

THE FATE CHANGER



HOPE IS COMING!
III

3rd BOOK

HOPE IS COMING!



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Kaderi Deęiřtiren 3

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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 OBTAIN WISDOM

*Many attempt to better their lives by cunning.
The Bible says there is a better way. What is it?*

What is a real man? Television shows most often portray a “real man” as one who can kick down doors and solve problems with a gun. Of course, he always gets the girl. In movies the “real man” is clever and has no objection to lying, cheating, or stealing to get what he wants. But what about the wise man, the honest man, the intellectual man, the compassionate father, and the loving husband? Where do they fit into manhood? In today’s lesson we will look at the calling of King Solomon. He defined a real man as one who is looking for righteousness, loves wisdom, and turns from evil. Before we look at what King Solomon has to say about manhood, let’s read a story.

Erdoğan felt the cold hard steel of a gun barrel pressing against the back of his head. His heart was pounding as if it were about to explode. He listened to the loud drunken words behind him,

“Now I will show you who the big boss is.”

Erdoğan was a university undergraduate student. He had hopes of being a children’s doctor. For two months he had become fascinated with going out late in the evenings and playing cards. He loved the challenge of logical thought, and with his mathematical mind he had figured out a way to memorize which cards had already been played and the odds of certain cards coming up. As a result of his new method, he began to see his win ratio as higher than mere luck

would allow. Always in need of money, Erdinç thought that his cleverness and card counting system would be an easy way to get cash. So he started playing in clubs where the bets were higher.

Erdinç was usually playing with men twice his age and twice his size who liked to drink lots of rakı. Many of them were foul mouthed and had an empty darkness in their eyes. At first, Erdinç felt uncomfortable in this environment. But he stayed encouraged by remembering how many times he had won while playing poker with his university classmates. Erdinç played by the rules and in the quiet of his mind used his ingenious card counting system. People would get mad when he won 70% of the games. But what could they do? Erdinç loved the feeling of success when he was collecting all the money from the table time and time again. He was doing it with his cleverness!

He thought to himself, “If I am playing by the rules, then there is nothing they can do to me.”

That was his mistake. Now he saw clearly what these men could do to him. An angry man could kill him without thought.

In the dark street the drunk man had grabbed him. He stood behind Erdinç ready to pull the trigger. Just at that moment two men grabbed the drunk man's arm. The gun went off. Erdinç felt a terrible sting of pain in his leg.

Today if you were to visit Erdinç's pediatric clinic, you would meet an aging doctor with a slight limp. He has grown old but his injured leg is a daily reminder of his bad choice. It also reminds him to pass on some good advice to the children in his clinic. He closes each appointment by looking every child in the eye and saying,

“I will give you two keys to success. First, choose your friends well. Second, remember there is something more important than being clever.”

The children take his bait and ask with curiosity, “Doctor, what is better than being clever?”

He smiles, his grey mustache wiggles, as he reveals his secret, “Wisdom!”

The next question that needs to be answered is, "What is wisdom?" To find an answer to that question, let's open our Bibles and look at the experience of one of the world's wisest men. His name was King Solomon the son of King David.

At the end of a long reign, the much loved King David was about to die. So he called his young son Solomon to his side to give him some advice. Let's start reading in 1 Kings chapter 2 verses 1-4:

1 When David's time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying, 2 "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, 3 and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn, 4 that the LORD may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'

This is very much like the historic words spoken by Ertuğrul to his young son Osman Ghazi. Perhaps Ertuğrul read the Tevrat and Zebur himself and was inspired to share this bit of ancient wisdom with his son.

“Hey oğul, beysin bundan öfke bize, uysallık sana. Güceniklik bize gönül almak sana. . . . Ey oğul öfken ve nefsin bir olup aklını yener. Sabretmesini bil. Rabbinden önce çiçek açmaz. Şunu da unutma; insanı yaşat ki devlet yaşasın. Ey oğul, işin ağır, işin çetin, gücün kıla bağlı Allah yardımcın olsun.”

Solomon followed his father's instructions, and he did become a great leader.

In the first part of 1 Kings chapter 3 verse 3 we are told:

3 And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father.

One day, Solomon went to Gibeon where the tabernacle which Moses built was located. While in this holy place, the God of Abraham appeared to Solomon in a dream and asked him a question. Let's read it in 1 Kings chapter 3 verse 5:

5 "In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee?"

What an amazing opportunity! God offered Solomon anything he wanted. What would you ask for from God? Would you ask for wealth and long life? If you were a king, would you ask for the defeat of your enemies or a disaster free life? The possibilities were limitless and King Solomon knew that God would give him anything he desired. So what do you think he chose?

Well, we know exactly what Solomon asked for. Let's find out in 1 Kings chapter 3 verses 6-9:

6 "And Solomon said, Thou hast showed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. 7 And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. 8 And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. 9 Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern

between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?"

Did he ask for gold, health, or power? No, Solomon asked for the ability to discern between good and evil. He asked for wisdom and understanding. Let's see how God responded to his request in 1 Kings chapter 3 verses 10-15:

10 "And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. 11 And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; 12 Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. 13 And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. 14 And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days. 15 And Solomon awoke; and, behold, it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings, and made a feast to all his servants."

To say God was merely pleased is an understatement. He not only rewarded him with wisdom, He also gave him wealth and honor. The Bible says that Solomon had forty thousand horses and twelve thousand horseman. There was peace on every side of his kingdom and his reputation spread far and wide. On one occasion a great Queen, likely from Arabia, came especially to meet Solomon. Let's review the story in 1 Kings chapter 10 verses 1-10:

1 Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. 2 She came to Jerusalem with a very great reti-

nue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. And when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. 3 And Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her. 4 And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, 5 the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the LORD, there was no more breath in her. 6 And she said to the king, "The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, 7 but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard. 8 Happy are your men! Happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! 9 Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness." 10 Then she gave the king 120 talents of gold, and a very great quantity of spices and precious stones. Never again came such an abundance of spices as these that the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

King Solomon wrote down the secrets of obtaining wisdom. His book called "The Proverbs of Solomon" is packed full of advice. He explains the keys to success in business, government, and friendship. He makes known everything he discovered about how to have a good family and home life. If you haven't read Solomon's Proverbs, start now. You will find his sayings insightful. Some are even humorous, like this one in Proverbs chapter 11 verse 22:

22 Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.

See if you can find the wisdom in that statement! Others, like Proverbs chapter 16 verse 3, are straight forward and offer sound advice:

3 Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.

In Proverbs chapter 2 verses 1-5 and 7, he writes from the perspective of an old experienced man:

1 My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless."

In Solomon's Proverbs, the idea that wisdom should be our life quest rather than riches is a theme that occurs over and over again. He also repeatedly tells us that we are to hate evil and love wisdom. We can read an example in chapter 10 verse 23:

23 "A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct, but a man of understanding delights in wisdom."

Once again in the first part of Proverbs chapter 8 verse 13, he says,

13 "The Fear of the Lord is to hate evil."

What is the evil that we must stay away from? Among it's many forms, Solomon specifically mentions pride, lying, adultery, alcohol, and laziness. In fact here is the difference between cleverness and wisdom. A clever action often contains a seed of evil. Whereas a wise act never does. Cleverness often includes lying or shrewd behavior that takes advantage of another person. Whereas **wisdom is always honest, selfless, and noble.**

Yes, above all else we are to seek after wisdom. Solomon says in Proverbs chapter 3 verse 13:

13 "Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than

jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.”

Men have been amazed at jewels since time began. But God’s word tells us that whether rich or poor there is a splendid jewel that all can find. It is a jewel called wisdom.

Every year millions of people from every corner of the planet visit Topkapı Palace. When they enter room number 4, they get to see the amazing 86 carat Kaşıkçı Diamond, the fifth largest diamond in the world. It glitters in a setting of 49 smaller diamonds. But how the diamond made it's way to Istanbul is perhaps even more amazing.

Rasid, the official historian of the Ottoman court, describes its origin in this way:

"In the year 1669, a very poor man found a pretty stone in the rubbish heap of Egrikapı in Istanbul. He bartered it to a spoon-maker for three wooden spoons. The spoonmaker sold the stone to a jeweler for ten silver coins. The jeweler consulted another jeweler who knew immediately that the pretty stone was really a precious diamond. But now the Grand Vizier, Kopruluzade Ahmed Pasha, had heard of the gem. When Sultan Mehmed IV was told of the affair, he ordered the stone to be brought to the palace, and he took possession of it. No one knows what history preceded it being thrown into the garbage heap."

Wouldn't it be a sad thing to lose such a treasure? On the other hand how exciting it would be to be the one who found the diamond in the trash! Unfortunately, most people have allowed the jewel of wisdom to be lost. Don't let another day go by! Be like King Solomon and ask God for wisdom. He will certainly grant it to you.

We began this lesson by asking, “what is a true man?” Here is Solomon’s answer in Proverbs chapter 19 verses 22 and 23:

22 What is desired in a man is steadfast love, and a poor man is better than a liar. 23 The fear of the LORD leads to life, and who-

ever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm.

Let's be wise men for our wives, children, and country!

— **DISCUSSION**  **QUESTIONS** —

1. If God came to you at night and asked you what you wanted, what would you wish for?
2. In the introductory story why do you think Dr. Erdinç told the children that wisdom was better than cleverness?
3. Why was God pleased with Solomon's request for wisdom?
4. Compare the last verse of the lesson Proverbs 19:22, 23 with Proverbs 9:10, and Proverbs 8:13. What is the key to wisdom that is revealed here?

2 SECRETS OF FATE IN THE TEMPLE

*Pagan's had temples, and God had a temple. Why?
What did God want to teach?*

In this lesson we are going to look at what the Bible says about "Solomon's" Temple. The word "Solomon's" is in quotes because it was really the temple that he built for God. It was God's temple and He gave specific instructions for its construction. It is often called "Solomon's" Temple to distinguish it from another temple that was built years later on the same site. So why is it important to read about a temple built a thousand years before Christ. What does it have to do with our life today?

The temple is important for us today for two reasons. First, it teaches us many things about how God deals with the biggest problem plaguing man: sin. We have already learned that **sin brought death into the world and death is everyone's fate**. No matter how hard man tries, he can't prevent it. But God can!

The second reason, and one which we will study in future lessons, is that the temple rituals were actually acted-out prophecies concerning the future. By learning about the temple services now, we can lay the foundation for those future studies.

One thing we don't want to do is think God's Temple was similar to the many pagan temples. There certainly were similarities, but the differences are huge. To help us understand some of these differences let's look at a pagan temple you may already know about.

The temple of Artemis in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was built around 550 B.C. Perhaps you have been to Selçuk and seen the single remaining makeshift column. It looks pretty lonely standing out there in the field. Originally there were more than 100 stone columns forming a temple more than 350 feet long and 180 feet wide. Some people say the columns were 40 feet tall and others say 60. If the latter is true, it was as tall as a six-story building. Just think; they had no modern equipment to erect that massive building. How did they do it? What must it have been like to stand in the middle of that temple and see the people come to worship the goddess Artemis? Her statue would have stood there decorated with jewels and ornaments. There was a grand festival each year in honor of the goddess and it was believed that she was responsible for the city's prosperity. It formed part of a distinctly Greek cultural and political identity. You can go to the Ephesus museum in Selçuk and see a model of the temple and the actual idols that were there. It is hard for us to imagine that people really did worship a carved image like that. But they did. Did you know that the famous temple of Artemis was not the first temple there?

The first temple in the area of Ephesus was probably erected about 800 B.C. It is generally believed that it was the worship site of a fertility goddess. Years later the Greeks most likely mixed the fertility goddess's attributes with those of Artemis. They liked to think of Artemis as a virgin huntress. In time the first temple was destroyed and Croesus of Lydia built the now famous Artemis temple when he conquered the area. Visitors came from all around to worship at that great temple. It was the pride of the local people and quite a tourist attraction to be sure.

Although quite different than the temple of Artemis and built hundreds of years earlier, the temple that God told Moses and the Israelites to build in the wilderness was also the center of attention. God had given the Israelites minute instructions on building a worship center for the nation. The tabernacle, you remember, was a tent structure with a holy place, a most holy place and an outer court-

yard. Everywhere the Israelites went the tabernacle was the physical and spiritual center of the entire camp. Why? **Because God said that He would dwell among the Israelites in that tabernacle or temple.**¹ God was with them. Can you imagine that?

For 40 years God was present in the tabernacle while the Israelites wandered in the desert. After they entered the Promised Land and settled there, the worship center of the nation was still that tent. Of course, it was moved a few times but the worship services were still practiced in that tabernacle according to God's command.

After David became king and the enemies of God were conquered around Israel, David wanted to build something more glorious for the King of the Universe. Well, we know that the One who created the heavens and the earth cannot be confined to an earthly building. But because God actually appeared when he spoke with Moses, David wanted to build a temple for God that was more glorious. However, God did not permit this because David had fought in too many wars and had too much blood on his hands. The building of His temple was to be a holy work. So David gathered materials, drew up plans, and commissioned his son Solomon to build the temple. This is why Solomon and not David built the temple.

Now let's look at a few key features of the Temple in Jerusalem and learn how it was different from the wilderness tabernacle and those used in pagan worship, how it was dedicated and how it was used.

Some might wonder why we should look at this in great detail or why it is important? Well the importance of the temple cannot be overestimated. **It tells us essential truths about God necessary for salvation. It shows us how we should and shouldn't approach God during worship.** Foremost, it shows us that the human mind can never achieve the heights that God intended by contemplating or worshiping idols. If we want our characters to continually develop we must be focused on the only true God.

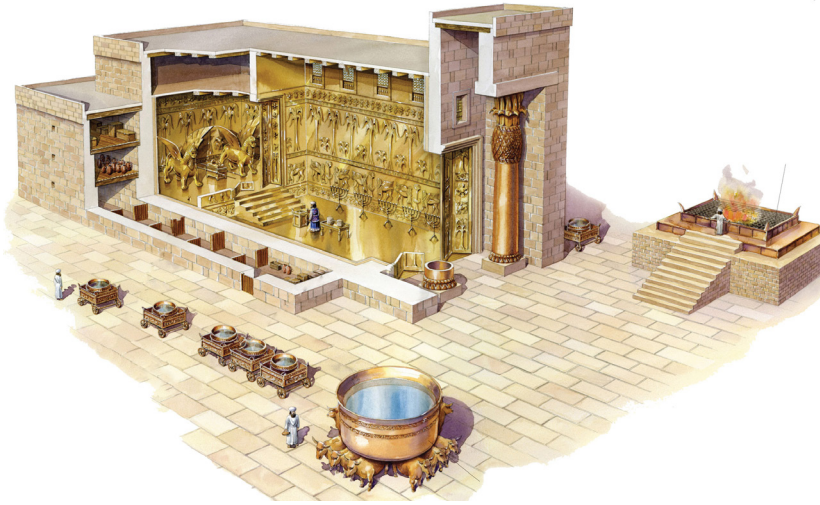
¹ Exodus 25:8

The overall plan of Solomon's Temple was the same as the wilderness tabernacle. There was the outer court with an altar of burnt offering and a laver, there was the Holy Place with the table of the "bread of presence", the candlestick and the altar of incense, and there was the Most Holy Place with the Ark of the Covenant. However, the Temple in Jerusalem was much larger.

The temple in the wilderness was a temporary shelter made of tents and curtains. The tent structure itself was 30 cubits² long, 10 cubits wide, and 10 cubits high. Solomon's Temple however would be a building of carved stone, not a tent structure. It was 60 cubits long and 20 cubits wide, making it twice as big. The inside dimensions alone were about 33 m long and 11 m wide and made of the finest cedars from Lebanon.

The furnishings of the temple were also larger and more elaborate than the ones in the wilderness tabernacle. For example the altar of sacrifice in the outer court of Solomon's Temple was so big it could not be moved around like the one in the wilderness tabernacle. There was a huge brass washbasin or laver in the courtyard from which priests took water for washing before entering the temple service. Together with this big laver there were also ten smaller ones used for washing parts of specific offerings. In the front of the temple were two columns about 10 meters high, each decorated with organic motifs called Boaz and Joachim. Unlike the wilderness tabernacle, which had one candle, the Holy Place of the Temple had 10. Additionally, Solomon had doors of olive wood covered in gold placed behind the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Finally, instead of one pair of cherubim there were two pairs of cherubim. So while the details of the temple were somewhat different than the wilderness tabernacle we see basically the same design and the same function. See the diagram below.

² There were various cubit dimensions known in those days and we do not know which one was used. A cubit could vary between 44.5 cm and 54.8 cm making that tabernacle at most 16.5 m long, 5.5 m wide and 5.5 m tall.



Now let's see how the Temple of God was different than the one in Ephesus by reading the Bible in 1 Kings chapter 8 verses 1 and 2:

1 Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. 2 And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month.

We can continue with verses 5 and 6.

5 And king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled unto him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that could not be told nor numbered for multitude. 6 And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims.

And lastly 1 Kings chapter 8 verses 9-11:

9 Nothing was in the ark except the two tablets of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. 10 And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, 11 so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

The first difference we see between the temple of God and the temple of Artemis is that **there was no idol in God's temple**. Instead there was a box containing the covenant agreement between God and His people. The covenant is called the Ten Commandments. In ancient times when people made a covenant, there were at least three copies of the covenant. Each party of the agreement had an open copy and then there was a sealed copy of the covenant kept in a secure place. If there was ever a disagreement over the contents of the open copies, the one kept in deposit could be opened in front of witnesses and the true terms of the covenant could be learned and judged.

God's covenant was very simple: If you will obey My laws and keep My commandments, I will be your God and you will be my people. God would forgive their sins and bless them.

A second difference that we see is that **God actually appeared in the temple concealed by a cloud**. If you read the Bible, you will learn that priests would die if they went in without preparation and reverence. Everyone knows that the only reason Artemis was in her temple was because someone carved her image from stone and put it there. There was nothing supernatural about it and most certainly no one will die if they look at the idol.

Let's continue reading in 1 Kings chapter 8 verses 22-25:

22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven; 23 and he said: "LORD God of Israel, there is no

God in heaven above or on earth below like You, who keep Your covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts. 24 "You have kept what You promised Your servant David my father; You have both spoken with Your mouth and fulfilled it with Your hand, as it is this day. 25 "Therefore, LORD God of Israel, now keep what You promised Your servant David my father, saying, 'You shall not fail to have a man sit before Me on the throne of Israel, only if your sons take heed to their way, that they walk before Me as you have walked before Me.'

The third difference is that **God fulfilled His promises**. And the God who fulfills promises not only let's us pray to Him, **He loves to answer our prayers!**

Let's continue reading Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings chapter 8 verse 26 and 27:

26 "And now I pray, O God of Israel, let Your word come true, which You have spoken to Your servant David my father. 27 "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!

Solomon knew that God was too great to only dwell in a building made with human hands, and that while God's physical presence would only be manifest at various times His name would always be there. We can continue with 1 Kings chapter 8 verses 28-30:

28 "Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O LORD my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You today: 29 "that Your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which You said, 'My name shall be there,' that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place. 30 "And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel,

when they pray toward this place. Hear in heaven Your dwelling place; and when You hear, forgive.

We ask God for blessings everyday, whether it is success in school, an exam, our careers, to find a spouse, to be happy in our marriage, to have children and grandchildren. These types of prayers are all good and nothing to be ashamed of. Our heavenly Father delights in us coming to Him in prayer. But the most important thing that we can pray for is the forgiveness of sins. **It is sin that separates humanity from God.** Sin is like a hole in the gas tank of your car. You can pour gas into it all you want, but until you fix the hole you won't get very far. In each of our lives, if we are to enter into paradise, the sin problem must be dealt with.

It is amazing that we can see that happening in the temple services. Do you remember how the worshipers brought an animal sacrifice to the temple? After approaching the priest, they would put their hands on the animal's head, confess their sins, and then kill the animal. The blood of the animal was sprinkled on the altar of burnt offering in the courtyard. Sometimes the priest would eat a small piece of the flesh and then go into the Holy Place. With that ritual we are see a symbolic transfer of the record of sin from the person to the tabernacle. We don't have enough information yet to see its full meaning, but there is something very important going on here that we want to remember for future lessons.

Solomon continued to speak about the sin problem in 1 Kings chapter 8 verses 31 and 32:

31 " When anyone sins against his neighbor, and is forced to take an oath, and comes and takes an oath before Your altar in this temple, 32 "then hear in heaven, and act, and judge Your servants, condemning the wicked, bringing his way on his head, and justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness.

When did the goddess Artemis ever judge between people, punish the wicked, and reward the righteous? Never!

Solomon continued to pray about forgiveness in 1 Kings chapter 8 verses 33-36:

33 " When Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy because they have sinned against You, and when they turn back to You and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication to You in this temple, 34 "then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to their fathers. 35 " When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You, when they pray toward this place and confess Your name, and turn from their sin because You afflict them, 36 "then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants, Your people Israel, that You may teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on Your land which You have given to Your people as an inheritance.

Did you notice that our sin and rejection of God can bring judgment in the form of defeat or drought? When we pray for blessings we must be sure that we are living according to God's wishes and not our own. Our prayers must be filled with repentance.

There was another important purpose for building God's temple. Let's read 1 Kings chapter 8 verses 41-43:

41 " Moreover, concerning a foreigner, who is not of Your people Israel, but has come from a far country for Your name's sake 42 '(for they will hear of Your great name and Your strong hand and Your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this temple, 43 "hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, that all peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this temple which I have built is called by Your name.

Did you notice in these verses God's intention to evangelize the world with His temple? People would hear about God and come to pray. Then God would accept their prayers. The temple was not for the Jews alone. As a worship center it would attract people from all over and they would come and learn of the great Creator, the true God. This would be a partial fulfillment of what God promised to Abraham when He said that in Abraham all the world would be blessed.³ Israel, Abraham's children, were called upon to take the knowledge of the true God to the whole world and the temple worship was a major part of that. Let's continue with 1 Kings chapter 8 and verse 54:

54 And so it was, when Solomon had finished praying all this prayer and supplication to the LORD, that he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven.

As we talk about worship it is important to note that the prophet Solomon, when he made his public prayer to God at the temple, did not remain standing. He knelt on his knees in reverence. We must always remember that God is holy and to approach Him with humility and respect. Let's read what happened next in verses 55 and 56:

55 Then he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice, saying: 56 "Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses.

There is an important truth in these verses. Sometimes we may wonder why God had the prophets record both the good and bad details of Israel's history. The answer is quite simple. God promised in the Law of Moses that if Israel obeyed His word and took the knowledge of the true God to the world, He would bless them in many ways. But He also told them what would happen if they forgot God and turned away from His covenant. The record of scripture shows

³ Genesis 12:3

that God was faithful to His covenant – both with blessings and curses. That gives us confidence that He will be faithful to us with His covenant as well. Let's go on to 1 Kings chapter 8 verses 57-63:

57 "May the LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us nor forsake us, 58 "that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers. 59 "And may these words of mine, with which I have made supplication before the LORD, be near the LORD our God day and night, that He may maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel, as each day may require, 60 "that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no other. 61 "Let your heart therefore be loyal to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and keep His commandments, as at this day." 62 Then the king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the LORD. 63 And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered to the LORD, twenty-two thousand bulls and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the LORD.

The Lord gave very specific instructions on varied types of offerings and ceremonies that were to be done at the temple. The temple worship was not left up to the decisions of men like in the temple of Artemis. He was particular because each offering and rite had meaning. We have not gone into much detail about that up until now but when we get to the New Testament we can better understand the meaning of the Old Testament temple and it's rites. But as important as Solomon's temple was, we need to keep a very important fact in mind. We can illustrate this with the following story.

In Turkey we sing our national anthem with reverence, pride and joy. When our national holidays come we see the star and crescent hanging from every building. The people who make the representations of our flag are careful to make sure that all the details are exactly right. The red must be the right color red. The star and the crescent must be

in its correct place. We do not let our flags drop to the ground nor do we allow them to be burned as other nations. We love our flag.

But we all know that our flag is not our nation. If someone were to take our flag and drop it to the ground and step on it the Turkish nation would not cease to exist. Our flag represents our nation but it is not our nation. It is a symbol of our nation and our people. To show respect and reverence for it is good and right. But the most important thing is not the flag or any other symbol of our nation. It is the people themselves.

God Himself honored the temple that was built for His glory. He worked miracles to show His approval of it. His manifestation and covenant were there. It attracted people from all over the world who eventually learned about the true God and true worship. The bleeding sacrifices told of a salvation that God would do and not man. The temple rites showed that the problem of sin and death would be solved. God's name was there at the temple, so it was holy. And yet the temple itself was not God. The temple could and would disappear, but the Creator of the universe would never disappear. Yes, God's name was at that temple and it was important. But the most important thing was the God of that temple.

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. The temple of Solomon was probably about 1/3 the size of the temple of Artemis. Why do you think God didn't tell Solomon to make His temple the biggest on earth?
2. One purpose of the temple in Jerusalem was to carry the truth of God to the whole world. What is that truth? Compared to Artemis, why would it be important for people to hear that truth?
3. Do you think the principles of the covenant (the Ten Commandments) that God made with the Israelites were for them only or do they apply to everyone including yourself? How does that make a difference in the way you behave and how you worship?

3 STAYING ON THE ROAD OF TRUTH

Hoping to be successful many break God's rules, and in the end wonder why fate has been so cruel to them. Had they only kept the rules, how might their life been better?

Have you ever tried to put something together without following the instructions? Men are notorious for this and we all probably have a story or two. Sometimes we get away with it and everything turns out okay. But usually we end up wasting time and having to start all over, albeit the next time looking at the instructions first.

But life isn't like a piece of IKEA furniture and we don't always get second chances. That is why it is important to do things right the first time. Well how can we get things right the first time? You look at the instruction manual and listen to those who know what they are doing! Let's start with a story and then read from the instruction book of life, the Holy Bible.

As Murat walked on the dusty sidewalk, he thought long and hard about his situation. He hadn't talked to Begüm in weeks, but he heard from some friends that she was kicked out of her parent's home.

“Friends! I guess you could call them that.” He mumbled to himself.

It didn't take a rocket scientist to know where this had all started. He remembered clearly when he and Begum started hanging out with a different crowd. He remembered the parties and the peer pressure. It was those same “friends” who said that Murat's problem could be

easily resolved. He just needed a little bit of money and a doctor. But Murat knew that wasn't an option. Besides, how could he go to Begüm and say such a thing? Fathering a child out of wedlock was bad enough. He didn't want to be a murderer too!

But most of Murat's real friends, that is the ones he had known since childhood, were of a different opinion and their comments were still ringing in his ears.

"We tried to tell you Murat."

"You did what? I can't believe you left her. You call yourself a man? How can you even sleep at night?"

"You don't want to know what I would do to you if she were my sister!"

At first Murat was shocked at what they said. But the more he thought about it, the more he knew they were right. He passed by the bank, walked into the park, and sat down on a bench. As he stared at the fountain, he started mentally berating himself.

"How could I be so stupid? Why did I give in to the temptation? I told her I loved her and when she needed me the most I left her. I'm a coward and a fake. I should have listened to my real friends. If only I could do it all over again."

Murat was right; he should have listened to his friends. He should have listened to his father's advice about waiting. He should have listened to that voice inside his head that said, "don't do it."

Murat was certainly not the first person to ignore advice. We all do it! Unfortunately, sometimes the consequences have a much greater effect than we ever anticipated. In one of the most unlikely places and from one of the most unlikely men, we can learn a major lesson about following instructions and taking advice. At first, you may think it is inconceivable that a man like King Solomon could find himself in a situation similar to Murat's. After all he was the most

famous king of his time. Not because of his wealth, but because he was wise.

Solomon solved disputes and gave advice. He governed his kingdom with justice and set up treaties with other kingdoms. People from other countries, often carrying gifts of cedar, gold, and fine fabrics, even came to ask him questions. But in spite of all this, at the end of his life Solomon was unhappy and cynical. He was a lonely king who had turned his back on God and realized that fame, power, wealth, and pleasure were all vanity. Like Murat, he was wishing he could have done it all over again.

To find out what went wrong, we need to look at God's original instructions for kings. Let's start in the book of Deuteronomy chapter 17 verses 14-20:

14 "When you come to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me, 15 you may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. 16 Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, You shall never return that way again. 17 And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. 18 "And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. 19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, 20 that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

There are several things in this text that stand out. First, when the Israelites were still wandering in the desert God predicted that they would want a king. He knew in advance that they would want to be like everyone else. Second, God would choose the king. We saw this happen when He chose Saul, David, and then Solomon. Third, God gave specific instructions for the kings to follow and He didn't want them to be forgotten. So the kings were to write them down, read them, and live by them. God's commands were like an instruction manual on how to run a kingdom with justice and righteousness.

The kings of Israel were not allowed to acquire horses or send people to get them. They were not allowed to marry foreign wives and they were not to acquire large amounts of silver and gold. Why do you think God made those rules?

First, God didn't want the Israelites to be involved with or dependent upon Egypt. He would provide everything that they needed. Trade and communication with Egypt might tempt them to return. Second, and also related to God's ability to provide for all their needs, was the prohibition of acquiring massive amounts of wealth. Wealth tends to drive people away from God and closer to materialism. A materialistic king can't rule with justice and righteousness because he is always looking to get rich. But why would God place a prohibition on inter-racial marriage? Let's find out by reading 1 Kings 11 verses 1-8:

1 Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, 2 from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods. Solomon clung to these in love. 3 He had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. 4 For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. 5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the

Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6 So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. 7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. 8 And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods.

Do we need to look any further? God knew the religious beliefs and practices of the Sidonians, Ammonites, Moabites, and Egyptians would destroy the Israelites. He didn't want them sacrificing their children to Molech or having sex for the fertility goddess Ash-toreth. He called them to be His people and different than those around them. That is why they practiced circumcision, wore different clothes, and avoided certain foods. If the kings, and people, of Israel married foreigners it wouldn't be long before they started acting like them and believing in their false gods. Unfortunately, that is exactly what happened with King Solomon! Not only did he tolerate their religious practices, he joined them and built places of worship. In fact, these places and false religions would continue to create problems for the Israelites for hundreds of years. So what happened? Do you think that God tolerated King Solomon's disobedience? Let's read verses 9-13.

9 And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice 10 and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the LORD commanded. 11 Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. 12 Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. 13 However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to

your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen.

God was furious. He could have destroyed Solomon right away because he had disobeyed the rules for kings. But in His mercy He allowed Solomon to live out his life and gave him a chance to repent. Besides, Solomon was destroying himself. The deeper he fell into idolatry, Solomon became a shell of the man he once was. He no longer depended on God and his spiritual wisdom became the wisdom of man. If you read Ecclesiastes, which was written by Solomon, you will see that he was a broken man. He lost his path, fell out of God's favor, and found no joy in life. Before his death, he did eventually acknowledge his sin and ask God for forgiveness. But his sin had affected his family and the people of Israel.

