

USING UKRAINIAN TALES TO TEACH BIBLICAL TRUTHS

RATIONALE AND LESSON PLANS

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RATIONALE

Following Paul's Example in Athens

In the first century, the apostle Paul was in a cross-cultural situation in the city of Athens. Normally, Paul had been speaking with Jews about Jesus in each of the cities he was visiting. Here he began speaking to a group of people who no longer were familiar with the Jewish context of the Messiah - these were the Epicureans and the Stoics. They were confused with his discussion of Jesus and the resurrection. Thus, Paul used a different tactic. This is how Luke explains it in Acts 17: 18-31.

Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him [Paul]. And some said, "What does this babbling wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, *I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.'* [italics added] What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for

““In him we live and move and have our being”

*as even some of your own poets have said,
 “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ [italics added]*

Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (English Standard Version)

On two occasions in Paul’s discourse with the Greeks in this passage, he uses objects and stories from the culture to teach them a Biblical truth. He first uses an idol and its inscription ‘to the unknown god’ to direct them to the true God. And secondly, he quotes one of their poets to prove a Biblical point; that is, that we are God’s creation and thus, we cannot create God. I believe that Paul was using stories from the Greek’s culture to give them a bridge so that they would understand Biblical truths. We can follow his example in using stories from the culture to use as a bridge to teach Biblical truth.

Following Youth For Christ’s Evangelism Model

The organization Youth for Christ has been training youth around the world in “3 story evangelism.” This training centers around the principle that evangelism includes my story, their story and God’s story. The student training handbook starts by helping the young person understand their own story by abiding in Christ. The next section teaches them to discover the story of the person they are talking to. The handbook states, “To share my faith with my friend, I must discover their story. Why? Because I can’t expose someone to Jesus’ love without giving it to them myself. Truly listening is an act of love. And I can’t suggest that Jesus is their answer

unless I first know their questions” (Youth for Christ 2004:19). This coincides with Paul’s example in Athens where he understood the culture and stories of the people he was talking to. The final part of Youth for Christ’s training to understand God’s story and how to connect the student to the gospel. Stories from the culture or person we are trying to reach can be the bridge to God’s truth.

Storytelling

Storytelling is more than a method, it is an educational philosophy. The lesson plans given here are to be a guide to the teacher as they tell the stories of Ukraine and scripture. There are many reasons to use storytelling to share Biblical truth. Dr. Tom Steffen has listed eight important reasons in his book *Reconnecting God’s Story to Ministry*:

- Storytelling is a universal form of communication.
- Approximately two-thirds of the world’s population prefer the concrete mode of learning.
- Stories connect with our imagination and emotions.
- Every major religion uses stories to socialize its young, convert potential followers and indoctrinate members.
- Approximately 75 percent of the Bible is narrative.
- Stories create instant evangelists.
- Jesus taught theology through stories.
- Stories are metaphors of life. (2005: 27)

Some stories within a culture seem to mimic the Biblical stories and morals that are found in scripture. These stories give us an easy bridge to cross to the truths we want to convey. Other stories from the culture may be the rival story to Biblical absolutes, yet these can also have a good purpose in the re-telling. As Steffen writes, “Good stories will not allow listeners or viewers to sit on the sideline, rather, they demand reflection on the actions of the highlighted characters as they try to resolve the conflict. Agrippa found this out with Paul’s faithstory (Acts 26:28). When re-

flection happens, story confusion often results. This is because the rival stories challenge existing allegiance stories, particularly in relation to religion. Followers of Christ, however, can trust the Holy Spirit to bring clarity to this confusion” (2005:145).

HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM

There are many ways a person can use the following lesson plans. They have been designed for a Christian teacher to use in a small group with Ukrainians. It is possible to use the lessons in any culture, but the original story will not have the meaning intended for the main audience. Each of these stories are intended to be use as individual lessons.

Storytelling Seminar. The curriculum could also be used as a seminar to teach teachers the value of using stories in teaching. If this is the case, the following outline for a 4-part seminar could be used:

- I. The Rationale for Storytelling (pages 1-4)
- II. An Example of Using A Moral Story (pages 5-8)
- III. An Example of Using A Rival Story (pages 9-12)
- IV. An Example of Using A Biblical Story (pages 13-16)

The stories have been chosen from hundreds of Ukrainian folk tales, oral epics, fables and Bible lessons that are prevalent in both Ukrainian and Russian culture. Most of these stories are unknown in the West and only have recently been translated into English. The author chose them based on personal preference and to give a variety of stories that Ukrainians could identify with.

A MORAL STORY: A UKRAINIAN FAIRY TALE
HONESTY AND DISHONESTY

Lesson Goal

To help students to choose to live honestly in a dishonest world.

Lesson Objectives

1. To understand that it is better to live honestly (or sow to the Spirit) than to live dishonestly (or sow to the flesh).
2. To accept the fact that we live in a dishonest world.
3. To recognize that rewards often are delayed in life, and “not to get weary.” (Ephesians 6:10)

Story Source and Background

This story has been told in Ukraine for hundreds of years orally. It is taken from the book The Magic Egg and Other Tales from Ukraine by Barbara J. Suwyn. College students in Ukraine today were asked if they knew this story, and most of them replied, “Definitely.”

