A 3D rendered metal chain, likely chrome or polished steel, is shown against a white background. The chain is composed of several interlocking links. One link in the center-right of the frame is broken, with numerous small, sharp fragments of metal flying outwards, suggesting a powerful impact or the shattering of a barrier. The lighting is bright, creating strong highlights and shadows on the metallic surfaces.

# THE FATE CHANGER

FROM SLAVERY TO  
FREEDOM  
II



# 2<sup>nd</sup> BOOK

## FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM



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## Kaderi Deęiřtiren 2

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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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# 1 EVEN A MURDERER CAN BE FORGIVEN

*If God can make good use of a sinful prophet, how much more  
grace abounds for you!?*

---

If you were a prophet do you think you would be a better person? Do you think your salvation would be assured? Do you think that your life would be free of problems and fears? Would you be happier?

When we think of prophets we think of people especially chosen by God because they served God and did what was right. We admire them because they were accepted by God and knew it. This makes them seem high, holy, and far above us. At least that is what we have often heard. Let's consider for a moment Moses, one of the greatest prophets of all time.

If you have seen the "10 Commandments" then you are familiar with the story of the Red Sea. God told Moses to lift up his staff and the waters parted allowing the people to pass. You might also remember Moses receiving God's Commandments on the mountaintop. Surely Moses must have been a great man to experience those events. But what many people don't know is that Moses's life wasn't filled with only victorious moments. He too had his fair share of problems.

To introduce our lesson, let's go to the Sultan Ahmet Mosque in Istanbul. Just in front of that mosque, in the area that used to be the hippodrome, is huge, granite Egyptian obelisk. Now you may be wondering what an Egyptian obelisk is doing in Istanbul. Well, sometime in the 4th century this obelisk was brought to the shores of

Istanbul where it laid until 390 A.D. when Theodosius had it erected in the hippodrome. It was originally 30 meters tall but because two thirds of it was lost it now stands about 18 meters tall. It is also said to have been covered with gold.

On the upper part of the obelisk is the name of an Egyptian Pharaoh named Thutmose III. The next time you go to Istanbul if you look at the top-most picture that faces toward Hagia Sophia you will see a picture of Thutmose III grasping hands with the god Amun-Ra. Although archaeologists still don't agree, one prominent theory is that this Thutmose III and Moses were very well acquainted with one another. It may have been that Moses himself saw that obelisk when it was erected in Egypt. What was the relation between Moses and this Pharaoh?

Let's go back in time and explore Egyptian history before the time of Joseph. Shortly after 2000 B.C. nomadic tribes, known as Hyksos or Shepherd Kings, came from Asia and took possession of Egypt. At first they were barbarous and destroyed many monuments, but in time they grew to favor the way of the Egyptians and adopted their culture. Some think that it was during the period of the Hyksos kings that Joseph ascended to such a high position in Egypt. The Hyksos people, themselves foreigners, most likely had no problem with putting Joseph, also a foreigner, in power over the Egyptians. But when the famine was great and the Egyptians sold their land and possessions to the Pharaoh for food, it may have created an animosity between the Hyksos rulers and the Egyptian citizens.

Eventually a local Egyptian prince in Thebes began to fight against the Hyksos. But it was his son Ahmose who finally expelled the Hyksos from Egypt. Ahmose's new dynasty was very nationalistic and became very successful in regaining international prominence and power. If the scenario we are talking about is right, it was probably one of the kings of the 18th dynasty that made the Israelites slaves. We can read about it in the scriptures starting in Exodus chapter one verses 5-11:

*5 All those who were descendants of Jacob were seventy persons (for Joseph was in Egypt already). 6 And Joseph died, all his brothers, and all that generation. 7 But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them. 8 Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9 And he said to his people, "Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; 10 "come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land." 11 Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses.*

You remember that God gave a prophecy to Abraham in Genesis 15:13 that his descendents would be afflicted 400 years in a country that was not their own. That prophecy met its exact fulfillment. Eventually the Hebrews multiplied so much that Pharaoh ordered the male children of the Hebrews to be killed when they were born. It was at this time that the baby Moses was born. Let's pick up the story at the beginning of Exodus chapter 2:

*1 And a man of the house of Levi went and took as wife a daughter of Levi. 2 So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him three months. 3 But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river's bank. 4 And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him. 5 Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. 6 And when she had opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him, and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." 7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may*

*nurse the child for you?" 8 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the maiden went and called the child's mother. 9 Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. 10 And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. So she called his name Moses, saying, "Because I drew him out of the water."*

Now why would the daughter of a Pharaoh take a Hebrew slave for a son? It doesn't make sense does it? Well maybe it would if she didn't have her own son! Let's review a little more Egyptian history to put the story in context.

Ahmose, in spite of his great victories over the Hyksos, was never able to produce a son and heir. But he did have a daughter who later married a commoner. This commoner became known as Thutmose I and heir apparent to the throne of Egypt. But after becoming king, he also couldn't produce a son. But he did have a daughter who was named Hatshepsut. As was common in those days, Thutmose I had a mistress and with her produced a son. So, Thutmose I gave his daughter Hatshepsut to be the wife of her half-brother. This half-brother took the name Thutmose II and assumed the throne when his father died.

Unfortunately, Thutmose II and Hatshepsut could only have daughters. But he did have an illegitimate son. When Thutmose II died, Hatshepsut became queen of Egypt and ruled successfully for some time. It is believed that Hatshepsut was the daughter who found Moses in the river.

Just like every ruler before her, Hatshepsut wanted her family to be in power. She thought that if she had an adopted son, he could marry one of her daughters and become the pharaoh of Egypt. But it wasn't to be; a subsequent revolution forced Hatshepsut to accept the illegitimate son of her half brother (and husband) as co ruler in the kingdom. This illegitimate son's name became Thutmose III, the name written on the obelisk in Istanbul. Thutmose III's coming

to power ruined Hatshepsut's plan for Moses and set him at great odds with the pharaoh. If Moses continued to live, Thutmose III would feel threatened.

So Moses and Thutmose III may have been very well acquainted with each other. Moses had grown up in the palace and was educated in war and politics. He would have had slaves attending him and people bowing at his feet. The most beautiful houses, clothing and jewels available would have surrounded him at that time. He would have walked in brightly painted temples that were the admiration of much of the world. At the same time he probably remembered being taught by his real mother, who he was, and where he came from. Perhaps Moses stood looking up at the sun gleaming off the golden cap on the 30-meter obelisk and thought, "I will not be Pharaoh of Egypt. Thutmose III has come to power and I can't stop that. But my people are in slavery. Perhaps God has raised me to this point to help free them." We don't know what Moses was thinking but we do know what he did. Let's continue by reading verses 11-15:

*11 Now it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren and looked at their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. 12 So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 13 And when he went out the second day, behold, two Hebrew men were fighting, and he said to the one who did the wrong, "Why are you striking your companion?" 14 Then he said, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" So Moses feared and said, "Surely this thing is known!" 15 When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well.*

This is a disturbing beginning in the adult life of a prophet. Moses was a murderer and tried to hide what he did. But the pharaoh found out. Perhaps it was Thutmose III, the person whose name is on the obelisk in Istanbul that Moses ran from. But no matter whom the

Pharaoh was, Moses committed a huge crime and had to run to save his life. What went through Moses's mind? Was he thinking that he ruined the opportunity to save his people? Did he only regret that his plan didn't work or did he consider that he had committed a great sin?

We hear so much about prophets being sinless. Where does it come from? Right here in God's Holy Word, we see that Moses, far from being sinless, committed a crime greater than the ones most of us have committed. Why would God select such a person to be a prophet?

Regardless of what we would like to think, the truth is that prophets can and do sin. In a previous lesson, we learned that Abraham on two separate occasions told a half-truth about Sarah. When asked, he said that she was his sister. We also read how Jacob deceived his brother to obtain the birthright. Now we see Moses is a murderer. It is perfectly clear that if God chose prophets based solely on merit all three of these men would not have been chosen. Can prophets sin? Yes! In spite of their sin, can God call a sinner to be a prophet? Amazingly that answer is also yes!

After fleeing from Egypt, Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness before God called him to deliver the Israelites out of slavery. What happened during those 40 years? Quite simply, he took care of sheep, unlearned all the things that qualified him to be a prince of Egypt, and learned to be the kind of leader that God wanted him to be. He was transformed from a sinner into a humble, man of God. A man who would do as he was led!

Do you see a parallel in each of the three prophets that made huge mistakes: Abraham, Jacob and now Moses? All three of them tried to force God's will through their own efforts and ended up only making huge mistakes. Abraham had a child by Hagar to try to make God's promise of a son come true. Jacob through deceit secured the birthright that had already been promised to him by God in a prophecy to Isaac. And now, Moses in an attempt to deliver

the children of Israel from Pharaoh committed murder. None of these were God's will or plan. God doesn't want His servants to be impulsive opportunists. He wants them to be patient and willing to listen and follow.

**Prophets are people who God uses to do great things.** But sometimes God has to instruct and, yes, even discipline a prophet through difficulty. When these three prophets, Abraham, Jacob and Moses started out with their own ideas' relying on their own talent, they failed. God could not use them in that condition. But did He abandon them? No, He did just the opposite. God took these erring men, taught them great lessons of life and faith, and made them into the men they needed to be. Some people put too much importance on a prophet. They almost make idols out of them. But we see that prophets are human and make mistakes. **They are just ordinary people that God uses to do extraordinary things.** Let's finish with the following illustration:

Gökhan was an honest accountant at a large manufacturing firm in Istanbul. One day it was discovered that he made a mistake that cost the company 20,000 lira. His boss called him into his office. As Gökhan made his way slowly to the bosses' office, he was sure that he was going to be fired. He began to think how he would feed his family. How could he find another job in accounting after making such a costly error?

The boss spoke privately to Gökhan. After awhile Gökhan returned to his desk.

One of the vice presidents went in to speak to the boss.

“Didn't you fire Gökhan, he is sitting at his desk working?”

“No” the boss said, “I did not fire him.”

“Why not” said the vice president, “He lost the company a lot of money.”

“Because” said the boss, “I could hire someone else who is just as likely to make the same mistake. But I now have an experienced employee who will never make that mistake again.”

Contrary to what we sometimes think, God doesn't call sinless, perfect men to be prophets. If that were so, there wouldn't be any prophets. No, **God calls people who are helpless without Him.** After killing a man, Moses was helpless and hopeless. If God can pick ordinary men and make them great through lessons of life and faith, can't he also make us faithful men and women?

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. For Abraham, Jacob and Moses, there was a great time delay between the promise of God and the fulfillment of the promise. What does that say to us about the way we view our lives?
2. Do you think that Moses ever thought to himself during those 40 years when he was watching sheep, “I blew it”? God cannot use me to do great things. I had a chance and it is all over.” Have you ever thought to yourself, “God can't use me. I have made too many mistakes. I am not good enough.”? Does this lesson about Moses encourage you?
3. Is there forgiveness with God, even for murder?
4. Do you understand that prophets are sinners just like everyone else?

## 2 A LOYALTY WE CAN TRUST

*Have you ever thought that maybe God is waiting for you to do something before He can do something?*

---

If you were headed on a long trip and needed to leave the keys to your house with someone, whom would you trust? What if you got into a situation in which you needed to give your ATM card and password to someone, to send cash to you? Probably only a handful of names come to your mind. But how did you come up with those names? Likely, you have spent a lot of time with those people. You really trust their character and know that given any circumstance, or any situation, they would always, always do what is best for you. In this lesson, we will learn something amazing about God – **He is more faithful than we could ever imagine.** In a dangerous world, it is a fact worth remembering!

In Erzincan in 1993, a father took his young son, Umut, to preschool. Umut’s father told him he would come back to take him safely home. On his way back to his house there was a terrible earthquake. Umut’s father’s heart was filled with fear as he rushed to where the school had stood only an hour before. Everything was totally demolished. He remembered the approximate location of Umut’s classroom and ran to that spot. There was no sign of life, but driven by his love for his son he began to dig. Other parents were in the area crying out in shrieks,

“They’re all dead, they’re all dead! Our sons and our daughters are dead.”

But Umut's father digging with his bare hands called out to them,

“Come and help me. I told my son Umut that I would always be there for him!”

In spite of the immense amount of rubble, he continued to dig. It wasn't long before the firemen came. The school site was a very dangerous spot because gas mains were exploding nearby. They told Umut's father that he must leave. But he kept on digging. From a distance, people were watching him. Some thought he was crazy while others could only watch in sorrow. They whispered with remorse,

“He needs to stop. It is foolish to continue digging. They are all dead.”

But Umut's father was only focused on digging,

“Don't just stand there! Come and help me! I promised my son Umut that I'd always be there for him! I promised that he would be safe!”

He continued to dig with bloodied hands and eventually made a large cavity in the debris. Still more hours passed; 12 hours; 15 hours; 24 hours. The police came and wanted to take him away. But he said,

“I must dig. My son Umut is here. I told him I would come back for him. Please help me dig!”

Unwilling to make him leave and knowing they needed the help, they allowed him to stay. But behind his back they pitied the grieving man.

“He has gone crazy,” they said to themselves.

Twenty-eight hours, then thirty hours, and Umut's father continued to dig. After thirty-two hours while digging in a large hole, he pulled a stone aside and found a small cavity under it. He cried out,

“Umut, Umut, Umut!”

Just then he heard a tiny voice,

“Daddy, daddy!”

Umut and several of his little schoolmates had been trapped in this little cavity and they were still alive. Umut threw his arms around his daddy’s neck and said,

“Daddy, I knew you would come for me. You promised to come back for me. I told my friends you’d always be there for me.”

Umut knew something about his father. He knew his father had given him a promise, and that his Dad always kept his promises. It was this fact that kept Umut’s faith alive. His faith matched his Dad’s character.

In this lesson we will learn of someone else who was “buried” and in need of help. That someone was God’s covenant people. The children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the one’s who were the holders of the Covenant Promise found themselves “buried” in bondage to the Egyptians. They were slaves surrounded by hardship and with no way to escape. The scars on their backs were the only reward for their hard work. Let’s start reading the story in Exodus chapter 2 verses 23-25:

*23 And it came to pass after many days that the king of Egypt died. And the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. 24 And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25 And God gave attention to the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them.*

God had made a promise, and like Umut’s father he was going to keep it.

You remember from the previous lesson that Moses was forced to live in the wilderness because he had killed a man and fled from Egypt. Well while he was in the wilderness, he met a wise man, married one of his daughters, and had two sons. After forty years of tending sheep, Moses was 80 years old and probably thought to himself,

"I have lived a long life. I have a wife, two sons, and look forward to finishing my days here in the desert with these sheep and my children."

**But what we want to do isn't always what God wants to do!** Let's see what happened next by reading chapter 3 verses 2-4:

*2 And the Angel of Jehovah appeared to him {MOSES} in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. And he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. 3 And Moses thought, I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burned up. 4 And when Jehovah saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, Moses! Moses! And he said, Here am I.*

Obviously God, being God, knows all of our names. But the fact that he comes and visits any human is a special moment. God knew Moses' name. Did you know that He knows your name as well? Though not every one of us has seen an angel or a burning bush, God speaks to all of us. For some it happens while quietly lying in bed and for others in the wild chaos of a family tragedy. Regardless of the situation, time, or location, God calls out because He has a message for each one of us. Did you notice that God didn't call his name until Moses turned aside to look? Let's read verse four again:

*4 And when Jehovah saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, Moses! Moses! And he said, Here am I.*

So too God waits for us to pay attention to Him. Have you ever thought that maybe God is waiting for you to do something before

He can do something? Let's continue with verses 5-8:

*5 And {GOD} He said, Do not come any closer. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. 6 Moreover He said, I am the God of your fathers; the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. 7 And Jehovah said: I have given attention to see the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I have acknowledged their pain. 8 And I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and broad land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites.*

God not only remembered his promise to Abraham and heard the Israelite's groaning, He intended to fix their problem! **The real hero isn't the one who sees a problem; it's the one who solves a problem!** Politicians of every country and every party talk about solving the problems of health care, education, roads, and unemployment. How many times have we heard promises that were never kept? Yes, talk is easy! But to solve a problem – that is where real leadership proves itself. And the Bible tells us that God wanted to solve the problem.

In essence, God said,

“I have seen the misery of my people. I am concerned about their suffering and I have come down to rescue them!”

God wanted to rescue them because it is in His character to rescue. In the 1800's the American southern states kept slaves. Occasionally, slaves would escape and try to make their way to the northern states. One strong black woman, Harriot Tubman, was nicknamed “Moses” because she single handedly helped over 130 slaves find their way north. In one true incident, a black man was about to

be hung for the crime of attempting to escape. Suddenly, bursting through the crowd Harriot Tubman raced to the slave, wrapped her strong arms around the man, and started dragging him to the nearby river. Guards were beating her, but she was strong and prevailed. She broke free from the crowd, threw the man over her shoulders and ran with him a hundred meters. She put herself and the man in a boat and rowed away. Can you imagine what the man thought! One minute he was standing at the gallows preparing to die and the next minute he was in a boat rowing towards freedom. Was he ever glad to have a surprise “Rescuer.” So why do you think Harriet Tubman was able to help all those slaves? It was her strong character. Wouldn't you agree that God's character and concern for people is even greater?

Listen now to the Bible as God tells his plans to Moses in Exodus chapter 3 verses 10-15:

*10 Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" 12 He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain." 13 Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.*

Why did God call himself, “I AM”? Perhaps it was to remind the pagan Egyptians that they worshiped gods that “Aren’t”! Yes, those idols, had names, but there was no real power backing them up. By

saying, "I AM" God was also making it clear that He has always existed and will always exist. It is present tense speech. **He is the God of the past, present, and future!**

God was also making a statement about His character. God told Moses, "I Am Who I Am" because God wanted Egypt, Israel, Moses, and the whole World to know that He is who He says He is. "I am who I am" is a statement that there is no lie, no duplicity, nothing phony, false or disguised about God. God had real compassion. Why? Because He is who He is. He has no hidden motives. God is a promise keeper and loyal to his friends. God was working out a plan of rescue. Why? Simply, because "He is who He is." God's Character was 100% up front. **What God says, does and who He is are 100% in agreement.**

What does that mean for you and me? It means we can trust God to do what He says He will do! How many times have you talked with someone who seems to imply God has harmful intent toward them? As if they better avoid God, because He wants to shoot fire down from heaven at them? No, people get burned because they play with fire. God helps those who look to Him for help. Period.

In the book of Jeremiah the prophet, in the Old Testament, God says this:

*"For I know the thoughts which I am planning for you, says Jehovah; thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."*

Listen to that again closely:

*"For I know the thoughts which I am planning for you, says Jehovah; thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." (Jer. 29:11)*

Because God says His name is, "I am who I am" – you can rest in the secure knowledge, that the good that God has said he plans for you, is all He wants for you. Just as Umut trusted his father's word,

we should trust God. Whatever life circumstance is burying you or whatever “slave condition” you find yourself in, know this: **God is a rescuer.** Don’t doubt it. Call on Him.

A young man filled out an application for admission to a university. One of the questions on the form was to “List your Personal Strengths.” The young man wrote,

“Sometimes I am trustworthy, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, brave, clean and respectful.”

The next question the form asked, “List Your Weaknesses.” The young man thought a moment and wrote:

“Sometimes I am not trustworthy, not helpful, not friendly, not courteous, not kind, not obedient, not cheerful, not brave, not clean and not respectful. None of us is perfect.”

Well, God is perfect and faithful. He has no weaknesses and part of His perfection is a character you can trust.

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Is your trust in God complete? Do you trust Him to take care of your family and possessions?
2. Why did God let Moses shepherd sheep for 40 years instead of using him while he was already a commander in Egypt as a young man?
3. Do you believe you can believe God fully to do what he says he will do?
4. Moses felt incapable for the task given him. How did God overcome his feelings of inadequacy?

# 3 CAN GOD BE KNOWN?

*Pharaoh believed that even God couldn't change fate.  
Boy was he wrong.*

---

Who is God and can He be known? These questions have been asked for thousands of years. And after thousands of years, it seems a bit foolish that people could still be wondering. After all, God has revealed Himself to individuals and nations in innumerable ways and on countless occasions. Some might say,

“God is unknowable and if He chose to reveal anything about Himself it would only be His will.”

But one only needs to look at the beautiful forests, mountains, and beaches to see that He is creative. Not to mention all the stories from the Bible that show God’s character, involvement and concern with humanity. Therefore, it seems logical that the proper question to ask is “How can God not be known?” Let’s look at two personal stories of how God made himself known both to an individual and a nation.

Oğuz is a normal man from Konya. Since his childhood, he has always been a hard worker. He knew that success depended upon the amount of effort that was put forth. Therefore, it was no surprise to his family that he graduated from primary school with top honors and got a scholarship to go to a good high school. After graduating from lise, he went on to university, completed his undergraduate studies and finished a master's program. Feeling adventurous, he decided to work abroad for a few years. Wherever Oğuz went, success followed. But in spite of his success there was always

something missing in his life. He could never shake the feeling of loneliness in his heart.

This loneliness wasn't the type that psychologists could treat or that success could satiate. And it didn't matter how much money he made, places he visited, or praise he received from his colleagues. He also knew that his wife couldn't counter this emptiness. He remembered that he first started to feel this way before he got married. He had accomplished all his goals and was ready to settle down.

"Surely," he thought to himself "a wife will complete my life!"

But after the wedding and honeymoon, the loneliness came back.

Oğuz thought he might be going crazy or had a psychological problem, so he visited a psychiatrist. The doctor asked him several questions and determined that this was a typical case of depression. He prescribed a medicine and wished Oğuz happiness. But, the medicine didn't help! Oğuz had reached his limit and was unable to take it anymore. One night while he was lying in bed, he begged God to help him,

"I don't know what is wrong with me! Please help me."

Eventually Oğuz fell asleep and the next morning he wrote about his dream:

"I was walking on a dirt path through a dark forest. The limbs of the trees were hanging over the path and blocking the sunlight. I felt like the farther I went the path became narrower. The branches of the trees and bushes were closing in on me and I became nervous. As the anxiety pressed down on me, I thought to myself that I would not be able to continue walking. Just then, I came to an old bridge with some of the boards missing. I knew that I needed to cross it, but I was afraid. I couldn't see the bottom of the valley and I didn't want to fall.

Out of nowhere, I saw a man dressed in white standing on the other side of the bridge. He said,

“Don’t be afraid! I will help you cross.”

Then he walked over, took my hand, and led me to the other side. To my dismay, the trail didn’t look any better than before. But before I even said one word, the man dressed in white said,

“Don’t worry! Just as I helped you over the bridge, I will help you on the path!”

I can’t describe the peace that I felt in His presence. All I can say is that I’m not lonely anymore!”

In the Bible, there was a time when the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob felt alone. They were living in Egypt as slaves and God’s promises of a homeland were unimaginable. With every lash from the whip, they were reminded that they were the property of the most powerful ruler of their time, the Pharaoh of Egypt. But God didn’t leave them alone in their loneliness. He had heard their cries for freedom and justice and decided to reveal Himself. Through Moses and his brother Aaron, He would show them that He kept His promises and was more powerful than any man or false god.

So Moses, after meeting with his brother Aaron in the desert, returned to Egypt and told the elders of the Israelites that God, YHWH, had heard their cries. As the shouts of joy diminished, they bowed their heads and worshipped the Creator and God of their fathers. The stage was set. The Hebrews were ready to be delivered. But how would the pharaoh react to God’s plan? Let’s pick up the story in Exodus chapter 5:

*1 Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness. 2 But Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go. 3 Then*

*they said, The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword. 4 But the king of Egypt said to them, Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get back to your burdens. 5 And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land are now many, and you make them rest from their burdens! 6 The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen, 7 You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as in the past; let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8 But the number of bricks that they made in the past you shall impose on them, you shall by no means reduce it, for they are idle. Therefore they cry, Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God. 9 Let heavier work be laid on the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words.*

“Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?” What a pompous statement! It is unlikely that the pharaoh would not have heard of the One True God, the Creator, Protector, and Revealer of Dreams. It wasn't like Egypt was isolated from the rest of the world or that they had no experiences with the God of Abraham. If you recall, it was God who saved Egypt by having Joseph interpret a previous pharaoh's dream. An event that not only revealed God's knowledge of the future and concern for humanity, but brought the family of Jacob to Egypt. No, **it wasn't about not knowing God as much as it was not wanting to submit to Him!** It is sad that people are still doing the same thing today. But the pharaoh didn't just deny God, he dared him to act by exacting a punishment upon the Hebrews. He ordered that their work be made more difficult.

As their cries intensified and went up to heaven, God heard them and once again sent Moses to the pharaoh. This time Moses came with a stern warning against the pharaoh's stubbornness. If he didn't obey God then all of Egypt would not only witness His power and judgment, but they would never be able to say that they didn't know

who He was! Lets continue the story in Exodus chapter 7 verses 10-13:

*10 So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. 11 Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. 12 For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. 13 Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.*

This is the first of many miracles that the Pharaoh witnessed. Most people would be amazed and scared during this type of event. But the pharaoh, who considered himself a god, didn't flutter one bit. He had seen his magicians do this type of thing many times before. So he called them forth to perform their secret arts. But two interesting things happened. First, the Bible doesn't say that they tried to undo what God did, they just merely copied it. Second, the miracle that they performed wasn't nearly as strong as God's because their serpents were destroyed. That single event should have convinced the Pharaoh that YHWH was stronger than magic, but it didn't.