As a nation of unified tribes, Israel only lasted for a time period of three kings. And sadly enough, Solomon started a trend that would continue for three hundred years. The nation would be divided in two, each with their own king. These kings would fight with one another and struggle with the worship of false gods. Let's continue reading verses 29-33.

29 And at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Now Ahijah had dressed himself in a new garment, and the two of them were alone in the open country. 30 Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. 31 And he said to Jeroboam, Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes 32 (but he shall have one tribe, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel), 33 because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and they have not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my rules, as David his father did.

So how important is it to follow instructions? When it comes to following God's instructions it is very important!

There once was a tailor's apprentice who was learning how to make clothes. One day the head tailor gave him some cloth and a pattern.

"I want you to study this pattern closely, measure out the cloth, and cut it. Then I want you to sew this coat exactly like the pattern. Be sure to follow the instructions because the cloth is expensive and the customer wants the coat to last a very long time. Do you understand?" he asked.

"Yes, I understand." The apprentice replied.

So the apprentice got started right away. He looked at the pattern and measured out the cloth. But before he started cutting, he thought that if the sleeves were a little shorter and the back a little longer the coat would look nicer. Besides, that was the current fashion trend. So he made the adjustments and cut the material. While he was sewing the coat he thought to himself,

"This is going to be a nice coat. Everyone will be impressed by my craftsmanship."

The next day he went to his boss and showed him the coat. The boss looked at the coat and then looked at him.

"I told you to follow the pattern. This isn't the coat I wanted you to make. The sleeves are too short and the back is too long. What were you thinking?"

But before the apprentice could reply, the head tailor ripped off the sleeves.

"Not only did you fail in this task, you have wasted time and money. Next time you will do what you are told or you will find another job!"

For as wise as Solomon was, you would think that he could follow some simple instructions. But he didn't. **God had given those rules because he wanted to protect Israel and it's kings.** But in the end, like the tailor who thought he could do better and Murat who wanted pleasure, Solomon was an unhappy, materialistic idolater who wished he could do it all over again. Let's be different. We too have been given commandments and they are found in the best instruction manual ever written. Let's not look back on our lives and wish that we had done something different. Let's listen to King Solomon's advice which he wrote in Ecclesiastes chapter 12 verses 13-14 after he repented:

"13 The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."

Let's read the Holy Bible and live the way God has showed us.

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Have you ever tried do something without using instructions?
2. What do you think Murat should do?
3. Why did Solomon not follow God's instructions?
4. What would a country be like if they didn't follow their own rules?
5. What would the world be like?

4

A LIE IS A LIE!

*A wise man once said, "the truth will set you free."
What lies are keeping you captive?*

Lying is a way of life for many people. People know they shouldn't lie but it seems like they can't resist. From their perspective, there are many circumstances where lying seems to be helpful or necessary! They lie to their landlord, the bank, and the government. They even lie to their spouses. Oddly enough some people like to believe lies! They tell lies to themselves and it encourages them. Why would someone tell himself a lie? Today's lesson will talk about the practice, the temptation, the rewards, and consequences of lying to others and oneself.

Once there was an honest merchant who went searching for an honest land and an honest king. While traveling he met a blacksmith in a Caravan Saray that told him,

"There is a distant king of whose land I was born. My king is 'a mighty hero,' 'a humble person' and 'a man of truth'. As to his might, I know that he is mighty, since the sea surrounds his country, and on the sea stands a fleet of ships with cannon, and no ship dares approach. As to his humility, I believe it because he fights side by side with his soldiers and makes no distinction between rank. But why he is called 'a man of truth' this is curious to me and I do not know. Perhaps you can find out."

The honest merchant thought about the king all night and in the morning, he decided to make a trip to that country. The merchant

decided to learn the essence of the country before meeting its king. How do you think he could learn the essence of the country? By listening to the country's jokes of course. After all, jokes reveal the heart and character of a people.

The merchant took lots of money and went to the land whose king was told to be 'a mighty hero,' a humble person' and 'a man of truth.' He found a café, sat and realized that they were telling all kinds of stories and jokes. He understood through the jokes that the country was full of lies from top to bottom. He also saw how they deceived and misled people in commerce. He saw that when men turned to the magistrate for justice, everyone there lied and accepted bribes.

The wise merchant understood that the whole country was full of lies and deceit, and there was no truth in it. He decided to do business in the country and he let himself be cheated in commerce. He planned this as a way to get into court and ultimately meet the king who he had heard was, 'a mighty hero,' 'a humble person' and 'a man of truth.'" According to plan his case went to trial and he saw that the lower court system was full of lies and bribery.

In time, the merchant's case went to the higher court and there too, everything was a lie. Needless to say, when he reached the senate it too was full of lies and bribery. At last, he was called to meet the king himself.

He was delighted to be ushered into the king, as that was his wish from the beginning. When he came to the king he felt sure he would meet the "man of truth" he had waited so long to see. As all honest men appreciate one another, he thought he would find here an immediate friend. He told the king his thoughts,

"Honorable king, there is trouble in your land because it is full of lies, all of it, from top to bottom. And there is no truth in it!"

To his surprise. The king frowned.

“Why have you come to our land?”

The merchant replied, “Oh king, you should know that your reputation is known afar. My story is thus, I am an honest merchant and I was seeking an honest king. While I was staying in a Caravan Saray two moons travel from here, a blacksmith told me about you. He said, “There is a king who is a mighty man, a humble man, and a man of truth.”

The king said, “As to being a mighty man, I have no equal. The strength of my little finger is stronger than another king’s leg. As to my humility, it is exaggerated. It is a virtue which is easier than kindness. But as to the rumor that I am a ‘man of truth,’ I am most delighted and curious, as I have not heard this before. Who told you this?”

The merchant replied, “It is as I told you, the blacksmith from the Caravan saray.”

The king asked, “And what was the blacksmith’s nationality? Did he tell you from what land he was from?”

The merchant replied, “He was born in your great land sir.”

Then the king motioned to the guard, who drew a great sword from his belt.

“So are you saying he is a liar?” The king asked.

That is where the story ends. Sadly, the merchant was right. The kingdom was full of liars from top to bottom! This legend provides a perfect backdrop for our Bible lesson. In the book of 1 Kings we can read about the lives of Israel’s kings after Solomon, most of whom turned away from God to idols, perversion, and warfare. Only a few of them were honest and followed God. The sins of the kings quickly corrupted the people, and the character of their leaders polluted the nation.

As soon as Solomon died his son Rehoboam became king. Almost immediately he rejected the advice of his heads of state and by his shortsighted leadership ended up splitting Israel into two parts. An old enemy of Solomon named Jeroboam was appointed by the people as king of the northern part of Israel. It became known as “Israel”. While the southern part of Israel was referred to as “Judah.”

Although both kings had complete rule over their part, Jerusalem was the focal point of the people because Solomon’s temple was there. Because it was the center of worship, King Jeroboam began to fear that if his subjects (the northern people) traveled to Jerusalem they would side with the kingdom of Judah in disputes. So King Jeroboam established a false worship system by setting up two golden calves for the people to worship. Does this sound familiar to a lesson we studied in Exodus? Yes, just like the gold idol that Aaron made when Moses was on Mt. Sinai.

Let’s read the story in I Kings chapter 12 verses 28-30:

28 So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." 29 And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. 30 Then this thing became a sin, for the people went as far as Dan to be before one.

It goes without saying that their idol worship infuriated God. So He sent a prophet to rebuke and correct the king. In the Bible, we are not even told the prophet's name. But this man of God did a brave work. He courageously stood in front of that idol's gold altar where King Jeroboam was worshipping and said that God was against him and his idol. Let's read it I Kings chapter 13 verses 1 and 2:

1 And behold, a man of God came out of Judah by the word of the LORD to Bethel. Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make offerings. 2 And the man cried against the altar by the word of the LORD.

Of course no liar likes to hear someone expose their lie! It shames them and makes them the fool. An idol of course is nothing more than a lie with eyes and a body. Surely the King knew this but he wanted to believe his own lie. Let's see how King Jeroboam responded in I Kings chapter 13 verses 4 and 5:

4 And when the king heard the saying of the man of God, which he cried against the altar at Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, "Seize him." And his hand, which he stretched out against him, dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself. 5 The altar also was torn down, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign that the man of God had given by the word of the LORD.

We don't know if it was an earthquake or the hand of an angel that destroyed the altar, but we do know that the altar fell into pieces. God was with this young prophet! He had spoken on behalf of God and God immediately showed His strength. Can you imagine how frightened King Jeroboam became standing in front of that golden cow with a withered hand? According to the Bible, he was so scared that he immediately asked the prophet to intercede for him. Let's continue by reading verse 6:

6 And the king said to the man of God, "Entreat now the favor of the LORD your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me." And the man of God entreated the LORD, and the king's hand was restored to him and became as it was before.

Yes, the merciful God we serve healed this rebellious king's hand. We can learn from this that God's forgiveness is immediate and He hears our prayers for other people, as undeserving as they may be. Let's see what happened next in verse 7.

7 And the king said to the man of God, "Come home with me, and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward."

So why do you think King Jeroboam invited the prophet to eat dinner? Did he want to seek guidance about being a better king? Or maybe, as the scripture says, he just wanted to pay the prophet for healing his hand! Let's see if the prophet accepted his invitation by reading verse 8:

8 And the man of God said to the king, "If you give me half your house, I will not go in with you. And I will not eat bread or drink water in this place, for so was it commanded me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'You shall neither eat bread nor drink water nor return by the way that you came.'" So he went another way and did not return by the way that he came to Bethel.

The young "man of God" had done well because he chose to obey God's word rather than get a reward from the King. Turning down the king's offer could have cost his life, but he had chosen the straight course. But oddly, this is where the prophet's story takes an unusual twist. We can continue reading in I Kings chapter 13 verses 11-17:

11 Now an old prophet lived in Bethel. And his sons came and told him all that the man of God had done that day in Bethel. They also told to their father the words that he had spoken to the king. And their father said to them, "Which way did he go?" And his sons showed him the way that the man of God who came from Judah had gone. 13 And he said to his sons, "Saddle the donkey for me." So they saddled the donkey for him and he mounted it. And he went after the man of God and found him sitting under an oak. And he said to him, "Are you the man of God who came from Judah?" And he said, "I am." 15 Then he said to him, "Come home with me and eat bread." 16 And he said, "I may not return with you, or go in with you, neither will I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place, 17 for it was said to me by the word of the LORD, 'You shall neither eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by the way that you came.'"

It seems that the “man of God” clearly understood God's orders. God had told him what to do and he was determined to obey Him. **Likewise, we too must be clear about what God asks us to do and willing to obey.** If we are ever in doubt, we simply need to look in the Bible, especially the 10 commandments. How different the world would be if Adam and Eve had obeyed God in the Garden of Eden!

Here is where the story becomes a bit strange. It seems that the old prophet didn't respect God's orders to the young prophet. Perhaps the older man's culture of hospitality made him obligated to insist further. We don't know his motive, but we can see what happened in verses 18 and 19:

18 And he said to him, "I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'Bring him back with you into your house that he may eat bread and drink water.'" But he lied to him. 19 So he went back with him and ate bread in his house and drank water.

What is this? The old prophet wanted to host the younger prophet so much that he lied to him! Perhaps the old man remembered times when God had used him mightily. Maybe angels had visited him in the past and he wished he too had received a “word from the Lord”. Instead of accepting the fact that God didn't use him this time, he lied to bring the focus on himself.

As we read, his plan worked. The young prophet decided to go with the old prophet. We don't know if the young prophet was truly convinced by the lie. Maybe he really thought that the older prophet had told the truth. But it seems more likely that the young prophet wanted to believe the lie. Maybe he was so hungry that his desire for food overpowered his desire to obey the command of the Lord. Maybe he wanted companionship, or rest. Whatever the “man of God's” motive for joining the older prophet was, it was against God's will and resulted in a very serious consequence. Every lie

has a consequence and every time we follow a falsehood we put ourselves in a dangerous situation.

As the two prophets are sitting at the table eating, the Spirit of God suddenly came upon the old lying prophet and rebuked the younger prophet for disobeying. Let's read about it in 1 Kings chapter 13 verses 20-24:

20 And as they sat at the table, the word of the LORD came to the prophet who had brought him back. 21 And he cried to the man of God who came from Judah, "Thus says the LORD, 'Because you have disobeyed the word of the LORD and have not kept the command that the LORD your God commanded you, 22 but have come back and have eaten bread and drunk water in the place of which he said to you, "Eat no bread and drink no water," your body shall not come to the tomb of your fathers.'" 23 And after he had eaten bread and drunk, he saddled the donkey for the prophet whom he had brought back. 24 And as he went away a lion met him on the road and killed him. And his body was thrown in the road, and the donkey stood beside it; the lion also stood beside the body.

How sad that this old prophet's lie led to the death of another man. We have seen in earlier lessons that prophets are men and women subject to temptation. They are blessed by God through their obedience to God. Yet just like other men, for example Adam, they too can be punished for disobedience.

In this story we see that one man's sin, does not excuse the disobedience of another person. Children fighting will often say to their parents,

“Well, he hit me first.”

It's no excuse. One man cheating will say,

“Well everyone is doing it.”

It doesn't matter. People love to make excuses for their lies and disobedience. But no matter how much you try, excuses can't alter God's commands and believing something you know to be a lie will never bring the sympathy of God.

Let's finish this story by reading it's interesting conclusion in verses 25-31:

25 And behold, men passed by and saw the body thrown in the road and the lion standing by the body. And they came and told it in the city where the old prophet lived. 26 And when the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard of it, he said, "It is the man of God who disobeyed the word of the LORD; therefore the LORD has given him to the lion, which has torn him and killed him, according to the word that the LORD spoke to him." 27 And he said to his sons, "Saddle the donkey for me." And they saddled it. 28 And he went and found his body thrown in the road, and the donkey and the lion standing beside the body. The lion had not eaten the body or torn the donkey. 29 And the prophet took up the body of the man of God and laid it on the donkey and brought it back to the city to mourn and to bury him. 30 And he laid the body in his own grave. And they mourned over him, saying, "Alas, my brother!" 31 And after he had buried him, he said to his sons, "When I die, bury me in the grave in which the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones."

It seems that now the old prophet saw the consequence of his lie and was remorseful. How he must have regretted his sin against this young man. How he must have wished to save the young prophet's life. It seems he would have loved to have said to the young prophet,

"I lied, I am deeply sorry."

But it was too late for apologies! Fortunate for us, it is never to late to ask forgiveness from God. Sin brings consequences which God does not reverse even when we repent. In his grief over his lie he said,

“Put my bones next to this man’s bones.”

Perhaps at the resurrection he intends to make things right. When they come back to life, he will be standing next to that young man of God, ready to confess his sin, and embrace him. Do you think that might have been his reasoning?

The Bible doesn't describe the old prophet's punishment for lying, other than the grief he felt the rest of his life. But we know that God will settle accounts with lying in the judgment even though people seem to "get away" with it in this life. The consistent message of scripture is that God will certainly deal with sin just as faithfully as He dealt with the young prophet. **Therefore we need to confess our sins now while we are still alive because there won't be an opportunity at the resurrection.**

This is a very serious story and should lead us all to some deep personal reflection. We need to ask ourselves,

“What lies am I telling and how do they effect or mislead others?”

The old prophet lied for personal pleasure and convenience. He wanted that young prophet at his table! How many times do you twist the truth to try and bring about events that you desire? Or are you like the young man who really wanted to believe the lie even though it is against God’s clear word?

It is much better to live the truth and be honest. A compelling story from history reminds us of the importance of integrity .

The great Antarctica explorer, Ernest Shackleton, was once asked to tell of his most terrible moment in the icefields of the Arctic. Many cold and terrifying experiences could have been shared. But he said his worst was spent one night in an emergency hut. They were in a dangerous situation and all knew they could die. After giving out the last ration of biscuits, he laid down a short distance from the other men. A short while later, all the men appeared to be asleep.

Then Shackleton saw one of the men turning from side to side surveying the situation. The man obviously made up his mind that all were asleep. In the darkness the explorer watched the shadowy figure stretch over the next man and draw the other man's biscuit bag to himself. Shackleton said he lived through an eternity of suspense. He would not have trusted his life in the hands of that man. Did this man have the character of a thief under such terribly tragic circumstances? Was he really going to steal another man's last biscuit?

Shackleton strained his eyes to see what would happen next and was surprised as he watched the same man open his own box, take out his only biscuit, and put it in his comrade's bag. Then he stealthily put the bag back at the sleeping man's side. A secret deed of kindness. Shackleton said,

"I dare not tell you that man's name. I felt that that act was a secret between himself and God."

Everyday we live and work with lying men, lying television programs, and lying newspapers. It is easy to become jaded. Even worse it is easy to get caught up in the lie, accept it as normal, and actually enjoy it. But it is just as easy to live with integrity. Commit yourself to live truthfully, to tell the truth, and believe the truth; even if it means giving up your last biscuit to save another person. A wise man said,

“The truth will set you free.”

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. What do you think motivated the old prophet to make up the story about an angel visiting him?
2. What is the best way to set straight a lie that we have been involved in telling?
3. Can you think of any lies people enjoy believing?
4. Are you resolved to always tell the truth yourself?
5. Discuss this quote, “Glorify a lie, legalize a lie, arm and equip a lie, consecrate a lie with solemn forms and awful penalties, and after all it is nothing but a lie. It rots a land and corrupts a people like any other lie, and by and by the white light of God's truth shines clear through it, and shows it to be a lie.”
—E.H. Chapin.

5 RETURNING FROM DEATH

What can a prophet do for you?

How do you know if someone is a true prophet? There have been a lot of people throughout history, who claimed to be a prophet. Nostradamus is famous as a prophet or seer though he apparently never claimed to be one. He said he used planetary configurations of past events in a comparative way to try to predict the likelihood of future events. Some research suggests that Nostradamus often paraphrased collections of end time prophecies from many sources including the Bible that were passed off as his own. His most popular predictions were written using a mixture of different languages, word games, and a writing technique where a passage from another source is taken and given a different meaning in a present or future context. He didn't give dates to these so-called predictions and they were often so vague that they can be applied to a number of events. This may account for some of his popularity. Nevertheless, Nostradamus remains popular and his book *The Prophecies* is still being printed.

There have been many more people, less famous than Nostradamus, who have come and gone from public attention. Many of these people who claim to be a prophet gather a large following. Some write out their prophecies of the future. Others just seem to collect money and attention.

How can you evaluate if someone is a true prophet or not? We need to have some criterion for evaluation. Perhaps we can start with the story of Orhan who was searching for a doctor. Diabetes had left him nearly blind in both eyes. So he went to the hospital for some help.

"Dr. what can be done to get my sight back?" asked Orhan.

"Well, I think you will need to come to my private office. After I finish at the hospital today I will go over there. I can do a proper evaluation and tell you what you need to do."

So Orhan went to the doctor's office and paid 250 lira for an exam. When the exam was done, the doctor said,

"I think you will need surgery. But I don't do that type of surgery, so you will need to go to someone else."

Orhan felt ripped off. He said to himself, "He could've told me that at the hospital without examining at his private office. He was just cheating me out of my money."

Orhan went to another hospital to see if he could find a qualified surgeon. While there, he found a number of doctors, but none of them could do the surgery. The doctors didn't have the special training and techniques necessary for working with the veins that supply blood to the eyeball. Then Orhan went to a teaching and research hospital and found a professor of eye surgery. He said to Orhan,

"I have some advanced training in eye surgery. But the surgery you need is very particular. There is only one person in Turkey with that education and experience. He is in a hospital in Istanbul."

So Orhan packed up and went to Istanbul to find that doctor.

When Orhan got to the hospital in Istanbul, he received an examination from the doctor who had been recommended.

"You were right to come here," said the doctor. "This will be a very difficult surgery, and very expensive. How did you know to come to me? I'm the only one in this country who could do the surgery."

Orhan said to the doctor, "I went from place to place, from hospital to hospital, and from doctor to doctor to find the one who had the right qualifications. I found many doctors, but learned that not every doctor can do this type of surgery."

Orhan was right, all eye doctors are not the same nor can they all do special surgery. This leads us to ask a question. Does every prophet have the same qualifications or do the same job?

According to the Bible, a prophet is someone who represents God before the people. God communicates His will to the prophet who in turn reveals that information to the people. It may be a warning or a commandment to do something. It may be general teaching on what to do in certain situations. It could even be a prediction of future events.

Sometimes prophets are permitted by God to work miracles. But remember that God gave specific warnings to the Israelites about prophets. Not all prophets are prophets of God, even if they are performing miracles, signs, and wonders. Let's look at Deuteronomy chapter 13 verses 1-5:

1 If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 "and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods' -- which you have not known -- 'and let us serve them,' 3 "you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 "You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. 5 "But that

prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.

We see that God deals seriously with evil. Did you notice that God said even liars and deceivers might have power to work miracles? Don't believe that everything supernatural is from God! Do you remember when pharaoh's magicians also worked miracles by making their rods become snakes? We know their power didn't come from God, so it must have come from God's enemy. Don't forget that Satan has incredible power and he can give that power to his agents when he wants to. It may be that the sign or wonder comes to pass. Then if you are deceived by the miracle you can be led to do evil, which God specifically forbids. Don't do it! Always follow what God has commanded specifically and don't make miracles your only criteria for belief.

We said that a prophet sometimes makes predictions about the future. One way you can know if a prophet is real is to see if his predictions come true. Let's see what the Bible says in Deuteronomy chapter 18 verse 22:

22 When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

If someone says he is a prophet and the events he predicts do not come to pass then we know he is not from God. Does every prophet make predictions about the future? No. Earlier we learned that a prophet is someone who communicates a message from God to the people. That message may or may not include a prediction of future events.

Moses at one time told the Israelites that another prophet would arise like him. Let's look at Deuteronomy chapter 18 verses 18-19:

18 I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. 19 'And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.

What characteristics of Moses would the future prophet have? The future prophet would be from among the Hebrews like Moses and not from some other race. Moses was certainly a leader. He received instructions from God and taught the people. He worked miracles when he delivered them from slavery and led them to the Promised Land. He also served as a judge of right and wrong when people had disputes. So Moses said that a prophet would come who would have these characteristics: **Hebrew, leader, teacher, judge, and miracle worker.**

Not every prophet works miracles, but some do. Today we will look at one of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament and how miracles were a part of his work for God. The prophet's name was Elijah. We can start by reading 1 Kings chapter 17 verse 1:

1 And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."

You remember that the nation of Israel was divided in the time of Rehoboam, Solomon's son. Jeroboam took ten of the tribes and formed the northern kingdom of Israel while the southern kingdom of Judah consisted of two tribes. Ahab was the king of the northern kingdom of Israel in the time of Elijah the prophet. He was one of the worst kings of Israel's history and lead the people into apostasy and idol worship. As punishment, God told Elijah that He was going to withhold the rain and wanted him to announce it. Drought was one of the curses that God said would come upon the nation if they

disobeyed.⁴ That tells us that it was not the predetermined fate of God that the drought occurred. If the people had obeyed the Lord, the drought would not have happened. The choice was theirs.

Also notice how precise the prophecy was. It was not some vaguely worded cryptic statement that could be interpreted a thousand different ways like one of Nostradamus' prophecies. This was a prophecy that was verifiable in history. Either the prophet's message was going to happen or it wouldn't. There was no guesswork here and no room for misinterpretation. In later lessons, we will see other examples of God's precise prophetic words, which make a wide and clear distinction between false prophecy and the true.

Let's pick up our story again in 1 Kings chapter 17 verses 2-7:

2 Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 3 "Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. 4 "And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." 5 So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. 6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook. 7 And it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

It is interesting to see that God works a miracle to sustain the prophet during the drought he himself was commanded to announce! God did not completely guard His true followers from the effects of the drought, but He did sustain them during it. This is an important lesson for us. God will not shield us from every trouble that comes upon a nation because of evil. But God will sustain us if we stay faithful to Him. Elijah did not eat like a king, but his needs were supplied. The story continues in 1 Kings chapter 17 verses 8-16:

4 Deut. 28: 23, 24

8 Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 9 "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you." 10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink." 11 And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." 12 So she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." 13 And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. 14 "For thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.'" 15 So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. 16 The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah.

We should stop here and contemplate this woman's faith. She, along with her son, was on the brink of death. They were about to eat their last meal! And yet, this widow's faith was so strong she was willing to sacrifice her own life by giving up her last bit of food to feed Elijah. Rest assured, God honors that kind of self-sacrifice and faith. For her kind act, God blessed them with the miracle of sustenance. Elijah, the woman, and her son were not eating baklava. But they were eating!

Is it possible that we take for granted the miracles God works every day to sustain us? Going to the market to buy tomatoes, cucumbers, and lettuce for breakfast seems like a normal, mundane task. But do you ever stop and think about the miracle God works every single day by providing the food that supports billions and billions

of people? Cut open a cucumber and notice its symmetry. Think of the millions of cells that grew one by one to form the it. Then think of the millions and millions of atoms that make it all form together. Who can make a cucumber? Only God can! It may not seem like much, but its a miracle! As this story points out, the sunshine and the rain are God's miracles too. Without them nothing grows. And no rain falls except at God's word. Let's continue reading in 1 Kings chapter 17 verses 17-24:

17 Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. 18 So she said to Elijah, "What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?" 19 And he said to her, "Give me your son." So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. 20 Then he cried out to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?" 21 And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, I pray, let this child's soul come back to him." 22 Then the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived. 23 And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives!" 24 Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth."

After all the woman had been through, you would think that her faith would remain strong. But in death, it is easy to be confused and distraught. We know the woman had faith from the beginning because she obeyed Elijah's command to give him food. She also witnessed the miracle of the flour and oil not running out. So while her faith may have been weak after her son died, we also see that it was

strengthened by the miracle. But miracles do not always strengthen faith.

The Egyptians saw the miracles directly done by God and the ones He did through Moses. But it did not make them believers. They still rejected the truth. Miracles can encourage faith and they can be the blessings received from having faith. They can also help people understand who is a true prophet. But we must still make sure that the prophet never speaks against what God has revealed through earlier prophets. Because if he does, we know that there is no truth in him. In other words a true prophet is never going to promote something contrary to God's revealed will through earlier prophets.

God's principles do not change even though the application of them may change under different circumstances. So when we are looking for the prophet who would be greater than Moses, we need to look for someone with the right qualifications. Consider an example from our own time.

If we would hope to find a leader for Turkey who would be greater than Ataturk, we would have to look for someone who was a successful general and who rallied the nation around a cause. We would have to find someone who would be strong enough to change the script of the language and set up a whole different system of government, complete with law and finances. We would have to find someone skilled in foreign policy who could manage to get the entire nation accepted as new in an international treaty. The list of what he did goes on and on.

So when we are looking to find the fulfillment of the great prophet who is to be like Moses, we should be looking for a prophet who is establishing the covenant of the Ten Commandments among the people. He would be a leader of the people and teach them what God revealed to him. He would be a prophet in the true sense of the word. He would work miracles that would be as great or greater than Elijah's miracles, including raising people from the dead. And he would lead the people to the Promised Land.

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. Have you seen something supernatural before? If so, did you believe it was from God?
2. If God worked more miracles in front of people do you think it would cause more people to believe the truth? If yes, why don't we see more miracles?
3. Think of people considered "Great Prophets." How many of them raised someone from the dead?

6 WHO'S SIDE ARE YOU ON?

Every once in a while, a single choice can decide your future and fate.

Have you ever had to take sides in an argument? How many times have you been asked which football team you support? Sometimes, taking sides is uncomfortable. Other times it is a necessary step before you can play a game like basketball, volleyball, or football. And every once in a while, taking sides can decide your future and fate. With that in mind, let's read a short story before we look at the Bible.

Excitement had been in the air for weeks. The end of the football season was coming, the weather was getting warmer, and two teams were tied for first place. It just so happened that they would be playing a match, the winner of which would be the champion. Those two teams were Fenerbahçe and Beşiktaş, bitter rivals.

It's not very often that two teams get to face each other in a real championship match and there was no way that Erdem was going to miss it. He was an avid Beşiktaş fan and didn't think twice about sleeping on the sidewalk for tickets. He knew his friend Berk might want to go to the match, so when it was his turn he bought two tickets.

The day came, the streets were filled with chants from both teams' supporters, and the crowds started making their way to the stadium. Anyone unfamiliar with football would have thought it was a riot, but to the people of İstanbul this was a controlled frenzy (if there is such a thing).

Erdem, dressed in his Beşiktaş uniform, and Berk entered the stadium and found a seat. It was packed and unfortunately the only seats available were the ones reserved to separate the two teams fans. Of course, no one wanted to be in between these two crowds because even though there were several rows reserved as neutral ground, there is no such thing as neutrality in a football match. Erdem and Berk took their places with Berk sitting on the outside edge of the row.

The fans were jumping up and down, twirling towels, burning flares, and throwing confetti. But Erdem and Berk weren't having the same experience. While Erdem was showing his loyalty to Beşiktaş, Berk was casually watching. He didn't know all the chants, nor did he particularly care to learn them. He liked football, but he didn't support a specific team. During halftime, when the crowd was a bit more subdued, Erdem confronted Berk:

“What are you doing? Why aren't you cheering? Are you a Fenerbahçe fan?”

“No. I don't support a team.” Berk replied.

“What? Are you a Turk? I can't believe what I am hearing!”

“Come on! What are you saying, I'm not a Turk if I don't support a team?”

“Look brother, everyone supports a team. You can't watch a football game and be neutral. That just isn't right. In fact it's strange. Even my grandma supports a team.” Erdem chided him.

For Erdem, it was impossible that someone could remain neutral at a football match. While it may also seem odd for some of us, some people don't pick sides or care which team wins. But you can't be that way with spiritual things. We actually make a choice when we do nothing. If we don't positively choose God's way, we by default accept Satan's way because there are only two choices. **You are either on God's side or Satan's side.** The biggest decision you will

ever make is to decide which side you will be on in this spiritual battle. Let's start reading in 1 Kings chapter 18 verses 17 and 18:

17 When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, Is it you, you troubler of Israel? 18 And he answered, I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals.

Elijah was a powerful prophet of God. He didn't come from a luxurious home or a famous town. But he was a man of faith and prayer, a man who was willing to deliver a message of rebuke and reform to an apostate nation. Yes, unfortunately the nation of Israel led by king Ahab had rejected the Creator of the Universe. The ones who God had continued His covenant with abandoned the worship of the one, true God for the worship of Baal, Asherah, and their idols. After years of prosperity and fame under the reigns of David and Solomon, the nation of Israel was now a divided kingdom. Two tribes, Benjamin and Judah formed the southern kingdom of Judah and the remaining ten tribes formed the northern kingdom of Israel led by the idolater, Ahab, and his evil wife, Jezebel.

It is interesting to note that King Ahab called Elijah a troubler. King Ahab was referencing the three year drought that Israel was experiencing – a drought that he blamed Elijah for even though it was a punishment for leading Israel astray. When Elijah predicted the drought, he was only doing what God told him. But it isn't like King Ahab didn't have a choice. If he had repented from his sin, God wouldn't have allowed the drought. But just like the Pharaoh of Egypt, King Ahab refused to repent and continued to lead the Israelites in idolatry. Therefore, it didn't rain for three years.

