The Unfolding Story
A Story-Based Study about God & His Relationship to Mankind
To the Student…

The Unfolding Story is a guide to the most amazing story in the history of mankind. It is the story of how God has made known his ways down through the ages. It is the story of how God has revealed his will through the Prophets of old. It is the story of how God has shown his love to men and women in ancient times, just as he shows his love to us now in our own times.

We hope that you can read and study this book with a friend. Together with a friend, you will be able to discuss the questions that appear throughout the study. This will help you to learn more about God and his plan for mankind. Our prayer is that as you reflect on God’s message, the stories you read will help you to draw closer to God and know him better.

The Unfolding Story is available in printed book form from Roshan Books. For information on obtaining copies please write to info@karezproject.org.

Audio versions of The Unfolding Story in Dari as MP3 files on CD are available by writing Sadaye Zendai, PO Box 702 GPO, Lahore, Pakistan.

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I An Introduction to Our Stories

STARRY NIGHT

Zahir walked silently away from the campfire, lost in his thoughts. Every night had been the same since his nation’s liberation from bondage in Egypt. When people lose their sense of home and become wanderers, stories from their distant past help them to find their future. So it was for young Zahir and his family. After the evening meal by their tents in the desert, the children of Jacob (Yaqub) sat in the cool night air and listened to their elders tell the stories of their ancestors.

Multitudes of young and old alike reflected on their beginnings while they watched the warm glow of the dying embers. They learned about the Prophet Adam, the first man, and his sons. They heard the story of how one had killed the other because of his blind jealousy. The account of how God had flooded the earth, to punish mankind for their sins, was told. Mankind had been saved only because the Prophet Noah (Nuh) had listened to God and built a great boat. When the flood waters came, he and his family were carried across the waters in the boat. They listened to stories about the Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim), how he left the life of the city and became a nomad in response to God’s word. Abraham wandered the rest of his life in a land promised to him. Yet he never gained possession of the land except in his heart. They learned how he became the Father of Faith believing that God would make him the father of many while he was yet childless. They marveled at Abraham’s faith when he was prepared to offer his son as a sacrifice according to God’s command. However, at the last moment, God’s angel held Abraham’s hand from harming the boy, and God himself provided a ram for the sacrifice.

As Zahir reached the edge of the encampment, he walked up a low hill overlooking the valley. His gaze was upon the many stars that formed a blanket over the tents below. Zahir could not help but dwell on the stars. That very evening his grandfather had told him about the promise God had made to Abraham on such a night as this one. When Abraham had questioned how he without an heir could be the father of many, God told him to look into the night sky and count the stars if he could. “So shall your descendants be” God had promised him. Zahir thought to himself, “How could Father Abraham even begin to count these stars of the desert sky?” As he rose to return to camp, his eyes fell from pondering the stars above to behold the scene below. Across the valley floor countless fires were burning by the tents of Abraham’s children. As if mirrored in a still lake, each fire was a reflection of the stars above. Before Zahir’s wondering eyes he saw the fulfillment of Abraham’s hope and came to realize that he was part of a story that was still unfolding.

Reflection
1. This imaginary story is set in the times of the Taurat of the Prophet Moses (Musa). The Taurat, Zabur of David (Dawud), and Injil of the Messiah Jesus (Hazoor al Masih) are also known as the Bible. Why do you think that Zahir felt that he was part of a story that was still being told?
2. The following lessons trace the story of God and his relationship with man as recorded in the Bible. The writing down of these stories tells a tale of God’s relationship to mankind. In your experience, what stories from your own life might show that God is still at work?
The Unfolding Story

II  Goodness
      Gone Bad

The Gardener

The gardener moved the small earthen dam holding the water back from the parched soil. In rushed the water to replenish the garden, bursting with new growth. He leant on his spade and surveyed the scene; fruit trees in flower promising an abundant harvest, vegetables and herbs enough to provide rich flavor to the table after a winter of dried seasoning, and flowers both beautiful and fragrant filling the senses with the wonder of spring. In moments like this his mind passed to his one true delight. Throughout his young life the gardener’s son had been ever beside him in the garden. He loved to work alongside his father, learning the gardener’s ways and tending the garden with care. However, as the boy grew into a young man his interests broadened. He took more and more time with his friends and spent less time in his father’s garden. It was with these friends that the young man became addicted to games of chance. And it was with these friends that the gardener’s son came to lose his meager earnings.

“Today will be different,” thought the gardener. His son had promised to visit the garden after a long absence and spend time helping his father as he had in his youth. In fact, often the young man had longed to return to the simpler days of his childhood. However, on his way to the garden a gambling companion stopped him. A dispute arose over a debt that the youth swore had been settled. Tempers flared and in his rage the gardener’s son struck and killed his accusor. Numb from shock he stood over the dead body while his friends grabbed him by his cloak and implored him to flee the city and never return. They knew that the dead man’s family would certainly seek revenge for his crime for the rest of his days. Lost in remorse and fear the young man fled past the walls of his father’s garden as he hastened into exile.

The sun slowly passed over the sky and began to set behind the garden wall. The gardener’s heart was heavy as he began to collect his gardening tools. Hope disappointed makes the heart sick. As day passed into twilight with no sign of the gardener’s son, words formed on the old man’s lips that had been echoing in his mind all day. “Son, where are you?”

Reflection
1. How did the son’s gambling lead to an even more shameful act?
2. Describe how you think the gardener would feel when he finds out what his son has done. Do you think that he would do anything to try to help his son? If so, what do you think he might try to do?

…and it was good

The Taurat of the Prophet Moses states that when God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, “God looked at what he had done. All of it was very good!” God created light and separated it from the darkness. God created the earth and separated it from the seas. God created plants and filled the earth, sea, and sky with living creatures. And on this good earth God formed the first man and woman to rule over it. The Prophet Adam was the first prophet of God. God gave instructions for the order of life on earth through Adam. God gave him the task of naming all living creatures. Truly those days were the best days on earth.

However, things did not remain that way. Adam and his wife had been commanded by God not to eat of a forbidden fruit that grew on a certain tree in the Garden. One day, Satan, in the form of a serpent, came and tempted Adam’s wife to eat the forbidden fruit. She ate the fruit and gave it to Adam who also ate it. By disobeying God they suddenly felt great shame and became afraid for their lives. They covered themselves and hid from God. Instead of enjoying being with God, they now feared his very presence. Like a ripe piece of fruit that rots in the sunshine, so the relationship that God had made to be very good was now spoiled.

Reflection
1. What were some of the consequences of disobeying God found in the story?
2. What are some of the consequences of mankind disobeying God as seen in the world today?
3. How are all humans like our first parents Adam and his wife? Do we obey God, or disobey God?
"WHERE ARE YOU?"
GENESIS 3:1-15, 22-24

The snake was sneakier than any of the other wild animals that the LORD God had made. One day it came to the woman and asked, "Did God tell you not to eat fruit from any tree in the garden?"

The woman answered, "God said we could eat fruit from any tree in the garden, except the one in the middle. He told us not to eat fruit from that tree or even to touch it. If we do, we will die."

"No, you won’t!" the snake replied. "God understands what will happen on the day you eat fruit from that tree. You will see what you have done, and you will know the difference between right and wrong, just as God does."

The woman stared at the fruit. It looked beautiful and tasty. She wanted the wisdom that it would give her, and she ate some of the fruit. Her husband was there with her, so she gave some to him, and he ate it too. Right away they saw what they had done, and they realized they were naked. Then they sewed fig leaves together to make something to cover themselves.

Late in the afternoon a breeze began to blow, and the man and woman heard the LORD God walking in the garden. They were frightened and hid behind some trees.

The LORD called out to the man and asked, "Where are you?"

The man answered, "I was naked, and when I heard you walking through the garden, I was frightened and hid!"

"How did you know you were naked?" God asked. "Did you eat any fruit from that tree in the middle of the garden?"

"It was the woman you put here with me," the man said. "She gave me some of the fruit, and I ate it."

The LORD God then asked the woman, "What have you done?"

"The snake tricked me," she answered. "And I ate some of that fruit."

So the LORD God said to the snake:

"Because of what you have done, you will be the only animal to suffer this curse—
For as long as you live, you will crawl on your stomach and eat dirt.
You and this woman will hate each other; your descendants and hers will always be enemies.
One of hers will strike you on the head, and you will strike him on the heel."

***

The LORD said, "These people now know the difference between right and wrong, just as we do. But they must not be allowed to eat fruit from the tree that lets them live forever." So the LORD God sent them out of the Garden of Eden, where they would have to work the ground from which the man had been made. Then God put winged creatures at the entrance to the garden, and a flaming, flashing sword to guard the way to the life-giving tree.

Reflection
1. How did Satan in the form of the snake change the words of God?
2. What were the things that Adam’s wife found attractive in the temptation? How do those things still attract people today?
3. Who did Adam and his wife blame for their sin?
4. According to this story from the Bible, who is responsible for the entrance of sin into the world?
5. Read the following Scripture and reflect on what the Prophet Paul says about the consequence of sin.

From the Pen of the Prophets

ROMANS 5:12

Adam sinned, and that sin brought death into the world. Now everyone has sinned, and so everyone must die.
A GIFT FOR YUNUS

The angel came when Yunus least expected a holy visitation; not in a quiet moment of reflection, not early in the morning just after prayers. No, the angel came when Yunus was sweating from the heat of the day as he threshed his wheat. At first he did not know it was an angel. He had had one eye on his neighbor threshing his grain in the distance, working hard to keep up, always wondering if he would surpass him with this year’s yield. The angel startled him and it annoyed him that he would have to stop for a time and entertain a guest. It was always like this for Yunus. Just when he had too much work to do, someone would come along to take up his valuable time. And this guest looked like he had never worked a hard day in his life. Whatever his reason for coming, Yunus’ guest looked like he had not come to help him gather his harvest.

But the angel did not want any tea. No, he had come with a message from God. When Yunus realized to whom he was speaking, his attitude changed. Mopping his brow he set about to make the holy being welcome. But again, the angel stopped him with this one simple message. Yunus would be granted one gift from God – anything his heart desired would be his. There was only one stipulation. Whatever he asked for, his neighbor would receive double.

“Double of my gift from God?” asked Yunus. The angel gently nodded. Yunus looked across the field at his neighbor busily threshing his wheat. Turning to the angel he said, “This is a great opportunity. I must ponder it for a time. Would it be too much to ask you to return in the morning?” The angel agreed and vanished before Yunus’ eyes.

Back at his hard labor he contemplated what suitable gift he might ask from God. “If I ask for one cow,” he thought, “my neighbor will get two. If I ask for one jerib of land, my neighbor will get two jeribs of land.” Suddenly an idea came to him. That night Yunus slept a very peaceful sleep.

In the morning a cool breeze blew past Yunus as he stood alone in his field. Just there before him appeared the angel from God. “Have you made up your mind? What is it that you will ask of God?” the angel inquired. “Yes, I have decided,” replied Yunus with a sly smile. “I ask that God pluck out my left eye!”

Reflection
1. Yunus thought that he was very clever. Yet, how did Yunus’ request show the evil eye he had towards his neighbor?
2. How have you seen this kind of attitude in the world today?
3. Does it surprise you that people can show such envy of others?
4. What gift do you think that Yunus should have asked for?

CONSEQUENCES FOR SIN

God cursed the Prophet Adam, his wife, and the serpent for their part in rebelling against him. From that time forward the earth would bring forth thorns and thistles. Only by the sweat of man’s hard work would the land yield its fruit. As a result of the woman’s sin, pain in childbearing was greatly increased. As for the serpent, it was caused to crawl upon its belly, eating the dust of the earth all its days.

Yet in the midst of the curses, a promise was given. God told Satan, that great rebel against the Holy God, that his doom was sure. A human child would one day come and crush the snake’s head. This would bring an end to Satan and all evil. In that promise lays the hope that all who long to see the end of evil cling to.

God also made a way for Adam and his wife to cover their shame. An animal was sacrificed to make clothing for them. From that time onward, the covering of mankind’s sins has required the offering of a blood sacrifice. In the next story from the Bible, we see how Adam’s first two sons, Cain and Abel, gave offerings to God – one acceptable, and one unacceptable.

Reflection
1. God was just in judging Adam, his wife, and the snake. But in his judgment, what promise did God give?
2. How do you think people today try to cover their sins in ways to avoid any sacrifice?
Bel became a sheep farmer, but Cain farmed the land. One day, Cain gave part of his harvest to the Lord, and Abel also gave an offering to the Lord. He killed the first-born lamb from one of his sheep and gave the Lord the best parts of it. The Lord was pleased with Abel and his offering, but not with Cain and his offering. This made Cain so angry that he could not hide his feelings.

The Lord said to Cain, “What’s wrong with you? Why do you have such an angry look on your face? If you had done the right thing, you would be smiling. But you did the wrong thing, and now sin is waiting to attack you like a lion. Sin wants to destroy you, but don’t let it!”

Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go for a walk.” And when they were out in a field, Cain killed him.

Afterwards the Lord asked Cain, “Where is Abel?”

“How should I know?” he answered. “Am I supposed to look after my brother?”

Then the Lord said, “Why have you done this terrible thing? You killed your own brother, and his blood flowed onto the ground. Now his blood is calling out for me to punish you. And so, I’ll put you under a curse. Because you killed Abel and made his blood run out on the ground, you will never be able to farm the land again. If you try to farm the land, it won’t produce anything for you. From now on, you’ll be without a home, and you’ll spend the rest of your life wandering from place to place.”

“This punishment is too hard!” Cain said. “You’re making me leave my home and live far from you. I will have to wander about without a home, and just anyone could kill me.”

“No!” the Lord answered. “Anyone who kills you will be punished seven times worse than I am punishing you.” So the Lord put a mark on Cain to warn everyone not to kill him. But Cain had to go far from the Lord and live in the Land of Wandering, which is east of Eden.

Reflection
1. Why do you think that Abel’s offering was acceptable to God and Cain’s was not?
2. How did God warn Cain not to sin?
3. In what ways were Cain’s responses like those of his father and mother when they were caught in sin? Can we ever hide anything from God?
4. How was the judgment of Cain’s sin just? How did God show mercy to Cain in the midst of judgment?
5. In the following Scripture from the book to the Hebrews, reflect on how Abel’s faith still speaks today.

From the Pen of the Prophets

Because Abel had faith, he offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. God was pleased with him and his gift, and even though Abel is now dead, his faith still speaks for him.
God’s Just Judgments

The Mad Dog

The man slowly raised his gun and took aim at the mad dog. “Father, is it right to kill the dog? It has not harmed us. If it is mad, then it will go away and leave us alone.” It grieved the boy to think of any animal dying. He loved every kind of animal. He kept birds that had fallen from their nests and raised them until they were able to fly on their own. He was the one who watched over the family’s chickens. Whenever one was butchered, the boy sat in silence through the meal, only eating rice. Once he had found a lame gazelle while walking in the hills. Fearful at first of the boy, the gazelle soon grew to trust him as a true friend. It followed the boy everywhere he went, hobbling around the garden, forever thankful for the boy’s kindness. Because of his great love for animals the boy begged his father to let the mad dog live. Against his better judgment, the man put down his gun and threw stones at the dog until it ran up into the hills. “Let’s hope and pray that that is the last we see of that cursed dog,” the boy’s father said, ushering the family back into their compound.

Weeks later, the gazelle followed the boy over the hills to his uncle’s village. Before returning home, his uncle warned him about the mad dog in the hills. “He has killed a number of goats and sheep,” his uncle reported. “He does not kill for food. He leaves his victims to rot in the hot sun. He just kills because of his madness. It is too bad that my brother did not shoot it when he had the chance.”

As they made their way home, the gazelle slowed the boy’s pace considerably. But now the boy was fearful of their journey. “I wonder if I was right to ask my father to spare the dog,” he thought. “Now many harmless animals have died because of my pleas for mercy.” Stopping by a stream to drink, the boy heard a low growling sound behind him. He turned to see the same mad dog he had pled with his father to spare attack the defenseless gazelle. It was no contest. In fact, the gazelle’s death came mercifully quickly.

The boy’s eyes filled with tears of sorrow and rage. “Why has something I so loved been taken in such a violent way?” he cried. His father could not comfort him. The compassion he had shown for the mad dog was now turned to anger. He was both angry at the dog for its senseless attack, and angry at himself for letting the creature live.

Reflection
1. The boy learned a valuable lesson. To kill the mad dog when they had the chance was the most just thing to do. How would you try to explain that to a child?
2. Next, we will read a story where God has to judge mankind for their sins. Can you think of an example from your life of a time when a severe judgment was the best solution to a problem?

An Ever Darkening World

Just as the light of day gradually fades when the late afternoon turns to twilight and then to night, so evil moves across the land. Its coming is hardly noticed. But little by little the darkness grows until it overwhelms all that is good. In such times of darkness, good people are hard to find. This was the way the world was at the time of the Prophet Noah.

Cain took the life of his brother and could no longer live off the land. For this reason, he established the first city. Sometimes cities can be places where evil is concentrated. We know from the Bible that Cain had a descendant named Lamech who wrote a song in which he boasted about killing a young man. “If seven lives are taken to pay for killing Cain, seventy-seven will be taken if anyone kills me,” Lamech sang. By this early time in mankind’s history, killing and revenge were evidence of the growing darkness.

