children and became quite wealthy in flocks and herds. One day God told him to return to his home country. But Jacob was very scared because he

didn't know if Esau was still angry. What if he still wanted to kill Jacob? What would happen to his family? Like his grandfather did many years before, he obeyed the Lord and started going home. Let's start reading the story in Genesis chapter 32 verses 1-5:

1 Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. 2 And when Jacob saw them he said, This is God's camp! So he called the name of that place Mahanaim. 3 And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, 4 instructing them, Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. 5 I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.

Notice how Jacob sends the message to his older brother addressing him as “my lord.” Jacob didn't want to fight or be number one. His message was one of peace and he hoped that Esau would want the same. These verses show that Jacob had changed. The competitive young man seeking to get the upper hand of his older brother was now a mature man of God. Let's look at Esau's answer in verses 6-12:

6 And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him. 7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, 8 thinking, If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape. 9 And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good, 10 I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. 11 Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me,

the mothers with the children. 12 But you said, I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.

This is definitely not the prayer of a proud and arrogant man. It is the prayer of a humble man who is understanding the price of deception and sin. It is the prayer of a repentant man. Let's continue with verses 13-24:

13 So he stayed there that night, and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau, 14 two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, 15 thirty milking camels and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. 16 These he handed over to his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, Pass on ahead of me and put a space between drove and drove. 17 He instructed the first, When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these ahead of you? 18 then you shall say, They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a present sent to my lord Esau. And moreover, he is behind us. 19 He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, You shall say the same thing to Esau when you find him, 20 and you shall say, Moreover, your servant Jacob is behind us. For he thought, I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me. 21 So the present passed on ahead of him, and he himself stayed that night in the camp. 22 The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. 24 And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.

Who was this man that began to wrestle with Jacob? What is happening here? Jacob was obviously alone, perhaps he was praying or thinking about his life when suddenly someone grabbed him. At

first, he may have thought the intruder was Esau, one of his men, or a bandit. Regardless, it was dark, Jacob was attacked, and considering the day's events he was wrestling for his life. As they push, pull, and roll around, dirt and sand mix with their sweat and their arms became slippery with mud. But Jacob, no matter how hard he tried, couldn't defeat his attacker. Jacob struggled until he couldn't breathe, his lungs felt like they were on fire and his hands were trembling from holding on so long. And then something unusual happened. Let's read about it in verses 25 and 26:

25 When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. 26 Then he said, Let me go, for the day has broken. But Jacob said, I will not let you go unless you bless me.

This is no ordinary wrestling match. Jacob at some point in time realizes that he is wrestling with someone who is special. So special that he has the power to bless him, someone from heaven. It is hard to imagine the pain that a dislocated hip would cause, but Jacob continued to hold on to this mysterious person. Who could it have been and what is the blessing that Jacob desired? Perhaps the next thing that is said in verse 27 will answer the question.

27 And he said to him, What is your name? And he said, Jacob.

In other words, "I am the supplanter, the one who deceived my father and stole from my brother." Perhaps Jacob was feeling remorse for his sin and desiring pardon. And this was his way of admitting his sin, expressing his guilt, and asking for God's assurance that he had been forgiven. Otherwise what hope would he have that Esau would not kill him and his family. The Kitabı Mukkades does not say. But let's read in verse 28 what the mysterious wrestler says to Jacob:

28 Then he said, Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.

This "heavenly" wrestler gave Jacob a new name, which meant "one who overcomes". Why would this name be given to Jacob? Quite simply, Jacob had struggled for a long time. He suffered the guilt of his previous sins, the pain of being separated from his family, and the deception of his uncle. But during all those years, Jacob accepted responsibility for his actions and begged God to forgive him. **With God's help, Jacob had become a new man.**

He was embarking on a new life, with a new identity, and everything about his old self was left behind. He was no longer the "supplanter" but the "overcomer." When the Turkish Republic banned the old names and titles and honors of the Ottoman Empire they too were announcing to themselves and to the world that a change had taken place and the new had replaced the old. They were acknowledging who they were and what their new names stood for.

For most of us, when we hear the name Israel it immediately reminds us of the modern country in the Middle East. But the original concept behind that name was not a political one, but rather a religious one. It signified a person who had overcome his/her sin by faith and repentance. It is true that in the Bible we will read about the "children of Israel" or the Israelites. But in each case, the name was to carry the religious meaning of "one in a covenant-relation with God by faith and repentance." Jacob was in a covenant relation with God. He repented and God forgave him.

It may be difficult to separate in our minds modern Israel from the concept spoken of here. But God gave the name Israel to Jacob as a compliment, a badge of honor. And it was passed on to his children, and anyone from any nation, who would repent of their sins and wrestle with God for forgiveness. Lets finish the story by reading verses 29-32 in chapter 32:

29 Then Jacob asked him, Please tell me your name. But he said, Why is it that you ask my name? And there he blessed him. 30 So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered. 31 The

sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. 32 Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

There once was a baby born who always smiled. So her parents gave her the name Güler. When she was little, her parents told her the story about how she got her name. After that day, whenever she was sad and someone said her name it reminded her to smile. No matter what the circumstances were, she chose to live up to her name.