As would happen on ten different occasions, God again sent Moses to the Pharaoh. On each occasion, He would reveal his power not only over nature, but an Egyptian god. The first demonstration of his power and judgment was against the very thing that gave life to Egypt. Let's see what happened next in Exodus chapter 7 verses 20-25:

*20 Moses and Aaron did as the LORD commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the water in the Nile turned into blood. 21 And the fish in the Nile died, and the Nile stank, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. There was blood throughout all the land of Egypt. 22 But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts. So Pharaoh's heart*

*remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. 23 Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. 24 And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile. 25 Seven full days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile.*

In our day, Egypt is still dependent upon the Nile's life giving waters. But a few thousand years ago, they couldn't have existed without it. The trees that lined the riverbank drank from it freely and the farmers depended upon its nutrient rich floodwaters to spill into their fields. If you close your eyes, you can probably imagine fishermen casting their nets and large barges carrying quarried rock to building sites. It is no wonder that the Egyptians viewed the river with awe and wonder. But, the problem was they were worshipping the created not the Creator. So when God turned the Nile waters into blood, **He showed that He, not the Nile god Hapi, was in control of the river and thus their very lives.** But in spite of this supernatural act, the pharaoh refused to let the Hebrews go. Let's read Exodus chapter 8 verses 1-15:

*1 Then the LORD said to Moses, Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, Thus says the LORD, Let my people go, that they may serve me. 2 But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs. 3 The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed and into the houses of your servants and your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. 4 The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants. 5 And the LORD said to Moses, Say to Aaron, Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the canals and over the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt! 6 So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. 7 But the magicians did the same by their secret arts and made frogs come up on the land of Egypt. 8 Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said,*

*Plead with the LORD to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD. 9 Moses said to Pharaoh, Be pleased to command me when I am to plead for you and for your servants and for your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile. 10 And he said, Tomorrow. Moses said, Be it as you say, so that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God. 11 The frogs shall go away from you and your houses and your servants and your people. They shall be left only in the Nile. 12 So Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the LORD about the frogs, as he had agreed with Pharaoh. 13 And the LORD did according to the word of Moses. The frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields. 14 And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank. 15 But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.*

Frogs were considered to be holy. According to some accounts, if you killed one it was punishable by death. They were the symbol of Heqt, the frog headed goddess who gave the breath of life to babies and protected women during childbirth. But the frogs that came from God did not respect the Pharaoh like he respected them. They entered his house, his bedroom, and even his bread bowl. In a sense, **they were a metaphor for God's ability to access every part of our lives.**

At first, the Pharaoh pretended to change his mind, but eventually showed his true intentions. Bolstered by the magicians' ability to once again replicate God's miracle, he refused to let them go. But there was one thing he did accept, only God could remove the scourge that was now plaguing Egypt. All of the sacrifices and prayers that had been sent up to Heqt, now proved to have been in vain. But when Moses spoke to God, God listened and dispersed the frogs. Now, the Pharaoh knew that **only God could respond to prayer.** But it still wasn't enough to convince him. Lets read verses 16-19 to see if a horde of gnats changed his mind.

*16 Then the LORD said to Moses, Say to Aaron, Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt. 17 And they did so. Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats in all the land of Egypt. 18 The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. 19 Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, This is the finger of God. But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.*

It was just a matter of time before the magicians' efforts would be futile. They knew that their powers were actually deceptive illusions and that they could only trick everyone for a period of time. That time had come and after they were unable to replicate what God had done, they admitted that **God was more powerful than them**. But the Pharaoh wouldn't listen. So God sent a swarm of flies worse than anything they had ever seen. And once again an Egyptian god was powerless!

What could have been going through the Pharaoh's head? They knew these gods, worshipped and revered them, and thought that they were in control. But what they thought was the truth turned out to be a lie! The amulets and statues of Kheper remained silent and the bugs, which he supposedly controlled, swarmed, buzzed, bit and tortured the Egyptians. Where was the supreme Amun, helper of the pious and god of the wind, to blow away this plague? Where was the guardian goddess Mafdet and the protector god Sed? They were silent because they didn't exist!

But the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did exist and there was a fascinating turn of events right before this plague. God made a distinction between the Hebrews and the Egyptians. While the Hebrews felt the effects of the water turned to blood, the frogs, and the gnats; the flies did not affect them. In fact they wouldn't be affected by any of the remaining plagues. **God wanted the Pharaoh to see and know that He protected His people**. Let's continue in

Exodus chapter 9 verses 1-7:

*1 Then the LORD said to Moses, Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me.2 For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them,3 behold, the hand of the LORD will fall with a very severe plague upon your livestock that are in the field, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks.4 But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing of all that belongs to the people of Israel shall die.5 And the LORD set a time, saying, Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land. 6 And the next day the LORD did this thing. All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one of the livestock of the people of Israel died.7 And Pharaoh sent, and behold, not one of the livestock of Israel was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.*

What would it take to convince you? Up to this point, the Pharaoh had only brought discomfort upon his people. The Nile was back to normal and the frogs, gnats, and flies were gone. But starting with this plague, the effects were going to be longer lasting. And this plague didn't just ravage the livestock populations it attacked a central figure and symbol of the Egyptian pantheon. The bull and ram were sacred and often used to depict gods like Apis, Nut, Neith, Hathor and Khnum. The Egyptians knew that when the very animals they worshipped began to die and the gods who represented them couldn't stop it, something terrible was happening. Let's see what happened in verses 8-12:

*8 And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh.9 It shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.10 So they took soot from the kiln and stood before Pharaoh. And Moses threw it in the air, and it became boils breaking out in sores on man and beast.11*

*And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils came upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians. 12 But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had spoken to Moses.*

This must have been a terrible disease. The Bible says that the magicians weren't even able to stand before Moses. As they picked, scratched, and wailed in agony they must have wondered why Sakhmet (protector against disease), Imhotep, (god of medicine), and Isis (goddess of life and healing) weren't helping them. YHWH was protecting the Hebrews, wasn't He just one god of many?

Once again, Moses went in to the Pharaoh and warned him. If he didn't listen to God, a plague of hail would fall upon Egypt. Everything that remained in the fields would surely be destroyed. But the Pharaoh's heart just grew harder and the hail came.

Some people have to learn lessons the hard way and it seems that Pharaoh was one of them. His stubbornness decimated the livestock and now the crops. It is hard to believe that a man with so much power and knowledge at his fingertips could be so stupid. He had to have noticed that he was fighting a battle that couldn't be won. Up to that point nothing had stopped God from inflicting judgment and it was only Moses' intercession that brought relief from each plague. The sky goddesses Nut and Hathor; the sky god Horus; Shu, the god of air and bearer of heaven; Seth, the god of storms and protector of crops; Neper, the god of grain crops; Osiris, the ruler of life and vegetation; Isis, the goddess of life; and all the cow and ram deities mentioned above proved impotent before the true God. And yet, the Pharaoh still would not let the Hebrews leave.

It is of worth to note that God, just as the Bible said, could have destroyed the Pharaoh and allowed his people to take over Egypt. But instead He gave Pharaoh the chance to not only know Him, but to make Him known to the whole world. God told Pharaoh what He wanted, warned him of what would happen, and gave him a chance to comply. But the Pharaoh would have nothing of it.

After this plague Moses once again went to the Pharaoh and warned him. He made it clear that if the Pharaoh didn't submit to God's request, locusts would destroy all the vegetation that was left. But the Pharaoh still didn't listen to God. He refused to let the Hebrews leave Egypt. Let's read the rest of the story in Exodus chapter 10 verses 21-29:

*21 Then the LORD said to Moses, Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.22 So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days.23 They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived.24 Then Pharaoh called Moses and said, Go, serve the LORD; your little ones also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind.25 But Moses said, You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.26 Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must take of them to serve the LORD our God, and we do not know with what we must serve the LORD until we arrive there.27 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go.28 Then Pharaoh said to him, Get away from me; take care never to see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die.29 Moses said, As you say! I will not see your face again.*

When darkness enveloped the land of Egypt and the rays of the sun were unable to penetrate it, so darkness must have covered Pharaoh's heart. He was angry, bitter, and frustrated. YHWH proved to be stronger than every Egyptian god, even Ra the Sun God. Many of us would like to think that we would never be like Pharaoh. But pride, selfishness, temptation and the desire for power do strange things to people. Is it possible that many of us, on a daily basis, do the same thing that Pharaoh did? We live our lives thinking God can't be known or ignoring the things He shows us. Sometimes we

approach God like one of four blind men who encounter an elephant for the first time.

They decide to feel the elephant to determine what sort of creature it is. The first blind man felt the back leg of the elephant and said,

"An elephant is like a tree."

The second blind man felt the trunk and said

"An elephant is like a snake."

The third blind man felt the tail and added

"An elephant is like a rope."

But the fourth blind man wouldn't touch the elephant at all because he was afraid. None of them could accurately describe the elephant because they only examined it from one aspect and the fourth one didn't even try.

Like the Pharaoh and the fourth blind man, some of us don't want to know what God is like or we make excuses that He can't be known. But after reading this story, it is apparent that God doesn't hide himself from humanity and goes to great lengths to reveal who He is. He expressed His will, showed His abilities and power, and made known His character to the Pharaoh. He proved that He controls nature, is the only one worthy of worship, gives a warning before acting, protects His people, and keeps His promises. But the story isn't over and God isn't finished. As the following events unfold, it will become clearer and clearer that God can be known!

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Why do you think the Pharaoh resisted God for so long?
2. Can you think of any other ways that God made himself known?
3. Why did God let the Hebrews experience the first few plagues, but not the others?
4. Why do you think God wanted the Hebrews to witness his power?
5. What does “God hardened the Pharaoh’s heart” mean?
6. What is preventing you from knowing God?
7. The Pharaoh altered the fate of his nation by the choices that he made. God altered the fate of a nation through miraculous acts. Do you think that God could alter your fate? Why?

# 4 TRUSTING CHANGES FATE

*God expects His followers to believe His word,  
and follow it exactly.*

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All of us put our trust in certain things. When we drive our cars we trust that the car manufacturer made the automobile to work correctly. When we walk on a bridge we trust that it is strong and when we put our money in the bank we trust them to protect it. Well how do you know that someone really trusts something? You know because they demonstrate their trust through action. We can say that we trust a car, but it is only when we drive it that we show our trust is real. The same principle can be applied to a bank, bridge, or anything else. It doesn't matter how much we talk about trust, if we won't walk on the bridge or put our money in the bank then we really don't trust either one.

Well what if we apply that principle to our spiritual lives? Who do you trust with your eternal destiny? Who is in control of your fate? Most people would say that they trust God for their salvation and that would be the correct answer. God is the judge of who will and will not attain eternal life. And just like the aforementioned items, we also show our trust in God by doing what He says. It isn't our words that show we trust Him, but rather our actions. Can we trust God with our eternal salvation? Yes we can and that trust will be revealed in what we do.

When God saves those who trust Him, God at the same time reveals those who do not trust Him. So then the day of salvation is also

a day of judgment for those who do not believe. Let's look at an illustration of these ideas.

Çetin Bey worked in his father's construction company for 25 years before his father passed away and left the company to him. Aytekin Construction had built two cooperative projects and over 35 apartment buildings in the city. Everyone at the municipality knew Çetin's father and his power to get projects done.

Çetin Bey was even more aggressive than his father and wanted to expand the company and make it the biggest in the city. To do so he planned a number of large and expensive projects. He would set his eye on a squatter (gecekondu) neighborhood and through bribes and influence get the municipality to knock down the houses and give land deeds to Çetin Bey. One day he was in a café with his friends and he began to boast.

"I am going to start a summer house village in Çamaltı," Çetin said.

All his friends were very impressed by this because no one could get permission to build summerhouses on that bay. It was protected land.

"How are you going to build there, no one can touch it," his friend Yaşar asked. "There are a few villagers who have been living there for years in their old houses. What are you going to do, knock down their houses and take their land?"

"Just sit back and watch. I have lots of power. I will do it!" he said.

So Çetin began to work. At first, he built in the area just outside of the old village houses. But as time went by he got closer and closer to them. The concrete trucks came and the foundations and the columns were poured. These houses were going to be big; the footprint alone was 80 square meters not including balconies. All of them had at least two floors, a view of the bay, parking, a small front

garden and a bigger one in the back. In addition, the streets would be lined with palm trees. If that weren't enough, the activity center would have a market, tennis and basketball courts, and a small park with exercise equipment.

When they were just about ready to build the second floors, the villagers complained to the municipality. But because they didn't have any money or influence, the mayor ignored their pleas and the construction continued. Shortly thereafter, the houses were bought by wealthy people and finished according to their desires. Each one was more beautiful than the next.

“Çetin, you were right, you are the most powerful guy in town,” said Yaşar. “Who can stop you now with all the most influential people buying the summer homes. You did it.”

Çetin laughed and said, “I own this town Yaşar. Everybody does what I want. No one can stand in my way.”

But there was someone who could stand in the way, the Governor. Word finally reached the governor that construction was going on at the bay and he was furious.

“Someone tell Çetin to stop his construction immediately. I will not allow that bay to be filled with concrete. It will remain a nature reserve.”

But Çetin did not believe the governor was powerful or brave enough to stop the construction.

“He can't stop me now. What is he going to do, knock down the summer homes of very wealthy and influential people? It would be political suicide.”

But the governor wouldn't back down and he sent another message to Çetin Bey. This time he was sending a wrecking crew to knock down the summer homes and clear the land. Again, Çetin Bey would not believe it.

“He will never do it. It is just a bluff,” he said. “Besides, I will call the mayor and he will back me up on this.”

Unbeknownst to Çetin, the governor also sent a message to the villagers. But it was different than the first. He said,

“You are living on protected land and you do not have deeds. But because you were there before the land was formally protected I will give you rights to remain there. The bulldozers will not destroy your homes. If you want this to happen, each of you must come to the governor’s office and sign a request form. You must also provide some evidence of your living there prior to the date the land became protected. If you sign the papers your homes will not be destroyed. If you don’t sign the papers, your fate will be no different than Çetin’s homes. After you get written permission from our office you will take a photocopy of the permission and nail it to your doors. The wrecking crews will not knock down the house of anyone who has the permission.”

All the villagers flocked to the governor’s building to get permission to keep their houses. The owners of the summerhouses heard what the governor was doing. But none of them went to his office or tried to get permission to stay. They trusted that Çetin Bey and the mayor were powerful enough to stop the governor.

When Çetin Bey heard the news he laughed, “In all my life I never heard anything so stupid. Who does the governor think he is dealing with, some idiot or a child?”

It was the governor against the construction company. Who would win? Who was more powerful? Was the mayor powerful enough to help Çetin Bey stop the governor? The governor gave the order for the bulldozers to roll. Çetin Bey went to the construction site. Everyone was there. The camera crews from every major television station, the wealthy homeowners and of course the villagers were all there. There was a lot of shouting. But their voices were drowned out by the sound of the bulldozers smashing the concrete. Some even

threw bottles and sticks and dirt at the bulldozers. But the sticks bounced off the steel. The angry shouts of Çetin Bey were no match for the command of the governor. The mayor did not even call much less show up. When the week was finished, not one summerhouse remained. All you could see were some old village houses with white papers tacked to their doors. The villagers were so happy that they celebrated the victory. They trusted the governor's word for salvation and demonstrated their trust by putting the permissions on the door. For Çetin Bey it was judgment day. But for the villagers it was a day of salvation.

In the Bible there are many stories of proud people who fought with God. Most of us think that it is stupid to try to fight with God because He will win. But that is what pride does. It makes us do stupid things. God had told Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go, but he refused. And after he refused God gave him 9 reasons to obey. The river was turned to blood, frogs, insects and disease infested the land and hail destroyed the crops. But Pharaoh wouldn't listen. He hardened his heart to the Lord and decided to go against him. The battle that was raging was greater than the one we just read about. The shouts of Pharaoh were coming against the command of God. Who would win? Let's start by reading Exodus chapter 12 verse 12:

*12 'For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.*

God said He would execute judgment against the gods of Egypt. He said He would kill the firstborn of the Egyptians because they refused to obey the Lord and let the Israelites go. It seems crazy doesn't it? Why didn't Pharaoh just let the Israelites go? Especially after God demonstrated His power in the 9 previous plagues. Why did Pharaoh continue resisting? Quite simply, Pharaoh trusted in his own strength and in the strength of his gods. Now we can start the story from the beginning by reading Exodus chapter 12 verses 1-13:

*1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, 2 "This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. 3 "Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth day of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. 4 'And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb. 5 'Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6 'Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. 7 'And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. 8 'Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9 'Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire -- its head with its legs and its entrails. 10 'You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. 11 'And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover. 12 'For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. 13 'Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. 14 'So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance.*

As the permission slip on each villager's door was a sign to the bulldozer operators not to destroy the houses, so the blood on the doorposts was a sign to the destroying angel not to kill the firstborn

in the home. It must have been a huge animal sacrifice like the sacrificial holiday (kurban bayram) because there was no house without a firstborn. The animals were chosen, laid down and their throats were slit. Some of the blood was collected and put on the doorpost. You can imagine the great interest shown by the first-born!

"Daddy, make sure that there is plenty of blood on the doorpost. We don't want to make any mistakes here. Are you sure this will work?"

"Yes, son, this will work. This is the sign that God has given to us. It is a symbol that we are under his protection and saving grace. It is a symbol that we have believed His Word."

In addition to the sacrifice, they were also told to eat unleavened bread for seven days. In fact they weren't even allowed to have leaven in the house. Even if they did have it, they wouldn't have time to let their bread rise because they would need to leave Egypt in a hurry. From this day forward, they were to commemorate the event by keeping a feast of unleavened bread. Let's continue with verses 28-36:

*28 Then the children of Israel went away and did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. 29 And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. 30 So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead. 31 Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said. 32 "Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also." 33 And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead." 34 So the people took their dough before it*

*was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders. 35 Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. 36 And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.*

What do you think that cry was like? None of us want to lose a child, much less as a result of not listening to God. Even after the sun rose, the darkness hanging over the Egyptians' hearts must have been thick. Their will to fight was gone. All that remained was a desire for all of Israel to leave Egypt. Their God was obviously more powerful than they ever imagined. But the Israelites didn't leave empty handed.

Sure they had their cooking supplies and herds. But more importantly they took gold, silver, and clothing. What would a bunch of ex-slaves do with silver, gold and cloth? They probably couldn't imagine, but they knew they were free! Free from slavery! Free from Pharaoh! Free from hopelessness! They had a future. Let's finish the story by reading verses 37- 41:

*37 Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. 38 A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds -- a great deal of livestock. 39 And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves. 40 Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. 41 And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years -- on that very same day -- it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.*

As the villagers trusted the word of the governor, so also the Israelites trusted God for salvation. As the power of Çetin Bey had no effect on the governor, so the power of Pharaoh had no effect on God. When Çetin Bey thought the mayor would protect him, the mayor couldn't be found. Likewise, when Pharaoh asked for his gods' help, they remained silent. Judgment day for Pharaoh was the day of salvation and deliverance for the people of God. Let's sum up the lesson's main point with the following story.

A young woman came from Ukraine to find work in Antalya, Turkey. While returning home one evening after looking for a job, she was kidnapped by some men who wanted to use her in a terrible way. They locked her in a hotel room, deprived her of food and water and tried to break her will so that she would do what they wanted. After three days her energy was nearly gone.

When she was on the verge of giving up, one of the men came to the room. In a moment of lapse mindedness, he temporarily left his cell phone on the table while he went to the washroom. The woman took the phone and whispering, called the police. The police asked her,

“What hotel are you in?”

But the woman didn't know. They said to her,

“Try to hang a piece of white clothing out a window and our cars will search for it.”

The woman quickly put the cell phone back on the table and wondered how she would hang a piece of clothing out the window. It had been closed and locked since the day she arrived. Instinctively, she soaked her red shirt with water. When her captor came out of the washroom, she asked him if he would hang it out the window to dry. Because of that shirt, the police were able to rescue the woman. She was free! The air never seemed so fresh nor the sun so bright. All because of a red shirt and little faith!

The girl believed that the police could save her and she trusted the instructions given to her. She didn't just think that the police could save her. She acted on it. She did something about it. It was a day of salvation for the girl. For the men however, it was the day that the captors became the captives. They were put in jail for a long time. That red shirt had made the difference. What had brought salvation for one was the doom of the other. There is a great judgment day. **Those who have shown their trust in God by doing what He says will find salvation.** Those who have shown their distrust in God by not obeying His word will find destruction.

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Why did God refer to the children of Israel as an army when they did not lift a sword or spear and did not kill anyone?
2. We see again that God expects His followers to believe His word. If the Israelites had not put the blood on the doorpost would the destroying angel have passed over that house or would the first-born have died?
3. Do you think there is some special power in the blood of the animal that resisted an evil spirit?
4. Why did God want them to sacrifice an animal so that they would live? Think back to the Garden of Eden.
5. Do you think there is some symbolism or meaning in the lamb? What could it be?

# 5 THE SAFEST PLACE TO BE

*God's protection is always there for us, whether we make good use of it is up to us.*

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It's a good feeling to know you're protected. Have you ever been walking and suddenly jumped as you heard a menacing bark? It's a sound that sends shivers up the backs of even the strongest men. You immediately go on alert as you turn to face the sharp barking. And within meters you see a big Kangal with white teeth, smashing his face against a chain link fence. At that exact moment, you realize how much you appreciate a fence. Have you ever thought that fate is sometimes like a big, vicious dog? Do you think that it, like a Kangal, can be fenced in (i.e., controlled)? If so, where do you think we can find a fence that will give us protection and the peace of mind we desire? By this point, you should know that we could find it in God's Holy Word, The Holy Bible. But let's start with a short story first.

Our story takes place in a village with beautiful farmland near the city of Adana. The fields around the village produced thousands of tons of cotton. Although picking cotton was hard, hot work, the villagers were pleased with their land. They understood that the fertile land and cotton harvest was God's gift to them and supplied them with a good life. The village sat happily on the vast Çukurova plain, stretching out to the South, long before the Seyhan dam had been built.

As the village grew and families multiplied, the young fathers began to acquire fields further from the village. One young man, named Selim, inherited a piece of ground and began to work it. In the center of the land was a long narrow hill that wound along for as far as the eye could see. It was about one and a half meters high, and about two meters wide. Why it bothered Selim, no one can rightly say. But to a boy who grew up on a plain, there was something unusual about that hill! A plain is meant to be flat and he wanted his field flat. So after he plowed the field and planted cotton, he began to work away at leveling that long narrow hill.

One day at the mosque several of the elders of the village surrounded Selim and said to him,

“Son, what you are doing is not wise. Our great-great grandfathers put that hill, there. It is a dike.”

Selim laughed and said, “What does it protect us from? The river is a days walk from here.”

The old men said, “This small hill protects our village and our homes from flooding. Once every hundred years there is such a flood.”

Then the village leader sternly said, “You will put it back.”

Selim angrily spent sixty days of hard work, putting the dirt and stones back in place. It was that single event that never let him forget his 22nd year of life and made him hate that hill! Every time he went to his field, he wished he could see a flat cotton field. But instead he saw a mound, the one that he worked to remove and then shamefully had to put back.

Then one February day, two days before Selim’s 67th birthday, it started to rain. But the rain didn’t stop and it began to pour like he had never seen before! It rained all through the night, the next day, and continued until the Seyer River burst its banks. Selim, now a village elder, walked to that dike in the middle of his field. He

looked at the river that had always been a day's journey away and now it was flowing at his feet. As he stood on that old long mound that he had held a grudge against for 45 years, he began to laugh. Here this pile of grass-covered dirt turned out to be his village's savior. The whole village would have been at least a meter under water, had it not been for that hill. He smiled to himself looking at the swirling rushing water on his left and the village houses dry on his right. Then he looked down from the mound where he stood and realized that the long time enemy beneath his feet turned out to be a friend. As he walked home, he thought to himself,

“I am so lucky that I didn't die at 66!”

That spring as Selim planted cotton he looked at the hill with a curious affection he had never known before.

Selim's story reminds us that it is possible to misjudge where our protection is coming from! What seemed like an enemy was actually a barrier, or fence if you will, of protection. Like all of the stories we have looked at, the Bible gives us an astounding picture of God's protection. We can examine one such event where we left off in the last lesson. The Israelites had just left Egypt after 400 years of slavery and were on their way to the land that God had promised their ancestor Abraham. Let's start by reading Exodus chapter 13 verse 21 and 22:

*21 And God went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to shine on them, to go by day and night. 22 The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.*

Can you hear the children talking to one another as they walked?

“Look at that cloud in front of us! My Dad says, that's no ordinary cloud. It is God protecting us from the hot sun.”

“We'll I am glad for that, it is nice to be in the shade in the day, otherwise it would be blistering hot out here.”

These great-great grandchildren of Abraham had every assurance that God was protecting them. During the day, the cloud kept them in good health, gave them guidance, and peace of mind. The Israelites knew that although they were going deeper into the desert, God was with them and had a plan. None of us want to wander through life not knowing for certain if we are going the right way. We all want a map, GPS unit, or guide that will help us get where we want to go. Well the cloud was there guide!

But God didn't leave the Israelites to fend for themselves at night. He provided a second miracle by turning the pillar of cloud into a pillar of fire! God knew how cold the desert gets and that a fire would keep them warm at night. So He once again provided for them physically. But God isn't concerned with just the physical health of His people. He also wants them to be mentally healthy. So He provided the pillar of fire to ease their fear. How so? By lighting up the desert and all those creepy crawlies! Under these conditions, the Israelites could rest and know that God was protecting them.

While the descendants of Jacob were moving closer each day to the Red Sea, the Egyptian Pharaoh began to seethe with jealousy and anger. Rescinding his word to let them go, he commanded his armies to assemble and recapture Moses' flock. A flock of people nearly a million strong! Can you imagine how fear and panic must have run through the group as word got out that there were chariots with swordsmen racing toward them! Listen to how the Holy Scriptures describe the moment in Exodus chapter 14 verses 9 and 10:

*9 And the Egyptians pursued them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon. 10 And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were pulling up after them. And they were greatly afraid, and the children of Israel cried out unto Jehovah.*

With wives, children, babies, and ox carts, the Israelites didn't stand a chance against the trained soldiers of Egypt. They were terrified. Let's see what happened next in Exodus chapter 14 verses 13, 14, and 19:

*13 And Moses said to the people, Do not be afraid. Take your stand, and see the salvation of Jehovah, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall not see again forever. 14 Jehovah will fight for you, and you shall keep silent. 19 And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them.*

Suddenly the cloud that they had always seen ahead of them moved mysteriously over top of them. As they watched, it moved directly between them and their approaching enemy! Like a brave husband would step between a drunken man and his wife. God placed Himself between the Israelites and the Pharaoh drunk with rage! But Exodus chapter 14 verse 20 describes something even more remarkable:

*20 "And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night."*

Essentially God had made a wall or fence around his people. On the inside of that fence there was bright light. A fire so God's people could prepare for their escape across the Red Sea. Can you imagine how afraid they would have been if there was only darkness? But God didn't want them to be afraid. He also didn't want them in confusion. The light allowed them to stay together and plan. But on the outside of God's fence there was darkness. And you can imagine how afraid and confused Pharaoh's army must have been. Remember they had already experienced the darkness of being outside God's will just days before.

There was one wall, but two sides. One side was filled with light and the other with darkness. It is very likely that Pharaoh's soldiers cursed that dark, cloudy wall all night. While at the same time, the Israelites gave praises because it provided them with warmth, light and protection.

The question for us is how do we get on the inside of God's fence? Is there still a wall of protection today? Let's look at a promise that God gave to Moses. A promise of protection that everyone can rely on. It is found in Exodus chapter 23 verses 20-30:

*20 Behold, I am sending an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. 21 Be on guard before Him and obey His voice; do not grieve Him, for He will not endure your transgressions; for My name is in Him. 22 But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and will afflict those who besiege you. 23 For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off. 24 You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall tear them down to overthrow them, and break and shatter their pillars. 25 And you shall serve Jehovah your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. 26 No one shall suffer miscarriage nor be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.*

Remember Selim at the beginning of this lesson? What would have happened had he not done what the village elders had said? For 44 years he would have thought he was right. He would have thought that he had defied those elders and proven them wrong. But on year 45, the village would have been destroyed for Selim's rebellion.