When God looked upon the earth he took note that the hearts of mankind are evil. The Bible says, “The Lord saw how bad people on the earth were and that everything they thought and planned was evil.” (Genesis 7:5) In order to control the evil, God set a time limit on the lives of men and women. He limited their life span to one hundred and twenty years. But this was not enough. The darkness still increased. God saw that he had no choice but to destroy all mankind. The evil intentions of human hearts were continuous.
Yet, the Prophet Noah found favor in God’s sight. God told him of his plan to destroy evil mankind. But God would save Noah and his family along with a representation of all the animals on earth. He was told to build a great boat. Noah and his family along with two of every kind of living creature boarded the boat. When they were safely on board, God caused a great flood to sweep over the earth. It rained for forty days and forty nights. In this way God judged the evil that had taken over mankind. Now a bright new day could dawn on the earth.

Reflection
1. How was Cain’s family an example of the growing darkness over the earth?
2. In what ways did God try to control the darkness?
3. Why do you think that God allows evil to exist even today? What should he do about it?

A SACRIFICE OF THANKSGIVING

GENESIS 8:20-22, 9:8-17

Noah built an altar where he could offer sacrifices to the Lord. Then he offered on the altar one of each kind of animal and bird that could be used for a sacrifice. The smell of the burning offering pleased God, and he said, “Never again will I punish the earth for the sinful things its people do. All of them have evil thoughts from the time they are young, but I will never destroy everything that breathes, as I did this time.

“As long as the earth remains,
there will be planting and harvest,
cold and heat; winter and summer
day and night.”

***

Again, God said to Noah and his sons, “I am going to make a solemn promise to you and to everyone who will live after you. This includes the birds and the animals that came out of the boat. I promise every living creature that the earth and those living on it will never again be destroyed by a flood.

“The rainbow that I have put in the sky will be my sign to you and to every living creature on earth. It will remind you that I will keep this promise forever. When I send clouds over the earth, and a rainbow appears in the sky, I will remember my promise to you and to all other living creatures. Never again will I let floodwaters destroy all life. When I see the rainbow in the sky, I will always remember the promise that I have made to every living creature. The rainbow will be the sign of that solemn promise.”

Reflection
1. Why do you think that Noah offered a sacrifice to God after leaving the boat?
2. How did God show his mercy in the midst of his judgment of evil?
3. What will a rainbow remind you of now that you know its origin?
4. Read the following prophecy of Jesus and reflect on what the day of final judgment will be like.

From the Pen of the Prophets

MATTHEW 24:37-44

When the Son of Man appears, things will be just as they were when Noah lived. People were eating, drinking, and getting married right up to the day that the flood came and Noah went into the big boat. They didn’t know anything was happening until the flood came and swept them all away. That is how it will be when the Son of Man appears.

Two men will be in the same field, but only one will be taken. The other will be left. Two women will be together grinding grain, but only one will be taken. The other will be left. So be on your guard! You don’t know when your Lord will come. Home owners never know when a thief is coming, and they are always on guard to keep one from breaking in. Always be ready! You don’t know when the Son of Man will come.
THE JUDGE, MY FRIEND

Farhad felt his shame, but not so much because he had been caught in the act of stealing the Emir’s gold. He had stolen many times before and not been caught. He had a talent for stealing. It had started with little things just for fun; fruit from the market or toys from the shops, but when he realized that stealing could give him the little extras in life, he spent more and more time taking the “easy way.”

No, he was not ashamed of who he was. He knew that others had suspected him. He could tell by the way friends would quickly shift valuables to another room when he came to visit. He sensed it when he caught the eye of someone looking at him with a cold stare. They would quickly turn away, but he knew what they were thinking. And he didn’t care – until today.

Farhad was ashamed today because of the judge. He recognized him as soon as he entered the courtroom. Asif had been his best friend in his youth. They had spent countless hours playing in the orchard and swimming in the river. But because of who they were inside, with very different ways of looking at the world, they had taken very different paths in life.

Now Farhad wondered what his old friend would do. The witnesses had testified. The evidence was clear. He had not been as smart in his vocation as he thought. Would Asif remember their friendship? Would he overturn justice in order to help out an old friend? Farhad sent a pleading glance for mercy in Asif’s direction. He tried to read his mind by watching the judge’s face, still familiar after all those years.

He watched as Asif’s eyes changed from stern reflection to soft confidence. His mind had been made up. Farhad felt somehow he would be let off. “Guilty,” announced the judge from his seat. “The fine is fifty thousand afghanis or three months in prison.” “How can I pay that sum your honor?” cried Farhad. “If you lack the resources to pay for your crime, then you should think twice before you steal again. Justice must be served.”

Rising from his seat, the judge then did the most incredible thing. He laid aside the symbols of his authority and stepped down to stand beside his old friend. “As for your debt,” Asif said looking intently into Farhad’s unbelieving eyes, “I myself will pay your fine. See to it that I never see you before me again as your judge.”

Reflection
1. What in this story indicates the true nature of Farhad? Do you think that he deserved to pay for his crime?
2. What are your thoughts about the judge paying the thief’s debts? Do you know a story where that has happened in life?

GOD’S PROMISES ARE SURE

Just as God made a covenant, or agreement, with Noah and all living things after the Flood, so he made a special covenant with Abraham, the Father of those who have faith in the One God. Abraham came from a great city in the east. But God called him out of the city and gave him two promises. One was that he would receive a land of his own. The other was that he would be the father of nations. For the rest of his days, he wandered in a land he did not own. Yet he believed that God had given it to him, and that was enough for this man of faith.

Not only had God promised Abraham a land, but he had promised him a son. Abraham had not any heir to inherit the great wealth that God had bestowed upon him. At times this troubled Abraham because he remained childless. His wife, Sarah, told him not to worry but to take her handmaiden because Sarah was barren. This Abraham did and a son, named Ishmael, was born to him from Hagar, Sarah’s handmaiden. But God had intended that the child of promise would come through Sarah. Abraham pled with God for a blessing for Ishmael. God did grant that Ishmael would become a great nation. However, God wanted Abraham, and all those who believe in the One God, to learn that God keeps his promise and can be trusted.

Sarah, in her old age, did bear a son to Abraham – the son of promise. Abraham poured his love into his son Isaac (Ishaq). But God wanted to test Abraham. He had not waited for the son of promise by agreeing to have a child through
Hagar. Now God would ask Abraham to show just how much he trusted him. He asked him to sacrifice his son Isaac on an altar. Without wavering, Abraham set out to do the will of God. In so doing he became the example of faith.

Reflection
1. How did Abraham show that he believed God’s promises?
2. When did Abraham show a lack of faith in God?

ABRAHAM’S FAITH AND GOD’S FAITHFULNESS

Genesis 22:1-14

Some years later God decided to test Abraham, so he spoke to him. Abraham answered, “Here I am, LORD.”

The LORD said, “Go and get Isaac, your only son, the one you dearly love! Take him to the land of Moriah, and I will show you a mountain where you must sacrifice him to me on the fires of an altar.” So Abraham got up early the next morning and chopped wood for the fire. He put a saddle on his donkey and left with Isaac and two servants for the place where God had told him to go.

Three days later Abraham looked off in the distance and saw the place. He told his servants, “Stay here with the donkey, while my son and I go over there to worship. We will come back.”

Abraham put the wood on Isaac’s shoulder, but he carried the hot coals and the knife. As the two of them walked along, Isaac said, “Father, we have the coals and the wood, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?”

“My son,” Abraham answered, “God will provide the lamb.”

The two of them walked on, and when they reached the place that God had told him about, Abraham built an altar and placed the wood on it. Next, he tied up his son and put him on the wood. He then took the knife and got ready to kill his son. But the LORD’s angel shouted from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am!” he answered.

“Don’t hurt the boy or harm him in any way!” the angel said. “Now I know that you truly obey God, because you were willing to offer him your only son.”

Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in the bushes. So he took the ram and sacrificed it in place of his son.

Abraham named that place “The LORD Will Provide.” And even now people say, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”

Reflection
1. In what way did Abraham show that he believed that Ishaq would be returned to him even though he sacrifice him on an altar?
2. What does it mean that God provided the sacrifice?
3. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews has also reflected on Abraham and Sarah’s life of faith. How do his words below help you understand the amazing story you have just read?

From the Pen of the Prophets

Hebrews 11:17-19

Abraham had been promised that Isaac, his only son, would continue his family. But when Abraham was tested, he had faith and was willing to sacrifice Isaac, because he was sure that God could raise people to life. This was just like getting Isaac back from death.
VI  Returning Good
For Evil

UNANSWERED PRAYERS

Noorzia could not keep her mind on her work. Together with her mother she kneaded the dough for the evening meal, but her mind was somewhere else. “Keep your mind on your work. Where are your thoughts, girl?” Fatima gently scolded her only daughter.

“Oh mother, don’t you think that Yasin is the most wonderfully handsome boy you have ever seen?” Noorzia whispered. Fatima’s cousin’s son visiting from the countryside had made quite an impression on all the girls in the neighborhood. “I pray every day that somehow God would make it possible that he could become mine.”

“So that is what has carried away your thoughts – and it seems your heart as well,” responded Fatima pausing in her work. “You must control your thoughts and feelings, and be careful how you pray Noorzia Jan. Sometimes God’s best gifts to us are unanswered prayers.”

Fatima lowered her voice as the two shared a secret moment. “Do you know the butcher by the main gate, the fat one they call the ‘lazy butcher’?”

“Oh yes,” Noorzia responded in a low whisper. “They say his wife does all the work in the house and the shop as well.”

“Yes, that’s the one. Well, my dear child when I was young I rather fancied him. He was not fat then. In fact, he was very handsome. But I think that even then he was lazy. I remember praying that we would somehow be wed.” Noorzia gave a short uncontrolled gasp. “But as you can see, God did not answer my prayers. Otherwise, I would have been the fat butcher’s slave.”

“And I would have him for a father!” cried Noorzia.

“Yes,” replied Fatima with a smile, “and you would have him for a father.”

Reflection

1. Have you ever wondered why God answers some prayers and not others? Do you have any examples of unanswered prayers you are thankful for?
2. It was not God’s will to answer Fatima’s youthful prayers. His will for her was better than her prayers had been. In what ways do you find that God’s will in your life has been for your good?

THE FAVORITE SON’S DREAMS

Isaac was the father of Jacob, and Jacob was the father of twelve sons. His favorite son was Joseph (Yusuf) who was known for his dreams. One day Joseph dreamed that while he and his brothers were binding the sheaves of their grain together, his brother’s sheaves gathered around and bowed down before Joseph’s. His brothers were neither happy with Joseph’s dream, nor the fact that their father had given him a colorful coat as a token of his love. When they had their chance, Joseph’s brothers beat Joseph and sold him into slavery in Egypt. They took his coat, tore it, and poured animal blood on it. Returning the coat to their father, they told him that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

But God was with Joseph in Egypt. He became the head servant of one of the Pharaoh’s officials. While faithfully serving his master, his master’s wife tried to seduce young Joseph. When he would not yield to her advances, she made it look as though he had and he was put into prison. But God was with Joseph in prison. He was given authority in the prison where he served faithfully. One night two of the inmates had dreams that troubled them. Joseph the dreamer was given the interpretation of the dreams. One of the men was later released from prison. When the Pharaoh had dreams that troubled him, this man remembered Joseph and he was brought from prison before the Pharaoh to interpret the dreams.

God was with Joseph and gave him the interpretation of the Pharaoh’s dream. There were to be seven years of good crops followed by seven years of famine. The Pharaoh looked upon Joseph with favor and appointed him to see to it that during the seven years of plenty, enough grain was stored for seven years of want. It was in that time of famine that Joseph’s brothers came to Egypt seeking grain. And as Joseph’s dream had predicted, his brothers bowed before him, now the ruler in Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh himself. When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers they could not believe it. They could not believe that the brother they had sold into slavery was now a ruler of Egypt. Neither could they
believe that he would forgive them for their mistreatment of him. Yet Joseph had learned an important lesson in his years of suffering. He came to learn that it is God who holds the future in his hands, and that God’s will is for the good of those who follow him in faith.

Reflection

1. Why do you think that Joseph’s brothers beat him and sold him into slavery?
2. How were Joseph’s dreams fulfilled in the end of the story? What does this teach us about God’s will?

MY BROTHER, MY DELIVERER

GENESIS 50:15-21

A
fter Jacob died, Joseph’s brothers said to each other, “What if Joseph still hates us and wants to get even with us for all the cruel things we did to him?”

So they sent this message to Joseph, “Before our father died, he told us, “You did some cruel and terrible things to Joseph, but you must ask him to forgive you. Now we ask you to please forgive the terrible things we did. After all, we serve the same God that your father worshiped.

When Joseph heard this, he started crying.

Right then, Joseph’s brothers came and bowed down to the ground in front of him and said, “We are your slaves.”

But Joseph told them, “Don’t be afraid! I have no right to change what God has decided. You tried to harm me, but God made it turn out for the best, so that he could save all these people, as he is now doing. Don’t be afraid! I will take care of you and your children.” After Joseph said this, his brothers felt much better.

Reflection

1. Joseph’s brothers worried that he hated them. They expected him to take revenge on them. Maybe they thought like this because that would be how they would have acted. What evidence did they have to indicate just the opposite attitude on Joseph’s part?
2. What was it about the way that Joseph responded that showed that he had a different outlook on the events of his life? Can you think of any other time when God turned the evil actions of men into something good?
3. The following proverb speaks of the certainty of God’s will regardless of the plans men make. How have you seen such things in your life?

From the Pen of the Prophets

PROVERBS 19:21

W
We may make a lot of plans, but the LORD will do what he has decided.
cross the dusty plain two riders approached the walled city. Arriving at the city gate, they dismounted and walked their horses down the busy narrow lanes to the main square. Dressed for war, yet bearing no weapons, they sought entrance into the Emir’s presence. Fearful, yet somehow curious, the Emir gave them an audience.

“We are ambassadors of the Great Khan,” the strangers began. “Our Lord has vanquished all foes who have dared to stand in his way. He demands that your city submit to his rule or you and your people will perish as have all who have sought to defy the will of the Great Khan. We will return in three days time for your answer. Will you fight and die, or submit and live?”

As the two emissaries rode off into the distance the Emir held counsel with his court. “Fight and spare our honor,” the young men cried. “Submit and spare our lives,” the old men warned. “We have no choice,” replied the beleaguered Emir. “The armies of the Great Khan are like a swarm of angry locusts. They devour all in their path. When the Great Khan arrives I will place the city into his hands. Who knows, maybe he will show kindness to us.”

No sooner had the Great Khan’s troops taken possession of the city than his commanders raised a battle cry and a massacre of the city’s citizens began. “Treachery,” cried the Emir who was one of the first to lose his life by the sword that day.

Quick to see what was happening, Omar the merchant gathered his frightened family into his house. Before he barred his great door, neighbors who knew of the kind man’s generosity sought safe haven behind the strong gate. From the far end of the city the bloodthirsty troops of the Great Khan moved on in their grizzly task. Fear rose in the hearts of those taking refuge inside Omar’s fortress-like house. Would the doors withstand the onslaught of the Great Khan’s murderous hoards?

When the troops finally made their way to the merchant’s great home, they stopped short at the great doors. “Look,” cried the commander pointing to the base of the doors. “Someone has already brought wrath upon this house. Blood even flows out under the door. Move on to the next house. Don’t waste your time here.”

Inside, the frightened friends and family of Omar could hardly believe their fortune. Their wise host had kept his wits about him and had slain a young lamb by the base of the door. The lamb’s blood had poured under the door onto the street outside. The sacrifice of the small lamb had saved the lives of many.

Reflection
1. Why was the lamb’s sacrifice so important? How did it save the people taking refuge inside?
2. In this case, the lamb seemed to be of little value compared to the lives of the people. Can you think of an example where someone or something of great value was sacrificed for someone of far less value?

time came in the land of Egypt, after Jacob’s family had joined his son Joseph there, when a new Pharaoh arose who no longer remembered God’s saving hand through the life of Joseph. Fearing the great number Abraham’s descendents had now become, the Pharaoh forced the children of Jacob into a life of slavery. In their bondage they cried out to God and he heard them. He sent his Prophet Moses to the Pharaoh and demanded that he free the children of Jacob.

But the Pharaoh did not listen to God’s Prophet. He did not fear God. In his ignorance he served idols. God told the Prophet Moses that he would judge the false gods of the Egyptians. God’s Prophet warned the king that unless he freed God’s people plagues would come upon the land. But the Pharaoh would not yield. The water of Egypt was turned into blood but the Pharaoh would not give way. Frogs and insects covered the land but the Pharaoh would not obey God. The Egyptian cattle died, the people suffered great boils, large hailstones fell from the skies, and locusts covered the land destroying the grain, and still the Pharaoh would not let the children of Jacob go. Finally the prophet stretched out his hand and the land was covered with darkness. But even still, the Pharaoh would not obey God and his Prophet. God had one final judgment. After this final plague, the Pharaoh let God’s people go.
Reflection
1. Have you in your life seen that many people, in their ignorance, do not worship the One God?
2. Why do you think that some people continue to refuse to follow God Almighty when God sends his Prophets to teach them about the true God?

