

A COLLECTION OF STORIES FOR CHILDREN

by
RICHARD WURMBRAND

Translator: Rebeca Lucaci

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**Help For Refugees, Inc.,
Michael Wurmbbrand, Director.
PO Box 5161,
Torrance, Ca. 90510, USA.**

**Email: hfr@helpforrefugees.com;
Internet address:
<https://www.helpforrefugees.com>**

We help orphans and elderly Christians (many in their 80s, even 90s) who had been imprisoned for their faith in present or former communist countries

Abraham crushes/smashes the idols

Terah, Abraham's father, was an idol maker although he knew some things about God. And when Abraham was but a child he would sent him to sell the idols on the street.

Once, on his way to the market to sell the idols, a man asked Abraham: "Do you have Gods for sale?" Abraham answered: "How old are you?" – "Seventy," said the man. Then Abraham told him: "The god you want to buy must worship you or do you want to worship him?" The man replied: "It's true that I don't really worship him." Then Abraham made it clear to the man: "Well, you are older than your god in years. You were created seventy years ago, while the god you want to buy has just been molded by my father."

In doing so Abraham always came back home with unsold gods.

One day Abraham made a great decision and swore: "God is alive. I won't have idols in my father's house. In three days time I will crush them all." Then he ran outside where his father was staying with the slaves, he stood before him and asked him: "Tell me, father, what god made the heavens, the earth and all men?" Terah replied: "The gods we have inside are the ones who created all things." And so Terah went in with Abraham and prayed before his gods.

Then Abraham addressed his mother and told her: "My father just showed me the gods that created the heavens, the earth and all men. Now hurry, take a kid from the flock, stab it and cook it well. I want to bring a gift of food to the gods so that they would eat and I please them." The mother did so. She took a kid, cooked it and gave it to Abraham. He took the food from his mother's hands and gave it to his father's gods. But Terah knew nothing about this matter.

Abraham stood before the gods all day long but they would not speak, nor move nor touch the food. Than Abraham mocked them saying: "Perhaps they don't like the food that I cooked or perhaps it's too little for them. That is why they don't eat from it. I'll prepare them some other kind of food tomorrow, a much better one and in a greater quantity."

And so he did – the next day he asked his mother to prepare another kind of food. This time she took three tender kids from the flock, cooked a very good meal out of them the way Abraham liked it and then gave it to her son. Again, Terah knew nothing about this matter.

So Abraham took the food from his mother's hands. He went into the gods' room/chamber, offered it to each of them and stood there all day long to see if they would eat it. But again – no sound came out of their mouths and no gesture was made towards the food. That night God's Holy Spirit came over Abraham and he said: "Woe to my father and to this reckless nation that believes in this vanity! They worship these gods made of wood and stone, but who cannot smell, hear or talk. They have a mouth, but they

do not speak, they have eyes, but do not see, they have hands but do not grab, they have feet but do not walk.” So Abraham took an axe and smashed/crushed his father’s gods except one, the greatest, in whose hands he placed the axe.

In that instance came Terah, who had heard the axe strikes. He ran to see what was happening and found the gods all smashed to the ground. There was only one left, holding the axe in his hands. In front of him there stood the food that Abraham had prepared. Seeing this, Terah became angry and told his son: “What have you done to the gods?” Abraham replied: “It’s not what you think father. I offered these gods food and they all stretched their hands towards it but the greatest had no more to take from. So he became angry, stood up, took the axe and smashed them all to pieces. Don’t you see the axe in his hands?”

Terah, very angry, answered: “What words are these? You’re lying. Do gods have breath or life in them? Do they have any power in them to do the things you told me about? They are of wood and stone. I myself made them. You’re lying when you’re saying that the greatest that was with them destroyed the others. You are the one who placed the axe in his hands.”

Then Abraham told his father: “Why is it then, that you worship these gods that have no power to do anything? Will they ever listen to your prayer when you ask them anything? Will they ever be able to restore you from the enemy’s hands? Will they ever fight for you? It is pure insanity to worship wood and stone and forget the God who created the heavens and the earth and who created us all. Father, leave these gods alone and worship the true God!”

And at one jump Abraham grabbed the axe from the greatest of gods, smashed him too and ran out.

Jesus said to him: “Away from me Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only’.” (Matthew 4:10)

1 John 5:21: “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.”

David and Goliath

The Philistines gathered their forces for war at Socoh, one of Judah's cities; they pitched camp at Socoh and Azeca, at Ephes-Damim. King Saul and Israel's men pitched their camps too; they encamped in the Valley of Elah and drew up their battle line against the Philistines. The Philistines occupied one side of the hill and Israel occupied the other side of the hill, with the valley between them.

A man from the Philistine camp came out between the two armies. His name was Goliath, he was from Gath and he was over nine feet tall. He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels. On his legs he wore bronze greaves and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him.

The Philistine stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel: "Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us." Then the Philistine said, "This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other!"

On hearing the Philistine's words, king Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

Now David was the son of an Ephrathite from the Bethlehem of Juda, named Jesse and who had eight sons. In Saul's time he was old and well advanced in years.

Jesse's three oldest sons had followed Saul to the war; the firstborn who went to war was Eliab, the second was Abinadab; and the third Shammah. David was the youngest. When the three oldest followed Saul, David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand.

Jesse said to his son David: "Take this ephah of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp. Take along these ten cheeses to the commander of their unit. See how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them. They are with Saul and all the men of Israel in the Valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines." Early in the morning David left the flock with a shepherd, loaded up and set out, as Jesse directed.

He reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions, shouting the war cry. Israel and the Philistines were drawing up their lines facing each other.

David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines and greeted his brothers, asking them about their health.