Selim's obedience brought protection to the village. But Selim didn't build the original wall; it was there from ancient times. Similarly, God says that He wants to protect us. Do you know His protection

is there for you all the time? And yes, sometimes in our mixed up, sin filled, battle zone of a world, bad things happen to good people. As we saw in the lesson about Job, Satan causes some of it. But if we are honest with ourselves, we can see that the choices we make also cause bad things to happen. One of those choices is to break down the wall that God has put up to protect us. Some people resent God, some doubt God, and some, like 22 year old Selim shoveling away at that old hill in the middle of his field, even try to destroy God's fence.

But remember, God offers to protect us through his Angel. **He says if we will follow His guidance, obey Him and listen to His voice, He will do wonders for us.** Let's finish with an illustration.

There were two young botanists from an Ankara University searching for a rare flower bulb on Mount Ararat. They wanted to see if they could multiply the flower in greenhouses and then replant it more broadly. They searched the mountain and after two days were elated to finally find one plant on the side of a steep cliff. But how would they get it? They decided to offer a bribe to a young shepherd boy. They would pay him money if he would let them lower him over the cliff on a rope and dig up the plant.

The young boy told the botanists to wait. The men sat, ate their lunch and took a little nap in the mountain air. After a few hours the boy returned with an old man,

“If you will let this man hold the rope, I will go down the cliff.”

The two university students protested saying,

“But we are stronger than him.”

The boy handing the rope to the old man and smiling said,

“But he is my father.”

The boy had confidence his father would protect his life in a way that a couple strangers never would.

Although you may not see a pillar of cloud guiding you or a pillar of fire lighting your way, trust God in every situation. **Pray, listen for His voice, and obey His Holy Words. Trust that He will protect you.** You never know when a flood is coming and when you will need His "mound" of protection.

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Have you ever felt like God was directly leading you? If so, when? If not, do you think you could trust God to do so?
2. What are you afraid of? How do try to protect yourself from it?
3. If you saw that pillar of cloud move over and stand between you and the approaching armies, how would you have felt toward God?
4. Reflect on this statement: God's protection is always there whether you make use of it or not is your choice. Do you think it is true? How do you show it to others?
5. In the next lesson we will see how God saves the Israelite people. What do you think He will do?

# 6 THE STRONGEST HELPER

*God is our help; any other so called 'help' is a delusion and a false hope.*

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Have you ever been really afraid? Not a sudden fright, like someone jumping out from behind a door, but a deep haunting fear that wouldn't leave you alone for hours, days or weeks? In the last lesson we talked about the safety of a fence. It's nice to have a big fence between you and a vicious dog. But imagine one day as you walk near that same barking dog you see his gate is open! Then what? Your mind begins to race; you immediately look for options to insure your safety. You look for a big stick or a heavy rock. You'll take your shoe off and throw it if necessary! Fear makes us creative and we'll use anything at hand! Well life has bigger problems than mean dogs. There are marriage problems, financial problems, children problems and health problems. In this lesson we will discover that God proposes one solution, and only one, to handle fear. Let's start with a story.

Every minute seemed like hours as Başak and Bilgen looked at their small precious boy lying on the hospital bed in front of them. He had been lying there for three days with tubes in his tiny arms. He was getting weaker and it was obvious that he was getting worse. The boy, Ömer, was soon to be three years old. When he was well, he had been the delight of the home. He had dark brown eyes and a curious smile. He loved old people and loved to sit with his aunts and uncles. Sitting on their laps he would sweetly say “story” and

then look at them in the eye until they would melt and tell him a story.

Almost four days ago he had broken out with a terribly high fever, then there was blood in his urine. The doctors said he had an enlarged spleen and a very low red blood cell count. They tested him for many things including sickle cell anemia. He had a blood transfusion and his body didn't receive it well. In fact something happened as a result of the transfusion something the doctors called Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome.

The boy was now suffering terribly. His heart, kidneys and other organs were not getting the necessary oxygen they needed. In spite of everything they tried, the boy was dying. You can imagine how the parents felt as they looked down at the son they loved so much. They were emotionally wrecked.

From day one, Başak had tried everything to protect his son and ease their fears for his safety. He remembered when Ömer was first born faithfully pinning a nazar bead to his clothes. A practice that he continued for a whole year. After watching his boy's condition worsen, he had decided to buy a rooster and make a sacrifice. Next, he went to the grave of a known religious teacher near his home and said a special prayer asking for help. Finally, he paid a *cinci hoja* for a special potion that he placed beneath his son's pillow. After all of this Başak and Bilgen sat and waited.

As they sat, they stared at their precious boy, and repeated through their tears, "Allah, Allah, Allah."

Several friends had visited and some of them pinned nazar beads on little Ömer. But nothing seemed to push away the disease. Despite everyone's best effort two days later that special little boy died.

The parents couldn't help but ask themselves, "What went wrong?"

Some said with sad faces and shaking their head, "Fate. Fate."

Ultimately, that's what Başak and Bilgen came to believe about little Ömer, it must have been his fate. They had done everything they could and yet nothing worked. But had they really done everything? Was this really the boy's fate? Let us consider the answer to those questions in light of a story from the prophet Moses.

Moses and the children of Abraham had escaped from Egypt and were making their way to the Red Sea. But their jubilation soon turned to panic. In front of them there was nothing but water and behind them the Pharaoh's army was violently racing towards them. They were trapped. They knew it and so did the Pharaoh. In fact, the Bible says what the Egyptians were thinking of doing in Exodus chapter 15 verse 9:

*9 "The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them.'"*

It seems strange that the Egyptians would change their minds so quickly. But there was a lot at stake. Who would do the work of those Israelites? What would the other countries think about Egypt letting all their slaves go free? While the minds of the Egyptian army were focused on regaining what they thought was theirs, the Israelites must have started thinking about how they could protect themselves. If you remember from our last lesson, God was protecting them with a cloud and pillar of fire. But it is obvious from the Biblical account that they had their doubts about how long that would last. Moreover, they started blaming Moses in Exodus chapter 14 verses 11 and 12:

*11 "They said to Moses, 'Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt?" 12 Is not this what we said to you in Egypt, Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.'"*

We don't know for sure how many days had passed since they left Egypt, but with the presence of God still surrounding them they started complaining. They were scared and desperately trying to find a solution to their dilemma. They weren't warriors and they knew their kitchen knives would be helpless against swords and their ox carts would become useless barricades. They probably started thinking of the things they had learned in Egypt. Some had perhaps learned magical spells. While others may have had charms and Egyptian idols. Surely they must have thought to use these to help them out of this situation.

But there was no way out of this situation. That is, except one, the one that God would invent. God wanted them to learn to lean on Him 100% of the time. They didn't need to do anything except believe that God could and would save them. Moses reminded them of this fact in Exodus chapter 14 verse 13:

*13 "And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."*

Actually there was something they needed to do. Moses told them to be silent. They were to remain silent because God was about to perform the greatest miracle since creation. The Bible describes the moment in Exodus chapter 14 verses 21 and 22:

*21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. 22 And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.*

All night the wild winds blew, and God parted the sea.

Imagine in the early morning light the steel blue sky and the bright white moon still shimmering on the dark sea as a million men, women, and children with their livestock and belongings began to

move down into that canyon of water. They were doing something that had never been done in the history of earth: they were walking on the bottom of a sea! In an almost eerie silence Moses and others walked in awe, as if in a dream. They looked at the dark watery walls on either side of them. Children must have patted the walls, and teenagers must have thrust their hand through the wall just to feel the cold wet ocean water. Walls of natural water held up by supernatural hands. Those walls must have rose above them like a 15 story apartment building. The fire of God's pillar was behind them giving them light, and they walked forward for several hours through the dark, cold Red Sea. God had made a way out of an impossible situation.

At that moment the people had no choice but to trust God entirely. There was nothing holding those dark powerful waters up except God's invisible hand. Some of them walked overpowered with fear and others with faith. Regardless of their motivation, they were not ambling leisurely through the sea. They were motivated by the frightful reality that the Egyptians were right behind them! Every man, woman and child's heart was pounding as they raced down the stony banks and through that mysterious dark water of the Red Sea. What do you think they thought when they saw the Egyptians getting closer?

After what seemed like an eternity, the he first of the fleeing people clamored up the banks of the far side of the Red Sea. Each helping push carts, and lift children. Moses urged them to keep going and make room for the 1000's who were still coming. People streamed up, up, up out of the depths of the sea, walking on dry ground. Never to see such a sight again in their lives. Morning was just now dawning and the swirling blue and pink sky made the great escape all the more mysterious and memorable. Let's continue reading in chapter 14 verses 24-28:

*24 "And in the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, 25 clogging their chariot wheels so*

*that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians. 26 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. 27 So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the LORD threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. 28 The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained.*

They watched in reverent awe as those great walls that had just been their passage, now slammed shut. There must have been a long moment of fearful exhilaration as people watched the tsunami force waters collide together. The roar of the waters was like low flying jets. And then suddenly there was calm, as if nothing had ever been. The morning sun rose and there was peace. In a split second the enemy they had dreaded, the thing they feared was gone forever. **God in heaven had done it!**

In an instant the overwhelming sense of freedom rushed over the crowd! Everyone began to sing. We can actually read what happened in chapter 15 verses 20 and 21:

*20 "Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. 21 And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea."*

Yes, God was their savior and their joy was so great they couldn't help but sing. It wasn't long before Moses himself began to sing. The lyrics of his song can be found in Exodus chapter 15 verses 2-18. But let's just focus on verses 2, 13, and 11:

*2 The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. 11 "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? 13 "You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.*

Why did Moses ask, “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?”

Well it certainly wasn't because Moses believed in more than one God! You see, if those Israelites had ever been tempted to believe in the Egyptian false gods they had no reason left. After what they had just experienced there was no question, the God of Heaven, alone, had power to rescue. He alone is capable of turning misfortune into celebration. Can you imagine the joy and celebration at that moment? The feelings of freedom from slavery and the elation of rescue. Not Moses, not one Israelite, had lifted a hand, or pulled a sword. **God had done everything.**

Moses' words lead us to think that, before the Red Sea experience, in the minds of the Israelites there had been confusion about who God was and is. Many of the Israelites likely left Egypt with magic charms and bracelets that they had brought out of Egypt. Emblems of cats, beetles, and the all-seeing pyramid eye. Now in the context of this amazing miracle of God, they surely would have ripped those “lucky” talisman's, charms, and necklaces from their bodies and thrown them into the foaming sea.

*Shouts of jubilee went into the air, “God alone, will I serve. He is powerful to protect us.”*

Let's read Exodus 15:11 again:

*11 “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”*

Prophet Moses' question is a good question for us and for our generation. Today many in our country live as if there were some other 'god' who had power equal to or greater than the Creator of the Universe. They hang nazar beads, as if God himself were not strong enough to protect them. They seek answers from the zodiac and astrologers, as if they might actually reveal the future. They think the god of the lottery will alleviate their sorrows. They look to the god of global politics, the god of fate, the god of fortune or the god of their own cleverness to solve their problems. Many even make themselves a god through their reason and logic. Are they blind to see that only the God who parted the Red Sea can help them? God is God; any other so called 'help' is a delusion and a false hope. **Only God has power over evil!**

I am sure Başak and Bilgen thought they were pleasing the Lord by doing what they had seen so many others do. But let's stop and think. Did God ever command us to do such things in the Holy Writings? Wouldn't trusting a nazar bead really be asking protection from something other than God? Did God command the cutting of a rooster for healing or did those ideas come from somewhere else? As we continue studying the Holy Bible the answers to these questions will become clearer. But for now we need to understand that God is not manipulated by sacrifice, beads, recited sayings, or charms. He is looking for faith and trust. Is that a guarantee that God will always heal? No, there are times when He chooses not to heal or even intervene. But He knows everything and we must trust that He sees more than us; that He is always working for the long range good of all humanity. So how do we grow in faith and trust? By getting to know God better through the study of the Bible.

There was an interesting news story in Spain a few years back. There was a home for mentally retarded young men under the watchful care of a very kind hearted director. He loved the boys and men as if they were his own children. They knew this and liked to call him Big Daddy. One day the old wooden home caught on fire. In an orderly way the men and boys rushed out of the building. It wasn't long before the whole house was engulfed in flames. Once outside,

the director counted his patients and realized one was missing. Just then he saw him leaning out of a second story window.

“Antoine,” he called, “you must jump.”

“No Big Daddy, I am brave. See I have a fire extinguisher. I will fight the fire.” He replied.

Of course it was crazy to think that he could fight a fire of that size with a fire extinguisher. But the boy was retarded. The director pleaded,

“Antoine, come to me. Jump to my arms.”

The second floor really wasn't that far and the boy could have easily jumped. Antoine just needed to believe Big Daddy and jump. But with the flames and smoke coming from all sides, the teen insisted on his silly plan,

“See Big Daddy, I have a fire extinguisher.”

The director and other boys watched in sadness and shock as Antoine disappeared from the window and never returned. The young man perished in the fire because he didn't trust his Big Daddy.

Let's not be like Antoine who didn't trust his caretaker. Nor like the Israelites who quickly forgot that God was protecting them and could easily give them a way of escape. Instead of relying on our own ideas and passed down traditions, let's trust the One who parted the Red Sea.

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. What authority does God have to tell us, “Don’t be afraid?”
2. What might have it felt like to have escaped the Egyptians through the Red Sea?
3. Why did God destroy the Egyptian army?
4. What problem do you need God to solve for you? Have you asked him in faith and trusted him to fully solve the problem?
5. Have you ever had something bad happen even though you had made all the "necessary precautions?"
6. Is it possible that seeking help from sources outside of God could be an insult to Him?
7. Are you using any methods similar to Ömer’s father to fight evil? If so, ask God to forgive you for trying to accomplish His work and trust him entirely.

# 7 WHO DO WE GO TO IN THE TIME OF NEED?

*Can complaining change your fate? Possibly.*

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Have you ever needed to pay the rent, vehicle taxes, or get the car fixed and you had no idea where you would get the money? It would not be an exaggeration to guess that most of us have been in that situation before! Well, what do you typically do if you need money, food, or something else? One thing is for sure, we start to feel stress. We may even cry, get angry, or complain. And for most of us, we would probably call our friends or family to borrow money. But should our first instinct be to ask other people to help us? After all the lessons we have studied together, you should easily be able to guess that the answer is no. We should first go to God because He always provides. Let's start by reading a story about a man named Ayhan who grasped this truth.

It was a typical hot July day. Not exactly the kind of day that someone would think of buying a leather jacket, much less hope to sell one. But as the tourists descended from the boat, Ayhan thought that today was the day.

Business had been slow lately and he desperately needed to sell a jacket or two to pay the bills. In fact, every summer was like this. However Ayhan never thought of changing professions or trying to sell something different because things seemed to always work out. During the summer, he never had employees because he just didn't

have enough money to pay them. So he stepped out into the heat and started looking for potential customers.

“Are you looking to buy leather?” He asked a tourist who was passing by.

“No thank you.” the tourist responded.

“Well at least he said something to me. It is better than being ignored,” Ayhan thought to himself.

Ayhan continued to search for hours and as 9 pm drew near, he decided to give up for the day. He walked into his shop, cleaned up, and was getting ready to leave. When he was in the back putting the broom and mop away he heard the bells on the door ring signaling that someone had entered the store.

“Hello, may I help you sir?” he asked.

“Yes as a matter of fact you can! I was told you sell high quality leather jackets and wanted to look at them. Do you still have time or are you closing?” the tall, well-dressed foreigner asked.

“Of course I have time. In fact, I was expecting someone.” Ayhan replied.

The foreigner thought this remark was quite odd because it was apparent that Ayhan was getting ready to leave, but he brushed it aside and proceeded to look at the jackets. The tourist knew what color and style he wanted, so it didn't take long for Ayhan to find 3 jackets. The foreigner stood there looking at the jackets, asking questions about each one.

“What kind of leather is this? Will it need to be repainted? Was it made in Turkey? How about the price?”

The questions continued one after the other. But Ayhan was used to this. He learned a long time ago that foreigners need a little time and sometimes a little push to purchase something.

“I think I will get the brown one with the fur collar.”

“Excellent choice! In the winter, the zipper will keep the wind out and the fur collar can be pulled up to keep your neck warm.” Ayhan said.

The tourist bargained a little for the price and paid. When he was about to leave the shop, he noticed that the streets were mostly empty and so he turned to Ahmet and asked,

“I don’t want to be rude, but you said your were waiting for someone. Almost everyone has left and it has been over an hour since I arrived. Who were you waiting for?”

“I was waiting for you.” Ayhan replied.

“But how could you know that I was coming? We have never met.” The tourist inquired.

“You are right! But I believe that everyday God will bring me customers. It doesn’t usually happen when I want it to, but it always happens when I need it to because He always provides!”

“Now I understand, have a good evening and thank you for the jacket.”

Since we started studying together, we have seen many aspects of God’s character. He is the Creator of the Universe, the Judge of the wicked, Caller of the faithful, Savior of the righteous, Revealer of Dreams and Protector of His people. **He is holy, but so concerned about humanity that He sends us messages through His prophets.** He even visited Abraham in the flesh to tell him about Isaac and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Unfortunately, many people still do not recognize God as any of these things. Sometimes the very people who should remember who He is forget. That brings us to this lesson. After everything the Israelites had experienced, you would think that they would have

trusted God to provide everything for them. But that wasn't the case. Lets start by reading Exodus chapter 16 verses 1-3:

*1 They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. 2 And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, 3 and the people of Israel said to them, Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.*

What? This can't be happening! The Israelites have just witnessed some of the greatest miracles ever. God brought plagues upon the Egyptians, while protecting the Israelites. He freed them from slavery and protected them from the Pharaoh's army. And if those things didn't convince them of His power, He divided the Red Sea in half and allowed them to walk across on dry land. Surely, this would be enough proof that God could also provide food! But according to the Scriptures, that wasn't the case. As the growls of their stomachs increased, all they could think about was the food they ate in Egypt. They were basically saying that they would have rather died in Egypt as slaves than suffer hunger as free people. How will God deal with this? Let's continue reading verses 4 and 5:

*4 Then the LORD said to Moses, Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. 5 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.*

For those of us who have kids, these verses may be a little easier to understand. How many times have you responded to your children's complaining by giving them exactly what they wanted? Well that is what God is doing here. Just as parents know the tendencies of

their children, God knows the tendencies of humanity. He knew that when the going got tough, they would want to give up. So He took it upon himself to prove to them once again that He was all they needed. But instead of just giving them food, He provided it with some conditions. They were to collect a certain amount of food for five days and on the sixth day twice as much. If they followed His commandment they would have food, but more importantly it would show that they trusted him and wanted to listen to him. Let's pick up the story in verse 8:

*8 And Moses said, When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.*

After Moses told the Israelites that God would provide food and under what conditions, he wanted to make something very clear. Their complaints were not against Moses and Aaron. They were against God. It is the same with us! When we complain about our situation, we are basically saying that God has abandoned us and isn't concerned about us; He isn't faithful and hasn't done His job. In addition, by choosing to complain instead of asking God directly we lose an opportunity for God to answer our prayers.

So Moses told Aaron what God said and Aaron in turn told the Israelites. Just then, like a flash of lightning, God appeared in the cloud that had protected them since they arrived at the Red Sea. In verse 12 He said,

*12 I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.*

Why did God provide them with food? So that they would know who God was and that He would provide all their needs. They had no reason to complain, no reason to worry, and no reason to doubt.

And just as we have seen before, God kept his promise! The story continues in Exodus chapter 16 verses 13-19:

*13 In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. 14 And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. 15 When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, What is it? For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. 16 This is what the LORD has commanded: Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent. 17 And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. 18 But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat. 19 And Moses said to them, Let no one leave any of it over till the morning.*

Let us imagine the first morning. It started with a few distant murmurs and as the news spread there was a loud tumult. Families exited their tents and saw people carrying baskets as if they were harvesting crops. Men, women, and children ran throughout the camp gathering the white, sweet substance. Their shouts of joy were mixed with tears.

"God did it. He kept his promise. He rained down bread from heaven. Now we won't starve. Praise be to God!"

It was a scene repeated over and over again because, as we will read, this "bread" was to be their main source of food for a long time. It is interesting to note here that the food was 100% from God. The Israelites didn't do anything to get it. They didn't plow the soil, sow seed, water or weed. All they had to do was go out in faith and pick it up off the ground every morning. There was only one rule, they were not allowed to save any for the next day. Do you think they listened? Let's find out in verses 20 and 21:

*20 But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. 21 Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.*

Everyday the Israelites were reminded that this “bread” was from God. When they went out morning after morning, it proved to them that God supplied all their needs. If they tried to keep it over night, their attempts would end in failure. After so many years of slavery, the descendants of Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham had learned to depend upon their Egyptian masters for food. As a result, they had forgotten the faith of their ancestors and how to trust and depend on God. These two things were very important because only faith and dependence upon God would enable them to keep the covenant of Abraham alive. But the story isn’t over. God wanted to give them something else that had been taken from them, namely rest. Let's read verses 22-26:

*22 On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, 23 he said to them, This is what the LORD has commanded: Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning. 24 So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. 25 Moses said, Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. 26 Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.*

God not only provided the Israelites with food, He gave them a day of rest. A weekly holiday that had existed since the beginning of time. If you remember, God created everything in six days and on the seventh day He rested. He blessed the seventh day and made it holy. He gave it to humanity as a gift! God was simply reminding the Israelites that they too were to rest. By resting they would have energy to travel and work the other six days. But more importantly,

it was another way for them to show that they trusted Him to provide for them. Sometimes we feel like we need to work everyday to make a living, but God is telling us here that we need to completely trust and depend on Him. By resting on the seventh day, we are showing God that we believe He is our Provider. And just as He provided a double portion of “bread” on the sixth day and kept it from spoiling, so to can He provide enough for us. So the Israelites did what God said, right? Wrong! Let's read about it in verses 27-31:

*27 On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. 28 And the LORD said to Moses, How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? 29 See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day. 30 So the people rested on the seventh day. 31 Now the house of Israel called its name manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.*

There is an old saying; “there is always a bad apple in every bunch.” It seems there were quite a few bad apples among the Israelites because a group of people went out on the Sabbath and disobeyed God. But just as God said, they didn’t find any of the “bread” they named “manna.” Let’s finish reading the story Exodus chapter 16 verses 32-36:

*32 Moses said, This is what the LORD has commanded: Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt. 33 And Moses said to Aaron, Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations. 34 As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept. 35 The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan. 36 (An omer is the tenth part of an ephah.)*

Just in case the Israelites forgot what God had done for them and to provide proof of His miracle, God commanded them to save a jar of manna. The jar of manna was then placed in a safe location. We will learn more about that in later lessons. Let's close with short illustration.

It takes a disciplined spirit to endure the monastery on Mount Serat in Spain. One of the fundamental requirements of the new monks is that they must maintain silence. Opportunities to speak are scheduled once every two years, at which time they are allowed to speak only two words. One young initiate in this religious order, who had completed his first two years of training, was invited by his superior to make his first two-word presentation.

"Food terrible," he said.

Two years later the invitation was once again extended. The young man used this forum to exclaim, "Bed lumpy."

Arriving at his superior's office two years later he proclaimed, "I quit."

The superior looked at this young monk and said, "You know, it doesn't surprise me a bit. All you've done since you arrived is complain, complain, complain."

When you find yourself getting stressed, worried and angry about your situation, don't get caught in the trap of complaining.

**Remember that God provides!**

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Have you ever done something that you know God didn't want you to do? What was the result?
2. Why is it so hard to go to God first when we need something?
3. Have you ever had an experience like Ayhan? What did God do for you?
4. Why did the Israelites not listen to God?
5. Is it starting to become clear to you that only God can change your circumstances? That depending on Him is the only safe way to survive in our dangerous world?

## 8

THE STANDARD OF  
JUDGMENT

*When God judges each of us, how will He judge us?*

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Have you ever made an agreement? Of course you have! It would be impossible to make it through life without making an agreement at least once. There was a time when you could seal an agreement with a handshake. A man's word was his honor and guarantee. But nowadays, it is almost impossible to expect anyone to keep an agreement unless it is written down. When an agreement is written down, the expectations of both individuals are completely clear. The written agreement also protects both parties. For example, if there is a disagreement or breach of contract and both parties go to court, the judge will have something to base his judgment upon. In this lesson, we will see that it is no different with God. He has expectations and His expectations are based upon some simple rules. Before we look at His rules, let's start with an illustration.

Muharrem owned a small apartment building on the outskirts of town. The building was in a neighborhood that used to be a village. As time passed the village became part of the city and little by little large apartments replaced the old village houses.

Through painful experiences Muharrem was learning how to be a landlord. On one occasion, he rented out one of his units to a man named Yaşar without any rental agreement. After negotiating a price, they simply shook hands. He had agreed in principle that Yaşar and his wife could live in the apartment for 475 lira a month.

In a three unit building there was no need for a doorman but there was a small monthly maintenance fee of just 25 lira. But there was an issue with who would pay for the electricity. Muharrem's building was all on one electric meter and he didn't want to pay to have the apartments separated. So to save time and effort he thought,

"I will simply pay the electric and raise the rent from 400 to 450 a month. I don't foresee two people using that much electricity."

But after just two weeks Yaşar allowed his daughter, son-in-law and their two small children to move into the house. Muharrem was concerned that they would be using too much electricity, so he went to talk with Yaşar.

"Yaşar Bey, the water and electric bills are going up. When we agreed on the price of the apartment it was just you and your wife. I will need to increase your rent to cover the costs." Muharrem said.

"No way" said Yaşar. "The price was for the apartment and not on the number of people in the house. I will not give any more rent."

"Yaşar Bey, if you don't pay more rent, we will have to go to court."

"Fine, we will talk to the judge." he replied.

At last the case went to the judge, but because there was no contract the judge couldn't do anything for Muharrem. The only way Muharrem could get Yaşar and his family out of the apartment would be to move his own children in there. That is, if his children had no other place to live. But it never happened and as many years passed, Muharrem lost a lot of money.

One day Muharrem went to visit Yaşar to collect the rent. Most of the time the rent was late and sometimes he didn't pay at all. The situation was becoming more unbearable for Muharrem and he

didn't know what to do. When Muharrem arrived, he knocked on the door and it creaked open. He thought it was quite strange so he entered the apartment.

"Hello, Yaşar are you here?" he said.