The Death Angel Passes Over
Exodus 12:21-30

Moses called the leaders of Israel together and said, “Each family is to pick out a sheep and kill it for Passover. Make a brush from a few small branches of a hyssop plant and dip the brush in a bowl that has the blood of the animal in it. Then brush some of the blood above the door and on the posts at each side of the door of your house. After this, everyone is to stay inside.

“During the night the Lord will go through the country of Egypt and kill the first-born son in every Egyptian family. He will see where you have put the blood, and he will not come into your house. His angel that brings death will pass over and not kill your first-born sons.

“After you have entered the country promised to you by the Lord, you and your children must continue to celebrate Passover each year. Your children will ask you, ‘What are we celebrating?’ And you will answer, ‘The Passover animal is killed to honor the Lord. We do these things because on that night long ago the Lord passed over the homes of our people in Egypt. He killed the first-born sons of the Egyptians, but he saved our children from death.’ ”

After Moses finished speaking, the people of Israel knelt down and worshiped the Lord. Then they left and did what Moses and Aaron had told them to do.

At midnight the Lord killed the first-born son of every Egyptian family, from the son of the king to the son of every prisoner in jail. He also killed the first-born male of every animal that belonged to the Egyptians.

That night the king, his officials, and everyone in Egypt got up and started crying bitterly. In every Egyptian home, someone was dead.

Reflection
1. How do the other stories about sacrifice we have studied in the lives of the Prophets differ from this sacrifice? How have they been similar?
2. How did the Israelites show that they believed God and his Prophet? How did God reward their obedience?
3. What does the following Scripture tell us was Moses’ motivation for doing what he did? What do you think it means when it says that Moses “saw” the invisible God?

From the Pen of the Prophets

Hebrews 11:27-28

Because of his faith, Moses left Egypt. Moses had seen the invisible God and wasn’t afraid of the king’s anger. His faith also made him celebrate Passover. He sprinkled the blood of animals on the doorposts, so that the first-born sons of the people of Israel wouldn’t be killed by the destroying angel.
VIII  God Gives  
His Holy Law

THE GOLDSMITH’S SON

T
he tears had stopped flowing down the young boy’s face, but the burn at the end of his finger continued to throb.

“Don’t look at it Hamed, keep your hand in the cool water,” said the goldsmith once again taking his attention off his work to care for his son’s burn. “I should not have let you come into my workshop today. You are too young. You should have stayed home with your mother. Now both of us will be burned today, your finger when you touched the molten gold, and my ears when we get home tonight and your mother finds out what happened.”

“But father, the gold glowed so wonderfully in the pot I just had to touch it. I never thought about the fire beneath. Why do you heat the gold? If you had not I would not have burned myself.”

“Gold is taken from the earth, my son. When it is mined, it contains other things besides pure gold. The gold miners sell it to me with all the impurities still within the nuggets of gold. It is my job to remove them. As I melt it in the fire, the impurities rise to the surface. Only then can they be removed. I use this small spoon to remove them as they float on the surface of the molten gold. The gold that shines the best has been refined repeatedly to remove all that is not pure.”

Stopping his work again the goldsmith looked at his son’s blistered finger. “This will leave a scar, Hamed. When you look at it throughout your life remember that purity has a price.”

Reflection
1. Have you found that purity has a price in your own life?
2. How can people’s lives be refined, or purified, by keeping God’s laws?

THROUGH THE WATERS

The Pharaoh released the children of Jacob after the night of Passover. Finally he submitted to God, but then only grudgingly. Moses led the people out of Egypt, and thus out of bondage, on the following morning. They set their hearts on a new land, the land God had promised Abraham he would give to him.

However, the Pharaoh was not done. Once again his heart turned to stone. He summoned his troops and set off in pursuit of the children of Jacob. But God was with them. With a great body of water before them, and approaching troops behind them, God told the Prophet Moses to stretch forth his hand over the water. God caused the water to divide and the people walked through it on dry land. The Pharaoh’s troops pursued them only to be overwhelmed by the waters after the people had safely passed through them. Not only had God released them from bondage, but he had separated them from the very land of their captivity.

Now in the desert, Moses led them to the mountain of God. It was at this mountain that God would reveal his will to the people, giving laws for them to live by. It is an awesome thing that God would meet with a Prophet and deliver his message in such a direct way. God is pure and holy. When God’s presence was there on the mountain, it was truly a remarkable sight.

Reflection
1. Why did God physically separate the people from their land of bondage?
2. The passing through the waters was something only God could have done. Do you think that the people could have defeated the Pharaoh’s troops if God had not protected them?

ON THE HOLY MOUNTAIN
EXODUS 19:16-26 & 20:1-21

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning. A thick cloud covered the mountain, a loud trumpet blast was heard, and everyone in camp trembled with fear. Moses led them out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

Mount Sinai was covered with smoke because the LORD had come down in a flaming fire. Smoke poured out of the mountain just like a furnace, and the whole mountain shook. The trumpet blew louder and louder. Moses spoke, and God answered him with thunder.
The LORD came down to the top of Mount Sinai and told Moses to meet him there. Then he said, "Moses, go and warn the people not to cross the boundary that you set at the foot of the mountain. They must not cross it to come and look at me, because if they do, many of them will die. Only the priests may come near me, and they must obey strict rules before I let them. If they don't, they will be punished."

Moses replied, "The people cannot come up the mountain. You warned us to stay away because it is holy."

Then the LORD told Moses, "Go down and bring Aaron back here with you. But the priests and people must not try to push their way through, or I will rush at them like a flood!"

After Moses had gone back down, he told the people what the LORD had said.

God said to the people of Israel, "I am the Lord your God, the one who brought you out of Egypt where you were slaves."

"Do not worship any god except me."

"Do not make idols that look like anything in the sky or on earth or in the ocean under the earth. Don't bow down and worship idols. I am the Lord your God, and I demand all your love. If you reject me, I will punish your families for three or four generations. But if you love me and obey my laws, I will be kind to your families for thousands of generations."

"Do not misuse my name. I am the Lord your God, and I will punish anyone who misuses my name."

"Remember that the Sabbath Day belongs to me. You have six days when you can do your work, but the seventh day of each week belongs to me, your God. No one is to work on that day—not you, your children, your slaves, your animals, or the foreigners who live in your towns. In six days I made the sky, the earth, the oceans, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That's why I made the Sabbath a special day that belongs to me."

"Respect your father and your mother, and you will live a long time in the land I am giving you."

"Do not murder."

"Be faithful in marriage."

"Do not steal."

"Do not tell lies about others."

"Do not want anything that belongs to someone else. Don't want anyone's house, wife or husband, slaves, oxen, donkeys or anything else."

The people trembled with fear when they heard the thunder and the trumpet and saw the lightning and the smoke coming from the mountain. They stood a long way off and said to Moses, "If you speak to us, we will listen. But don't let God speak to us, or we will die!"

"Don't be afraid!" Moses replied. "God has come only to test you, so that by obeying him you won't sin."

But when Moses went near the thick cloud where God was, the people stayed a long way off.

Reflection
1. From this story, what shows the holiness of God?
2. How do the laws he gave, which we call the Ten Commandments, show the holiness of God’s character and what he expects of his people?
3. Towards the end of his days, Moses summed up the laws of God in the following passage. How does it reflect the spirit of the Ten Commandments?
4. What role does the intent of human hearts play in following God’s commands?

From the Pen of the Prophets

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

Listen, Israel! The Lord our God is the only true God! So love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength. Memorize his laws and tell them to your children over and over again. Talk about them all the time, whether you’re at home or walking along the road or going to bed at night, or getting up in the morning. Write down copies and tie them to your wrists and foreheads to help you obey them. Write these laws on the door frames of your homes and on your town gates.
God Judges a King’s Disobedience

STOLEN APPLES

Stolen apples taste sweet. Yet when caught in the act of stealing the sweet fruit can turn bitter in your mouth. The boy was caught red-handed climbing down from the tree with a load of apples in his shirt tale and the final bite of his stolen meal still in his mouth. The gardener pulled him up short and all the apples spilled out on the ground.

“You shall pay for these apples with a beating,” he said as he broke a switch off one of the trees.

“Please sir, be merciful to me. Just yesterday I carried the widow’s supplies from the city to her home for her. And this morning I rose early to bring our young calf to the Jumma bazaar for sale. I have just carried the water for my auntie because her daughter has been ill for days. Please sir, show me kindness for these things.”

“What is that to me?” replied the gardener. “Do you think that all your good works will pay off your evil deeds? No, my young thief, you will long remember our meeting today!”

Reflection
1. Why do you think that the boy believed that his other good deeds made his one wrong deed OK?
2. How do you think that God looks upon our deeds? Do you think that it is OK to steal if we are good at other times?

A NEW LAND AND A NEW KING

Freed from bondage and given God’s law to live by, Moses now continued to lead the people towards their goal of a new land. God provided for all their needs, even to the point of giving them daily bread from heaven called manna. However, when the people discovered just how difficult that task would be to take possession of the new land, they grumbled against Moses. They wondered if it would not have been better to stay back in Egypt, back in the land of captivity. Therefore, God judged that generation causing them to wander in the wilderness for forty years.

Possession of the Promised Land came many hard years later. It was clear to the children of Jacob that just as God had freed their fathers from bondage in Egypt, so God would go before them to make their possession of the land possible. And just as God had helped them take possession of the land, so he sought to rule over them in their new land. When the people rebelled against God’s rule, he sent his Prophets the Judges to restore God’s order.

It was in the time of the last of the Judges, a holy man of God named Samuel (Ishmawil) that the people rebelled again and asked God for a king. They wanted to be like all the other nations. Samuel was angry with the request the people had made. Yet, God told him to appoint a king for the people, a man of God’s own choosing. This man was Saul. In the beginning of his reign he followed God’s ways, but as his power grew so his pride increased. Commanded by God to completely destroy a tribe of idolaters called the Amalekites, Saul disobeyed and kept the best things of the booty for himself and his men. This greatly displeased God, for his rebellion was like that of the people he was meant to lead.

Reflection
1. How did the people rebel against God and his Prophet in the desert? What was the consequence?
2. How are the people Moses led different from the people in the times of the Prophet Noah? How are they the same?

THE WRONG SACRIFICE

I SAMUEL 15:10-35

The LORD told Samuel, “Saul has stopped obeying me, and I’m sorry that I made him king.”

Samuel was angry, and he cried out in prayer to the LORD all night. Early the next morning he went to talk with Saul. Someone told him, “Saul went to Carmel, where he had a monument built so everyone would remember his victory. Then he left for Gilgal.”

Samuel finally caught up with Saul, and Saul told him, “I hope the LORD will bless you! I have done what the LORD told me.”

“Then why,” Samuel asked, “do I hear sheep and cattle?”

“The army took them from the Amalekites,” Saul explained. “They kept the best sheep and cattle, so they could sacrifice them to the LORD your God. But we destroyed everything else.”

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"Stop!" Samuel said. "Let me tell you what the LORD told me last night."

"All right," Saul answered.

Samuel continued, "You may not think you're very important, but the LORD chose you to be king, and you are in charge of the tribes of Israel. When the LORD sent you on this mission, he told you to wipe out those worthless Amalekites. Why didn't you listen to the LORD? Why did you keep the animals and make him angry?"

"But I did listen to the LORD!" Saul answered. "He sent me on a mission, and I went. I captured King Agag and destroyed his nation. All the animals were going to be destroyed anyway. That's why the army brought the best sheep and cattle to Gilgal as sacrifices to the LORD your God."

"Tell me," Samuel said. "Does the LORD really want sacrifices and offerings? No! He doesn't want your sacrifices. He wants you to obey him. Rebell ing against God or disobeying him because you are proud is just as bad as worshiping idols or asking them for advice. You refused to do what God told you, so God has decided that you can't be king."

"I have sinned," Saul admitted. "I disobeyed both you and the LORD. I was afraid of the army, and I listened to them instead. Please forgive me and come back with me so I can worship the LORD."

"No!" Samuel replied, "You disobeyed the LORD, and I won't go back with you. Now the LORD has said that you can't be king of Israel any longer."

As Samuel turned to go, Saul grabbed the edge of Samuel's robe. It tore! Samuel said, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel away from you today, and he will give it to someone who is better than you. Besides, the eternal God of Israel isn't a human being. He doesn't tell lies or change his mind."

Saul said, "I did sin, but please honor me in front of the leaders of the army and the people of Israel. Come back with me, so I can worship the LORD your God."

Samuel followed Saul back, and Saul worshiped the LORD. Then Samuel shouted, "Bring me King Agag of Amalek!"

Agag came in chains, and he was saying to himself, "Surely they won't kill me now."

But Samuel said, "Agag, you have snatched children from their mothers' arms and killed them. Now your mother will be without children." Then Samuel chopped Agag to pieces at the place of worship in Gilgal.

Samuel went home to Ramah, and Saul returned to his home in Gibeah. Even though Samuel felt sad about Saul, Samuel never saw him again.

**Reflection**

1. What was Saul’s first response when confronted by Samuel? How is this like the response Adam and Cain gave to God when he confronted them over their sins?

2. What was the consequence of Saul trying to make the wrong kind of sacrifice? How does God view such worship?

3. In the Zabur of the Prophet David, the following passage reflects God’s view of wrong sacrifices. How might the law “written on one’s heart” be reflected in their worship of God?

**From the Pen of the Prophets**

PSALM 40:6-8

Sacrifices and offering are not what please you; gifts and payment for sin are not what you demand. But you made me willing to listen and obey. And so I said, “I am here to do what is written about me in the book, where it says, ‘I enjoy pleasing you. Your Law is in my heart.’”
FIRST IN THE CLASS

Not only was Karim first in the class, but the school’s headmaster, Abdul Khan, was his mother’s brother. Only once before had he been sent to the headmaster. The previous year, his cranky old teacher Agha Salim had sent Karim to see Abdul Khan. Agha Salim expected Karim to get a thrashing for hitting Jan Mohammad. Karim was unrepentant. Jan Mohammad deserved it for talking back to the first in the class. And besides, when he did see Uncle Abdul, he simply told him to mind himself and then drifted off into talking about his own childhood school tales. Karim missed the rest of the lesson and had a great time with his uncle. He was sure that it would be the same today. When would his new teacher learn that Karim was not only first in the class, but was also the headmaster’s nephew?

When he was ushered into the headmaster’s office, the look on Karim’s face changed in an instant from bold confidence to shocked disbelief, and then to horror. “Why the grim face, Karim Jan?” said Agha Salim from behind the headmaster’s desk. “I guess you have not heard the news. Your uncle was given a promotion this morning to the new post in the education department. It has been my honor to replace him. Now tell me, what brings you into my presence this morning?”

Reflection
1. Why do we sometimes take advantage of our position in life?
2. Do you have any stories from your own life which are like the story of Karim?

A MAN AFTER GOD’S OWN HEART

God tore the kingdom from Saul and give it to a better man, and that man was the Prophet David. While only a teenager, David had defeated the giant Goliath in a battle where his only weapon was a sling-shot and five stones. God was with David and David’s heart was with God. He wrote many songs and poems about the One God who made the heavens and the earth. In these poems we find the heart of a man submitted to God’s will.

God responded to David’s devotion and when Saul and his son died in a battle, David was declared king, just as the Prophet Samuel had foretold. Because of David’s keen devotion to God he was given a promise. God declared that he would have a son who would reign on his throne forever. What a wonderful thought that was for David who marveled at God’s favor towards him.

Sometimes when people show such strength of character, they still have a major area of weakness. Such was the case with David. One sleepless night as he walked upon his rooftop he saw a woman bathing below. She was married to one of David’s soldiers fighting in a far-off battle. He called for a servant and had her brought to him. She became pregnant by David. Trying to cover his sin, David called back the woman’s husband, Uriah, from the battlefield. However, he would not sleep with his wife while his comrades were still in battle. So David sent Uriah back with a message to his commander that Uriah should be placed into the heat of the battle. And so Uriah died, and David took Uriah’s wife as his own. What David did greatly displeased God and so he sent his Prophet Nathan to speak God’s judgment on a king’s private sin.

Reflection
1. What indication do we have from the story that David had no intention of repenting from his adultery?
2. Was David guilty of murder as well as adultery?

A PROPHET’S PARABLE
II SAMUEL 12:1-15

The Lord was angry at what David had done, and he sent Nathan the prophet to tell this story to David: “A rich man and a poor man lived in the same town. The rich man owned a lot of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had only one little lamb that he had bought and raised. The lamb became a pet for him and his children. He even let it eat from his plate and drink from his cup and sleep on his lap. The lamb was like one of his own children.
“One day someone came to visit the rich man, but the rich man didn’t want to kill any of his own sheep or cattle and serve it to the visitor. So he stole the poor man’s little lamb and served it instead.”

David was furious with the rich man and said to Nathan, “I swear by the living Lord that the man who did this deserves to die! And because he did not have any pity on the poor man, he will have to pay four times what the lamb was worth.”