As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. When the Israelites saw the man, they all ran from him in great fear. Everyone of them had been saying: “Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills this Philistine. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his father’s family from taxes in Israel.”

David asked the men standing near him, “What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” They repeated to him what they had been saying and told him, “This is what will be done for the man who kills him.” When Eliab, David’s oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked: “Why have you come down here? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.” David said: “Now what have I done? Can’t I ever speak?” And he turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter and the men answered him as before. What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him.

David said to Saul: “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.” Saul replied: “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy and he has been a fighting man from his youth.” David said to Saul: “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God.” David also added: “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” Saul said to David: “Go and the Lord be with you.”

Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around because he was not used to them. Then he told Saul: “I cannot go in these because I am not used to them.” So he took them off.

Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepard’s bag and with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine. Meanwhile, the Philistine with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David.

He looked David over and saw that he was only a boy, ruddy and handsome and he despised him. The Philistine said to him: “Am I a dog that you come at me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. Then he said: “Come here and I’ll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field.” David said to the Philistine: “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the

Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give all of you into our hands."

As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground. So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him. David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine's sword and drew it from the scabbard. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword.

When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran. Then the men of Israel and Judah surged forward with a shout and pursued the Philistines to the entrance of Gath and to the gates of Ekron. Their dead were strewn along the Shaaraim road to Gath and Ekron. When the Israelites returned from chasing the Philistines they plundered their camp.

David took the Philistine's head and brought it to Jerusalem, and put the Philistine's weapons in his own tent.

God keeps all his promises

In the “Makkot” tract of the Talmud the following is written:

“Once upon a time, Rabbi Gamaliel, Rabbi Eliezer ben Azaria and Rabbi Akiba went on a journey to Jerusalem. Upon arriving on the mountain where once the Temple had been, they saw a fox getting out from what once had been the Most holy place. Rabbi Gamaliel and Rabbi Eliezer started crying, while Rabbi Akiba started laughing.

They asked him then: “Why are you laughing?” and he replied: “But why are you crying?” So they told him: “How are we not supposed to cry? The place where once no Israelite was allowed is now haunted by foxes.” Rabbi Akiba answered: “This is precisely what makes me laugh. Because it is written: ‘Therefore, because of you Zion will be plowed like a field.’” (Micah 3:12) But it is also written: “This is what the Lord almighty says: Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem. (Zechariah 8:4)”

As long as the commandment from Micah was not fulfilled I really feared that neither that from Zechariah would not come true. Now if I see the fulfillment of the first one, I am sure that told by Zechariah will also come true.

Then Rabbi Gamaliel and Rabbi Eliezer told him: “Akiba, you brought us comfort! You brought us comfort!”

Hebrews 6:18 “It is impossible for God to lie.”

Hebrews 10:35 “So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.”

He died for me

It said that once upon a time in the Orient there were two brothers. One of the lived a debauchery life and the other, on the contrary, lived his life in fear of God. The latter one begged the first one in vain, having tears in his eyes, to change. But the latter one went from bad to worse until he came to commit murder.

One night, with his clothes stained with blood, he burst in his brother’s house, screaming: “Brother, rescue me! I have killed a man! The police are after me!” The good one was immediately ready to do all he could to help his brother. They changed clothes in a hurry. The innocent one took on the clothes stained with blood; the guilty one put on the white, unstained clothes.

When the Police arrived the innocent one was arrested.

When judged, he had no thought of defending himself. he would always say: “I know I have to die for this crime!”

So he was condemned to death.

When he was asked what his last wish was, he gave the judges a letter addressed to his brother and asked them to immediately give it to him. So the guilty brother received the letter exactly when the innocent brother was

being executed, a letter with the following contents: “My dear! In this very moment I die in your place, dressed with your clothes that are stained with blood. You, dressed in my clothes, will live in my memory with a holy and righteous face.”

In vain did the guilty brother full of remorse try to stop the execution. He arrived at the place all too late. In vain did he try to become himself condemned. The Justice had been satisfied with sacrificing the innocent brother.

But now, the freed one had the duty to bring fruit of righteousness. His prayer became the following: “Lord, do not let me die in my sin. Another man had died for them. Help me fight against my sin! Make me worthy of wearing the clothes of the one who died for me! Help me keep these clothes unstained!”

Isaiah 53:4-5 “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”

1 Peter 2:23 “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.”

How Abraham came to have faith in God alone

Before Abraham came to know God, his mind had been wandering through the creation saying: “How long will we be worshipping the things made by our own hands when no one else deserves praise and adoration but the earth that produces its crop and maintains our life?” But, when Abraham saw that the earth needed rain and that it did not produce its crop if the heavens would not open to water it, he said to himself: “No! The heaven alone deserves worship!” And he started to look at the sun; he saw how the sun lights the world and makes the plants grow. Then, he said to himself: “By all means only the sun deserves worship!” But at night, when he saw the sunset he said to himself: “The sun cannot be God!” So he started thinking again. He looked at the moon and at the stars, the night lights of the sky and said: “Of course, only these deserve worship!” But as the morning star rose, the stars all disappeared. Abraham understood: “Neither these are gods.” He was sad and thought: “If all these did not have a leader over them, how could one rise and the other set?”

Abraham experienced the same thing as the traveler who once saw a big palace. He wanted to enter, looked for the door but did not find it. He started shouting out loud but no one heard him. Then, looking out high he saw some red linen lay on the roof. After a while, instead of the red linen he saw some white linen lay on the roof. The man spoke up: “There must be someone in this palace. If not, how could things be gathered and replaced with others?” When the man inside the house saw the traveler’s trouble and the just conclusion he had reached, he showed himself to the traveler and told him: “Look, I am the master of the house!”