Preparation Needed

Read and know the story in your own words. The story can be found in its entirety in the Appendix. If you would like to dress in native Ukrainian and act as a wise “Teller of Tales,” this may enhance the presentation. The most important thing is to know the story very well so that you do not have to use notes.

Opening

Memorize the opening line of the story: “Once there were two cousins, one rich and one poor....”

Summary of the Ukrainian Story

1. Setting, characters, and plot

The setting of the story is in fairy tale kingdom. There are two main characters, a poor cousin who is interested in living life honestly, and a rich cousin, who is interested in living his life dishonestly and for himself. The story begins with a bet between the two cousins to see if they can find any person who believes that it pays to live life honestly. After losing the bet, the poor cousin overhears some evil spirits talking about the problems they have caused that day and the solutions to the problems.

The next day the poor cousin helps everyone out with the magic solutions, and ends up saving the princess from death and becoming her husband. Later, when he is king, the rich cousin returns in shock that the poor cousin has done so well for himself by living honestly. He then determines to find the evil spirits and copy the poor cousins actions. The jingling of the rich cousins gold coins give his position away to the spirits who rob him and leave him as a poor church mouse for the rest of his life.

2. Unifying themes, and choices which are made

The theme is the good will eventually win in the struggle between honesty and dishonesty in an evil world. Our main characters make wrong decisions and learn from them in the end.

3. Episodes in the text

- Bet between cousins about honesty and dishonesty in the world
- Poor cousin learns how to correct evil spirits' attacks

- Poor cousin receives benefits from helping others and honesty
- Rich cousins loses everything from selfish, dishonest desires

4. Key theological points of emphasis

- A good person will go through trials in our evil world
- In the end, honesty will win.
- In the end, dishonesty will be judged.

5. Cultural bridges

The story itself is a fairly common Ukrainian folk tale. This story has inherent Biblical truths within the narrative. The bridge to scriptural truth is easy to make.

6. Caution: Cultural barriers or gaps

The fact that this is a fantasy may cause the listener to make the moral lesson a fantasy as well. We must be careful not to lose the moral lesson. In Ukrainian culture and stories, evil spirits are assumed to be true. This is different than in Western culture. If there are questions concerning the activities of evil spirits or demons, direct the listener to truth found in scripture concerning fallen angels.

Biblical Application

Read Galatians 6:1-10. In this passage, Paul compares a person that “sows to his own flesh” to the “one who sows to the Spirit.” Focus on the last three verses:

1) Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2) Bear one another’s burdens,

and so fulfill the law of Christ. 3) For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4) But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. 5) For each will have to bear his own load.

6) One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches. 7) Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8) For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9) And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10) So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

The theme of the passage is that we reap what we sow. In verse 7, Paul says that God is not mocked or stupid, this truth will be fulfilled in its time. When verse 8 talks about the man sowing to his flesh, we can see the dishonest cousin, as well as the honest cousin as the one who sowing to the Spirit. There is a warning in the beginning verses of the passage, that we should be careful, lest we become the one who sows to the flesh.

Discussion Questions

1. How is the man sowing to the flesh like the dishonest cousin?
2. How is the man sowing to the Spirit like the honest cousin?
3. What does Ephesians 6 say about living for ourselves? Or living for God?
4. What are the final admonitions to us in the Ephesians 6 passage?
5. Have you felt weary doing good? How can you apply this to your life?

Closing

Encourage the students to not get weary in doing good. The reward for those who walk in the Spirit will be “in due season.”

A RIVAL STORY: A KYIVAN FOLK EPIC

VOLKH VSESLAVYEVICH

Lesson Goal

To teach that Jesus is a true hero (and anti-hero) to the world's heroes.

Lesson Objectives

1. To show character qualities of Jesus' life that are different than the world's heroes.
2. To teach that the origin of rival stories can be Satanic.

Story Source and Background

This *bylina*, or Russian oral epic, is considered to be the oldest oral story in the Russian language. The story has some possible connections between the main character of Volkh and the Kyivan Prince Vseslav Polotsky, who ruled in the 11th century. "Although the epic Volkh and the historical Vseslav share several characteristics, the origins of the main elements in the *bylina* are more ancient than Kyivan Rus and hence Prince Vseslav" (Bailey and Ivanovna 1998:4). It is clear that there are many pagan characteristics to the story that are rivals to the Biblical account of Christ. These will be pointed out in the lesson.

Preparation Needed

The teacher should read the *bylina* in its entirety from the Appendix and determine which sections to use in class. Time should also be taken to study each of the scripture passages that counter this rival story. Always remember to use this story as a bridge to the Biblical truth and do not concentrate on the oral epic. The teacher must be familiar with Christ's life.

Opening

This epic was usually sung. For an attention-getter, the teacher may begin by singing the first few lines of the story in any tune.