But God didn't give up on Israel because He still loved them. He knew that the promise of His covenant must be fulfilled. It is at this point that He calls Elijah, who had been in hiding for three years, to not only bear an important message, but to represent Him during one of the greatest displays of God's power. Let's continue with

Elijah's command to King Ahab in 1 Kings chapter 18 verses 19 and 20:

19 Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table. 20 So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel.

The prophet of God delivered the proclamation that everyone was to gather on Mt. Carmel. This mountain sits high above the valley floor and from its peak you can see in all directions. Unlike the worshippers of Baal and Asherah, who liked to secretly worship in covered forests, God was about to do something that all could see. It would be here that He would remind every Israelite that He alone was powerful. So the false prophets of Baal and Asherah, King Ahab and Jezebel, Elijah, and all Israel assembled on and around the mountain. Let's pick up the story in 1 Kings chapter 18 verses 21-24:

21 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. And the people did not answer him a word. 22 Then Elijah said to the people, I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. 23 Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it. 24 And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, he is God. And all the people answered, It is well spoken.

Elijah asked one of the most profound questions of the Bible and followed it up with one of its greatest appeals.

“How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.”

In other words, **stop sitting on the fence**. Stop trying to be neutral. You are either for God or against Him. You either worship the one, true God and live like He matters to you or you don't! In today's language, which team are you supporting?

Imagine just for a moment what it was like for Elijah. He was basically an outcast surrounded by a crowd of what could be considered enemies. He knew that they thought he was the sole reason for this drought. They could have easily captured, beaten, and killed him. And yet he stood there with confidence rebuking the King, the people, and a false worship system. He knew that the future of these peoples' lives depended on this one decision. But the Bible says,

“And the people did not answer him a word.”

Silence. By not answering they were giving a very clear answer. Their heart attachment to false worship and peer pressure was too strong to break from the cultural lie. Their silence testified against them. They were guilty. Let's read verses 25-29:

25 Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it. 26 And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, O Baal, answer us! But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. 27 And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened. 28 And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. 29 And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

The heathen priests prepared their altar and sacrifice. They prayed to Baal and Asherah. They sang and danced. But there was no an-

swer. Elijah teased them and asked them where their god was.

“He must be busy and can’t hear you,” he taunted.

So the false priests began cutting themselves and moaning. But no matter how much they prayed, chanted, cut or bled, Baal and Asherah remained silent. Their false gods demanded much and gave nothing in return. Let's see what happened next in verses 30-35:

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, Come near to me. And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down. 31 Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be your name, 32 and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. 33 And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood. 34 And he said, Do it a second time. And they did it a second time. And he said, Do it a third time. And they did it a third time. 35 And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water.

After the people saw that Baal and Asherah were not responding, they were curious as to what the one, true God would do. They drew close to Elijah and watched with eagerness as he repaired an old altar. They listened as he told the story of Jacob and his twelve sons. They were reminded of the covenant promise transferred to their nation. They reflected on their greatness and mourned the loss of their prosperity. Each one of them knew that their descent into idolatry happened one step at a time. It was over a period of days, months, and years. Now let's read verses 36-40:

36 And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and

that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. 37 Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back. 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God. 40 And Elijah said to them, Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.

Elijah stood in stark contrast to the false priests of Baal. He didn't sing, dance, chant, or cut himself. He started by acknowledging God's identity and superiority. He said a simple prayer and asked God to accept the sacrifice and the peoples' repentance. Almost instantly, fire came down from heaven and engulfed the altar. The flames were so hot that the sacrifice disintegrated before the peoples' eyes. There was no doubt that the one, true God was real and only He deserved worship. The people immediately covered their faces and fell to the ground. The only words they could proclaim were:

“The Lord, He is God. The Lord, He is God.”

Elijah, prompted by God, ordered that the unrepentant priests of Baal be captured and led away. The people, motivated by fear and awoken from their spiritual slumber, took hold of the idolaters, led them away, and killed them. They would no longer be allowed to entice the people of God into sin. The Israelites had made up their mind and decided that they wanted to be on God's side. Who's side do you want to be on?

As steps for another World War were being taken and countries began making alliances, the Republic of Turkey faced a major decision. Would they be an Ally or Axis power? After the terrible losses of WWI and the struggles of nearly losing their homeland, the Turkish nation decided that the cost of war was too high. In spite of im-

mense pressure from the countries of both sides, Turkey remained neutral throughout the war. A position that proved to be hard, but possible.

In the spiritual life, as we have seen in this lesson, there is no room for neutrality. You either worship God or you don't. If you choose not to worship the Creator, you will inevitably worship something else. It might be another god, a relationship, entertainment, or money. One thing is for sure, only the one, true God has your best interests at heart. He doesn't want you to be deceived nor does he want you to be a slave of sin. He wants you to be blessed!

If you want to be on His side, say this prayer:

“God I want to be on your side. Please show me the straight and narrow path. Please show me your will and lead me on the path of righteousness. I know that you love me. You and only you are God. Amen.”

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Is there anything in your life, actions, or thoughts that keeps you from being on God's side? That is, are there things that you are doing that you wouldn't do in front of God?
2. Would it take fire coming down from heaven to convince you to commit yourself fully to God or are you ready right now?
3. If you are on God's side, what would it take for you to be like Elijah and tell others?
4. Do you need the help of your friends or small group to stay true to God? If so, ask for their help. Make a covenant to support each other in this spiritual journey.

7 THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDSHIP

Are you bringing someone along with you on this spiritual journey?

It has been said,

"A friend is someone who knows the song in your heart and sings it back to you when you have forgotten how it goes."

Yes, a good friend lightens our life and lifts our spirit. What is the value of a good friend? Can you put a price on it? Faithful friends are not easy to find. But if you have ever had a close friend, you know what a treasure deep friendship is. Acquaintances are many, but to have someone you deeply love and who understands you is very rare. The highest relationship is to have a friend who not only likes you for who you are, but also inspires you to be better! In Proverbs chapter 18 verse 24, King Solomon wrote,

24 A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

In this lesson, we will take time to consider how to be just that kind of friend – one that is closer than a brother.

Perhaps the most famous friendship in Turkish history has been that of Jalaludin Rumi and Shams-i-Tabrizi. This Konya friendship of the 13th century changed Turkish history forever. Rumi was already a talented lawyer and a scholar. Shams was a wandering mystic. When the two met, Shams gave something to Rumi that he hadn't

had before: inspiration. The pair were kindred spirits immediately. They were intellectual equals who enjoyed discussing and debating matters of God, man and divine love. Rumi had knowledge, and perhaps too much of it. But Shams seemed to open a window for him that Rumi had never looked through before. He turned the corner from a knowledge based religion to a spiritual encounter. His new friend opened for him what Rumi liked to call the bliss of the divine consciousness.

Their friendship ended with the tragic death of Shams. But for Rumi, his life would never be the same. Rumi, writes most of his poetry as an ode to his dearest friend. It is a friendship that most of us can't understand. "I am wind, you are fire," Rumi wrote about Shams.

Some have pondered that if Rumi had never met Shams, likely Turkey would hardly know the name of this lawyer of Konya. A good friend does just that. He inspires us, so that we can in turn inspire the world.

Now let's look at an even more ancient friendship. The remarkable partnership of two prophets, Elijah and Elisha. We have already read about Elijah. This time let's read the inspiring story of his closest friend, Elisha.

We pick up the story after Elijah had boldly challenged 850 pagan priests on Mt. Carmel. Fire had reigned down from heaven in response to Elijah's prayer. But right on the heels of this great victory came bad news. A messenger raced to Elijah to announce that the devilish queen Jezebel was searching for him. She had only one reason to find him; she wanted to cut off his head! Elijah did exactly what you and I might have done; the Bible tells us he panicked and fled. God allowed him to run and run. For over a month Elijah fearfully ran in the desert. He was scared of his own boldness against the pagan priests and scared of what Jezebel might do to him. Elijah was emotionally exhausted and in his human weakness he simply wanted to die. Twice the Bible says that the Lord fed him by the hand of angels. Yet, still Elijah was filled with fear. Then God spoke

to Elijah. Let's start reading the story in I Kings chapter 19 verses 13 and 14:

13 And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 14 He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."

It seems God wasn't so interested in Elijah's CV. Instead, of patting Elijah on the back for his accomplishments, God was about to encourage Elijah in a different way. He was going to give him a friend, an ally in the prophetic ministry. We continue reading part of verse 15 and 16.

15 "And the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way. And when you arrive 16 you shall anoint Jehu to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat you shall anoint to be prophet in your place."

Filled with new courage he got up from the cave where had been hiding, and went immediately to find this man "Elisha" that God had mentioned by name. It was spring time, so the farmers were working in their fields. As he approached, he could see his successor across the partially plowed field. Perhaps Elijah paused for a moment to watch Elisha give instructions to the other farm workers that were harnessing the animals. Now, imagine in your mind's eye this magnetic moment when these two men met for the first time. The account is recorded in 1 Kings chapter 19 verses 19-21:

19 So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. 20 And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said,

"Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" 21 And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.

Now to really understand this passage, we must remember a few facts from the last lesson. You remember, that it had not rained in Israel for three and half years. Now by God's grace the rains had begun to fall again. The ground was moist and fertile. This was the time a farmer lived for and Elisha was a farmer. Not only that, a talented one. We see him managing twelve yoke of oxen.

Elisha was doing what he loved to do and at a time of great opportunity. The steady thumping rhythm of the plow cutting the earth and the side to side motion of the oxen plodding forward had an almost hypnotic power. Elisha was likely thinking about the wonderful harvest which he was certain to reap.

Suddenly, a hand was laid on his shoulder, Elisha turned and was surprised to see a man he had heard about all of his life. The prophet Elijah! He knew that when Elijah covered him with his cloak it was a sign that he was being called. He could sense the Holy Spirit's presence. His respect for Elijah was great and he knew he could entrust his future into God's care by serving Elijah wherever their relationship would lead. However, just in case there was still a doubt in Elisha's mind, Elijah gave him one more opportunity to make a different choice by saying, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" But for Elisha, there was no other choice. He was going to accept God's call.

Before leaving home, he showed honor and respect to his parents. He kissed them and told them goodbye, but that wasn't all he did. He also sacrificed his work equipment. He burned his plow and roasted his oxen. It was his way of severing his ties to his old job. There was no turning back. God had called him to something more impor-

tant. From that time on he and Elijah would be allies, partners, and friends in the service of God.

Here we learn a key fact of leadership for qualification in doing God's work. Elisha was a hard worker. And because he did his farm work well, he had become qualified to do prophetic work well. So too, whether you find yourself washing dishes at a restaurant, sewing clothes in a factory, or managing accounts for your employer, work hard. **Do your work to the glory of God** so that when God calls you to a higher position you will be ready.

Elisha's work was to simply help Elijah as an assistant. The Bible says he was "pouring water on the hands of his master." He was willing to do anything that would bless Elijah. At every step he was growing the most important character trait for useful service to God: humility.

Leadership training in the school of the prophets was far different from the power hungry style of today's businessmen. As the prophet's personal attendant, Elisha watched how Elijah served others and imitated his behavior. Elisha continued to prove faithful in little things, while daily he devoted himself to spiritual growth. We can be sure he did this by sharing in Elijah's passion for prayer, rising early to meditate on the Tevrat and Zebur, and listening to God as one would listen to a friend.

Elijah's work was not that of a philosopher, nor mystic, nor poet. No, he was a prophet! His duty was to call people back to the Law of God. He had a difficult work among the people to raise up the laws that had been torn down. Elijah had literally raised the dead. He had called fire down from heaven and performed other miracles. This was not dreamy philosophy nor the life of a whirling dervish. No Elijah was counteracting the power of sin and fighting spiritual battles by God's power! This direct confrontation against Satan and his agents was the work Elisha needed to learn. But miracle working can't be taught by apprenticeship. Spiritual power isn't a skill. **It is a living relationship with the Divine!**

The relationship that Elijah had with God was what inspired Elisha. He wanted strongly to be the kind of man that Elijah was. Elisha loved Elijah because of his devotion and resolute determination to stand for God's truth. Elisha yearned in his heart to be able to live in the presence of heaven just like his master. God had honored him to be a team with this great prophet. Now he aspired to stand up to the honor.

Many years before, during the time of David, the Prophet Samuel had created, "Schools of Prophets." These schools had closed during the long period of Israel's idolatry. Elijah made it his last work to restore these training centers so that youth could be taught the truths from the Tevrat and thus rightly now how to become spiritual leaders in their families and country. At these schools they could learn the deep meaning of the lamb sacrifice and how to lead their nation into God's glorious forgiveness.

Elijah was growing old and was making one last round to visit these schools. God was about to take Elijah to heaven. Here is what the Bible says in 2 Kings chapter 2 verses 1 and 2 :

1 Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. 2 And Elijah said to Elisha, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.

News was going around that Elijah's time was about to end. Elisha didn't want to say goodbye to his friend. He didn't even want him to go. So he was not about to let his master out of his sight. He wanted to be near him. Let's continue by reading verse 3:

3 And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?" And he said, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet."

It wasn't easy for one prophet to keep a secret from another prophet! Elijah was having a hard time getting out from under the spiritual radar of his friend! In fact, there is a bit of humor here, because as they visited the "schools of the prophets" the young students had also been shown in their prayer times that Elijah was going to be taken. They immediately began to tell what they knew. The incident happened similarly three times. We can read about them in verses 4-6:

4 Elijah said to him, "Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. 5 The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet." 6 Then Elijah said to him, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on.

And so this powerful pair walked on. They had covered many dusty miles together talking, praying, and praising God. Now the training was complete. The Bible says that they went down to the Jordan River where the young men of the prophets were standing. Let's continue with 2 Kings chapter 2 verses 7 and 8:

7 Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. 8 Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground.

No, this wasn't a wandering poet nor a bookish scholar! This was a man filled with the power of God. Elisha must have smiled to himself as they walked across that dry river bed. This was his friend, the man of God. Suddenly the smile faded and tears filled his eyes as he realized this was the last time they would see one another for a long

time. Elijah turned and looked at his friend and gave him a great gift: a wish. Let's read verses 9-12:

9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me." 10 And he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so." 11 And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. 12 And Elisha saw it and he cried, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

Why did Elisha tear his clothes? Wasn't this a victory moment? Yes, but there was sorrow too as Elisha saw his friend vanishing! Their bond had been severed. His heart felt empty. In a moment his mentor was gone!

It was a scene better than any that Spielberg or any Hollywood producer could have created. With a crack of lightning, a ball of fire roared close. Four blazing white horses came down from heaven, manes like silver tinsel and eyes like molten metal. The horses came in with rippling muscles and tails flying like banners. Elijah climbed aboard the golden chariot and in an instant, with a gust of hot wind, they were gone. Elijah had gone to heaven without seeing death! Only one other prophet, Enoch, had that privilege. Even Moses had died. It was as if God had sent his own chauffeur for Elijah! Would you like to be taken to heaven the same way?

While Elisha was still kneeling on the ground, suddenly out of the clear blue sky, something came drifting down to earth. It landed in the grass with a "Pfooom." It was Elijah's camel skin cloak. It was the very same cloak that his friend had laid on him years before when he was plowing the field and had received his calling. Can you imagine the scene? Elisha has his head down on the ground crying

for the loss of his friend. Suddenly, his sobs are interrupted by his own thoughts.

“What did I ask Elisha for?” He thought to himself.

The words of his request come rolling back into his mind,

“Please let a double portion of your spirit rest on me.”

A double portion of the prophetic spirit. With that Elisha lifted up his head, stood up, and took a firm grasp on the cloak. We can finish the story by reading I Kings chapter 2 verses 13-15:

13 And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. 14 Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over. 15 Now when the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho saw him opposite them, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." And they came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.

God had granted Elisha's request. In fact if you study the Bible carefully you will find the prophet Elijah performed seven miracles. If you trace the work and ministry of the prophet Elisha, you will discover that fourteen miracles were recorded! Exactly double. He had received the double portion that he had asked for.

The two had a very different emphasis in their ministry. Elijah was a fiery reformer. Elisha was one who brought reconciliation. Both important, both prophets, yet different. Oddly, though Elisha had "double the spirit" of his mentor, ultimately he died and was buried. Both of their destinations was heaven, but they would get there at different times. The first to go was Elijah who went to heaven by special transport, never experiencing death. The second, Elisha, died and is still waiting for the great resurrection at the end of time to enjoy paradise. Even though they were both prophets, why God

chose to take one person and allow another to die isn't explained right here. However, we will explore that subject in a future lesson.

We close this lesson with a short story from history. Italian composer Puccini was famous for composing the operas *La Boheme* and *Madame Butterfly*. It was during his battle with cancer in 1922 that he began to write *Turandot*, which many now consider his best work. He worked on the score day and night, despite his friends' advice to rest and to save his energy. When his sickness worsened, Puccini said to his students, "If I don't finish *Turandot*, I want you to finish it." He died in 1924, leaving the work unfinished. Students gathered all that was written of *Turandot*, studied it in great detail, and then proceeded to write the remainder of the opera. The world premier was performed in Milan in 1926, conducted by Toscanini, Puccini's favorite student. The opera went beautifully until Toscanini came to the end of the part written by Puccini. He stopped the music, put down the baton, turned to the audience, and announced,

"Thus far the master wrote, until he died."

There was a long pause; no one moved. Then Toscanini picked up the baton, turned to the audience, and with tears in his eyes announced, "But his disciples finished his work."

The opera concluded with thunderous applause and a permanent place in the world's greatest compositions.

Likely Elijah's greatest work as a prophet was to mentor Elisha to continue his own spiritual work. Each of us has an ability to inspire another. All of us are given a certain responsibility to help one another to be their best. Parents are given the job of inspiring children and teachers to inspire students. As we have seen in this lesson, the right friendships can push us towards peak performance. You have come a long way in these lessons. Are you bringing someone along side you on this spiritual journey? Perhaps it's time you prayerfully laid your "coat" on the shoulders of an honest person and invite them to become a spiritual friend.

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. What do you think is the key ingredient to a good friendship?
2. Elisha and Elijah weren't friends until God introduced them. Why do you think God put the two of them together?
3. Why do you think Elijah put his energies toward organizing schools?
4. Elijah went straight to heaven. Elisha died and is in the grave waiting the resurrection. Why do you think prophets are subject to death?

8 THE IMPORTANCE OF OBEDIENCE

What really does God want from me?

“What does God want from me?” the woman said in frustration. “I’m a good person. I mind my own business, I don’t harm anyone.”

She was angry to think that God wanted her to do something other than be “a good person”. Of course, according to her own definition. While the woman was expressing anger to God inappropriately, the question she asked is a good one for the true seeker of God. What does God want from me?

There are many answers to that question, but in this lesson we will look at just a few. Let us begin with a story that will help our understanding.

Adnan was a tall, lanky man with dark eyes that stood out sharply from his bony tanned face. You would have expected him to be much younger than 74 years old by the color of his hair. Some even said that he dyed his hair but it wasn’t true. The true success of his youthful appearance lay in his genes, affability, positive attitude, and willingness to always learn something new.

Those qualities helped him go from being a shepherd’s son with a handful of sheep to a sugar factory owner. While his Mercedes and Blackberry Smartphone gave him the appearance of a modern man, there was much about Adnan that was still old-fashioned. For exam-

ple, he expected his two sons to kiss his hand even though they carried the lion's share of the workload at the factory these days. Not to mention Adnan still held the reins of the operation in his hands.

One day while sitting in his office drinking tea with friends, his secretary brought in a man wearing a worn plaid jacket that was hanging to one side as if there was something really heavy in one of the pockets. His shoulders were slouched forward so it made his emaciated frame look all the more fragile. His pants were so baggy you would think you could put someone else in there with him. He had a three-day beard, speckled with gray hairs. His mouth puckered because he had no teeth left. In his hands were a bunch of bright red roses.

Adnan sipped his tea and paused, building the suspense of his waiting friends. When he saw their interest he spoke to the old man who reeked of cigarette smoke.

“What is that there in your hands?”

“You asked for flowers. I brought you flowers just like you said.”

“Man, I told you bring violets, not roses.” Adnan replied.

“I know, but the roses looked good and women love roses. Your wife will like these better. Can I have my money now?”

Adnan's friends were shocked at the boldness of this last sentence. Didn't he understand who he was talking too? They waited to see what Adnan would do.

“Man I am not going to give you a kuruş for those roses. I specifically said that I wanted violets. You brought me roses which I didn't ask for.”

The slovenly dressed man said, “What difference does it make, flowers are flowers. Are you going to give me the money or not?”

Adnan leaned back in his big leather chair and said: “I will give you money for violets and nothing else.”

With that, the strange visitor put the roses on the desk and with a disgusted look on his face said, “Fine then, take your roses.”

And then he left in a huff without taking any money.

Adnan’s friends looked at him with a puzzled look on their faces. Before they asked for an explanation, He just started to tell the story.

“I was on my way to work this morning. Just outside the factory at the traffic light was this beggar. He asked me for two lira. I said, ‘Look, it is better for you to have some healthy employment than to beg. If you do something for me, I will give you five lira.’ His eyes got big and I said, ‘Go to the garden area out behind the cafeteria kitchen and bring me a bunch of violets.’ He said, ‘O.K.’ and he went to the garden and I went to my office. Then he comes in here with these roses. I didn’t want roses I wanted violets. He didn’t do what I told him.”

One of Adnan’s friends dared to interject, “Adnan, why did you reject the roses? Of course, he didn’t do what you asked him to do. But you still could have used the roses.”

“Today is my anniversary and I wanted those flowers for my wife. We are going out for lunch. When I asked my wife to marry me I gave her violets, not roses. That guy came in here with this attitude like he knows what I should be doing. What the world doesn’t need is a proud beggar!”

Although to some people Adnan’s response may seem harsh, there is a truth in what he said. Sometimes, we can be like proud beggars who want to tell God that what we want is better than what He wants. If people didn’t assume they know more than God, the world would certainly be a better place.

In this lesson, we are going to look at one man's struggle with, "what God wants." We can start by reading 2 Kings chapter 5 verses 1-12:

1 Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor; but a leper. 2 And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife. 3 Then she said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy." 4 And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel." 5 Then the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. 6 Then he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said, Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy. 7 And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me." 8 So it was, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." 9 Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha's house. 10 And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean." 11 But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.' 12 "Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of

Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage.

Naaman had heard that there was a man in Israel who could heal him of leprosy. He came to his own conclusions as to how that should take place. He made a plan and expected that God would work in accordance to that plan. But God does not work according to our ideas always. He may have expectations of us that are not according to our own thinking. Many people exclaim,

“What does God want from me? I am a good person!”

What they are really claiming is that God should adhere to the standard of expectation and righteousness that they themselves have set up. But is that what God really wants?

In our introductory story we had a beggar who wanted money. Then he encountered someone who could give him the money. Unfortunately the beggar did what he thought was best instead of following the will of Adnan. But Adnan surprised the beggar because he had different expectations than what the beggar assumed they would be.

Who was really in control, the beggar or Adnan? Adnan was in control, of course. Adnan had the money, he had the garden, the flower beds, everything. He also had a logical reason for wanting violets that the beggar didn't know. Adnan expected willing obedience. But the beggar was too proud to yield his will to the expectations of Adnan. He was so proud he was willing to go away empty handed. So was Naaman the Syrian!

Naaman is really a beggar before God. He has no power over his illness. Gold and silver could not buy his health. But now Naaman thinks that God should accept his own efforts and gifts as “good enough” to get healed. When God says, “No” to the rivers in Syria, which were perhaps bigger and more beautiful than the Jordan, Naaman is willing to walk out empty-handed like the beggar did from Adnan’s office. Let’s continue reading in 2 Kings chapter 5 verses 13 and 14:

13 And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" 14 So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

How wonderfully shocked Naaman must have been! The dreaded disease is gone! Perhaps he caressed his new clean skin again and again with his hands to help make his eyes believe what he was seeing. Perhaps he shouted with joy to his companions, "I am healed, I am healed!"

Perhaps he shouted, "Praise the Lord!" as well. What reaction would you have if God healed you from terminal cancer for example? Imagine what was going through Naaman's mind. How would he be able to explain everything to his family and the king back home?

It is not according to our own ideas of righteousness or values that we can expect things from God. It is according to His power and ability to supply our need. It is also according to His expectations that we can approach Him. We are beggars before God. We cannot buy eternal life with our money. We can receive eternal life only on God's terms. Let's continue reading with 2 Kings 5 verses 15-19:

15 And he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him; and he said, "Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel; now therefore, please take a gift from your servant." 16 But he said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing." And he urged him to take it, but he refused. 17 So Naaman said, "Then, if not, please let your servant be given two mule-loads of earth; for your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD. 18 "Yet in this thing may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the temple of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand,

and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon -- when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD please pardon your servant in this thing." 19 Then he said to him, "Go in peace." So he departed from him a short distance.

Naaman had not only been cleansed of leprosy, more importantly he had discovered the true God. There was joy and peace in his heart from finding the truth. But Naaman was a wise man and he knew that he would be returning to a land full of idolatry. He knew that he would have to live out his faith in a hostile environment. How could he do that?

One of the first problems he would encounter was with the king. The king would go into the temple of his god and bow down. When he did so, he would expect his servant Naaman to hold his arm so that he would not fall. Naaman did not want Elisha to think that he had returned to idol worship.

Elisha did not scold Naaman but told him to go in peace. The Spirit of God would teach Naaman what he would need to do with family and friends. Many people are concerned about what will happen when they begin to worship God in spirit and in truth. We see that God wants believers to love and respect their parents even though they may not accept their newfound faith. How should a believer relate to the feasts and festivals of the family members if the believer doesn't agree with them? Where does respect for parents over-reach and become disrespect for God's commands? These are not easy questions. But if a new believer will seek God's will in their life and surrender, He will show them the way. He will not leave them comfortless. Let's finish by reading 2 Kings chapter 5 verses 20-27:

20 But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "Look, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought; but as the LORD lives, I will run after him and take something from him." 21 So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw him running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him, and said, "Is all well?" 22 And he

said, "All is well. My master has sent me, saying, 'Indeed, just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments.'" 23 So Naaman said, "Please, take two talents." And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and handed them to two of his servants; and they carried them on ahead of him. 24 When he came to the citadel, he took them from their hand, and stored them away in the house; then he let the men go, and they departed. 25 Now he went in and stood before his master. Elisha said to him, "Where did you go, Gehazi?" And he said, "Your servant did not go anywhere." 26 Then he said to him, "Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? 27 "Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever." And he went out from his presence leprous, as white as snow.

Lies and pink lies are common in Turkey.

“God will forgive,” they say.

But the lesson of Gehazi is for us. God expects honesty and truth in all that we do. Gehazi was a stumbling block to Naaman in his new faith. The favor of God cannot be purchased with money. It is received through willing obedience. Lying is not a minor sin. In the Ten Commandments, lying has its own place just like killing and stealing.⁵ The result of Gehazi's lying was rotten flesh and scornful looks. He had leprosy the rest of his life.

What does God want? We have seen some things in this Bible lesson that God wants from us. We need to leave our expectations to one side and come to God on His terms. We need to understand that God's terms are not a simple mechanical service. Consider this illustration.

⁵ Exodus 20: 13-16

Şevket was with his friends at the hospital waiting for his mother to get out of the exam room. While they were waiting Şevket took his friends to the canteen area where there was a food-dispensing machine.

“Look” he said to his friends, “I have a piece of steel that I found on the floor at the lathe shop. It is about the right size of a lira. Let’s put it in the machine and see if it takes it.”

Şevket put the steel slug in the machine and it worked. Out came a Fanta! With bold satisfaction Şevket said to his friends,

“I fooled that machine!”

God is not a food-dispensing machine in a hospital that doesn’t know the difference between a good coin and a slug. He is a living being with personality. We cannot fool Him by just bringing to Him gifts or offerings of our choosing. **God desires willing obedience.**

When God asks us to do something, there may be a reason for it that we don’t know. The beggar did not know why Adnan wanted violets and not roses. He should have brought violets. But there did not have to be a reason. Adnan had the money and the beggar had nothing. If Adnan wanted violets for no other reason than he wanted them that was sufficient reason for the beggar to bring violets. Did God choose Abraham because Abraham was better than everyone else? Did God choose Israel because Israel was better than everyone else? No. In life God may command and there may be a good reason for it that we don’t know. But on the other hand, the reason might also be that God wants to see if we will be loyal to His command and words. We are beggars and God is the provider. We can only approach him on His terms and according to His expectations. But as Naaman discovered, **God rewards those that diligently seek him.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When Naaman went home to his wife after dipping in the river, what do you think he told her?
2. Have you ever asked, “What does God want from me?” What do you think God really wants from you? How can you be certain?
3. People often think that God only wants them to be “good” and if they are He will take them to heaven. Could it be that God has a different idea of what constitutes a “good person” than what they think? What would that be?
4. What is your attitude toward “little” sins like lying?
5. Are you willing to yield your life to the expectations of God?
6. In what ways are your beliefs differing from those around you? How will you maintain your beliefs without compromise and yet be understanding and tolerant of those who understand God differently than you do?

9 REPENTANCE CAN CHANGE FATE

Is repentance still relevant in our modern age?

One of the hardest things to do in life is to admit we are wrong. Perhaps it is only secondary to actually doing something about it. Either way, before we can admit we are wrong or try to rectify it we must first acknowledge the truth that what we did wasn't right. Interestingly there is a word that describes this whole process. It is called repentance. This single word sums up the whole experience of realizing a wrong, apologizing or paying restitution for it, and then trying not to commit the same offense. Repentance literally means "to change our thoughts and actions to correct a wrong and gain forgiveness from someone." In the context of our studies, **repentance is acknowledging a sin, asking God's forgiveness for it, and ceasing to commit it.** In this lesson, we will see that repentance is a direct result of realizing our sinfulness in relation to God's holiness through the reading of His Holy Word.

There is an excellent example of this truth in the very first novel ever written in the English language. The book is read by almost every Turkish student at some point in their life. The book is called Robinson Crusoe and follows the life of a young man who was lost at sea. He had always dreamed of being a sailor, but his parents didn't want him to go. They had warned him repeatedly that the job was dangerous and that he was risking a life of comfort and ease. But Robinson didn't see the wisdom in their counsel and ran off.

On his very first voyage, the ship ran aground and sank. He was fortunate to survive that wreck and for a short time it quelled his thirst for adventure. But once again, the desire to leave was stronger than his desire to be safe. So Robinson sought passage on yet another ship. Just like the first voyage, the second one also ended in tragedy when pirates took Robinson prisoner.

After a period of time, Robinson escaped from his captors and made his way to Brazil. While there, he bought a plantation and acquired a small fortune. For most of us, the first two voyages would have been a lesson to not take unnecessary risks. But Robinson was a stubborn man and the thought of making even more money was too much to resist. The only problem was that the result of his decision would have a long lasting impact on his daily life.