The same thing happened to Abraham. He saw the sun rising and setting and said to himself: “If they didn’t have any ruler over them, they couldn’t have such an established schedule. So I cannot bow down and worship them. I have to worship the one who rules over them.” And so Abraham’s mind started to look for the truth.

When the Lord saw all his trouble, He looked at him and told him: “You are the one I want to anoint higher above all nations that were before you.”

Hebrews 11:3 “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”

How Rabbi Akiba became famous

Rabbi Akiba had not always been a Christian and a wise man.

In his youth he had had a hard heart and an insensible mind. But, by God's mercy, he had a very wise wife who was dedicated to the Lord. She once told him: "Listen, Akiba, I really want you to become God's child, shining in your faith and a great teacher in Israel."

Akiba, who knew very well his weakness, bowed his head humbly: "What are you talking about woman? My mind is closed to the godly things. And my heart is of stone. It cannot feel love for the one in heavens. This plan of yours is not fit for me."

Then his wife told him: "Come with me at the village's well." When they got there, she showed him: "Can you see that small hollow in stone made above the well, where the rope always rubs?" "I can see it" "Who rubbed the stone like that?" "I don't know." "Let me tell you. It was made by the rope." "But how could the smooth rope rub the stone so hard?" "It could do that through perseverance. The rope rubbed the stone today, it rubbed tomorrow, it rubbed day by day and year after year. It never stopped. And after many years, this hollow was formed."

The wife went on: "This is what I advise you, Akiba. Rub day by day and year after year your stony heart and mind with the smooth rope of God's Word! At first no result will be noticed! But be perseverant and do not give up. And you will find a place in you for God."

Akiba understood that. But he still had one objection: "The world will laugh at me!" "I know the cure for that too!"

Back home, she made him load a donkey's back with earth. In this earth Akiba needed to plant violets.

When the violets grew beautiful on the donkey's back, she advised him to take the donkey and walk it around the city.

He did so, but came back home very troubled. "What have you done to me, woman? All the children followed me and mocked me! They had never seen such a stupid man who planted violets on a donkey's back." She replied: "Don't get upset, go again tomorrow!"

He mumbled something, but obeyed. The second day he came back home even more sad: "Today it was even harder. The entire city laughed at me. They all shouted: 'The lunatic! The lunatic!' and threw stones at me."

But she did not give up: "Go to the city!" And so she sent him day by day to the city with the donkey that had flowers on his back, until the city became used to him. So no one laughed at him nor paid any attention to him.

"See?" – she told him – "it will also be like that in your faith life. First, people will laugh at you when they see that you follow God. But in time, they will get used to it and you will be able to serve the Lord peacefully."

Akiba understood this lesson too. He persevered, he bore all the mocking and became a great light in Israel.

Hebrews 12:1 “Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

Hebrews 6:12 “We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.”

Hebrews 12:2 “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

In the tomb

There was once a king who was told that one of his subjects woke up in the middle of the night and robbed the dead of their clothes. So the king commanded two of his friends to trace him.

The two followed the guilty one and saw him entering a tomb. But they saw that he was not robbing the dead, but instead he was talking to himself: “Woe to you, my body! Woe to you oh haunted soul! Woe to you oh greedy mind and to you oh poor man, made of dust! What is your hope? What will you say when you come to sit here, you who loved yourself only and you who gathered many riches? What good did it do you to get angry and scream so many times? Why don’t you think about your own being? Whom did you trust? Who will help you? Where are your friends? You only did what was wrong! When you die, your sin will surely reach you. You have sown and now you will reap. You despised people and you will be despised. Humble yourself, o wretched soul! You have defied yourself through your bad deeds and you have trampled your worth to the ground. Look for your origin and recognize your Creator! Worms will eat you, oh body! Fire will torture you! What will you do when you reach this place, when you will have to move into the house of darkness and fear? Here the heaven is never clear, the sun is a dark ball, the moon and stars do not shine. Where will you run? Here is your place. What good will all the palaces and big rooms do to you? As your neighbors have been placed in the tomb so you yourself will be placed in it. You will stay here as if you were never alive. Leave what you did badly behind and turn to God! Think about what awaits you! If you could escape death, you could do whatever you wanted. But you cannot escape it. And from all the things you did on earth it is only repentance that will give you eternal fruit.”

When the king found about all these strange words he was greatly amazed. So both the king and his subjects stopped doing wrong.

Matthew 4:17 “Jesus said: ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’”

Matthew 6:19-20 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heave, where moth and rust do not break in and steal.”

1 Timothy 6:7 “For we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it.”

Let us not be deceived by appearance

A well known doctor decided once to travel around the world. He told himself: “The one who bestows people science has enlightened my soul and has discovered to me the secrets of curing. There are not many people in this country that know as much as I do. But maybe I can find in other lands people that know more than I do. I will do my best to learn from them. For wisdom is worth more than gold. Especially the art of curing is much more valuable as it prolongs people’s lives.”

So the doctor set off. He went from country to country. He only had with him a mule on which he traveled and a small bundle with medicine. Wherever he went he took interest in the poor sick people and tried to cure them.

When he reached Canaan the doctor – his name was Timothy and he was a Macedonian – made a halt near the town of Betar. As he was extremely tired, he unsaddled the mule, placed his medicine bundle under his head and fell asleep near the road. The mule was grazing on a field next to him.

A stray man was passing by and when he saw the doctor sleeping, he said: “I am lucky! He took off his dirty rags and took on the doctor’s clean and bright clothes. After that he saddled the mule and took off.

When the wise man woke up from his sleep he noticed that he was naked and without shoes. Some rags laid on the ground before him. The mule was not there anymore. He understood that a stray man had done that. Having no other solution, he took on the rags and said: “Right are the words of the Scriptures: ‘Sleeps makes people go poor.’” He took his bundle and went to the city.