Summary of the Ukrainian Story

1. Setting, characters, and plot

In this Russian expression of the epic theme about the birth of a hero and his first exploit, a series of motifs is combined in an imaginative way: miraculous birth, rapid growth, unusual strength, a born hunter and warrior, investiture of arms, learning wisdom about shape-shifting, collecting a retinue, becoming a leader, first journey, capturing a city, and defeating an adversary. As often is the case in such stories, Volkh has a supernatural origin, since his human mother conceives him from a serpent....As in magic tales, Volkh grows not by the day but by the hour. He soon speaks, and he asks for armor rather than for diapers: a scene presenting the investiture of arms for a future warrior. As a boy he is taught not only reading and writing but also sly wisdom, or shape-shifting. (Bailey and Ivanovna 1998:3).

2. Unifying themes, and choices which are made

Everything in the story is an obvious anti-story to the Biblical account. From Volkh's miraculous conception by a serpent to his miraculous deeds. Volkh's self-indulgence, sorcery, and brutality against his enemies are all praised and rewarded. These choices will all be confronted in the Biblical application.

3. Episodes in the text

At the age of twelve, Volkh forms his own druzhina [personal guards], the number 7,000 being an epic exaggeration for the more traditional multiple of 30, and, as an exemplary chieftain, he supplies his druzhina with food and clothing through his shape-shifting and hunting. In order to scout the hostile Indian Kingdom, Volkh first transforms himself into an aurochs with golden horns, the fierce European wild ox that became extinct in the sixteenth century. Volkh then changes himself into a falcon that swiftly flies to the Indian

Kingdom and eavesdrops on the Indian Tsar and his wife. One might assume that she has had a prophetic dream and therefore warns her husband about a future enemy who has been born in Kyiv. Volkh flies back to his druzhina and returns with it to besiege the Indian Kingdom, which resembles a city more than an entire country. He uses his magical powers to change himself and his retinue into ants that crawl under the gate, restores his men to their original state, orders them to cut down people of all ages except for 7,000 darling maidens, and confronts his adversary, whom he quickly kills. Volkh becomes tsar and marries the former tsar's wife, the members of his druzhina marry the surviving maidens, and booty from the city is divided among the future townspeople. (Bailey and Ivanovna 1998:3).

4. Key theological points of emphasis

It is very important to show the differences between this epic story and the Biblical account of Christ. A chart is given under the Biblical Application section to use to discuss the main theological differences found in the rival story. Point out that Satan writes rival stories to truth as a deceiver.

5. Cultural bridges

The bridge needs to be made from the pagan (or Satanic) origins of the Russian epic to the scriptural (or God-inspired) origins of the Biblical account. If the audience has any knowledge of Christ's life, ask them for other ways that this song actually led people away from the truth.

6. Caution: Cultural barriers or gaps

Most of the contemporary Ukrainian audience will not be familiar with this epic. They may have heard of the main character, but they will not be familiar with the details of the tale. The cultural roots of the story can still make the bridge to the Biblical story of Christ's life.

The author experimented with this story in a small group setting in his home with 10 college-aged Ukrainians. The Russian version of the story was used. None of them were familiar with the epic, and in some ways, the story did not provide the bridge that was desired. This story may be more useful in a village setting versus a city setting.

Biblical Application

The following chart should be discussed and the scripture passages which show the truth of Jesus' life should be read in class:

<u>Volkh</u>	<u>Jesus</u>
Line 8-9: Serpent father	Matt. 1:18: Virgin birth/Holy Spirit
Line 11: Moon shining	Matt. 2:9: Guiding star
Line 29-33: Baby armor	Luke 2:12: Swaddling clothes/manger
Line 43-44: Worldly wisdom	Luke 2:42-47: Godly wisdom
Line 86: Personal sorcery	Luke 4:40: Healed others
Line 189-190: Brutality	Isaiah 53:1-5: Meekness

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you feel there are so many similarities to this story and the Biblical account of Jesus' life?
2. What are the inner character differences between Jesus and Volkh?

Closing

Read Philippians 2:1-11. Discuss the differences between looking to Jesus as my hero and Volkh.

A BIBLICAL STORY: A RUSSIAN ORTHODOX LESSON
HOLY APOSTLE THOMAS LESSON

Lesson Goal

To teach students to learn from scripture rather than icons.

Lesson Objectives

1. To teach the importance of faith
2. To show the importance of a personal relationship with Christ.

Story Source and Background

When discussing this project with a Ukrainian believer, he did not think that folk tales and epics would provide the cultural bridge to the Bible that would be best. “Most Ukrainians call themselves Russian or Ukrainian Orthodox. They have a general knowledge of Bible stories. We should start with this simple knowledge of their Bible stories, and bring them to Biblical truth from this point” (personal communication with Dima Slipenko on December 27, 2006).