Then Nathan told David, “You are that rich man! Now listen to what the Lord God of Israel says to you: “I chose you to be the king of Israel. I kept you safe from Saul and even gave you his house and his wives. I let you rule Israel and Judah, and if that had not been enough, I would have given you much more. Why did you disobey me and do such a horrible thing? You murdered Uriah the Hittite by having the Ammonites kill him, so you could take his wife. Because you wouldn’t obey me and took Uriah’s wife for yourself, your family will never live in peace. Someone from your own family will cause you a lot of trouble, and I will take your wives and give them to another man before your very eyes. He will go to bed with them while everyone looks on. What you did was in secret, but I will do this in the open for everyone in Israel to see.”

David said, “I have disobeyed the Lord.”

“Yes, you have!” Nathan answered. “You showed you didn’t care what the Lord wanted. He has forgiven you, and you won’t die. But your newborn son will.” Then Nathan went back home.

Reflection
1. Why do you think that David could not see that the story referred to him until Nathan told him that he was the man?
2. What differences do you see between David and Saul when God’s Prophets confronted them about their sin?
3. The Prophet David wrote the following prayer after his sin with Uriah’s wife. What important thing about sacrifice did David recognize in his prayer?

From the Pen of the Prophets

PSALM 51:10-17

Create pure thoughts in me and make me faithful again. Don’t chase me away from you or take your Holy Spirit away from me. Make me as happy as you did when you saved me; make me want to obey! I will teach sinners your Law, and they will return to you. Keep me from any deadly sin. Only you can save me! Then I will shout and sing about your power to save. Help me to speak, and I will praise you, Lord. Offerings and sacrifices are not what you want. The way to please you is to feel sorrow deep in our hearts. This is the kind of sacrifice you won’t refuse.
XI  Refugees in a Strange Land

THE VILLAGE DOCTOR

Relaxing after the wedding feast, Saddiq Khan, the kindly white bearded village elder, leant back on a cushion next to his beloved son-in-law. It was hard to believe that soon Omar and his family would be moving to the capital city, a two day journey from their remote village. The esteemed doctor had served his time in village service. The village’s new doctor was on his way and Omar was to report to the main hospital in the capital.

“You will attend much grander weddings in the city, Omar Jan,” the elder said as together they watched the village men dancing. “I will always be reminded of my own wedding day at those times, my father,” Omar replied. “It was the happiest day of my life for not only did I gain a wife, but I finally saw this village in a different light. No longer did I see it as an outsider does. And from that day until now, I have begun to see the value of village life. I do not think I would have been able to change if you had not shown me such kindness when I first arrived. I thought that I was being sent to prison. I just hope that the new doctor is not as prejudiced as I was.”

“Oh, he will be, Omar Jan,” replied Saddiq Khan. Omar’s brother-in-law grabbed his hand and pulled him into the dance. “But I have another daughter,” the elder called out with a glint in his eye.

Reflection
1. Omar thought that his time in the village was like going to prison. What was it in Omar’s life that enabled him to view his time in the village as a reward and not an imprisonment?
2. Many people have had to live in places they did not choose. Can you think of times in your life when you faced what you thought would be certain difficulties only to find blessings as well?

RETURN TO CAPTIVITY

King David’s child by Uriah’s wife died. Because David recognized his sin, humbling himself in prayer, God gave him another son whom he named Solomon (Sulaiman). After this, one of his many sons led a palace rebellion against his father, even sleeping with the women of David’s harem. This fulfilled the words of the Prophet Nathan. However, God was still with David and he overcame his son’s rebellion. When David died, his son Solomon became king.

Solomon became the wealthiest of all the kings of the Israelites. He was also known throughout the world for his wisdom. He built himself a grand palace and for God he built a beautiful temple. However, at the end of his life Solomon displeased the one true God. He had married the daughters of idol-worshipping kings and they brought with them their idols to worship. In this way, Solomon allowed idolatry to come into his kingdom.

From that time onward the glories of Solomon’s reign diminished as his kingdom was divided after his death. The kings who ruled these divided kingdoms sometimes submitted to God’s law. But many times the kings were evil and brought the ignorant practices of idol worshippers into the land. Because of this, God decided that the people would lose their land to foreign invaders. Just as their history had begun with their captivity in Egypt, now they would return into captivity in Babylon.

Reflection
1. What was the real cause of Solomon’s failure as a righteous king?
2. How easy is it for people to follow the one true God when their rulers are worshipping idols?

EXILE FOR SIN

II CHRONICLES 36:14-21

The people of Judah and even the priests who were their leaders became more unfaithful. They followed the disgusting example of the nations around them and made the Lord’s holy temple unfit for worship. But the Lord God felt sorry for his people, and instead of destroying the temple, he sent
prophets who warned the people over and over again about their sins. But the people only laughed at and insulted these prophets. They ignored what the Lord God was trying to tell them, until he finally became so angry that nothing could stop him from punishing Judah and Jerusalem.

The Lord sent King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia to attack Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar killed the young men who were in the temple, and he showed no mercy to anyone, whether man or woman, young or old. God let him kill everyone in the city. Nebuchadnezzar carried off everything that was left in the temple; he robbed the treasury and the personal storerooms of the king and his officials. He took everything back to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar's troops burned down the temple and destroyed every important building in the city. Then they broke down the city wall. The survivors were taken to Babylonia as prisoners, where they were slaves of the king and his sons, until Persia became a powerful nation.

Judah was an empty desert, and it stayed that way for seventy years, to make up for all the years it was not allowed to rest. These things happened just as Jeremiah the Lord's prophet had said.

Reflection
1. What was the general attitude of the people to the prophets God sent? How are people like that today when faced with choosing God's ways or man's ways?
2. The people stayed in captivity for 70 years. That was equal to all the years they had not followed God's law about letting the land rest every seven years. What does that tell us about God's judgment?
3. How can we tell that God was not limited to only working in the land of the Israelites?
4. In the prophecy given by the Prophet Ezekiel below, God reveals the new type of relationship he will have with his people. What role will God's Spirit have in that relationship?

From the Pen of the Prophets

EZEKIEL 36:24-27

I will gather you from the foreign nations and bring you home. I will sprinkle you with clean water, and you will be clean and acceptable to me. I will wash away everything that makes you unclean, and I will remove your disgusting idols. I will take away your stubborn heart and give you a new heart and a desire to be faithful. You will have only pure thoughts, because I will put my Spirit in you and make you eager to obey my laws and teachings.
The Mogul king looked majestic on his peacock throne. The day had come for him to hear the cases before him in the Durbar pavilion. The first decision was a dispute between two former friends over a priceless golden goblet. Each claimed possession of the treasure. Whether it was pride, or whether he had truly intended his old friend to have the goblet, Mamud had lavishly given it to Hamed at the party celebrating his son’s circumcision. However, when Hamed rose to leave with the gift, Mamud cried, “Stop, thief. Dare you openly steal from me after my generous hospitality?” His honor challenged, Hamed asked Mamud what he had then meant in his public gesture of generosity only moments before. “I only offered for you to drink from it, you fool! I never intended for you to take it.”

With both men’s honor at stake, neither would back down. And so, due to their positions of great importance in the empire, they had received permission to bring their case before the emperor. Each man had brought with them four witnesses who had been present at the feast. Mamud’s witnesses began with their stories. As each one recounted the events surrounding the presentation of the goblet, each story was identical, almost to the point of being word for word. They all agreed that Mamud had not given the goblet to Hamed. When Hamed’s witnesses began to speak, they each testified that Mamud had in fact given the goblet as a gift to Hamed. But each differed slightly in their witness. One had noticed the reactions of those around him and included that in his story. Another had caught a tone of pride in Mamud’s voice during his presentation speech. Another had recalled that Mamud had gone into the history of the goblet – how it had come to India two centuries before on a caravan from Arabia. And still the fourth witness added that Hamed had pleaded with his host to not be so lavish in his gift, but that Mamud had been insistent.

The king sat upon his throne without expression during the presentations of the eight witnesses. When the last one had spoken he bid Mamud and Hamed to come before the throne. “Mamud son of Iqbal, why do you waste the time of the Emperor of all India with your foolish claims? You have been deceiving this assembly with your false witnesses. A child could see that they had practiced their lines as if for a play. But you shall learn that the Mogul court is no cheap carnival stage. As for Hamed’s witnesses, they each spoke the truth. Only their stories held details of a real eyewitness. The Golden Goblet of Arabia goes to Hamed son of Hussein and you and your four lying witnesses go to the dungeon until you can learn the value of speaking the truth.”

Reflection

1. Why is it helpful to have more than one witness when determining what really happened?
2. The Injil of Jesus contains four books called Gospels, each written by a different author. How can their different perspectives help us, today, to understand more clearly what happened two thousand years ago?
The Righteous Judge

As the venerable old man passed by in the bazaar, Hussein turned to his father and asked, “Why does everyone call Hakim Khan Sahib the ‘Righteous Judge’?” “Because he knows what it is like to be poor and the victim of injustice,” replied his father. “You see, Hakim Khan was born to the wealthiest family in the district. When he was your age he was abducted for ransom by bandits and taken to a faraway city. However, before his kidnappers had a chance to collect the ransom, wily young Hakim escaped. Penniless and his clothes in tatters, he lived on the streets. But he was too proud to beg and too honest to steal. His only resources were his wits. He worked hard at any task he could find and was soon well thought of and looked after by the merchants in the bazaar. They knew that they could trust the young street boy.

“One day, Hakim’s father came to the city on business. Hakim could not believe his eyes when his father came into the bazaar. Running to him he called out ‘Daddy’ and threw himself into his father’s arms. Hakim returned to his home with great joy and feasting. At his feast, all the street boys of our city were the honored guests. Again he wore fine clothes and studied under the best teachers. When he grew to be a man, he was held in such high regard by all the people that he was made our judge. Hakim Khan knows how to judge our cases with justice because he was once like us. In fact, he is still like us in his heart.”

Reflection
1. How important is it for a judge to know what the lives of everyday people are like? How could this make him a better judge?
2. Do you think that an outsider can really know how to save you from your problems?

The Long-Expected Savior

When the Israelites returned to their homeland from Babylon, they rebuilt the temple and the city walls of Jerusalem. They tried to live lives more pleasing to God by seeking to keep the laws God had given through Moses. And all the while they waited for the return of the king who would sit on David’s throne as promised by God.

In time, their land was again overrun by the Greeks for a season and then by the Romans. Still the people waited for a new age to dawn, an age when the rule of God would be established. Just as God had made an agreement with Adam and with Noah and with Abraham, so he would make a new agreement when his Messiah, or Anointed One, would come. The people thought that when he came, the Messiah would overthrow the Romans and re-establish the kingly line of David. In God’s time the Messiah did come, but he came in a way that no one had expected. He did not overthrow the Romans, but established a Kingdom from above.

In a village called Nazareth in the Roman province of Syria, a young girl had a visitor from heaven. The angel Gabriel (Jibrail) appeared to Mary (Maryam) and told her, “You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus (Isa). He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end!”

What an amazing message! Mary was to become the mother of the Messiah. But she was a virgin and engaged to be married to the village carpenter Joseph. How could she become pregnant? Gabriel told her, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God’s power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God.” Thus, Mary would remain a virgin, although pregnant in a miraculous way, not in a human way. Gabriel also visited Joseph and told him that Mary’s pregnancy was a miracle of God and that he should still become her husband. They were to name the child Jesus, which means “God saves”, because God would save his people from their sins through Jesus.
Reflection
1. How did the behavior of the Jews who returned to the land reflect that they were trying to seek God with all their hearts?
2. What was it that made the Jews long for a Messiah?
3. How was the coming of the Messiah different from what anyone had imagined? What was so special about his birth?

The Messiah Is Born
Luke 2:1-21

About that time Emperor Augustus gave orders for the names of all the people to be listed in record books. These first records were made when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to go to their own home town to be listed. So Joseph had to leave Nazareth in Galilee and go to Bethlehem in Judea. Long ago Bethlehem had been King David's home town, and Joseph went there because he was from David's family.

Mary was engaged to Joseph and traveled with him to Bethlehem. She was soon going to have a baby, and while they were there, she gave birth to her first-born son. She dressed him in baby clothes and laid him on a bed of hay, because there was no room for them in the inn.

That night in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were guarding their sheep. All at once an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the brightness of the Lord's glory flashed around them. The shepherds were frightened. But the angel said, “Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. This very day in King David's home town a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay.”

Suddenly many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God. They said: “Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God.”

After the angels had left and gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let's go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about.” They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and they saw the baby lying on a bed of hay.

When the shepherds saw Jesus, they told his parents what the angel had said about him. Everyone listened and was surprised. But Mary kept thinking about all this and wondering what it meant.

As the shepherds returned to their sheep, they were praising God and saying wonderful things about him. Everything they had seen and heard was just as the angel had said.

Eight days later Jesus' parents did for him what the Law of Moses commands, and they named him Jesus, just as the angel had told Mary when he promised she would have a baby.

Reflection
1. What was significant about Jesus’ birth taking place in the home village of king David?
2. What can we learn about the character of God when we reflect on the birth of his Messiah in a humble stable and the announcement of the birth to humble shepherds?
3. In the following prophecy about the Messiah from God’s Prophet Isaiah, what characteristics do we learn about the promised child?

From the Pen of the Prophets

Isaiah 9:6-7

A child has been born for us.
We have been given a son who will be our ruler.
His names will be Wonderful Advisor and Mighty God, Eternal Father and Prince of Peace.
His power will never end; peace will last forever.
He will rule David's kingdom and make it grow strong.
He will always rule with honesty and justice.
The Lord All-Powerful will make certain that all of this is done.

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THE BLIND BEGGAR’S BLESSING

Every day was the same as the day before for Ali, the blind beggar at the gate to the shrine. The shopkeeper’s son would guide him from his tiny room behind the shop, and down the narrow streets to the central square where he would spend the day begging. If Ali was lucky some food scraps might be given to him. At the end of the day, the kindly boy would return and they would retrace their steps back to his small room. If the day’s offerings had been generous, Ali might be able to buy a piece of fruit or a sweet on the way home.

But today was different. The boy almost seemed gleeful as he guided Ali home. His step was quicker. And right away Ali knew that they were not heading in their normal path but along much more even streets in a part of the city he had never been to before. “Where are you taking me?” Ali questioned the boy. “You’ll see – I mean, just be patient,” he replied with a giggle.

“Welcome home!” The voice was somehow familiar, as if an echo from the distant past. “Please sit down,” the voice said. Removing his shoes, Ali was guided across a silk carpet to a plush cushion. Never before had he felt such comfortable surroundings.

“Let me explain,” the voice continued. “I am your father. Many years ago when you were a small infant your mother died. Shortly thereafter, you contracted the disease that took your sight. I was overcome with the grief at the loss of my wife, and then I became angry that God had given me a blind son. I gathered what goods I had and sold them, leaving a portion with the shopkeeper’s father. I begged him to take you in while I went on a short visit to see my village relatives. However, I had no intention of ever returning to this city.

“As time went by I became a mercenary in the Emir’s army. I took all the anger I had at life and sent it down the blade of my sword. I was merciless in battle and quickly became captain. But my successes on the battlefield, and the wealth I gained in the Emir’s service, never brought me the peace I sought.

“Then one day my life was again shattered. In the heat of battle my right arm was severed by an enemy’s sword. My men quickly came to my aid, thus saving my life. But a fever took me and during my weeks of recovery I was in and out of consciousness. It was then that I dreamed. I saw you in my dreams. I saw you there by the shrine begging. I could not get you out of my mind. For the first time in my life I began to feel sorry for someone other than myself. I thought of all the wealth that I had amassed and wondered if I would ever live to spend it. I began to see myself for who I really was. I was rich, but terribly poor. And that’s when I prayed. I told God that if I lived, I would live for others, beginning with my own son. I returned to the city this week and bought this house, your new home. Welcome home, son.”

Tears that had welled up in Ali’s eyes poured down his cheeks as father and son embraced. “You have saved me, father,” he cried. “No son,” his father replied, “you have saved me.”

Reflection
1. What do you think is God’s attitude to the poor and disabled?
2. How was this man made whole through losing his arm?

A MISSION AND A TEST

As Jesus grew, he impressed his elders by his wisdom and character. He found favor with all those he met. And when the time was right for him to begin a mission of prophetic teaching and healing, he went to present himself for baptism. The Prophet John was baptizing people in the Jordan River. He was telling people to turn from their sins, and to show they wanted to live a new life by being baptized. When Jesus presented himself to John, John could only reply, “I ought to be baptized by you, and yet you have come to me!” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so for now. For in this way we shall do all that God requires.” So John agreed. When Jesus was baptized, the Spirit of God came down from heaven like a dove and rested upon him.

Leaving the Jordan River, Jesus went into the desert and fasted for forty days and forty nights. During this time Jesus was tested. Satan came to him and tempted him. When tempted, Jesus’ only reply was to quote the Scriptures. At the end of his testing time, Satan departed and God’s holy angels ministered to him.
Jesus left his home and moved to a village called Capernaum where he preached the coming of God’s kingdom. He also healed many people of their diseases. The people were amazed at the authority of his teaching and the power he showed to heal the sick.

**Reflection**
1. Why do you think that John was reluctant to baptize Jesus?
2. What experience at his baptism showed that God was with Jesus in a special way.
3. Why was it important for Jesus to be tempted, and yet not sin?