While walking on the streets of Betar he heard a woman screaming and wailing. He went in the house to see why she was crying so hard. There he saw a young man lying sick. He was dying. He was barely breathing. Three doctors were staying beside his bedside. They all had lost hope that the sick one would ever get well. The mother and father both mourned for their child.

Timothy immediately realized that the disease was not hard to cure. He wanted to help as he took pity on the poor young man who could die in his youth. So he said to those around him: “Listen to me brothers. Entrust me the sick man and I will cure him by the power God has graced me and with the help of the medicine that I have with me.”

The doctors looked at the wretched man, burst into laughter and mocked him.

When seeing how the doctors laugh, the father got angry and said: “We are in deep mourning and you feel like joking. Get out of my house!” With these words he grabbed Timothy by the hair and pulled him out of the house, slamming the door after him. The Macedonian was so surprised and so ashamed that he could not even open his mouth. So he went away humbled and sad.

When the doctors had finally left the house of the sick man, the young man's mother said to her husband: "Why were you so quick in judging that poor man and sent him away? If he dared to speak so in front of doctors, he must have known what he was talking about. Perhaps he knew other doctors in his life and had found out things from them. He only had a bundle with him in which he was saying he had cures. You were wrong."

These words only made the man angrier: "Shut up, woman! It is not said in vain 'Woman – long dress, short mind'. How could such a beggar know anything about medicine? He was insolent in saying that he could cure him, as if he were Timothy the Macedonian, the well-known doctor! Perhaps all he had in his bundle was mould bread and an extra shirt. How quick you are to believe, you women! Shut up. It is better for women to shut up than to speak!"

That night the young man died leaving his parents in deep pain. Day and night they were crying as he had been their only son.

After a few days Timothy said: "It is time to make myself known to people. If I go on like this I will end up badly." So he started shouting in a loud voice: "Listen to the people! I am Timothy the doctor. Whoever has a sick person in their house can bring him to me and I will cure him with God's help."

Those passing by thought he was crazy. They all laughed at him.

As no one believed him, he sat and started to pull out all kinds of potions and ointments. He offered them to the ones around him. The strong smell of the cures drew more and more people around him. They were all asking him: "How can you be the true Timothy if you are dressed in rags? You should be wearing clothes of gold and purple!" Then Timothy told them what had happened to him.

Full of trust, people started bringing to him all the sick men that other doctors had abandoned. He cured them and performed wonders. No one doubted that he was truly Timothy the Macedonian.

The news also reached the man whose son had died. His wife was full of sadness and told the man: "Woe to you, angry man! Woe to me for having taken you as my husband! It is through your pride that you lost your son and have ruined both of us! You were very wrong in not listening to me!"

The man remained speechless.

He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

(Isaiah 53:2,3)

And yet he is Messiah. The Jewish people that rejected him became misery, while all those who believed in him, either Jews, or people from the nations, have been saved from sin, healed in their souls and received as God's children.

Miriam sacrifices her own sons

Miriam, the daughter of Tanhum, was imprisoned with her seven sons and then brought to Caesar, who told the oldest of her boys: "Worship my god!" The boy replied: "I won't deny the Holy one of Israel who told us: 'I am your God'". Then the boy was taken away and killed. The second son was called out: "Worship this god!" But the boy replied: "I won't deny the Lord, my God who said 'Have no other gods but me'." So he was also killed. The third one was called and he was ordered the same thing. The young man answered: "I won't leave the Lord, my God who commended never to worship other gods." Again he was also killed. The fourth boy was also called and heard the same order. So he replied: "I will not dishonor the God who advised us: 'Do not bow down in front of another god!'" So he was also slaughtered. After that, Miriam's fifth boy was brought in front of Caesar and he was also commanded to worship that god. He said: "Shall I deny my Lord, the one who said 'Listen Israel, I am your Lord, your one and only God'?" So he was also executed. They then brought the sixth one in front of the Emperor and he was similarly spoken to. The young man said: "I do not want to turn away from the Lord and there is none like Him!" He was killed too.

In the end they brought the youngest of Miriam's sons, to bow down before that god. So the boy said: "I want to ask some advice from my mother." He turned towards her and said: "What shall I do?" Miriam replied: "Don't you want to be near the Creator just as your brothers? Do not listen to this godless man and do not stray from your brothers." So the boy turned towards the king and was asked: "So, will you obey me?" The boy replied: "I shall not stray from my God who said: 'Today you chose me as your God.'" The king told him: "I will throw to the ground the ring with the face of my god on it; bow down and pick it up and do my will." The boy replied: "Woe to you, oh king! You want to keep your dignity before your subjects and that is why you ask me to do this. But all the dignity is to be given to the Holy one of Israel." So he was quickly taken out and killed.

Miriam said to the king: "Let me kiss my children!" And she was given permission to do so. She turned to her dead sons and told them: "Say to your father Abraham not to pride himself with one sacrificed son, for I had seven sons and I have sacrificed them all." And she kissed her children. Then she also died. There was a heavenly voice that called out: "Strong is this mother's children."

Jesus says: "Whoever loves his mother or father more than he loves me, is not worthy of me; and one who loves a son or a daughter more than he loves me, is not worthy of me."

Moses at the well

Moses was in the habit of choosing solitary places where he could practice the so unusual art of talking to himself. God's spirit came upon him in those times.

It is said that one day he lied under a tree next to a well and let his thoughts at will. He then saw a man coming who drank some water and then went away. But the man lost a bag that he had without noticing. After a while, there came another man at the well, he also drank water and saw the fallen bag. He picked it up happily and went on his way. After him, there came a third traveler who made a halt at the well and stood there for a while.