After receiving a new name, Jacob probably had a similar experience. Whenever he heard the name Israel, it reminded him of God's forgiveness and his new identity. If you aren't happy with who you are and want a new name, call out to God! Maybe He has a new name for you!

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Does your name have a meaning and do you think it fits your experience and personality?
2. What did you see in Jacob's character that showed he had changed?
3. Who do you think that mysterious wrestler was and why?
4. Would you take the name Israel if God gave it to you?
5. How do you "wrestle" with God? What are your struggles, unresolved questions, and deepest desires? Do you share them with God in prayer?

18 DON'T BE A SLAVE TO THE SITUATION!

How can a person live a moral life in an immoral world?

How can a young person live a moral life in an immoral world? Can a person stand for peace in a world that fights? Is it possible to resist drinking alcohol in a world that drinks? Or be honest in a world that is dishonest? Can a young person keep his/her virginity in a world that sleeps around? What would make someone choose to do good when it seems like everyone is choosing evil? In today's lesson, we will look at the true story of two young men. Although their first names are the same, when translated, they responded to the hardships of life in completely different ways.

Josef's father was quite wealthy, but an alcoholic who approached his son with an abusive fist. They moved at least nine times in Josef's first ten years of life. The town where Josef grew up was a lawless place. It only had a small police force and a culture of violence that included gang-warfare, organized street brawls and wrestling tournaments.

At the age of ten, Josef began his education. He was one of the best students in the class, earning top marks in all subjects. He had a lovely singing voice and was often hired to sing at weddings. He also began to write beautiful poetry. Josef's father, who had always wanted his son to be trained as a shoemaker, was infuriated when the boy was accepted into school. In his anger he smashed the windows of the local tavern and later attacked the town police chief.

Josef continued to excel in school. Despite obstacles of contracting small pox, being struck by a horse cart, and being kidnapped by his own father and forced to work in a shoe factory, Josef pressed forward with great determination. He graduated first in his class. At the age of 16 he gained notoriety by having his poetry published in several local newspapers.

Josef was on his way to leading a productive life for the good of others, but something happened that changed his life. Josef read a book in high school written by Karl Marx. After reading it, he became an atheist. But it was his enrollment in a Gregorian Orthodox school that completed his transformation. Josef later described this school experience as one of "surveillance, spying, invasion of inner life, and violation of feelings". In Josef's own words this greatly influenced the design of his future terror state. Yes, you read those last words, correctly, terror state. You see the Josef we are talking about is none-other than Josef Stalin.

The years of abuse he experienced, violence he witnessed, and atmosphere of paranoia he lived in changed his character. He failed to rise above his circumstances and began using violence to unleash his anger on others. Bombings, assassinations, arson, train hijacking, large-scale murders, and the burning of factories and villages became the norm. Ultimately he became a dictator that was responsible for the physical death of millions of lives and the moral death of millions more. Estimates of the number of people he was directly responsible for killing range from three million all the way up to 60 million!

Josef Stalin was a talented boy who had known much hardship in childhood. Did the hardship excuse his murders? No, because Josef Stalin still had a choice, as do all of us. "What will I make of my life? Will I turn my pain into gain, will my suffering polish me to shine with virtue, or ruin me?"

Now we turn our attention to one of the most fantastic stories of scripture; a boy who also faced bitter odds and came out not as a

dictator like Stalin, but a hero and a savior. He chose to rise above the circumstances that were pushing him down.

Here is the story of Joseph, son of Jacob (Israel), the grandson of Isaac, and great grandson of Abraham. He was the 11th of 12 children who grew up in a home full of conflict. You see his father Jacob had four wives and the result of his polygamy left a trail of pain. The jealousy of Jacob's wives had embittered the family relation and the brothers had grown up fighting, impatient and lacking self-control. Needless to say, Jacob's life was darkened by loads of anxiety and as these eleven sons arrived at manhood they had developed serious faults of character.

But Joseph's character was different than his brothers. He was the oldest son of Rachel (the one Jacob originally wanted to marry) and he had a rare inward beauty of mind and heart. Pure, active, and joyous, the boy gave evidence also of moral earnestness. He listened to his father's instructions, was hardworking, honest, and loved to obey God. Interestingly, his life story begins with a dream and ends with its fulfillment.

One bright morning, Joseph awoke from his sleep, delighted by an amazing dream he had had. Filled with excitement he ran to his father and explained it to him. We will consider his dreams in a future lesson dedicated to the subject of dreams. But for this lesson, it is important to know that these dreams, combined with his father's special attention made Joseph's brothers angry and jealous. So jealous that they plotted against Joseph. Let's start reading in Genesis chapter 37 verses 14-28:

14 So he (Jacob) said to him (Joseph), Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word. So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. 15 And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, What are you seeking? 16 I am seeking my brothers, he said. Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock. 17 And the man said, They have gone away, for I heard them say, Let us go

to Dothan. So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. 18 They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. 19 They said to one another, Here comes this dreamer. 20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams. 21 But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, Let us not take his life. 22 And Reuben said to them, Shed no blood; cast him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. 23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. 24 And they took him and cast him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. 25 Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. 26 Then Judah said to his brothers, What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 27 Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh. And his brothers listened to him. 28 Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

Can you imagine being sold by your own brothers into slavery? To become a slave was a fate more feared than death. Surely he cried out in terror appealing to one brother after another, but they only sneered at him. Some had pity, but fear of speaking up against the others kept them silent. The camel caravan moved on with Joseph weeping and hands bound. Back home, the brothers dipped Joseph's coat in sheep's blood and lied to their father telling him that they had found the coat. They said that a wild animal probably killed him. A lie that haunted them the rest of their lives.