**THE PROPHECY FULFILLED**

**LUKE 4:16-30**

J esus went back to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and as usual he went to the meeting place on the Sabbath. When he stood up to read from the Scriptures, he was given the book of Isaiah the prophet. He opened it and read,

“The Lord’s Spirit has come to me, because he has chosen me to tell the good news to the poor.

“The Lord has sent me to announce freedom for prisoners, to give sight to the blind, to free everyone who suffers, and to say, ‘This is the year the Lord has chosen.’ ”

Jesus closed the book, then handed it back to the man in charge and sat down. Everyone in the meeting place looked straight at Jesus.

Then Jesus said to them, “What you have just heard me read has come true today.”

All the people started talking about Jesus and were amazed at the wonderful things he said. They kept on asking, “Isn’t he Joseph’s son?”

Jesus answered, “You will certainly want to tell me this saying, ‘Doctor, first make yourself well.’ You will tell me to do the same things here in my own home town that you heard I did in Capernaum. But you can be sure that no prophets are liked by the people of their own home town.

“Once during the time of Elijah there was no rain for three and a half years, and people everywhere were starving. There were many widows in Israel, but Elijah was sent only to a widow in the town of Zarephath near the city of Sidon. During the time of the prophet Elisha, many men in Israel had leprosy. But no one was healed, except Naaman who lived in Syria.”

When the people in the meeting place heard Jesus say this, they became so angry that they got up and threw him out of town. They dragged him to the edge of the cliff on which the town was built, because they wanted to throw him down from there. But Jesus slipped through the crowd and got away.

**Reflection**
1. What kind of ministry was outlined in the prophetic passage from Isaiah that Jesus read? Why did it cause a stir when he applied the fulfillment of the passage to himself?
2. In the following passage from the words of the Prophet Isaiah, the ministry of Jesus in the Galilee region was predicted to be a time when people passed from darkness into light. What must people do to leave their ignorance behind and come into the light?

**From the Pen of the Prophets**

**ISAIAH 9:1-2**

B ut those who have suffered will no longer be in pain. The territories of Zebulun and Naphtali in Galilee were once hated. But this land of the Gentiles across the Jordan River and along the Mediterranean Sea will be greatly respected.

Those who walked in the dark have seen a bright light.
And it shines upon everyone who lives in the land of darkest shadows.
The Unfolding Story

XV A Challenging Ministry

GOD BLESS YOU

The grain harvest had never been better. The men had never seen the pile of threshed wheat rise so high. With the threshing completed, the men would spend only one more night in the open to keep watch over the grain. In the morning the trucks would arrive and a record year’s harvest would be bagged and taken to market.

The sun was low in the sky when an old Baba came into view. He had come down from the mountains with nothing but an empty bag. His clothes in tatters, he begged the foreman for some grain. “I have so little land and it is not suitable for grain. Can you please spare something from your abundant crop for my family?” “Sit down, Uncle and have some tea.” Taking his bag from him, the foreman sent one of his men away with a wink and said, “Now you fill Uncle’s bag with the best of the grain.”

As the Baba began his journey back up the mountain he turned to bless the men. “May God bless you as you have blessed me,” he said. The men never heard him over the foreman’s scoff, “Wait until he finds out that he carried a bag of dirt all the way up the mountain!”

Before sunrise the trucks began to arrive. “Let’s begin,” said the foreman. “Begin what?” asked the truck driver. The Baba’s blessing had come upon them. The sun rose to reveal the men standing before a large mound of dirt where the grain had been the night before.

Reflection
1. What motivates men to be cruel when God has been kind to them?
2. How would God want us to respond to the old Baba’s request?
3. How do you think Jesus would respond to a request for food?

DEEPER TEACHING, GREATER SIGNS

Jesus’ ministry in the Galilee brought great light to the region, fulfilling the words of God’s Prophet Isaiah. Yet his teachings seemed so different from what the Jews expected. They thought that their Messiah would put together an army and overthrow the Romans. But Jesus gave another kind of message. He taught that we should return good for evil, that we should pray for those who persecute us, and that if someone asks us to carry something for them a kilometer then we should carry it two kilometers. His teachings seemed to stress something much deeper than anything they had heard before from other religious leaders.

One day, when he had finished teaching a great multitude of people in a remote part of the countryside, his students came up to him and asked him to send away the crowds for the time was getting late and they would need to go back to their homes for food. Jesus then told his students to feed the crowds. One student said that they had no food and that it would take up to eight month’s wages to buy the amount needed. But Andrew, the brother of Peter, said to Jesus, “There is a boy here who has five loaves of barley bread and two fish, but they will certainly not be enough for all these people.” Jesus told his students to have the people sit down and then he gave thanks for the bread and fish, broke it, and gave it to his students to distribute to the thousands of people on the hillside. Everyone ate as much as they wanted and there were baskets of food left over.

The people were so amazed that Jesus had fed them with such little amount of food, they sought to make him king by force. But Jesus withdrew to the mountains and his students crossed over the lake back to Capernaum where Jesus joined them later.

Reflection
1. How was the ministry of Jesus different from what the people thought the Messiah was going to be like?
2. What did Jesus’ feeding of the multitudes from such small resources show about the power God had given him? Why do you think that the people wanted to force him to become king?
The Unfolding Story

BREAD FROM HEAVEN
JOHN 6:25-40

They found him on the west side of the lake and asked, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”
Jesus answered, “I tell you for certain that you aren’t looking for me because you saw the miracles,
but because you ate all the food you wanted. Don’t work for food that spoils. Work for food that gives
eternal life. The Son of Man will give you this food, because God the Father has given him the right to do
so.”

“What exactly does God want us to do?” the people asked.
Jesus answered, “God wants you to have faith in the one he sent.”
They replied, “What miracle will you work, so that we can have faith in you? What will you do? For
example, when our ancestors were in the desert, they were given manna to eat. It happened just as the
Scriptures say, ‘God gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”
Jesus then told them, “I tell you for certain that Moses wasn’t the one who gave you bread from heaven.
My Father is the one who gives you the true bread from heaven. And the bread that God gives is the one
who came down from heaven to give life to the world.”
The people said, “Lord, give us this bread and don’t ever stop!”
Jesus replied, “I am the bread that gives life! No one who comes to me will ever be hungry. No one
who has faith in me will ever be thirsty. I have told you already that you have seen me and still don’t have
faith in me. Everything and everyone that the Father has given me will come to me, and I won’t turn any of
them away.
“I didn’t come from heaven to do what I want! I came to do what the Father wants me to do. He sent
me, and he wants to make certain that none of the ones he has given me will be lost. Instead, he wants me
to raise them to life on the last day. My Father wants everyone who sees the Son to have faith in him and to
have eternal life. Then I will raise them to life on the last day.”

Reflection
1. According to Jesus’ words, what was the real bread from heaven?
2. What is the ultimate reward to those who ‘eat’ of the bread of life?
3. In the following prophecy of the end times, an angel describes a scene in heaven. How are Jesus’ promises and this
   fulfillment connected?

From the Pen of the Prophets

REVELATION 7:13-17

One of the elders asked me, “Do you know who these people are that are dressed in white robes? Do
you know where they come from?”
“Sir,” I answered, “you must know.”
Then he told me, “These are the ones who have gone through the great suffering. They have washed
their robes in the blood of the Lamb and have made them white.
“And so they stand before the throne of God and worship him in his temple day and night.
“The one who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.
“They will never hunger or thirst again, and they won’t be troubled by the sun or any
scorching heat.
“The Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd.”
“He will lead them to streams of life-giving water, and God will wipe all tears from their eyes.”
XVI  The Way of Suffering

CITY OF DARKNESS

No one thought that their city was an evil place until the Sufi came to live in the shadow of the derelict shrine. No one really noticed him until he began repairing the rundown holy place. Most people had no idea that it had been a holy site and were using it as a place to dump their garbage. But beyond his interest in bringing back to life the spiritual center of the city, the Sufi was more noticed because of his character. He refused to pay bribes, he was never known to gamble, and his moral life was spotless. In short, it was because he lived such a righteous life that the evil in the city folk, once never noticed at all, was now exposed.

“He thinks he’s so good, does he? Well, we’ll show him what we think of his saintly life.” Some thugs plotted together bringing the worst of the city’s young hooligans in on their plot. They conspired with their young actor to bring the Sufi down a dark alley where they lay in wait to kill him. As night fell over the city, the boy went to the Sufi’s hovel and begged him to come to the aid of his sick mother. “I don’t know what good my presence can bring, but if you insist,” replied the Sufi. “Maybe I can be of some help.” Waiting in the dark, each with a sharp dagger in hand, the men jumped on the unsuspecting saint.

They buried him in the ruins of the shrine. And people said that things got better after that. Some thought that having a holy man’s shrine in their city was what made the difference. But all who paused to think about it knew why the city seemed less evil after the Sufi’s death. Darkness does not seem so dark when the light is put out.

Reflection
1. Why do you think that people prefer to let evil continue?
2. By what standard should a community judge itself?

BETRAYAL AND DEATH

After Jesus told the crowds that he was the Bread of Life, many stopped following him. His popularity began to decline, but his closest followers still stayed with him. When Jesus asked them if they too would like to go, Peter said to him, “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. And now we believe and know that you are the Holy One who has come from God.” To this group Jesus spoke of his suffering to come. He told them that he would be handed over to be put to death, but he would arise on the third day. They could not understand what he was saying at the time. Later, however, it all made sense to them.

Jesus traveled with his closest followers to Jerusalem in order to observe the Passover. As he rode into the city, a great crowd celebrated his arrival. They thought that now he would become their king and liberate them from the Romans. The religious leaders questioned him all week long in order to find some fault in his teachings. While they were questioning Jesus around the court of the temple, outside the city walls other religious leaders were examining the lambs that were to be sacrificed for the Passover. Each lamb had to be without blemish if it was to be a Passover lamb.

Inside the temple courts, the religious leaders could find no fault in Jesus’ teaching or in his character. They were desperate to convict him because they only held their power through Rome. If Jesus tried to raise a rebellion against Rome, their way of life would cease. So they plotted with one of Jesus’ closest followers to betray him. They found a quiet place to arrest Jesus, and then after a night of trials the religious leaders saw to it that the Romans condemned him to die on a cross.

Reflection
1. How did Jesus’ examination by the religious leaders show that he was without blemish?
2. Does it surprise you that the religious leaders sought to put Jesus to death? What other examples from the stories we have studied show that leaders often turn away from God?
Simon from Cyrene happened to be coming in from a farm, and they forced him to carry Jesus’ cross. Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus.

The soldiers took Jesus to Golgotha, which means “Place of a Skull.” There they gave him some wine mixed with a drug to ease the pain, but he refused to drink it.

They nailed Jesus to a cross and gambled to see who would get his clothes. It was about nine o’clock in the morning when they nailed him to the cross. On it was a sign that said why he was nailed there. It read, “This is the King of the Jews.” The soldiers also nailed two criminals on crosses, one to the right of Jesus and the other to his left.

People who passed by said terrible things about Jesus. They shook their heads and shouted, “Ha! So you’re the one who claimed you could tear down the temple and build it again in three days. Save yourself and come down from the cross!”

The chief priests and the teachers of the Law of Moses also made fun of Jesus. They said to each other, “He saved others, but he can’t save himself. If he is the Messiah, the king of Israel, let him come down from the cross! Then we will see and believe.” The two criminals also said cruel things to Jesus.

About midday the sky turned dark and stayed that way until around three o’clock. Then about that time Jesus shouted, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you deserted me?”

Some of the people standing there heard Jesus and said, “He is calling for Elijah.” One of them ran and grabbed a sponge. After he had soaked it in wine, he put it on a stick and held it up to Jesus. He said, “Let’s wait and see if Elijah will come and take him down!” Jesus shouted and then died.

At once the curtain in the temple tore in two from top to bottom.

A Roman army officer was standing in front of Jesus. When the officer saw how Jesus died, he said, “This man really was the Son of God!”

Reflection
1. What is ironic about the sign placed on Jesus’ cross?
2. What do you think Jesus’ reference to ‘rebuilding’ the temple in three days means?
3. Can you think of why God had to abandon Jesus?
4. In the following passage we see the first part of a famous prophecy about the Messiah written 700 years before Christ. How was Jesus’ death a fulfillment of the prophecy?

From the Pen of the Prophets

ISAIAH 53:7-9

He was painfully abused, but he did not complain.
He was silent like a lamb being led to the butcher, as quiet as a sheep having its wool shorn.
He was condemned to death without a fair trial. Who could have imagined what would happen to him?
His life was taken away because of the sinful things my people had done.
He wasn’t dishonest or violent, but he was buried in a tomb of cruel and rich people.
The Unfolding Story

XVII The Gift of Life

THE LAPIS MINER’S GIFT

The old man lifted the loose board at the base of the cupboard to reveal the parcel, heavy as lead and wrapped in an old oily cloth. “Here my friend. I want you to have this. I won’t need it where I’m going.” The old man had set his mind to make a pilgrimage that would be his last. He knew that he would never return. “Open it now,” the old man said leaning on his friend’s shoulder as he sat back down on the cushion. “I want to tell you its story before I go.”

His friend gently unwrapped the gift, revealing a large pristine block of lapis lazuli – the finest piece he had ever seen. His eyes widened and his mouth fell open as he beheld its beauty. The old man was also entranced as he gazed upon the treasure, and his eyes misted up as old memories flooded his mind.

“He old man began. “Well, this piece was the last lapis lazuli my son collected. He had seen it in the wall and knew that it would be priceless if he could remove it in one piece. However, he did not realize that in removing it from inside the mountain the tight passage would give way. His chest was crushed by a falling rock when he pulled the piece from the wall. I was able to bring him back to our small house where he died clutching this gemstone in his strong young hands. You have been my faithful friend for all these years. Please accept this gift as a token of our friendship.”

“How can I accept so beautiful a gift?” said the friend. “It must be worth its weight in gold. No, my friend, I must pay you something for this lapis treasure for its value is beyond imagination.”

“You do not understand,” the old man replied. “How can I accept anything in return? You see this came to me at the price of my son’s life. I give it to you freely. No, there is nothing you can give nor anything you can do to ever match its worth. Please accept it with the same grace in which I give it.”

Reflection
1. What gave value to the lapis far above its worth as a gemstone? Why was it important that it be given as a free gift?
2. If God’s gift of salvation to mankind is free, then what does that say about those who try to pay him for salvation through their good deeds?
3. We now turn to the amazing story of the resurrection of Jesus Messiah. His victory over the grave represents God’s victory over sin and its consequence – death. This gift is God’s gift of life. How could anyone try to pay God for such a gift as this?

GRIEF TURNED TO JOY

The followers of Jesus were shocked. Only days before great crowds heralded Jesus as their king. Now they had turned on him and he had been killed. Jesus was laid in a tomb and a large stone was rolled over the entrance. The religious leaders knew that Jesus had predicted that he would rise again, so they arranged with the Romans to put a group of guards at the tomb. They wanted to make sure that Jesus’ followers did not come to the tomb and steal his body.

On the morning of the third day after Jesus’ death, some of the women who helped Jesus and his followers went to the tomb in order to properly prepare his body for burial. When they arrived they found the guards gone and the stone rolled away. An angel greeted them and told them the most wonderful news. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “I know you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is not here—he has been raised!”

Could it be true? How could this be? If it was true that Jesus was alive, what would that mean to them? Their heavy grief was turned to bewildered joy.

Reflection
1. Do you think that Jesus’ followers were able to steal his body from armed Roman guards?
2. What do you think the resurrection meant to Jesus’ followers? What could it mean to us today?
A WALK WITH JESUS
LUKE 24:13-35

That same day two of Jesus’ disciples were going to the village of Emmaus, which was about twelve kilometers from Jerusalem. As they were talking and thinking about what had happened, Jesus came near and started walking along beside them. But they didn’t know who he was.

Jesus asked them, “What were you talking about as you walked along?”

The two of them stood there looking sad and gloomy. Then the one named Cleopas asked Jesus, “Are you the only person from Jerusalem who doesn’t know what was happening there these last few days?”

“What do you mean?” Jesus asked.

They answered, “Those things that happened to Jesus from Nazareth. By what he did and said he showed that he was a powerful prophet, who pleased God and all the people. Then the chief priests and our leaders had him arrested and sentenced to die on a cross. We had hoped that he would be the one to set Israel free! But it has already been three days since all this happened.

“Some women in our group surprised us. They had gone to the tomb early in the morning, but didn’t find the body of Jesus. They came back, saying that they had seen a vision of angels who told them that he is alive. Some men from our group went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said. But they didn’t see Jesus either.”

Then Jesus asked the two disciples, “Why can’t you understand? How can you be so slow to believe all that the prophets said? Didn’t you know that the Messiah would have to suffer before he was given his glory?” Jesus then explained everything written about himself in the Scriptures, beginning with the Law of Moses and the Books of the Prophets.

When the two of them came near the village where they were going, Jesus seemed to be going further. They begged him, “Stay with us! It’s already late, and the sun is going down.” So Jesus went into the house to stay with them.