Meanwhile, the first one realized that he had lost his bag and said: "I surely lost it at the well when I bowed to drink some water." He ran back quickly and saw the man sitting. He asked him: "What are you doing here?" The other answered: "I am tired and I want to get some rest here. I ate and drank something and now I want to move/go on." Then, the man who lost his money told him: "You must have found my bag, the one I lost here. It can't be another person as I have just lost it." The blamed man replied: "My friend, I found no bag of yours here. Do not blame me for this robbery. Perhaps you lost it somewhere else or maybe you didn't even lose it at all."

And then a big quarrel started between them. Then they started fighting. Moses wanted to stop them. But before he could reach them, the one who had lost his bag killed the other one and ran away.

Then Moses felt compassionate to the one who suffered unfair death and even wondered how God could let such things happen. He said: "My Lord, I have witnessed three unfair deeds. Firstly, you allowed one to lose his fortune. Secondly, you allowed another one delight in something that was not his. And thirdly you did not prevent the death of an innocent person. And as if this were not enough, the loser became the killer. Please explain to me, oh mighty God, how am I to understand these things?"

God said to his servant Moses: "You think that the way I acted is wrong. And this is how people wonder at the many things I do, because they do not know that every action has its consequences. The one who lost the bag was indeed a good person, but his father had robbed this money. The robbed one was the father of the one who found the bag. That is why I planned everything like this, so that the owner's son could reach his right fortune. Then, the one who was killed had never said that the bag was his, but once, a long time ago, he killed the brother of his own killer. His deed had no witnesses and the blood of the killed one remained unavenged. That is why I allowed the killer to be presumed by the victim's brother and then be killed. And there are many other things that I allow to happen on earth and man cannot understand. No one can examine my ways and most of the times no one can understand why a mean person lives well and a good one the opposite."

The faithful one believes in God. The faithful one believes that God has enough good and righteous reasons to act the way he does in all situations. No matter how bitter or hard to understand some things that happen to different persons seem, the faithful glorifies the Lord in his heart.

Moses' Portrait

When Moses brought out the Israelites from Egypt and the news reached the other nations, they were all overwhelmed by fear and wonder and asked among themselves who could the man who did so many valiant deeds have been. An Arab king wanted it very badly to see Abraham's son and sent a chosen painter in the Hebrew camp to make a portrait of the leader of Jacob's tribes. The painter went, painted Moses' portrait and brought back the painting to his prince. The king called out all the wise men and asked them to read from the portrait the inner being and the character of the one in it and to discover from his features the mystery of his power. All the wise men looked at the portrait and unanimously gave the following answer: "Judging after what we can see, we have to confess that this well known man must be one of bad character, full of pride, greed and strong passions, one that can encompass all the vices that degrade the human soul." The king became very upset and said: "I think you all want to make fun of me. I can only hear good words about this wonderful man from everywhere."

The wise men and the artist got scared and tried to justify themselves in a humble manner. The wise men blamed the painter and said that the painting was not properly done. The painter, in his turn, blamed the wise men who did not draw the proper conclusions.

The king wanted to know the truth and went personally with his horsemen in Israel's camp. He saw Moses, God's man, and his face from a distance. He took out the portrait and compared it to the original. They matched perfectly. The prince was very surprised at this. He went to the prophet's tent, he bowed down, fell facedown in front of him and told him what had happened to the painter's work. He said: "May you grant me grace, man of God. Before I saw your face, I thought that the painter's work was wrong. Now that I see you with my own eyes, I realize that the wise men who eat at my table have deceived me and that their art is but deceit."

Then Moses answered the prince: "It is not so, sir. You have to render justice to both your painter and your wise men. If I were not how your thinkers described me, I would be likened to a piece of dried wood that is free of any vice. Yes, my sir, I cannot avoid confessing to you that all the wrongs your wise men read in my portrait are in me and even many more. But thanks to God's grace I am now sovereign over them and the opposite is now my second nature. This is the cause of my having such a great name and glory both in heavens and on earth."

Ephesians 2:1 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins." "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Rabbi Hofeth Haiim and the thief

There was a rabbi who was nicknamed Hofeth Haiim, which means 'the one who desires life'. His holiness was very well known among the Jews. As he was a very faithful man, he was also considered one of the pillars of the Israel back then.

One day, one of his disciples was unrightfully accused of spaying for the enemy. As anti-Semitism was very powerful, it seems that a great persecution awaited the Jews if the blame was proven to be true. All the Jewish communities were tensed.

The day of the trial came. Rabbi Hofeth Haiim was the main witness for the defense, but the Court would not listen to him as he refused to swear.

So one of the lawyers said: 'Your honor, I will take the liberty to tell you a short story from this man's life in order to convince you that such a man can be trusted upon his word only, although he does not make an oath.'

So the lawyer began, 'One day, Rabbi Hofeth Haiim went from house to house to gather support for poor people. Because of the great name that he was having among people, he managed to gather an important amount of money that he carried in a box. As he was walking by on the street with the box in hand, a man came to him asking him to change some small money into a bigger banknote. Rabbi Hofeth Haiim gladly opened the box. The man who had long spied on him, quickly snatched the box from the Rabbi's hand and ran away.'

The Rabbi was terrified. Not because he had lost the money that was destined to help the needy. In his heart he quickly made the decision – he would replace the money from his own fortune. But he shuddered at the thought of the sin the man who had stolen the money destined to the widows and orphans had burdened himself with.

So that God would not consider the thief's deed as a sin, Hofeth Haiim shouted after him, 'Wait! Don't go away! I am giving you this money! You did not steal it from me! It is all yours!'

Then the judge stopped the lawyer, 'Sir, do you really believe what you are telling us now?'