Joseph was being taken to Egypt. Walking behind the camels the boy turned and looked back at the hills where his father's tents were. He wept bitterly at the thought of never seeing his father again. As Joseph thought of the pit and his angry brothers, he felt cold chills go down his spine.

What a change in situation for Joseph! The tenderly cherished son became a despised and helpless slave! Alone and friendless, what would be his lot in the strange land to which he was going? For a time Joseph gave himself up to uncontrolled grief and terror. Then his thoughts turned to his father's God.

In his childhood he had been taught to love and fear God. Often in his father's tent he had listened to the story of the vision of the ladder to heaven that Jacob saw as he fled from his home. He had been told of the Lord's promises to Jacob, and how they had been fulfilled. How, in the hour of need, the angels of God had come to instruct, comfort, and protect him. He then and there gave himself fully to the Lord, and he prayed that the God of his father would be with him in the land of his exile.

This was a pivotal moment for Joseph. He could have used his pain and sorrow to let his life become hard and wicked. Instead, his soul thrilled with the high resolve to prove himself true to God. Under all circumstances he would act as a subject of the King of Heaven. He would serve the Lord with an undivided heart. He would meet the trials of his situation with courage and perform every duty with integrity! One day's experience had been the turning point in Joseph's life.

There are two attacks on character. The first is pain and the second is pleasure. The pain of betrayal, an abusive spouse or parent, an unfair boss, a terrible accident, a disease or some other injustice can often cause people to wallow in self-pity. Even worse, it can cause us to fall into all kinds of shameful sins. But the same pain can also make a person's character strong, if they so choose. Joseph

triumphed over the first attack and didn't allow his pain to destroy him.

Now Joseph was to face the second test: the fire of pleasure. Would he withstand? Lets continue by reading Genesis 39 verse 1:

1 Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there.

Joseph found himself in the middle of a luxurious, pagan world. In Egypt royalty and the most highly civilized nation of its time glamorized the worship of statues, and the immoral life that went with it. Even back then, luxury was an effective advertisement for sin! After witnessing the wealth of Egypt, could Joseph have wondered if the simple story passed to him about the invisible God of his father Jacob was really true? After all, wealth has a way of making every lie believable.

Similarly in our day, television celebrities with their beautiful cars, clothes, and bodies can play tricks on a person's mind. Their alcohol drinking, having sex outside of marriage, and lavish lifestyles gives the illusion that they are enjoying their lives. It can make paradise seem as if it is on earth and the paradise of God seem as if it doesn't really exist. And it can make God's laws seem old fashioned. But if a person searches for happiness long enough, he/she will realize that only God knows the source of real happiness and He wants to reveal it to us!

Joseph had grown up in a farming village with his family raising sheep. Now he found himself a slave in a big thriving city, with nobody around who believed in the God he believed in. He had no one but his own conscience and God to help him through the temptations that come with manhood: immorality and greed.

While working for Potiphar, he did not allow his thoughts to linger on subjects that would lead him toward darkness. It's amazing, but

the desire to gain the favor of the Egyptians did not cause him to hide his principles. Principles that he wouldn't compromise at any price. He was not ashamed of the religion of his father, and he made no effort to hide the fact that he was a worshipper of the true God. Let's read verses 2-4:

2 The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. 4 So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had.

Potiphar's confidence in Joseph increased daily and he finally promoted him to be his personal steward. You can imagine that Joseph's work at first was cleaning, cooking, and gardening. Although some people consider these jobs low, he did them with excellence. His employer saw his passion for personal excellence, and soon the jobs seemed too low for a young man so worthy! Much like when Mustafa Kemal was given the name Kemal by his teacher – excellence is noticed.

Prosperity came to Potiphar as he put Joseph in charge of more and more of his business. The success that came to the captain's house was not some miracle. It was the direct result of Joseph's industry, care, and energy. God then blessed these efforts of Joseph. Joseph hoped that through his faithful work and moral uprightness, his life would stand in contrast to the heathenism around him.

Joseph's faithfulness won the heart of the chief captain, who came to regard him as a son rather than a slave. It ended up that through this trust the youth was brought in contact with men of rank and learning, and he acquired a knowledge of science, languages, and political affairs. The scriptures give us this powerful description in verses 5 and 6 of the trust Joseph won:

5 From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. 6 So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

One day while Joseph was alone in the house with Potipher's wife a fiery temptation came to him. The scriptures tell us in verse 7 this short but clear sentence:

7 And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, Lie with me.

This woman's invitation was against the law of God. Up to this point Joseph had remained untainted by the corruption teeming in that heathen land. But this temptation, so sudden, so strong, so seductive was different. How should it be met? Joseph felt like he was backed into a corner. If he submitted to the woman, she would treat him well and he would gain personal pleasure. But he would have to go against his principles. And if he rejected her, who knows what a vindictive, idol worshipping woman would do. His future life depended upon the decision of one moment. Would principle triumph? Would Joseph still be true to God? The woman wanted him and no one was around.