After Jesus sat down to eat, he took some bread. He blessed it and broke it. Then he gave it to them. At once they knew who he was, but he disappeared. They said to each other, “When he talked with us along the road and explained the Scriptures to us, didn’t it warm our hearts?” So they got straight up and returned to Jerusalem.

The two disciples found the eleven apostles and the others gathered together. And they learned from the group that the Lord really was alive and had appeared to Peter. Then the disciples from Emmaus told them what happened on the road and how they knew he was the Lord when he broke the bread.

Reflection
1. Why do you think that Jesus did not reveal who he was to these two men at the beginning of their walk together?
2. Jesus’ followers did not understand that the Messiah would die according to the Scriptures. In what ways are they like people today who cannot believe that Jesus died?
3. Below, we again look at Isaiah’s prophecy on the Messiah. In it, God’s purposes for the Messiah’s death are revealed. From these words, how do you understand God’s purposes in the death and resurrection of Jesus?

From the Pen of the Prophets

ISAIAH 53:3-6, 10-12

He was hated and rejected; his life was filled with sorrow and terrible suffering. No one wanted to look at him. We despised him and said, “He is a nobody!”

He suffered and endured great pain for us, but we thought his suffering was punishment from God.

He was wounded and crushed because of our sins; by taking our punishment, he made us completely well.

All of us were like sheep that had wandered off. We had each gone our own way, but the Lord gave him the punishment we deserved.

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The LORD decided his servant would suffer as a sacrifice to take away the sin and guilt of others.

Now the servant will live to see his own descendants. He did everything the LORD had planned.
By suffering, the servant will learn the true meaning of obeying the LORD. Although he is innocent, he will take the punishment for the sins of others, so that many of them will no longer be guilty. The LORD will reward him with honor and power for sacrificing his life. Others thought he was a sinner, but he suffered for our sins and asked God to forgive us.
The Unfolding Story

XVIII Jesus’ Ascension &
the Community of Faith

RAFIQ’S BIRDS

The heat of the day had passed and the sun cast long shadows down the streets as Rafiq’s birds circled overhead. Young David Jan loved to sit on the roof of Uncle Rafiq’s house as he sent his birds out to fly in the late afternoon sky. Rafiq’s call was clear and the birds responded as if on a string, alighting on the cage, then out again for another pass above the houses. Sometimes at the end of the evening another bird would join Rafiq’s flock. Sometimes Rafiq would lose a bird to one of his neighbors. On this evening, there was one less bird in Rafiq’s brood at the end of the day.

“Why do they leave for another home?” asked David Jan.

“Maybe they are confused when they pass another group and go home with them,” answered the kind uncle. “Maybe my neighbor has fresher seed. Who knows? That’s the game of it, David Jan.”

“Why, then do you let them go? If they were mine I would keep them in their cages and never let them fly freely. They are too valuable to lose,” David Jan responded.

One of Rafiq’s favorite birds came to roost on his hand. He gently stroked the bird’s chest. The bird cooed in contentment. “Do you see this bird, David Jan? He has been with me now for three years. He was born in this breeding cage. Every evening he has a chance to fly away, but he always returns. The fact that he returns increases his value to me. Perhaps I could keep him in the cage, but then how would I know if he really is my bird? Every night when he returns with the flock I know that at least for one more day he is mine. The bird that did not return tonight was never mine in the first place.”

Reflection
1. Would you say that humans can choose to be with God in the same way as Rafiq’s birds can be with him? How is it the same? How is it different?
2. Do you want to be considered one of God’s people?

JESUS LEAVES AND THE SPIRIT COMES

It was true. Jesus was alive! He met with his followers for many weeks after his resurrection. And then he told them that they were to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them. When the Holy Spirit came, they would have power to be witnesses of all that they had seen. And then the most amazing thing happened. When Jesus finished speaking to them he was taken to heaven right before their eyes. While the men and women were still looking into the sky, an angel appeared next to them and said, “Why are you standing there looking up at the sky? This Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way that you saw him go to heaven.”

Returning to Jerusalem, the followers of Jesus gathered in prayer and waited for the promised Holy Spirit to come. There were about one hundred and twenty gathered one day praying when they heard the sound of a mighty rushing wind in the room. Then they saw tongues of fire come to rest on their heads as they were filled with God’s Holy Spirit. They all began to speak in languages they did not know. In the city that day were visitors from all over the world. As the people came out of the room speaking these languages no one knew what was happening. But the visitors each remarked that they heard them telling of the wonders of God in their own language. How could this be? What did it mean for those in Jerusalem on that day?

Reflection
1. Why do you think that Jesus returned to heaven in the way that he did?
2. What is the significance that people from all over the world heard the message of God in their own languages?
Peter stood with the eleven apostles and spoke in a loud and clear voice to the crowd. “Friends and everyone else living in Jerusalem, listen carefully to what I have to say! You are wrong to think that these people are drunk. After all, it is only nine o’clock in the morning. But this is what God had the prophet Joel say,

‘When the last days come, I will give my Spirit to everyone.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy.
Your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams.
In those days I will give my Spirit to my servants, both men and women, and they will prophesy.
I will work miracles in the sky above and wonders on the earth below. There will be blood and fire and clouds of smoke.
The sun will turn dark, and the moon will be as red as blood before the great and wonderful day of the Lord appears.
Then the Lord will save everyone who asks for his help.’

“Now, listen to what I have to say about Jesus from Nazareth. God proved that he sent Jesus to you by having him work miracles, wonders, and signs. All of you know this. God had already planned and decided that Jesus would be handed over to you. So you took him and had evil men put him to death on a cross. But God set him free from death and raised him to life. Death couldn’t hold him in its power. What David said are really the words of Jesus,

‘I always see the Lord near me, and I will not be afraid with him at my right side.
Because of this, my heart will be glad, my words will be joyful, and I will live in hope.
The Lord won’t leave me in the grave.
I am his holy one, and he won’t let my body decay.
He has shown me the path to life, and he makes me glad by being near me.’

“My friends, it is right for me to speak to you about our ancestor David. He died and was buried, and his tomb is still here. But David was a prophet, and he knew that God had made a promise he wouldn’t break. He had told David that someone from his own family would some day be king.

“David knew this would happen, and so he told us that Christ would be raised to life. He said that God wouldn’t leave him in the grave or let his body decay. All of us can tell you that God has raised Jesus to life!

“Jesus was taken up to sit at the right side of God, and he was given the Holy Spirit, just as the Father had promised. Jesus is also the one who has given the Spirit to us, and that’s what you are now seeing and hearing.

“David didn’t go up to heaven. So he wasn’t talking about himself when he said, ‘The Lord told my Lord to sit at his right side, until he made my Lord’s enemies into a footstool for him.’

“Everyone in Israel should then know for certain that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ, even though you put him to death on a cross.”

When the people heard this, they were very upset. They asked Peter and the other apostles, “Friends, what shall we do?”

Peter said, “Turn back to God! Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven. Then you will be given the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you and your children. It is for everyone our Lord God will choose, no matter where they live.”

Peter told them many other things as well. Then he said, “I beg you to save yourselves from what will happen to all these evil people.” On that day about three thousand believed his message and were baptized. They spent their time learning from the apostles, and they were like family to each other. They also broke bread and prayed together.

Reflection
1. Why do you think that Peter explained the prophecy from the Prophet David to the people?
2. For Peter, what was the significance of Jesus’ resurrection? What did this mean for those he preached God’s message to?
3. What is the significance of the life and work of Jesus on the cross for you?
The Unfolding Story

From the Pen of the Prophets

REVELATION 22:16-17

I am Jesus! And I am the one who sent my angel to tell all of you these things for the churches. I am David’s Great Descendant, and I am also the bright morning star. The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’

Everyone who hears this should say, ‘Come!’

If you are thirsty, come! If you want life-giving water, come take it. It's free!

Invitation

In these closing words of the Bible, an invitation is given. Will you respond to it and follow Jesus as your King and Savior? Will you allow his story to unfold in your life?
Introduction

The Unfolding Story is a story-based Bible study designed to help Central Asians who are seeking answers to questions of faith. It follows the chronological revelation presented in the Bible of mankind’s condition before God and God’s gracious gift of salvation found in Christ. Major themes on the redemption of mankind have guided the development of the course. Direct teaching in the lessons has been avoided by embedding the teaching within the parables, used to introduce the lessons, and the reflection questions.

Story-based

The vehicle for communicating the message of salvation has been aided by the use of a story-based approach. Central Asians are great lovers of stories, and therefore, the use of storytelling can greatly reduce the historical antipathy some have toward Christianity. Rather than a dogmatic treatise on Christian doctrines set against the prevailing religion, Jesus as a person is presented.

Chronological

The study follows the story of salvation in a chronological fashion from creation to Pentecost. The Bible itself presents the salvation message in such a way, building on foundations laid from the beginning of time. Without these foundations in place, many Central Asians will have greater difficulty understanding their need for a savior.

Thematic

The selection of Bible stories included in the study has been made in order to emphasize a number of salvation themes. The problem of sin is central if people are to understand the biblical perspective on mankind’s dilemma. God holds mankind accountable, judging our sins. The relationship between works and grace is also stressed through examples of those whose worship was unacceptable due to the condition of their hearts. Sacrifice, while not fully appreciated in the biblical sense in Central Asian culture, is more completely taught through the Bible stories chosen in order to show God’s way of solving the problem of sin. Ultimately, the sacrifices of the Old Testament culminate in the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. For this reason, Christ’s fulfillments of prophetic predictions about the Messiah are stressed. Central Asians have a high regard for the prophets. The prophets predictions of Jesus’ person and work are presented at two levels – his
atonement for sin on the Cross, and his fulfillment of the prophecies regarding the Davidic Covenant, that a Son of David would rule forever. On the basis of Jesus’ fulfillment of these prophecies, his claim as both Savior from sin and sovereign Lord are presented.

Methodology and Lesson Dynamics
This course can be completed in three months at one session per week if lesson one is combined with lesson two, and lesson twelve is combined with lesson thirteen. Lessons one and twelve are short and introductory in nature. This study would best be conducted in a one-to-one setting with a close friend. An oral adaptation of the materials for non-literate persons is available.

The sessions will be most effective if the lesson is read before the meeting. In the main, Asians do not confront their teachers. If they have an opportunity to read through the lesson before their session with the facilitator, then a three way dynamic is established – the student/inquirer, the facilitator/friend, and the lesson as teacher/challenger. The facilitator should avoid taking the role of teacher and rather be a fellow student with the inquirer. The facilitator might start the session by saying something like, “That was an interesting story this week about Noah. Can you imagine that the world got so sinful that God had to destroy mankind?” In this way, the lesson materials, an inanimate piece of writing, can challenge and be challenged in lively dialogue between the facilitator and student. In the next section, there are suggestions for how a facilitator might guide the discussions in each lesson.

The reflection questions are designed as aids to discussion on the topics raised in the stories. Care should be given to move at the pace of the study. Facilitators may be tempted to jump ahead of the story, telling the “punch-line” too soon, i.e. getting to Jesus’ life and work before laying the foundation needed to fully appreciate it. When a line of questioning leads in that direction, the facilitator should leave the cliff-hanger in place. Such unanswered questions can encourage deeper study and reflection. The reflection questions are designed to “mine” the treasures from the stories. Facilitators should avoid directly answering questions. (Answers are given for most questions in the following section.) Rather, they should turn the question back on the learner. An example from Luke 10:36 illustrates Jesus’ use of this technique. “And Jesus concluded, ‘In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbor towards the man attacked by the robbers?’” In so doing, the student interacts with the lesson material as his or her teacher/challenger and a debate with the facilitator, or the temptation for the facilitator to tell the student what to think, may be avoided. Powerful learning takes place when students can draw their own conclusions. We trust that through prayer and the grace of God, those who study this material will come to place their hope in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
Lesson Support Materials

I. An Introduction to Our Stories Where the Bible came from

a. Purpose and Themes: The purpose of this lesson is to indicate where the Bible comes from. The Bible is a collection of stories told through the ages recounting the acts of God and His relationship to mankind. This lesson will help newcomers to the Bible understand how these stories might have been retold and eventually collected into a book.

b. Background: The Qur’an was collected during the lifetime of one man, and therefore it may be a new idea to some students that the Bible is a collection of stories collected over hundreds of years from many authors and in many genres (narrative, poetry, prophecy, law, etc.).

c. Parable Reflection Questions:

i. This imaginary story is set in the times of the Taurat of the Prophet Moses. The Taurat, Zabur of David, and Injil of the Messiah Jesus are also known as the Bible. Why do you think that Zahir felt that he was part of a story that was still being told?

Zahir had the story of God’s promise to Abraham in his mind when he looked at the stars. When he saw the campfires and how they were a reflection, in a sense, of the stars, he realized that his own existence was part of the wider story of God’s salvation history.

ii. The following lessons trace the story of God and His relationship with man as recorded in the Bible. The writing down of these stories tells a tale of God’s relationship to mankind. In your experience, what stories from your own life might show that God is still at work?

Some questions will try to engage the student’s personal story. There are no right or wrong answers. Students will vary on how much they are willing to speak personally. They should not be forced to relate their personal stories; however, it is at this level that much of the application of the lessons will take place. At this stage you should ask how they may have seen God at work in their life. You may want to tell part of your own story as an example.
II. Goodness Gone Bad *The original sin of Adam*

a. **Purpose and Themes:** *The purpose of this story is to introduce God as the holy Creator and mankind’s fall into sin. Understanding the problem of sin is paramount in order for people to understand God’s solution in Christ. Think of how John’s preparation for Christ’s ministry was one of emphasizing sin in the lives of all persons in the society. As the lesson will show, God’s work was perfect and the guilt of sin lies wholly with mankind.*

b. **Background:** *Muslim’s regard the problem of mankind to be one of lack of submission to God’s will. They believe that Satan fell because he refused to worship Adam. This lesson can correct some misunderstandings; however care should be taken to not get into fine points of disagreement over details in the stories. If variant Islamic stories are offered, simply remind the students that this is what the Bible teaches and leave it at that.*

c. **Parable Reflection Questions:**
   i. How did the son’s gambling lead to an even more shameful act? *Of course, murder is the right answer.*
   ii. Describe how you think the gardener would feel when he finds out what his son has done. *Shame is a major concern in Islamic culture and you would do well to draw out this concept here. You may want to develop the idea of shame more fully by discussing the way the son’s family would cope with the shame of his actions.* Do you think that he would do anything to try to help his son? If so, what do you think he might try to do? *A few minutes spent trying to solve this problem for the fictitious family can underscore the problems sin causes in human relationships.*

d. **Context Story Reflection Questions:**
   i. What were some of the consequences of disobeying God found in the story? *At this stage we would want to emphasize the souring of the relationship between mankind and God.*
   ii. What are some of the consequences of mankind disobeying God as seen in the world today? *You could go on for hours. Try to make the connection between the truth of the concept taught in the lesson – the problem of sin – and the way things are in reality today.*
   iii. How are all humans like our first parents Adam and his wife? Do we obey God, or disobey God? *Again, we want to identify with our first parents in their sinfulness. We may try to do good works, prayers, pilgrimage, fasts, etc., but we still fall short and sin.*
e. Bible Story Reflection Questions:

i. How did the Satan in the form of the snake change the words of God? *He calls God a liar by telling Eve that there are no consequences for sin. This is a good time to show that temptation always leaves out the consequences.*

ii. What were the things that Adam’s wife found attractive in the temptation? How do those things still attract people today? *At what point do temptations draw us away? Notice the comparison between I John 2:16 and Genesis 3:6 – the lust of the flesh (when the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for fruit), the lust of the eyes (…and pleasing to the eye), and the boastful pride of life (…and also desirable for gaining wisdom).*

iii. Who did Adam and his wife blame for their sin? *They blame God ultimately for giving the woman to Adam and making the snake.*

iv. According to this story from the Bible, who is responsible for the entrance of sin into the world? *Emphasize here mankind’s culpability. The tempter’s role was to tempt, but the sin is mankind’s. Make sure that that concept is stated, even if you student does not take it on.*

v. Read the Scripture below and reflect on what the Prophet Paul says about the consequence of sin. *It would be good here to emphasize the consequence of sin in death. This will be important for understanding why sacrifices have to be given for sin and why Jesus had to die.*

III. My Brother, My Killer *The first murder*

a. Purpose and Themes: *This lesson shows just how quickly mankind sinks into the worst kind of sin – murder. The tragedy is that it is between two brothers. However, the sacrifice offered by Abel foreshadows themes of redemption. You should note that Cain’s unacceptable offering illustrates that what some people regard as right worship can in fact be unacceptable to God. Also, the hint of the solution of sin through sacrifice is indicated in the lesson.*

b. Background: *The history of tribal warfare in Afghan culture forms a backdrop here. Also, revenge killing is part of the culture. On matters of worship, try not to be too blatant about Islamic forms of worship. It is hoped that over the weeks of study the recurring theme might show some that their worship, no matter how sincere, may not be what God requires of them.*
c. Parable Reflection Questions:
   i. Yunus thought that he was very clever. Yet, how did Yunus’ request show the evil eye he had towards his neighbor? Some may think of Yunus as the hero of the story. Its point, however, is to show the distortions people come to in their thinking when they are taken over by sin – in this case by envy.
   ii. How have you seen this kind of attitude in the world today? Everyone should have a story to tell about the evil eye.
   iii. Does it surprise you that people can show such envy of others? It may come as no surprise – which is telling in and of itself.
   iv. What gift do you think that Yunus should have asked for? This may be a stretch for some who may want to give an answer that they feel might be acceptable to you. Here we are trying to train the conscience to recognize sinful attitudes within.

d. Context Story Reflection Questions:
   i. God was just in judging Adam, his wife, and the snake. But in His judgment, what promise did God give? A Muslim will most likely agree that God is just. The promise is that sin will be crushed by the Seed of the woman – a clear prophecy of Christ's coming work. At this stage, just bring up the idea of what that Seed might look like. How could the Seed of the woman crush Satan’s head?
   ii. How do you think people today try to cover their sins in ways to avoid any sacrifice? We don’t call sin sin. We think of it as a mistake or flaw of character or defilement. Or like Adam and Eve we blame others, including God for creating us like He has.

e. Bible Story Reflection Questions:
   i. Why do you think that Abel’s offering was acceptable to God and Cain’s was not? The text is not very clear here, but it does indicate the heart attitude of Cain and that should be stressed.
   ii. How did God warn Cain not to sin? God warned him that he would sin if he did not change his attitude. This leads us to the conclusion that Cain’s action was premeditated, adding greater shame to his action.
   iii. In what ways were Cain’s responses like those of his father and mother when they were caught in sin? Can we ever hide anything from God? He refused to confess when confronted by God. This is a common human reaction to the conviction of sin. It may be good to recognize this in Cain’s life and at the same time recognize that nothing is hidden from God.
iv. How was the judgment of Cain’s sin just? How did God show mercy to Cain in the midst of judgment? The ground is polluted by the spilling of Abel’s blood. God marks him and thereby protects him from becoming a murder victim.

v. In the following Scripture from the book to the Hebrews, reflect on how Abel’s faith still speaks today. Abel’s offering was given through faith in God, not in the performance of the sacrifice. The attitude of his heart was what set his offering apart from Cain’s. This is an important distinction to make.

