

Kingdom Come Story

More Than a Hike

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Sitting in the middle of a room with mud walls, in a tiny village deep in the Atlas Mountains, they decide it's time. This is why they came. They're not sure how the curious group of strangers gathered around them will react, but they push the button.

Their muscles clearly remember the miles of mountain walking over the past few days, especially after a night on a mat on a dirt floor. They can't smell themselves any more, but they know their odor would cause people to raise their eyebrows and edge away, back in America. Not to be left out, their stomachs are growing weary of the volatile diet combinations of jerky and peanut butter consumed on the trail, alternated with helping after helping of rough bread and olive oil pushed at them by various gracious hosts along the way.

They would never complain, and their hosts wouldn't understand if they did. Their words are mostly a babble to each other. Getting across key points with charades and a handful of words—like that they need to go outside and use the bathroom—can be a satisfying challenge, but also intimidating. And frustrating. They could explain their mission, and learn all about life in the village, but they don't describe life with the same sounds these people do.

Maybe it's just as well they can't say too much about what they are doing, because the government here considers it illegal—"shaking the faith of a Muslim." The government welcomes tourists, but the hikers are not tourists. Their nicknames for each other, "Yakob," and "Driss," aren't just trail names but serve the purpose of concealing their identities when necessary.

Is the government right that they are trying to shake the faith of Muslims? "Shake" might not be the right word. They want to tell these people more. Their ancient faith speaks of God, but not of the life that Jesus brings, the life that offers an escape from death now and forever.

Sometimes they wonder if it will do any good. Does anyone listen to the Bible stories on the solar-powered audio players they have planted in houses all along their route? Do they throw them away? Are they going to report them to the authorities? Are they interested, or only polite?

Today they have been invited to have tea in a local house with about ten people from the village, who warmly welcome the foreign hikers and celebrate the few local words they try out. When the tea is done, the hikers pull out the audio player. "We have something to show you," they say and gesture. Excited murmurs run around the room.

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They push “play”, and a hush falls. The odd contraband coming out of the speakers is a man’s voice, telling the story of Noah in the language spoken by those in the room. They drink it in, stone silent.

It’s over now, and they get ready to leave. The owner of the house, a wrinkled man with whitening hair and a kind smile, thanks them earnestly for coming and for playing the story. “Here,” Yakob says, holding the audio player out to him. “It is for you. Keep it.” His eyes widen incredulously, and then a wide grin splits his face and deepens the wrinkles around his eyes. He thanks them over and over as they leave for the next village.

Out on the trail again, they are both smiling.