Joseph's answer reveals the power of personal moral principle. He would not betray the confidence of his earthly master and, whatever the consequences, he would be true to his Master in heaven. Many people do things behind closed doors that they wouldn't do if people were watching. But what they don't realize is that God and His angels are always watching! Joseph's first thought was of God.

"How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" he said.

And the Bible tells us he ran from the room. Which is really the best defense for all of us, leave the scene of temptation. Are you

tempted to sin? Get away from it, or her or him. Run to the safety of God. **Let each of us ever remember that wherever we are, and whatever we do, we are in the presence of God.** God is the only safe place for those who are tempted. God would rather us remain pure, than to ask for forgiveness because sin forever changes our ability to relate to others and ourselves.

Joseph ended up suffering for his integrity. Potiphor's wife didn't take the rejection lightly and vowed to destroy Joseph. She sought revenge by accusing Joseph of rape. Of course he was innocent, but nonetheless, he was thrown in prison. Had Potiphar believed his wife's charge against Joseph, the young Hebrew would have been executed. But Joseph's life pattern of strong character and good conduct were proof of his innocence.

At first his jailers treated Joseph with great severity. The prophet David writing in the Psalms says about Joseph,

"His feet they hurt with fetters; he was laid in chains of iron: until the time that his word came to pass; the word of the Lord tried him." (Psalm 105:18, 19)

In prison, after being wrongly accused and under the torture of jailers he decided to remain loyal to God. Joseph gradually gained the confidence of the keeper of the prison, and was finally entrusted with the charge of all the prisoners. Joseph allowed neither pain nor pleasure to pull him off course from the agreement he made with himself to be loyal to God and God's laws. Consider this short story:

An old man and his boy were watching sailboats on the Bosphorus one day. The boy said,

"Grandpa, are there two winds? How can some sailboats be blown by the wind up the Bosphorus, and others be blown by the wind down the Bosphorus?"

The Grandfather kindly corrected the boy, "Son, it's not the wind but the set of the sail that determines the boats course."

Very similarly, it isn't the circumstances, good or bad, that determine our destiny, but what we choose to do with those circumstances. Bad things happen to good people. **In the midst of injustice and with God's help, we can forgive and in the midst of dishonesty we can choose to be honest.** Where will you set your sail?

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Do you think Josef Stalin was destined to kill millions of people or could he have chosen differently?
2. Joseph was sold as a slave. Had he not chosen to live a moral life in Egypt, how might he have spent his years there?
3. Have you ever been sexually tempted like Joseph? If you gave in to temptation, how did you feel about yourself afterwards? How can you get a new start?
4. The experience of pain and pleasure has a powerful effect on our lives. What circumstances are you faced with that can affect the rest of your life?

19 DREAMS AND FATE

*We can thank God he alters our fate sometimes
through dreams!*

Dreams are an amazing phenomena of the human mind. Sometimes dreams are unusual and we like to sit with friends and laugh at their unexpected twists and turns. But sometimes we look at our dreams more seriously and believe that God wants to tell us something. It is true that God has used dreams throughout history to teach, instruct, guide and even warn people. Is it possible that God still uses dreams to tell us something? If so, has He ever spoken to you in a dream? Furthermore, how do we know if a dream really is from God? Lets begin by considering how a dream changed the future of a world famous surgeon.

In the 1960's, Ben Carson was a young, African-American student at Yale University. He had graduated from high school with honors and had longed to become a doctor since he was eight years old. Now upon entering one of the most prestigious universities in the world, he found the courses to be very difficult. It was time for his first semester test in chemistry. Ben was certain he was going to fail because he didn't understand the concepts. And the fact that he had put off studying didn't help. Now it was already nighttime and the test was the next day. He took a little walk, and in the cold night air, he began to think about how stupid he had been for not studying harder. He realized that not many students get accepted to Yale and he was lucky to even have a chance. Let alone, he was a black man living in a turbulent time. This had been his life goal and

he was blowing it! He became angry with himself for having been so lazy. He determined that he would give it his best effort, went home and opened his chemistry books. It was 10 pm and he began memorizing chemistry formulas. He worked hard, but by midnight his brain was too tired to absorb anymore. He curled up in bed and resigned himself to fate. In his autobiography he wrote,

“I whispered in the night, “God, I’m sorry. Please forgive me for failing You and for failing myself.” Then I slept.”

That night Ben had a very strange dream. In his dream he was sitting alone in his chemistry class. A mysterious man opened the door, entered the room, and began writing chemistry problems on the board. Ben took imaginary notes of everything the man wrote. When he woke up, the dream remained in his mind as if it were a real memory. So, he immediately wrote down everything he could remember from his dream.