But no one answered. Instead he was met with a horrible stench that burned in his nose. The living room was bare and the floor was covered with plastic bags filled with rotting food and diapers. It was apparent that they had left in a hurry. Muharrem covered his nose with his shirt and entered the kitchen. Some of the cabinet doors were on the ground and others were hanging crooked because the hinges were broken. They had left the water on and the drainpipe was leaking. Muharrem could see that it must have been dripping for a long time because the cabinet below was water logged and rotting.

Muharrem said to himself, "How can human beings live like this? After all I have endured, this is how it all ends. Dirty animals!"

Muharrem spent two months and thousands of lira restoring the apartment to its original condition. But Muharrem learned many things. Most importantly, he wasn't ever going to seal an agreement with only a handshake. He was going to have everything written in a contract so that there would be no misunderstanding. Then if there was a problem, he could at least go to court and get the renter removed. For Muharrem the contract was both ridiculous and necessary. If the renter behaved like a decent human being, there was no need for a contract. But the reason the contract was necessary is because some people don't behave like they should and when confronted with their wrongdoing, they deny it. There was one thing clear, without a written contract Muharrem would never rent his apartment again. He wanted the renter to know his expectations from day one.

All relationships are based upon expectations. Sometimes those relationships are governed by rules of society that aren't necessarily

written down. They are shared from generation to generation through the traditions and teachings of elders. The children learn what is expected of them from their parents and grandparents. Relationships can also be protected by vows, like in a marriage. The expectation that two people will love each other in good and bad times is expressed in the vow. In other cases like a landlord and a renter, the expectations of each party may need to be carefully clarified in a written document.

Although God did not write them down, He made His expectations clear to Adam and Eve when He said that they could not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Unfortunately for all mankind, they weren't able to meet His expectation. But God in His mercy was patient with them and has continually gave their descendants additional opportunities to follow His directives. If you remember, God made a covenant with Abraham promising him several things. When we review them look for the expectation or agreement that Abraham fulfilled. We can start in Genesis chapter 12 verses 2 and 3:

*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."*

God then repeated this promise in chapter 22 verse 18 adding that it was because Abraham had obeyed Him:

*18 "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."*

But God's promise was not only limited to Abraham, it also applied to his descendants. Just in case you missed it from the last two examples, let's read Genesis chapter 17 verse 7:

*7 "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you."*

Why? We can look at chapter 26 verse 5:

*5 "because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."*

God made these promises to Abraham not because he knew God's laws, but because he obeyed them. In other words, the promise was not based on knowledge as much as it was action. Now as far as we know, God's laws, commandments, and statutes were not written down in Abraham's day. But we do know that God spoke with Abraham, much as He did with Adam and Eve, and made His expectations clear. But what about the Israelites? What was their knowledge of God's laws, statutes, and commandments?

Based on what we have seen in previous lessons, we can assume that their knowledge was minimal. They had been slaves for 400 years when they came out of Egypt. They didn't have time for art, philosophy, or deep religious thought. They were just trying to survive. Therefore it was important for God to remind them. Immediately after saving them from the Pharaoh and before they continued on their journey, He wanted to re-establish the covenant of Abraham with them. But first, they needed to understand the responsibility of the covenant that God had made with their ancestor. **God was not interested in a relationship without rules** just like Muharrem did not want a renter without a contract.

In the book of Exodus we can read about the covenant that God made with the Israelites. Before we read the terms of the covenant let's read how they entered into the agreement. We can start in chapter 19 verses 3-6:

*3 And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 4 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. 5 'Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me*

*above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."*

The Israelites had left the eastern shores of the Red Sea and entered into a mountainous region of the Sinai peninsula. While they were camping, God spoke to Moses from a mountaintop. Although we don't know for sure, some scholars believe that Moses led the Israelites to the same mountain where he saw the burning bush. Regardless, it was on this mountain that God would make His laws and the conditions of the covenant clear.

God wanted them to remember what He did for them, to trust Him, and obey Him. If they could do those things they would be His special people. It is important to note that the covenant expected the Israelites to be a kingdom of priests. Priests are supposed to be holy people who guide and teach others about God. It seems that God wanted the Israelites to teach all nations about Him. Is this what God meant when He said that Abraham's seed would be a blessing to all nations? Let's continue with verse 10:

*10 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes."*

God is holy and before He made a covenant with the Israelites He wanted them to be clean. The action of cleaning themselves reminded them of their dirtiness compared to God's purity. It also reminded them of His expectation that they live holy lives. They would be His representatives to the rest of the world. As we will see shortly, God would define holiness through His commandments. Now we can read verses 18-21:

*18 Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. 19 And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became*

*louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. 20 Then the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. 21 And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at the LORD, and many of them perish.*

The scene must have been awesome. The people were camped at the base of a large mountain and waiting for something to happen. Suddenly, clouds began to accumulate around the mountain's summit. There was lightning and thunder. Then the audible voice of God calling Moses to the summit. The people probably fell to the ground and prostrated themselves before the Creator. God didn't want any of them to die, so He ordered Moses that they not approach the mountain.

Then God gave to the Israelites the terms of His covenant, His definition of holiness. We can read the exact transcript of God's words in Exodus chapter 20 verses 1-21. We can start by reading verses 1-11:

*1 And God spoke all these words, saying: 2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3 "You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. 7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. 8 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your*

*female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.*

In the first four commandments God revealed how the Israelites were to relate to Him. They were to show honor, respect, loyalty and love for Him. He was the center of their worship because He brought them out of bondage. They were destined to spend the rest of their lives in slavery, but God intervened and gave them freedom. Their relationship with God was based on this redemptive foundation. A relationship that God held even more sacred than marriage. The Israelites would in turn show how much they appreciated Him by keeping the first four commandments. It is no different with us; **God wants us to also be free from fear, doubt, and sin. He wants to have the same relationship with us!** Well what do the next six commandments say? Let's look at verses 12-17:

*12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you. 13 "You shall not murder. 14 "You shall not commit adultery. 15 "You shall not steal. 16 " You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."*

Here God describes how the Israelites were to relate to other human beings. First and foremost, people on this planet are God's possession because He created them. They needed to respect them, their property, their person, and their relationships with others. And let us not forget that we too are bound to these rules in our relationship with God.

In the 10th commandment we see something very interesting. The commandment is not confined to action. Coveting actually starts in

the heart and mind. It is after we have become jealous of another person's possessions that we would try to take them. But then again, you could say the same about stealing, murder, lying, and adultery. The sin actually begins with a thought. In short, we see that keeping God's commandments is not just about external behavior. Rather our behavior is the result of us living according to an internal principle. The principle of God's law in our hearts. We might say that the ten commandments could be restated in a simple sentence. **Love God and love your neighbor.** Isn't that a great foundation for a relationship! Let's finish with verses 18-21:

*18 Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. 19 Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." 20 And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin." 21 So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.*

Notice that Moses told the people not to be afraid and that God's fear should be before the people so that they would not sin. How could they not fear and keep God's fear before them at the same time? They would not need to fear God as long as they were not going against His commandments. In other words, as long as they lived up to God's standard, as long as they met His expectations, the relationship would remain intact. God would judge the relationship through the keeping of His law.

Let's use another illustration to see the importance of relationships being based on principles of respect and love.

Ayşe was 13 years old. She never knew her father. He left her mother shortly after she was born. Her mother said he was a gambler and a drunkard. Ayşe's mother was usually broke and often gone from home for days at a time without telling anyone where she was. At

last the government stepped in and gave custody of Ayşe to her grandmother. Ayşe was unhappy and rebellious. When she first came to her grandmother she was instructed that it was proper for her to kiss her grandmother and grandfather's hand. She did not want to do this.

“I never kissed anyone's hand in my life” she said. “Why should I start now?”

Her grandmother said to her, “Ayşe, in every society there are ways of showing respect to elders. It may differ from culture to culture. It can even differ from family to family in the same community. Perhaps you never did this in your home. But you live here now and these are the rules of our home.”

Whether we like it or not or whether we accept it or not, we live in God's universe, in God's house so to speak. There is no other house. If we want to continue to live in “God's house” we must accept the rules or covenant of His “house”. The rules of life, the rules of God's “house” are the commandments, the laws and statues that God gave to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (verbally). Because the Israelites lost the knowledge of God's laws, He gave them the terms of His covenant in written form. From that point on, they would know what was expected of them, what their relationship with God was founded on and how that relationship would be maintained. The Ten Commandments are the rules for humanity in God's “house”. When God judges each of us, how will He judge us? Will He not judge us according to the rules of life that He gave to Abraham and to his descendants as an everlasting covenant? The answer is yes!

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. In your relationship with God have you considered the Ten Commandments as the rules regulating your relationship? Are you living up to the rental agreement that God has with you?
2. The 10th commandment points to a sin that originates in the heart. Do you think the other Ten Commandments are about sin that originates in the heart?
3. If God were to judge you according to the Ten Commandments right now, could you remain in His “house”?
4. Take a moment re read the Ten Commandments in Ex. 20. Number them from one to ten and meditate on their value for life, family, and society.

# 9 DON'T BE A SLAVE TO YOUR PASSIONS

*Where do thoughts of wrongdoing come from?*

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A terrorist bomb explodes and kills 37 people. A country is exploiting a smaller country for its oil reserves. There is drought in a certain country and no one can get aid to the starving people because of fighting tribes. Someone is caught embezzling thousands of dollars at the bank. Someone is offering bribes to a government official so that he can get electricity for his illegally built home. The mafia extorts a local business for money. A man cheats on his wife. One child makes fun of another because he is short and overweight. A small child grabs his little sister's toy and makes her cry. Everyone should agree that all these things are not good and yet they happen every day all over the world. Why is the world bad if we know how to be good?

Some people think that all the babies born into the world are completely neutral on the subject of sin. They say that children do not know the difference between good and evil so they do whatever they have been taught to do. Other people look thoughtfully at their little children and understand that even little children sometimes do bad things. Sometimes when we tell them to put the toy down and that it is time for bed, they refuse to do what we say. Where did that defiance come from? Did we teach that little child to rebel? No we didn't. Then where did that attitude come from? Where did they learn to disrespect the wishes of their mother or father?

All of us at some time or another have felt a temptation in our minds and bodies to do something that is not good. Where do those thoughts of wrongdoing come from? Why don't human beings always just naturally think good thoughts and do good things? If we know the difference between right and wrong why is it that sometimes we do wrong? Could it be that there are forces at work within us that are contrary to what is right?

Most people have confidence that in any given situation, given the choice between right and wrong, they will do the right thing. Then why do so many people do wrong? Why is it that even when we want to do the right thing that sometimes we just do the wrong thing? Maybe we shouldn't have so much confidence that we will always do the right thing. Maybe we are weaker in moral power than we really think. Perhaps that is the reason that we continually fail. Consider this story of over-confidence and how it affected the lives of those involved.

Muharrem Bey had just finished spending thousands of Lira repairing the apartment to rent out again. Do you remember him from the last lesson? He is the one who had unwisely rented his apartment out without a contract. The family that lived there finally had abandoned the place and left a horrible mess of garbage and broken doors, cabinets and windows. It took several months to clean, fix, and get the smell out. But Muharrem Bey had learned a lesson. He would never rent his apartment out without a contract.

He thought that was the end of his problems but it wasn't. A new renter came and wanted to install a very large air-conditioner. The renter, Serdar, wanted to install the air-conditioner himself and change the wiring to adjust for the high wattage on the circuit.

“Serdar Bey. According to the rental contract all appliances must be installed according to the building and usage codes. You are not a qualified electrician. You can't do this properly. You don't know the codes well enough to keep them.” Muharrem said.

"Looking at his landlord coldly, Serdar raised his eyebrows and clicked his tongue, 'Never! We don't need to pay an electrician for this. I know what I am doing. I can do it.'"

So Serdar installed the air-conditioner as he thought best and also put a higher-wattage circuit breaker in the fuse box.

One hot summer day Muharrem drove by the apartment building and couldn't believe what he saw. Smoke was pouring out the window and a fire engine was pouring water into Serdar's apartment. Muharrem jumped out of his car and ran to the side of the firemen.

"Is everyone O.K.? Is everyone safe?" he said.

"Everyone is O.K.," the fireman said. "There is no one left in the building. We got them all out."

Muharrem was very relieved to know that no one was injured or died in the fire. But as the smoke turned from black to grey to white and the firemen began to clean their hoses and pack up their equipment and suits, Muharrem began to think what caused the fire. He went to the fire chief and asked what he knew about the fire.

"It's simple," he said. "You can't have a big air-conditioner like that and a microwave on the same circuit with this tiny wire. If that wasn't enough, the circuit breaker wasn't hooked up right. That's what caused the fire. This whole electric circuit doesn't meet the building code. You didn't have a professional do this did you?"

Muharrem was livid. "I told Serdar he couldn't do it, I told him. But would he listen? No! He burned my house down. What shall I do with such a jerk! What?" he shouted.

What would you do if you were Muharrem Bey? Would you take Serdar to court? Would you want to take personal revenge? Serdar had confidence that he could do the work. Only through great loss did he learn that he was not as good as he thought he was.

If the situation involved God's people, what do you think God would do? Well, it just so happens that we don't need to guess because there is such a story in the Bible. Let's see what God did when the Israelites were overly confident of their own goodness. We can start by reading Exodus chapter 32 verse 1:

*1 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."*

Isn't it amazing that the people forgot God so quickly? Did they really think that Moses had parted the Red Sea instead of God? Did they really forget who was feeding them day-by-day with manna from heaven? Did they really think that Moses was supplying water for them in the desert? After all they had witnessed, you would think that they would be more patient and trusting. Don't forget, they had just made a covenant with God to trust Him and keep His commandments. And now, within days, they are already abandoning God for idols. Let's read what happened next in verses 2-7:

*2 And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." 3 "So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. 4 And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" 5 So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD." 6 Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.*

Up until this point, this could possibly be the most bizarre thing we have ever read. The Israelites, God's own people who were to be a

holy nation of priests, began to worship something that they made with their own hands. How could they do that? Could they really forget the God who spoke the ten commandments to them from the pillars of fire on the mountain? Did they really think that this gold object made from their earrings really performed all those miracles? What was the point in covenanting with God if they were going to turn right around and break the agreement? It doesn't really make any sense, does it? Let's continue with verses 7-14:

*7 And the LORD said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. 8 "They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' " 9 And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! 10 "Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation." 11 Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: "LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 "Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. 13 "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.' " 14 So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.*

There are a few things worth noting from these verses. First, God called the Israelites stiff-necked people. They were stubborn, pompous, and arrogant. We better not forget foolish. Second, it is interesting to see what Moses did when he interceded for the

nation of Israel. While God referred to the people as “them” Moses referred to them as “your people”. Then Moses reminded God of His covenant and what a shame it would be to the cause of truth if God would destroy them. It reminds us of Abraham interceding for the people of Sodom. Third, God listened to Moses and relented. Let's read verses 15-19:

*15 And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand. The tablets were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other they were written. 16 Now the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets. 17 And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp." 18 But he said: "It is not the noise of the shout of victory, Nor the noise of the cry of defeat, But the sound of singing I hear." 19 So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.*

The breaking of the stones of the ten commandments was an excellent symbol of the people breaking God's law. They had shattered their relationship with God. They were guilty of sin and no longer had any rights to the covenant blessings. Let's see what Moses did next in verse 20:

*20 Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it.*

As the gold of their “god” passed through their digestive system it should have been clear that their “god” did not bring them out of Egypt. Their god was only fit for the septic system. But Moses wasn't finished. He needed to confront his brother Aaron. We can read what happened in verses 21-24:

*21 And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?" 22 So Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. 23 "For they said to me, 'Make us gods that shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' 24 "And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.' So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out."*

Aaron, along with Moses, was the spiritual leader of the Israelites. He should have been leading the people while Moses was with God. But instead of standing firm and pointing out their sin, he became a pushover. Even worse, he lied to cover up his error. What do you think God did next? Do you think He just forgave everyone? Let's find out by reading verses 25-35:

*25 Now when Moses saw that the people were unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to their shame among their enemies), 26 then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, "Whoever is on the LORD's side -- come to me." And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. 27 And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother; every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.'" 28 So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. 29 Then Moses said, "Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother." 30 Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." 31 Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! 32 "Yet now, if You will forgive their*

*sin -- but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written." 33 And the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. 34 "Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin." 35 So the LORD plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made.*

For some people these verses are hard to swallow.

"How could God just kill these people?" They ask.

But the answer is very simple in the context of what we have studied so far. As a people the Israelites did not keep their end of the agreement. Yes a portion of the group, that is those who were killed, were probably the instigators of the sin. But collectively, the Israelites had allowed the transgression. They promised to live according to God's commandments and represent Him, but they fell extremely short of the mark. And they didn't just break some rules, they completely abandoned God. It would be impossible for the Israelites to continue as God's people if they allowed open rebellion and disregard for God's law. Thus, they were punished.

Those who focus on and struggle with God's reaction in these verses often overlook one of the greatest demonstrations of love and commitment in the whole Bible. Moses, in spite of being the leader of a rebellious and unthankful people, really loved the Israelites. In fact he loved them so much that he was willing to die with them even though he was innocent. He pleaded with God as an intercessor to save them. And while God did punish them, He accepted Moses' pleas, spared the people, and gave them another chance.

We want to ask an important question here. What was the cause of this problem? Why did the people directly transgress the law of God? They saw the signs and miracles of judgment that God did in Egypt. They also had the visible presence of God right in

front of them. Not many people are so bold as to run a red light in front of a police officer. Why would they break God's law when He was right there? The people had seen the cloud with them in the daytime and the pillar of fire at night. They heard God's voice speaking to them from the mountain when they received the ten commandments. They had water and food delivered to them every day in the desert. How could any person forget God under those circumstances? Maybe the problem of human rebellion is deeper than simply human forgetfulness.

Perhaps the people were confident that they could keep God's law. Do you remember reading this when God gave the Israelites the 10 commandments, the contract of the covenant? Let's quickly read Exodus chapter 24 verse 7:

*7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient."*

That is the right response isn't it? Isn't that what everyone should agree to when we enter into a covenant with God? But sometimes it isn't as easy as that, is it? Is it possible that there is a power at work inside of us pulling us to do wrong.

There once was a man who made a firm commitment to quit smoking. He knew it was bad for his health. He knew that his wife didn't like it. He knew that it was bad for his kids. He knew that it cost a lot of money. He certainly didn't want to see his hard-earned money going to American tobacco companies. So he made a decision to quit. He tore his package of cigarettes into pieces and threw them in the garbage.

"That is my last pack of cigarettes," he said to his work associate.

He went home and confidently declared that he had smoked his last cigarette. His wife said, "I am so proud of you. I know you can do it."

But it wasn't that easy. The next few days seemed like hell to him. He was nervous and shouted at customers. He felt sick and dizzy. He yelled at his wife and kids. At last he bought a pack of cigarettes and began to smoke again.

What happened to his decision? He was not as strong as he thought. He needed help to quit smoking. But he didn't know that.

Serdar needed help to do the electric work on the house. But he was too proud to get help. The Israelites said that they could keep God's law. But they couldn't. It just wasn't that easy.

Some people have strong will power and can quit cigarettes fairly easily. Others cannot. But for all of us there is something about ourselves that we cannot master. For some it is pride. For others it is appetite. Still others are lazy and selfish and don't help others. Some people tell lies. Others have impure thoughts. Although we are different one thing is the same. Sooner or later, without God's help in our individual lives we will sin against God. The sooner we recognize that there is a power toward evil in our very being pulling us to do wrong the sooner we can find the answer for it in God. **Yes only God can give us the strength necessary to overcome the pull of the flesh to do wrong.**

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Have you ever felt the desire inside you to do something that intellectually you knew was wrong? Where do you think those feelings come from?
2. Did you ever do something selfish before you really thought about it? That is you did it and then you realized it was selfish later? Why don't we naturally do things unselfishly without thinking about it?
3. If you made up your mind to never sin again do you think you could do it? If not, why?

# 10 DON'T LOOK AT THE OUTSIDE LOOK ON THE INSIDE

*A building with a secret message about fate.*

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How important is a building? Well it depends on why it was built and who it was built for! It isn't an exaggeration to say that the most magnificent, and longest lasting, buildings throughout history were built for kings or religious purposes. And anyone who has been to Istanbul can attest to this fact because in one day you can easily visit the home of the Ottoman Sultans (Topkapi Palace), the Hagia Sophia, and the Sultan Ahmet Mosque. And while there are some beautiful rooms in Topkapi Palace, nothing compares to the massiveness, design, and splendor of the Hagia Sophia or Sultan Ahmet Mosque. And this is quite fitting because these buildings are more than mortar, stone and wood; they are places of worship and prayer. Yes, when a building is made to worship God great care needs to be taken to make it just right.

The Sultan Ahmet Mosque was built between 1609-1617 and the principal architect was Sedefhar Mehmet Ağa. At the time, Mehmet was the royal architect and one time assistant of Turkey's most celebrated architect Sinan. According to the details in his eight-volume memoir, his main sources of inspiration were the earlier works of Sinan and the Hagia Sophia. One need only look at the outside of the building and take a stroll through its interior to see that a lot of planning was done before a single stone was laid.

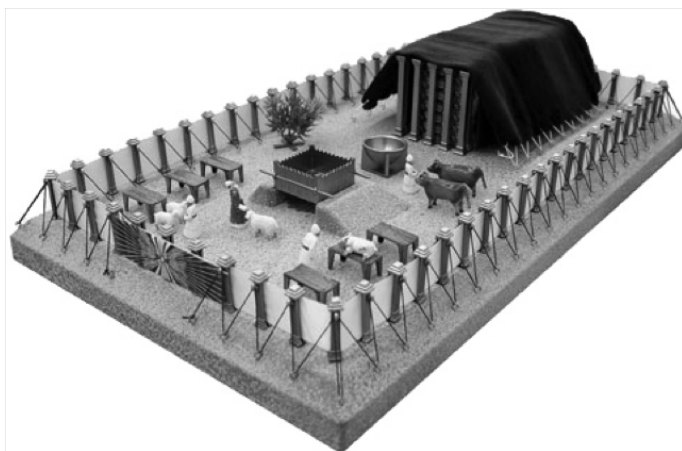
The basic layout of the mosque was based on the Şehzade Mosque, built by Sinan, with the same square-based symmetrical plan and spacious courtyard. The prayer hall was topped by an ascending system of domes and semi-domes, culminating in the central dome, which measures 23.5 meters wide and 43 meters high. These domes are supported by four massive pillars similar to the ones in Selimiye Mosque in Edirne, also built by Sinan.

The interior of the mosque was lined with over 20,000 handmade ceramic tiles from Iznik. The tiles are mostly composed of red and blue and have over 50 different tulip designs on them. In addition to the tiles, 200 intricately designed, stained glass windows filter natural light into the building. All of these elements create a grand, artistic, and peaceful environment.

Breaking with tradition, the sultan actually paid for this mosque with treasury funds and he employed the kingdom's best designers. In addition to Mehmet, the experts Kaşıcı Hasan and Mustafa Mersin Efendi designed the tiles, while Seyyid Kasim Gubari was responsible for painting the calligraphy. This mosque would be the crowning achievement of Sultan Ahmet and he wanted it to be the grandest of Ottoman classical architecture. According to modern day scholars, he accomplished his goal.

But what do you do when God wants a building, not to be worshipped in, but rather to dwell in? What would it look like and what would you use to build it? And if you were a nomadic, tribe of ex-slaves where would you get the materials for such a building? Let's find the answers to these questions and more by reading Exodus chapter 25 verses 1-9:

*1 The LORD said to Moses, 2 Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. 3 And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, 4 blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats' hair, 5 tanned rams' skins, goatskins, acacia wood, 6*



*oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, 7 onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece. 8 And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. 9 Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.*

As we have studied the Bible, we have learned many things about God's character and intentions. And it shouldn't amaze us that there is still more to learn. The God who spoke to Abraham in the desert, rained judgment down on Sodom and Gomorrah, and appeared to Moses in the burning bush is now saying He wants to be among His people. It is almost unfathomable to think that the Creator, who is separate from His creation, could at the same time be present in His creation. But then again, **nothing is impossible for God!**

However, God didn't want just any building. In fact, He said that His Tabernacle would be based on a pattern. Now if there is a pattern, there must be an original that it is based on, right? And where would the materials come from? Well the text tells us that the people would provide them through free will offerings (i.e., those willing to give would give.) If you remember, the Egyptians gave many things to the Israelites as they left Egypt and it is certain that most of the

precious metals and stones given for the building of the Tabernacle were a result of those gifts. But what would they do with all the materials?

Before we look at each specific item, let's organize the materials into three main categories. Some of the materials would be used to make the actual Tabernacle structure (i.e., the curtains, walls, support posts, etc.). The other materials would be used to make special furniture important for the worship of God. The rest would be used to make garments for those who served as priests. As we continue, we will not only explain each item but what it was used for. **In addition it is important to know that the tabernacle was divided into three main sections: the courtyard, Holy Place, and Most Holy Place.** Each piece of furniture was placed in one of these three areas.

Now we aren't just studying the Tabernacle structure because we are interested in architecture and furniture. Rather, it is because there is vital information hidden within the details that we must be familiar with to understand later parts of the Bible. Although all of those mysteries will not be revealed in the following texts, we look forward to unlocking them in later studies.

Lets start by reading about the special furniture in Exodus chapter 25 verses 10-12:

*10 "They shall make an ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. 11 You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside shall you overlay it, and you shall make on it a molding of gold around it. 12 You shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on the one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it.*

God's first instruction was to make a box out of wood. This box was called an ark and was overlaid with gold. Just like every part of the tabernacle, this box was made according to exact measurements

given by God. Although every piece of furniture and structural element of the Tabernacle was important, the ark was the most special. Let's read about it's cover and contents in verses 17-22:

*17 "You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. 18 And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. 19 Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends. 20 The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. 21 And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. 22 There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.*

The ark's special cover or lid was called the Mercy Seat. It was one solid piece of gold with a cherubim, or angel, on either end. The angels' wings formed an arch over the mercy seat and the angels' faces were looking down. It was in the midst of these two angels that God would appear and from which He would speak to Moses. In a sense, you could call it His throne.