IV. God’s Just Judgments The great Flood and the Prophet Noah

a. Purpose and Themes: The purpose of this lesson is to show the universality of sin and that God both judges sin, and at the same time provides a rescue from condemnation for believers.

b. Background: The Qur’anic story of Noah carries much condemnation of unbelievers. It is hoped in this lesson that we would focus more personally on our own culpability.

c. Parable Reflection Questions:
   i. The boy learned a valuable lesson. To kill the mad dog when they had the chance was the most just thing to do. How would you try to explain that to a child? The student may not agree. You may want to talk about the problems faced with making decisions like this. How could God be just in making a like decision? – He can see the end from the beginning where the boy in this story could not.
   ii. Next, we will read a story where God has to judge mankind for their sins. Can you think of an example from your life of a time when a severe judgment was the best solution to a problem? Answers will vary and may be too personal to recount.

d. Context Story Reflection Questions:
   i. How was Cain’s family an example of the growing darkness over the earth? Murder became a hallmark of Cain’s descendents.
   ii. In what ways did God try to control the darkness? By limiting the number of year’s men and women would live.
   iii. Why do you think that God allows evil to exist even today? What should He do about it? This question touches on the problem of evil. No matter where your discussion leads, try to draw conclusions made from the text that God is not the author of evil.
e. Bible Story Reflection Questions:
   i. Why do you think that Noah offered a sacrifice to God after leaving the boat?
   
   Noah is thanking God, he is establishing God as the focus of his worship, and the sacrifice shows that God is worthy of praise in the midst of His judgment – that all His ways are just.

   ii. How did God show His mercy in the midst of His judgment of evil? He saved Noah and his family as well as all living creatures. He also promises to never destroy mankind through a flood.

   iii. What will a rainbow remind you of now that you know its origin? It speaks of God’s promises – that He will be true to His words.

   iv. Read the prophecy of Hazrat Jesus below and reflect on what the day of final judgment will be like. People showed no interest in the things of God in Noah’s times. We should be vigilant to be true to God and be prepared for Judgment.

V. God Provides the Sacrifice Abraham sacrifices his son

a. Purpose and Themes: In the remarkable story of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, we learn that God Himself provided the sacrifice. In this lesson we should be sure to emphasize the role God played in providing the sacrifice. We also get a hint at the resurrection from the dead. Isaac is “brought back” so to speak. This foreshadows Christ’s resurrection which stands as the penultimate reversal of the curse of death as a consequence of sin. The foundation of these important concepts can be laid in this lesson.

b. Background: Muslims believe that Ishmael was the son Abraham “sacrificed”. It does no good to argue the point. You may want to just say that this is what the Bibles teach if the distinction comes up. However, it is important that we see God fulfilling His word to Abraham and Sarah. That is why the point is made in the lesson that Isaac was the son of promise and the son sacrificed. In this way he is a type of Christ. That gets missed if Ishmael is substituted for Isaac in the story.

c. Parable Reflection Questions:
   i. What in this story indicates the true nature of Farhad? Do you think that he deserved to pay for his crime? Farhad has lost his conscience until it is reawakened in the meeting of his childhood friend. It might be good to talk about our consciences at this point.

   ii. What are your thoughts about the judge paying the thief’s debts? Do you know a story where that has happened in life? This question predicts God’s payment of our
price for redemption. It will be seen in the ram caught in the thicket in the Bible lesson and later in Christ substitutionary work on the Cross. At this stage you will only want to make sure that the concept is raised.

d. Context Story Reflection Questions:
   i. How did Abraham show that he believed God’s promises? *He left his homeland and became a wonderer.*
   ii. When did Abraham show a lack of faith in God? *He did not wait for the son of promise through Sarah.*

e. Bible Story Reflection Questions:
   i. In what way did Abraham show that he believed that Isaac would be returned to him even though he sacrifice him on an altar? *By stating to his servant that he and the boy would return.*
   ii. What does it mean that God provided the sacrifice? *Emphasize here that it is God who makes a way of salvation.*
   iii. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews has also reflected on Abraham and Sarah’s life of faith. How do his words below help you understand the amazing story you have just read? *God keeps His promises, and Abraham had a glimpse at the wonderful concept of resurrection.*

VI. Returning Good for Evil *Joseph saves his family*

   a. Purpose and Themes: *This lesson will present a man who returned good for evil. It stands in stark contrast to the normal way humans interact. It also serves to show a type of Christ in Joseph. We will also see again how God is at work in the world through events beyond our control.*

   b. Background: *The Joseph story in the Qur’an goes into great detail over Potifer’s wife. If someone has read that story they may bring it up. The moral of this lesson is that revenge is not the correct way to respond – a concept somewhat lacking in Afghan culture and worth discussing here.*

   c. Parable Reflection Questions:
      i. Have you ever wondered how God answers some prayers and not others? Do you have any examples of unanswered prayers you are thankful for? *We trust that God’s answers are always in character with His goodness – although we cannot always see to good consequences.*
ii. It was not God’s will to answer Fatima’s youthful prayers. His will for her was better than her prayers had been. In what ways do you find that God’s will in your life has been for your good? This calls for any story where their life took a turn for the good. If they cannot think of an occasion like that, you can give your own story as an illustration.

d. Context Story Reflection Questions:
   i. Why do you think that Joseph’s brothers beat him and sold him into slavery? *Again, we see the evil eye at work.*
   ii. How were Joseph’s dreams fulfilled in the end of the story? What does this teach us about God’s will? Afghans will affirm that God speaks to us in dreams and this is a biblical account of just that.

e. Bible Story Reflection Questions:
   i. Joseph’s brothers worried that he hated them. They expected him to take revenge on them. Maybe they thought like this because that would be how they would have acted. What evidence did they have to indicate just the opposite attitude on Joseph’s part? *He was upset by the thought that he would have ill intent towards his brothers.*
   ii. What was it about the way that Joseph responded that showed that he had a different outlook on the events of his life? Can you think of any other time when God turned the evil actions of men into something good? *Joseph saw that God had control of the events of his life and that he had Joseph’s good in mind. This question will anticipate the good news that comes out of the Cross of Christ.*
   iii. The proverb below speaks of the certainty of God’s will regardless of the plans men make. How have you seen such things in your life? *You may want to share how God has shown his sovereignty in your life.*

VII. The Sacrifice that Saved The Passover celebrated

a. Purpose and Themes: *This very important lesson shows how the blood of a sacrifice saves from death. This will be important to see in the future lessons about Christ. This story has one of the most significant types of Christ in the Old Testament.*

b. Background: *Muslim understanding of sacrifice is sketchy at best. This lesson will help your student to understand deeper meanings of biblical sacrifices.*

c. Parable Reflection Questions:
The Unfolding Story

i. Why was the lamb’s sacrifice so important? How did it save the people taking refuge inside? The Khan’s troops thought that the household had already been killed.

ii. The lamb was of little value compared to the lives of the people. Can you think of an example where someone or something of great value was sacrificed for someone of far less value? This question is meant to provoke thought. There are very few stories of one person giving their life for another – much less an enemy or a person of less value. This question will anticipate the gracious offering of Christ’s life for us.

d. Context Story Reflection Questions:
   i. Have you in your life seen that many people, in their ignorance, do not worship the One God? They may respond from an Islamic point of view for these questions and that’s ok at this point.
   ii. Why do you think that some people continue to refuse to follow God Almighty when God sends His Prophets to teach them about the true God? This kind of question will place a personal challenge in one’s heart to respond to God’s prophets.

e. Bible Story Reflection Questions:
   i. How are the other stories about sacrifice we have studied in the lives of the Prophets differ from this sacrifice? The way the blood was applied – the fact of lives saved. How have they been similar? The sacrificial victim was perfect.
   ii. How did the Israelites show that they believed God and His Prophet? They obeyed his commands. How did God reward their obedience? By saving them from the Death Angel and bringing them out of bondage.
   iii. What does the following Scripture tell us was Moses’ motivation for doing what he did? His faith in God. What do you think it means when it says that Moses “saw” the invisible God? He could see what God was doing on the earth.

VIII. God Gives His Holy Law The Ten Commandments

a. Purpose and Themes: This lesson introduces the Ten Commandments. In the giving of the Law we also see the holiness of God. Thus we see that God requires mankind to abide by certain rules and that he hold us responsible. You may want to look at each law and ask what truths about God’s character can be seen in each one.
b. Background: Muslims maintain that God’s will is what we are to follow. This is true in a sense from the Christian perspective. However, a purist Muslim view would divorce any sense of relationship with God in a personal way. Notice how the Ten Commandments are actually the establishment of the parameters of relationship – one through four concerns our relationship with God and five through ten concerns our relationships among other humans. This point may be made in the analysis of the Law in your discussions.

c. Parable Reflection Questions:
   i. Have you found that purity has a price in your own life? There may be many examples that you might show of those, who by seeking to live a holy life, might be persecuted.
   ii. How can people’s lives be refined, or purified, by keeping God’s laws? What we find, as we try to keep God’s Laws, is that we fall short of them. We cannot always attain to their high standards. It is in our falling, that our condition can be revealed to us. This truth can help correct wrong notions about the role of good works as a path to salvation.

d. Context Story Reflection Questions:
   i. Why did God physically separate the people from their land of bondage? Of course in the NT we will see this passing through the waters as a type of baptism. But now the people could not go back on the venture they had set out upon. This is a good thought to reflect on – that in seeking God we should press forward, regardless of the consequences, and not turn back.
   ii. The passing through the waters was something only God could have done. Do you think that the people could have defeated the Pharaoh’s troops if God had not protected them? Again we see the role of God as deliverer and savior. With their backs against the Sea and troops bearing down on them they found the sufficiency of God to save.

e. Bible Story Reflection Questions:
   i. From this story, what shows the holiness of God? The storm on the mountain and the warnings from Moses to not touch the mountain.
   ii. How do the laws He gave, which we call the Ten Commandments, show the holiness of God’s character and what He expects of His people? He expects us to revere Him and live in right relationship with Him and others.
iii. Towards the end of his days, Moses summed up the laws of God in the following passage. How does it reflect the spirit of the Ten Commandments? *The essence of the Law is love. This speaks of the relationship that God seeks with mankind.*

iv. What role does the intent of human hearts play in following God’s commands? *This is a hard question and may be beyond some students. Muslims hold that the intent (niyyah) of our hearts is important and what God will look upon in His judgment of our sins. A student may follow this line of reasoning. However, while we would want to affirm God’s graciousness, something of God’s holiness is lost if He gives us requirements in His Law only to right-off our responsibility to keep His Law in the end if we really meant to keep it. This problem can be raised now with a view to returning to it later when we look at the work of Christ. His work on the Cross both pays the price for our sin and shows the abundance of God’s grace at once.*

IX. God Judges a King’s Disobedience *Samuel confront King Saul*

a. Purpose and Themes: *The stories in the life of Saul emphasize the importance of following God in our hearts, particularly when contrasted with David’s life as seen in the next lesson. The lives of these two kings shows that God demands righteousness from all persons, regardless of their station in life.*

b. Background: *While no overt comments need to be made, this lesson will address the problems associated with Islamic forms of worship. Jesus made it very clear to the Samaritan woman that there are both correct and incorrect forms of worship while there are also correct and incorrect heart attitudes in worship (John 4:1-47). If the “straight path” does not lead to God, then it does not qualify as true worship. Neither are true forms a guarantee if one is not right with God in their heart (Luke 15:9-14).*

c. Parable Reflection Questions:

i. Why do you think that the boy believed that his other good deeds made his one wrong deed ok? *He was keeping a balance sheet in his mind. Unfortunately many religious people do this, trading their good deeds in for a few bad ones along the way.*

ii. How do you think that God looks upon our deeds? *They are indications of what is going on in our hearts. Do you think that it is ok to steal if we are good at other times? These kinds of questions are geared to show the futility of good works as a path to salvation. Our good deeds flow from faith. They are not the means to faith.*
The Unfolding Story

d. Context Story Reflection Questions:
   i. How did the people rebel against God and His Prophet in the desert? What was the consequence? They wanted to go back into captivity rather than move forward with God.
   ii. How are the people Moses led different from the people in the times of the Prophet Noah? They would respond, at times, to the preaching of God’s prophets. How are they the same? They still wandered in their hearts and actions away from God.

e. Bible Story Reflection Questions:
   i. What was Saul’s first response when confronted by Samuel? He tried to cover-up his disobedience. How is this like the response Adam and Cain gave to God when He confronted them over their sins? He gave excuses for his sin – the most common human response when confronted with our sin – stress that this is a universal response.
   ii. What was the consequence of Saul trying to make the wrong kind of sacrifice? God took the kingdom from him and gave it to David. How does God view such worship? It is unacceptable – God demands a right heart before Him in worship.
   iii. In the Zabur of the Prophet David, the following passage reflects God’s view of wrong sacrifices. How might the law “written on one’s heart” be reflected in their worship of God? This is a tough question dealing with an abstract idea. It is placed here so that the student can be prepared for the concept of the New Covenant relationship, where God’s Law is within. It also builds on the idea previously touched on when we looked at the intent of a person’s heart. You might ask what the role of God’s Spirit could have in helping people to follow God. This will anticipate the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.