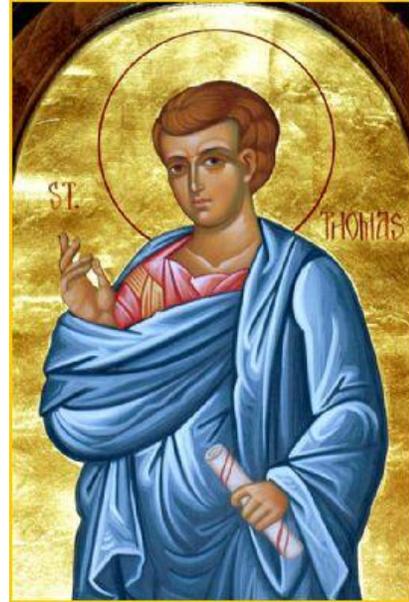
This story is a lesson found on a Russian Orthodox website. The story found in the Appendix was used in English-speaking Orthodox churches.

Preparation Needed

Read the complete article. Be able to the Bible lesson in your own words, but include thoughts from the Orthodox article.

Opening

Show a picture of the St. Thomas icon. Ask the students, “What do you know about Thomas?”



Summary of the Ukrainian Story

1. Setting, characters, and plot

The main story in the New Testament concerning Thomas is in John chapter 20.

The setting is a locked room where the disciples had been hiding for several days. The characters are Thomas (who is in doubt that Jesus has resurrected), the disciples and Jesus. It is a simple plot. Thomas believes that Jesus is alive after he can actually touch him.

2. Unifying themes, and choices which are made

Thomas must make a decision. The Orthodox Bible lesson says it this way:

The twentieth chapter of St John's Gospel describes how, when he doubted the appearance of the Risen Lord, Christ appeared to him again, saying "Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing," at which Thomas cried out "My Lord and my God. Through this one event the Holy Scriptures attest that Christ is risen bodily, not merely as a spirit, as some heresies claim; and that He is in fact God. (Russian Orthodox Church 2006: par.2)

3. Episodes in the text

- Disciples tell Thomas about Jesus' resurrection. He does not believe them.
- Jesus appears to Thomas. Thomas touches Jesus and believes

- Icon is inappropriately labeled “Doubting Thomas,” and should be labeled “The Belief of Thomas.”

4. Key theological points of emphasis

- The importance of believing in Christ for true faith.
- Jesus’ bodily resurrection

5. Cultural bridges

The Orthodox lesson matches the Biblical text. You can use this lesson and the comments about Thomas’ icon to talk about the theological truths.

6. Caution: Cultural barriers or gaps

The Orthodox church tells people to trust the church for salvation. It will be important to emphasize the personal relationship Thomas had with Jesus - and this led to belief.

Biblical Application

The Orthodox lesson helps the students to evaluate pre-conceived notions about Thomas:

Some icons depicting this event are inscribed "The Doubting Thomas." This is incorrect. In Greek, the inscription reads, "The Touching of Thomas." In Slavonic, it says, "The Belief of Thomas." When St Thomas touched the Life-giving side of the Lord, he no longer had any doubts. (Russian Orthodox Church 2006: par.5)

But the lesson does not go far enough. The students need to be challenged in the same way Jesus challenged Thomas in John 20:29, “Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Though Thomas proclaimed Jesus to be his Lord and God, Jesus reproved Thomas because he had to see before he could believe. The blessed ones are they who have not seen and yet have believed. Some people think they would believe in Jesus if they could see a definite sign or miracle. But Jesus says we are blessed if we can believe without seeing. We have all the proof we need in the words of the Bible and the testimony of believers. (Life Application Bible Commentary 1993:John 20:29)

Discussion Questions

1. How do you think the icon of Thomas should be labeled?
2. Have you ever felt like Thomas?
3. What do you think a “personal relationship” with Jesus means?
4. What are the advantages of scripture over icons?

Closing

The Orthodox Church says that icons enhances worship and also assist in evangelism. But the picture of Thomas used in this lesson should only be a bridge to the Biblical text. This text can be applied to our lives.

APPENDIX

Lesson One**Ukrainian Folk Tale : Honesty and Dishonesty**

Once there were two cousins, one rich and one poor. Often they would chat together about life, or this and that, and almost always they disagreed about things. One day as they were walking together, the poor cousin asked, "Do you think it pays to be an honest man, cousin?"

At this the rich lad laughed, "Oh, cousin, you are so foolish. It is only with lies and deceit that you can ever become rich!"

But the poor cousin disagreed, "Surely it pays to be honest. Many would agree with me."

"Well, I'll make you a wager they don't. We'll ask the first three people we see. If they agree with you that honesty pays, I'll give you everything I own. If they agree with me, you give me everything you own."

The poor cousin thought for a moment. He could not afford to give away any of his possessions, but oh, what might he accomplish if he had his cousin's livestock and home! Surely people would agree with him that honesty pays.

"All right, it's a deal," he said. They continued down the road. On and on they walked, and soon they came upon a laborer who was walking the other way. As the man approached, the rich cousin started waving.

"Good day!" he shouted.

"Good day to you too," replied the laborer.

"Listen, we have a question for you," said the rich cousin. "Does it pay to be honest?"