When Ben arrived at class, the teacher passed out the tests to all 600 students. With heart pounding Ben opened the examination booklet and couldn’t believe his eyes. He excitedly scanned the whole book and smiled to himself. The exam problems were identical to the ones written on the board during his dream. Ben wrote,

“I didn’t stop to analyze what was happening, I was so excited to know the correct answers that I worked quickly, almost afraid I’d lose what I remembered. Near the end of the test, where my dream recall began to weaken, I didn’t get every single problem. But it was enough I knew I would pass.”

After he finished the test and as he was exiting the room he said a silent prayer,

“God, You pulled off a miracle for me.”

The thing that shocked Ben most was that the dream went against everything he had ever read in his psychology books. There was only

one explanation and he wrote about it in his incredible bestselling book, "Gifted Hands":

"The answer was humbling in its simplicity. For whatever reason, the God of the universe, the God who holds the galaxies in His hands, had seen a reason to reach down to a campus room on Planet Earth and send a dream to a discouraged ghetto kid who wanted to become a doctor."

Not only did he pass that test, Ben Carson went on to become a world-renowned doctor. In fact, he was the first doctor to successfully separate Siamese twins connected at the head.

We all dream and dreaming is important for mental health whether you remember your dreams or not. Sleep laboratories have proven that everyone dreams one to two hours each night during a certain period of sleep known as alpha level, which is light sleep. Every 90-minute cycle of sleep begins with alpha, and then goes into deeper sleep, which is called theta, and finally deepest sleep, which is called delta. Scientists have discovered that if they awaken a person every time they enter the alpha stage, preventing him/her from dreaming, after about three nights the individual will begin to show signs of a nervous breakdown. Clearly dreams are an inner release mechanism which provide us with emotional balance and maintain our sanity. Dreams can be considered guardians of our mental and emotional well-being. But this research doesn't explain why God communicates to humans in dreams.

So why does God give us dreams? Certainly not all dreams are God given. But at times, we know without doubt that God has been talking with us. One of the great prophets and patriarchs of old, Joseph, is particularly noted for his dreams. In this lesson, we will attempt to better understand the subject of dreams and why God speaks through them, by looking at the life of Joseph.

As mentioned in the previous lesson, Joseph's amazing story began with a dream and ended with its fulfillment. As the sun appeared

over the horizon, bathing the earth in its morning glory, Joseph the son of Jacob awoke from his sleep. He was delighted by a mysterious dream he had and filled with excitement he ran to tell his brothers. We can start reading in Genesis chapter 37 verses 6-8:

6 He said to them, Hear this dream that I have dreamed: 7 Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf. 8 His brothers said to him, Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us? So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Shortly thereafter, Joseph had another dream, which was very similar to the first. Let's read about it in verses 9-11:

9 Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me. 10 But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you? 11 And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

Joseph's brothers were already jealous of him and these dreams weren't helping them get over it. His father, although astonished at what the dream was implying, pondered these things deeply. He foresaw that Joseph could be the one through whom the prophecy of the Prophet Abraham would be fulfilled. He knew that one of his sons would keep the covenant of Abraham's house alive and spread God's message of hope to the world. He was hoping it would be Joseph, the son of his favorite wife Rachel.

If you can ever get your hands on the ancient book of Job, it is well worth your reading. In this ancient book of Job we are told these words:

For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; Then He openeth the ears of men, and sealet their instruction, That He may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword (Job 33:14-18)

This is a very important text as we learn several things as to the purpose for which God sends people dreams. God's intent in sending dreams is to turn people away from pride and "keep his soul from the pit." Which is another way of saying that **God sends dreams to instruct people for the purpose of safe guarding their soul from a fiery judgment, to alter their fate and direct them to paradise.** We can thank God for helping us through dreams!

Certainly, the dreams Joseph had of the sheaves bowing to him and of the sun and moon and stars served that purpose. They were a "north star" for his whole life. Those childhood dreams from God served as a compass to keep him faithful and from following the wicked ways of the Egyptians he would later live with.

Joseph's second encounter with dreams happened after his slave master's wife falsely accused him of a crime and he was thrown in prison. We don't have time here to describe those two dreams in their entirety. But you can read them in Genesis chapter 40. In short, the Pharaoh's baker and cupbearer were thrown in prison and one night they had unusual dreams. Joseph saw the men were upset and told them that with God's help, he could interpret their dreams. Shortly thereafter, Joseph's interpretation came true and the cupbearer was restored to his former position. Although the cupbearer promised to help Joseph, he soon forgot. But God didn't forget about Joseph and his third encounter with dreams would just alter his fate but a whole nations.

The story continues in Genesis chapter 41 verses 1-8:

1 After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, 2 and behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows attractive and plump, and they fed in the reed grass. 3 And behold, seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. 4 And the ugly, thin cows ate up the seven attractive, plump cows. And Pharaoh awoke. 5 And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time. And behold, seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. 6 And behold, after them sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind. 7 And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump, full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. 8 So in the morning his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

You can imagine that it was a tense moment in the royal court! Anxiety and nervousness filled the air, as this mighty king had a need and no one could fill it. He called for all of his magicians and all of his astrologers, and asked them to interpret his night dream. But it was to no avail! As agents of the dark side they were unable to help. Suddenly, the cupbearer remembered what Joseph had done for him while he was in prison. Immediately he spoke to the Pharaoh, saying:

12 A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each man according to his dream.

Imagine Josephs' surprise as he was brought from the prison, bathed, given clean clothes, and brought before Pharaoh. Now remember, at this time Pharaoh was considered to be more than a ruler of a nation. He was the ruler of the world!