But why was it important for the angels to be looking down, as if their heads were bowed? The first reason is that they were showing respect for God's holiness. **All creation owes its existence to God and as we approach Him we should do it in reverence of His righteousness.** The second reason was because their gazes were fixed upon the contents of the ark, that is the testimony of the law. The testimony, or **10 commandments, was the foundation of God's covenant with the Israelites and the basis from which He judges sin.** In fact, the whole tabernacle worship system revolved

around the seriousness of sin and the need for forgiveness. Let's continue with verses 23-30:

*23 "You shall make a table of acacia wood. Two cubits shall be its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height.24 You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a molding of gold around it.25 And you shall make a rim around it a handbreadth wide, and a molding of gold around the rim.26 And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and fasten the rings to the four corners at its four legs.27 Close to the frame the rings shall lie, as holders for the poles to carry the table.28 You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, and the table shall be carried with these.29 And you shall make its plates and dishes for incense, and its flagons and bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold.30 And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me regularly.*

In addition to the Ark and Mercy Seat, known collectively as the Ark of the Covenant, God told Moses to make a table. This table, called the table of showbread, was also made of wood and covered in gold and had a specific function in the worship of God. The priests made sure that the table always had twelve loaves of unleavened bread, one for each of the twelve tribes (sons) of Israel. Every Sabbath, the seventh day, they were to eat this bread and **it symbolized their dependence on God for sustenance and survival**. In addition to the bread, there were bowls and spoons for frankincense, pitchers to hold liquid, and plates for the bread.

You probably noticed that it had rings and poles for carrying. We need to remember that the Israelites were in the desert and on their way to the land that God promised to Abraham and his descendants. When the Israelites broke camp and traveled, the tabernacle had to go with them. Thus it was important that everything be portable.

In verses 31-33 God continued by saying:

*31 “You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work: its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it. 32 And there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; 33 three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower; on one branch, and three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on the other branch—so for the six branches going out of the lampstand.*

The tabernacle had no windows and the only source of light within its walls came from this lampstand. It was made of pure gold and resembled a tree with six branches. At the end of each branch there was a cup in the shape of an almond blossom. The priests were responsible for keeping the lamp burning by filling the cups with oil. But just like the table, the lampstand also had a symbolic purpose. The constantly burning lights reminded the Israelites that God was always with them. And just as a lampstand provides light in a dark room, God is the source of light in our dark lives. Now let's turn our attention to the tabernacle or tent by reading Exodus chapter 26 verse 1:

*1 “Moreover, you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns; you shall make them with cherubim skillfully worked into them.*

Unlike most temples, which were built with stone, the inner sections of the tabernacle were made of curtains. These curtains were designed after the pattern God gave to Moses and were covered with cherubim. We can only imagine how beautiful the inner tabernacle was when the light from the lampstand reflected off the table of showbread and flickered against the blue and purple walls. When the priests were inside the tabernacle, they probably felt as if they were in heaven. Angels surrounded them and the colors blue and

purple reminded them of God's laws and majesty. But the outside of the tabernacle wasn't nearly as beautiful. Let's read about it in Exodus chapter 26 verses 7 and 14:

*7 "You shall also make curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; eleven curtains shall you make. 14 And you shall make for the tent a covering of tanned rams' skins and a covering of goatskins on top.*

On the outside, the tabernacle didn't appear to be very special. In fact, compared to the interior it was quite plain. The goat and ram skins provided insulation, served as a sound barrier, and also kept the interior of the tabernacle dry. But there was also an underlying message in its design.

In the inner most part of the Tabernacle, where God appeared on the Mercy Seat, the most precious metals and materials were used. But as you moved away from the Mercy Seat, the materials became less valuable. And the lesson for us is that in the presence of God there is beauty and purity and as you get further away from Him, there is only judgment and a need for continual cleansing. Have you ever felt like you just couldn't be good enough or feared the judgment? It's likely you need to draw closer to God!

Now let's look at the actual layout of the tabernacle and get an idea of where each of the aforementioned items was placed. We can read about this in Exodus chapter 26 verses 31-35:

*31 "And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it. 32 And you shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, with hooks of gold, on four bases of silver. 33 And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy. 34 You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the Most Holy Place. 35 And you shall set the table outside the veil, and the*

*lampstand on the south side of the tabernacle opposite the table, and you shall put the table on the north side.*

The interior of the tabernacle was divided into two sections. The smallest area was called the Most Holy Place and the Ark of the Covenant was placed there. It was important that this area be separate from the other section of the tabernacle, so they hung a curtain to divide the two rooms. It is important to note that the curtain prevented the priests from being in the continual presence of God. **It is also a symbol of sin which separates us from God.** As we will read in the next lesson, the High Priest was the only one allowed to enter the Most Holy Place and only once a year. The other area was called the Holy Place. It was in this room that the table of showbread, lampstand, and altar of prayer were placed. It was also where the priests conducted most of their work. Although the Israelites never entered the tabernacle, they had an intimate knowledge of what happened in its outer courtyard.

The courtyard was surrounded by a wall made of white linen curtains and could only be entered through a special gateway. The gateway, instead of being made of white linen, was made of multicolored cloth. The Israelites knew that there was only one way to God and it was through that gate. And once on the inside, they would see two pieces of furniture that were crucial to their sacrificial worship system; the altar of sacrifice and the wash basin.

The altar was the first thing seen after entering through the gate. The people would bring their sacrifices to the priest, kill it and burn it upon the altar. The next piece of furniture was the basin for washing. It was placed between the altar of sacrifice and the entrance to the Holy Place. It's description is found in Exodus chapter 30 verses 17-20:

*17 The LORD said to Moses, 18 You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it, 19 with which Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands*

*and their feet. 20 When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn a food offering to the LORD, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die.*

It was very important that the priests be clean. Before a man became a priest, he had to be ceremonially cleansed. Afterward, they were not allowed to sacrifice or enter the tabernacle without cleaning their hands and feet first. Before they sacrificed it was important that they be purified and before they entered the Holy Place of the tabernacle, they needed to wash away the blood. But there was also symbolism in the washing.

Hands represent service and work, while feet represent the paths of life we travel. The priests were representatives of God and thus their actions had to be holy and pure. So when they washed their hands it reminded them that they were the mediators between God and man and role models for the people of Israel.

Even today, many people wash before they pray to God. And it is no mystery as to why. Humans by nature feel dirty and shameful in relation to God. We can easily see that God is holy and we are not. The Israelites knew this and realized the importance of having a special people to represent them, namely the priests.

Now that all of the furniture, curtains, support posts, and priestly clothes had been made, God wanted every part to be blessed for service. Let's read what He said to Moses in Exodus chapter 40 verses 1-15:

*1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 On the first day of the first month you shall erect the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. 3 And you shall put in it the ark of the testimony, and you shall screen the ark with the veil. 4 And you shall bring in the table and arrange it, and you shall bring in the lampstand and set up its lamps. 5 And you shall put the golden altar for incense before the ark of the testimony, and set up the screen for the door of the tabernacle. 6 You shall set the altar of burnt offering before*

*the door of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, 7 and place the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it. 8 And you shall set up the court all around, and hang up the screen for the gate of the court. 9 “Then you shall take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and all that is in it, and consecrate it and all its furniture, so that it may become holy. 10 You shall also anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and consecrate the altar, so that the altar may become most holy. 11 You shall also anoint the basin and its stand, and consecrate it. 12 Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and shall wash them with water 13 and put on Aaron the holy garments. And you shall anoint him and consecrate him, that he may serve me as priest. 14 You shall bring his sons also and put coats on them, 15 and anoint them, as you anointed their father; that they may serve me as priests. And their anointing shall admit them to a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations.*

The tabernacle was now complete. Moses did exactly what God had told him both in the construction and dedication of His Tabernacle. And then something amazing happened. Let's read about it in verses 34-38:

*34 Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.35 And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.36 Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. 37 But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up.38 For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.*

There once was a reclusive monk who lived in a cave. One day a visitor came and asked him,

“Why do you insist on living here all alone? There is a large church and monastery in the city. In fact, it is one of the most famous in all the land. You should live there and worship God.”

“I don’t understand why I should live there. I have everything I need right here!” he replied.

“What do you mean? That church is one of the finest in the world! The artwork, statues, lofty ceilings, and fine craftsmanship are unmatched. You only need to look at it and see that it is a House of God.”

"Sir, pardon me. When you look at my cave you see a hole. But don't forget that it is still part of the mountain! How grand a palace God has given me. It is here that I meet with him."

On the outside, the tabernacle wasn't the most impressive structure. But on the inside there was something more precious than the gold, bronze, wood, and fine linen it was made of. Likewise, the Israelites were not that impressive. They were former slaves traveling through the desert with nothing more than a promise. But they had something greater than the Egyptians temples, palaces, and statues. They had the God of Creation, YHWH, dwelling among them. What a day it will be when we too can dwell in the house of the Lord!

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Have you ever been somewhere and you felt like God was there with you?
2. Why do you think God wanted the outside of the Tabernacle to look plain?
3. What do you think the pattern is based on?
4. Do you think God wanted the curtain to separate the priests from His presence or to protect them?

# 11 SACRIFICE AND FATE

*What does sacrificing animals have to do with my fate?*

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In our day, there are so many things that occupy our time and thoughts. The fact is, for many of us, we are so busy trying to survive that we don't have time to think about anything else. But let's pause for a moment and ponder a few questions. Perhaps these are questions you have never considered. But at the end of this lesson, you may find that they are of the utmost importance.

Why is our society so fascinated with sacrifice? Why do we kill animals to dedicate new buildings and celebrate holidays? Moreover, why have many of the world's cultures sacrificed animals at some point? Is there something important about the shedding of blood or is it just a barbaric practice, a stain on an otherwise modern nation? Let's start with the story of a young boy who asked similar questions.

Mert stood there anticipating the moment he had seen so many times before. As his grandfather lifted the knife and walked toward the sheep, he replayed the moments that had led up to that day.

He remembered hearing his parents talk about how much money the sheep would cost and where they would get it. He remembered going to his grandparent's village and getting the sheep from a local farm. Some of the sheep were white, some gray, and others were brown. Mert didn't know why, but his grandfather said it was important that the sheep be healthy and clean. They chose the nicest one and walked home with it. As they tied up the sheep, he thought

forward to the day they would cut it. The whole family would be gathered together and there would be lots of food.

Suddenly, Mert's mind was back in the present and he focused in on his grandfather. As his grandfather reached down to cut the sheep, Mert asked him:

“Why do we cut the sheep every year grandfather?”

His grandfather paused and answered, “We do it to commemorate Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. God ordered Abraham to do this and he obeyed. But right before he sacrificed his son, God provided a sheep. You have heard the story before, why are you asking me again?” his grandfather responded and bent over the sheep.

“Well, why did God tell Abraham to sacrifice his son? That doesn't seem right!”

“It is hard to say. We can't understand all that God does.”

After Mert's grandfather said this he cut the sheep's throat. As the sheep lay there twitching and bleeding, Mert asked,

“Was Abraham the first to sacrifice?”

“No. After the flood, Noah made a sacrifice to God for saving his families life.”

“Where did Noah learn about sacrifice?” Mert inquired.

There was a long silence and then Mert's grandfather and father began to clean the sheep and divide up the meat.

A good question deserves a good answer and Mert's last question was very good. Actually, to find the answer we need to go back to the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve sinned, God expelled them from the garden. But if you look closely at the scriptures, you will notice that before they left God gave them clothes made from

animal skins (Genesis 3:21). How do you get the skin of an animal without killing it? The answer is you can't. That is when man first started sacrificing animals. After God gave specific instructions about sacrifice to Adam, the rules were passed down through the generations and that is why Abel, Noah, and in turn Abraham, sacrificed animals. So we see that before Adam and Eve sinned there was no killing and no sacrificing. But after sin entered the world, animal sacrifice started. **In other words, there is a direct connection between sin and animal sacrifice.**

In previous lessons, we learned about God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. We learned that this covenant would be an everlasting covenant and that God's intention or desire was to bless the whole world. Perhaps you didn't notice, but every time the covenant was passed on to another person they made a sacrifice to God. But something terrible happened, the descendants of Jacob became slaves in Egypt and over 400 years had forgotten most of what God had passed down through their ancestors. So after God rescued them from slavery and brought them out of Egypt, He had to teach them how to live, love, and worship. And sacrifice was a very important part of that worship.

In general, sacrifice was used for three things: to seal a covenant, give thanks, and atone for sin. But only the sin sacrifice was mandatory. And in regards to that sacrifice there were three types: the daily, the personal, and the annual. In this lesson, we will only be focusing on the personal and annual. Let's start with a brief explanation of the personal sin sacrifice as explained in Leviticus chapter 4 verses 27-31:

*27 "If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, 28 or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. 29 And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill the sin offering in the place of burnt offering*

*30 And the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out all the rest of its blood at the base of the altar. 31 And all its fat he shall remove, as the fat is removed from the peace offerings, and the priest shall burn it on the altar for a pleasing aroma to the LORD. And the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.*

When a person sinned, it was their responsibility to offer a sacrifice for their sin. They were to bring a healthy, unblemished female goat (or sheep according to verse 32) to the priest and confess their sins on it's head. **In essence, the person's sins were being transferred to the goat and the goat was paying the price for their sins.** This was done at the Altar of Burnt Offering with the priest serving as a mediator between the person and God. The priest then sacrificed the animal and burned it on the altar. Let's imagine the event.

A man sins, knows he sinned, repents of the sin, and wants to be forgiven. So he follows the rules laid out by God. He picks the best goat from his herd, picks her up, and starts walking to the Tabernacle. As he draws closer, he can sense all the people watching him. But it doesn't bother him that much because he knows that everyone offers sacrifices. After all, no one is perfect! He walks to the east side of the linen wall and approaches the multicolored entrance. The sound of bleating goats, sheep, and bulls fill his ears and the smell of smoke and burning flesh sear his nostrils. He knows what is about to happen, he knows that his sin has formed a wall between him and God, he feels guilty, and he knows that the wall can only be breached by offering a sacrifice.

He trembles as he hands the goat to the priest and confesses his sins upon it's head. He then lifts the knife and cuts the goat's throat. As the blood drains out, the man realizes even more than before the enormity of his sin. After the blood has drained out, the animal is laid on the altar and burned. The man's sin is forgiven and the penalty for his sin, that is death, has been paid. Let us not forget that personal sacrifices occurred over and over again every day. And

everyone was expected to sacrifice something for his or her sins, even the priests.

But if the Tabernacle itself was a holy place, is it possible that all the people's sins and the offerings themselves could defile it? That is make it not holy? The answer is yes and that is why God had the priests conduct an annual sacrifice.

This sacrifice was a very solemn event for several reasons. First, it was on this day, called the Day of Atonement, that the Tabernacle needed to be cleansed from the people's sins and uncleanness. Second, it was the only day of the year that the priest could enter into the Most Holy Place where God appeared above the Ark of the Covenant. Third, it was the day that the previous year's sins were completely blotted out from the Books of Judgment, a symbol of the Final Judgment. Fourth, it reminded the Israelites that the wall and shame of sin was very real. Let's read about it in Leviticus chapter 16 verses 3-5:

*3 But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. 4 He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on. 5 And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.*

God was very precise in how He wanted the High Priest to conduct sacrifices on the Day of Atonement. First, the High Priest (at that time Moses' brother Aaron) needed to wash himself. He then put on the priestly clothes whose design had been explained by God. When he was finished preparing himself, he collected two male goats, a bull and a ram.

On the Day of Atonement, only a pure High Priest could appear before the Lord. But Aaron was not pure; he was a human being and subject to sin. So before Aaron was allowed to mediate for the people, it was important that he repent of his sins and be forgiven. It was for this reason that he sacrificed the bull. Let's continue with verses 12 and 13:

*12 And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil 13 and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die.*

After Aaron killed the bull, he filled a censer with burning coals and took it, along with two handfuls of incense, into the Holy Place. When he passed through the curtain dividing the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, he dropped the incense onto the burning coals. As the incense's sweet smell filled the air, the room became cloudy and the Mercy Seat was obscured by smoke. It was only under these conditions that Aaron was able to enter. In a way, the smoke protected the High Priest from the glory of the Almighty Creator.

In that smoke filled room, in the presence of God, Aaron took some of the bull's blood and sprinkled it on the Mercy Seat seven times. Likewise, he did the same with the goat's blood. In the Bible, seven is the number of completeness and identified as God's number. So when Aaron sprinkled the blood seven times it symbolized the completeness of the forgiveness of sins and the cleansing of the Tabernacle from the people's uncleanness. And God made it clear that there was no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood.

In fact, that is the major theme of this event. Humanity is separated from God because of sin, as if it were a wall that couldn't be penetrated. In the Tabernacle that wall was visible, in fact there were several walls. The first wall surrounded the whole complex, the second enclosed the Holy Place and Most Holy Place, and the

third wall was the veil that divided the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. **The people were unclean and unholy; while God is pure, holy, and without sin.** And yet God was able to dwell among these people. How could that be? First, the walls of the Tabernacle separated that which was holy (God) from that which was unholy (the people). And second, the people had to constantly acknowledge their sinfulness and need for forgiveness through the sacrifice of animals. Perhaps the following story will help us understand how only the shedding of blood can atone for sin.

The Beyoğlu Municipality in Istanbul was tearing down some old buildings to put in a new road. The work crews got started and were making quick progress. After a few days of easy work, they reached a series of walled-in courtyards with old water fountains. The crew chief called over several men and gave them some instructions:

“Alright, I want you three to take out these walls and be quick. Those walls are keeping us from finishing this job. Each of you get a sledgehammer and get started.”

“But sir, how can we tear those down with just sledgehammers? Those walls are one-meter thick, reinforced concrete! Why can’t we just use the backhoe?” they asked pointing at the machine.

“The backhoe is being used for something else. If you can’t do it, I will find someone else!” the crew chief retorted.

The workers knew how hard it would be to break down those walls with just sledgehammers. But they didn’t want to lose their jobs, so they started hammering away. After four exhausting hours, they had made no progress. They were right. No matter how hard they worked, it would be impossible to tear down those walls. They would die before the job was done.

**Well according to the scriptures, trying to get your sins forgiven without the shedding of blood is like trying to knock down a reinforced concrete wall with a sledgehammer.** It can’t happen! But this raises yet another question, albeit one we won’t be able to

answer in this lesson. Why don't we still sacrifice animals for our sins?

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Do you think it would be difficult to kill your best or most favorite animal?
2. Why can sin only be forgiven by the shedding of blood?
3. How do you think the sin sacrifices are connected to the covenant that God made with Adam, Abraham, and the Israelites?
4. Think of the last sin you committed. If you had to kill an animal every time you committed that sin would you keep doing it?
5. Does this lesson give you a different perspective of sin and sacrifice?

# 12 WHO ARE YOU ALLOWING TO CONTROL YOUR FATE?

*Change your fate by not listening to faithless people!*

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Going against the crowd isn't easy. Though history may prove the lone voice to be a hero, we have all learned that it is much easier to agree with the opinion of the majority. But when our convictions are based on principle, it pleases God more for us to stand firm in those convictions. Even when it goes against the opinions of the crowd. It takes courage to stand alone. Today we will see that following our conscience is more important than trying to please others. A firm decision to do the right thing and listen to God, despite the popular opinion of the crowd and the risks involved, may just be the thing that turns the direction of your life towards personal success, family happiness, or even our nation's salvation.

It was a moment that called for a clear mind, good counsel, and a nationalistic vision. The Second World War was crippling Europe. In a few short weeks, Hitler's lightning fast warfare (blitzkrieg) had obliterated Poland, subdued Norway, and sent fear through the entire French Army.

It was a cold morning as President Ismet İnönü slipped on his jacket and rode in his private car to a secret meeting. This clandestine meeting was with none other than British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. As President İnönü rode along, his mind must have been whirling with the situation of his beloved nation. He had recently met with Hitler's man, Franz von Papen, who made a determined

effort to persuade Turkey to join the Axis powers. And now, he was sure that Winston Churchill would make a similar proposition.

President İnönü was waiting for Churchill inside a train wagon at the Yenice Station 23 kilometers outside of Adana, Turkey. It was January 30, 1943. The strength of the Germans' victories in the first years of the war had motivated Churchill to ask Turkey to join the Allied forces. Although up until that point Turkey had not been involved in the war, they had maintained a decently-sized Army and Air Force. Churchill's hope was that the Turks would open a new front in the Balkans. İnönü knew very well the hardships his country had suffered during years of incessant war between 1908 and 1922 and he was determined to keep Turkey out of another war as long as possible. The young Turkish Republic was still rebuilding, recovering from the losses due to earlier wars, and lacked the modern weaponry and infrastructure necessary for such a fight.

However, the decision wasn't an easy one because İnönü was sure that Stalin would love to have the Turkish straights. He could see the significant value of financial and military aid from the United Kingdom and the United States if the Soviets were to invade. What should the president decide? He was certainly not a stranger to war and he knew very well how to manage an army and lead an attack. But was this the time to join? Was fighting another war the best option for his country?

Can you imagine the pressure he felt as he sat with one of the most influential men in the world? You can be sure that Churchill was giving him every conceivable reason to join in the cause against Hitler's regime. But President İnönü did something very brave; he resisted the pressure to join. He decided his nation needed time to heal, a time to grow internally. Both of which would never happen if Turkey got involved in the war. History revealed his wisdom. The President's decision altered the fate of perhaps over 100,000 Turks and their generations. Thousands of young men of that generation, grew up, married, had children, and lived to see their grandchildren. Turkish blood had already proven it's valor on the field of battle

and President İnönü's choice saved Turkey's strength and honor for future battles.

Times of war call for secret dealings and big decisions. After leaving Egypt under Moses' leadership, the Israelites found themselves in such a situation. They had just completed their journey through the deserts of the Sinai peninsula and were standing on the edge of the Promised Land. The promise that God had made almost 400 years earlier was about to be fulfilled. They would finally have their own gardens, lands, and homes. But before they entered that land, God instructed them to examine it. Let's read about it in Numbers chapter 13 verses 1 and 2:

*1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel. From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a chief among them."*

Each tribe of Israel chose one man to send into Canaan as a spy. The spies' assignment was simple. They had to learn as much as they could about the land that would soon become theirs. It was a beautiful land, abundant in fruits, trees, and fertile fields. God's plan was to honor His covenant with Abraham and supply the Israelites with a wonderful land for worship, honest work, and the pleasures of friends and family. It was to be a place to safely harbor the promised seed of Abraham until He should be born. The mission of the twelve appointed spies is described in Numbers chapter 13 verses 17-20:

*17 Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan and said to them, "Go up into the Negeb and go up into the hill country, 18 and see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, 19 and whether the land that they dwell in is good or bad, and whether the cities that they dwell in are camps or strongholds, 20 and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be of good courage and bring some of the fruit of the land." Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes.*

So the men started their journey and explored the land for forty days. It must have been a marvelous adventure for them after living most of their lives as captives along the Nile. They must have been excited at the rich brown soil, fertile valleys, pine trees and streams. It was like paradise! As they drank from the cool fountains, ate the luscious grapes, and stretched their eyes over the hills, they could hardly believe this was to be God's gift to them. After spending 40 days in paradise, the spies safely made it out of Canaan and returned to tell the people everything they had seen. The news that they had returned quickly spread through the camp and the people gathered in excitement to hear what it was like.

Let's read the account of the spies' journey in Numbers chapter 23 verses 23-31:

*23 And they came to the Valley of Eshcol and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them; they also brought some pomegranates and figs. 24 That place was called the Valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster that the people of Israel cut down from there. 25 At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. 26 And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan." 30 But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." 31 Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are."*

As the people saw the beautiful fruit that was brought back, and heard the stories of the clear water and green hills they were excited with the romantic thought of owning their own farms. This was their destiny! But ten of the spies began to report things that were negative and even scary. They said,

"The men are like giants, we would be the size of grasshoppers and the walled cities are impenetrable."

Suddenly the joy of the crowd turned to doubt and fear. A new picture was emerging. One filled with terror and destruction.

Just then two men full of faith, Caleb and Joshua, stepped forward, faced the crowd and cried out:

"Stop my friends! Let us overcome."

It isn't easy going against the opinion of a small group, much more a whole nation. But, Caleb and Joshua knew the other spies were wrong and refused to doubt. How were they able to withstand that kind of social pressure? Quite simply, they focused on what God could do, not what the people couldn't. They remembered those 40 days in paradise and the strong promises that God had given them. Hadn't they seen the Red Sea parted? Hadn't they seen God perform miracles when He provided food and water? Did they so quickly forget when God's presence descended with fire and lightning on Mt. Sinai? They resisted the urge to follow the crowd by following God instead.

Let's continue the story by reading Numbers chapter 13 verses 31 and 32 and chapter 14 verses 1-10:

*31 Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." 32 So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height.*

*1 Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. 2 And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" 4 And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt." 5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the people of Israel. 6 And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes 7 and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. 8 If the LORD delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. 9 Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them." 10 Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. But the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel.*

**Many people think the course of their life is based upon a pre-written fate. But in this Biblical event we see that the attitude of the people is what shaped their destiny.** By allowing fear to overwhelm them and by their lack of self-control they were actually participating in turning themselves away from the destiny that God had planned for them. God had made every provision for them to own their own land. A beautiful land which God wanted them to have. Now the imaginations and fears of the people, the bad report of the ten spies, and their lack of faithfulness to God's promises were placing a distinct block between the blessing God desired toward them and their chance of obtaining it.

Someone might say, "Well, they had a right to be afraid of those people. The Canaanites were like giants."

But God had not told them they had to fight those people! He could have run out the inhabitants with bees if He had wanted to! Hadn't He overcome the Egyptian Empire with a plague of frogs and lice? Never forget God has a 1000 ways to solve your problems which you have never thought of. **Trust in Him no matter what. Do not be afraid!**

Caleb and Joshua attempted to persuade the people. But the people wouldn't listen to them. God became so upset with the people's lack of faith that He withdrew the opportunity to enter Canaan from them. Like a good parent who doesn't tolerate a child throwing a tantrum, we can only expect there would be consequences for Israel's bad behavior. So, God had no choice but to help this child – Abraham's grandchildren – learn a hard lesson. Let's finish up by reading Numbers chapter 14 verses 26-35:

*26 And Jehovah spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, 27 How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, that murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. 28 Say unto them, As I live, saith Jehovah, surely as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: 29 your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number; from twenty years old and upward, that have murmured against me, 30 surely ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swear that I would make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. 31 But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected. 32 But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. 33 And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness. 34 According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.' 35 I, the LORD, have spoken. Surely this will I do to all this*

*wicked congregation who are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall come to a full end, and there they shall die."*

What a sad day as the camp of Israel turned from the borders of the promised land and headed back into the desert where they would spend the next 40 years. One year of wandering for every day of rebellion. A year for a day. Was it their fate? No. Their fate had been to celebrate in the good land. They had negatively altered their fate, by their bad beliefs and bad behavior. Just as President İnönü in 1943 had spared his nation by a good choice, those ten spies had doomed theirs by a bad one. Do you know what happened to the ten spies who gave the bad report? The Bible says they died of a plague!

How can you positively alter your fate?