"Ho!" the laborer snorted, "if it paid to be honest, I'd be a rich man. Why, I just worked the entire year—long and hard, too—and what do I have to show for it? My boss even cheated me out of three weeks' wages. No, I would say honesty definitely does not pay."

"That's one point for me," the rich cousin gloated. The poor cousin looked downward and grimaced, but said nothing.

They continued walking. By and by they met up with a wealthy merchant.

"Good day, sir," they greeted him.

"Good day to you too," he replied.

"I wonder if you could settle our dispute," began the rich cousin.

"Yes, yes, we want to know if it pays to be honest," the poor cousin quickly chimed in.

The merchant rolled his eyes. "What a question!" he exclaimed, "How do you think I became rich? To sell, you must trick your customers. A little lie here, a little lie there—it does no harm. In my line of work, I'm afraid it's not honesty that pays, but dishonesty." The merchant walked away, chuckling and muttering to himself.

"You see, cousin? That's two for me," said the rich lad. "There is no way you can win the bet now, but I tell you, if the third person we meet says honesty pays, we'll call it a draw." The poor cousin agreed and the two walked on.

By and by they came upon a priest. “Ah,” thought the poor cousin, “surely the priest will agree with me,” and his hopes were renewed.

“Good day, father,” he greeted the priest eagerly.

“Good day to you too, my sons,” replied the priest.

“Father, tell us, does honesty pay?” the poor cousin asked.

“Honesty?” The priest looked surprised. “Where can you find honesty in this day and age? All around I see only lies and deceit. The ways of the world are wicked, my sons. Honesty does not pay—only dishonesty.” The old priest walked away, shaking his head sadly.

“You see?” cried the rich cousin. “Everyone agrees with me—even the priest! Now all your possessions are mine!” He rubbed his hands together and began making plans for his new property.

The poor cousin was so sad that he left his cousin without saying a word. He went home and said goodbye to his animals, then left his hut and wandered out into the world. Soon the poor lad grew hungry. Thinking he might find some blackberries to eat, he went into the forest. He spotted a big thicket and had just started picking berries when he saw a bear. Before the bear could see him, he climbed a tree and hid among the branches. There he fell asleep, only to be awakened in the middle of the night by a strange ruckus. It was the evil spirits flying and they came to roost in the tree right next to the one where the poor cousin crouched.

The poor man could see that there were four spirits, one of which was the ringleader. After perching in the tree branches, the spirits began to speak with one another.

“What did you do today?” asked the ringleader.

“I wrecked a dam,” replied the first spirit. “The overlord is cursing and whipping his laborers like mad, but there’s nothing they can do. Many will die and others will fall into our clutches.” He cackled loudly and jumped up and down in the branches, shaking the leaves, and the other spirits did the same.

“That’s good,” said the ringleader, “but not good enough.” The spirits fell silent. “The three large pines at the edge of the forest could be felled into the river to start a new dam. The rest would be easy.”

“Ah, but they don’t know that,” replied the evil spirit, and his brother spirits agreed.

Then the second evil spirit spoke. “I drained the village wells, my lord. It’s a great hardship. Now the townsfolk have to walk thirty miles just to get water. Many will die of thirst and others will fall into our clutches.” He clapped his hands and gave a shrill laugh, and again the tree shook with evil.

“That’s good, but not good enough,” said the ringleader. Again the spirits fell silent. “The villagers can make another well. All they need to do is move that big rock at the edge of town. There they will find all the water they could ever need.”

“Ah, but they don’t know that,” said the second spirit. His evil brothers glanced furtively at one another and nodded in agreement.

Then the third evil spirit spoke. “I did a very nasty thing,” he boasted. “I made the king’s beautiful and beloved daughter fall ill with a terrible disease. Soon she will die. Surely the king will then fall into our clutches.” All the spirits gasped at the thought of having the king himself within their power. Once again the tree rattled

with evil.

“Yes, yes, that’s good, but it’s still not good enough,” said the ringleader. The evil spirits fell silent once more. “If anyone were to sprinkle the princess with morning dew, she would recover.”

“Ah, but they don’t know that,” replied the third evil spirit, and all his brothers agreed.

“True enough, but we still have work to do,” said the ringleader—and off they flew into the night.

Overhearing all this, the poor cousin was astonished. He slept the night in the tree and when he woke, he told himself it was a dream.

“But what if it’s not a dream?” he thought, “what if it’s true?” He decided to go see if the dam was still standing.

As he approached the river, he could hear the angry shouts of the overlord and the groans of the workers. He saw the overlord standing with a whip in his hand. He saw the laborers sweating and struggling. They had welts on their backs. But the river flowed swiftly—they could not fix the dam quickly enough to stop it.

The poor cousin stepped up to the overlord and said, “Whipping your workers won’t accomplish anything.”

For a moment the overlord stood with his mouth open, and then he bellowed, “Do you have a better idea? You insolent fool, you!” He snapped his whip upon the ground.

“As a matter of fact, I do,” the cousin replied calmly. “Give me your best man and we’ll stop the river.”

“Fine,” snorted the overlord. He pulled a strong man off the line and shoved him toward the poor cousin. Together they felled the three trees into the river. Quickly the other workers finished the new dam. The overlord stood amazed.