The scriptures tell us in verses 15 and 16:

15 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it. 16 Joseph answered Pharaoh, It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.

Joseph's response teaches us that only God can give the interpretation of a dream. If you go to an astrologer, palm reader, or fortuneteller, you will be like the Pharaoh depending on his magicians. **They will not be able to help you and the interpretations they give will be false.** It is important to remember a few other things as you consider dreams and their interpretation:

- 1) Never pay money to have someone interpret a dream. If God wants you to know the meaning, he will either tell you or bring someone to you who can help.
- 2) The interpretation must agree in principle with God's kingdom. In other words he will never give you a dream that will instruct you to lie, steal, or commit adultery.
- 3) God given dreams have a purpose of helping the one who receives the dream to alter their fate. With Pharaohs' dream, the purpose turned out to be for the purpose of saving thousands of people's lives!

Here is the interpretation that Joseph gave to Pharaoh recorded in Genesis chapter 41 verses 25-37:

25 Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. 26 The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. 27 The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind are also seven years of famine. 28 It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he

is about to do. 29 There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt, 30 but after them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. The famine will consume the land, 31 and the plenty will be unknown in the land by reason of the famine that will follow, for it will be very severe. 32 And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. 33 Now therefore let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. 34 Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years. 35 And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. 36 That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine. 37 This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants.

Who could the Pharaoh find to put in charge of such a project? Well the man who God used to interpret the dream of course! So that very day Joseph went from prison to second in command over all of Egypt! The Pharaoh gave his official seal to Joseph and Joseph became the equivalent of a Prime Minister. With God's help Joseph skillfully managed the taxation and gathering and storing of grain during the seven abundant years. And right on time, according to the dream, in the eighth year the drought came.

Though we may not understand all dreams, one thing is for certain, God speaks through dreams at various times. The Ottoman Empire started to take shape through the work of dreams. In one dream Osman Ghazi had a dream in which he was told that he would establish an empire that would rule the whole world. And weeks before the terrible Tsunami of 2005 Turkish bloggers wrote on the Internet about dreams they had of just such an event.

The next time you have a dream, consider what we studied today. Is God trying to tell you something? Perhaps in your private prayers ask God if there is anything he would like to show you that would keep you out of harms way and help you on your life journey. For those who find themselves wanting to alter their fate in a world that is out of control, think about how God used dreams to interrupt and change the course of history.

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Why does God speak to people through dreams?
2. How did the boyhood dream help Joseph maintain his integrity though slavery and prison?
3. What can we learn from the fact that God didn't give Joseph a dream to tell Pharaoh? But rather Pharaoh had his own dream and Joseph was able to help him.
4. Do you think you could tell the difference between a dream God gave and a normal dream? What would be some of the differences?

20

THE POWER OF
FORGIVENESS

Fate often pivots on a single act of forgiveness.

When someone hurts your feelings or shames you, what is your typical response? Do you immediately want to forgive that person or do you hold a grudge and think of revenge? For most of us, forgiveness is the last thing we are thinking about. Why is that?

Behnaz was a 13-year-old girl living in Batman. She was very intelligent, hardworking, and dreamed of one day moving to Istanbul to be a doctor. She remembered the time when she was gravely sick and a local doctor saved her life. While she was lying in bed recuperating, she promised herself that she would dedicate her life to helping others. But unfortunately, that dream would never be realized.

One day after school, one of her older brothers saw her talking with a boy in the school courtyard. He quickly walked up and told the boy to get lost. He grabbed his sister's arm and nearly dragged her home. That night he told his father and without ever questioning Behnaz, they exacted a punishment.

Unfortunately, the ending of the story is grim and we don't need to provide any details. Behnaz never became a doctor because she was killed at the tender age of 13. Her family thought that she had shamed them by talking to the boy, but she was actually answering a question about homework. Blinded by rage and unwilling to listen

to her explanation they chose revenge over forgiveness. Why is it so hard to forgive?

In the Bible, there are many stories of shame and betrayal. And while there are some incidents of revenge, there seems to be a recurrent theme of forgiveness. One of the best examples from the Old Testament happened during the life of a remarkable young man. The young man was Joseph and after being sold into slavery by his brothers and imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit, he could have become very bitter to those who had treated him unfairly. And if he ever had a chance, he could have sought revenge. But he chose to view the events of his life from a different perspective and to walk the highroad of forgiveness. Let's pick up the story from where our last lesson left off in Genesis chapter 42 verses 1-4:

1 When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, Why do you look at one another? 2 And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die. 3 So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him.