There is a story of commander İnönü, in which is hidden a key that may help you in your quest to positively shift fate. Long before İnönü was the national chief, he was invited to represent Turkey in Lausanne Switzerland in December of 1922. The conference was held between Britain, France and Turkey to renegotiate the treaty of Sevres. The proceedings of the conference were notable for the stubborn diplomacy of İnönü.

The British representative was Lord Curzon. Lord Curzon would launch into lengthy speeches opposing Turkish demands for recognition of the national pact. Already partially deaf, İnönü would simply turn off his hearing aid when Curzon would make his long winded speeches denouncing the Turkish position. Once Curzon was finished, İnönü would turn on his hearing aid and restate his original demands. He was oblivious to Curzon's denunciations. Why? He literally hadn't even heard them!

Every human is equipped with a hearing aid of sorts. If we turn it off when need be, we could shift fate powerfully and often. The crowd, listening to the fearful report of the ten spies, should have turned off those negative false ideas much sooner. They should have kept

their ears listening solely to the word of God. Always remember, it is only those who listen to God that will ever enter paradise.

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Do your decisions help shape the course and direction of those under your leadership? Your spouse, children, or other respected friends?
2. The ten spies' negative report quickly turned the crowd's opinion from joy to horror. Is there anything or anyone in your life that makes you afraid, insecure, or unhappy? How can you ignore them?
3. How do you think God felt about the people's rejection of His gift of land for the children of Abraham?
4. How are you using God Promises to cancel fear and grow in faith?

# 13 THE PUNISHMENT FOR DISOBEDIENCE

*Does God favor some people over others?*

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Being a prophet is a great honor. One of the most famous prophets of all time was Moses. In the first five books of the Bible, the experiences of Moses can be found in great detail. We have already learned how his mother put him in a basket on the river to save him from execution and how the pharaoh's daughter found him. We also learned that Moses tried to save Israel by force, killed a man, ran to the desert, and lived there for 40 years. Then we read how God brought him back to Egypt and performed miracles to set the Israelites free. Yes, Moses was God's prophet and means of communication to the people of Israel. In Exodus chapter 33, verse 11, the Bible says that God spoke with Moses face to face as a man speaks to a friend. Moses was privileged to go up into the mountain and receive special instructions from God for the people. When he came down from the mountain after speaking with God, the Bible says that his face glowed and the people were afraid to even approach him.

Being a prophet is also a great responsibility. God asked prophets to lead, warn, instruct and rebuke people. All of which make prophets very unpopular at times. The prophets were rejected more often than they were accepted and were well acquainted with hardship and trial. Do you remember what happened when Moses was called to bring the Israelites out of Egypt? Many of the Israelites rebelled against Moses and Aaron. They accused the two leaders of trying to

kill them. If you were in Moses' place would you manage to keep your temper with these complaining people?

Yes, Moses was called to an important task and he had special privileges that others did not have to help him carry out that task. But when it comes to righteousness does God treat people differently? Can a prophet break God's law and not suffer the consequences? Can a prophet disobey the Lord or even attempt to take the glory that only belongs to God without suffering repercussions? Does God show special favor to prophets by overlooking their sins?

To help illustrate our questions let's look at a story of favoritism from a purely human standpoint.

Eda was taller than the other girls in her 6th grade class. She wore her shiny black hair long and when she wasn't in her school uniform she wore white and black clothes a lot to complement her olive colored skin. Being a little taller than the others she could sometimes pass as an eighth or even 9th grader. Good grades came easy to her and she never took a book home with her to study. In fact, she spent more time listening to her Ipod than doing schoolwork. She liked to sit close to the teacher, but not up front and the boys were always competing for her attention.

On the first day of class, Eda was caught talking to her friend Kutsal who was in the row behind her. The teacher, Nilufer Hanim, scolded Kutsal but said nothing to Eda.

"Kutsal, why are you talking during my lecture? Do you have something to say that everyone should hear?" she asked sternly.

Kutsal shrank in her desk.

"See to it that I don't hear your voice again today when I am talking" the teacher added.

Most of the kids were pretty sure that the teacher saw Eda talking also and wondered why Eda got away with talking in class and

Kutsal did not. It didn't take long for the students to think of her as the teacher's pet. Eda consistently turned her homework in late, but her grades were never lowered and her papers were never refused. Eda's classmate Sinan was shocked.

"Eda, I don't know what it is with you, but Nilufer Hanim won't take my paper even one minute late. You get to turn in your paper the next day or next week. How is that?"

"I don't know" said Eda, "She just likes me better I guess."

Eda's classmates got used to the idea that Eda could do no wrong in the teacher's eyes. Eda really didn't try to court the teacher's affections. She didn't try to butter the teacher up with flattering words. But for some reason the teacher always favored Eda over the other kids, especially when it came to praise.

"Children, did you see Eda's composition? It was excellent!" She would say. "If only you children could be more like Eda."

The other kids at first were resentful but after awhile they realized that this was the way it was and there was nothing anyone could do about it. The teacher just liked Eda better than the others. Whatever rules there were they did not seem to apply to Eda. She could talk in class, come to class late, even skip class occasionally and there were no repercussions. Eda was pretty but not the most beautiful girl in class. She was a good student but not the best. The other children tried to figure out why Eda received special treatment but there didn't seem to be a reason.

How do you feel about that story? Does it remind you of a situation you have seen in your own life with a teacher, coach, or boss? Yes favoritism creates jealousy. There seems to be an injustice at the very core of favoritism. Yet some people say that God plays favorites with the prophets. Does He? Does God have two standards of righteousness? Does He have two measuring sticks? Is there one standard for "normal" people like you and me, and another one

for prophets? **No, one thing is certain, God has one and only one standard of righteousness.**

God's righteousness is very different than Eda's teacher's standard of righteousness. Let's look at a situation in the Bible where God reveals His impartiality. We can start in the book of Numbers chapter 20 verse 1:

*1 Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the Wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh; and Miriam died there and was buried there.*

The first month of the religious calendar would have been April and the grass would have been fresh and green from winter rains. The Lord had promised that He would bring the children of Israel into a good land and settle them there. The green grass should have lifted their spirits to receive the promise and served as a reminder that God still intended to give that land to them. They knew that they had been punished for their disbelief and that the 40 year punishment was about to end. The real question was whether or not they had learned a lesson from their dead fathers and grandfathers. Had they learned their lesson to trust God? Let's find out by reading Numbers chapter 20 verses 2-5:

*2 Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron. 3 And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! 4 "Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? 5 "And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink."*

Forty years earlier the people had made a similar complaint to Moses. Do you remember reading it in the book of Exodus? It took place in Horeb. Let's review it in Exodus chapter 17 verses 3-7:

*3 And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, "Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" 4 So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!" 5 And the LORD said to Moses, "Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. 6 "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 So he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"*

All those years in the desert, God provided the Israelites with water which was no simple task. According to the book of Exodus, there were 600,000 men not including the children and women. If every person used 8 liters of water a day for cooking, bathing and drinking, they would have needed 12 million liters of water per day. And that is a pretty conservative number. Let's remember that they also had animals. More than 12 million liters of water a day isn't just a fountain; that is a river of water.

Everyday for forty years, God quenched their thirst and satiated their hunger. Both of which served as a continual sign of God's care and protection. But suddenly there was no water. Had God forsaken them?

Apparently the children of Israel didn't trust God any more than their fathers had trusted God. After 40 years of receiving food and water from God in the desert why would they think that God had abandoned them? It didn't make sense. They should have seen the drying up of the waters as a sign that they were about to enter the promised land and would no longer need the water which had been miraculously provided. But instead they murmured against Moses.

And just as their fathers had done 40 years earlier they accused Moses and Aaron of trying to harm the people.

After working so hard to lead a people from slavery to freedom, living in the desert for 40 years, and constantly hearing their complaints, how do you think you would feel if at the slightest sign of difficulty they turned on you? Would you be able to keep your patience if they accused you of trying to kill them? Let's continue the story by going back to Numbers chapter 20 verses 6-8:

*6 So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them. 7 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 8 "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals."*

The instructions given to Moses here were a little different than the ones that God had given previously. At Horeb God told Moses to strike the rock with the rod. Whereas here God told Moses to speak to the rock. The Bible doesn't tell us why God did not ask Moses to strike the rock, but there must be a reason. Perhaps there was some meaning or symbolism to the method. Unfortunately, we will have to wait a little to learn that one.

Let's see what Moses does in verses 9-11:

*9 So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him. 10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" 11 Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.*

Moses was supposed to speak to the rock, but instead in the midst of his anger he turned away from God's instructions to his own

solution. Taking the miracle into his own hands he struck the rock. In mercy toward the thirsty people, God made the water flow. But God was unhappy with Moses' act of rage. He had broken a strong sign for the people by his disobedience. Here are God's words in Numbers chapter 20 verses 12 and 13:

*12 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." 13 This was the water of Meribah, because the children of Israel contended with the LORD, and He was hallowed among them.*

There was a bigger problem than just not following instructions. God said to Moses and Aaron that they had not believed in Him! He said that they did not hallow Him in the eyes of the children of Israel. After working 40 years to bring the children of Israel to the promised land, Moses and Aaron would not enter themselves. They would die in the wilderness just like the rebels had! What went wrong? What is God doing?

The first thing we can say is that God certainly isn't playing favorites. When Moses and Aaron did something wrong God did not wink at their sin. God dealt with their sin. Yes the prophet of God pays a consequence for wrong-doing just like everyone else. God is righteous and when it comes to righteousness there is not one standard for the people and another for the prophets. They are the same.

So what was Moses' and Aaron's sin?

We need to look closely. God had said that He would bring water out of the rock for the people. But Moses said,

"Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?"

The choice of whether the water would come out of the rock did not belong to Moses and Aaron. But Moses was behaving as if God would not do what He said He would do. Moses and Aaron put themselves in God's place.

“Must we bring water for you out of this rock?”

Furthermore Moses and Aaron exhibited a passionate anger because they were personally insulted. They shouted,

“Hear now, you rebels!”

Yes sometimes God uses a prophet to rebuke the people but it should not be a personal issue with the prophet. Prophets are not to use personal insults. The prophets are to represent God before the people and they must exhibit patience and forbearance. In all these things they did not honor God and it gave the Israelites a reason for complaint.

Throughout the time in the desert the Israelites had complained against Moses and said that it was Moses who had brought them into various difficulties. They did not acknowledge that it was God who led them into places where their faith was tested. By drawing attention to themselves Moses and Aaron had given support to the argument that it was not God but Moses who was leading them. This was clearly a big mistake.

What shall we say then, did God forsake Moses and Aaron? Did they lose their eternal salvation? In later chapters, it is apparent that God did accept their repentance. But it is equally apparent that He didn't allow the sin to go unpunished. After 40 years of traveling in the desert both Aaron and Moses died without ever taking one step into the Promised Land. God was clearly showing the people that He does not show favoritism. The standard of righteousness is the same for both the people and prophets. If anything, He requires greater obedience and trust from leaders because of their important influence over the people. **Yes prophets can sin and God sees their sin no different than anyone else's. They have just as much a**

**need to repent and turn from sin as we do.** Let's consider another story regarding favoritism.

In Ankara one of the ambassadors from another country was always parking in illegal places. But the police officers could not give him a ticket. He had what is called diplomatic immunity.

One day the ambassador parked right on the corner of the street with half the car sticking out in the street. A tourist bus came and couldn't pass. The driver got out and tried to find the owner. He could not find the owner of the car but he finally found a police officer.

"Will you get this car towed?" he asked the policeman.

"Sorry, I can't do anything. It's a diplomat's car."

"What do you mean it is a diplomat's car? Is a diplomat born from a virgin that he is different from everybody else? It isn't fair. He is blocking the whole street. No one can go anywhere."

Behind the bus there were other cars that were unable to pass. After a few minutes they became impatient and began honking their horns.

"Sorry, I can't do anything" said the policeman.

"Look how many people are stuck here. Don't you hear their horns blowing? What are you going to do about it?"

"Sorry, I can't do anything."

"Look" said the bus driver, "diplomatic immunity is just to protect the diplomats from being thrown in jail on false charges or from accidental cultural errors. It was never meant to be a license to break all the laws of the country."

"It doesn't matter" said the police officer. "They can do what they want and I can't touch them."

How do you feel when you see higher officials not having to obey the rules? Is it irritating? Does it seem unjust to you? If it is unjust

from a human standpoint, then it is certainly unjust from God's standpoint whose thoughts are infinitely more fair than ours.

**Contrary to popular belief, prophets are not cut from a different cloth. They are ordinary people called to do extraordinary things with the help of God. They have no power of their own and owe their salvation to the grace of God just like everyone else.** Therefore, God holds them accountable for their sin and if need be punishes them. God doesn't give anyone a license to sin. He holds everyone accountable to His own standard of righteousness. While a prophet has a special job to perform, it does not put him above God's law. God's law is just and righteous. Let's not belittle it by saying that some people are not subject to it.

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Why does favoritism create jealousy?
2. Some people think that God made prophets in such a way that they cannot sin. Do we find that idea in the scriptures or did that idea come from somewhere else?
3. Since God's standard of righteousness for us and prophets is the same, what is the set of rules that it is measured from?
4. Why do you think God asked Moses to simply speak to the rock and not to strike the rock with a rod?
5. Do you see any similarity between Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden and Moses' sin in striking the rock?

## 14

## DON'T BE A LIAR!

*Lying has a heavy cost.*

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What would you do to be famous, rich, or powerful? Would you lie, cheat, and steal? In a time of war, would you betray your friends to an enemy? Would you be willing to give up an eternity in heaven for a moment of bliss on Earth? Most of us would say no. But under extreme pressure and with a strong desire for riches, you might be surprised what some people would do! In today's lesson we will explore this very thing and discover that no one is immune from the temptation of worldly success, not even prophets! Let's start with the following story.

There was once a man who looked older than his age. He was a skilled man and with hard work was barely able to provide for he and his wife. One day his wife went to the bathhouse and noticed a huge crowd. She asked the other ladies,

“Why are all these people here? I've never seen a crowd like this before.”

The other ladies replied, “Haven't you heard? The head soothsayer's wife is coming to the bathhouse today.”

Just then, the sound of music filled the air and a great parade of people approached the bathhouse. The head bath woman, in the hope of receiving a great reward, honored the soothsayer's wife and

begged her to take her place. You can only imagine the impact all of this had on those poor women.

Feeling slighted and a bit jealous, the poor woman took her bath and returned home. On the way, she made up her mind and upon entering the home she said to her husband,

“Either you become a soothsayer or I will leave you!”

“What do you mean you will leave me? I am barely earning our daily bread. I don’t have enough time to learn the art of soothsaying. How will I do what you are asking?” the man inquired.

But the woman wasn’t going to change her mind. He would become a soothsayer or she would leave him. Needless to say the man was despondent, his wife was beautiful and she was all he had.

That night, he decided to go to the coffeehouse and while he was in deep thought a friend approached,

“What’s up?”

With that simple question, the poor man explained everything to his friend. After hearing the whole story, his friend said,

“Don’t worry! I know the head bath woman and she will help us.”

The friend left the coffeehouse, went to the bathhouse, and consulted with the head bath woman. She thought for a moment and told the man,

“Tell your friend to sit outside the gate of the bath house tomorrow with paper, pen, and ink. Tell him to scribble away as if he were a soothsayer. And don’t worry, I will take care of the rest.”

So the poor man, even though he couldn’t read or write, went to the stationary store and bought the necessary materials. He then went

to the bathhouse gate and started writing. It didn't take long before everyone started calling him hoja. Just then, the chief soothsayer's wife came for her usual bath.

While she was being tended to, one of the attendants took one of her costly rings and hid it in the mud, which had collected in the gutter. As this was the chief bath woman's plan, she revealed the ring's location to the poor man posing as a hoja.

It wasn't long before the chief soothsayer's wife was ranting and raving about her lost ring. While the attendants were running around trying to find the ring, the chief bath woman approached her and said,

"There is a hoja sitting at the gate who is very skilled in finding lost items."

"Well what are you waiting for? Go get him at once!" she screamed.

They ran to get the hoja and told him what happened. The poor man, posing as the wise hoja, stepped into the bath house and said,

"Stop worrying! The ring is buried in the mud at the narrow part of the gutter."

The chief bath woman sent an attendant to the spot and the ring was found. The lady was very happy and rewarded the hoja with lots of money. After receiving the money, he went home highly satisfied with his first success as a soothsayer. And that brings us to today's Bible lesson.

In the Bible, we can read the story of a very interesting man named Balaam. Unlike the poor man who pretended to be a hoja, we know that Balaam was a real prophet because of his ability to communicate with God. But, the most interesting and disturbing part of his story is that he took advantage of his position to gain wealth and fame;

a decision that would eventually cost him his life. We can start by reading the story in Numbers chapter 22 verses 1-6:

*1 Then the people of Israel set out and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho. 2 And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. 3 And Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were many. Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel. 4 And Moab said to the elders of Midian, This horde will now lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field. So Balak the son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, 5 sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the people of Amaw, to call him, saying, Behold, a people has come out of Egypt. They cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me. 6 Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.*

After the Israelites had spent a long 40 years wandering in the desert, they were standing on the edge of the Promised Land. Even though 40 years had passed, their identity and fame had spread far. So far that Balak, the king of Moab, was worried. He thought that a war was imminent and decided to call upon the services of Balaam, a man who he thought was nothing more than a spiritual mercenary, a diviner for hire.

So the king of Moab sent messengers to Balaam to explain what was happening, and to ask him to come and curse the Israelites. Balaam told the messengers that he would seek God's will and invited them to stay the night. But that night, God spoke with Balaam and told him to send the men away. Balaam could not curse that which God had blessed.

But the king of Moab didn't give up, he believed in the power of money. If the price was right Balaam would come. So he sent a

group of dignitaries to convince him. Now, Balaam already knew what God's will was, but he really wanted that money. So, he told them to stay the night. This was Balaam's first mistake!

**We know that God can read our hearts and minds.** And He knew what was in Balaam's heart. But we also know that God allows us to make our own choices. So, God permitted Balaam to go with the men under one condition. Balaam could only say what God told him to say. The problem was that Balaam didn't want to listen to God. That was apparent when he allowed the second group of men to stay in his house after God sent them away. God knew what was in Balaam's heart and was about to teach him a lesson. Let's continue reading the story in Numbers chapter 22 verses 22-30:

*22 But God's anger was kindled because he went, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him. 23 And the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand. And the donkey turned aside out of the road and went into the field. And Balaam struck the donkey, to turn her into the road. 24 Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on either side. 25 And when the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she pushed against the wall and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall. So he struck her again. 26 Then the angel of the LORD went ahead and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left. 27 When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam. And Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff. 28 Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times? 29 And Balaam said to the donkey, Because you have made a fool of me. I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you. 30 And the donkey said to Balaam, Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Is it my habit to treat you this way? And he said, No.*

As hard as it is to believe, this donkey actually spoke to Balaam. And Balaam didn't seem to be surprised because he answered the donkey's question. But more importantly there is some interesting symbolism in this event. Just as the donkey left the main road, Balaam turned from God's direct will. Remember God didn't want him to go and when he fell out of God's favor he was subject to God's judgment. And instead of opening his eyes and understanding the event as a warning, Balaam thought it was a distraction and hindrance to his main objective, which was to get money. So he beat his donkey and threatened it. Balaam was right! He was a fool, but not because of the donkey. Let's see what happened by reading verses 31-35:

*31 Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face. 32 And the angel of the LORD said to him, Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to oppose you because your way is perverse before me. 33 The donkey saw me and turned aside before me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, surely just now I would have killed you and let her live. 34 Then Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, I have sinned, for I did not know that you stood in the road against me. Now therefore, if it is evil in your sight, I will turn back. 35 And the angel of the LORD said to Balaam, Go with the men, but speak only the word that I tell you. So Balaam went on with the princes of Balak.*

Many people in the world do not believe that there is a spiritual battle raging all around us. Do you think they would react the same way as Balaam if their eyes were opened? Would they continue to act like Balaam when bad things happen? Or would they recognize that sometimes bad things happen because they are disobeying God? They need to be reminded, just like Balaam, that God is in control.

Although God allowed Balaam to continue on his journey after he repented, it was clear that Balaam needed to leave his personal

motives behind. God would use him, but it was important that he follow God's orders.

So Balaam continued his journey and eventually came to Balak the king of Moab. The king didn't waste any time and immediately asked Balaam to curse the Israelites. But Balaam didn't forget what God said and reminded Balak that he would only be able to say the words that God gave him. After the sacrifice of several bulls and rams, God gave Balaam his first message. We can read it in Numbers chapter 23 verses 7-10:

*7 And Balaam took up his discourse and said, From Aram Balak has brought me, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains: Come, curse Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel! 8 How can I curse whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced? 9 For from the top of the crags I see him, from the hills I behold him; behold, a people dwelling alone, and not counting itself among the nations! 10 Who can count the dust of Jacob or number the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the upright, and let my end be like his!*

Balak was furious because he was paying good money to Balaam. But instead of cursing Israel Balaam blessed them. The king of Moab was a stubborn man and so he took Balaam to another hilltop. From there they looked down upon the Israelites, offered more sacrifices, and waited for God's next message. Unfortunately for Balak, the next message was also a blessing. Now any person in their right mind would probably realize that this was an exercise in futility. It didn't matter how much he paid or how many sacrifices he made, God wasn't going to curse what He had blessed. But Balak, the king of Moab, wasn't in his right mind! So he took Balaam to another hilltop and begged him to curse Israel. Let's read what happened in Numbers chapter 24 verses 3-9:

*3 and he took up his discourse and said, The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor; the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, 4 the oracle of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision*

*of the Almighty, falling down with his eyes uncovered: 5 How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel! 6 Like palm groves that stretch afar, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that the LORD has planted, like cedar trees beside the waters. 7 Water shall flow from his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters; his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. 8 God brings him out of Egypt and is for him like the horns of the wild ox; he shall eat up the nations, his adversaries, and shall break their bones in pieces and pierce them through with his arrows. 9 He crouched, he lay down like a lion and like a lioness; who will rouse him up? Blessed are those who bless you, and cursed are those who curse you.*

This blessing sounds familiar. Do you remember what God said to Abraham? He said that his seed would be like the stars and sand on the seashore. He said that He would bless those who blessed and curse those who cursed Abraham. God was making it clear that He had a covenant with Israel, the same covenant that He had with Abraham. **Let us not forget that the main goal of that covenant was to bless the whole world!**

Now up until this point, Balaam had only made one mistake and after repenting of his sin he did what God asked him to do. But Balaam wasn't finished. He knew that he couldn't curse Israel because God wouldn't allow it. But what if he could get them to sin and fall out of God's favor? God never warned him against that! So Balaam went to Balak, the king of Moab, and explained his plan. They could send Moabite women into the Israelites' camp to seduce them into sexual immorality and idol worship. You may be thinking to yourself:

“Well now wait a minute. You mean to tell me that the Israelites, after all they had been through, would turn against God? That is impossible!”

But that is exactly what happened! And Balaam was involved every step of the way. We can read about it in Numbers chapter 25 verses 1-3:

*1 While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. 2 These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.*

What Balaam couldn't accomplish in words, he did in actions (see Numbers 31:16). Not only had the Israelites turned their backs on God, but they had also broken the first and seventh commandments of God's law. They worshipped other gods and committed adultery. Needless to say the consequence of their sin was great. A terrible plague raged through the camp and 24,000 people died.

Shortly thereafter, God ordered the Israelites to form an army and destroy the Moabites and Midianites. Both of whom had tempted the Israelites and openly rebelled against God. When the dust settled and the battle ended, Balaam was found among the dead. He thought that money and fame could bring him happiness. But he paid a high price for such a short lasting success. He would forever be known as the prophet who betrayed God.

Now, let's return to the Turkish fable that we referenced at the beginning of the lesson to gain a better understanding of Balaam's mistake.

While the poor man from our first story was still celebrating his first success, the Sultana called for him. She too had lost a ring and wanted the poor man to find it.

“My ring has disappeared and I want you to find it. If you don't find it by tomorrow morning, you will die.”

She then had the “hoja” arrested and thrown into prison. The “hoja” immediately fell onto the ground and started crying.

“What have I gotten myself into? How will I ever find her ring? I am a dead man!”

At the same moment, a young servant could not sleep because she was afraid of being caught. She had stolen the ring and wanted to confess her crime to the "hoja". So she risked her life by going to the prison and told the hoja everything. The hoja realized his fortune had changed and said:

"Don't worry young girl. Find a duck in the garden and let it swallow the ring. But be sure to break its leg."

The young girl snuck out and did exactly what he said. The next morning the hoja was called before the Padishah and he said:

"Master, let it be known in all the land that I have found your ring. If we go to the garden I will give it to you."

The people began to whisper as they walked to the garden. The hoja started to scribble on his paper and stopped briefly to look at the birds. When he saw the limping duck he told the king:

"Master, kill that limping duck and you will find the lost ring inside it'."

The Padishah ordered that it be done and to everyone's amazement the ring was found.

Those of you who are familiar with this story know that the poor man became a very respected hoja. And while we may admire the wit and wisdom of the poor "hoja" in this story, deception is not a joke in real life. Deceit in a fable may be funny, but deceit in real life is a cursed sin. Balaam's actions prove to us that lying and cheating in real life push us away from God and towards the darkness of eternal doom. Unfortunately it is true, motivated by the desire for wealth and power to do evil, even a prophet isn't immune to the temptation of sin!

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. What should the poor man have done differently? Was there anything wrong with what he did?
2. How could Balaam do wrong after God had spoken to him so many times?
3. Does it seem strange that a prophet could sin and actually disobey God?
4. What should Balaam have done the first time the men came to him?

## 15

FULFILL YOUR  
POTENTIAL

*God always sees our potential and wants to build on it.  
Will you let him?*

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What have you done in your life that has required you to be brave? We all must learn to defeat fears, meet challenges, and step up to hard situations. Therefore life requires a certain level of bravery. How can you overcome the fears of school exams, a new job, or of quitting smoking? The brave one is the one who dares to challenge the very thing that by nature he would shrink from. That doesn't mean the brave person doesn't feel any fear, but rather we get braver as we step from one challenge to another. No one can learn bravery if they never have to face something challenging. God may ask you someday to do some brave thing. Are you ready to step up and meet the challenge?

Suleyman the Magnificent's father was called "the Brave" because he had pushed the Ottoman Empire across Arabia. Now Suleyman was expanding the empire even further by pushing toward the north and overtaking Hungary. All of Europe was afraid of Suleyman because they had heard of his amazing accomplishments.

Although it was not really Roman, holy, or an empire, at that time Europe was controlled by the Holy Roman Empire. Instead of being a vast territory under the control of a central government, we actually know that it was a conglomeration of nation states controlled by the Catholic Church. And it certainly wasn't "holy" as it is common knowledge that the Catholic Church has been filled with dishonest

politics, plots and intrigue, murder and scandal for over a 1000 years.