“I am grateful to you, lad,” he said. “Take this horse and 100 rubles (ruble is Russian or old Ukrainian monetary unit) for your trouble.” The poor cousin took the money, mounted the horse, and rode off toward the village where the wells had been drained.

On his way there, he saw an old woman straining under a yoke strung with two buckets. She stumbled along awkwardly, water spilling everywhere.

“Good woman,” he greeted her, “might I trouble you for a sip of water? It would lighten your load.” The old woman sighed and set her buckets on the ground.

“How can I give you water when I don’t even have enough for my own family?” she said.

“Don’t worry,” replied the young man, “I can show you a place near the village where there is water enough for everyone.” So the old woman gave the poor cousin a drink and then followed him to the village.

As they neared the town’s edge, the old woman ran ahead, telling everyone about the lad and his promise. Soon a crowd had gathered.

“This young man will save us all,” the old woman announced. The villagers swarmed around the poor cousin and his horse, following them to the big rock.

“Now, if someone will just help me move this rock,” said the lad, and several people joined him to push the rock away. Beneath it was a gushing spring of cool,

clear water. The villagers laughed and danced and splashed themselves with water.

When the young man prepared to leave, all the villagers pressed money and food and gifts on him. Thus the poor cousin became richer than he had ever imagined.

He then rode off to the castle where the sick princess lay dying. On his way he stopped in the forest to collect dew. When he arrived at the castle, the young man demanded to speak to the king.

“Your majesty,” he said, “I understand your daughter is gravely ill.” The king nodded sadly and the lad continued, “I believe I can cure her.”

The king shook his head. “What can you do?” he asked. “I’ve had the finest physicians in the land trying to cure her and they can do nothing.” The king sighed deeply. “But if you insist, go to her. We will see what happens.”

So the lad went to the princess’s chamber. There she lay, pale and thin. It was plain to see that she was on the brink of death. He took out a small vial of dew and sprinkled it over the princess. Instantly she opened her eyes and smiled. At that the servants rushed in, exclaiming, “She’s alive, she’s alive. It’s a miracle.” They began feeding her, stroking her hair, and murmuring with happiness, for everyone loved the young princess. Soon she was walking about as rosy-cheeked and beautiful as ever.

The king was overjoyed. “You may have my daughter’s hand in marriage, if you so choose,” he said, “and when I die, you shall inherit the kingdom.”

So it came about that the lad married the princess, and when the king died a few years later, the former poor man became king. He was a kind and just ruler, and the people loved him.

He had ruled for a number of years when a rich merchant came asking for permission to trade in the kingdom. The merchant was none other than the new king’s rich cousin. When the king saw who it was, he ran to the man and embraced him warmly, saying, “Cousin, tell me about your life.”

The rich cousin told the king of all his travels. When he finished, the king said, “When you and I were young lads, you told me that honesty does not pay. But it is through honesty that I became king, and you are just a merchant.” Then he recounted the whole story of how he came to be king. When he ended his tale, the two cousins feasted together and drank wine. Before the cousin left, the king gave him many gifts and told him to remember that honesty pays.

Once the merchant left the palace, though, he was seized with jealousy and greed. “I deserve to be as rich as my stupid cousin,” he said to himself, and he decided that he would go to the forest where his cousin had seen the spirits. Perhaps he could do the same as his cousin had done.

When he came to the tree that his cousin had told him about, he did not know what to do. He did not want to leave his possessions behind, lest he lose them, but it was difficult to climb the tree encumbered by heavy robes, jewelry, and sacks of gold. Well, he thought, perhaps these things would come in handy with the spirits. Certainly they would earn him some respect, and perhaps he could use his gold and jewels for bargaining. The merchant struggled and panted and finally got up the tree with all his possessions. He made himself as comfortable as he could among the branches. There he lay, draped with his jewels and furs, with bags of gold hanging

from the branches around him. Just as he began to doze off, a great ruckus arose. It was the evil spirits flying to their roost. The merchant stirred and his sacks of gold swayed, jingling noisily. One of spirits heard the noise and saw the merchant.

“Look over there,” he shouted, pointing to the tree where the merchant sat.

“Why, it’s a rich merchant, loaded with jewels and gold,” said another. At once they pounced on the man, taking everything from him—even his clothes. Then they flew off shrieking. The spirits left the merchant without a stitch or a penny. Now he was as poor as a church mouse, and that is how he lived the rest of his life.

- Taken from The Magic Egg and Other Tales from Ukraine by Suwyn, Barbara J. Suwyn, Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1997, pages 78-83.

Lesson Two

Kyivan Folk Epic: Volkh Vseslavyevich

Source: Kirsha Daniiov, *Ancient Russian Poems* (Moscow, 1977), pp. 32—36.