As most of you know, Robinson's ship ran aground and broke into pieces. He was stranded on a deserted island, alone and without any hope of rescue. Fortunately, Robinson had enough ingenuity and time to save many things from the broken ship. Although he did get guns, gunpowder, cloth, food, tools, and a couple of animals, the most important item was a box of books.

At first, Robinson wasn't concerned with books. He needed to survive. So he began to build a house, find food, and protect himself from wild animals. As time passed he became angry about his situation. He didn't have anyone to talk to, so his mind became all mixed up. He even blamed God!

“Why would God do this to me? Why didn't I listen to my parents? It would have been better to die with everyone else.”

But one day he opened up that box of books and found something that changed him forever. It was like finding a buried treasure. But instead of being filled with jewels, it was filled with knowledge and wisdom that changed his perspective on life. He had heard about it before, but never bothered to take even one look at it. He blew off

the dust, opened the cover and began to read. It was the Holy Bible which includes the Torah, Psalms, and Gospel of Jesus.

Robinson soon realized that his outlook was completely wrong. Instead of blaming God, he should be thanking Him. Robinson could have been dead like the other sailors. But for some unknown reason, God had spared his life, put him on an island suitable for survival, and even supplied him with modern comforts. It was impossible for Robinson to ignore God's provision and compassion; especially in relation to his own selfishness and ungratefulness.

In the light of God's love, Robinson's heart melted and he asked for God's forgiveness. He decided to no longer focus on the negative, but to embrace the new life that he had been given – a life that he later used to help others.

As we have learned from previous lessons, and just like Robinson ignoring his parents, the nation of Israel ignored God's counsel on several occasions. One of their biggest mistakes was the desire to be like other nations and have a king. Although God warned them, they thought that the benefits of having a king far outweighed the risks. But it wasn't long before the people found themselves in a terrible situation. After King Solomon, the nation was split into two kingdoms: the northern one called Israel and the southern kingdom called Judah.

We will not cover all the details of what happened in the next 300 years after the split, but if you read through the books of Kings and Chronicles, a clear picture will emerge. The kings of Israel and Judah for the most part were not followers of the One, True God. They indulged in sin, worshipped false gods, killed rivals, and even persecuted God's prophets. As a result, many of the Israelites followed their example and were breaking God's law through the worship of false gods. Suffice it to say, the situation was terrible! Not only had the Northern Kingdom of Israel been conquered by the Assyrians and most of the Israelites taken off as slaves, the Southern Kingdom of Judah was also being threatened.

Many of you are probably wondering,

“Well how did this happen? Didn’t God promise to make them a great nation? What about the covenant to bless the whole world?”

It is quite possible that there were Israelites thinking the very same thing. But unlike the Israelites, we won’t have to wait a long time to get answers. For now, let’s see what happened when a young king tried to get the southern Kingdom of Judah back on track. We can start reading the story in 2 Kings chapter 22 verses 1-7:

1 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. 2 And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the way of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left. 3 In the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, son of Meshullam, the secretary, to the house of the LORD, saying, 4 Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may count the money that has been brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the threshold have collected from the people. 5 And let it be given into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the LORD, and let them give it to the workmen who are at the house of the LORD, repairing the house 6 (that is, to the carpenters, and to the builders, and to the masons), and let them use it for buying timber and quarried stone to repair the house. 7 But no accounting shall be asked from them for the money that is delivered into their hand, for they deal honestly.

As the text says, King Josiah, the 16th king since King Solomon, started ruling Judah when he was a child. But what set him apart from the previous kings is that he never betrayed God (i.e., like King David he never worshipped false gods). But that doesn’t mean he was innocent or even perfect. He was responsible for his people and his people were living in sin. We can deduce from the text that the people had not been taking care of the Temple. Otherwise it

wouldn't have needed a massive amount of repair. If they weren't paying attention to God's Temple, they probably weren't paying attention to God. So, King Josiah decided that repairing God's temple would put their focus back on God.

While they were cleaning and preparing the Temple for repair, Hilki-ah the High Priest found an old scroll. He knew it was very important, so he gave it to Shaphan the king's secretary. It is believed that this scroll was actually the book of Deuteronomy. Do you remember reading about its importance in our study about King Solomon? This was the book that all the kings were supposed to copy and read every day. Apparently a previous king, Manasseh, had neglected the true worship of God to the point that the Book of the Law was lost! Devoid of it's instruction, the people slipped further and further into idolatry. What do you think happened when King Josiah heard it? Let's find out in 2 Kings chapter 22 verses 11-13:

11 When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes. 12 And the king commanded Hilki-ah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, 13 Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.

It was as if King Josiah's heart was pierced with a spear. After hearing God's laws, counsel, and punishment for disobedience, King Josiah knew that time was short. As he heard those inspired words, he realized that his peoples' actions would bring forth God's judgments. In fact, he was so distraught that he actually tore his robe.

After bowing and asking God for forgiveness, he immediately told Hilki-ah and Shaphan to seek the counsel of a prophet. Let's continue with verse 14:

14 So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter), and they talked with her.

For those of us who thought that prophets could only be men, the verses we just read may have been shocking. But the Bible says it is so, therefore we need to accept it. Let's see what she said in verses 15-20:

15 And she said to them, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Tell the man who sent you to me, 16 Thus says the LORD, behold, I will bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. 17 Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched. 18 But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, 19 because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the LORD. 20 Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place. And they brought back word to the king.

The message of Huldah was two fold. First, the inhabitants of Judah (also known as Jews) had gone too far. There was no way to avert the punishment that was about to be poured out. Second, God heard King Josiah's prayers and promised that he would not share in their punishment. In spite of the inevitableness of punishment, King Josiah wasn't about to sit back and do nothing. He decided to not only

make known to his people God's decree, but to plead for them to also repent and cease from sinning against God.

King Josiah called all the elders, priests, and people of Jerusalem to the Temple. The people must have been wondering what was happening and why the King had called them with such urgency. The crowd was immense, but when King Josiah announced that the Book of the Law was going to be read they became silent and listened intently.

When he was finished reading, King Josiah addressed the people. Let's pick up the story again in 2 Kings chapter 23 verse 3:

3 And the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people joined in the covenant.

King Josiah, as the leader of his people, made it clear that he would uphold God's law. After hearing the seriousness in his voice and the impassioned plea to join with him, the people of Judah also promised to follow God. They realized their sin and repented. Now it was time for them to act!

As we read the following verses, pay close attention to their sins. Rather than being isolated incidents, their sins had spread throughout the whole kingdom. It seems like there wasn't a place left that hadn't been affected by idolatry and lasciviousness. Let's read verses 4-20:

4 And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second order and the keepers of the threshold to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron and carried their ashes to Bethel. 5 And he deposed the priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to make offerings in the high places at the cities of

Judah and around Jerusalem; those also who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and the moon and the constellations and all the host of the heavens. 6 And he brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD, outside Jerusalem, to the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron and beat it to dust and cast the dust of it upon the graves of the common people. 7 And he broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes who were in the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the Asherah. 8 And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had made offerings, from Geba to Beersheba. And he broke down the high places of the gates that were at the entrance of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on one's left at the gate of the city. 9 However, the priests of the high places did not come up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread among their brothers. 10 And he defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no one might burn his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech. 11 And he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the chamberlain, which was in the precincts. And he burned the chariots of the sun with fire. 12 And the altars on the roof of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars that Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, he pulled down and broke in pieces and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron. 13 And the king defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, to the south of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 14 And he broke in pieces the pillars and cut down the Asherim and filled their places with the bones of men. 15 Moreover, the altar at Bethel, the high place erected by Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, that altar with the high place he pulled down and burned, reducing it to dust. He also burned the Asherah. 16 And as Josiah turned, he saw the tombs

there on the mount. And he sent and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altar and defiled it, according to the word of the LORD that the man of God proclaimed, who had predicted these things. 17 Then he said, What is that monument that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and predicted these things that you have done against the altar at Bethel. 18 And he said, Let him be; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet who came out of Samaria. 19 And Josiah removed all the shrines also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which kings of Israel had made, provoking the LORD to anger. He did to them according to all that he had done at Bethel. 20 And he sacrificed all the priests of the high places who were there, on the altars, and burned human bones on them. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

The verses we just read are filled with some of the most abominable sins. It is almost unfathomable to think that the Israelites would worship false gods in the Temple of God. But their actions didn't end there. They burned incense in honor of the sun, moon, and stars. They allowed male prostitutes to perform lewd acts for the false goddess Asherah. They were burning children as sacrifices for the false god Molech. The kings had even dedicated horses to the sun. No wonder Josiah tore his robe when he read the Book of the Law. The Israelites had been blatantly disobeying God for years and the consequence would be severe. Moreover, these sins were not only taking place in Jerusalem!

If you look at a map, you will notice that many of King Josiah's reforms took place outside of Judah. These sins stretched from north to south, east to west. The disregard for God's law was a widespread pandemic. When he and the people made the covenant before God, they were speaking on behalf of the entire nation because the entire nation needed cleansing. But King Josiah didn't just put an end to false worship. He also reinstated the Passover. Let's read about it in verses 21-23:

21 And the king commanded all the people, Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant. 22 For no such Passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, or during all the days of the kings of Israel or of the kings of Judah. 23 But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was kept to the LORD in Jerusalem.

If you remember from a previous lesson, the Israelites were to keep the Passover on an annual basis as a remembrance of their delivery from Egypt.⁶ It was a celebration that they hadn't kept as a nation in over 300 years. This was just another way that they had slipped further and further away from God. King Josiah knew that the Passover was a major symbol of the Israelites freedom and dedication to God. So, he made sure that it would be celebrated from this day forward.

We get a perfect picture of repentance in the life of King Josiah. When he encountered God's Holy Word, just like Robinson Crusoe, he realized the seriousness of sin and its effect on people. With an open heart, he asked for God's forgiveness and led his country to flee from what was causing their destruction. Although this story isn't well known, it is nonetheless very important because in it we can see the proper response of a sinner who sees his (and his people's) sins for what they really are.

A young boy had a crush on a young girl in his class. He was immature and unsure of how to deal with his feelings, so he started to tease the girl. He made fun of the way she spoke, pulled her hair, and laughed when she made mistakes. At first the girl just ignored what he said. But after a while, his taunts and inconsiderate behavior started to annoy her. She asked him to stop, but he just continued to do the same thing. Eventually, she couldn't take it anymore.

One day after class when all the kids left the room, she sat at her desk and cried. Her best friend came back from the break and tried to console her. But it was too late. The girl's heart was broken. She couldn't take it anymore and didn't want to come back to school.

6 Fate Changer Book 2 Lesson 4

About that time, the young boy came back to class. He saw that the girl was crying and asked what was wrong.

"You are what's wrong! You always tease me, pull my hair, and make fun of me. I am sick of it! Leave me alone!" she screamed.

The boy didn't know what to say. He just stood there dumbfounded. He didn't realize that what was fun to him, was hurtful to the girl.

"I am sorry. I shouldn't have done those things. I promise to always be nice to you. Do you forgive me?" he asked.

"Yes." she sniffled.

Repentance starts with recognizing that you did something wrong. After recognizing your sin, you stop doing it and ask for forgiveness. Although quite basic, this story illustrates how destructive our actions can be to ourselves, others, and from a spiritual standpoint to our relationship with God. King Josiah recognized this and in 2 Kings chapter 23 verse 25 we can read these words about King Josiah:

25 Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him.

We live in a world that isn't much different than ancient Judah. We are surrounded by sin and we struggle with it every day. There were many reasons why the Israelites had lost sight of God. But there was only one solution, repentance. It doesn't matter if you are a man, woman, or child; rich, middle class, or poor; if you are a human you are a sinner and every sinner needs to repent. As John the Baptist said, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near!"

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. Would it have been possible for Robinson Crusoe to sin on an island with no people? How?
2. Have you ever thought about your sin in relation to God's holiness? How does it make you feel?
3. We may not be worshipping idols or killing children, but we do sin. Do you think God favorably looks upon any sin and says, "It wasn't that bad."?
4. Do you have any sins that you want to repent of right now? If so, let's pray.

10 ONE STEP CLOSER TO THE FATE CHANGER

If God could give his own life to save us would he?

God transcends time and holds it in His hands. Whereas we humans are subjects of time. Whether we like it or not, we are born and we die. Morning goes and evening comes, youthfulness disappears like morning mist burned away by the rising sun and old age comes as sure as autumn. Yes, humans can't speed up nor slow down time. We have no control over it.

Therefore, most people fight to find a balance between past troubles and future fears on the island of worry called, "the present." God, on the other hand, has no worries and fears nothing. Today's lesson is about how God, who is not subject to time, works inside the bubble of time to help us. Amazingly, God foretold through one of His ancient prophets how he would enter into time to rescue us from troubles, save us from the penalty of sin, and help us bear the burden of life. Let's start with an illustration.

It was Emre's first year in school. He was barely seven years old. He lived on the edge of Bilecik where his father, whom he greatly admired, worked at a marble quarry.

Everyday, Emre had to walk home alone from school because his mother was caring for his younger siblings. He only lived a kilometer from the school which wasn't very far for a little boy. But he had to walk two hundred meters along the main asphalt road where the big flat bed trucks carried giant pieces of marble from the quarry.

The trucks were fast, the road was narrow and when two trucks passed there was no room for pedestrians. Emre's parents continually warned him to quickly come straight home from school. His mother, a kind woman, simply wanted the peace of knowing that her precious boy was safe. She would kiss Emre when he arrived and loved to ask about his school day. Then he was free to play as he wished.

Unfortunately, Emre's trip home was rarely as fast as his mother wanted. In fact, he often took hours getting home! While on that stretch of road, he liked looking for metal parts and pieces of chain that had fallen off the big trucks. Emre's father and mother warned him again and again, telling him he must come straight home. The kind father even spanked the boy severely for not coming directly home. Unfortunately, it didn't solve the problem. The boy's disobedience was growing and his wandering journey from school continued. Needless to say, his mother was constantly worried.

One day his parents warned him that there would be strong consequences, different consequences, if he didn't come immediately back from school.

The boy came late again. His mother met him at the door but said nothing. At dinner that night, the boy walked into the kitchen and looked at the wonderful food his mother prepared. Shortly thereafter, greenbeans, roasted meat, rice, garbanzos and salad were all in dishes on the family tray in the center of the floor.

When Emre was about to sit down, his mother pointed to another plate sitting in the corner. It had half a slice of bread and a glass of water.

“This is the place for the disobedient,” his mother said softly.

She showed Emre where he could sit, pointing to the shameful plate. The boy looked at the family gathered around the tray and all the food, then he looked away from his father and mother ashamed. His

father remained silent. He simply looked at the boy, his face showing signs of broken trust.

The boy was crushed. He knew what he had done was wrong. He looked at the half slice of bread. On an ordinary day, he would have been thankful for a glass of water. But now, under these circumstances, it was like poison. Tears began to flow down his seven year old face. His disrespect for his parents' commands had finally caught up with him.

The father waited for the full impact to sink in. Then he quietly stood up, walked to the corner, took Emre by the hand, sat him down in the Baba spot at the family table, and placed a spoon in his hand. Then Emre's father went and sat down in the corner in front of the "plate of the disobedient." While looking at the half slice of bread, he said loudly,

"Son, your disobedience hurts the whole family."

During the meal, Emre watched his father eat the bread from 'the plate of the disobedient.'

Many years later, as a grown man, Emre reflected on the moment:

"That night the food didn't taste good to me as I watched my dear father eat only that half slice of bread. There was plenty of food. But he chose to eat what was rightfully mine. He suffered the punishment that I deserved. Baba was a big man, hungry and tired from a hard day's work at the quarry. And my actions made his life harder. From then on," Emre said, "I obeyed my mother, because I didn't want to hurt my dad again."

The mother had given the son "justice". While the father had worked within the boundaries of the mother's justice to supply the boy with "grace." From this story we see that grace came to Emre at the expense of his father's hunger. In today's lesson we will look at some prophecies of Isaiah which reveal an extraordinary mystery to us.

This mystery helps us see that the grace which we receive from God also comes at a great expense, specifically to God Himself.

Let's first start by reviewing how Isaiah was called to be a prophet of God, and the credibility of his prophethood. We can read about his call in Isaiah chapter 6 verses 1-7:

1 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

It is interesting to note that God calling prophets in and of itself is an example of how the timeless One actually reaches into time and alters/interferes with what seems to be fate. He actually pursues us and calls us to obedience through his prophets. In Isaiah's case, God goes to Isaiah and calls him to be a prophet around 700 BC. But before he could serve as a prophet, Isaiah had to recognize his sinfulness and repent. After his repentance and cleansing, God proceeded to reveal some amazing things to Isaiah. Let's review two of them.

The first example is from II Kings chapter 19. At the time Jerusalem was surrounded by nearly 200,000 Assyrian soldiers. The situation seemed hopeless. But Isaiah had prayed and God told him that he would perform a miraculous deliverance for his people. Sure enough, the next morning when the watchman looked out from the

walls of Jerusalem they found that “the angel of the Lord” had come and slain 185,000 of the pagan Assyrian army!

Isaiah’s prophecy of the future came true because the spirit of God was instructing him. Let’s read the second example of his prophecies, this time concerning the great Persian king Cyrus in Isaiah chapter 45 verse 1:

1 “Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed:

Iranians still hail Cyrus as their greatest leader. And today, you can go to Sardis, climb a mountain above the old temple ruins, and stand on the very site where Cyrus conquered the Lydian Empire. But in Isaiah’s day, Cyrus hadn’t even been born! In fact it wasn’t until 160 years after Isaiah died that Cyrus became famous for conquering Babylon. Moreover, Isaiah foretold exactly how Cyrus would do it. Imagine how remarkable it would be if a document had been written in 1760 stating that a man named Mustafa Kemal would come liberate Turkey from foreign oppressors!

Yes, Isaiah’s words are remarkable and he told many things about the future. And as remarkable as our first two examples were, they pale in comparison to the mystery of all mysteries that Isaiah sheds light on. Let’s look at that mystery’s foundational text in Isaiah chapter 1 verse 18:

18 “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”

It is this theme of God interacting with man for his redemption that sets the foundation for one of the most amazing prophecies of the Bible. It is the prophecy that would unlock the oldest mystery recorded, the meaning of God’s original promise to Adam and Eve after they sinned. Let’s review what God said in Genesis chapter

3 verse 15. Remember He was talking to the snake who we later learned was Satan.

15 "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

Basic biology tells us that men have the seed. So what does this strange statement, 'the seed of the woman', mean? Let's see how Isaiah reveals the secret to this mystery. We can continue reading in chapter 7 verses 11-14:

*11 "Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. 12 "But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test." 13 And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. **Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.***

The first revelation of this mystery is that a virgin shall conceive and bear a son! Moreover this will not be an ordinary boy. His name would be Immanuel which means "God with us." In other words, this boy would be born unlike any child who had ever been born, that is without an earthly father or his seed. The second revelation is that this boy would be a king. Let's read about it in chapter 9 verses 6 and 7:

*6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and **the government shall be upon his shoulder** . . . 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*

It seems that there isn't anything ordinary about this child. His mother will be a virgin, he will be descended from King David, and

he will establish David's throne forever. Moreover, he will do it with justice and judgment, both of which require great wisdom.

But as Isaiah continues to describe this child as a man, with perhaps his most graphic and important words, we quickly see that his life will not be as one might expect. In chapter 52 and 53 Isaiah begins to paint a picture of him as a sufferer. In fact, we learn from Isaiah that suffering plays a large part of this heaven sent king's role and mission on earth. Read and imagine what Isaiah is saying in chapter 52 verses 13-15:

13 Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. 14 As many were astonished at you-- his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind-- so shall he sprinkle many nations; 15 kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.

Isn't it strange that this future servant of God would be exalted as a just king and yet something terrible would happen to him. Did you notice the holy prophet said, "many would be astonished by him" and "His appearance would be marred"? What does that sound like to you? How could God allow that to happen him?

If you continue reading in Chapter 53, you will see that it is entirely about this "suffering servant." Let's read verses 2-12:

*2 For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 **Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;** yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 **But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities;** upon him*

was the chastisement that brought us peace, and **with his stripes we are healed.** 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and **the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.** 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? 9 And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. 10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. 11 Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; **by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous,** and he shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Why does the Bible say that he would be “wounded for our transgressions?” Is this connected perhaps with the ancient prophecy at Eden that the serpent would "bruise his heel?" What did it mean when it said,

“By his stripes (injuries) we would be healed?”

What was to happen to this man chosen by God to set up King David's throne forever? Would Isaiah's prophecies hold true that the miracle baby born of a virgin would actually end up “like a lamb, silent, being led to the slaughter?”

Let us consider more carefully several of these verses. We can start with verses 5 and 6:

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Notice that it is the LORD who was to lay upon him the iniquity of the people. In fact to be more precise it says the “iniquity of us all.” In other words this person was going to suffer a penalty that we deserved. Much like Emre’s father in the introductory story who bore his child’s punishment, this king would suffer for us.

We know that God is intent on blessing the whole world through Abraham and yet it appears that this man's suffering has some kind of connection to that original blessing. In some strange way, his suffering will bring us relief. Relief from what? The words transgression and iniquity give us a hint: **our sin!**

In fact the first part of Isaiah chapter 53 verse 10 says:

10 Yet it pleased Jehovah to crush Him; to grieve Him; that He should give His soul as a sin-offering.

And even more clearly in verse 11 we learn that his suffering and death would bring justice to all people.

11 He shall see the travail of His soul, and shall be fulfilled. By His knowledge shall My righteous Servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities.

Yes, the mercy of God isn't cheap. It comes with a price. The price is the blood of one man who would suffer much at the hands of wicked men; a sacrifice of obedience and love.

Perhaps Yunus Emre captured the meaning of this type of love in a poem he wrote:

I'm Yunus, mystic of sorrow.
 Suffering wounds from top to toe,
 In the Friend's hands I writhe in woe,
 Come see what love has done to me.

In chapter 61 verses 1-3, Isaiah wrote a final description of this suffering king's mission:

1 The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me; because the LORD has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 to proclaim the acceptable year of Jehovah and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; 3 to appoint to those who mourn in Zion, to give to them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the mantle of praise for the spirit of heaviness; so that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Jehovah, that He might be glorified.

The one to come was anointed to bring joy and relieve the mourning and heaviness of the people. He was to preach the gospel to the poor, proclaim the year of God's acceptance, and make us trees of righteousness. It is precisely this type of event that Isaiah pleaded for in chapter 64 verses 1-5:

1 Oh that You would rend the heavens and come down! That the mountains would quake at Your presence, as the brushwood fire burns, as the fire causes water to boil; to make Your name known to Your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Your presence! 2 When You did awesome things which we did not look for, You came down, the mountains shook at Your presence. 3 For since ancient times they have not heard, nor been obedient.

4 Eye has not seen any god besides You, who works for him who waits for Him. 5 You meet him who rejoices and works righteousness, those who remember You in Your ways (Behold, You were angry, for we sinned continually), and we shall be saved.

The Prophet Isaiah saw that rescue originating from heaven was the only way out of our miserable condition because humans have no goodness of their own. Some people reject this Biblical truth, but listen to this strong, even shocking, comparison in verse 6:

*6 But we are all like an unclean thing, and **all our righteousness deeds are like a menstruation cloth**. And we all fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*

The prophet said all of our good works are like a filthy rag! Humans are not gods. We cannot create or generate goodness that will secure us a place in heaven. No matter how hard we try, it can't happen. It is a fate we owe to our first ancestors. Our sins are like the crimson stains of blood at a crime scene. So how can we ever make it into paradise?

The answer to that question is the exact point of Isaiah's prophecies. Isaiah says that God could not find a person on earth who could solve this problem, so He Himself had to solve humanity's sin problem. Listen to this in Isaiah 63 verse 5:

5 And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me.

Did you notice the words, "mine own arm brought salvation to me?" Unfortunately, the Turkish translation doesn't give this verse justice in its original language. A better translation would have been "my own arm has brought salvation." Literally, "God's own arm brought salvation to me." Perhaps that is why the suffering king's name is Immanuel.

During the Korean war, the M.A.S.H. units saved many thousands of soldier's lives. If you remember, the Korean War was when the South Koreans, Turks and about 20 other nations fought side by side for the cause of political freedom. Our Turkish war veterans were witnesses to the heroic actions of the M.A.S.H. unit doctors in the Korean forests. The nurses and doctors were an amazing bunch of dedicated life savers.

The efforts of the medics to save lives provides a fitting illustration to close this lesson. Often a truck or helicopter would drop ten or more critically wounded patients at a M.A.S.H. surgical ward. An urgent siren would sound and the doctors and nurses would rush to the surgery tents, and prepare for the worst. Soldiers had faces torn off, shoulders blown off, or legs loaded with shrapnel. Patients would arrive a crimson mess.

Imagine the following scene. In one corner of the room, a doctor is working frantically to clamp off veins. The young man's whole belly is wide open and the doctor is attempting to work as fast as he can to remove shrapnel from the soldiers stomach. The patient is losing blood fast. The doctor is afraid for the patient's life and with hands dripping in blood he makes an urgent call,

“Nurse we need another unit of blood!”

The nurse's reply came back negative, but respectful, “Doctor we have had so many units given out today, there is no more to give.”

The doctor stops, hangs his head as if in a moment of defeat, and thinks. Then without another moment's hesitation the doctor said,

“Get a bottle and table ready for me.”

With dedication and pity for his patient, the doctor pierced his own arm and give his own blood for that soldier.

Like those wounded soldiers, Isaiah paints a clear picture that the people of this world are in trouble. We are in the middle of a battle between good and evil and we are fatally bleeding. The prophet says we can't mend our own wounds. He says **all our righteousness is like filthy rags**. However, the prophet Isaiah says that God, like the doctor, would come to our rescue. A baby would be born of a virgin, grow into a man, suffer innocently, and give himself as a sacrifice for our iniquity. It is a sacrifice that humans can't provide, but one that God himself would send from heaven. He calls that ONE his "annointed." Yes, in 680 BC God revealed to his prophet the strategy to conquer evil in the life of the Messiah!

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. From the introductory story, why do you think Emre never forgot what his father did?
2. What do you think God means in Isaiah 1:18, "Come now and let us reason together, says Jehovah: Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool?"
3. According to Isaiah 53, God's Messiah would have to suffer. According to the text what reason or purpose is given for his suffering? (See Isaiah 53:5-11.)
4. Have you ever had a problem so big you knew you couldn't solve it on your own, you needed God's help? Do you believe God can personally intercede to provide a solution?

11

WHERE DID EVIL COME FROM?

*Where did Satan come from and why hasn't God
destroyed him yet?*

At the very beginning of our lessons we asked some important questions about the presence of evil in our world, fate, and the character of God. If God is good, why is there evil in the world? Did God create evil? If He did not create evil, where did evil come from? Is God powerful enough or loving enough to destroy evil from the universe? Or will sin continue for all eternity? We already found the answers to some of these questions. We learned that sin came into the world when Satan, disguised as a snake, enticed Adam and Eve to disobey God in the Garden of Eden. Fortunate for us, immediately after their sin God foretold that the offspring of Eve would crush Satan's head. Sin would not continue forever. But up until now our lessons haven't answered the question of how Satan came to be evil in the first place. Before the events in the Garden of Eden, what happened?

In most lessons we have studied a single story or passage of scripture from the same author. In this lesson, we will examine two separate passages of Scripture to learn how one prophet adds to and compliments another prophet's writings. After comparing them we will actually get a clearer picture of a somewhat complex event.

Both authors, Isaiah and Ezekiel, have something to teach us about the origin of evil and what God will do about it. To help us under

stand the nature of these Scripture passages let us consider a story from secular literature.

Have you ever heard of the book called *Animal Farm* written by George Orwell and published in 1945? Most people understand that *Animal Farm* is a satire based on events that happened in Russia after the 1917 Revolution. In that year workers overthrew the Czar of Russia. Based on the writings of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and others, the first major leader, V. I. Lenin developed the ideas of communism. The basic principles were government by the common people and equality.

After Lenin died in 1924, two Communist Party leaders, Stalin and Trotsky competed for power. Stalin ended up the winner, and in 1934 he ordered mass executions of people who were considered enemies of the state. In 1941 Stalin named himself the head of the collective government. During most of Stalin's rule rationing was enforced and minimum labor requirements were imposed on all. Contrary to the fundamental beliefs of communism, Communist Party members were generally recognized as having a higher living standard than the average citizen.

In the book *Animal Farm*, the story takes place on Manor Farm owned by Mr. Jones. One night the prize boar, Old Major, makes a speech to the other farm animals. He says to them,

"Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. He does not give milk, he does not lay eggs, he is too weak to pull the plough, he cannot run fast enough to catch rabbits. Yet he is lord of all the animals. He sets them to work, he gives back to them the bare minimum that will prevent them from starving, and the rest he keeps for himself."

He tells the animals that they must work to overthrow the human race because, as he says,

"All men are enemies. All animals are comrades."

He tells all the animals, including the wild ones, to stick together and remember that they are all equal.

But Old Major dies and two boars named Snowball and Napoleon become leader of the pigs. The pigs start teaching Old Major's ideas to the other animals. They call their new system Animalism. One night Mr. Jones gets drunk and forgets to feed the animals. The animals get so hungry that they rebel and drive the human beings off the farm. They rename the farm, "Animal Farm". They even write the seven Commandments of animalism:

1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.
2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend.
3. No animal shall wear clothes.
4. No animal shall sleep in a bed.
5. No animal shall drink alcohol.
6. No animal shall kill any other animal.
7. All animals are equal.

Of course, Snowball and Napoleon can't agree about the farm's future plans. A power play ensues and eventually Napoleon calls in nine dogs to chase Snowball off of the farm.

Up until this point in the story, the animals had worked very hard making a windmill to provide electric power to the farm. It was really Snowball's idea, but Napoleon claimed it as his own. The work on the windmill is slow and relies heavily on Boxer the cart-horse who is strong and hard-working. While Boxer works away, the pigs decide to move into the farm house and sleep in beds; even though sleeping in beds like humans was forbidden by the seven Commandments.

Soon thereafter life became harder than ever for everyone but the pigs. While the other animals were forced to adhere to the Seven Commandments, which constantly changed, the pigs began to walk on two feet. Eventually, the Commandments were taken off the wall of the barn. Then comes the famous quote,

“All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.”

When a group of humans come to see the farm, the other animals notice that they can't tell the difference between the humans and the pigs.