But there is a backside to Suleyman's accomplishments that is little known. Suleyman the Magnificent, in his war against the Holy Roman Empire, had an unusual partner. A great man who fought as valiantly as Suleyman did. History shows that although they never met, they were allies against the same foe. The man's name was Martin Luther and he lived in Germany in the early 1500's. Unlike Suleyman who waged his battles with the sword, Martin Luther chose to fight with a pen. But it was a powerful pen! The impact of Martin Luther's words upon the enemy were as powerful as the iron balls fired from Ottoman cannons. How did he help the Ottoman cause? We'll it happened this way.

Martin Luther's father wanted his son to become a lawyer, but the boy was plagued by fear that he would burn in hell and insisted on becoming a priest. But becoming a priest did not relieve Martin Luther's fear of damnation - instead it only increased his anxieties. Sometimes he would stay in the church long hours praying, counting prayers on his prayer beads, fasting for days, and beating his back with a whip, hoping in some way to account for his sins and earn a place in paradise.

At that time the Church of Rome was selling something called "indulgences." Basically, people could pay money to receive forgiveness for sins. You can guess how much money the Catholic Church collected from this! The poor people were taught that if they didn't give money, they would likely stay in a place of torment for a long time. What do you think they used the money for? Some of it was used to build up the grandeur of the Vatican. But they also used a lot of it to arm soldiers in the fight against the Turks!

Now, Martin Luther visited Rome wanting to earn freedom from the sin and threat of punishment that tortured his conscious. When he got there, he was shocked to find a city full of idols, brothels, and people selling religious trinkets, such as crosses, pictures of saints,

and supposed slivers of wood from Jesus' Cross. As a result, Luther returned to Germany more confused than before. Wanting to find answers to his questions, he began reading the Holy Bible. In it he found the exact opposite of the practices he had seen in Rome. Then he read these words of scripture:

"The just shall live by faith."

It struck him like a lightning bolt. "Faith!" Not by long prayers and touching the graves of saints. Just like Abraham, it was possible for him to also live by FAITH. Luther who had been so fearful of hellfire, now found escape. He realized that his fear was based on the reality that he could never do enough good deeds to fulfill God's expectation. But faith, that was simple. **All he needed to do was believe and trust in God.**

His soul became so brave in this new found truth, that he was willing to risk his life to reveal it to others.

At that time the Roman church killed anyone opposed to her views. Nonetheless, Luther made a huge poster writing 95 faults with the Roman papacy and priesthood. To prove the truth of each problem he had identified, he provided evidences from the Holy Bible -- the word of God. When he was finished writing he boldly nailed it to the main door of the University in the center of the city!

The truths written on that piece of paper nailed to the door, swept through the city like wild fire. The hearts of all those who had been held spiritually captive, just like Luther, were finally freed from fear. Faith sprung to life. It became one of the first publications to meet the new invention called, "the printing press." The 95 Thesis, as they became known, first spread across Germany and then all of Europe. It exposed the lie that people could buy salvation and made invalid the promise that money or good works could earn a place in heaven. What do you think that news did to donations toward the Catholic Church? Suddenly the income died and there was no money to fund the war against Suleyman the Magnificent.

In addition Rome's attention was split in two directions. They had a new enemy called "Protestantism."

Though it may never have been Luther's aim to link arms with the Turks, the end result was they became unknowing partners. By taking the word of God as true, God quenched this man's false fears, and then used him to wound one of the most powerful entities of his day. His stand against idolatry and false religion, helped to destabilize the greatest enemy of the Ottoman Empire.

There is a fascinating story in the Bible about a man who was very much like Martin Luther. His name was Gideon. He lived after Moses and Joshua had died. The people had already conquered the land of Canaan, built houses, planted vineyards and began to live on the land. Unfortunately, in this comfortable state, the people began worshipping idols! Here is where Gideon's story begins. Let's read Judges chapter 6 verse 1:

*1 The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years.*

The Midianite raiders had turned daily life upside down. Harvest time had turned into a time of terror. The Bible says in Judges chapter 6 verses 3-6:

*3 For whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. 4 They would encamp against them and devour the produce of the land, as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel and no sheep or ox or donkey. 5 For they would come up with their livestock and their tents; they would come like locusts in number--both they and their camels could not be counted--so that they laid waste the land as they came in. 6 And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the LORD.*

Now it so happened that a young man named Gideon was working in a winery. Oddly, he was working there in early summer when there

wasn't a grape in sight anywhere! What was this fellow doing at a winery with no grapes? He was secretly threshing wheat. You see, he was afraid and hiding where he thought the raiders would least suspect to find him. But God knew where he was! Let's continue reading in Judges chapter 6 verses 12-14:

*12 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor." 13 And Gideon said to him, "Please, sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian." 14 And the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?"*

Did you notice the angel of the Lord greeted him by calling him a "man of valor?" God obviously saw Gideon as something other than a fearful young man. It is amazing how God always sees our potential and wants to build on it. We can read Gideon's conversation with the angel in Judges chapter 6 verses 15-23:

*15 And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." 16 And the LORD said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man." 17 And he said to him, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. 18 Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you." And he said, "I will stay till you return." 19 So Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them. 20 And the angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour the broth over them." And he did so. 21 Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of the staff*

*that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. 22 Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face." 23 But the LORD said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die."*

The angel's visitation was a tremendous experience that gave Gideon much courage. The Bible tells us that God appeared to Gideon that night and gave him his first assignment. It was a daring assignment, as it tested Gideon's loyalty to God over his own family. He was to go out at night and tear down his own father's idols, one to the idol Baal and the other to the mother goddess. Then he was to build an altar and sacrifice his father's prize bull to the true God, the Creator of heaven and earth. Before Gideon fought the Midianites, he had to make certain his own people were rightly following God. Let's read about it in verses 25 and 26:

*25 That night the LORD said to him, "Take your father's bull, and the second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it 26 and build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of the stronghold here, with stones laid in due order."*

Gideon took ten men and did exactly as the Lord had asked. In the morning all the town's people were furious when they saw the shattered idols. They demanded to know who had torn down the statues. When they found Gideon's father they said,

"Bring out your son, that we can put him to death."

But Gideon's father was wise, he said, "If Baal is a god, then let him defend himself! If these things you called gods were true, then do you need to come to their rescue?"

Of course there was no power in the false religion. People following superstitions and lies often get angry when someone challenges their

false beliefs because they are ashamed of the fact that their religion is actually powerless. Truth has its own power and it doesn't need to be supported by human force or violence.

After Gideon cleaned up his neighborhood, He wanted some reassurance that God was with him. So he again asked the Lord for a sign. We can read about it in Judges chapter 6 verses 36-40:

*36 Then Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, 37 behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said." 38 And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. 39 Then Gideon said to God, "Let not your anger burn against me; let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more with the fleece. Please let it be dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground let there be dew." 40 And God did so that night; and it was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew.*

The miracle that Gideon witnessed gave him all the more courage to move ahead. Bold actions require an inner confidence that what one is doing is right. Gideon could be brave when there were signs and miracles. But how would he respond if God asked him to do reduce his army to half its size? What happened next was an amazing act of faith. Let's find out in Judges chapter 7 verses 2 and 3:

*2 The LORD said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' 3 Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.'" Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained.*

Can you imagine Gideon lying on his bed at night pondering the events of the day when 22,000 of his soldiers were sent away? If ever there was an opportunity for fear this was it. But it seems Gideon's faith stood strong. **God wanted Gideon to know that it doesn't matter how many are on your side but WHO is on your side.** But, God wasn't finished with stretching Gideon's faith. Let's see what happened next in Judges chapter 7 verses 4-7:

*4 And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' shall not go." 5 So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink." 6 And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men, but all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water. 7 And the LORD said to Gideon, "With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home."*

Now Gideon had just 300 men to go into battle with against a massive army. God had reduced the army to such a degree that everyone who heard the news would know that the battle was won not by military strength, but by faith in God.

That night God told Gideon and his men to carry trumpets, earthen pots and torches. These are strange weapons for war! Then they were to wait in the dark around the camp of the Midianites. Thousands and thousands of the enemies' tents were below them. Gideon divided the men into three groups of a hundred and they perched on the hills in the darkness waiting for the signal from Gideon. We can read what happened next in Judges chapter 7 verses 19-22:

*19 So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch,*

*when they had just set the watch. And they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands. 20 Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow. And they cried out, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" 21 Every man stood in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled. 22 When they blew the 300 trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army. And the army fled.*

In a moment 300 pots crashed to the rocks. The Midianites' hearts melted as they looked at the thundering mountains and saw the lights of what they imagined were thousands of soldiers. The torches pierced through the night sky, terror seized their hearts, and in confusion they began to fight against themselves! God had used Gideon's willingness and turned it into bravery and victory for his people.

Here is a final story of bravery from a village not so far from you.

Kenan's father had been an alcoholic. The villagers had told Kenan from the time he entered elementary school,

"Your grandfather was an alcoholic, your father is an alcoholic and you will be an alcoholic."

Sure enough, after Kenan got into high school he drank his first beer. But that was just the beginning. Soon, rakı became Kenan's best friend, or should we say his worst enemy, until he turned 37. At age 37, something happened that changed Kenan's life and saved his family's happiness.

On a bus trip, Kenan met an Ankara businessman who had broken free from alcohol. Never before had Kenan thought it possible that he could be different than his father or grandfather. But oh, how badly he wanted to be free! He had hurt his wife and now he had begun hurting his little boy. As hard as he had tried to quit drinking, the truth was that the bottle was his master. As Kenan listened to

the Ankara man's story, he started to believe that he too could be free. This business man shared step by step the seven secrets of his success. The Ankara man told Kenan,

"The first thing you must know is that you do not have power in yourself to quit. You don't have power to push this bus, you don't have power to fly a plane, and you don't have power to quit alcohol. God, however, can give you that power."

He told Kenan, "Your human effort isn't enough."

Kenan knew it was true because he had tried to quit before. Then the man wrote down the first secret on a bus napkin and talked about it. After that he wrote down all seven secrets and handed it to Kenan before the two parted ways. That hour, that day, that moment he made a brave determination in his heart to follow the seven secrets at any cost. Today Kenan is free, happy and a new man.

What was this man's fear? He was afraid that he couldn't overcome the inherited inclination to be just like his dad and grandfather. His new start began when one day he believed someone who said that he could change by faith in God alone.

Luther and Gideon and Kenan all had one thing in common in their stories of bravery. Each made a decision to be brave and face a challenge and each of them gained the victory over their fears by an unseen power. That power came to them through the action of faith. If Luther had been a positive thinker and believed in himself, would that have overcome his fear of death and hellfire? If Gideon had only believed in himself would the Midianites have fled? If Kenan had only believed in himself would he have overcome alcohol? We can have faith in the wrong thing and gain no victory. In each of these cases the victory came not because they had a faith in themselves. It was by faith in God that miraculous bravery was born. That real power over every evil thing comes from God. This is true bravery, the bravery that overcomes the world. And it is yours by faith. Won't you ask God to strengthen your faith today?

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Do you think God can make a person brave?
2. Martin Luther left the priesthood and for the rest of his life fought against the religion that he had been a part of. What was the turning point that made him brave?
3. Gideon asked God for a sign. What are things we can learn from Gideon about asking God for signs?
4. Gideon received a clear sign with the wet fleece. Do you think that made it any easier to watch his army be narrowed down to 300 men?
5. Pray that God will give you bravery when you need it most.

# 16 THE IMPORTANCE OF MAKING THE RIGHT DECISION

*Does God really give us the freedom to choose our future?*

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How much freedom does God give us to make choices in our life? Does God direct our every movement like someone operating a remote control car or plane? A remote control car can only turn when the operator commands it to. Can we only do what God has predetermined or tells us to do?

For example, does God determine where we will go to school, our occupation, and even who we will marry? Does God determine beforehand how, when, and where we will die? To what extent do our actions and choices play a role in what happens?

Does God give us freedom to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes? How can we know? If God does give us a choice in our lives, will He help us make the right choices to avoid unpleasant circumstances?

We will look at a story today from the book of 1 Samuel where God does permit something to happen against His own expressed wishes. Why would the God of the universe who holds all power in His hands, who can create or destroy anything by merely speaking a word, allow something to happen against His will? There are several reasons why God might allow something to happen that is not according to His will. To help understand one of them let us consider the following story.

Aylin was dressed all in white. The color of the dress was in deep contrast to her black hair and hazel eyes. She had looked forward to this day her whole life. As she looked into the mirror she shifted the shoulder of her dress to make sure it was just in the right place. She gave one last long look and then smiled. Everything seemed to be alright. Just then she was startled by her father's voice behind her.

“Aylin.”

“Ah! Ödümü patlattın Baba. Yes, father.”

“Aylin, I want to talk to you alone for a minute.”

“O.K. father we are alone. What is it?”

“Aylin, you look very beautiful in your wedding dress.”

“Thank you father. I was just checking to see how it will sit on my shoulders.”

“It looks beautiful. Aylin, your wedding is just a week away. The guests are invited and the menu is set. We will go to the wedding salon soon.” Her father paused a long time. “Aylin, it is not too late if you don't want to marry Hakan.”

Aylin looked at her father carefully. His eyes were soft. His voice had been low and tender as he spoke to Aylin. Aylin knew her father loved her and wanted the best for her. Her father was concerned about Aylin's fiancé because he thought Hakan was not a man of character. He suspected Hakan would be lazy and manipulating. From the very beginning of Aylin's relationship with Hakan, her father had not wanted them to be married.

“Thank you father. I know you want what is best for me. But, I am going to marry Hakan.”

Aylin's father looked into his daughter's eyes to see if there was any hesitation in her decision. Aylin had been a good student in school; she finished METU before she was 21 years old. He respected his

daughter's intelligence and her right to make a decision. He knew that he could have fought Aylin about this marriage and tried to prevent it. But what would it do to his relationship with Aylin? How would she recover from the emotional battle that would ensue? How could he ever prove to her that the marriage would have been bad?

The truth is that he could never prove what had never happened. She would always wonder what would have happened if she had married Hakan, especially if her marriage to someone else did not go well. Aylin's father knew Aylin was a strong-willed woman. He smiled meekly and kissed his daughter's forehead.

“O.K. Aylin.”

After the wedding Hakan became a different person. It was as if Aylin had never met the man she was married to. He would not let her go anywhere without his permission. Hakan took all the money Aylin made and spent it on nice clothes for himself. Sometimes he unexpectedly bought fish in the marketplace which he expected her to cook and clean immediately. The refrigerator was almost always empty and Aylin often called her father to get money to go to the pazar. Hakan would go late to work and come home early. There was never any money. Hakan refused to let them have guests and there was a gloomy atmosphere in their home that never lifted.

After a having a child and struggling for years to make the marriage work, the coldness and unhappiness in the marriage increased. Hakan and Aylin agreed to divorce. Aylin didn't know how to explain it to her father. But she didn't have to, he already knew it was coming. When her father came to get her things and help her move back into the home, he said no scolding words to Aylin. He did not say, “I told you so!” He was just sad.

Aylin's father had respected Aylin enough to let her make her own decisions in life, even when he disagreed. And he never forced his own will upon her.

As we will see later, sometimes there are other reasons that a parent may let a child choose a course that the parent thinks is wrong. In the following Bible story let's see how God relates to His people when they want to do something contrary to His will. Surprisingly, God allows His people to do what they want. Does He allow it because He respects them to be able to make a decision? Perhaps there is an element of that here. But as we will see, the situation is not quite like Aylin's and her father's. There is an added dimension. Let's start by reading 1 Samuel chapter 8 verses 1-7:

*1 Now it came to pass when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges over Israel. 2 The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. 3 But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice. 4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, 5 and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." 6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." So Samuel prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.*

After Joshua brought the Israelites into the promised land, the people faithfully worshiped God for many years. But after Joshua's generation passed, a new generation rose up and the people began to worship other gods. After they started worshipping other gods, the God of heaven being true to His covenant, removed some of His protection and blessings. As a result, the people fell prey to their enemies. Then God raised up judges for Israel. The judges' responsibilities were to lead the Israelites in battle, make important decisions, and govern the people according to the law of God. They were God's appointed helpers but they were not kings. God was their king!

Soon after God delivered the Israelites from their oppressors, the people would once again return to idolatry. Then the whole cycle of oppression by their enemies, their crying to God for deliverance, God delivering them through the hand of another judge, and the return to idolatry would continue. And thus it went for centuries. At last Samuel was judge in Israel. Although he was a godly person from his youth, his sons did not follow in his footsteps. They were not good judges and difficulties arose. In the previous verses we saw that God had clearly declared that He Himself was king and that the people were rejecting His kingship. God had many reasons why He didn't want the people to have an earthly king. But He gave permission anyway. Why?

It wasn't the first time that God allowed the Israelites to do something that was against His expressed will. Do you remember when the Israelites desired flesh food? God had already given them manna from heaven. It was not meatballs (note: pick the most liked food of a culture), but they weren't starving and as long as they ate it they would not be sick. However the people continued to complain. So, God decided to give them what they desired. Unbeknownst to them, the meat came with a judgment and many of the people died while the flesh was still in their mouths. In other words, God gave a rebellious group of people what they wanted even though it was against His will. Why? Let's find out by reading 1 Samuel chapter 8 verses 8-20:

*8 "According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day -- with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods -- so they are doing to you also, 9 "Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them." 10 So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who asked him for a king. 11 And he said, "This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his*

*chariots. 12 He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, will set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. 13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. 14 And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. 15 He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants. 16 And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put them to his work. 17 He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. 18 And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the LORD will not hear you in that day." 19 But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, No! But there shall be a king over us, 20 that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.*

The description of what a future king would do was a warning to the people. God was giving them an opportunity to change their minds. But they would not listen and refused to obey the voice of Samuel who was obviously resisting their desire for a king. Think about what they were rejecting! They had a king for their country who was all powerful, all knowing, who had taken them from slavery and given them the land. And that King was in heaven. All this they were rejecting for an earthly kingdom.

Let's see how God responded in 1 Samuel chapter 8 verses 21 and 22:

*21 And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he repeated them in the hearing of the LORD. 22 So the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed their voice, and make them a king." And Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Every man go to his city."*

Yes, God would give them their king. If you read ahead in your Bible you will learn of Israel's first king Saul. Saul started out on the right track, but as you will read, the prophecy about what kings

would do, one by one began to be fulfilled. In a future lesson you will read about how far off track that king actually went. Israel was stubborn. What do you do with a stubborn child who just doesn't listen? Consider this story.

Ferdi was 7 years old and the youngest of Osman's three sons. One day the four of them were walking home from the fields along the roadside. Across the street was a large cream-colored dog. Osman said to his sons,

"Don't go near that dog. He bites."

The older boys stayed near their father. But Ferdi was different. He immediately went toward the dog. Osman followed right behind his son because he knew his son's behavior well.

Ferdi came up to the dog and tried to put his hand out to pet the dog. The dog snarled and tried to bite Ferdi. Just at the right time, Ferdi's father pulled his son's arm back and saved him from a nasty bite.

"Son, why don't you listen to me?" his father said. "Didn't I tell you that the dog would bite you?"

The group continued on toward the house when they came across Abdullah amca watering his cherry orchard from the canal system. There was water over the whole orchard. Ferdi headed straight for the field.

"Don't get in that water Ferdi. You don't have boots on. Your shoes will get all messed up and your mother will kill both of us" his father said. "You won't be able to play in the soccer match tomorrow with wet and muddy shoes."

But again Ferdi didn't listen. He kept on going towards the field. This time Osman didn't chase after his son. He watched as Ferdi climbed over the water channel and into the field. He sank in mud right up to his knee.

"Dad, pull me out of here, I'm stuck!" he cried.

Ferdi's father and older brothers went over and pulled him out of the mud. Ferdi's shoes were wet and muddy. It was only a short walk back to the house and when they arrived Ferdi's mother was watching them from the balcony. Her words weren't directed to her son but to her husband.

"Osman, what is the matter with you that you don't look after your son? Look at the shape he is in! What were you thinking?"

"Cemile, you know your son is stubborn and won't listen. The only way he learns is by suffering. I didn't let him get bit by a dog but I let him sink in the mud!"

Ferdi's mother said, "You won't play in the soccer match tomorrow with those muddy shoes. And you won't even be able to watch the match. As wet as you got you need to stay home or you'll get sick."

What do you do with a stubborn child? The answer to that depends on what you want. If you want the child to remain dependent on you for everything the rest of his life you simply give commands and force obedience. But if you want the child to grow and develop and to be able to make decisions for himself, the child must learn to think independently of you. And that requires giving the child opportunities to learn and make mistakes. Sometimes you let them learn by suffering the results of their actions. But you don't want a stubborn child to suffer permanent injury in the learning process. So you limit the freedom you give to that child to make mistakes. You allow them to be uncomfortable at times so that they will learn to reason from cause to effect. You may let them get their shoes muddy. But you don't let them get bit by a dog.

We see that God allowed Israel to make a mistake in choosing a king. God warned Israel what would be the consequences. But they were stubborn and demanded a king anyway. They wouldn't listen to God. It seems that Israel would not learn any other way; they must learn by suffering the consequences of bad choices.

Does God allow us to make choices? Certainly He does. God told Abraham to go to Palestine. Abraham was allowed to wander in the promised land wherever he wanted to go. God did not tell him under which tree to sit.

Abraham told Abimelech and Pharaoh that Sara was his sister (Genesis 20: 2, 3). That wasn't God's will. But God allowed Abraham to make that wrong choice and hopefully learn from the mistake. Abraham said to Lot in Genesis 13:9:

*"Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left."*

God allowed these two men to make choices.

Since God allows us to choose, it follows that we are able to make wrong choices. How important is it for us to ask God to guide and lead us? How important is it that we make correct choices? How can we make correct choices? First, we can learn the ways of the Lord in the scriptures and live our life accordingly. When we stray outside of righteousness we can expect negative results to soon follow. The most basic of which is that if we stray away from God we can expect only negative results. Second, we can pray for guidance and by faith believe that God will help us. Third, we can take the nation of Israel as an example and not stubbornly persist to have our own way. Unlike them, let's yield to God's way.

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Why do you think the Israelites were so insistent on having a king “like other nations”?
2. Have you ever ignored some good advice? When? What were the consequences?
3. Samuel’s sons did not judge righteously like Samuel did. Was there any guarantee that the king would be any better than Samuel’s sons?
4. There is a saying “Ne ekersen onu da bicersin.” Are there any changes you should make in your life right now so that you will not reap negative results?

# 17 OVERCOMING FEAR

*Is it possible that fear is merely the result  
of not trusting in God?*

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**F**ear. It is just a four-letter word, and yet it has a lot of power over us. People are afraid of spiders, snakes, not having enough money, losing a lover, terrorism, earthquakes, disease and even the future. We are afraid of what we can see and what we can't see. And let us not forget death! But what if all this fear is in vain? Is it possible that fear is merely the result of not trusting in God? Let's explore that very idea.

Can's friends always thought of him as a tough man. If something heavy needed to be lifted, he could do it all by himself. He would just lean down, lift the object onto his back, and stand up. One of his friends still loves to tell what he witnessed:

"I remember that day like it was yesterday. In fact, I won't forget it until the day I die. Can picked up a refrigerator and carried it up four flights of stairs. He didn't even stop to take a break. If it were any other man, I believe it would have ruined his back forever."

But in spite of his extraordinary shows of strength, Can was still just an ordinary man. A man, who, like everyone else, found himself helpless against something he couldn't even see. No matter how hard he tried, it couldn't be beaten with strength or cunning. And there was no use in trying to hide from it because it was everywhere. So, he just followed tradition and tried to control it. Or did it control him?

Now Can wasn't a very religious guy, but he did believe in God. So when he bought his new dump truck he had "Allah Korusun" painted on the front and back. But just in case, he also had a big, blue nazar symbol painted on the tailgate. After all, he didn't want to invite any unwanted accidents or breakdowns. But his fear of the unseen wasn't only limited to material things like his house and car which also had little blue beads attached in strategic locations. It also included his wife for whom he bought necklaces and bracelets. No matter what it was, if it was of value to Can, he would protect it with a blue bead.

When his daughter Deniz was born, he attached a little blue bead to her clothes and hung a larger bead above her door. Can and his wife knew that Deniz was an exceptionally cute girl, but they thought that calling her ugly and dirty would protect her. So they continued the tradition until Deniz grew into a young woman. But one day, an old man asked Can a question that he couldn't answer.

"Can, do you believe in God?"

"Yes, of course I do! Show me a real Turk who doesn't." Can replied.

"Then why are you so afraid of nazar? Why do you hang those blue beads on everything? Don't you think that God is more powerful than a bead? Can, why don't you trust God?"

Can didn't know what to say. He just stood there for a few seconds and stared at the old man. He was never one to make excuses and after seeing the wisdom in the old man's questions, he turned around and walked away.

Throughout the Bible, there are many stories of how people overcame fear and became subjects of fear. And interestingly, **the ones who trusted God the most were the least afraid.** Perhaps the most famous story involved a young man named David who later became the King of Israel.

At the time, the Israelites and Philistines were at war. The armies had assembled along the sides of a large valley and set up camp. But neither side wanted to attack first because it would make them vulnerable. Except for the use of modern weapons and battle tactics, it was similar to the stalemates of trench warfare during World War I. And just like WWI when the soldiers would yell insults back and forth, there was a man who openly challenged the Israelites. Let's start reading the story in 1 Samuel chapter 17 verses 4-11:

*4 And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. 5 He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. 6 And he had bronze armor on his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. 7 The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron. And his shield-bearer went before him. 8 He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. 9 If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us. 10 And the Philistine said, I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together. 11 When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.*

Goliath was a huge man! If you have ever seen a professional basketball player, it is about the closest you will ever get to understanding how big Goliath was. According to modern estimates, Goliath was close to 3 meters tall. That means he would have made Shaquille O'Neal look small. Can you imagine the fear that this man created in the hearts and minds of any opponent? Well that is exactly what happened when he challenged the Israelites. So much so that every man, even King Saul, didn't know what to do!

Now in those days, it was common for the family to send provisions to the army and to get news. So David's father, Jesse, sent him with some bread and cheese. He wanted to know if his three oldest sons were okay. Let's continue in chapter 17 verses 20-23:

*20 And David rose early in the morning and left the sheep with a keeper and took the provisions and went, as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the encampment as the host was going out to the battle line, shouting the war cry. 21 And Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. 22 And David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage and ran to the ranks and went and greeted his brothers. 23 As he talked with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him.*

For a young boy, the scene must have been amazing. Tents were set up and soldiers were sharpening their swords and spears. Archers were preparing arrows while the flags were blowing in the wind. As David arrived he couldn't help but be intrigued, so he ran among the soldiers looking for his brothers. While he was speaking to them, the largest man he had ever seen walked into the valley that separated the two armies.