X. God Judges Secret Sins David’s sin of adultery
   a. Purpose and Themes: This lesson will show that God requires uprightness in all persons, even His Prophets. In contrast to Saul, David responds in humility to God’s rebuke. As a result, although he still must bear the consequences for his sins, God forgives him.
   b. Background: When pressed, Muslims will acknowledge that the Prophets were not perfect. You may want to discuss how this lesson from David’s life and his poetry (Psalm 51), teach us powerful lessons about humility. David was the king and he could have suppressed this story. The fact that we have such details of the story shows that he wanted his life to be a cautionary tale for others.
c. Parable Reflection Questions:
   i. Why do we sometimes take advantage of our position in life? *This is a natural inclination and one that will drive David to take liberties with another man’s wife.*
   ii. Do you have any stories from your own life which are like the story of Karim? *Afghan’s should have a number of stories related to this theme.*

d. Context Story Reflection Questions:
   i. What indication do we have from the story that David had no intention of repenting from his adultery? *He tried to cover it by bringing Uriah back from the battlefield.*
   ii. Was David guilty of murder as well as adultery? *Later on, the text will reveal that God considered him guilty of murder as well as adultery.*

e. Bible Story Reflection Questions:
   i. Why do you think that David could not see that he was in the story until Nathan told him that he was the man? *Stories can hide a message. When the moral of the story is revealed, then the impact of the message is released.*
   ii. What differences do you see between David and Saul when God’s Prophets confronted them about their sin? *David does not make excuses. You might ask rhetorically, “Do we make excuses for our sins?”*
   iii. The Prophet David wrote the following prayer after his sin with Uriah’s wife. *What important thing about sacrifice did David recognize in his prayer? The importance of the heart again is stressed.*

XI. Refugees in a Strange Land *The exile in Babylonia of the Jews*

   a. Purpose and Themes: *Again we see that God judges mankind, and that his judgments are just. Just as Adam and Eve were exiled, so the Israelites were exiled. God removed the blessed promise of the Land from them, in order that they might come to appreciate the greater blessing of knowing God.*

   b. Background: *Afghans should easily identify with this story. The Afghan refugee crisis has touched every Afghan’s life. They may come to reflect on how God might be using their present crisis as a way of focusing their attention on Him.*

   c. Parable Reflection Questions:
      i. Omar thought that his time in the village was like going to prison. What was it in Omar’s life that enabled him to view his time in the village as a reward and not an imprisonment? *This well-know scenario, of a doctor “serving time” in the village,*
was changed when Omar become one with the village through marriage. This is not always the case in real life.

ii. Many people have had to live in places they did not choose. Can you think of times in your life when you faced what you thought would be certain difficulties only to find blessings as well? This may be hard for your student to see, especially if they tend to a more pessimistic view of life. You may want to be prepared with examples from your own life.

d. Context Story Reflection Questions:

i. What was behind Sulaiman’s failure as a righteous king? Setting-up the idol’s of his wives in Jerusalem.

ii. How easy is it for people to follow the one true God when their rulers are worshipping idols? Of course, very difficult. This question touches on the certain persecution awaiting any Afghan who chooses to follow Christ. “Counting the costs” needs not be taken at this time, but this lesson may be referred to later when such questions arise.

e. Bible Story Reflection Questions:

i. What was the general attitude of the people to the prophets God sent? As those who challenge mankind’s sin, the reactions against the prophets was negative, in keeping with the response most people have to such confrontation. How are people like that today when faced with choosing God’s ways or man’s ways? We all still justify our actions and are slow to respond in humility. You may want to touch on the role that pride takes in keeping people from responding to God’s challenges.

ii. What was the length of captivity in Babylon in relation to? The number of years that the Sabbath was not observed. What does that tell us about God’s judgment? This shows that God is not arbitrary in his judgments. Rather, the consequences for sin are always in relation to the sin in some way. We may not always be able to see that connection.

iii. How can we tell that God was not limited to only working in the land of the Israelites? He revealed Himself in the land of captivity.

iv. In the prophecy given by the Prophet Ezekiel below, God reveals the new type of relationship He will have with His people. What role will God’s Spirit have in that relationship? Again we anticipate the coming of God’s Spirit and His role in guiding God’s New Covenant people.
XII. An Introduction to the Injil The testimony of the four Gospels

a. Purpose and Themes: This lesson is a bridge between the Old and New Testaments. It seeks to show that the multi-faceted testimony of the Gospel writers, rather than disproving them, indicates that they are trustworthy. It also explains why there is more than one testimony about the life of Christ in the New Testament.

b. Background: Muslims are taught that the Christians changed the witness of Jesus in the Injil and thus God had to send Muhammad and the final book – the Qur’an. This lesson can address this to a degree. Other materials on the trustworthy character of the Bible deal more completely with this. Debate on the issue should be avoided if possible. This story, simply presented, may address concerns and help the student gain a measure of trust in the Bible.

c. Parable Reflection Questions:

i. Why is it helpful to have more than one witness when determining what really happened? You may want to illustrate an accident at a four-way intersection with witnesses at each of the four corners, each having their own perspective on what happened.

ii. The Injil of Jesus contains four books called Gospels, each written by a different author. How can their different perspectives help us today understand more clearly what happened two thousand years ago? They give a much more complete picture than one lone witness could provide.

XIII. The Annunciation and Birth of Jesus Predictions concerning the birth of the Messiah

a. Purpose and Themes: This lesson will show that Jesus was the long-expected Messiah. We will also hint at the profound truth of the incarnation.

b. Background: Jesus as Son of God is a great stumbling-block to Muslims. Care has been taken to not push the deity of Jesus too soon; however, it cannot be avoided. The testimony of the Gospels is clear. And the false witness of Islam that Jesus is not God is part of the bondage that someone coming to Christ from Islam will have to overcome by God’s grace. The parable in this lesson hints at incarnation. David Rodda has used a chronological approach in sub-Sahara Africa with Muslim seekers, and when they came to the Gospel testimony that Jesus is the Son of God, those who had stayed with him through the OT lessons accepted the NT witness without question. This is not to say this will happen with you.
c. Parable Reflection Questions:
   i. How important is it for a judge to know what the lives of everyday people are like?  
      *He can relate to the real needs of everyday people.* How could this make him a  
      better judge? *He can be more just in his judgments.*
   ii. Do you think that an outsider can really know how to save you from your  
      problems? *For Afghans, it is the outsiders who have caused most of their problems.*

d. Context Story Reflection Questions:
   i. How did the behavior of the Jews who returned to the land reflect that they were  
      trying to seek God with all their hearts? *Trying more to keep God’s Law and  
      anticipating the Messiah.*
   ii. What was it that made the Jews long for a Messiah? *The rule of the Romans over  
      them.*
   iii. How was the coming of the Messiah different from what anyone had imagined?  
      *He would not overthrow the Romans.* What was so special about his birth?  
      *Announced by angels and a virgin birth.*

e. Bible Story Reflection Questions:
   i. What was significant about Jesus’ birth taking place in the home village of King  
      David? *He would be the promised King to sit on David’s throne.*
   ii. What can we learn about the character of God when we reflect on the birth of His  
      Messiah in a humble stable and the announcement of the birth to humble  
      shepherds? *God values humility – return to the problem pride presents to following  
      God.*
   iii. In the prophecy about the Messiah from God’s Prophet Isaiah below, what  
      characteristics do we learn about the promised child? *“Our ruler” indicates that  
      Jesus should be one’s Lord. He sits on David’s throne. He is said to be God!*

XIV. A Marvelous Ministry *Rejection at Nazareth*

a. Purpose and Themes: *This lesson will show what type of mission Jesus set-out to  
   accomplish. It included the infilling of God’s Spirit, the message of good news to the poor,  
   liberty for captives, sight for the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. He would  
   announce that the salvation long-anticipated by God’s people was now upon them. The  
   reaction from his hometown was rejection. This will place a challenge before the students  
   – will she/he reject Christ too?*
b. Background: Some Muslim commentators believe that Jesus will return to establish a political ministry. God taking him to heaven cut short his intended ministry on earth. Muslims consider that God’s prophets have both a spiritual and political ministry. You may want to look at how the Kingdom of God, present in the lives of Jesus’ followers even now, is in fact just such a representation. When the Jews in Nazareth heard Jesus proclaim a ministry of release for the captives, they would have had in mind the Roman rule of Palestine. However, Jesus freed captives of something greater than temporal bondage – he broke the power of sin and death.

c. Parable Reflection Questions:
   i. What do you think is God’s attitude to the poor and disabled? God wants us to be mindful of the poor.
   ii. How was this man made whole through losing his arm? In his disability he was able to understand his son’s disability. There will be a connection with the ministry of Jesus here, that his heart is inclined to the poor and disabled. What handicap did Jesus have? Paul teaches us that he emptied himself of his prerogatives as God to become man (Philippians 2:7). You may be able to interject this idea if the incarnation has been something that has been taken on by the student.

d. Context Story Reflection Questions:
   i. Why do you think that John was reluctant to baptize Jesus? The greater should not come to the lesser – remember the story of the House of Blood and the question about the status of the sacrificed victim.
   ii. What experience at his baptism showed that God was with Jesus in a special way. God’s Spirit comes upon him. (We have not continued with the voice of God the Father from heaven in order to control the number of Sonship verses – a stumbling-block for Muslims. However, if the idea can sit well with your student, you can bring it up. It is one of the clearest examples of Trinity found in Scripture. Be forewarned that if you do go in this direction you should be prepared with an illustration of Trinity. Water, ice, and steam is one that people who face the concept for the first time can readily understand. All three have the same composition but are perceived by humans in three different ways.)

1) God is One in the Holy Trinity by Zachariah Butrus is a good little booklet written with Muslims in mind and available from The Good Way, PO Box 66, CH-8486, Rikon, Switzerland.
iii. Why was it important for Jesus to be tempted, and yet not sin? Muslims may fall back on Christ’s prophethood as a reason for his holiness. Gently move in the direction of showing his holiness was due to his unique nature. Later when we see his work on the Cross we will note the importance that Jesus was a perfect sacrifice in keeping with the OT stipulations of the Passover lamb.

e. Bible Story Reflection Questions:
   i. What kind of ministry was outlined in the prophetic passage from Isaiah that Jesus read? A ministry of liberation. You may try to discuss this at several levels. You could ask, “What would you like to be liberated from?” Why did it cause a stir when he applied the fulfillment of the passage to himself? Jesus claimed that he was the messiah they were waiting for.
   
ii. In the passage from the words of the Prophet Isaiah below, the ministry of Jesus in the Galilee region was predicted to be a time when people passed from darkness into light. What must people do to leave their ignorance behind and come into the light? Before the coming of Muhammad, that time was called a time of ignorance. The connection here should be clear to a Muslim seeker. Light makes it possible for us to see and therefore understand. People have to come out of their darkness in order to see. Things that they have been doing wrong will be revealed at that time.

XV. A Challenging Ministry The Bread of Life
   a. Purpose and Themes: This lesson will show that just as bread nurtures our bodies, so Christ can nurture our soul if we will “partake” of him in a spiritual sense.
   
   b. Background: Central Asians have a high regard for bread. They will turn over a piece of nan that has been placed up-side-down. If it falls on the ground they will pick it up, kiss it and hold it to their forehead in honor of this essential staple of their existence. Jesus tapped into this in the passage studied in this lesson
   
   c. Parable Reflection Questions:
      i. What motivates men to be cruel when God has been kind to them? The sin in the men’s hearts led them to give dirt instead of grain. (NB: This story is told about two large mounds of earth outside the city of Mazar, and thus may be known to some students.)
      
      ii. How would God want us to respond to the old Baba’s request? By giving the grain graciously.
The Unfolding Story

iii. How do you think Jesus would respond to a request for food? By giving more than was requested. (This story from John’s Gospel will speak of bread at different levels and that kind of use of language should be discussed.)

d. Context Story Reflection Questions:
   i. How was the ministry of Jesus different from what the people thought the Messiah was going to be like? He did not raise up an army (in contrast to Muhammad’s ministry). His ministry was known for his teachings that stressed prayer rather than armed conflict.
   ii. What did Jesus’ feeding of the multitudes from such small resources show about the power God had given him? Jesus showed the same creative powers that God exhibited in the creation of the world. Why do you think that the people wanted to force him to become king? They wanted a Jewish ruler who would oppose the Romans and this one (Jesus) could even feed them on meager resources.

e. Bible Story Reflection Questions:
   i. According to Jesus’ words, what was the real bread from heaven? Jesus himself. Quite an astounding claim. Ask your student what he thinks of that.
   ii. What is the ultimate reward to those who ‘eat’ of the bread of life? Eternal life – which is, in point of fact, the ultimate reversal of the curse on Adam and Eve.
   iii. In the Prophecy of the End Times given below, an angel describes a scene in heaven. How are Jesus’ promises and this fulfillment connected? Not all things in this reference are addressed in the lesson’s Bible story. The satisfying of mankind’s hunger and the quenching of mankind’s thirst are, however.

XVI. The Way of Suffering Jesus is crucified on a cross

   a. Purpose and Themes: This lesson will show the rejection of Jesus by the Jews because he did not fit into their idea about what the Messiah should be. Yet, his death was as the true sacrificed Passover Lamb, of whom all previous sacrifices pointed to.
   b. Background: Islam teaches that Jesus was not killed on a cross. The spurious Gospel of Barnabas\(^2\) promotes the false notion that Judas was made to look like Jesus at his arrest, that God’s angel took Jesus to heaven, and the Judas was crucified in his stead. It is difficult for Muslims to see how God would let one of His Prophets suffer such indignity.

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\(^2\) An English copy is available from Muslim Educational Trust, Book Market, Main Bazaar, Lahore, Pakistan.
Yet, this is the offense of the Cross and it must be presented as the story unfolds. We will return to the challenge it places before Muslims in the next lesson.

c. Parable Reflection Questions:
   i. Why do you think that some people are attracted to good and some are attracted to evil? This story deals with the inclination of mankind toward darkness. Theologically we could say that Adam’s sin accounts for this in the heart of all mankind.
   ii. By what standard should a community judge itself? God’s standard should be the basis for right and wrong. When that is lost, society is lost.

d. Context Story Reflection Questions:
   i. How did Jesus’ examination by the religious leaders show that he was without blemish? His answers to their questions and his holy character could not be challenged.
   ii. Does it surprise you that the religious leaders sought to put Jesus to death? John teaches us that men prefer the darkness. What other examples from the stories we have studied show that leaders often turn away from God? The rejection of God’s prophets all through history tells this story.

e. Bible Story Reflection Questions:
   i. What is ironic about the sign placed on Jesus’ cross? He really was the King.
   ii. What do you think Jesus’ reference to ‘rebuilding’ the temple in three days means? He would be raised from the dead.
   iii. Can you think of why God had to abandon Jesus? Because Jesus took on sin for all mankind. (Muslims will not see this right away and it will need to be explained to them.)
   iv. In the passage below we see the first part of a famous prophecy about the Messiah. How was Jesus’ death a fulfillment of the prophecy? They way he was treated and how he responded is predicted in this prophecy. (NB: The phrase “His life was taken away because of the sinful things my people had done…” will answer the previous question.)

XVII. The Gift of Life Jesus rises from the dead

   a. Purpose and Themes: This lesson will show that Jesus rose from the dead and that in so doing canceled the power of sin over mankind and freed us from our sins.
b. Background: Objections that Muslims make to Jesus’ death are echoed in the questions about his death and resurrection voiced by the two men on the road to Emmaus.

c. Parable Reflection Questions:
   i. What gave value to the lapis far above its worth as a gemstone? The life of the miner’s son. Why was it important that it be given as a free gift? If he tried to pay for the gift, it would devalue the sacrifice made in mining the gemstone. (This story will lay a foundation to God’s free gift of salvation. We are nearing the point where a decision for Christ will be sought. Muslims will state that our works – prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, etc. – are needed for our salvation. This story indicates the opposite.)
   ii. If God’s gift of salvation to mankind is free, then what does that say about those who try to pay Him for salvation through their good deeds? No amount of our good deeds can pay for Christ’s sacrifice.
   iii. We now turn to the amazing story of the resurrection of Jesus Messiah. His victory over the grave represents God’s victory over sin and its consequence – death. This gift is God’s gift of life. How could anyone try to pay God for such a gift as this? No one can pay for this gift. It is priceless.

d. Context Story Reflection Questions:
   i. Do you think that Jesus’ followers were able to steal his body from armed Roman guards? They were weak and fearful. The resurrection was a work of God’s power.
   ii. What do you think the resurrection meant to Jesus’ followers? They now had hope that their sins could be cancelled and that they could live eternally. What could it mean to us today? We too can be freed from our sins to live forever.

e. Bible Story Reflection Questions:
   i. Why do you think that Jesus did not reveal who he was to these two men at the beginning of their walk together? He wanted to find out what was on their minds.
   ii. Jesus’ followers did not understand that the Messiah would die according to the Bible. In what ways are they like people today who cannot believe that Jesus died? They do not understand why he had to die.
   iii. Below, we again look at Isaiah’s prophecy on the Messiah. In it, God’s purposes for the Messiah’s death are revealed. From these words, how do you understand God’s purposes in the death and resurrection of Jesus? God willed the suffering of Jesus in order to bring forgiveness of sins. What great love God has shown mankind through this gift of life!
XVIII. Ascension and the Community of Faith *Jesus ascends to heaven and the Holy Spirit comes*

a. Purpose and Themes: *It is now time to make a decision. The stories have been told. In this final one, many hear the preaching of Peter and respond to his call for repentance. We pray too that your student will do the same.*

b. Background: *Christians are part of a community that spans the globe and reaches back two thousand years to the time of Christ. It is into that community that followers of Jesus are called to come. The church is not perfect, and never will be until the time of judgment (See Mathew 13:24-30, 36-43).*

c. Parable Reflection Questions:
   i. Would you say that humans can choose to be with God in the same way as Rafiq’s birds can be with him? *In many ways they do so every day.* How is it the same? *We fly from one master to another.* How is it different? *Our choices are made in our minds whereas the birds act instinctively.*
   ii. Do you want to be considered one of God’s people? *Answers will vary and indicate the direction the students will go.*

d. Context Story Reflection Questions:
   i. Why do you think that Jesus returned to heaven in the way that he did? *Jesus had conquered death and so the only way to ascend to heaven was directly.*
   ii. What is the significance that people from all over the world heard the message of God in their own language? *This message is for all people.* (You may note that present in Jerusalem on that day were people from Ancient Persia.)

e. Bible Story Reflection Questions:
   i. Why do you think that Peter explained the prophecy from the Prophet David to the people? *Jesus became the answer to the promise God made to David.*
   ii. For Peter, what was the significance of Jesus’ resurrection? *God the Father has honored him and raised him to his right side.* What did this mean for those he preached God’s message to? *They were convicted of their sins and repented.*
   iii. What is the significance of the life and work of Jesus on the cross for you? *Answers will vary.*

f. Invitation:

In these closing words of the Bible, an invitation is given. Will you respond to it and come to Jesus as your King and Savior? Will you allow His story to unfold in your life? *Answers will vary.*