1 Through the garden, through the green garden,
 Walked and strolled the young Princess
 Marfa Vseslavyevna,
 She jumped from a stone on a fierce serpent.
 5 The fierce serpent coiled itself
 Around her green morocco leather boot,
 And around her silken stocking,
 With its tail it beat along her white thigh.
 At that time the princess became pregnant,
 10 She became pregnant and bore a child.
 In the sky the bright moon was shining,
 In Kiev a mighty bogatyr was born,
 The young Volkh Vseslavyevich.
 The damp earth trembled,
 15 The famous Indian Kingdom shook,
 And the blue sea became rough
 Because of the bogatyr’s birth,
 Of young Volkh Vseslavyevich.
 Fish went to the bottom of the seas,
 20 Birds flew high in the skies,
 Aurochs and deer went beyond the mountains,
 Hares and foxes went into thickets,
 Wolves and bears went into fir groves,

Sable and marten went into stands of trees.

25 And when Volkh was one and a half hours old, Volkh spoke like thunder roars:

“Hail to you, my lady and mother,

Young Marfa Vseslavyevna!

Don’t swaddle me in scarlet diapers,

30 Don’t gird me with silken bands,

But swaddle me, mother,

In strong steel armor,

And on my reckless head put a golden helmet,

In my right hand—a mace,

35 A heavy leaded mace,

The mace should weigh three hundred poods.”

And when Volkh was seven years old,

His mother sent him to study reading and writing—

Reading came easily to Volkh.

40 His mother sat him down to write with a pen—

Writing came easily to him.

And when Volkh was ten years old,

At that time he was taught several wisdoms:

The first wisdom he studied—

45 Was how to turn himself into a bright falcon,

The second wisdom Volkh studied—

Was how to turn himself into a gray wolf,

The third wisdom Volkh studied—

Was how to turn himself into a bay aurochs with golden horns.

50 And when Volkh was twelve years old,

He started gathering himself a druzhina,

He gathered a druzhina for three years,

He collected a druzhina of seven thousand.

Volkh himself was fifteen years old,

55 And all his druzhina was fifteen years old.

A great rumor then reached

The capital city of Kiev.

The Indian Tsar was preparing himself,

He was bragging and boasting,

60 He wanted to plunder the city of Kiev,

And to send God’s churches up in smoke

And to ravage the venerable monasteries.

But at that time Volkh was shrewd,

With all his brave druzhina

65 He set out on a campaign

To the famous Indian Kingdom.

The druzhina slept, but Volkh didn’t sleep,

He turned himself into a gray wolf,

He ran and dashed through the dark forests

and dense trees,
70 He slaughtered the homed elk,
 He gave no quarter to the wolf or bear,
 And sables and snow leopards were his favorite morsel,
 He didn't scorn hares and foxes.
 Volkh gave his brave druzhina food and drink,
75 He shod and dressed his good youths,
 They wore sable coats
 And had leopard coats as spares.
 The druzhina slept, but Volkh didn't sleep,
 He turned himself into a bright falcon,
80 He flew far away to the blue sea,
 He slaughtered geese and white swans,
 He gave no quarter to small gray ducks.
 He gave his brave druzhina food and drink,
 And all his dishes were varied,
85 Varied and tasty dishes.
 And Volkh started practicing sorcery.
 "Hail to you, my daring good youths!
 There aren't too many or too few of you— seven thousand,
 But brothers, do you have a person,
90 Who would turn himself into a bay aurochs,
 Who would run to the Indian Kingdom,
 Would find out about the Indian Kingdom,
 About Tsar Saltyk Stavruyevich,
 About his reckless head as one of Batu's clan?"
95 As a blade of grass would flatten out,
 So all his druzhina bowed down,
 The daring good youths answered him:
 "Except for you, our Volkh Vseslavyevich,
 We don't have such a youth."
100 Then Vseslavyevich turned himself
 Into a bay aurochs with golden horns,
 He started running to the Indian Kingdom,
 He made his first bound for a whole verst,
 But no one could see his second bound.
105 He turned himself into a bright falcon,
 He started flying to the Indian Kingdom,
 And he arrived in the Indian Kingdom,
 And he perched on the white-stone palace,
 On the royal palace,
110 And on the window with a wooden frame
 Of the Indian Tsar.
 Violent winds were blowing over the crusted snow,
 The Tsar was conversing with the Tsaritsa.
 The Tsaritsa Azdyakovna spoke,