Once again Goliath challenged the Israelites. Just like the 40 days before, none of the soldiers responded. And it wasn't like the soldier who killed Goliath would go unrewarded. King Saul promised that he would get his daughter and riches. But it was all in vain because the soldiers' fear suppressed their desire for fame. They were too scared to act.

David, after learning of the reward, asked a powerful question:

“For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?”

David made an excellent point! The men assembled for war did not represent Israel as much as they did God. And the God that David

spoke about wasn't stone, wood, or animals. He was the living God, the Creator, and Fulfiller of Promises; the same one that exists today. King Saul's army didn't have any reason to be afraid and David knew this. But unlike most people who pretend to be brave and never do anything, David was ready to back up his words with actions. Let's continue with verses 31-37:

*31 When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him. 32 And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine. 33 And Saul said to David, You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth. 34 But David said to Saul, Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, 35 I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. 36 Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God. 37 And David said, The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said to David, Go, and the LORD be with you!*

Those are confident words coming from David's mouth. But he didn't speak out of pride and self-promotion. Regardless of the success he had as a shepherd and the victories he had won against wild animals, He knew that God protected him. And if God didn't allow lions and bears to kill him, an uncircumcised Philistine didn't stand a chance.

After hearing David speak and seeing his confidence, King Saul gave David permission to fight. But things weren't going to happen like King Saul thought. Let's read about it in verses 38-40:

*38 Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail, 39 and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them. So David put them off. 40 Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine.*

If you were going to fight a seasoned warrior would you choose the armor and sword or a staff and sling? For those of us who regularly try to solve our problems through logic and common sense, the armor and sword would be the preferred choice. But David was different. It's not that he wasn't smart; he simply trusted God. He would enter this battle with the same thing he had in the fields, the confidence that God would make him successful. Well what do you think happened next? Let's find out in verses 41-47:

*41 And the Philistine moved forward and came near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. 42 And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. 43 And the Philistine said to David, Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 44 The Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field. 45 Then David said to the Philistine, You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46 This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, 47 and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand.*

As if Goliath's size wasn't scary enough, he began to curse at David in the name of his gods trying to intimidate him. But David wasn't afraid of Goliath's size, weapons, or words. He stood in front of both armies and made it known that God was greater than any weapon, false god, or evil force. This battle was not David's, it was God's. Goliath, because of his pompousness, pride, idolatry, and defiance, was going to die the death that he deserved. Let's see how God made David victorious. We can read the outcome in verses 48-51:

*48 When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. 49 And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground. 50 So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. There was no sword in the hand of David. 51 Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.*

Reread verse 48 again. Did David stand there and wait for Goliath to get close? No, he ran towards him and initiated the attack. He was able to act because he wasn't afraid. **He didn't just believe in God, he trusted Him with his life and knew that God would protect him.** We actually see the same principle in horses.

Horses are by nature very skittish animals. They get startled easily and can be afraid of almost anything. So how do you get a horse, which is naturally afraid, to be a great racehorse or to charge into battle? Well the trainer/rider needs to work with it and build a relationship. As times goes on the horse becomes less afraid and willing to follow the lead of its owner/rider. Its fear is replaced with trust!

Before fighting Goliath, David had an experience with God. He had learned to trust and depend on the Lord. So when the situation got

hard, there just simply wasn't any room in his heart or mind for fear. David didn't see a giant, he saw God. The Philistine army, Goliath, Goliath's false gods, and the fear of defeat had no power over Him because he knew that the power of God was greater.

There are many fearful things in life. But we don't have to live a life of fear. Things like spiders, snakes, dogs, lack of money, terrorism, earthquakes, disease, and even the uncertain future are all a part of life. But they don't need to rule us or have control over us. **We just need to trust that God loves us, cares for us, and will never leave us to defend ourselves.** Instead of trusting in charms, amulets, and beads, trust in God!

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Do you think Can continued using nazar beads? Do you use them?
2. Which do you think is more powerful: the One who made human hands or the blue beads made by human hands?
3. Why was David so confident that God would protect him?
4. Why do you think David only took a sling and five stones?
5. Goliath came out for 40 days and challenged the Israelites. The things we fear in life are just like Goliath. They are constantly bothering us and holding us down. Is there a "Goliath" in your life that scares you? Is it something that keeps you awake at night, causes stress, or worry?
6. Do you think God can do for you what He did for David? If not, how can you learn to trust God more?

# 18

## STAY AWAY FROM SPIRITUALISM

*Can the dead help us to know the future?*

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What happens after someone dies? Can the dead speak to us? Can the dead help us to know the future? These are important questions. Questions that only God's holy book can answer. In this lesson we will look at the experience of a man who wanted to know the future so bad that he visited a witch to get answers from a dead prophet. Was it right for him to do so? Was it helpful for him? Did it harm him? If you have ever thought about visiting a medicine man, or yearned to have someone help you know the future through card reading, palm reading or other supernatural arts, then this lesson is for you.

In Istanbul a man and his wife held a séance in their home. They had some land that they wanted to sell and wanted advice before making a decision. After some conversation and the reading of cards, the hodja, a graying woman, asked them if they would like to see or talk to anyone who was dead. They had already received a good fortune about the land they wanted to sell and they were in quite a good mood, so they agreed. As they drank wine together they thought it would be amusing to talk to the form of a beloved actor and comedian who had died. So they sat back, sipped their wine, and waited to see what the hodja could do. It wasn't long before the form of the actor was sitting at the table and speaking with them. Needless to say, they were amazed and delighted at the chance to see such a famous person. After listening to the ghost speak and

after listening to his witty humor, they were convinced that it was the dead comedian. When the séance was over they happily paid the hodja a nice fee.

However two weeks later, while the family was watching one of the dead comedian's old black and white movies their 15 year old son suddenly began to have terrible problems. His eyes began rolling around in his head uncontrollably. He was sweating and rolling on the ground as if something were strangling him. The parents were frightened and now needed urgent help. Could the boy's problem and the family's visit to the hodja be related? As for the family, they were certain there was a connection.

To help us understand what was happening behind the scenes in this true life story, let's turn to the Holy Bible for wisdom.

You may remember that Saul was chosen to be king over Israel because he was especially tall and well built. But despite these masculine qualities he had problems with low self-esteem. Low self image made Saul jealous, easily irritable, moody and depressive. For example after David defeated the warrior Goliath, Saul should have been grateful for the youth having solved a big national problem. Instead, Saul began to think of ways to kill David! Ultimately, Saul's dark, depressive thought patterns made him vulnerable to what the Bible calls "an evil spirit." Let's begin in 1 Samuel chapter 18 verses 6-12:

*6 And it happened as they were coming, as David was returning from killing the Philistine that the women came out from all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with instruments of the triad. 7 And the women responded as they played, and said: Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. 8 And Saul was very furious, and the saying made his eyes quiver; and he said, They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed only thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom? 9 So Saul eyed David from that day forward. 10 And*

*it happened on the next day that the evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he prophesied inside the house. So David played music with his hand, as at other times; and there was a spear in Saul's hand. 11 And Saul threw the spear, for he thought, I will pen David to the wall! But David turned away from his presence twice. 12 And Saul was afraid of David, because Jehovah was with him, but had departed from Saul.*

David was especially gifted at playing the harp. He was the Orhan Gencebay of his time! King Saul would hire David to play soothing music for him, so he could relax and find relief from the evil spirit that afflicted him. But the more David played, the more bitter and angry Saul became. Saul, overwhelmed with rage and under the influence of the evil spirit, tried to kill David not once, but twice. You should have no doubt that every evil spirit's goal is to depress and destroy humans.

Moreover, it says that “Saul was afraid of David because Jehovah was with him.” Saul prayed, went to the temple, and did all the things a “good religious man” was supposed to do. But Saul didn’t have God in his heart and so he was afraid. For forty years Saul lived with this terrible hatred and anxiety which finally drove him to madness. Let's make a mental note of two things. First, if God isn't in your life, you will be full of fear. Second, hatred that is held close to the heart only hurts the one holding it. In Saul's case, both came to fruition.

Now the Philistines, who were Saul’s great enemies, had amassed a huge army. The scriptures tell us in 1 Samuel 28:5 that when Saul saw this huge army he trembled in fear. He began to pray, but God didn't answer him.

So what was Saul to do? Well, when God doesn’t immediately answer a prayer you should be patient, study the prophets, and pray more. Instead, Saul allowed his fear to compel him to do something that was directly against God's commandments. We can read about it in chapter 28 verse 7:

*7 Then Saul said to his servants, "Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "Behold, there is a medium at Endor."*

Now, this was directly against all that God had said was lawful for his people. Just as a parent might tell a child to never play with matches or a bottle of paint thinner; so too, God told His people not to mess with mediums. Let's read it in Deuteronomy chapter 18 verses 10-14:

*10 There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices divination, or conjuring, or fortunetelling, or sorcery, 11 or one who charms magic spells, or a medium, or a wizard, or one who calls up the dead. 12 For all who do these things are an abomination unto Jehovah, and because of these abominations Jehovah your God is dispossessing them before you. 13 You shall be perfect before Jehovah your God. 14 For these nations which you shall dispossess listened to fortunetelling and divining. But as for you, Jehovah your God has not consecrated you to such things.*

**God makes it clear, if you want His help and His support then stay away from witches, sorcerers, and demons.** He doesn't tell us why – other than the strong hint, that these are His enemies. Truly, if you want God as a friend, His enemies must become your enemies. There is no middle ground. Middle ground in warfare is for double agents and traitors. God's forbidding our involvement with divination is especially important today. Through television and computer games, our children are being trained by the toy and film industry to love wizards and witches. Could it be that children's hearts are being trained to love the very things God hates? We can't just ignore what is happening and call these things "games" when really they are the very thing God calls an "abomination." Be careful!

Unfortunately, Saul decided to go to a *cinci hodja* for help which is like saying, "I decided to go to the mafia to solve my financial

problems.” Of course they might help, but you can bet there will be strings attached. The truth is, the medicine man (note: use what is culturally appropriate) works with demons, and demons have only one agenda – to play with our minds until we come to a fearful end. Let's see what happened when King Saul encountered one in 1 Samuel 28 verses 10-14:

*10 “Please divine for me by necromancy, and bring up for me the one I shall say to you. 11 Then the woman said, Whom shall I bring up for you? And he said, Bring up Samuel. 12 And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman spoke to Saul, saying, Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul! 13 And the king said to her, Do not be afraid. What have you seen? And the woman said to Saul, I have seen a god-like one ascending out of the earth. 14 And he said to her, What is his appearance? And she said, An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped with a robe. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he bowed down with his face to the ground and prostrated himself.*

Here we interrupt the story to mention that what king Saul saw was not really the prophet Samuel. Nor in the story at the beginning of the lesson, was the person the family saw really the dead actor. The Bible tells us this in Solomon’s book of Ecclesiastes chapter 9 verses 5 and 6:

*5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. 6 Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.*

The dead don't know anything and don't have feelings. They can't be summoned from the dead and they certainly can't talk. **The scriptures teach us that no one will rise from the dead until the resurrection of all men at the end of the world!** So if the dead do not know anything, who appeared to King Saul pretending to be

the prophet Samuel? Well, the answer is simple. If you go to a cinci hodja, you can expect to see demons! In later lessons we will study this subject in greater detail. But for now suffice it to say, that Satan and his helpers have broad power to impersonate and even pretend to be something they are not. The demons were impersonating the form of the prophet Samuel, to deceive Saul.

As we continue reading the story in 1 Samuel chapter 28, remember that everywhere we see the name "Samuel" we should be thinking about the "demon pretending to be Samuel". Let's continue with verse 15:

*15 "And Samuel said to Saul, Why have you disturbed me to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, either by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, to make known to me what I should do."*

Then demon proceeded to tell Saul that the next day his army would lose to the Philistines. We can read Saul's response in 1 Samuel 28 verses 20 and 21:

*20 Then Saul quickly fell full length on the ground, and was greatly afraid because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day or all night. 21 And the woman came to Saul and saw that he was exceedingly terrified.*

Do you think Saul gained courage by going to this witch? Do you think he could now go into battle with confidence that he would have the blessing of God, or that he would have any hope of winning? No! The words of the demon tormented him further. How many people make the same mistake and go to fortune tellers, thinking it will help them, to have more courage?

Thus, Saul's discouragement was multiplied and his ability to lead shriveled. These are the negative results of dabbling in astrology,

palm reading and tarot cards. The dark aim of all those crafts is to plant seeds of a false destiny so strongly in people's minds that ultimately that destiny is unavoidable. Certainly for a time, the demons will lead a person along with the sweet sugar cubes of happy, romantic words. But the end is the same, confusion and death.

The next day the armies gathered in great numbers. The scriptures tell us in detail what happened to Saul in 1 Samuel chapter 31 verses 3-5:

*3 The battle was heavy against Saul; and the shooting of the archers found him, and he was writhing with exceeding pain from the shooting of the archers. 4 And Saul said to his armorbearer, Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me. But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. 5 And when his armorbearer saw that Saul had died, he also fell on his sword, and died with him.*

Yes, suicide was Saul's sad end. Dabbling in sorcery and witchcraft is like flirting with death. It is a relationship that none of us should want to be in. Demons play a cruel game. They like to coerce humans by doing a favor once or twice. But you can be sure that the third time will end in misery. Their method is reminiscent of a recent story.

A pizza seller (note: use culturally appropriate word) from a tourist city on the Aegean coast needed money badly. He had unwisely bought a high priced Audi on credit. Within the first week, before getting insurance, he hit another car. The payments to the other driver really set him back. Plus, the bank was really putting pressure on him to make payments on the Audi, which now sat unusable until he could get it fixed. Caught between these expenses, he let the rent for his Pide shop slide and he soon was four months overdue. He knew he had to do everything he could to keep the shop open. Someone asked him,

“Why don't you borrow money from a jeweler friend I know.”

But he was more than a jeweler, he was a member of the local mafia. Of course he owned a jewelry shop, but his biggest source of income was from the drug trade. So, the pideci went to the jeweler and asked for a loan. Of course he was happy to help with a little interest and the pideci took the loan. The pideci owed 7500 lira in rent which was nothing to the mafia man, but he was expected to pay back double the amount of the loan within 3 months. Now the pideci was in deep. Ninety days passed like the wind. The "jeweler" came twice in one week demanding the money. The pideci thought to himself,

“I probably have a little bit of time. If they kill me, they will never get the money. Besides, no one kills a man for 7500 lira.”

But what he didn't know was that the banker who had lent him the money for the car owed 450,000 lira to the mafia! The mafia needed an “example” to frighten the banker, so they told him about the pideci's debt to them. A few days later the banker read that the pideci had been murdered.

**Demons are Satan's mafia. These are filthy and dangerous, and the path they will lead you on leads to death. Don't take the risk of being caught in their net by watching them on films, television, and video games. God says leave them alone and do not visit their terrible workers: witches, sorcerers, astrologers, and palm readers.** Why would you want to go to Satan when you have the Creator of the Universe for help? God alone can give you what you really desire.

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. Why did Saul go to the witch of Endor?
2. Why didn't the witch recognize King Saul?
3. How do we know that what King Saul saw was not really Samuel the prophet?
4. Why would Satan want people to believe that he wants to help them?
5. People sometimes believe that they can get temporary help from supernatural workers and then escape unharmed. Do you think this is wise reasoning?

# 19 THE IMPORTANCE OF REPENTANCE

*God can forgive adultery, and murder, but there is one thing He won't forgive. What is it?*

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People seem to be fascinated with stories of other people's failures and even crimes. Some of the most popular shows on television are those where two people are fighting over their relationship, whether it be mother/daughter, husband/wife, or two sisters. News reporters comb the country looking for crimes to reveal to the public who remain glued to the television to hear every detail of the accusation. Why is that? Do we feel more moral when we see others doing things worse than ourselves? Are we really trying to justify our own goodness when we point out and discuss the failures of others?

A number of years ago an executive had an extra-marital affair with one of his unmarried assistants. The affair involved nine meetings over a period of 17 months. It was only after the assistant went to work at another office that the affair ceased. Perhaps it would have gone unnoticed but the assistant decided to share her experience with a coworker who secretly recorded the whole story. But that wasn't the first time the executive had an affair.

Prior to the affair, the executive was accused of and charged for the sexual harassment of another woman. As the case was brought against the executive, the prosecuting attorney called to court those who were believed to have had affairs with the man. The assistant was called and gave a statement in court saying that she did not

have an affair with the man. When the assistant's co-worker learned about the denial, she gave the recordings about the affair to the prosecuting attorney. Now it was the executive's turn to testify. When he was questioned this is what he said:

"I have never had sexual relations with that woman."

At that point the prosecuting attorney brought forth the recordings and also a dress that had DNA evidence that an affair had taken place. The executive was caught. He was considered by many to have lied in court, but after citing a grammatical technicality in his testimony charges of perjury were dropped. Who really cares if some executive had an extra-marital affair and then lied about it in court? It matters because the story is true and the executive was the President of the United States!

Quickly some people tried to remove the President from office. Some cried that it was just political motives that instigated the demand for impeachment. Others said,

"No, we can't have a President that lies under oath and is a womanizer."

Many people in Turkey laughed at the idea of impeaching a President over this issue.

"It's just sex. So what?" they said.

But for many Americans, a leader must be a moral man and the president's conduct was not a proper example to the nation. For many Americans, it is not macho to have an extra-marital affair. It is a shameful sin!

The president blamed his "terrible moral error" on the pressure he felt from opposing political parties and other adverse events such as the death of his mother.

The world seemed entranced by the events and the news was full of the details. But at that point it didn't matter anymore. The

President's marriage was a wreck and his reputation was soiled. A man's moment of passion became one of the biggest scandals of the 20th century. While, the assistant became one of the most well-known people in the world.

Scandals are common on TV today. What is rare in these television reports is someone confessing their guilt and expressing a deep repentance for their crime. Instead we hear people's denials and excuses for their deeds. What is the relationship between repentance and our position before God? Will God forgive big sins? What are the conditions of that forgiveness? Do we need to give money or make a pilgrimage to satisfy God? These are some of the questions that come to mind as we read the following story of one leader's fall from righteousness and his eventual restoration. What can we learn in it about the consequences of our actions and the nature of sin? Let's start by reading 2 Samuel chapter 11 verses 1-4:

*1 It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. 2 Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. 3 So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" 4 Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house.*

King David's sin began with a look. He saw something he shouldn't be watching and it enticed him to sin. Perhaps Bathsheba shouldn't have been so exposed. But David certainly didn't turn his head away. He spent time observing and his passions took control of him. It is an important lesson for us. If we spend time looking at things we shouldn't, we become more susceptible to sin and are more easily overcome by temptation. We should be careful about what we read,

watch on TV and what we listen to. Improper media can expose us to great sins.

Just like Abraham who told a lie, Jacob who deceived his father, and Moses who lost his temper and attributed God's power to himself, we see in these verses a prophet who falls into sin. Prophets are people too and the Bible does not cover up their sins or count them as insignificant. But we learn much through their experiences. How did they find favor with God after that? What were the consequences of their sins? In the case of Abraham, Jacob and Moses we saw that they suffered great loss because of their sins. Abraham was required to go through a test of obedience and offer his son as a sacrifice. Jacob had to run away from home and never see his mother again. Not to mention the deception he experienced in his marriage with Leah. As for Moses, he was not permitted to enter the promised land. **Often it is the case that one sin leads to another.** Let us see what happens as King David tries to cover his sin in 2 Samuel chapter 11 verses 5-27:

*5 And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child. 6 And David sent to Joab, saying, Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David. 7 And when Uriah was come unto him, David demanded of him how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered. 8 And David said to Uriah, Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet. And Uriah departed out of the king's house, and there followed him a mess of meat from the king. 9 But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house. 10 And when they had told David, saying, Uriah went not down unto his house, David said unto Uriah, Camest thou not from thy journey? why then didst thou not go down unto thine house? 11 And Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? as thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing. 12 And David said*

to Uriah, Tarry here to day also, and to morrow I will let thee depart. So Uriah abode in Jerusalem that day, and the morrow. 13 And when David had called him, he did eat and drink before him; and he made him drunk: and at even he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but went not down to his house. 14 And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. 15 And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die. 16 And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were. 17 And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab: and there fell some of the people of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also. 18 Then Joab sent and told David all the things concerning the war; 19 And charged the messenger, saying, When thou hast made an end of telling the matters of the war unto the king, 20 And if so be that the king's wrath arise, and he say unto thee, Wherefore approached ye so nigh unto the city when ye did fight? knew ye not that they would shoot from the wall? 21 Who smote Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? did not a woman cast a piece of a millstone upon him from the wall, that he died in Thebez? why went ye nigh the wall? then say thou, Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also. 22 So the messenger went, and came and shewed David all that Joab had sent him for. 23 And the messenger said unto David, Surely the men prevailed against us, and came out unto us into the field, and we were upon them even unto the entering of the gate. 24 And the shooters shot from off the wall upon thy servants; and some of the king's servants be dead, and thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also. 25 Then David said unto the messenger, Thus shalt thou say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another: make thy battle more strong against the city, and overthrow it: and encourage thou him. 26 And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. 27 And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife,

*and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.*

So David's sin of adultery led him to become a murderer. That is a lot worse than what Abraham, Jacob and Moses did. A prophet became a murderer! We saw in the story of Balaam that a prophet can become covetous and fall out of God's favor. Should we expect a lesser consequence for David's sin? He was the king and the specially anointed one of God.

When the President of the United States sinned, he tried to cover it up. Why? Well he certainly didn't want his wife to know. Why should he care if his wife knew? After all he was the most powerful man in the world. What could she do about it? He could just act like a macho man couldn't he?

He recognized that it would be painful for his wife and daughter if they knew of his infidelity and he would be ashamed in front of the nation. Shame is not a word we hear much of anymore. National leaders are caught having affairs and many of them are not only not ashamed, they even boast about it as if it was something to be proud of. President Clinton knew his sin would be a shame to himself, the office of the presidency, and the nation. David also knew that adultery was shameful for the king of the Hebrew nation. Remember, God had called them to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, to show the world the righteousness of the one true God. David's sin, as Israel's leader, would lower the standard of righteousness in the country. He tried to cover it up but he could not. One sin of adultery led to lying and then murder. Let's see how God dealt with King David in chapter 12 verses 1-12:

*1 Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: "There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. 2 "The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. 3 "But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food*

*and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. 4 "And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." 5 So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! 6 "And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity." 7 Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 'I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! 9 'Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. 10 'Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' 11 "Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. 12 'For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.'"*

According to the law of God, both the man and the woman caught in adultery were to be stoned to death. There is no double standard in God's law. The punishment for both offenders is the same. God is not partial when it comes to justice. Whether you are a man or woman, rich or poor, Turk or foreigner, there is one standard of righteousness. **God will judge all, small and great, before His judgment seat whether they have done good or evil.** No one should think that the woman in adultery is guilty and the man innocent.

Even if the whole land of Israel had been searched, there probably wasn't anyone who would inflict the death penalty on King David, nevertheless David deserved death, not only for adultery, but also the murder of Uriah and some of his fellow soldiers who died with him. It is interesting to note that David had had a long time to think about what he did. The child of his adultery was born and so it was a minimum of nine months later that the prophet Nathan comes to David with a message from God. It is evidence to the divine source of the scriptures that man is not glorified in them. When men write according to their own thinking they exalt themselves and hide their sins. But the scriptures do not paint such a picture. **The scriptures show that even great men, if they do not stay close to God, can fall into sin. It is a warning to all that we can not depend on our own power to overcome the evil in our nature.** No, we must constantly be on watch against temptation and rely on God for strength to overcome our tendencies to evil.

Now what would happen to the guilty adulterer and murderer David? Let's find out in verses 13-25:

*13 So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. 14 "However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die." 15 Then Nathan departed to his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became ill. 16 David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. 17 So the elders of his house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the ground. But he would not, nor did he eat food with them. 18 Then on the seventh day it came to pass that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead. For they said, "Indeed, while the child was alive, we spoke to him, and he would not heed our voice. How can we tell him that the child is dead? He may do some harm!" 19 When David saw that*

*his servants were whispering, David perceived that the child was dead. Therefore David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" And they said, "He is dead." 20 So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate. 21 Then his servants said to him, "What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food." 22 And he said, "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' 23 "But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." 24 Then David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in to her and lay with her. So she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. Now the LORD loved him, 25 and He sent word by the hand of Nathan the prophet: So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD.*

David was exposed before his whole court so the nation would know about his sin. What was David's response? He confessed his sin. It is interesting to compare David's case with the first king of Israel, king Saul. Do you remember how he was rejected as Israel's king by God? Certainly Saul's sins were not greater than adultery and murder. What was the difference? If you review 1 Samuel chapter 15 and especially verse 20 we see that Saul denied his sin when confronted with it. Even though he confessed that he was guilty in verse 24 apparently it was not heartfelt because God did not accept his so-called confession. But here David's repentance is accepted by God. However, **let us not forget that repentance doesn't negate all the consequences that result from sin.** This is an important principle for us to learn about God. He will forgive our sins when we repent but He will not always shield us fully from the negative impact of our deeds. David was not killed and did not receive the full results of his sin, but God did not stop all of the evil that would result from David's sin.

The important lesson from this story is that **God can forgive even the most terrible sins if we confess them and repent and turn away from sin.** But a shallow confession or an attempt to hide or justify our sins will never be acceptable to God. What is remarkable about this story is not the fact that a leader fell into sin. It happens all the time. The remarkable thing is the depth of humiliation, confession, and repentance that David showed and the mercy of God in accepting it.

A policeman once described how he behaves with people who have been stopped for speeding.

“I don’t usually pull them over unless they are going about 15 km over the speed limit. But when I have the radar showing they were going 15 km over, I don’t want to hear a bunch of resistance about their guilt or even lies that they weren’t speeding. If they are honest with me I give them a warning. But if they give me lies and excuses, I write them a ticket.”

Perhaps not every police officer does that, but we see that even human beings want to be dealt with honestly and are willing to forgive. How much greater is God than man! We should deal openly and honestly with God and not try to hide and cover our sins. In that way we can find mercy. There is no sin so deep or so bad that our God cannot forgive and rectify as long as we are willing to confess, repent, and turn from that sin.

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. The President of the United States is the highest position in America and the executor of its laws, but he is also subject to God's laws. Which law did he break?
2. God said that David's sin would give the enemies of the Lord opportunity to blaspheme. What did He mean by that?
3. The President of the United States was the highest official and upholder of American law, but he still came under God's laws. What law had he broken?
4. Is media a negative influence in your life? What do you think you should do about it?