Much to everyone's surprise, the lawyer replied, 'No, I cannot imagine that so much goodness could ever exist in man! I cannot believe this story that I have heard from others.'

The judge became upset, 'You are very bold to tell us such stories that you yourself do not believe.'

'Do not be offended, your honor, but allow me to ask you one question that will also settle the situation. Has anyone ever said such things about you, your honor? I for one know that no one has ever said such things about me, nor could such things be invented about me. My deeds are totally different in nature. Your honor, just think how holy this rabbi must be that people weave such wonderful stories about him.'

The judge, impressed by this argument, listened to the rabbi's witness and freed the accused.

Many find it hard to believe that Jesus is born of a virgin, that he had performed so many wonders that he raised from the dead and ascended to heaven.

But if he had been a sinner, a man who defied God as his Pharisee enemies considered him, how come that people weave so many wonderful stories about him?

Whether we believe these things or not, the mere fact that these things have been told about him are proof of Jesus' purity, power and divine character. Once we are convinced about these things we no longer find it hard to believe that in his life many wonderful things happened.

Rabbi Iohanan ben Zaccai and Titus

It was the year 70 a.Ch. Jerusalem surrounded by the Roman armies was experiencing moments of great terror. God's wrath fell upon the people because of Christ's crucifixion. Hunger made thousands of victims. Mothers tore their own children up to eat them. The Romans forbade the provision of food supplies into the city.

The only thing the Romans allowed mockingly was the burial of the dead outside the city.

Terribly stricken, the city was still holding on. The population did not want to surrender.

Rabbi Iohanan ben Zaccai, the spiritual leader of the Jews, asked his students to place him in a coffin as if he were dead. He was taken outside the city in the coffin. Once outside he made his way out of the coffin and managed to reach Titus's tent, the commander of the Roman forces.

He fell to his knees and begged him: "Master! Take mercy on the crowd of innocent children from the city and on the mothers who starve!"

"Stop!" answered Titus. "You lied from the very first word you uttered!"

Iohanan ben Zaccai, who had never defiled himself by lying, did not understand what the Roman commander wanted to say.

But the latter continued: "You are a liar from your first word! You called me 'Master'! But if I am the Master, why don't you all lovingly open the gates for me? If I am your master, why don't you receive me with praises and triumphant songs? If indeed you consider me your master, why do I have to besiege the city?"

Iohanan ben Zaccai had no answer to all that. For the first time in his life he defiled himself with a lie.

For the holidays we go to the synagogue and pray the following words: "Hameleh haiosev al kise ram venisa" – The king that sits on his throne be praised!

But this is hypocrisy. If we really considered God as the King of Israel, we would all obey him with love all year long, we would honor his commandments, we would make him the master of our houses and hearts.

But this way, we only praise him with our lips.

When God came among us, humans, as a human, in the person of Jesus, the Messiah, we crucified him and mocked him. And since then we constantly deny our true king, but continue to confess him as God. "Our master, our king."

If God is the Master, we have to lead a life of obedience.

Samson and Delilah

Samson, one of the judges of Israel who was known for his physical power, loved a woman from the Valley of Sorek. Her name was Delilah.

The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said: "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver." Delilah said to Samson: "Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued." Samson answered her: "If anyone ties me with fresh thongs that have not been dried, I'll become as weak as any other man." Then the rulers of the Philistines brought her seven fresh thongs that had not been dried and she tied him with them.

With some men hidden in the room, she called to him: "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the thongs as easily as a piece of string snaps when it comes close to a flame. So they did not discover the secret of his strength.

Delilah told Samson: "You have made a fool of me; you lied to me. Come now tell me how you can be tied." He told her "If anyone ties me securely with new ropes that have never been used, I'll become as weak as any other man." So Delilah took new ropes and tied him with them. Then, with men hidden in the house, she called to him: "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the ropes off his arms as if they were threads.

Delilah said to Samson: "Until now you have been making a fool of me and lying to me. Tell me how you can be tied." He replied, "If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric on the loom and tighten it with a pin, I'll become as weak as any other man." So while he was sleeping, Delilah took the seven braids of his head, wove them into the fabric and tightened it with the pin. Then she told him: "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He woke from his sleep and pulled up the pin and the loom with the fabric.

Then she told him: "How can you say 'I love you', when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength." With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death. So he opened his heart to her and told her everything: "No razor has ever been used on my head. I have been a Nazarite set apart to God since birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would be as weak as any other man." When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, "Come back once more; he has told me everything." So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands. Having put him to sleep on her lap, she called a man to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him. Then she told him: "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He woke up from his sleep and thought: "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did

not know that the Lord had left him. Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding in the prison. But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon, their god and to celebrate saying: "Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy into our hands." When the people saw him, they praised their god saying: "Our god has delivered our enemy into our hands, the one who laid waste our land and multiplied our slain." While they were in high spirits they shouted: "Bring out Samson to entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison and he performed for them.

When they stood him among the pillars, Samson said to the servant who held his hand, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them." Now the temple was crowded with men and women, all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform.

Then Samson prayed to the Lord: "O, Sovereign Lord, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes." Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said: "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he was alive. Then his brothers and his father's whole family went down to get him. They brought him back and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah, his father. He had led Israel as judge for twenty years.

The constantly opened door

The daughter of a very pious woman ran away from home and became a great-deprived woman. For about ten years she lived in debauchery and gave her mother no sign of life. However, after ten years she suddenly woke up full of remorse, took the train and arrived late at night in her little hometown.

She went to her mother's home. She was very surprised when she saw light in her mother's room, although it was that late at night. The girl was frightened: "Perhaps my mother is sick as the light was never on at this time of night." She wanted to knock at the gate, but the gate was also opened. So her anguish became greater: "Surely my mother is sick" – she said to herself – "the doctor must have been sent for."