115 The young Yelena Alexandrovna:
 “Hail to you, my famous Indian Tsar!
 You wish to prepare for war against Rus,
 But you don’t know and aren’t acquainted with one thing—
 In the sky a bright moon was shining,
120 And in Kiev a mighty bogatyr was born,
 An opponent for you, my Tsar.”
 At that time Volkh was shrewd—
 Sitting on the window with a wooden frame,
 He heard the words they said,
125 He turned himself into an ermine,
 He ran through the basements and through the cellars,
 And through the high chambers,
 He bit through the strings of the taut bows,
 He pulled out the iron tips of the tempered arrows,
130 From the arms, from the firearms,
 He jerked out the flints and ramrods,*
 And he buried everything in the ground.
 Volkh turned himself into a bright falcon,
 He rose up high in the skies,
135 He flew far away to the open field,
 He flew to his brave druzhina.
 The druzhina was sleeping, but Volkh didn’t sleep,
 He woke up his daring good youths:
 “Hail to you, my brave druzhina!
140 It’s not time to sleep, it’s time to get up,
 Let’s go to the Indian Kingdom!”
 And they came to the white-stone wall,
 The white-stone wall was strong,
 The gates of the city were made of iron,
145 All the hinges and bolts were made of copper,
 Guards were standing there night and day,
 The threshold was made of expensive walrus tusk,
 Intricate notches had been carved,
 But only a tiny ant could pass through the notches.
150 All the youths became despondent,
 They became despondent and sad,
 They spoke these words:
 “We’ll lose our heads in vain,
 How can we pass through the wall?”
155 Young Volkh was shrewd.
 He turned himself into a tiny ant
 And turned all his good youths into tiny ants,
 They passed through the white-stone wall
 And the youths then stood on the other side
160 Inside the famous Indian Kingdom.

He turned them all into good youths,
 They stood there with their fighting gear.
 He gave all his youths an order:
 "Hail to you, my brave druzhina!
165 Go through the Indian Kingdom,
 Cut down the young and old,
 Don't leave any for posterity in the kingdom,
 Only choose and leave,
 Not too many and not too few—
170 Seven thousand darling pretty maids!"
 And his druzhina went through the Indian Kingdom,
 And it cut down the young and old,
 And only chose and left
 Darling pretty maids.
175 And Volkh himself went into the palace,
 Into the royal palace,
 To the Tsar, to the Indian Tsar.
 The doors of the palace were made of iron,
 The hinges and hasps were made of gilded steel.
180 Then Volkh Vseslavyevieh spoke:
 "Although I might hurt my foot, I have to break down the doors!"
 With his foot he kicked the iron doors,
 He broke all the steel hasps.
 He took the Tsar by his white hands,
185 The famous Indian Tsar,
 Saltyk Stavrulyevich.
 Volkh then spoke these words:
 "One doesn't kill or execute tsars like you."
 Grabbing him, Volkh struck him against the brick floor,
190 He smashed him into pieces of shit.
 Then Volkh himself became tsar,
 And took the Tsaritsa Azdyakovna in marriage,
 The young Yelena Alexandrovna.
 And his brave druzhina
195 Married all those maids.
 Then young Voikh became tsar,
 And his druzhina became the townspeople.
 He rolled ow barrels of gold and silver,
 And divided steeds and cows into herds,
200 And gave each person one hundred thousand coins.

- taken from *An Anthology of Russian Folk Epics* by James Bailey and Tatyana Ivanovna (pages 6-11).

Lesson Three

Russian Orthodox Biblical Lesson: Holy Apostle Thomas

The Holy and Glorious Apostle Thomas was born in the Galilean city of Pansada and was a fisherman. Hearing the good tidings of Jesus Christ, he left all and followed after Him. The Apostle Thomas is included in the number of the holy Twelve Apostles of the Savior.

One of the Twelve Apostles, he was a Galilean by birth. His name means "twin." The twentieth chapter of St John's Gospel describes how, when he doubted the appearance of the Risen Lord, Christ appeared to him again, saying "Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing," at which Thomas cried out "My Lord and my God. Through this one event the Holy Scriptures attest that Christ is risen bodily, not merely as a spirit, as some heresies claim; and that He is in fact God. After Pentecost, St Thomas proclaimed the Gospel in the East, and established the Christian faith as far as India, where the small remnant of the ancient Church still traces its foundation to him. According to some accounts he met a martyr's end; according to others, he reposed in peace. St John Chrysostom mentions that his tomb was in Edessa in Syria; his relics may have been translated there from India in the fourth century.

According to Holy Scripture, the holy Apostle Thomas did not believe the reports of the other disciples about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ: "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20:25).

On the eighth day after the Resurrection, the Lord appeared to the Apostle Thomas and showed him His wounds. "My Lord and my God," the Apostle cried out (John 20:28). "Thomas, being once weaker in faith than the other apostles," says St John Chrysostom, "toiled through the grace of God more bravely, more zealously and tirelessly than them all, so that he went preaching over nearly all the earth, not fearing to proclaim the Word of God to savage nations."

Some icons depicting this event are inscribed "The Doubting Thomas." This is incorrect. In Greek, the inscription reads, "The Touching of Thomas." In Slavonic, it says, "The Belief of Thomas." When St Thomas touched the Life-giving side of the Lord, he no longer had any doubts.

According to Church Tradition, the holy Apostle Thomas founded Christian churches in Palestine, Mesopotamia, Parthia, Ethiopia and India. Preaching the Gospel earned him a martyr's death. For having converted the wife and son of the prefect of the Indian city of Meliapur [Melipur], the holy apostle was locked up in prison, suffered torture, and finally, pierced with five spears, he departed to the Lord. Part of the relics of the holy Apostle Thomas are in India, in Hungary and on Mt. Athos. The name of the Apostle Thomas is associated with the Arabian (or Arapet) Icon of the Mother of God (September 6).

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