Many years had passed and Jacob's sons were now men. The same famine that was affecting Egypt was also affecting Canaan. It seems that Joseph's plan to save grain during the seven years of plenty was working well. The Egyptians were surviving and there were enough surpluses to sell to foreigners. As the supplies of Jacob's family dwindled, it became apparent that they too would need to buy grain from Egypt. Jacob, still hurting from the loss of Joseph and not wanting to lose another young boy, ordered his 10 older sons to go and Benjamin to stay. Let's read what happened next in verses 5-8:

5 And the sons of Israel came to buy corn among those that came: for the famine was in the land of Canaan. 6 And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the

people of the land: and Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth. 7 And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food. 8 And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him.

Take a minute to imagine the scene. Jacob's sons arrive in Egypt and are ushered forward to the governor who oversaw all grain sales. The guards are standing there with spears, the measuring scales are being filled with grain, and money is being exchanged. The Bible says that amidst all the hustle and bustle Joseph, looking like every other Egyptian official, immediately knew his brothers. He could have immediately exacted revenge on his brothers but didn't and he chose not to reveal his true identity. Imagine Joseph's emotions racing as they bow down before him fulfilling the prophetic dream given to him so many years before. He begins to interrogate them in verses 9-17:

9 And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come. 10 And they said unto him, Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come. 11 We are all one man's sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies. 12 And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come. 13 And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not. 14 And Joseph said unto them, That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies: 15 Hereby ye shall be proved: By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither. 16 Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies. 17 And he put them all together into ward three days.

Those men must have wondered what in the world they got themselves into. All they wanted to do was buy some grain and go home. But instead they were in prison and being accused of espionage. It appears the tide had turned and they were reaping what they sowed many years before. What does Joseph have in store for them and why isn't he telling them who he is? Let's continue with verses 18-24:

18 And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; for I fear God: 19 If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison: go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses: 20 But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die. And they did so. 21 And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us. 22 And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required. 23 And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spake unto them by an interpreter. 24 And he turned himself about from them, and wept; and returned to them again, and communed with them, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes.

Joseph, knowing that he held the lives of his brothers in the palm of his hand and wondering if they had changed, decided to test them in three areas: honesty, loyalty, and self-sacrifice. Three character traits that they had placed such little value on when they were younger. So many years had passed since they betrayed him and lied to their father. During those years, Joseph had suffered so much as a slave and prisoner; not to mention being separated from his father and mother. He wondered if they had changed as much as he had and if they were worthy of his forgiveness. And what about this younger brother they spoke of? Were his brothers telling the truth or just trying to get themselves out of trouble?

The scriptures say that Joseph was greatly moved by his brothers' sense of guilt and unable to control his emotions he turned to cry. It is amazing that there is no mention of bitterness or thoughts of revenge in the whole story. It wasn't self-discipline or even self-control, but rather the close communion that he had with God that allowed him to act without anger. Somehow, Joseph was able to hold back the tears and continued. He ordered that Simeon, the one whose idea it was to sell Joseph as a slave, be thrown into jail and the others released. Let's get back to the story in verses 25-38:

25 Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way: and thus did he unto them. 26 And they laded their asses with the corn, and departed thence. 27 And as one of them opened his sack to give his ass provender in the inn, he espied his money; for, behold, it was in his sack's mouth. 28 And he said unto his brethren, My money is restored; and, lo, it is even in my sack: and their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us? 29 And they came unto Jacob their father unto the land of Canaan, and told him all that befell unto them; saying, 30 The man, who is the lord of the land, spake roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country. 31 And we said unto him, We are true men; we are no spies: 32 We be twelve brethren, sons of our father; one is not, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan. 33 And the man, the lord of the country, said unto us, Hereby shall I know that ye are true men; leave one of your brethren here with me, and take food for the famine of your households, and be gone: 34 And bring your youngest brother unto me: then shall I know that ye are no spies, but that ye are true men: so will I deliver you your brother, and ye shall traffick in the land. 35 And it came to pass as they emptied their sacks, that, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack: and when both they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid. 36 And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and

ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me. 37 And Reuben spake unto his father, saying, Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again. 38 And he said, My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

Jacob couldn't believe what he heard. His sons had brought him so much pain through the years and now he had two lost sons instead of one. As far as he knew, Joseph was dead, Simeon was a prisoner in Egypt, and a foreign power wanted his youngest son Benjamin. How could the great covenant with God be fulfilled if his sons were to be slowly taken away? Jacob didn't want to lose anything else and refused to give his sons permission to return to Egypt. But the food would only last so long and Jacob eventually found himself in a bind. If he sent his sons back to Egypt without Benjamin, he would lose them all. And if he didn't send them back for more food, they would all die. Jacob was forced to make a hard decision. Lets pick up the story in chapter 43 verses 11-16:

11 Then their father Israel said to them, If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. 12 Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. 13 Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man. 14 May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved. 15 So the men took this present, and they took double the money with them, and Benjamin. They arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph. 16 When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, Bring the men into the house, and slaughter

an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon.

So with a prayer, Jacob sent his sons back to Egypt and entrusted their care to God. He had promised to follow God all his days whether they were good or bad. And these certainly appeared to be bad ones. Let's continue with verses 26-34:

26 When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present that they had with them and bowed down to him to the ground. 27 And he inquired about their welfare and said, Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive? 28 They said, Your servant our father is well; he is still alive. And they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves. 29 And he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son! 30 Then Joseph hurried out, for his compassion grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there. 31 Then he washed his face and came out. And controlling himself he said, Serve the food. 32 They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. 33 And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement. 34 Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him.