You may be wondering what this story could possibly have in common with the origin of sin in the universe. We will see the relation as we begin to look at our story in Isaiah chapter 14 verses 3-20:

3 It shall come to pass in the day the LORD gives you rest from your sorrow, and from your fear and the hard bondage in which you were made to serve, 4 that you will take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say: "How the oppressor has ceased, The golden city ceased! 5 The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked, The scepter of the rulers; 6 He who struck the people in wrath with a continual stroke, He who ruled the nations in anger, Is persecuted and no one hinders. 7 The whole earth is at rest and quiet; They break forth into singing. 8 Indeed the cypress trees rejoice over you, And the cedars of Lebanon, Saying, 'Since you were cut down, No woodsman has come up against us.' 9 "Hell from beneath is excited about you, To meet you at your coming; It stirs up the dead for you, All the chief ones of the earth; It has raised up from their thrones All the kings of the nations. 10 They all shall speak and say to you: 'Have you also become as weak as we? Have you become like us? 11 Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, And the sound of your stringed instruments; The maggot is spread under you, And worms cover you.' 12 " How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! 13 For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into

heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' 15 Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit. 16 "Those who see you will gaze at you, And consider you, saying: 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, Who shook kingdoms, 17 Who made the world as a wilderness And destroyed its cities, Who did not open the house of his prisoners?' 18 "All the kings of the nations, All of them, sleep in glory, Everyone in his own house; 19 But you are cast out of your grave Like an abominable branch, Like the garment of those who are slain, Thrust through with a sword, Who go down to the stones of the pit, Like a corpse trodden underfoot. 20 You will not be joined with them in burial, Because you have destroyed your land And slain your people. The brood of evildoers shall never be named.

This passage of scripture begins as a prophecy against the king of Babylon. It expresses a time when the Israelites would return from their captivity in Babylon and Babylon would no longer be the center of a strong empire. It explains how the whole world rejoices to be free of the despotic power of Babylon and her king. But just as Animal Farm had a double meaning, so does this passage of scripture. In fact, right in the middle of this account, in verses 12-14, we can see that Isaiah is talking about something deeper. Let's reread those verses:

12 " How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! 13 For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'

Who is Lucifer? It is Satan himself! This is actually the history of Satan's fall with Babylon only serving as a comparison. The king of Babylon became very proud and with his power he oppressed the nations of the earth. In the same way Lucifer, who fell from heaven, came to power and oppressed the people under him, that is, all the nations of the earth. We see that the reason for this rebellion was ambition and pride. Lucifer, who after his fall is called Satan, actually desired to remove God from His throne and take over the kingship of the universe. In short, **he wanted to be God!**

It is rumored that in 1995 when Michael Jackson came to Turkey he visited Topkapı palace. There is a throne there made with 250 kilos of gold and laden with jewels. When he saw the throne, Michael Jackson asked if he could sit on it and have his photo taken. Of course it is forbidden for anyone to sit on it because it was the sultan's throne and has great national and historic value. Nonetheless Michael asked and was denied. The museum would make no exceptions. Michael Jackson wasn't the sultan! Likewise, Satan isn't God and has no right to sit on His throne.

On the surface, the book *Animal Farm* is an amusing story about animals and a farm. But with a little comparative historical analysis, it is obvious that it is the history of communism in Russia. It is the story of rebellion against a monarchy and the establishment of a new government. Likewise, we see that the fall of Satan was also the result of rebellion.

In previous lessons, we have seen a few glimpses of the nature of Lucifer's rebellion against God. Do you remember when Satan approached Eve in the Garden of Eden and said:

"You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."⁷

⁷ Genesis 3: 4, 5

Satan suggested to Eve that God was selfishly withholding good things from her and exalting Himself.

In the book of Job Satan said to God,

"Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!"⁸

The implication of Satan's words touch at the very foundation of the government of God. God declares that the foundation of His government is unselfish love. But Satan says that Job only served God because he received physical benefits that God provided. He insinuated that God was bribing Job for his allegiance and that it wasn't based on love but rather selfish gain.

In the book *Animal Farm* there was a rebellion against an oppressive ruler. The animals took over and formed their own government. But they found in a very short time that the equality they were seeking was still eluding them. The leaders were selfish and broke the rules that they themselves had set up. They indulged themselves in luxury while the others worked and suffered.

The lesson is that humans can not sustain a government that depends on unselfishness because humans are by nature selfish. That is the inheritance we receive from our ancestors Adam and Eve who were infected with it by Satan. So all human governments, regardless of what we call them, have this weakness, the selfishness of the people who live in it and run it. Therefore, no matter how well the government is planned or how hard humans try, most governments eventually fail. Everywhere we hear, "We are all equal." But everywhere we see the principle played out as, "But some are more equal than others."

⁸ Job 1:9-11

So what is the solution? Well it can't be found with the human mind. The only solution is a supernatural act that requires God to change the selfish human heart into an unselfish heart, full of the desire to serve others. The Bible calls it conversion and the Kingdom of God. No other government can work. That is why the Bible consistently deals with the sin problem, the problem of self. That is the real problem, not the governments. Whether the government is a democracy, communism, socialism, or a monarchy doesn't matter. If the people are selfish, the system won't work.

In *Animal Farm* after the animals overthrew the monarchy to create a better way of life, they replaced it with the very oppression and self-seeking that they accused the monarchy of exhibiting! When Adam and Eve chose to believe Satan over God, they essentially gave him dominion over the earth. It was at that point that Satan began to set up the kingdom that he claimed would be better than God's. How have you liked living in it so far?

Every day the newspapers are filled with reports of the vilest crime and terrible suffering. This is certainly not the kingdom that God created! Those evils are the result of selfishness reigning in the human heart. Self is the basis of the kingdom of Satan. It doesn't work. It can never work. But people need to see that it doesn't work. So God allows us to try every conceivable government in an attempt to reverse what Satan has started.

Now we come to the fascinating part. God could destroy everything like He did in Noah's day. But He doesn't. Instead **He reveals Himself to man in goodness that He may win the people's hearts again to Himself. He is allowing Satan to play his game so that his real character is revealed.** When Satan's character, motives, and intentions are exposed in the light of God's pure character, no one in their right mind would want to keep living as part of Satan's kingdom. Only by giving our allegiance back to God can we find true peace and happiness. Man's problems will not be solved by just making another government system if that system is based on self.

The answer to all the problems of humanity are found in the unselfish reign of God in the heart.

There is another passage of Scripture that is similar to the passage in Isaiah. Let us go to the book of Ezekiel. There we will read a lamentation for the king of Tyre. But can you find clues in this passage that there is a deeper meaning? Do you see indications that there are parallels with the fall of Lucifer and his work in this world? Let's read chapter 28 verses 12-19:

12 "Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "You were the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. 13 You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The sardius, topaz, and diamond, Beryl, onyx, and jasper, Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes Was prepared for you on the day you were created. 14 "You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. 15 You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you. 16 "By the abundance of your trading You became filled with violence within, And you sinned; Therefore I cast you as a profane thing Out of the mountain of God; And I destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst of the fiery stones. 17 "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, That they might gaze at you. 18 "You defiled your sanctuaries By the multitude of your iniquities, By the iniquity of your trading; Therefore I brought fire from your midst; It devoured you, And I turned you to ashes upon the earth In the sight of all who saw you. 19 All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you; You have become a horror, And shall be no more forever."

When was the king of Tyre in the Garden of Eden? He never was. A covering cherub is one of the angels in heaven that stand closest to

God.⁹ Was the king of Tyre a covering cherub? Of course not! When was the king of Tyre cast out of the mountain of God? He never was. So we understand that the lamentation against the king of Tyre is a metaphor similar to Isaiah's against Babylon. As *Animal Farm* used a story about animals to illustrate deeper political relationships and concepts in terms that we could understand, so also the Bible makes comparisons to help us understand.

In Ezekiel's account, we learn a number of things about the fall of Lucifer. Lucifer was a covering cherub. So no one was more acquainted with the character of God than Lucifer. As an angel, he actually stood in the presence of God. He was also very beautiful. So much so that he became proud and his heart became filled with violence. He actually started to believe that he was better than God and wanted to overthrow him. But now we come to the most important question. Did God create Lucifer that way?

Ezekiel tells us that Lucifer was perfect in all his ways until iniquity was found in him. God did not create the iniquity in him. But God did give him free choice, just like Adam and Eve, because it is necessary in a kingdom established upon love. **He wants us to love Him because we choose to, not because we have to!** Lucifer abused that privilege and became selfish, proud, and rebellious.

Another important thing that we learned from these passages is that sin will come to an end. Lucifer, who became Satan, will at last be destroyed. He will not be the guardian of an eternally burning hell and he will not live on to cause misery and temptation to anyone in God's kingdom. He will become ashes. Remember the verse we just read from Ezekiel chapter 28 verse 18:

18 "You defiled your sanctuaries By the multitude of your iniquities, By the iniquity of your trading; Therefore I brought fire from your midst; It devoured you, And I turned you to ashes upon the earth In the sight of all who saw you.

⁹ Imagine one of the angels standing above the Ark of the Covenant in Solomon's Temple.

Pride caused the king of Babylon and the king of Tyre to abuse their position and they lost their kingdoms. Pride caused Lucifer to rebel against his Creator and to oppress God's people. Lucifer, like the king of Babylon and the king of Tyre will lose his kingdom. He will be destroyed.

In Animal Farm the animals rebelled and attempted to rule the farm better than the farmer. But their attempt ended in failure. In 1917, the Bolsheviks of Russia led a rebellion against the czar and set up a new form of government called Communism that also ended in failure. In this lesson, we learned that Lucifer became dissatisfied with the leadership of God in heaven and desired to take God's place. Like a politician looking for supporters, he incites others to join him in rebellion against the Creator. The real question is: Is God and His leadership good?

We see from the outworkings of Satan's rebellion that the result of Satan's rulership is only sin, misery, suffering and eventually eternal death. When everyone has had a chance to choose which side they are on in this great controversy between God and Satan, the end of this world will come. Satan is a personal being that is intent on your destruction. He hates what God loves and that puts you at risk. There can only be one king of the universe and the Bible says it won't be Satan. Whose side do you want to be on?

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. The animals experienced the selfishness of the pigs in Animal Farm. Can you share some of the things you have experienced because of your own selfishness or the selfishness of others?
2. Lucifer had been in the immediate presence of God and knew of God's love and power. What do you think made Lucifer think that he could rebel against God and win?
3. Can you give an example that you have seen of how pride has blinded someone to the truth and caused them to do something foolish?
4. In Animal Farm, the pigs removed the 7 commandments from the barn wall. Why did they do that? Do you think Satan tries to remove the 10 Commandments of God from people's minds? How does he do that? What role does that play in the controversy over the allegiance of people to either God or Satan?

12 AN HONORABLE LIFE

Honor is more than an ideal, it is achievable one determined choice at a time. What is your choice?

In big cities hundreds of cars line the streets underneath "No Parking" signs. The general attitude of the people seems to be,

"If you can get away with it, do it."

It seems like very few people understand that there are reasons behind the prohibitions. Or perhaps obeying laws is just a matter of convenience to most people. What about God's instructions? Is God particular in His requirements or does He put them out there as a suggestion that would be good to follow if you have time or feel like it? Is He really not that interested in the details just as long as you make up for His requirements with some other compensating good deed?

In today's story we will look at our covenant relationship with God as it is carried out in practical life. It is in the every-day actions of life that our religion finds its expression, that the principles that motivate us find their application. We begin with a conversation between two men regarding some practical life situations.

Vural turned his glass bottom up and finished his last swallow of tea. He dropped the spoon into the glass with a clank as if to announce that he had come to a conclusion. He proclaimed,

“Kenan, I think you're crazy! You are too particular. You are losing a lot of money for nothing.”

Kenan looked at his friend carefully. It was not the first time that they had had this conversation.

"Why do you think that, Vural?" Kenan asked.

"Why don't you record half of your sales without a sales receipt? The value added tax is 18.5 percent. All that money goes to the government and you will never see any benefit out of it. Who knows how much of that money goes to buy summerhouses and Mercedes for government officials? I mean, isn't that really too much tax? And that isn't your only tax. There is stoppage tax because you are renting this shop and there is KDV tax and SSK quarterly tax and that does not include chamber of commerce bi-annual fees or insurance. Who can make any money with all these suffocating taxes and fees lingering over our heads? Just write down enough sales to make the tax office happy and do the rest under the table and make some money."

Kenan's computer store was certainly not rolling in money. His was only one of many such small stores on that busy downtown street. Vural had described exactly what Kenan's competition was doing. Beside himself, Kenan did not know anyone who operated his or her business completely within the law. Everyone was cheating on his or her taxes.

They would all say, "Well my machine is broken right now, I can't give a receipt."

Kenan responded to his friend, "Vural, from a financial standpoint you are right. But money is not the only thing in life. I am not saying that money isn't important. But is money there to serve me or am I here to serve money?"

Vural interjected, "I am not talking about being rich, I am talking about survival."

"I know, I know. It may be that I can't survive with my own store, that I have to close it, and go work for someone else. That is not what I want to do but it certainly is within the realm of possibilities. But what I am talking about is how I want to live. I do not want to go through life being a liar and a cheater. That is not the kind of person I want to be. I want to be a person of principle and character. And that includes my relationship with the government. I do not want to look upon the government as my enemy. While I am sure that there is graft and corruption in various places, all those taxes do provide socialized medicine, Social Security retirement, roads, schools, and the general laws that make the whole system work. If those weren't in place everything would be chaos. I want to support my country, not tear it down. Don't you love Turkey?"

Vural winced and said, "Yes of course I do, but I want to eat too. You can't make a living like this."

"Well, I haven't gotten rich yet, but I am surviving. Sometimes it is hard. But I want to trust God to meet my needs without having to go around the law to do it."

"The government will not miss your money. They have plenty of money. It is you who are poor. Don't worry about it. Don't cut so many receipts."

"Is that it? If someone is rich I should not pay him or her? Carrefour and Kipa have money, so I shouldn't pay them because they are rich? You want me to use pirate software because Bill Gates does not need the money?"

"Definitely. Bill Gates is rich. You don't need to give him another kuruş!" Vural said raising his voice.

Kenan leaned forward to make his point more emphatic, "So according to you, I should not give anything to God either because He is richer than everyone, right?"

"Well that's different," stuttered Vural. "We don't really give to God, we give to the poor or to our religion."

"How is it different? If our religious institutions are rich then we don't have to give. Isn't that right? With that kind of thinking all societal structures would break down. Things work best when everyone does their share. So I pay my taxes."

Vural lit his cigarette and watched the smoke curl up into the air.

"I still think you're being too particular. You are poor and the government doesn't need your money. They have too much anyway."

"How can I tell you something about principle? For example, if some foreigner walked into the shop and offered you pig's meat to eat, would you eat it?"

"No way!" shot back Vural. "That's disgusting!"

Vural curled up his nose as if the bad smelling meat was right in front of him.

"Why wouldn't you eat it?"

"Because it's forbidden," Vural said flicking the ashes from his cigarette to the floor.

"But why do you think it is forbidden? Is it because it is dirty? It has been washed and cooked just as much as any kokoreç."

"The meat itself is nasty. It is not fit for food."

"So you are saying that it is harmful to your body, is that right?"

"That's right," said Vural.

"And that cigarette you are smoking, I suppose you think that it's good for your body! And what about the rakı that you drink? What is that, organic health food?"

"Well that is different."

"How is that different? What is the principle? God revealed to man that swine's flesh is not good for food. And under no circumstance would you eat it. You think it's filthy and dirty. And you would feel yourself unclean (murdar) before God if you should eat it. Why then would you think that smoking and drinking wouldn't make you unclean before God? Don't they also destroy the body? And why do we think that eating swine's flesh would make us more unclean before God than telling lies or stealing Bill Gates' software? What kind of a tradition are we under where physical cleanliness supposedly recommends us to God more than moral purity? When did the idea come out that God accepts adulterers before pork-eaters?"

Vural was quiet for a moment. "I don't know, it just seems that way."

"It seems that way because tradition told us that, not because God's Word tells us that. God's Word tells us that eating muscles (midye) is just as unclean as eating pork. But on every seashore in Turkey, muscles are for sale to eat. Go look up God's command through the prophet Moses about what foods we could eat.¹⁰ You will see. But the question still remains, shall we live by principle or shall we do what is simply convenient? Shall we do right because it is right, no matter what the cost?"

Morals, food, tradition, covenant and principle are all important factors in this Bible lesson based on Daniel chapter 1. Let's start by reading verses 1-5:

*1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.
2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles*

¹⁰ Leviticus ch.11

into the treasure house of his god. 3 Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, 4 young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. 5 And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king.

As we see in these verses, the Ottomans were not the first to make use of the talents of captured peoples. After conquering the southern kingdom of Judah, destroying Jerusalem, and taking thousands of people captive, the king of Babylon saw potential in the descendents of Judah's king and other noble families to serve in his government. So, he placed them under the supervision of his officials, took care of their needs, and trained them in the local laws, religion, language, and traditions for three years. Let's continue by reading verses 6-8:

6 Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. 7 To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego. 8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

Imagine that you have been captured and taken to a place hundreds of miles from your homeland. You are among people who worship idols. You are given a name that corresponds to one of those false gods as a way of influencing you to give up your own religion and accept the gods of your captors. What would you do if you were offered pig's meat and wine? Would you eat it and drink it?

“No!” you say, “I would be true to principle. I would not consume either one.”

Well you know how important it is not to offend your host and to eat and drink what is offered to you. Not to mention that you don't have that problem right now in Turkey because everyone eats and drinks according to the same value system. But if you were miles away from family and peers living in Germany, would you make the same decision? Would you dare to be different? Let's see if Daniel follows through with his convictions in verses 9 and 10:

9 Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. 10 And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king."

Now the stakes are little higher. If Daniel refuses to eat the king's meat and drink his wine, it might offend him. He might even be killed. Under those two conditions, would you still remain true to principle, even if you lose your life? After all, you could think to yourself,

"Is it better to eat and drink something that I shouldn't and stay alive or refuse and die? What good is it if I am dead? Is it really worth risking my life over food and drink?"

But perhaps the issue is bigger than food and drink. Wasn't there also the issue of idolatry? In ancient cultures, the meats were traditionally offered to idols. When a person ate those meats they were actually paying honor to the false gods. Surely, Daniel wanted no part in that kind of religious practice. Let's see what happened next in Daniel chapter 1 verses 11-21:

11 So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to

eat and water to drink. 13 "Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants." 14 So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days. 15 And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. 16 Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. 17 As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. 18 Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. 20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm. 21 Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.

Daniel and his three friends would not compromise the principles of the covenant that God had laid out for them in the Torah. For Daniel and his friends, the principles of the Torah were not just rules and regulations. They were living principles. Daniel understood that to eat foods offered to idols would be considered participation in idolatry and of course he would not do that. Moreover, Daniel understood that eating foods forbidden by God was detrimental to his health. By staying true to principle, Daniel would be stronger mentally, physically and spiritually. He would be able to resist temptation and sin more easily because his body, brain and spirit were all interlinked.

Perhaps Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah remembered the story in Genesis where God had given Adam and Eve the perfect plant based diet in the Garden of Eden. Daniel and his friends believed that if they lived according to God's original plan they would

be blessed. Why? Because God created us and He knows what is best for us.

Daniel did not resort to some compensatory program. He did not say,

“Well I ate some meat and drank a drink that I shouldn’t, but if I count off 99 prayers I will make up for it.”

No, Daniel was true to principle. He risked his life for principle. As a result God blessed Daniel and showed everyone that He is particular and wants us to be faithful in both large and small matters.

God does reward right doing in this world. Sometimes we have to wait to see the results of that because God is also allowing evil to pursue its course. It is only after we see evil for what it really is that we can comprehend the goodness and wisdom of God.

Do you remember in the previous lesson, when the covering cherub Lucifer rebelled, that God did not destroy him right there and then? Since that moment, that fallen angel who became Satan has been permitted to tempt the people of this world. But just as God blessed Daniel for being true to the covenant and resisting Satan’s temptations, God will bless our lives with the peace of righteousness and the strength to resist evil when we remain true to Him. Consider the following situation:

Enver was on a business trip in Istanbul with several of his co-workers. After a kebab dinner, his coworkers invited him to a nightclub to have drinks and meet some girls.

“I am happily married, guys. You can go on without me.”

“We are happily married too, they said. We are just out for a little fun. Our wives don’t have to know.”

“Well, I cannot participate in your fun.”

“Mama’s boy” they all said. “Do you need permission to go out?” They teased.

But Enver would not budge.

“You can say what you want, but my commitment to my wife is stronger than your desire to get me to go to a club.”

Thus Enver went back to the hotel alone; he called his wife. They talked and were happy to hear each other’s voice.

The next day Enver was nearly finished with his breakfast in the hotel when his co-workers came down. Their eyes were half shut and red. They were making jokes among themselves about the girls they had danced with the previous night. Then one of the men's cell phones rang. It was his wife on the line.

"No, dear, we didn't go out to a club last night" he lied. "The reason I didn't answer my phone was because we were at a meeting and I left my phone on the charger in my room."

The man's face turned angry. "I am not lying. Why are you accusing me!" he shouted. "So you called the hotel to see if we were having a meeting that night! So you are following me around to check up on me..."

The atmosphere was tense and angry. Enver was so happy that he did not go to the club. He had nothing to hide and nothing to be ashamed of. On the contrary, he was comforted by the serenity of his relationship with his wife.

Our covenant with God is like a marriage relationship. **We are committed to God under all situations and conditions.** We are committed to our spouses. If we break that commitment, even in our hearts or minds, we damage that relationship. We may be far from our spouses; they may not see our movements. But are we committed to them?

We don't live in the presence of God in the sense that we do not see His form. But God does know our every movement. He knows if we are liars, cheaters or adulterers. Daniel was a man committed to God. Can you say the same thing about yourself? If not, then you can pray,

"God, help me to be a man committed to you in all areas of my life."

He will certainly answer that prayer.

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. If someone is rich are you comfortable to not pay him or her what you owe? Is the principle you act from based on the Word of God?
2. Which do you think is more displeasing in God's eyes, to not take off your shoes before you enter someone's house or to cut in front of them in line at the post office? Why?
3. Which is worse in God's eyes, to eat meat in which the blood was not properly drained or to tell a lie? Why do you think so?
4. If you tried to be good in all things, what kind of a reaction would you get from your family and friends? If it would be a negative response, where would you get the moral fortitude to do what is right no matter what others think?

13 THE POSSIBILITY OF KNOWING THE FUTURE

God alone knows the future. Go to Him and see what he can tell you about your fate and future.

What do you think the future will be like? If it can be known, where do you think you could find the answer? How different the world would be if stockbrokers, businessmen, politicians and scientists could clearly see the future. Knowledge of what the future holds is probably the most sought after information. Perhaps second only to the solution for death. And yet after thousands of years, humans have never been able to convincingly predict the future. Of course they have tried and will continue to try, but the closest they will ever get is still just a guess. In this lesson, through the dream of a king and the interpretation of a prophet, we discover God has given us a clear glimpse into the future, even the end of the world.

Cem always had a fascination with knowing the future; some might even call it an obsession. It probably started as a game or pastime. But as he grew older not a day went by that Cem didn't try in some way to discern what would happen next. The only problem was that instead of providing security, his quest for knowledge only caused more confusion and frustration.

You could perhaps say that Cem first became curious when he was a child. He remembered when his mother's friends would get together, talk, and drink coffee. When the coffee was finished, they would put the saucer over the cup, swirl it around a few times, let it settle, and then flip it upside down. He specifically remembered the older

woman who would look at the coffee grinds and “interpret what they said”. There was talk of angels, triangles, clouds, squirrels, beans, cats, eagles, and eyes. For the women, it may have just been a game, but for Cem it was a mysterious door into the unknown. A door he would try to walk through many times.

As an adult, Cem attempted to learn the future through the constellations. On his way to work, he would get the paper and rush to the office. With a cup of tea in one hand and the paper spread out on his desk, he would read his horoscope and contemplate what life would be like if it came true. But after those events didn’t happen and he realized that the predictions for most “signs” were diluted versions of the same thing, he gave up.

“There must be another way!” he thought to himself. “I know, I will go to an astrologer and have them read my star chart.”

So Cem looked in the newspaper, found an advertisement, called the number and set up an appointment. When he showed up, the woman asked a bunch of questions about his birthday, place of birth, parents, and siblings. As she was drawing up Cem’s chart and “reading” the stars, she paused and said,

“If you want me to be more specific or to have a chance at changing your fate, I could always read the tarot cards for you. Of course there is an additional fee.”

At this point, Cem wasn’t too concerned about the price. He reasoned to himself,

“Well, I don’t really want to spend the money. But then again, can you put a price on knowing the future? After all, knowing the future might help me avoid a disaster, meet a woman, or even become rich. Besides, you only make money to spend it!”

“Sounds good to me,” he replied.

After a couple of hours, Cem walked out of the store with a chart, a prediction, and a sense of accomplishment. He felt like he possessed a knowledge that very few would ever obtain. As he walked home, he began to make a plan with the information he had just sequestered. It wouldn't be long before all his dreams and desires would be fulfilled.

Then, about two weeks after his visit to the astrologer, Cem's world came crashing down. He had an experience that not only wasn't predicted, but was completely contrary to what the woman had told him. Cem was a mess of mixed up feelings; anger, worry, doubt, shame, and confusion were just a few that he was experiencing. But perhaps the worst feeling was uncertainty, specifically about the future. An uncertainty that became so unbearable that he was depressed for years. Unfortunately, Cem never looked in the right place.

One of the most wonderful things about the Bible is that it provides the answers to many of life's questions – answers that can bring real peace into a person's life, not only for the present, but also for the future. Up to this point, we have been reading about historical events with the occasional reference to the future. But in the book of Daniel, the message of the Bible makes a dramatic shift. Starting in the 6th century BC, God provides a glimpse, sometimes broad and sometimes detailed, of the earth's future. A future filled with justice and injustice, happiness and despair.

When most people read the book of Daniel and compare the scriptures with history, they are amazed. It isn't an exaggeration to say that most skeptics of the Bible have a very hard time understanding how a man could write such vivid details of future events hundreds of years before they happened. Although they have tried in vain, they can't dispute the facts. God foretold the future, and it happened just as He said it would.

In this second lesson from the book of Daniel, we will get a very broad glimpse into the future from Daniel's perspective. In other

words, most of the events he saw happened at the end of his life or later in history. Not only do these visions show God's intimate knowledge of future events, they form the backdrop of Daniel's later visions which depict events that will take place at the earth's end. Let's start this fascinating lesson by reading from the book of Daniel chapter 2 verses 1-6:

1 In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him. 2 Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king. 3 And the king said to them, I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream. 4 Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation. 5 The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins. 6 But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation.

If you remember from the last lesson, King Nebuchadnezzar was the ruler of the Babylonian Empire. Like many of the kings that would reign throughout history, he too thought of himself as the ruler of the world. Whatever he wanted he got. His kingdom stretched from the Mediterranean Sea's eastern shores to the Persian Gulf and up the Tigris and Euphrates rivers into modern day Turkey.

But after several successful military campaigns, Nebuchadnezzar learned that some things were not obtainable through human means. After a nearly sleepless night of tossing and turning, he woke up frightened and confused. He knew that he had a dream, but he couldn't remember what happened. Well his dream obviously wasn't ordinary because he proceeded to call all of his magicians, sorcerers, and astrologers into his chambers. Nebuchadnezzar didn't

waste any time, he immediately ordered them to not only interpret his dream, but to tell him what it was. What would you do in that situation? You would do the same thing they did, ask for him to explain the dream.

But Nebuchadnezzar saw right through their deceit. He knew the task was impossible and probably knew that their rituals and enchantments were nothing more than a show. After all, these men were doing the same thing that the Pharaoh of Egypt's sorcerers did. But the enchanters of Babylon weren't as stubborn as the ones in Egypt. They knew their limitations. Let's read their response in Daniel chapter 2 verses 10-12:

10 The Chaldeans answered the king and said, There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. 11 The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh. 12 Because of this the king was angry and very furious, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed.

Nebuchadnezzar's men admitted that they were incapable of fulfilling his desire. It was a task that could only be done by the gods and it was believed that the gods had little concern for man. In fact, they said that they dwell "not with flesh." They obviously didn't know much about the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Daniel – the Creator who not only dwells with man but also makes agreements.

Regardless of their excuses, King Nebuchadnezzar was serious and if the dream wasn't revealed and interpreted by these men, they would all die. Moreover, their names would be wiped from the history books, their property destroyed, and their very existence forgotten forever. And that is what was about to happen. Let's continue with verses 13-16:

13 So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them. 14 Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon. 15 He declared to Arioch, the king's captain, Why is the decree of the king so urgent? Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel. 16 And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king.

In our last lesson we learned a lot about Daniel. He was a man of integrity, strong faith, and completely dedicated to living a holy life. Unfortunate for him, his education and position as a counselor in Babylon caused him to be included with the astrologers, sorcerers, and magicians. But as we read in the last lesson, he had proven himself to be wiser and more reliable than his years. Thus it is no surprise that he was granted additional time to interpret the dream. But how could he do it? Daniel was after all just a human and humans are not able to read minds.

Daniel went to his friends and told them to pray. He never intended to interpret the dream himself and he knew the God of Abraham would protect him and his friends just as He had before. So they prayed and while asleep, God showed Daniel the dream and explained what it meant. Before we read about the dream, let's read Daniel's response to God in verses 20-23:

20 Daniel answered and said: Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. 21 He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; 22 he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. 23 To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter.

In short, Daniel gave God all the credit for revealing the dream and he pointed out many key aspects of God's character. He pointed out that God is wise and mighty. He has the ability to change times and seasons, He is in control of worldly governments, and He is the source of all wisdom and understanding. As we continue to read through the Bible, we will see all of these on display. But in the context of this lesson, **the most important aspect of God's character is that He reveals deep and hidden things and knows what is in the darkness.** Is there anything more hidden than the future?

With determination and confidence, Daniel requested an audience with King Nebuchadnezzar and made his way to the palace. Now Daniel could have entered that palace with show and arrogance. He could have explained the dream and interpreted it for the king. He could have gotten all the glory while becoming famous and rich. But he didn't. He gave credit to the only One who can reveal what is hidden. Let's read Daniel 2 verses 26-30:

26 The king said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation? 27 Daniel answered the king and said, No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, 28 but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these: 29 To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be. 30 But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.

Oh that we could all be as humble as Daniel. How much better would our world be if everyone acknowledged God as the source of wisdom, goodness, and success? Not only did he condemn the use of magic, enchantments and astrology to discern the future, he made

known to King Nebuchadnezzar that there was a God who cared enough to reveal events before they happened. Why do you think God wanted Nebuchadnezzar to know the future? Would it help him govern his empire? Would it make him a better ruler? Or was it for some other reason? Let's read about the dream in verses 31-35:

31 "You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. 32 The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. 34 As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Have you ever had a dream, forgotten what it was about, and then remembered it at some point during the next day? Maybe someone said something that reminded you or a smell, taste, or sound triggered your memory. Well, what would you do if someone came to you and said,

"I know you had a dream last night and this is what it was about"?

To say you would be shocked is probably an understatement. And yet this is exactly what Daniel just did!