When she placed her foot on the first step she suddenly heard her mother's voice: "Rachel, is that you?" "Yes mother", she replied crying. "How come is the gate opened at night?" "It's been ten years since you left and the door has never ceased to stay opened", the mother answered. "And why is the light on in your room?" "Ever since you left I have been waiting for you," replied the mother again.

Jesus says: "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37)

"Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him and to our God, for he will freely pardon." (Isaiah 55:7)

The high official driven away

Once upon a time a king was speaking to one of his high officials about a very important affair in the state. While discussing, the king saw one of his children destroying an expensive toy that he had warned the child to keep in good care.

The king called for the kid. The boy came, but fearing his punishment, he did not dare to come closer. Then the king became very compassionate about the child, kissed him, placed the child on his lap and caressed him.

Then he addressed the high official again in order to go on with their affair.

But the king saw that the high official did not approve of his behavior towards the child. Then he asked the official: "Do you have any children?" The high official said: "I have wives and mistresses that bore me 30 children." The king also asked: "Do you approach your children as I do?" Then the high official started bragging: "On my life, I have never kissed any of them. I have never placed any of them on my lap."

The king then gathered together all his servants. When these were all gathered, the king told them exactly what he had spoken with the high official. And all those who knew the high official approved that indeed that was the way he behaved towards all his children.

Then the king became very furious and said: "On the Father in heaven that has reached all his creatures' hearts with his love towards all his babies! You can no longer remain in my service! You have no mercy for your own children! How then could you show compassion towards other people's children?"

Matthew 19:14 "Let the little children come to me!"

Psalms 103:13 "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him."

Ephesians 1:7 "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding."

The meaning of sour apples

It is said that a rich gardener thought of planting the best apples in the world in his garden. After wanders around the world looking after the most tasteful seed, he started engrafting and practicing other artificial selections and eventually managed at the end of his life, to have a type of apples that were unsurpassed in taste and beauty. Full of joy, he went to one of his friends and told him: “Take some time to come to my place and eat some apples as you have never had before!” The friend promised he would come, but never showed up.

He repeated the invitation again and again. But every time the man replied: “I’ll come!”, but never came. This made the gardener upset. Why wouldn’t one come to eat apples?

One day he asked for an explanation: “You have to tell me honestly why you never accepted my invitation?” So the friend replied: “Let me explain to you! Once I passed by your garden. The wind had blown some of the apples that stood along the ground. Knowing that you have the best apples, I bowed and took one, thinking that I would be happy. But what a horror when I had bitten out of it! Never in my life had I had something sourer than that! Pure vinegar! So I realized then that you mock people with your bragging and more, you are the one who had not the best apples, but the worst apples in the world.”

How the gardener laughed: “So you also fell in that trap, didn’t you?” and then explained: “As I am having such a special type of apples in the middle of the garden, I had a great problem to solve – namely how to protect by fortune of thieves and the multitude of children that would have damaged my garden. So I had an idea – to plant around the fence some apple trees that would bear inedible fruits, so that both the thief and the child that would jump over the fence, would taste the apples and become outraged. This way I would eat my tasty apples in peace together with my guests.”

This is how God also circled his garden with a row of sour apples. Jesus says to those who want to follow God’s way: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

All men will hate you because of me! (Matthew 10:22)

These are the sour apples that God used to surround his garden and that frighten many. The ones he chose and that enter the door – the door is Jesus – discover the eternal joys.

The meaningless of worldly praise

It is said that in his conquering crusades, Alexander the Great reached a country where the only survivor of the royal family spent all his time in the cemetery. When Alexander called him to award him the throne, the man refused and said: "It's been years since I try to differentiate the kings' bones from those of the beggars and I cannot make it out. What good would all these honors do me?" "Indeed, but if you are a king you at least lead a happy life on this earth." "I do not believe in this happiness, because there is no life without death here, no youth without old age, no fortune without need, no happiness without pain, no health without sickness, no truth without mistakes and no cleanness without sins. I do not need the throne!" the young man said.

Ecclesiastes 1:2 "Meaningless! Meaningless! says the Teacher. Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."

James 4:14 "You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."

The merciless rich man and Lazarus

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.

At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even dogs came and licked his sores.

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried.

In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

The rich man answered, 'The I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

Abraham said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'

How to serve

Simon the righteous said: "Do not be like the slaves who serve their masters desiring reward; on the contrary, be like the slaves that serve their masters without thinking about their reward and may the fear of heaven be upon you."

The prodigal son

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in the whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.

He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'

So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

The older brother became angry and refused to go in.

So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'

The victorious painter

Two parties of painters fought for supremacy before a king and each of the two spoke highly of their own way of creating. So the king decided to ask the artists from both parties to paint the walls of a big room. The room was split into two by a curtain and each party received half of it. After they would finish the work, the curtain would be taken away and the winning party and the losing one would be proclaimed. Everything took place just as the king commanded.

Before starting to work, the first party gathered all the shiniest colors, while the others started leveling and polishing the walls that were to be ornamented.

When the first party had finished working, the others declared that they too had finished, although they had not painted anything. The king told them: "How can you say that you have created something, when you haven't even used colors nor painted the walls?" But their answer was: "Take the curtain away and you will see who worked better!" So they took away the curtain that split the two parts of the room. And the half that the party who had not painted anything, but leveled and polished the walls, showed the same paintings as the other half, only in shinier colors. Through hard work and perseverance the walls were made to shine as if they were mirrors and so reflected what was in front of them.

The human soul can, likewise, be made to thank God: 1. By doing perfect, clean works. But who can do that? 2. By self cleaning and polishing through faith in Jesus the Messiah, without any other deeds, so that it can mirror God's glory and his wonderful works. It is through faith that this soul becomes victorious.

