

Story 1517 (1981 Tapes 8, 9) Narrator: Ali Çiftçi, farmer
by now in mid-60s

Location: Çıkırıkçı village,
Sarıkaya kaza,
Yozgat Province

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Noah and the Flood

The blessed Noah lived for 950 years, but during that entire time, he was able to convert only forty people to İslam. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.¹ We come from Japheth's line. Ham did not board the Ark and died in the flood as a result. Shem decided to build a house that would be waterproof, but he forgot to make provisions for a toilet, and so he died in his own dirt. Japheth did what his father had ordered, boarded the Ark with him, and was saved.

Noah took aboard the forty people who had by then become Moslems² and a pair of each kind of animal. When it came time for the male donkey to board the Ark, Satan prevented it from doing so by holding on to its tail. "Come on! Climb in!" Noah shouted. But the donkey did not move. "Come on in!" Finally Satan entered the donkey's hind end and in this way managed to board the Ark undetected. After the Ark was

¹The narrator calls these sons, respectively, Sam, Yam, and Yafes. Ali Çiftçi's account of Noah's sons here is very different from the Biblical account.

²The extreme anachronisms here and in the opening sentence are obvious. Such lack of historical perspective is very common among Turkish peasant raconteurs.

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afloat, Noah saw Satan and asked, "How did you get aboard when you had been forbidden permission to enter the Ark?"

"Because you ordered me in!" said Satan. "I was within the donkey, and you twice commanded the donkey to enter."

"May Allah strike you blind!" said Noah.

/Ahmet Uysal: "Is that how one of the eyes of Satan was blinded?"

Narrator: "No, he was blinded during the time of the Blessed İsmail. When Abraham was taking İsmail to be sacrificed,³ Satan ran to Hagar⁴ and said, "What are you doing? Have you lost your mind? Why are you sending your son off with Abraham? His father means to sacrifice him!"

"Why?" asked Hagar

"Because Allah ordered him to do so! That is why!" said Satan.

"If it is Allah's order, then let my life also be sacrificed too. Go away, damned one!"

Finding no sympathy with Hagar, Satan went to İsmail himself and asked, "İsmail, do you know where you are going? Your father is not really

³In the Koran it is İsmail (Ishmael), not Isaac, who was to be sacrificed.

⁴The Biblical Hagar is called Hacer by the narrator.

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going to cut wood, as he says he is. He is going to cut⁵ you."

"Why is he going to sacrifice me?"

"Because Allah ordered him to do so."

"Then may my life be sacrificed for Allah!"

Saying this, İsmail threw a stone which struck one eye of Satan, blinding it.

Ahmet Uysal: So this happened a long time after the time of Noah?"

Narrator: "Yes."⁷

Noah asked Müşmuluk,⁶ one of the sons of Adam, to bring him a load of wood with which to build the Ark. Müşmuluk was 300 years older than Noah. He was so tall that the water of the sea came up only to his knees. (He had another name which I cannot remember, but we have always known him as Müşmuluk. He was so tall that when he caught fishes, he would hold them up close to the sun until they were cooked before eating them. Noah said to him, "If you will bring me a load of wood, I shall give you enough food to satisfy your appetite."

⁵Turkish people use the word cut to mean slaughter. They do not say to cut the throat of a sheep but simply to cut a sheep. Thus, the terms here cut wood and cut you have two different meanings and are not a play on words.

⁶We can find no reference elsewhere to this name except in the same narrator's version of the tale "Blood Castle."

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Müşmuluk therefore went to Damascus and started carrying from that place a load of wood so large that it looked like a mountain. Along his way back, however, he met Satan (who was later blinded in one eye), and Satan asked him, "Where are you taking all of that wood?"

"I am taking it to Noah."

"What is Noah going to do with it?"

"He is going to build a great ship. Noah is also going to give me all of the food I want as payment for bringing him this wood," said Müşmuluk

Satan said, "He has put only one cauldron of pilav⁷ on the fire. That will not satisfy your appetite." Hearing that, Müşmuluk dropped his load and took to Noah only those pieces of wood that stuck to his clothes.

When they sat down at the table to eat, Noah said to Müşmuluk, "You must say 'Bismillah'⁸ before you begin eating.

"No, I won't

"Say it!" Noah insisted.

⁷A staple of Turkish cuisine, pilav is a rice dish containing small bits of meat and often pine nuts and/or currants.