In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, we have all the elements of a good story: a king, a prophet, a vision involving precious metals, and ultimate destruction. What could it all mean? Why is the image made of different kinds of metals? What do you think it looked like? And how could a rock destroy iron, silver, and gold? Let's find some answers to these questions in chapter 2 verses 36-43:

36 *“This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. 37 You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, 38 and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold. 39 Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. 40 And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. 41 And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. 42 And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. 43 As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay.*

The image was in the shape of a man, much like the statues in many of our museums. It had a head, shoulders, arms, body and legs. Based on the description that Daniel gave Nebuchadnezzar, the image or statue was broken up into five sections with each section made of a different metal (see picture). Starting at the head and moving to the feet, each section represented an empire – an empire that would not only conquer the previous one but also incorporate all of its cultural refinements (e.g., military tactics, art, beliefs, laws, and architectural designs). Perhaps the most important characteristic was that all of these empires would control Israel, the land promised to the descendants of Abraham. And on a much deeper level, they would control the fate of God's covenant people. In some cases they would help them and in others they would persecute them.

Let us not forget that this prophecy doesn't attempt to describe every king and empire that ever existed. It is rather a very broad view of history and one upon which later prophecies will be built. Just in

case you have any doubts, we will be studying this subject much deeper in Daniel chapters 7-9.

At that time, King Nebuchadnezzar's empire was one of the strongest in the world. It just so happened that he was also in control of Jerusalem, the holy city and capital of Israel. So it makes sense that the Babylonian Empire was the head of gold. Interestingly, gold was very important to King Nebuchadnezzar. It is well known that Nebuchadnezzar had a human figure and two lions made of gold (all three were about 6 meters tall). And let's not forget the Golden Table and Golden image of Baal, both of which were made with solid gold and weighed approximately 25,000 kilos.

But Nebuchadnezzar wasn't going to live forever and his kingdom would eventually collapse. From 605-539 BC, the Babylonian empire reigned supreme. But in the east, another empire was on the rise: an empire consisting of two separate kingdoms united for the purpose of world domination, a unity represented in the image by the chest and two arms of silver. This empire was not as wealthy as Babylon, just as silver is not as valuable as gold. However, it was stronger. The kingdom that Daniel foretold was the Medo-Persian Empire which ruled the eastern Mediterranean from 539-331 BC.

The next kingdom that arose was led by Alexander the Great who created a larger empire than the previous two and in a record amount of time. Alexander's armies moved swiftly east until they reached the modern country of Afghanistan. The Greek empire that Alexander started would rule from 331-168 BC and repre-



sented the thighs of bronze. But it was the next kingdom that would be the strongest and rule the longest.

Iron is not a very valuable metal, but it is very strong and durable. The fourth kingdom of the image would be the strongest and also last longer than the previous three. Any student of history would tell you that the next great empire was the Roman Empire. From the year 168 BC until 476 AD, the Roman Empire ruled Europe and the Mediterranean with an “iron fist”. The glories of their architecture, culture, and government are still evident today. Yes, Rome was the iron legs. But what about the feet made of an iron and clay mixture? What do they represent?

Because the feet have iron in them, we know that the fifth kingdom will be a continuation of the Roman Empire or at least have characteristics derived from its Roman predecessor. Let’s review what Daniel said about the statues feet in verses 41-43:

41 And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. 42 And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. 43 As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay.

No one would be willing to argue that the destiny of Europe wasn’t shaped by the Roman Empire. Nearly everything about those countries is rooted in Roman culture, ideology, and government. It is also interesting to note, that Europeans have been trying for years to unite but have never succeeded. The French and English royal families arranged marriages, but remained enemies for hundreds of years. Charlemagne, Napoleon, and even Hitler tried to unite Europe but eventually failed. What do you think will happen to the European Union? Is it destined to last forever? This brings us to the

final kingdom, one not made with “human hands.” How long will it last? We can find out in Daniel 2 verses 44 and 45:

44 And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever; 45 just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.

What makes this kingdom different than the previous five? First, God, and not man, will set up the kingdom. Second, it will never be destroyed nor taken by another people. Third, it will destroy every earthly kingdom and last forever. Fourth, this is the only part of the dream that has not happened. So how do we know that what we just read is true? We have the proof of history and the promise of God!

Now some people may be thinking,

“I knew it! The scientists have been warning us that a meteor will destroy the earth. And the Bible is saying the exact same thing.”

Is that really what the Bible is saying? This dream is filled with symbolism and the rock is also a symbol. We know that it symbolizes God’s kingdom, but will that kingdom be physical or spiritual? Will it be on earth or in heaven? Is it somehow connected to the eternal kingdom that God’s “suffering king” will establish? Right now we don’t have enough information to answer these questions. But as we continue to study, not only will we find answers to those questions, we will see that God’s kingdom is the only thing that will last forever and we will want to be a part of it.

So how do you think King Nebuchadnezzar reacted to Daniel’s interpretation? Let’s find out in Daniel 2 verses 46-49:

46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. 47 The king answered and said to Daniel, Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery. 48 Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. 49 Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court.

Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged God as the revealer of mysteries and made Daniel a governor. There was no doubt in his mind that what God just showed him would come to pass. Do you have any doubts? Does the uncertainty of the future cause you stress? If it does, don't seek help from the stars, divination, or sorcery.

Cem didn't realize that looking to created objects for answers to the future is like asking a shoe shiner to build your house. The shoe shiners function is to clean and polish your shoes. He has been trained for that purpose. He has no knowledge of architecture, load bearing points, zoning restrictions, or concrete reinforcement. If you want to build a house you go to an engineer or architect. It is the same with stars; God created stars to bring light to a dark night, guide sailors on the ocean, and to record time. No matter how many times you look at them or chart them, they will never tell you the future! **If you want to know the future you have to go to the engineer and architect of time itself, the True Revealer of Mysteries, the God of the Universe, the Creator!**

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. How much time do you spend thinking about the future?
2. Does the uncertainty of future events scare you or cause stress?
3. Can you think of some things that the rock might represent? (Hint: Think about all the stories we have read that involved rocks.)
4. Everyone in the world is a citizen of a country, city, or town. How can we be a citizen of God's kingdom?
5. Are you starting to see a bigger picture emerge about God's plan for this world and your life? Is it changing your ideas about fate, life, and death?

14

IS FATE REAL?

In a contest between God and the idol of fate, who wins?

Good government protects and guarantees the basic freedoms of people. Everyone should have the basic human rights to raise a family, to own property and to get an education. It is a foundational freedom for people to be able to work and get paid for their work. Another basic freedom is the right to worship as one chooses. More than a few times in history great troubles have arisen where government has superimposed laws regarding worship. In other words, governments have dictated how, when, and where people were to worship. Thankfully, in Turkey we have the right to worship as we wish. Every person can choose whether they wish to be a Muslim, Jew, Christian, Buddhist or even Atheist. It's their right. It is a freedom we accept without much thought. But really the freedom is a great treasure. Unfortunately, it isn't that way everywhere around the world. History has proven that where government and religion are intertwined, trouble is sure to follow. In this lesson we will look at the courage of a few men who found themselves in just that situation. Let us begin this lesson with a short story from the pages of history.

In 1492 King Ferdinand of Spain, issued an edict to expel from his country all the Jews who had not converted to Catholicism. Many yielded to this pressure and became Catholics, while others stood for the faith of their ancestors and faced persecution. When the news of forced expulsion reached the Ottoman Empire, Sultan Beyazit

II issued a decree welcoming Spanish Jews into the Ottoman territories. This decree has been historically noted as one of the first visionary gestures of a “global community.” From Sultan Beyazit’s perspective, he couldn’t see why Spain would toss out such a class of useful and skilled people. He joked with his courtiers,

"You venture to call Ferdinand a wise ruler, he who has impoverished his own country and enriched mine!"

As a result of this invitation, a significant portion of the Spanish Jews came to the Ottoman Empire. Once here, they became known as Sephardic Jews.¹¹

Since that first invitation 500 years ago, the Ottoman Sultans and the Turkish Republic have offered Jews a safe haven from persecution in the European countries. It has been suggested that one of the characteristics that extended the domination of the Ottoman Empire was its allowance of religious freedom for the different nationalities and minorities under its rule. While many European nations expelled, persecuted or tried to convert the Jews under their dominion, the Turkish people of the Ottoman Empire, remained as an outstanding example of tolerance of different nationalities with different religions. Thank you Sultan Beyazit for such an example.

In the third chapter of the Prophet Daniel’s book, we find a powerful story of loyalty to monotheism, despite religious intolerance. In the last chapter we saw Nebuchadnezzar’s stunning dream of a metal statue: gold, silver, bronze, iron and iron mixed with clay. These represented the kingdoms of the world, all ultimately toppled by the kingdom of God.

About ten years after this dream, King Nebuchadnezzar decided to make his own glorious statue. Whether it was a statue of himself or an idol of a pagan god, we don’t know. But we do know that the statue was nearly 30 meters high. More amazing is that it was made of gold, a tribute to the king himself!

¹¹ Sephardic is derived from the Hebrew word Sephard which means Spain.

Nebuchadnezzar was an interesting ruler. Like Sultan Beyazit, he had high regard for the learned and intelligent men of other cultures. Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful conqueror, having conquered even Egypt. After conquering an area, he took captive the most gifted people and set them to work in his kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar was also noted for building great projects. One of them was known as the “Hanging Gardens” and one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Modern archaeology tells us that all over ancient Babylon there were temples and statues built for pagan deities. Let’s start reading about his grandest and most famous statue in Daniel chapter 3 verses 1-6:

1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. 2 Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 3 Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 4 And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 5 And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace."

Here was a royal invitation to a tuxedo event. All of the highest-ranking officials of the country would have been there! But it was a strange invitation because it came with the threat of death!

“Come, bow, or be burned.”

Most likely the furnace he mentioned was very large and used for purifying gold or glazing bricks. It quite possibly was even used to

make the golden image. Try to imagine a giant pide furnace, ready to be fired up for any of the guests who refused to honor this statue made of gold.

Nebuchadnezzar sat as a proud king watching over all these intelligent, well-educated men and perhaps even women, dressed in their finest silk robes. It was a grand occasion and had been planned to the finest detail. Even the instruments that were to be played were planned ahead. The mood of the moment, when all the rich and famous were to bow, was to be set perfectly with enchanting music.

But of course the story wouldn't be much of a story if everything went exactly as planned! There was trouble at this government sponsored, image worshipping party. Let's see what happened next in Daniel chapter 3 verses 8, 9, 12 and 13:

8 Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. 9 They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! 12 There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." 13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king.

Imagine the guards thrusting the men before the king.

"Here are the three men who refused to bow to your statue! O king."

Where had they learned such loyalty to the God of heaven? Of course, from their mother and father, when they were boys. They had learned the second of the Ten Commandments, which says, "make no idols." Certainly they learned from God's Spirit who told them that this was wrong. They may have only been three young men standing among hundreds of officials and intellectuals, but they were brave and taking a stand for what was right. Was it a foolish

move? Couldn't they have bowed with the others and simply asked God to look the other way for a moment? After bowing, couldn't they just recite some prayers or do some good works to outweigh their disobedience? They could have tried, but it wouldn't have worked because good works can't erase the sin we commit. No! While all bowed, they stood up for truth.

King Nebuchadnezzar was irate because there was more at stake than just a few men's disobedience. You see, Nebuchadnezzar means "the favorite son of the god of Nabu." Well, who is Nabu? He was the god of fate. **Though popularly accepted, many would be surprised to learn that the idea of Fate—each man's life being scripted ahead of time—has its roots in paganism.** In ancient Babylonian belief, Nabu controlled everyone's fate. Now, King Nebuchadnezzar, Nabu's favorite, was being challenged by these young men's refusal to bow. Did he really have control of their fate? Apparently, the king believed he did. Let's see what he did in Daniel chapter 3 verse 14:

14 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?"

Surprisingly he decided to give them a second chance. We can read about it in verse 15:

15 Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"

But the three men didn't want or need a second chance. Without hesitation, they responded to the king's offer in verses 16-18:

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this

matter. 17 If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. 18 But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

It was like throwing gasoline on a fire! Nebuchadnezzar blew his top. We can read his reaction in Daniel chapter 3 verse 19:

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated.

King Nebuchadnezzar was going to show them who controlled their fate! Wood and straw were added to the furnace. Then great bellows began to blow and within a minute the furnace was roaring. Flames were leaping from the sides and top of the furnace and the clay oven was even turning orange from the heat!

The young men were unwavering in their commitment to worship the true God. These were wealthy esteemed men who had worked their way into a life of government service. They were enjoying the benefits of wealth and position. All they had to do was bow to avoid shame and persecution by the king. But guided by inner principle and a loyalty to their God, they would not bow. To do so would shame their faith and their God.

In front of all the other dignitaries, Nebuchadnezzar roared with fury. He demanded the three men be immediately cast into that blazing furnace. Here is the story from Daniel chapter 3 verses 20-22:

20 And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. 21 Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. 22 Because the king's

order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

The great crowd watched in amazement. The soldiers fell to the ground dead. The king stood to his feet. Within seconds the men should have been turned to ashes in that fire. But instead silence fell upon the crowd as they stared into the raging fire, hardly believing their eyes. The three men stood up in the furnace! The flames were leaping around them, but they were not burning! Listen to Daniel's description of this miraculous event in verses 23 and 24:

23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. 24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king."

The king's question was an important one because to everyone's amazement it seemed as if God Himself was at the side of these beloved young men in the midst of the fire! Read closely in verses 25-27:

25 He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods." 26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. 27 And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.

God is faithful to his own! He didn't save them from the fire. **He saved them in the fire!** Just as He had protected thousands at the Red Sea by coming in a great pillar of cloud and flame, God protect-

ed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. But this time He appeared in person. God spared their lives and showed Himself powerful to the pagan king.

Remember, Nebuchadnezzar's name meant "son of the fate god." Now even he realized fate was a false god and was no match for heaven's principles of loyalty and love built on human choice.

Moved with emotion and in front of all the people, Nebuchadnezzar made the following declaration in chapter 3 verse 28:

28 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God."

We began by considering one of the most basic human freedoms, the right to be able to worship as one chooses. In May 1844, an official Ottoman edict was issued. It read,

"No subject of the Sublime [Ottoman] State shall be forced by anyone to convert to Islam against their wishes."

It was a reflection of the idea that there should be no compulsion in religion. Similarly in the Reform Edict of 1856 the Sultan proclaimed,

"All forms of religion are and shall be freely professed in my dominions. No subject of my empire shall be hindered in the exercise of the religion that he professes."

In other words, freedom of religion was not a concept, idea, or dream. It was a reality and no person could be forced to believe something against their conscience or will. Furthermore, all religions would be respected and freely practiced within the boundaries of the empire. In short, you were free to worship as you pleased.

Of course with this same freedom a person has the right to ignore truth. It is sad, and a shame upon the human intellect, that a person wouldn't even be interested in finding the TRUTH! Congratulations for exercising your right and God-given duty to study for yourself the ancient writings of God.

Today in Turkey we are blessed to have government that has affirmed that all people are equal without distinction of religion. But seasons come, laws change, and the winds of popular opinion blow. Someday perhaps you will be forced to decide if you will make a public stand for truth or not, just like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. May God help you to stand tall in your commitment.

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. What do you think those three faithful men were thinking when the music began to play and everyone bowed?
2. After coming out of the fire, what might the three men have told King Nebuchadnezzar about the God in heaven?
3. What freedoms do you think are God given? How does government work to guarantee these?
4. Why is it dangerous when a government begins to mandate religious forms and practices?

15 KNOWING SOMETHING BEFORE IT HAPPENS

*What if you found a document written in 1850 that foretold
with accuracy the events of Sept. 2001?*

Many people like to think about the future and what will happen to them. We try to plan our future so we can have a pleasant life. We go to school or take occupational courses so we can have a good income. Young girls look through bridal magazines imagining what their own wedding will be like. But our thoughts of the future aren't limited to our personal lives, we also think about the future of the world.

Will rising seas from global warming destroy the world? Will our cities collapse because of earthquakes? Will there be a nuclear accident that destroys millions? As we have been seeing in our lessons, the only real true source about the future comes from God. In our lesson about Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel chapter 2, we learned that God revealed the future rise and fall of several nations. For hundreds of years, those nations would have influence over God's covenant people.

Daniel wrote about that prophecy more than 500 years before Christ. Yet he predicted the rise and fall of four major empires with precision. The first kingdom to fall was Babylon at the hands of the Medes and Persians. He predicted that the Greek empire would replace the Medo-Persian long after he died. Amazingly he also predicted the rise of the Roman Empire. Then, with incredible accuracy, guessing we might think another empire would rise, Daniel showed that the

pagan Roman Empire would be divided. A huge empire would not take its place.

It all came to pass as Daniel had said. We saw that during the time of the various European nations the end of the world as we know it would come. God would intervene, all those nations would be swept away, and an everlasting kingdom would be set up. The world would not be destroyed by a nuclear accident. Rising seas from global warming would not drown the world. The world's empires would be swept away by a kingdom that God would make.

Now we love to think about the future and what will happen to us, but why did God reveal the future to us through Daniel? The reason is that **God wants us to be sure that He is in control**. Perhaps there is another. How do you know that you can trust the Old and New Testaments? How do you know that they are a reliable testimony of God's will? After all, there are lots of sacred writings in the world, each claiming to be the word of God. How can you tell the real from the fake?

At the bank, a man noticed the teller was using a yellow pen to mark on each of the banknotes he was receiving.

The man said to the teller, "Do you mind if I ask why you are marking the money with that pen?"

"Sure" the teller said, "If the money is fake it will not show up as yellow but some other darker color. If it is real, it will show yellow and the yellow goes away after a short time."

"Wow, that is really interesting. Is there anything else you can do to identify if the banknote is a fake?"

"Sure. Up here where it says 'Türkiye Cumhuriyet Merkez Bankası' the letters are raised. You can feel them with your fingers. The writing of the bill and the pictures need to be very clear and the colors must hold fast. When you study the real thing very closely, identifying a fake becomes pretty easy."

“Is there anything else?”

“Sure. There has to be this hologram on the bill. If it is not there or if it is not shining, you can be sure that the bill is a fake.”

You can be sure the bill is a fake if it doesn't have a hologram. Is there anything that can help us to know whether the Bible that we have in our hands is really from God and not something made up by man to deceive us? The answer is yes! It is called predictive prophecy. Daniel chapter 2 is a great example of predictive prophecy. Many people have tried in vain to show that the prophecy was written after the events actually took place. In 1948, when the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered in Palestine they found a copy of Daniel's writing that had been written at least 200 years before Christ. That means that we have proof that Daniel's prophecies existed at least 650 years before the fall of the Roman Empire. That is not conjecture.

Moreover, the Bible does not have just one example of predictive prophecy. If that was so, we might consider Daniel's prophecies a coincidence or some other trick. No, the Bible has many examples of predictive prophecy where God reveals the future through His servants the prophets. The purpose for doing this is not for God to impress us with His greatness. **It is to establish in our minds that the Bible we have in our hand is not a fake.** Predictive prophecy is like God's hologram on His word. It shows us that we have the real thing.

As we saw in the last lesson, astrologers and fortunetellers cannot do what God does in His word. You can be sure that if the so-called sacred writings you are familiar with do not have many examples of predictive prophecy, you are dealing with a fake and not the real thing.

In this lesson, we will look at another predictive prophecy in the Bible. It was also written by Daniel and recorded in chapter 5. Let's start by reading verses 1-4:

1 Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. 2 While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. 3 Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. 4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver; bronze and iron, wood and stone.

Belshazzar was king of Babylon. His father was Nabonidus and his grandfather was Nebuchadnezzar. In the waning years of the Babylonian Empire, Nabonidus was often leading the armies in war. Because of his absence, Belshazzar was appointed co-regent of Babylon. Thus while Nabonidus was still alive his son was also called “king”. As we learned in the lesson on Daniel 2, the kingdom of Babylon stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf and up the Tigris and Euphrates rivers into modern day Turkey. But it was slowly diminishing in size and power.

Belshazzar’s grandfather left testimony regarding the true God. In Daniel chapter 4, King Nebuchadnezzar declared how he had become proud and that God had humbled him. After going crazy, he lived in the fields like an animal for seven years. But he eventually realized his folly, repented, and God restored him as king. We can read his testimony in Daniel chapter 4 verse 37:

37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.

In spite of his grandfather’s experience and testimony, Belshazzar was so bold that he would ignore Nebuchadnezzar’s warning and test God by drinking wine from the sacred vessels taken from the temple in Jerusalem. When the Bible says that he gave the com-

mand to bring the vessels after he had “tasted the wine” it indicates that he was probably already drunk. In case you were wondering, it was common for monarchs to desecrate vessels held sacred by other religions. It was their way of showing their power or their gods’ supremacy over the conquered peoples’. Let’s see what happened next in Daniel chapter 5 verses 5-9:

5 In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. 6 Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other. 7 The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." 8 Now all the king's wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. 9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

Just a few minutes before, the king was proud and arrogant against the Creator of the Universe. Perhaps he felt confident that a conquered people’s God couldn’t be true or powerful. But before the king learned the meaning of the writing, he was frightened. In fact the term “joints of his hips were loosened” carries the connotation that he soiled himself. Why should he be frightened? Why didn’t he think it was a message of peace and prosperity sent from the gods of the Babylonians? Because Belshazzar had a guilty conscience, that is why! He knew that what he was doing was wrong. God had not left him without a testimony in the way of righteousness. But Belshazzar had ignored all that and moved according to the dictates of a proud spirit. Let’s read on in chapter 5 verses 10-22:

10 The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, "O king, live

forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. 11 "There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father -- your father the king -- made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. 12 "Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation." 13 Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke, and said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the captives from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? 14 "I have heard of you, that the Spirit of God is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. 15 "Now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing. 16 "And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." 17 Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation. 18 "O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. 19 "And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. 20 "But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. 21 "Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the

wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses. 22 "But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this.

That last sentence is critical. Belshazzar knew all about the story of his grandfather's fall, repentance, and acknowledgment of the true God. But Belshazzar would not humble his heart. It wasn't that Belshazzar was simply doing wrong in ignorance of the truth. He was doing wrong in defiance of the truth. Let's see what Daniel said and what happened next in verses 23-31:

23 "And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. 24 "Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written. 25 " And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. 26 "This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; 27 "TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; 28 "PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." 29 Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. 30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. 31 And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

History shows that Cyrus, king of the Medes and the Persians conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. Now that may not seem to be a particularly interesting fact of history. But let's stop and think a minute. Babylon was not just another city. It was the biggest city of its time

with a circumference of more than 16 kilometers. The only city that could rival its size was Thebes, Egypt. Its walls were so wide a horse and chariot could turn a full circle on top of them. It enclosed a large portion of the river Euphrates. Thus providing water during the longest sieges. The city walls were protected by a great system of moats and canals. Large guarded gates kept anyone from entering the city by way of the river. In short, the city was impregnable. It was the richest, most protected city in its day. And in one night it fell without a single wall being destroyed. How could that happen? Do you remember our lesson entitled God's Own Arm where the prophet Isaiah wrote a prophecy concerning this? Let's review what we read in Isaiah chapter 44 verses 24-26:

24 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, And He who formed you from the womb: "I am the LORD, who makes all things, Who stretches out the heavens all alone, Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself; 25 Who frustrates the signs of the babblers, And drives diviners mad; Who turns wise men backward, And makes their knowledge foolishness; 26 Who confirms the word of His servant, And performs the counsel of His messengers; Who says to Jerusalem, 'You shall be inhabited,' To the cities of Judah, 'You shall be built,' And I will raise up her waste places;

God frustrates the signs of the babblers and drives the diviners mad because their fortune telling proves to be wrong. Thus these so-called wise men are confused and their knowledge turns out to be human foolishness. But God proves the word of the His prophets by showing that their predictions come true. Let's finish reading the prophecy of Cyrus conquering Babylon in Isaiah chapter 44 verses 27 and 28 and chapter 45 verses 1-4:

27 Who says to the deep, 'Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers'; 28 Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," And to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid.'" 1 "Thus says the LORD to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held -- To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings,

To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut: 2 I will go before you And make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron. 3 I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the LORD, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel. 4 For Jacob My servant's sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me.

Yes, a century and a half before Babylon fell there was a predictive prophecy written by Isaiah that foretold:

1. A man named Cyrus would subdue nations and kings,
2. The waters would be dried up before him,
3. The double gates would be left open before him,
4. He would give the decree to rebuild Jerusalem and to lay the foundations of the temple.

Did all that come to pass? Yes it did. When Cyrus captured Babylon, he did it in one night. The Bible says that the river would be dry and the double doors would be open. The Greek historian Herodotus wrote that on the night Cyrus captured Babylon the city gates over the Euphrates River were not closed. A festival was in progress and people were permitted to cross the river as they pleased. The inhabitants of the region also told Herodotus that the Persians diverted the course of the Euphrates so that his armies would have access to the open gates. It enabled them to avoid the intricate system of fortress walls. When the events happened it was fall and the river would have been at its lowest point. But even still, it would be a large undertaking to divert a river unless God had caused the river to be extraordinarily dry. Why were the gates open? Was there a conspiracy against the king and some traitors let the enemy in? Was it an accident because of drunken guards or simply negligence? We don't know. But we do know this.

There are lots of prophetic writings in the world like Nostradamus that can be interpreted a thousand different ways and forced to fit a number of situations. But right here in God's word is a prediction about an event that would happen a century and a half later. It even gave the name of the person who would do it! This is God's "hologram" on His word. **We know that the Tevrat, Zebur and Incil are God's word because, not once, twice or with vague words that can be applied to anything, but many times the future is predicted with 100% accuracy.** Fortunetellers cannot do it. Horoscopes can't give it. It is the infallible word of God that shows these things. Without the "hologram" of predictive prophecy, you can be sure that some so-called sacred writings are a fake. They are not the word of God. They do not stand the scrutiny of the test of predicting future historical and verifiable events.

How could the fall of the largest empire in the world occur in one night without even one wall being destroyed? Isn't that impossible? Perhaps, but when God decides to punish iniquity the impossible happens.

"Impossible" Mete said. "America is too big, too powerful for something like that to happen from outside. The CIA destroyed the World Trade Center buildings. America has all the technology to make New York impregnable."

"But don't you think these things could happen if God punished the U.S. for its iniquity by removing His protective hand?" asked his friend Lütfi.

"I don't think a handful of terrorists could have pulled it off. I think the U.S. bombed their own citizens to create an excuse for invading Afghanistan and Iraq."

"That is possible," said Lütfi. "But when I read history, I see that strange things can happen and huge empires can fall without a fight if God decrees it."

Lütfi is right! When God decrees the fall of nations in scripture, it will happen. Babylon is one example. As we read forward into the New Testament we will see prophecies concerning the United States. But in scripture we also read prophecies that involve all nations, though not necessarily by name. Consider this prophecy from Isaiah chapter 24 verses 1-6:

1 Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty and makes it waste, Distorts its surface and scatters abroad its inhabitants. 2 And it shall be: As with the people, so with the priest; As with the servant, so with his master; As with the maid, so with her mistress; As with the buyer, so with the seller; As with the lender, so with the borrower; As with the creditor, so with the debtor. 3 The land shall be entirely emptied and utterly plundered, For the LORD has spoken this word. 4 The earth mourns and fades away, The world languishes and fades away; The haughty people of the earth languish. 5 The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, Because they have transgressed the laws, Changed the ordinance, Broken the everlasting covenant. 6f Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, And those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, And few men are left.

We see that God has an everlasting covenant with all nations. If people obey His laws and keep His covenant they will be blessed. But if they do evil, His protection will be removed and their kingdoms taken from them. Could the New York event be a warning of things to come? Is God in His mercy telling people to turn from wickedness before worse things happen? In Job's life, we saw how quickly Satan can destroy things if God removes His protection.

There is no prediction in scripture about the September 11 bombing of the World Trade Centers in New York. But if there had been a prediction written in the 1850's naming the place and who would do it, we would be held in awe by the prediction. Just such a prediction is found in the Bible concerning Babylon. It happened. That is why you can trust the Tevrat, Zebur and Incil. They do what no other

books do. They predict future world events with absolute accuracy. It makes you wonder what other predictions about the future are in the Bible doesn't it?

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Belshazzar certainly was wrong to use the sacred, golden cups from God's temple at the party. Why do you think his punishment was greater than his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar's who destroyed the temple itself?
2. If we can distinguish a fake banknote from a real one by studying the real one closely, how can we tell a true prophecy from a fake one? Are you willing to commit the time necessary to do that?
3. Which would be a more important indicator to you of whether something was true or not: a substantiated predictive prophecy or what our parents and teachers tell us? Why?
4. To many people, the fall of Babylon is just another story of one nation conquering another. But in the word of God we see that the overthrow was the result of one nation ignoring the warnings of God. The Bible says that God has a covenant with every nation. Does this change your perspective of what is happening in the world? Do you see God's hand in world events?

16 THE IMPORTANCE OF LOYALTY

Would you deny God or go against His will to save your life?

Let's start this lesson with two very serious questions. But before you answer either one of them, be sure to think for a few minutes. The first question is:

“What are you loyal to?”

The second question is:

“What would you be willing to trade that loyalty for?”

Every single person on this planet is loyal to something. We are loyal to products, businesses, family, and friends. And while these are all important, our greatest loyalty should always be to God. He is the source of our life, values, and salvation. So in that context, let's ask the second question again. Is there anything you would be willing to trade your loyalty to God for? Would you give up your beliefs for fame? Would you trade your religious values for prestige or wealth? Would you deny God or go against His will to save your life? Before we look at another story about Daniel, let's look at what Sadık did when he was pressured to compromise his values and convictions.

Sadık had been an accountant for a long time. He was meticulous, had a good reputation, and was a hardworker. When he graduated from university he started working at a very unique, private school.

The school owner was very honest with all of his business transactions and insisted that every type of income or payment be recorded. Sadık had always considered himself an upright man and he really appreciated the school owner's desire to be honest. Thus he had no problem carrying out his responsibilities. In short, he felt like he had the perfect job.

After several years passed, Sadık decided to start his own business. He turned in all the paperwork, rented an office, and bought some furniture. Because of his good reputation, it wasn't long before he had several customers. But Sadık was bothered by the fact that although his prices were competitive, he didn't have more clients. Of course, Sadık wasn't stupid and he knew the reason why many people chose to go to other accountants. Unlike them he wasn't willing to lie.

"Why don't you just record less income so their taxes are lower?"
Some of his colleagues asked.

But Sadık always refused. He wasn't about to compromise his values to make a few lira. Besides he believed that if he was honest, God would take care of him and his clients.

"Sadık you need to be a little more flexible with your beliefs. Everyone is doing it." They continued.

In other words, he could make more money if he compromised or went against his values of integrity and honesty. But Sadık ignored their advice and continued to trust in God. It didn't happen overnight, but Sadık did eventually get more clients. Do you know what their main reason was for choosing Sadık? They trusted him with their money. They knew that if he was honest with the government, he would be honest with them. Sadık's loyalty to his values and to God not only improved his reputation and business, it gave God the opportunity to bless him. Don't we all want to be blessed by God and have a good reputation! We have already seen that the prophet Daniel was a man of good reputation. Although he was wise and

trustworthy, it was his loyalty to God and godly principles that propelled him into positions of power and importance. From his first days in captivity, Daniel made it clear that he would never compromise his loyalty to God. But his loyalty was about to be tested at the highest level. Let's start by reading Daniel chapter 6 verses 1-5:

1 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; 2 and over them three presidents, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. 3 Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. 4 Then the presidents and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. 5 Then these men said, We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.