Joseph's brothers' honesty proved that they had changed and they showed their loyalty by coming back to save their brother Simeon. Joseph saw that they cared greatly for one another and that all traces of jealousy were gone, even when Benjamin was treated more favorably. They had passed the first and second tests. How would they fair with the third and final one? What would they do if one of

their lives were threatened? Let's learn by reading Genesis chapter 44 verses 1-18:

1 Then he commanded the steward of his house, Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack, 2 and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain. And he did as Joseph told him. 3 As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. 4 They had gone only a short distance from the city. Now Joseph said to his steward, Up, follow after the men, and when you overtake them, say to them, Why have you repaid evil for good? 5 Is it not from this that my lord drinks, and by this that he practices divination? You have done evil in doing this. 6 When he overtook them, he spoke to them these words. 7 They said to him, Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing! 8 Behold, the money that we found in the mouths of our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? 9 Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die, and we also will be my lord's servants. 10 He said, Let it be as you say: he who is found with it shall be my servant, and the rest of you shall be innocent. 11 Then each man quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. 12 And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. 13 Then they tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city. 14 When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground. 15 Joseph said to them, What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination? 16 And Judah said, What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord's servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found. 17 But he said, Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand

the cup was found shall be my servant. But as for you, go up in peace to your father. 18 Then Judah went up to him and said, O my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself.

Joseph had them cornered and the greatest test of all was about to be played out. How would the oldest brothers react? Would they chastise Benjamin and blame him for the predicament? Would they turn on him and give him up like they did Joseph? And if they did, would Joseph still forgive them? It wouldn't take long for Joseph to find out because Judah stepped forward and asked if he could speak. Joseph granted him an audience and listened attentively to what Judah had to say. After Judah explained the whole story, the love for his father and brother shined brighter than the sun. But it was his final statement that carried the most weight. In verse 33 and 34, Judah says:

33 Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. 34 For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father.

They successfully passed the test! Judah was willing to give up his own life to save Benjamin's and keep his father from despair. Joseph had found out everything he wanted to know. His brothers had changed and were deserving of his forgiveness. But, he never needed to test them to forgive them. He already had years ago. At the beginning of Genesis chapter 45 we read:

1 Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, Make everyone go out from me. So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptian sheard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. 3 And Joseph said to his brothers, I am Joseph! Is my father still alive? But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

Jaws dropped and his brothers just stood there in amazement. How could this be? Let's finish the lesson by reading verses 4-15:

4 So Joseph said to his brothers, Come near to me, please. And they came near. And he said, I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9 Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. 10 You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. 11 There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty. 12 And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. 13 You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here. 14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

Joseph's forgiveness and embrace of his brothers must have been a powerful scene to witness. Anyone who has seen a family reunited at the airport can imagine how much happier this reunion must have been. But the family won't be complete until Jacob and the rest of the family come to Egypt. A move that will not only fulfill God's prophesy to Abraham, but also culminate in one of the greatest shows of God's power.

This story of forgiveness can remind us of one of Turkey's greatest moments. In 1934, Ataturk gave a moving speech commemorating the battles of Canakkale. Instead of being bitter and focusing on the Anzac's attacks, he too took the high road of forgiveness and acceptance by paying homage to those who died:

"You the mothers who sent their sons from faraway countries wipe away your tears, your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace. After having lost their lives on this land, they have become our sons as well."

What an amazing statement! Thousands of Turkish men lost their lives and thousands of Turkish mothers lost their sons in the battles of Canakkale. This was a perfect moment for Ataturk to talk about the bravery of Turkish men, the atrocities of foreign invaders, and the ultimate triumph of the Turkish army. But he chose to close this chapter in history by comforting the mothers of the foreign forces and offering words of reconciliation and forgiveness. What kind of man can face betrayal and even war in this manner? A forgiving man!

Forgiveness is powerful! And it is a necessary ingredient for reconciliation. We all want healed relationships with our mom, dad, husband, wife, brother or sister, and neighbors. But sometimes it is so hard to forgive someone that you think doesn't deserve it. But how can you expect to be forgiven if you can't forgive? Joseph went from slave to prince by holding on to his integrity and forgiving. A forgiveness that he learned from a loving and forgiving God. He learned all that he knew of mercy and grace from looking at how God deals with humanity. **You too can find healed relationships!** How? **By forgiving and asking for forgiveness!** If Joseph could forgive his brothers for selling him into slavery and lying to his father, how necessary should it be for us to forgive those who do much less to us? Don't let your unforgiveness get in the way of your being forgiven!

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Have you ever noticed how much easier it is to be angry and hold a grudge than it is to forgive? Why do you think it is that way?
2. What was so special about Benjamin that Jacob didn't want him to go?
3. Why did Joseph want to test his brothers before revealing his identity? Is there wisdom in testing someone before you forgive him or her?
4. What is your view of God? Is he more like Behnaz's family or Joseph?