The way of peace

During the war between Hyrcanus and Aristonul, a righteous man was forcibly brought in Hyrcanus's camp to curse Aristobul and his camp. He prayed the following: "O Lord, king of all the world! Because the ones sitting next to me are your people and those under siege are your priests too, I am begging you not to listen to the prayers of the friends close to me but neither to the prayers of latter ones." Onias was killed because of this prayer that contained the way of peace, which is unknown to men.

Jesus says: "This is my command – love one another as I have loved you." John 13:12

Ephesians 2:14 "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations."

Acts 17:26 "From one man he had made every nation of men."

The Wise Little Fish and the Fox

King Antiohus Epiphanes had issued a decree that no Jew was allowed to circumcise his children, to keep the Sabbath, to study God's law or to fulfill any other practice of the Jewish religion.

Then Rabbi Akiba put on his prayer cloak, he put on his phylacteries and stood in front of his house to read the Book of the Law, to meditate and say his prayer.

Another rabbi, one of the more frightened, ran quickly to him, "What are you doing, Akiba? You are getting yourself killed. You are defying the king! You'll be in big trouble!"

But Akiba calmly answered him: "Let me tell you a story!"

Once a fox was walking along the bank of a river and was craving for a fish that was swimming in the shallow waters of the river. Then she told the fish: 'Dear fish, I want all the best for you and that is why I want to warn you. There are lots of big fish in the river that are going to get you and then swallow you up. You'd better get out of the water, come on the bank and so save your life.' However, the little fish answered: "Thank you very much dear fox for the advice you have just given me. But I reason that if even here in the river, my natural environment and the place God Himself designed for me, I am in danger, then I am not allowed to get out of the river, because out there sure death is waiting for me.

This is how I think for myself as well. If I fulfill God's will and am still exposed to great danger, what should I expect if I leave God?

No! I'd rather remain in God's word and leave all my worries in the hands of our Father in heaven."

With an angel in the world

A believer fasted for many days and asked the heavenly Father to show him an angel. His wish was fulfilled. An angel appeared to him and asked him: "Do you want anything from me? I want to gratify you a wish." The believer replied: "I want to travel with you, to see your activity on earth and then use it and have some of your wisdom."

The angel answered: "You won't understand what I do and you will ask me to explain to you the reasons of my deeds." The believer assured him that he would not do that and settled to go forever together, but that the journey would end when the believer would ask the angel questions.

They both set out and entered the home of a very poor man who only had a cow. The man and his wife were sitting in front of their gate. When they saw the travelers coming they were happy and welcomed them and gave them the best seats they had. Then they brought out the best of their food. The two ate and then slept there over night. Morning came and the two wanted to leave, when the angel said a prayer that made the cow fall dead. The believer noticed that and was surprised. He almost went crazy. He said to himself: "Is this the reward this poor man has for honoring us, that his cow, his only fortune, should be taken away from him?" And so he asked the angel: "Why did you kill the cow of this man who received us so well?" The angel said: "Remember the deal we have that you would not speak unless you want to stop traveling with me. When you decide to stop I will tell you everything." The believer asked no more.

So they went further on another day and when night came they reached the house of a rich man. The man did not even look at them and did nothing to receive them well. They ate nothing in his house.

The house of the rich man had a broken wall and the master was busy repairing it. When morning came the angel prayed and the wall was restored as if by a miracle. The believer's anguish and sadness grew deeper, but he held to himself the desire to ask the angel for the reasons of his actions.

They went on traveling. Again night came and they reached a big synagogue. The benches there were of gold and silver.

When the two entered, one of the parishioners asked: "Who would like to offer supper to these two beggars tonight?" One replied: "Some bread and a little water would surely do." No one bothered to treat the two travelers the way they should. Before leaving, the angel said to the ones in the synagogue: "May God help you become great and well known!" These words brought more misery to the sadness the believer lived, but he remained silent.

At sunset, the travelers reached another city. Here people welcomed them with great joy. Their faces were smiling and they offered them the best house as shelter. There they also had dinner. Upon leaving, the angel prayed: "May only one in this city be great and well-known, oh Lord!"

This time the believer could help it no more and told the angel: "You have to let me know your secret!" The angel replied: "If you are willing to

leave me I will explain to you all the reasons for my actions. So that you know: The poor man's cow was very sick. All in that house would have died if they continued drinking from its milk. That is why I prayed for the cow to die. If the rich man had torn down the whole wall he would have found a great gold and silver treasure. But to prevent this, I repaired the wall. I wished for the cold-hearted people from the synagogue to become great and well known because this is a great misfortune that brings quarrel. Where there are too many great people, the place becomes desolate eventually. To the righteous I wished to have only one head and my prayer will do them well. Their synagogue will become stronger because of their unity."

In the end the angel advised the believer: "I am now leaving you and I want to teach you some useful things. Do not wonder if you see a bad man doing well. His happiness leads to misfortune. If you see a righteous man in trouble and sad because of his hardships, who is hungry, thirsty or naked, do not grow angry and do not doubt the Maker's providence. On the contrary, praise Him as righteous and believe in Him, for God is righteous, his judgments are true and his eyes see men's deeds. Who can tell him what he has to do?"

1 Peter 2:23 "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."

Romans 8:29 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

**Help For Refugees, Inc.,
Michael Wurmbrand, Director.
PO Box 5161,
Torrance, Ca. 90510, USA.**

Email: hfr@helpforrefugees.com;

Internet address:

<https://www.helpforrefugees.com>

We help orphans and elderly Christians (many in their 80s, even 90s) who had been imprisoned for their faith in present or former communist countries