Daniel was still living in Babylon, but he was now witnessing the first fulfillment of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The Babylonian Empire had been conquered by the Medo-Persians. The new ruler of Babylon, King Darius, wanted to govern the province with order and accountability, so he organized his government into divisions. At the head of each division was a governor and over every 40 governors there was a president. The three presidents were obviously supervised by King Darius.

At this time, Daniel was old. But King Darius noticed that Daniel was an upright man full of wisdom and ability. He had served in the Babylonian political system for most of his life and knew the people and customs of the area. Because of his reputation and previous experiences, Daniel was appointed to be a president. As the text said, after a period of time Daniel proved to be more skilled than every other governor and president. This didn't go unnoticed by the King and eventually Daniel became his trusted advisor.

Jealousy is almost as old as the earth and in this story we see that over 2500 years ago politicians were doing the same things they do today. They wanted Daniel's position and tried to question his credentials and character. The only problem was that Daniel was an upright and faithful man. They couldn't find anything against him personally. So they decided to attack him spiritually by making a law against being good.

They knew Daniel was loyal to God in his everyday life. He sought God's advice before making choices, shared his feelings, and worshipped God through daily prayer. They decided to use this against Daniel and tricked King Darius into passing a law that made it illegal to seek counsel from anyone other than the king for 30 days. If a person were caught breaking the law, they would be thrown into the lions' den. King Darius, unaware of their true motives, endorsed this new law knowing full well that according to tradition it could not be changed. Inevitably, Daniel would make a choice. Would he be loyal to God or compromise to save his life? Let's see what happened next in Daniel chapter 6 verse 10:

10 When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

So what did Daniel choose to do? Obviously, he continued to do what he had always done. He got on his knees and prayed. God had been the source of Daniel's wisdom, success, and long life. Daniel knew this and had remained loyal to God throughout his whole life. He wasn't about to compromise now, even if it brought death. Let's continue with verses 11-13:

11 Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. 12 Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god

or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked. 13 Then they answered and said before the king, Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.

The governors and presidents quickly ran to King Darius and told them that Daniel had disobeyed his command. Their plan was working flawlessly. They knew Daniel wouldn't compromise his loyalty to God and that the King would be forced to punish him. They even added fuel to the fire by emphasizing that Daniel didn't just break the law once, but rather three times in one day. In their minds, Daniel was about to meet his end.

But there was one problem. King Darius liked Daniel and in spite of the law being signed, he tried to find a way to acquit him. In fact, he probably realized right away that the sole purpose of this law was to destroy Daniel. But all of his efforts were in vain because the governors and presidents reminded him that according to tradition the law could not be changed. If the king didn't follow his own law, he couldn't be king anymore. Thus, King Darius had to make the hardest decision of his life. Let's read about it in verses 16-18:

16 Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you! 17 And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. 18 Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

King Darius's commandment was nothing more than the death sentence for Daniel. He was thrown into the lions' den and left for dead. He chose the death of a loyal martyr over the life of a compromiser

and traitor. But Daniel didn't go into the lions' den alone. Just as King Darius acknowledged, **God was with Daniel and He was in control.**

King Darius was so distraught that he went home and sat alone. He refused food and all types of entertainment. How could he eat or laugh at a time like this? He knew that he had condemned an innocent man to death and his sorrow was so deep that it prevented him from sleeping. He waited and waited until the first rays of sunshine pierced the darkness and immediately ran to the lions' den. Let's continue the story in Daniel chapter 6 verses 20-23:

20 As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions? 21 Then Daniel said to the king, O king, live forever! 22 My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm. 23 Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

Daniel was alive! God's loyal servant was not only safe; he didn't even have a scratch. King Darius ordered his men to remove Daniel from the lions' den. Although the Bible doesn't say, he probably hugged him, checked him for wounds, hugged him again and kissed his cheeks. Who knows, maybe he even kissed his hand and put it to his forehead. The king's most trusted advisor and friend was once again at his side. How do you think the governors and presidents reacted? What do you think happened to them? Let's find out in verse 24:

24 And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bot-

tom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

Although the punishment sounds harsh, it was fitting for the men. They had not only plotted to kill an innocent man, they had broken King Darius's law in the process. After the law was passed, they discussed with each other how best to tell the king about Daniel's offense. In other words, they counseled one another and brought judgment upon themselves.

It would be nice to think that the loyal always prosper, but that isn't the case. We live in a world filled with sin and evil people. Sometimes God intervenes and the loyal live long prosperous lives. While other times He allows events to unfold and the evil ones seem to get the upper hand. Therefore it is important for us to remember that our loyalty isn't measured by the outcome of an event. **It is measured by our willingness to obey God regardless of the consequences.**

During the Middle Ages, it is estimated that the Catholic Church killed over 50 million people. Many were God fearing Christians burned at the stake, killed by sword, tortured, and thrown from cliffs because they would not submit to the Catholic church's authority. No one was spared, men, women and even children were killed. So what were these God fearing Christians' offenses? They refused to pay money and engage in false worship practices for the forgiveness of their sins. They printed the Bible in their own languages instead of Latin, which wasn't even the original language of the ancient Biblical texts. Among other things, they also believed that every person had the right and ability to communicate with God through prayer and worship. Like Daniel they preferred to die as loyal martyrs instead of living lives filled with compromise and rejection of God.

Some people might say that they were stupid. If they had just given in they would have lived. But who would want to live a life without God? **He is the source of love, life, and happiness. Without Him, you can't really have any of those things.** Perhaps King Darius

himself summarized best the reasons why we should be loyal to God. Let's finish by reading verses 25-28:

25 Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. 26 I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. 27 He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions. 28 So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

A wise man once asked, "What does it profit a man if he gained the whole world and lost his soul?"

The answer is simple: nothing!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Daniel was so special? Why did he succeed at everything he did?
2. If Daniel had left his windows shut while praying the men wouldn't have seen him praying and breaking the king's law. Although it was his custom, what was the real reason that Daniel didn't hide his prayer from others?
3. Do you ever hide your faith from others? If so, do you think it is compromising your loyalty to God?
4. In a sense, King Darius' loyalty to the Medo-Persian Empire was also tested. If he had released Daniel, he would have compromised the fundamental principle of their law. Do you think he did the right thing by upholding the law?
5. How do you think Daniel felt when the stone was rolled over the opening of the den and he heard the growls of lions? What do you think he did?
6. When tradition contradicts truth as expressed by God or outlined in the Bible, should we follow the tradition or the truth? In essence, should we follow God or tradition?
7. Is there anything in your life that you are more loyal to than God? Is it friends? Family? Work? Money?

17 BEASTS, KINGDOMS AND THE JUDGMENT

Is judgement good or bad? It depends if your innocent or guilty.

These days banking on computers requires secret passwords and encryption. Some banks even send a code to your cell phone to make sure that it is really you trying to access your account! Why? Because everyone knows that there are thieves, deceivers, and liars who pretend to be someone they really aren't. Did you know God's word says that a powerful liar would rise up and try to deceive the whole world? Who is this liar and what would he try to do? Let's consider a story from Ottoman history, about a man who claimed he was someone he wasn't, to help us prepare for this lesson.

In 1648, when he was 22 years old, Sabbatai Zevi claimed that he was the long awaited Messiah. About the year 1651 after acquiring several followers, the rabbis of Smyrna (today's İzmir) banished him and his disciples. In 1658 while in Constantinople, he met a preacher named Ha-Yakini who confirmed Sabbatai's messianic mission. Evidence suggests that Ha-Yakini forged a manuscript using archaic characters and apocalyptic language to declare that Sabbatai was called by God. This fabricated document was titled "The Great Wisdom of Solomon". The manuscript began with a fictitious dream of Abraham:

"I, Abraham, was confined in a cave for forty years, and I wondered greatly that the time of miracles did not arrive. Then was heard a voice proclaiming, 'A son will be born in the Hebrew year

5386 [modern calendar year 1626] to Mordecai Zevi; and he will be called Sabbatai. He will humble the great dragon; ... he, the true Messiah, will sit upon My throne."

With this document in hand Sabbatai began wandering from city to city gaining adherents. He visited Athens, Aleppo, Cairo and Jerusalem. While in Gaza he met a man named Nathan Levi who quickly embraced Sabbatai as the Messiah. Nathan became Sabbatai's right-hand man and professed to be the prophet Elijah who had returned to prepare the way for the anointed one. Realizing that Jerusalem was not a congenial place to carry out his plans, he went to Smyrna, while his so-called prophet, Nathan, proclaimed that Gaza would be the sacred city instead of Jerusalem. In the autumn of 1665, Sabbatai returned to Smyrna from a journey, entered a synagogue, and publicly declared himself to be the expected Messiah. His declaration was hailed by a great multitude with the blowing of the ram's horn and chants of "Long live our King, our Messiah!"

The news traveled throughout all of Europe and there was great excitement among the Jews. At the beginning of 1666 Sabbatai again left Smyrna for Constantinople. He hoped that his "prophet" Nathan's words would come true and that the sultan would coronate him. But as soon as he arrived, he was arrested and cast into prison in chains.

After a short time in prison, Sabbatai learned that his life would be spared if he converted to Islam. Much to the surprise of all of his followers, he immediately converted. The kingdom that this false Messiah proclaimed was never established and he proved himself to be nothing more than an imposter.

Sabbatai's story is an unusual one. But it serves as a warning to us that every age and every time has had men who would play the imposter to obtain power, money, or the adoration of people. In the Bible, God warns us through prophecies that such figures would come. But there is one in particular that is extremely unique and

successful. Let's look at an interesting prophecy about this subject and learn who it is. We can start reading in Daniel chapter 7 verse 1:

1 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter.

God sometimes uses dreams to communicate important information to people. You certainly remember from the lessons on Joseph's life, how dreams played an important role in Egypt's preparations for 7 years of drought. In those dreams animals, plants, and stars were symbols for future events and global influences. Similarly, in Daniel chapter 2 we read how God gave the Babylonian king an important dream. In that dream God used a statue made of various metals as a symbol to describe future kingdoms that would sequentially rule over God's people. Amazingly, the prophet Daniel interpreted that dream and helped generations to understand the saga of history leading up to the end of the world.

Several years later, God decided to give more details about those kingdoms. So, He spoke to Daniel in a shocking dream. In the dream Daniel saw four unusual beasts coming up out of the sea. The fourth beast in particular perplexed Daniel because it had a fierce horn that arose up out of it and that spoke against God! The horn even attempted to make war against God! The dream concludes with a very clear and gripping scene of judgment. Because Daniel asked an angel to interpret the dream, he was given a few key insights that enable us to unlock this fascinating prophecy of the future and prepare for the coming judgment. Let's start at the beginning by reading Daniel chapter 7 verses 2-14:

2 Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. 3 And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. 4 The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man

was given to it. 5 And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.' 6 After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. 7 After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. 8 I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. 9 And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things. "As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. 10 A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. 11 I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. 12 As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. 13 "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

To understand this dream, one needs to be a bit of a detective, and fortunately the clues are many. In verse 15, the prophet himself is struggling with the meaning of this troublesome vision. The dream

has basically seven parts: four beasts, a scene about a devious little horn with eyes and a mouth, and two powerful judgment scenes. Seven scenes in all. Of course Daniel wanted to understand the dream, so he asked the angel for help. Let's read about it in verses 15 and 16:

15 "As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. 16 I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things."

The angel then provided Daniel with the first reliable clue to unravel this mystery. Let's read verse 17:

17 "The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth."

So the beasts represent kings! Interesting. Can a king exist without a kingdom? Of course not. **Therefore, each one of these beasts represents a kingdom with a king as its leader.**¹²

Do you remember in Daniel chapter 2 when God differentiated each section of the statue by using gold, silver, bronze, iron, and iron mixed with clay? Each one of those sections represented a kingdom. In this dream, instead of using a statue made of various metals, God used beasts to describe each kingdom. Surely, there must be a connection between the two dreams!

Let's review the first dream in Daniel chapter 2 verse 39 and 40:

39 "After you another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, for iron breaks and smashes everything...."

That first dream was a chronological picture using symbols from the time of Daniel until the end of the world. In total there were seven

¹² Daniel 7:23

scenes: five kingdom scenes, the judgment scene of a rock smashing the whole thing to pieces, and the scene of the rock becoming an everlasting kingdom. Seven in all. Once again in Daniel chapter 7, we see beasts representing kingdoms with a great judgment scene at the end. Seven in all.

When we take the scenes of the beasts coming out of the sea and lay them side by side with the metallic statue from head to toe, we will notice the beasts and the metals represent the same empires and events! But the second dream gives us more information and a fuller interpretation of those future events.

The first beast is a lion which correlates to the statue's head of gold. Both represent the ancient kingdom of Babylon.

The lion is the king of beasts and so Babylon was honored as the greatest of the pagan empires. It was given wings like an eagle symbolizing its speed of conquest. But Babylon's dominance over Israel lasted only 70 years, the length of an average man's life span.



Babylon Empire

The second beast is a bear raised up on one side with ribs in his mouth. This correlates to the statue's chest of silver. Both of these are symbols for Cyrus and the Medo-Persian kingdom. The three ribs represent three empires conquered by the Persians: Babylon, Lydia, and Egypt.

The bear is raised on one side because the Persians were always stronger than their partners the Medes. It is interesting to note that the Lydian Empire's capitol was in Sart, near today's Salihli. You can go there today, hike a small mountain, and stand in the very spot that King Cyrus himself probably stood.



Medo-Persian

The third beast is a leopard with four heads and four wings. This beast correlates to the statue's belly of bronze. This symbol represents Alexander the Great and the Greeks. His remarkable abilities as a tactician, general, and leader earned him a god-like status among the people of Ephesus and other cities he conquered. Ultimately his empire was divided among his four generals represented perfectly by the four heads.



Greek Empire

Although the first three beasts were interesting, Daniel was most intrigued by the fourth beast. He described the fourth beast as, “terrifying and frightening and very powerful with large iron teeth to crush and devour its victims.” This matches precisely the description of the statue's iron legs. If you recall, the iron legs and this fourth beast represent the Roman Empire.

But the dream went into further detail about the fourth beast and Daniel was anxious to learn what it meant. Let's learn those details by reading chapter 7 verses 19-22:

19 "Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet, 20 and about the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn that came up and before which three of them fell, the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and



Roman Empire

that seemed greater than its companions. 21 As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, 22 until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.

Daniel was eager to know more about the meaning of the ten horns. They are notably comparable to the statue's feet and ten toes which represented a divided Roman Empire. So the angel continued to give more details. Let's read what it said in verses 23-25:

23 Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. 24 The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. 25 He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.

In Bible prophecy, a horn represents a king, kingdom, or power. As mentioned earlier, these kings represented their kingdoms. Thus, the 10 horns are actually 10 kingdoms or groups of people. Although there is historical evidence that lots of people groups were present in Europe during the fall of the Roman Empire, 10 major groups are typically identified as the ones who filled the power vacuum created by the empire's collapse. It is also well accepted that those ten major tribes were displaced and searching for places to settle as a result of the Turkish Hun 's invasions from the East. Interestingly, those people groups eventually formed the countries of modern day Europe.

But what about the little horn that uprooted three of the 10 people groups? Who was that and what would it do? The Bible says that it would grow very strong and become a persecuting power. In fact it would grow so strong that it would control most of Europe.

In Daniel chapter 7 verse 8, it was described as having "eyes like a man." If you have eyes like God, what do you think it would mean? It means you see the world as God sees it; you agree with God's perspective. So if you have the eyes of man, it means your perspective is the opposite of God's. In other words, your ideas, viewpoints, and expectations would be sinful and focused on worldly things. In the same verse it also says the little horn "spoke boastfully." What could that mean? Well in verse 25, Daniel says "it spoke against the Most High." Not only is the little horn's vision contrary to God's, it's words are against God. They are spiritually corrupt! Does this sound familiar?



The Little Horn

Think back to the Garden of Eden. Do you remember when Satan spoke against God? Do you remember what the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel said about Him? He wanted to sit on God's throne. He wanted to be God. **Just like Satan himself, the little horn is pompous, proud and rules a kingdom that is in opposition to God's ideals.** Do you think it will also want to sit on God's throne or attempt to take His place?

Let's get another a clue by rereading verse 21:

21 I was watching, and the same horn made war with the saints and prevailed against them

Here we learn that this unusual power symbolized by a little horn with eyes is fighting a spiritual battle against God by attempting to destroy His faithful followers!

Thus far we have gathered several clues to help us determine the identity of this little horn power. Let's focus on two more by rereading verse 25:

25 And he shall speak words against the Most High, and shall continually harass the saints of the Most High. And he shall intend to change times and law. And they shall be given into his hand for a period of a time and times and one half time.

Our next to last clue is that the kingdom or power would try to change times and laws. Whose times and laws? Well, if the little horn power is making war against the Most High, it only makes sense that it is God's laws and times that he is against. God's laws are the Ten Commandments. Can you think of what times God established? In our very first lesson, we learned that God created the heavens and the earth in six days. On the seventh day, He rested and declared it holy. Therefore, it is easy to see that God's times refers to the seven day weekly cycle and the holiness of the Sabbath day. Who do you think has meddled with God's laws and tried to turn people from honoring God's Sabbath?

The last and very substantial clue is that this power would fight against God and His people for a specific period of time. The verse says 3 1/2 years. When a prophecy takes place in a specific amount of time, it is called a "time prophecy." We will go into greater detail on how to interpret time prophecies in the next lesson. But very briefly, in time prophecies God uses a day as a symbol of one literal year. The ancient Hebrew calendar had 360 days in a year. Therefore this 3.5 years would actually be equal to 1260 days (3.5 x 360) or in prophetic terms 1260 years. In other words, the little horn power persecuted God's people for 1260 years! This last clue is essential in helping us identify the little horn power.

Do you want to know who this little horn power is? Because the fourth beast was so disturbing to Daniel and the little horn was so ruthless, it is imperative that we know it's meaning. Not to mention that if you consider yourself one of God's people you need to know its identity. Let's review all the clues we uncovered about this little horn and it's role in history:

- 1) It emerges from the Roman Empire after its collapse in the late 5th century
- 2) It supplants three of the major people groups when it emerges on the scene of history
- 3) It's eyes were like those of a man
- 4) It spoke boastfully against the Most High
- 5) It waged war against the saints
- 6) Its intent was to change God's times and laws
- 7) It would have great strength for a period 1260 years
- 8) It was diverse from the other kingdoms. There was something different about it.

Who fits all these clues? Before reading on, take a minute to look carefully at the list of clues we found in the Bible. Think hard about history and see if you can deduce what world power fulfills all eight of the clues above.

If we do a quick overview of history following the Roman Empire, we will find that only one power had all those characteristics. It is amazing that the Bible can give such precise details of history hundreds, even thousands, of years in advance. This very fact about the Bible authenticates it as God's word and a reliable source of truth. The power we are searching for most certainly emerged from the remnants of the pagan Roman Empire and grew into a fierce and proud entity that made warfare against the innocent and gentle people of God. It was both a spiritual and political power intertwined. **Yes, pagan Rome turned into Papal Rome.**

Under the pretense of keeping the church pure of heretics, the Roman Papal System was the most ruthless persecuter the world has ever known. They brought terror to Europe, Africa, South America, and the Middle East! There is even an expression for the 1260 years

that Papal Rome was at its zenith. It is called "The Dark Ages." From Daniel 7 we learn that this little horn power would be a major player in world politics until the end of time. Can anyone deny that the Roman Catholic Church isn't politically powerful? It maintains formal diplomatic relations with 178 nations and 72 of these countries maintain permanent resident diplomatic missions accredited to the Holy See in Rome. It also maintains 106 permanent diplomatic missions to nation-states around the world. If that isn't enough proof, on February 11, 1929 it was given full sovereignty by Italy.



What about Daniel's prophecy that it would "speak against the Most High?" The Roman Catholic Church has had a Pope claiming to speak in place of God for almost 1500 years! A short look at their history shows us that Daniel's prophecy is accurate to the detail giving us a renewed sense of awe at the amazing inspiration of the Bible!

Stunningly accurate are the prophecies about attempting "to change times and laws." Who would think a professed Abrahamic religion would toss away the Ten Commandments? Yet, the Roman Papal system did away entirely with God's second commandment. Let's read it in Exodus chapter 20 verse 4, 5:

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. You shall not bow down to them or serve them...."

Have you ever been to a Catholic church and seen all the statues of saints and Mary? Do a quick Internet search and see for yourself!

They also turned the world's attention away from the fourth commandment by claiming the authority to establish a new day of rest. Here is God's original fourth commandment in Exodus chapter 20 verses 8-11:

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 a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Of course, instead of God's Sabbath day, the Papal power has substituted Sunday as a day of worship and rest. Even here in Turkey we have adopted "Europe's standard day of rest" and also a reinvented week beginning on Monday. Why? Where did it originate from? Now you know.

The papacy is a power that claims to be the representative of God. Thus it says it has by its own authority changed God's laws. But actually it has misrepresented God's holy word, both in teaching and lifestyle. It has sold forgiveness for money, claimed pilgrimages to holy shrines and cities to be meritorious, and worshiped Mary as a diety! Because of its philosophy that "the end justifies the means", millions of people have been persecuted and treacherous criminal deeds have been committed for hundreds of years.

How did the Roman Papacy gain so many followers when its teachings are so far from what the Tevrat and Incil teach? The story is too long to tell here, but the root of the story isn't so far from Sabbatai Zevi's strategy. The Pope claimed direct authority from God. Thus the Roman church diminished the established scriptures and exalted their own ideas. Then they kept people from reading the Tevrat and Incil saying it was only fit to read in Latin, a language the general population didn't know. It substituted a long list of rules regarding

ritual prayers and visits to the shrines of saints for God's simple and direct commands. Just as Sabbatai deceived many people, many false religions have kept people trapped for centuries. And just as the Sultan judged Sabbatai and found him to be false, so God will judge the little horn and its friends. He will find them guilty of fraud. Let's read what will happen in Daniel chapter 7 verses 9 and 10:

9 As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. 10 A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.

Certainly for everyone, judgment is a somber thought. When those books are opened, every imposter will be exposed! It is vital that we live authentic lives, connected to the truth! In Daniel chapter 7, we see the judgment as good news, not bad news. After this little horn power has been doing his deadly worst to destroy and kill, God comes as the rescuer.

The good news is proclaimed in verses 21 and 22:

21 As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, 22 until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

Yes, justice is a good thing.

A woman from Diyarbakir lived in Izmir. When her parents died, she received a piece of land as an inheritance. The land sat for almost 15 years. One day while the woman was talking with some old friends from Diyarbakir, they asked her how much money she had gotten for the sale of her land. She was shocked. She hadn't sold the land.

They said someone was building a house on the land. How could it be possible? She hadn't sold it! She went to the courthouse and found her signature verifying the sale. How could it be? After more research, she learned that a person had put up a "for sale" sign with their own phone number. They used her name and forged documents for the sale. The land had been "sold" without her consent! Can you imagine how happy that woman was when the imposter was found and justice was administered?

God says that one day the books will be opened and all liars will get their just reward. Small lies and big lies will all be revealed. Lies that have fooled nations and that have been promoted by governments to mislead whole generations of people will be exposed. There will be a day when justice and truth reigns. Those who love the truth will search for it until they find it. They will investigate until they are sure they are standing on solid ground. By studying these lessons, doesn't that make you a seeker of truth?

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Take a piece of paper and draw out the different kingdoms represented in Daniel 2 and compare it with the detailed description of the same powers in Daniel 7. Notice how Daniel 7 elaborates and expands the information. Have you ever seen any other book that has predicted the future with such accuracy? What does that tell us about the Bible?
2. Considering Sabbatai Zevi's story, how can you know whether someone is truly sent from God? Do you think someone like Sabbatai Zevi could come again and deceive many people?
3. Why was Daniel especially interested in the fourth Beast?
4. Do you believe it is possible to see the judgement of God as good news? How?

18 THE FATE CHANGER IS COMING!

What does God sending a Messiah have to do with your fate?

Have you ever seen someone standing outside the gates of an airport with a sign in his hands? Why are they standing there? Well, it is because they are expecting someone to come and someone is expecting them to be there. Their job is to make sure that the person arrives safely and gets to the place they need to go. What do you think it would be like for a person who was expecting a helper but didn't get one? It would be discouraging and even scary!

Interestingly, in life we have lots of helpers. Second to God, the most important are our parents, teachers, coaches, and friends. But do we ever think about how their help gives us direction, hope, and a desire to face the unexpected? Do we really appreciate the comfort that their words bring to us in a dangerous world that seems to be falling apart? Metaphorically, our parents are supposed to be like God. They help us maneuver through the experience called life. They help us prepare for the future. They help us learn the importance of honesty and trust in a relationship. They help us know what to expect.

Ever since he was young, Serkan had been inquisitive. He liked to ask questions and always wanted to be prepared. His father Emrah remembered the day that he first realized this about his son. It was the summer of 1976 and Serkan was only 5 years old.

“Dad, what will school be like?” he nervously asked.

“My boy, you will like it a lot. You will see your friends and have lots of fun.” Emrah answered.

“But what will we do? How long will I be there? Will I ever see you again?”

“Of course you will see me! You will go in the morning and come back in the afternoon. First, you will go into your classroom and sit down at your desk. Then your teacher will tell you what to do.” Emrah spoke confidently.

“What will he tell us to do?” Serkan inquired.

“First he will tell you his name. Then he will begin to teach you how to read, write, and do math.”

“Will he always be my teacher?”

“Well he won’t be your teacher forever, but for the first five years. And don’t forget that you won’t go to school in the summer. Every summer will be like this summer. You can play, watch TV, go to the beach, and visit your grandparents in the village.”

“I am scared father.” Serkan timidly replied.

“Son, there is no reason to be afraid. I just told you what it would be like. Do you trust me?”

“Of course father!”

“Good! Don’t worry about it. Now that you know what to expect there is no reason to be afraid. Come on, let’s go get some ice cream from the market.”

It was quite natural for Serkan to be worried about school. He had never experienced it before and the uncertainty scared him. Emrah, like any good father, could tell from Serkan’s shaky voice that he was deeply concerned and he wanted to comfort him.

It shouldn't be a surprise to us, that God is the same way. He knows our insecurities and our need for certainty. He knows that our lives will be less stressful and predictable if He gives us a glimpse into the future. This is one reason why He calls people to be prophets. He doesn't want us to worry, be confused, deceived or afraid. He wants us to know what to expect. He wants us to have hope!

Since Adam and Eve's first sin, God's people had been waiting for the fulfillment of His first promise. God said that a child would be born who would crush the head of the serpent. In subsequent lessons we learned that the serpent was Satan and that he was focused on four things: the destruction of humans through sin, the defamation of God's character, hindering the fulfillment of God's promise, and receiving the worship of all humanity. Ever since that first sin, he has been working nonstop to accomplish these goals. He is the source of all your pain, worry, and confusion. Unfortunately, he is fighting a losing battle because God is in control and always fulfills His promises! As Emrah helped his son Serkan calm down by revealing to him what would happen, God has assured us through prophecy that this powerful enemy will be defeated and we are not to live in fear.

As generations passed, God sent messengers to remind the people that He still intended to fulfill that initial promise. His list of messengers was long and included men like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, King David, Elijah, Isaiah, and Daniel. Each prophet had a specific message for his generation. But they also reminded the people that God would send the child who would crush the serpent's head. After our lesson in the book of Isaiah, have you started to figure out who that child is? That is right; the greatest expectation of all was the Messiah!

In this lesson, we will look at a prophecy that showed exactly when the Messiah would come. Not only does it give us confidence in the Bible as the predictor of the future, it shows us that God doesn't speak in generalizations. He gives us details so that we can trust in Him, have hope, and know what to expect. We already know

from history that Jesus was the Messiah. But there is some confusion about what that title means, why He was the Messiah, and what really happened. Although it might be quite shocking, in this lesson we will begin to find clarity about those very things. Lets start by reading the prophecy as recorded in Daniel chapter 9 verse 24:

24 Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.

Daniel learned that 70 weeks were determined for his people and the holy city. God hadn't forgotten about the Israelites and He wanted Daniel to know that this part of the prophecy focused specifically on them and Jerusalem (often referred to as God's holy city). So what were they supposed to do?

In verse 24, there are six things listed. The first two were the responsibility of the Israelites, the second two were the responsibility of God, and the third were simply the result of the first four things. Let's first look at what the Israelites had to do.

The Israelites were to put an end to rebellion and sin. In other words, **they needed to stop disobeying God and start following His commandments**. As part of the original covenant, God wanted them to be a holy people with a society based on His holy law. We see in this prophecy that God was giving them a second chance to be the people He wanted them to be. In fact, they had to do this to prepare the way for what God was going to do.

Because humans are sinful and nothing good comes from us, we know the next two things had to be done by God himself. **God was going to make reconciliation for iniquity and bring in everlasting righteousness**. The language here is once again reminiscent of the priestly sacrifice system we studied in Exodus. But there is a major difference!

The priests had to repeat the Day of Atonement¹³ ceremony annually. This showed that the animal sacrifices had no real power to permanently remove sin. But they did remind the people to have faith in something that would. And although the priest couldn't really change the fate of mankind from judgment to acceptance, the Messiah would!

The final two events would be the result of the first four. Prophecy and prophethood would be sealed up and the Most Holy place would be anointed. Due to the complexity of these two events, we will discuss them in a later lesson.

Did the Bible really predict exactly when the Messiah would come hundreds of years in advance? Yes! To demonstrate this we need to know when the 70 weeks or 490 days start and what it was leading up to. Let's find the answers to those questions by reading Daniel chapter 9 verse 25:

25 Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.

God said that a decree would be made to restore Jerusalem. It is interesting to note that this decree was a prerequisite to the Messiah's coming and directly connected to the Israelites' ability to return to their homeland from Babylon, as prophesied by the prophet Jeremiah. Let's read it in Jeremiah chapter 30 verses 1-3:

1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 2 Thus speaketh the LORD God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book. 3 For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them

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to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.

Although four decrees were actually made, through careful study we know that the final decree by King Artaxerxes in 457 BC gave full authority to the Israelites to complete the restoration of the temple, Jerusalem, and its outer walls. In other words, his decree fulfilled this part of the prophecy. Now that we have a starting date (457 BC) we can begin to move forward through the other events of the prophecy. But before we do that, we need to explore an important Biblical principle regarding time prophecies.

When God places a prophecy in a specific time frame or gives a time limit, He usually uses a technique of substituting years with days. Let's look at one example in Numbers chapter 14 verse 34:

34 After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.

When the Israelites arrived at the border of the Promised Land they sent out spies to see what the land was like. After 40 days of investigation, the spies returned and told the Israelites what they saw. In spite of the encouragement that two of the spies gave, the people refused to enter the land because they were afraid of the large, war-like inhabitants. By refusing to continue they had directly disobeyed God and showed themselves to be faithless. Therefore God made them stay in the desert for 40 years, one year for every day that the spies were inspecting the Promised Land.