⁸Bismillah means in the name of Allah. It is a shortened form of Bismillahirrahmanirrahim--in the name of the most merciful Allah. Devout Moslems often utter one of these expressions before beginning any undertaking. Even those not especially devout use the shorter form to bring good luck to whatever project or venture they are about to commence.

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"No, I will not say 'Bismillah'!" answered Müşmuluk

"Go ahead and eat," said Noah, for the word "Bismillah" had actually come forth from Müşmuluk's mouth. Müşmuluk began eating, but he was unable to eat more than half of the pilav which had been prepared.

Noah cut the wood which Müşmuluk had brought into 124,000 pieces.

/Ahmet Uysal: "Was Noah a carpenter?"

Narrator: "Yes, he was a carpenter. He was also a master of seamanship."⁷

Then he lined up all 124,000 pieces of wood and wrote on each of them the name of one of the 124,000 prophets.⁹ In the morning, however, he found that all of those names had been erased. He again labeled all of the pieces with the names of the prophets, but again they had all been erased by the time he looked at them the following morning. He then received a message from Allah: "O Noah, write my name and the name of Mohammed on the pieces of wood next time, and those names not be erased." Noah accepted this advice, writing Allah's name on the first piece of wood and Mohammed's name on the second. The next morning the names were still there

Noah then started building the Ark, and he continued working until it was finished. He took forty people and pairs

⁹Another anachronism, for most of the prophets appeared later.

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of all the animals into the Ark and floated about on the water for about six months. At the end of that time Noah sent out a crow to determine whether or not the waters had receded. This was Allah's kaddaf¹⁰ water. It came forth both from the sky and from the ground. It was forty meters deep. Allah had taken to Heaven from Mecca the Beytul Menur¹¹ to protect it from the kaddaf water

Āhmet Uysal: "What sort of thing was that?"

Narrator: "It was a cubical building just like the Kaaba which pilgrims now visit. It was different, however, in that it was invisible to human eyes. Birds flying toward it knew of its presence and changed their course in order to avoid striking it. During the prayer services which most Moslems attend, the angels used to pray there. The Blessed Gabriel served as muezzin,¹² and the Blessed Nisa¹³

¹⁰This word does not appear in standard Turkish dictionaries nor in the Encyclopaedia of Islam.

¹¹Some sources identify Beytullah with the Kaaba, the small square building which houses the sacred Black Stone within the Great Mosque at Mecca. The narrator considers it a predecessor of the Kaaba.

¹²The person who chants and sings the call to prayer.

¹³What angelic being is here being referred to as Nisa? Such a name is not given in the standard reference works.

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served as imam.¹⁴ All of the other angels became the congregation. As the imam prayed, he said, 'May Allah give all of the sevabs¹⁵ which I have earned as an imam today to the Moslem imams on the earth.'

"Then Gabriel said, 'May all of the sevabs which I have earned as muezzin today be given to the Moslem muezzins on earth.'

"Finally, all members of the congregation said, 'May all of the sevabs which we as worshipers have earned today be given to the Moslem worshipers on earth.'

"From this it can be seen that all of the angels work for us Moslems, and all of the 124,000 prophets work for Mohammed, the most distinguished prophet. Allah had first created the spirit of Mohammed and then later had created Mohammed himself from that spirit. Allah had once said, 'O my beloved Mohammed, I should never have created the earth and skies if they had not been intended to be yours.'

¹⁴ Moslem prayer leader.

¹⁵ A sevab is a divine reward for pious acts that one has committed.

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"Near the place in the Koran where that verse appears, Gabriel says, 'I once feared the evil of Satan but I am no longer afraid, knowing now that Allah, in His great mercy, created everything for Mohammed.'"⁷

As I said, Noah sent out a crow to see whether or not the waters had receded yet, but the crow did not return. He then sent forth a pigeon, which returned with an olive leaf in its beak and some mud on its claws. Noah prayed for the welfare of the pigeon and cursed the crow, saying, "May your face be black." That is why the crow is black.

There was one woman who lived through the Flood without being in the Ark. This woman had a cow, and every day while Noah was building the Ark, she used to bring him milk. She never even saw the Flood, but every evening when her cow returned from the pasture its feet would be muddy. Because of the way she had helped Noah, Allah had never allowed the Flood to come close enough to that woman so that she could see it

Noah lived a total of 950 years. When Azrail came to take his life, the angel said, "O Noah! You lived for 950 years. How did you find life in this world?"

Noah replied, "I found this world to be like a two-door inn. You enter through one door and leave by the other."