We actually see the same principle also used in Ezekiel chapter 4 verses 5 and 6. However, it is reversed in that one year would be represented by a day.

5 For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. 6 And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt

bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year.

Ezekiel was a prophet who lived the same time as Daniel. In fact, he was also taken captive to Babylon and probably knew Daniel very well. In these verses, God was telling Ezekiel to lie on the ground for a specific number of days. Each day that Ezekiel laid on the ground represented one year that the northern tribes of Israel and Judah had committed idolatry and disobeyed God. Ezekiel's actions led up to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem and were a daily reminder of the Israelites' 430 years of disobedience.

It is interesting to note that there is a direct link between the day for a year principle and sin. In the first example, the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years as a punishment for their disbelief and sin. In the second example, Ezekiel laid on his side for 430 days as a constant reminder of the Israelites disobedience. But in Daniel chapter 9 verses 24 and 25, we see that **God's intention is not to punish, but to remove and forgive sins forever!**

Now that we understand this truth about Biblical time prophecies, have a starting date of 457 BC, and know that this prophecy lasts 490 years, let's reread Daniel chapter 9 verse 25:

25 Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times

In verse 25, the original Hebrew says that 69 weeks (483 days/483 years) after the order to rebuild and restore Jerusalem "the anointed one" would come. This was none other than the Messiah that had been prophesied by Moses, King David, and Isaiah and who the Israelites had been waiting for in anticipation. Sure they would have to wait longer. But, God was telling them the exact moment He would appear! If we add 483 years to our starting date of 457 BC

shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

Verse 27 says that the Messiah would make a covenant that would last one week which equals seven years. Once again, if we look at the original Hebrew we will see that the verb used in verse 27 means “to confirm”. Confirmation in and of itself requires something already in existence. Thus the best translation would be that the Messiah would confirm or fulfill a covenant that has already been made. Based on the previous studies we have done, it is easy to connect this covenant with the one that God originally made with Abraham. If you recall, God renewed that original covenant with Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob’s children who became known as Israel. Do you remember what God promised when He made the covenant with Abraham? He promised to bless the whole world through Abraham’s seed! Thus **the Messiah would bring a blessing not only to the Israelites, but the whole world.**

Sometimes we think that the Messiah was only a prophet for the Jews, maybe even the Christians. But the Bible says that He was coming to bless the whole world, rescue everyone from sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness. Is that a message of exclusiveness? Would it not also include us?

The final aspect of verse 27 that we need to point out is that half way through the last seven years the Messiah would put an end to sacrifice. This is obviously referring to the daily and annual sacrifices for sin. How do you think that will happen? Will it have anything to do with His murder? Does it affect the ultimate fate (i.e., death) of mankind? Unfortunately, we will have to wait until a later lesson to find out the answers to those questions.

We have covered a lot of ground in this lesson. So before we finish let’s summarize the entire lesson in a few sentences.

Daniel was shown a prophecy that would last 490 years and start with the order to rebuild Jerusalem which occurred in 457 BC. The

restoration would last 49 years and then 434 years later, in 27 AD, the Messiah would appear. According to the prophecy, the Messiah would confirm God's original covenant with Abraham for seven years and at some point be murdered. And what was the whole point of this? **God wanted to bring in everlasting righteousness and make reconciliation for sin.**

Now granted there are some parts of this vision that are still a little unsettling. Specifically in regards to how the Messiah would be treated. But overall it was very reassuring for Daniel. He was shown that God still cared for them, they were being given a second chance, they were going home, their beloved city would be rebuilt, and the Messiah was coming. If there was any doubt along the way, all they had to do was compare the prophecy to the events as they occurred in history. But the Israelites, and everyone else who studied the prophecy, had no reason to doubt God because He had always been right!

Serkan also had no reason to doubt his father. When he was scared at night, his father would lay with him in bed. When he burned his hand on the stove, his father rinsed it under cold water. When he was sick, his father took him to the doctor. And Serkan knew that his father would be there with him when he walked into his classroom on the first day of school. He didn't know everything that would happen, but at least he had an idea. An idea that was reinforced by his loving father.

We also don't know everything that will happen. But God through the years has revealed quite a lot. He hasn't left us standing in the airport without a guide or helper. As we continue to study the Bible, we will see that the events outlined in this prophecy happened exactly when and how God said they would. We will also see that those events had a lasting impact on world history and the fate of mankind. We are getting closer to discovering the answer to the ultimate question of whether or not fate can be changed. Don't quit! Let's keep exploring the mysteries of the Bible so we can find comfort in a chaotic world and the key to changing our fate and canceling fear.

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. Do you remember a time in your life when someone comforted you about a future event?
2. Is there something right now that you have doubts about or need advice for? How can God help you with them?
3. Is it hard to believe that the Israelites would kill the very person that they had been expecting for years?
4. How do you think God is going to fulfill His covenant with Abraham to bless the whole world?
5. Has your faith in God grown since you started studying the Bible?

19 FINDING COMFORT IN REPENTANCE

If repentance changed the fate of a nation, could it change yours?

Do you believe that statement,

"Humility and repentance are able to win more battles than pride and fighting for one's rights."

How many times have you seen families fall apart because the husband, wife, brother, sister, or cousins couldn't bring themselves to say, "I am sorry."

So many employers have lost good employees because one or the other wouldn't humble themselves to say, "You were right, I was wrong."

In fact whole nations go to war and millenniums of bloodshed have ravaged the world because people won't repent and say, "I am sorry."

It takes courage to apologize and to accept an apology when given. In this lesson we will witness something very unusual, a nation that repents. The results are beautiful. First let's start with a modern story that will help us gain perspective for the scriptural narrative.

It was a beautiful spring day in May of 2005. Ismet, his wife and two teenage girls took the metro to the center of Berlin, where thousands of other German citizens gathered for speeches and a time of

remembering. Ismet who was born in Van moved to Berlin after he gained employment with a washing machine manufacturer.

The day's festivities marked the sixty year anniversary of the end of World War II. Ismet and his family planned ahead suspecting it would be crowded and they arrived almost two hours before the event. Fortunately, they found good seats near the front. His wife had prepared some börek and brought tea in a thermos. So they passed the time in grand Turkish style.

Once the event began and he heard the speeches of the leaders, Ismet was surprised at his own emotions. He had suspected a lot of political rhetoric. Instead he found men who were honestly confessing the wrong that they and their country had done in the War. On a large stage where local leaders sat, a huge video screen suddenly flickered on transmitting a live broadcast from the nation's parliament.

First the president, Mr. Köhler, stood up and said,

"We Germans look back with shock and shame at World War II, which was unleashed by Germany, and at the Holocaust, which was a breakdown of civilization for which Germans are responsible."

This was followed by similar speeches stressing Germany's responsibility for starting a war that they said, "turned Europe into a mass graveyard."

As Ismet and his wife rode the subway home that day, they soberly discussed how unusual it was to hear a nation profess it's guilt. Ismet always felt proud to be a Turk and he always would. But for the first time in his life, he also felt proud to be a German. He questioned himself,

"Why would I feel such pride to belong to a country like Germany who had committed such cruelties?" He thought, "Certainly life here is orderly and the people have cleverly designed the cities.

But my feeling is not about ease or comfort. No, it is something else. Today I felt proud to hear my leaders confess.”

He rolled this question over in his mind all evening.

The next morning while his daughters were getting ready for school, he heard a conversation between the two of them through the door of the bathroom. One of them apologized to the other for using a hair brush without asking. A smile spread across his face as he heard the second sister kindly forgive the first. He felt a twinge of fatherly pride when his girls worked out their problem in such a civil manner. Suddenly, his question from the day before came back to his mind. He concluded that the sense of national pride he felt towards Germany was linked to the noble integrity necessary for honest confession.

Ismet would say that day in the park was a turning point for him.

“I realized that if a nation can be more respectable because it can confess, apologize, and remove it’s shame, then certainly I can be a better man, employer, father, and husband by doing the same.”

Confession, repentance, and heartfelt sorrow are powerful changers of fate. In this lesson we will see the remarkable things God is able to do when men have a humble spirit and cooperate with Him.

For hundreds of years, the nation of Israel was not cooperating with God. They weren't even looking to Him for guidance. The result was that their city was in ruins and their people scattered. God had allowed them to be conquered by Babylon because of their idolatry. After reaching rock bottom, there was only one thing that could change their situation, repentance.

After almost 70 years of captivity, Daniel was now an old man. In Daniel chapter 9, he tells us that he was studying the book of Jeremiah. This shows us that even prophets take time to read and contemplate the writings of other prophets! While studying he learned that Israel’s captivity was about to end. Jeremiah had prophesied

that after 70 years, the Israelites would be set free. Filled with hope Daniel began to pray and confess the sins of his people. Let's read a portion of that prayer in Daniel chapter 9 verses 4-6 and 17:

4 I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 5 we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. 6 We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. 17 Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate.

Daniel was repenting for his nation. Over 200 years before this, the Prophet Isaiah had written that King Cyrus of Persia would restore the Israelites to their homeland. The Prophet Daniel had read the prophecies of Isaiah regarding the Persian emperor and was determined to show him the sacred book. According to Josephus, the first century historian, it was Daniel who brought the scriptures to Cyrus' attention. Let's read the verse where Cyrus is mentioned by name in Isaiah chapter 45 verse 13:

13 I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward says the LORD Almighty.

Can you imagine the emperor's surprise when he saw his own name on that ancient scroll? Surely it had to be a humbling experience. His empire stretched from the deserts of Iran in the east to the coasts of Asia Minor. And yet, he was still subject to God's will. Let' read his response in Ezra chapter 1 verses 2 and 3:

2 This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has

appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. 3 Anyone of his people among you- may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem.

This decree took place in 537 B.C. It was a tremendous moment for God's people, a royal decree to return to their homeland. In addition they were supplied with enough gold, silver, and materials to rebuild their beloved temple! It was an amazing day. Now they knew how their ancestors felt when they had left Egypt.

Thousands traveled from Babylon back to Jerusalem. After getting settled in homes the first thing they did was build an altar for sacrifices. Let's read about it in Ezra chapter 3 verses 1-3:

1 And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel [were] in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. 2 Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. 3 Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and evening sacrifices.

The most important words in verse 2 are “in accordance with what was written in the Law of Moses.” They studied the word of God, found God's directions for worship, and they obeyed what it said. In spite of being afraid of their neighbors, they were determined to live according to God's word and fulfill the prophecy laid out in Daniel 9. They were preparing the way for the Messiah. Let us not forget that the altar of sacrifice wasn't just a place to burn animals, it was a place of repentance and a symbol of salvation.

Shortly thereafter, they set to work building a new temple. The money Cyrus had given was used to buy lumber from the forests of

Lebanon. Finally, almost two years after their arrival, the foundation was completed and all the people gathered to celebrate. It was a very emotional moment, listen to the description in Ezra chapter 3 verses 10-13:

10 When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel. 11 With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: He is good; his love to Israel endures for ever. And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. 12 But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. 13 No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away.

The sound was heard far away! Shouts of joy and sounds of weeping filled the air. It was a special day for everyone. The old men even wept. They remembered the glory of Solomon's temple and its destruction. They, more than anyone else, remembered what had caused their captivity.

Not long after this, some enemies of Judah came and attempted to stop the work on the temple. Their devious efforts are described in Ezra chapter 4 verse 4 and 5:

4 Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build and 5 bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

For almost 13 years no work was done on the temple. It was just a bare foundation. But God raised up an amazing team of leaders,

each with unique skills and talents to finish the work. The Bible describes them in Ezra 5 verses 1 and 2:

1 Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. 2 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.

Through the vigilant prayers and efforts of these men, God again provided a miracle in the pagan courts. He inspired the Persian king Darius to renew Cyrus' commandment and eliminate those who would impede the rebuilding of the temple. After years of waiting and work, the temple was rebuilt. We can read about it in Ezra chapter 6 verses 14-16:

14 And the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia; 15 and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. 16 And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.

This was an unforgettable triumph, but it wasn't the end of the story. Though the temple had been rebuilt, the city around it was still in ruins. In fact the city walls and all the gates were still broken. Can you imagine how vulnerable they must have felt without any city walls protecting their beautiful temple inlaid with gold and cedar? Not to mention how strange it must have looked to have a beautiful place of worship sitting on a heap of rubble! Rocks and wooden beams were strewn everywhere. Likely gecekondos had gone up and squatters were slowly overtaking the city. Thus was the scene for about sixty years after the temple was completed.

Fortunately, God wasn't finished. After sixty years, God raised up two new spiritual leaders and inspired yet another pagan king, Artaxerxes, to make a decree similar to Cyrus'. Immediately upon receiving the decree, a man of God named Ezra took the king's letter and thousands of Jews back to Jerusalem to work on the city in 457 BC. We can read about it in Ezra chapter 7 verses 11-16:

11 This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, a man learned in matters of the commandments of the LORD and his statutes for Israel: 12 "Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven. Peace. And now 13 I make a decree that anyone of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom, who freely offers to go to Jerusalem, may go with you. 14 For you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the Law of your God, which is in your hand, 15 and also to carry the silver and gold that the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, 16 with all the silver and gold that you shall find in the whole province of Babylonia, and with the freewill offerings of the people and the priests, vowed willingly for the house of their God that is in Jerusalem.

Over the course of years, Ezra and another godly man named Nehemiah worked hard to restore both the city and its walls. They persistently moved ahead in faith against every kind of danger. The neighboring pagan people were determined to stop their progress, but the God of heaven prevailed and they succeeded in rebuilding Jerusalem.

The amazing climax of this saga concludes on a battlefield. But not a battlefield with horse, sword, and soldier. It was rather on the battlefield of the human heart. Do you remember the reason why Jerusalem had been destroyed over a hundred years earlier? Why had God allowed it to be pillaged by the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar? God had pleaded with the people through a prophet named Jeremiah to repent from idolatry and other lusts. But they would not repent.

Here are the prophet's words from Jeremiah chapter 5 verses 1-3:

1 Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her. 2 Though they say, "As the LORD lives," yet they swear falsely. 3 O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent.

And now, over a hundred years later they have returned to their homeland and rebuilt their city. The series of events leading up to this day started with Daniel's prayer of repentance. By sweat, blood, and faith the temple was finished, the city rebuilt, and the walls repaired. One month after the last block had been laid, completing the wall of Jerusalem, the people gathered all together. It was the last holiday in their holy calendar. We can read this amazing moment of reconciliation between God and His people in Nehemiah chapter 8 verses 1-11:

1 And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. 2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. 4 And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose.... 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. 6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. 7

Also the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. 8 They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. 9 And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. 10 Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." 11 So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved."

Why were the people crying? When the people heard the Tevrat read, the Spirit of God moved powerfully and they were deeply convicted of their sins. The Law was beautiful and holy. They were weak, defiled, and spiritually dirty. They felt shame and sadness for their sins and the sins of previous generations. For over three weeks they gathered every day to hear what Ezra would read to them.

Let's read what happened on the 24th day in Nehemiah chapter 9 verses 1-3:

1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. 2 And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. 3 And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God.

It was an unusual day. A day when a whole a nation repented! Much like the gathering that Ismet found in Berlin. But this day was much deeper and passed with great tears and heartfelt confessions.

Jerusalem had been physically rebuilt, but now it's spiritual atmosphere was being rebuilt by the humility of the people. Surely this was a place where God could live! It was a 180 degree reversal for a nation that had been rebelling against God for hundreds of years. Listen to their prayer of confession in Nehemiah chapter 9 verses 5-8:

5 Then the Levites, said, "Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. 6 "You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you. 7 You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. 8 You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite. And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous.

It is a beautiful prayer, similar to Daniel's 160 years earlier when he had repented for his nation. Now the people were living in the midst of the miracle he had prayed for. The prayer climaxes in verses 32-38:

32 "Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day. 33 Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly. 34 Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them. 35 Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and

rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works. 36 Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. 37 And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress. 38 "Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests.

Their repentance was so heartfelt, they wanted to write it down and give it to God! They were finally free from the years of shame and guilt. It was a moment of great jubilation. It was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel chapter 9, that they would put an end to sin and create an atmosphere worthy for the Messiah's coming.

A father was growing old. Though not wealthy, he had a career in the military and had obtained several properties over his life. He was making his will and dividing up his inheritance among the children. When the older sister heard of it, greed overcame her and she saw it as a moment to get ahead of her brother. She repeatedly spoke behind her younger brother's back attempting to persuade the father to leave all of the inheritance in her name. Perhaps because the mother had died many years earlier and the daughter was a reminder of his beloved wife, the father gave in. The younger brother was a very soft spoken man. It bothered him immensely that he would be treated like a step child and not respected by his father or sister. But he did not fight. For the next five years, the inheritance stayed in the older sister's name.

Whenever she visited the younger brother, her greedy deed was eating away at her conscience. But she tried hard to brush away the guilt because she loved money and really wanted those properties. She was resolved to stick with her decision. Over time her heart became harder and harder, until she no longer even liked herself.

One day, while they were all together the young brother got up the courage to speak,

“My Father, my older sister, how can you treat me in such a way?”

Immediately the sister was filled with anger and began to defend herself. She shouted accusations. But strangely, like a lightning flash in a dark room, she had a moment of clarity. She could see things through her brother’s eyes. It was the Spirit of God giving her the opportunity to repent. In a moment she was faced with a decision: fight or do right? She asked for a moment with the father alone.

In a half hour they came out of the back room. The older sister hugged her brother and began to cry. She apologized and said that she had discussed everything with the father. Everything would be split half and half. It was as if chains were cut from her heart. The act of confessing, apologizing, and then doing the right thing had set her free.

People often attribute wars to "fate". But millenniums of bloodshed have ravaged the world because people won't repent and say,

“I am sorry.”

In other words, "fate" can be altered by a few small words.

"I was wrong. I am sorry. Forgive me."

It takes courage to apologize and courage to accept a meaningful apology. We may not think that words can be so powerful, but in this lesson we saw that words of repentance change fate.

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. Is it possible for a nation to repent today?
2. Reread the text from Jeremiah 5:1-3. What do you think it means that “God is looking for truth?”
3. Three times God moved on pagan emperor's hearts to help his people. King Cyrus, King Darius, and King Artaxerxes, all made decrees to build up the city of the Great God. Do you think the people's repentant spirit had anything to do with these miracles?
4. Why do you think Ezra and others faced obstacles and opposition when they were clearly doing God's work? Couldn't God have made it easier for them?
5. What are some attitudes or behaviors or motives that God is needing you to repent from? Do you see how a repentant spirit is an opportunity to be free?

20 HE WHO COMES BEFORE THE FATE CHANGER

If "all religions are the same" as some claim, why do they yield such different results?

There are lots of religions in the world. While many of them contain some shared principles of morality, they are not the same. They disagree with one another about who God is, what He is like, and how He deals with the problem of sin and death. They also vary in their understanding of what God expects from humans and why. With such a plethora of information to sift through and evaluate, many people are confused. What is the truth? Where can I find it? How can I be sure I don't spend my whole life headed on a path that in the end leads me nowhere? We really wish there was someone or something to show us the way.

Fortunately God has given us someone and something to show us the way. He has not left us without witness to the truth. God announces events through living messengers called prophets. Of course some prophets write down the messages given to them. Those messages of the prophets constitute the sacred writings. The sacred writings are something that shows us the way to truth. But there have also been prophets who didn't write down one word. For example, several lessons ago we read about a prophet who condemned a wicked king and announced his doom. Interestingly, his name is not known nor did he write any of the scriptures.

In this lesson, we are going to learn about a messenger, or prophet, named Malachi who was given a message from God. In the prophe-

cy, Malachi says that another messenger will come who will prepare the way for yet another messenger. That's a lot of messengers! But why are all those messengers necessary. Let's consider a story that will help us understand the answer to that question.

Bayram was driving along the road one day and a policeman stopped him. But Bayram wasn't the only one who was stopped; all the traffic was blocked.

“What is going on?” Bayram thought.

He rolled down the window and called to the policeman.

“What is going on here, why have you stopped all the traffic?”

The policeman didn't answer. He just cleared the cars to the side of the road. As Bayram waited on the side of the road, he noticed that along the roadway lots of policemen were stationed at certain intervals. Then suddenly several police cars drove by with several black automobiles following closely behind. Each car had a 06 license plate.

After the black cars passed the policeman let the traffic continue. But Bayram's curiosity was piqued, so he asked the policeman:

“Who was that?”

“The prime minister is here for a meeting.” The policeman responded.

When important people come to town there is usually a big announcement that they are coming. Often signs are hung from the lampposts and posters are plastered on the walls of the highway bridges. Even if the VIP isn't coming for public meetings, at the very least the roads are guarded, security checks are made at every point, and the cars are cleared away.

Since we first started studying the Bible, we have seen a series of prophecies and events that have predicted the coming of a very

unique person. Immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, we read God's promise that someone special would come to bruise the head of the serpent. We later learned that the serpent was Satan.¹⁴ Suffice it to say, whoever bruises Satan's head is an incredibly powerful person! We also read the promise to Abraham that all the nations would be blessed through his offspring.¹⁵ The chain of promises continued when Moses predicted that a prophet would rise up like himself from among the Jews and that the people must listen to him.¹⁶ Moses talked with God at the burning bush and was even permitted to partially see God from behind. Could there really be a prophet greater than Moses? It has to be because the Bible predicted that such a prophet would arise.

We learned in the Psalms that a priest would arise according to the order of Melchizedek and not of Aaron. Do you remember when Abraham paid a tithe of 10% to Melchizedek? God said He would put all the enemies of that priest under the priest's feet and would sit him at God's own right hand.¹⁷ Later we learned that God would seat someone on David's throne and that his kingdom would last forever because it was established with judgment and justice.¹⁸

But if that wasn't enough God said that the one who would come would have a miraculous birth and his name would be Immanuel, which means, "God with us".¹⁹ In Isaiah 52:13-15 we read about a "Servant" who would come, be exalted and yet suffer great harm. Furthermore in Isaiah chapter 53 we saw that this servant would suffer for the sins of the people and actually justify them through his suffering. He would change the fate of all humanity! Who could that be?

14 Genesis 3:15

15 Genesis 22:18

16 Deuteronomy 18:15

17 Psalm 110:1-4

18 Isaiah 9:6, 7

19 Isaiah 7:11-14

In the book of Daniel, we studied a prophecy that declared the Messiah would appear on the world stage in 27 A.D. and be murdered within 7 years.²⁰ Could all these predictions possibly be about one person: a crusher, blessing, prophet, priest, king, servant, and sufferer? If so, wouldn't God announce to the world in unmistakable terms who that person is and when he would appear?

If all the prophecies that we read about were for one person who would crush Satan's head, be a prophet like Moses, sit on David's throne in an eternal kingdom, have a miraculous birth, justify the people by suffering for their sins and actually be called, "God with us", then we could rightly expect an announcement about his coming wouldn't we? And that brings us to the verses we want to look at now. Let's go to a small book called Malachi.

Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament and at the end of a group of books called the Minor Prophets. In the book of Malachi, the author gives no personal information about himself or the time he wrote the book. He is not mentioned in any other book of the Bible. We understand that Malachi was written while the Persians were ruling over Israel sometime between 538 and 331 B.C. when governors were the highest officials over Israel. This would have taken place after the Babylonian captivity. Let's read what God says to His people through the prophet Malachi in chapter 3 verse 1:

1 "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts.

Someone is coming and that person is very important! The prophet Malachi said that the Lord, who is the Messenger of the covenant, is coming to His temple. The Lord Himself is coming! This is the same person in Daniel 9 who will confirm the covenant.²¹ Will he come without warning? No, the Lord says He will send a messenger

²⁰ Daniel 9:24-27

²¹ Daniel 9:27

to prepare the way for Him. That is certainly logical. If they send someone to prepare the way for the prime minister what should be done for the Lord, the Messenger of the covenant?

The messenger sent before the Lord and the Messenger of the covenant are two different people. Who is the messenger sent before the Lord? We don't have the answer here. But be patient. What will happen then when the Lord comes? Let's find out in Malachi chapter 3 verses 2-7:

2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire And like launderer's soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver; That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness. 4 "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the LORD, As in the days of old, As in former years. 5 And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien -- Because they do not fear Me," Says the LORD of hosts. 6 "For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. 7 Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," Says the LORD of hosts. "But you said, 'In what way shall we return?'

The Lord is coming and His purpose is not an election meeting! He is the Lord and no votes will be cast for another! When He comes He will come to judge. He will judge against things we expect Him to judge against: adultery, sorcery, perjurers and those who exploit widows and orphans. He will judge against those who turn a foreigner away. Sadly, Malachi says that God's people have done all these things. It is only because of God's great mercy and righteousness that He has not consumed the sinners; the same righteousness He declared to Moses in Exodus chapter 34 verses 6-7:

6 And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, 7 "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

The very fact that God sends messengers to warn of the coming judgment shows His righteousness and mercy. He is calling men to return to Him in repentance. He is calling them from death to life.

The Lord said specifically that He would come to the Levites to cleanse and purify them so that they would make an offering in righteousness. Just as gold becomes purer and purer in the fire, God said that He would purify the sons of Levi. It was only after this purification that their offerings could be pleasing to the Lord.

Do you remember that the Levites were the priests, the religious leaders of the people? They were the ones who served in the temple of God during the worship services. They were continually giving offerings to the Lord, but the Lord was not pleased with their offerings. Why not? Let's look for some answers in Malachi chapter 1 verses 6-8:

6 "A son honors his father, And a servant his master. If then I am the Father, Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, Where is My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts To you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?' 7 "You offer defiled food on My altar. But say, 'In what way have we defiled You?' By saying, 'The table of the LORD is contemptible.' 8 And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" Says the LORD of hosts.

The priests were doing their job begrudgingly. They actually had contempt for the Lord's service. It was drudgery to them. They were giving food offerings that were unclean and contrary to God's instructions. The Lord had specifically told the Israelites that all the animals that were sacrificed should be without spot or blemish. The Levites were offering animals that were lame, sick and even blind! God rebuked them for their disrespect and irreverence. He says in essence,

"Would you give such an animal to the governor? No! It would be a shame. So how are you offering them to the Creator of the Universe?"

Before we are quick to condemn those Levites, we should ask ourselves a question. **Do we really love to worship God or do we do it because it is a duty? Do we view worship as a job that we have to do; a task that we need to hurry up and finish so can move on to something more interesting? Do you really think God accepts that kind of worship? Are we giving our best to God?** We can read more about the priests and what they were doing in Malachi chapter 2 verses 7-8:

7 "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, And people should seek the law from his mouth; For he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. 8 But you have departed from the way; You have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi," Says the LORD of hosts.

Earlier we said that the prophets were living messengers of the Lord. Prophets relay a message directly from the Lord. Religious teachers can also be messengers of the Lord but in a different way. They are to teach God's word and exemplify it in their lives. In verse 7 we read that the priest was a messenger of the Lord. But the Levites were causing people to fall away from the true faith by their disobedience and indifference. They were betraying the people's trust! God said He would change all this by coming to His temple.

The Lord Himself would come and send a messenger before He arrives. Let's learn some more about the messenger that will come before the Lord in Malachi chapter 4 verses 5–6:

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. 6 And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

How can the Lord's coming be both great and dreadful? To the ones who are ready for His coming it will be a great day. But for the rejecters of God's mercy it will be a dreadful day. Will there be a warning? Before the Lord will come in great judgment, He will send Elijah the prophet. That is interesting. Do you remember who Elijah was?

He was a great prophet of reform during the reign of King Ahab in Northern Israel. The people had turned their backs on God and were worshiping Baal, the national god of the Canaanites. Elijah told the people to repent. Elijah was also the one who had a contest with the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel. After some taunting by Elijah, dancing, chanting, and even cutting themselves the priests of Baal weren't able to call fire down from heaven to consume their sacrifice. The reason is that Baal wasn't a real god. But Elijah called fire down from heaven and his sacrifice was consumed by fire from the Lord. Later, Elijah was translated to heaven without seeing death. Is the prophet Malachi saying that this same Elijah would be the messenger to prepare the way of the Lord for His coming? Would he return to earth? Would his message be the same?

This is the last prophecy written before the New Testament. So we will have to wait for the answer. Of course, you may not like waiting. But imagine the Israelites who waited 400 years between the time of Malachi and the time of the New Testament! Don't worry, you won't have to wait that long to learn who the messenger is. For now, just remember that whoever this messenger is, he will do a

work of spiritual reform turning the “sons,” as the Hebrew says, to the fathers. That is, the messenger would turn the Israelites’ hearts to the true faith of their forefathers.

When you think of examination and inspection perhaps you remember the days of your military service or one of your relatives talking about the coming of the commander (Tugay Komutanı). Perhaps the announcement came a week before the commander (Tugay Komutanı) came. Maybe it came a month beforehand. What would happen? First, the announcement would come from the lieutenant:

“All right men, next week the commander is coming to our division and everything will be perfect. Get ready for inspection!”

Everyone knew what that inspection meant. Everything from your hair to your fingernails had to be perfectly cleaned and in good shape. Your locker and everything in it had to be perfect, right down to your socks. Of course the weapons would be inspected to see that everything was cleaned and in perfect working order.

Then the corporal (astsubay) came in and said:

“What is this soldier? Do you call this clean? Redo this!”

Finally the commander came and addressed the company. But instead of inspecting all the things they had prepared, he didn’t even look!

The above illustration is one of both comparison and contrast. Before the military inspection there was an announcement of the commander's coming. Likewise, before the Lord comes there will be a messenger announcing His coming. Like the military inspection, there is a preparation necessary for the Lord's coming. But the Lord is not like the company commander. He will not just appear and then go without inspection. No, He will purify and judge as He said He would. The Lord isn’t only looking for personal cleanliness but rather righteousness.

The priests washed their hands and feet before they went into the temple and did the Lord's service. In spite of this, the Lord still was not pleased. It was not enough. Some people think that they can continue being a thief and a liar and so long as they do their ritual washings and prayers, the Lord will accept them. We see here in the Bible that this is not true. Yes, the Lord desires physical cleanliness when we come into His presence. But physical cleanliness and an offering is no substitute for righteousness. The Lord addresses the liar and thief by asking,

"Do you call this clean?"

But when the Lord corrects us, He does not begin a harsh scolding. He pleads with us in mercy. **He desires our ultimate goodness, not just simply outward adherence to a set of rules.** Malachi's prophecy stands. A messenger will come and then the Lord Himself will come. Get ready! The New Testament will tell us who they are!

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. If you were living in Malachi's time, do you think the behavior of the priests would have influenced your attitude about religion? Why or why not?
2. The Lord is called the "Messenger of the covenant" in the prophecy. Why do you think He carries that name? What does the covenant have to do with the judgment that will take place?
3. If you were living at the time that Malachi wrote this prophecy about the coming of the Lord, and you were not Jewish, what would you do? Would the message to prepare for the Lord's coming be valid for you too? Why do you think so?

