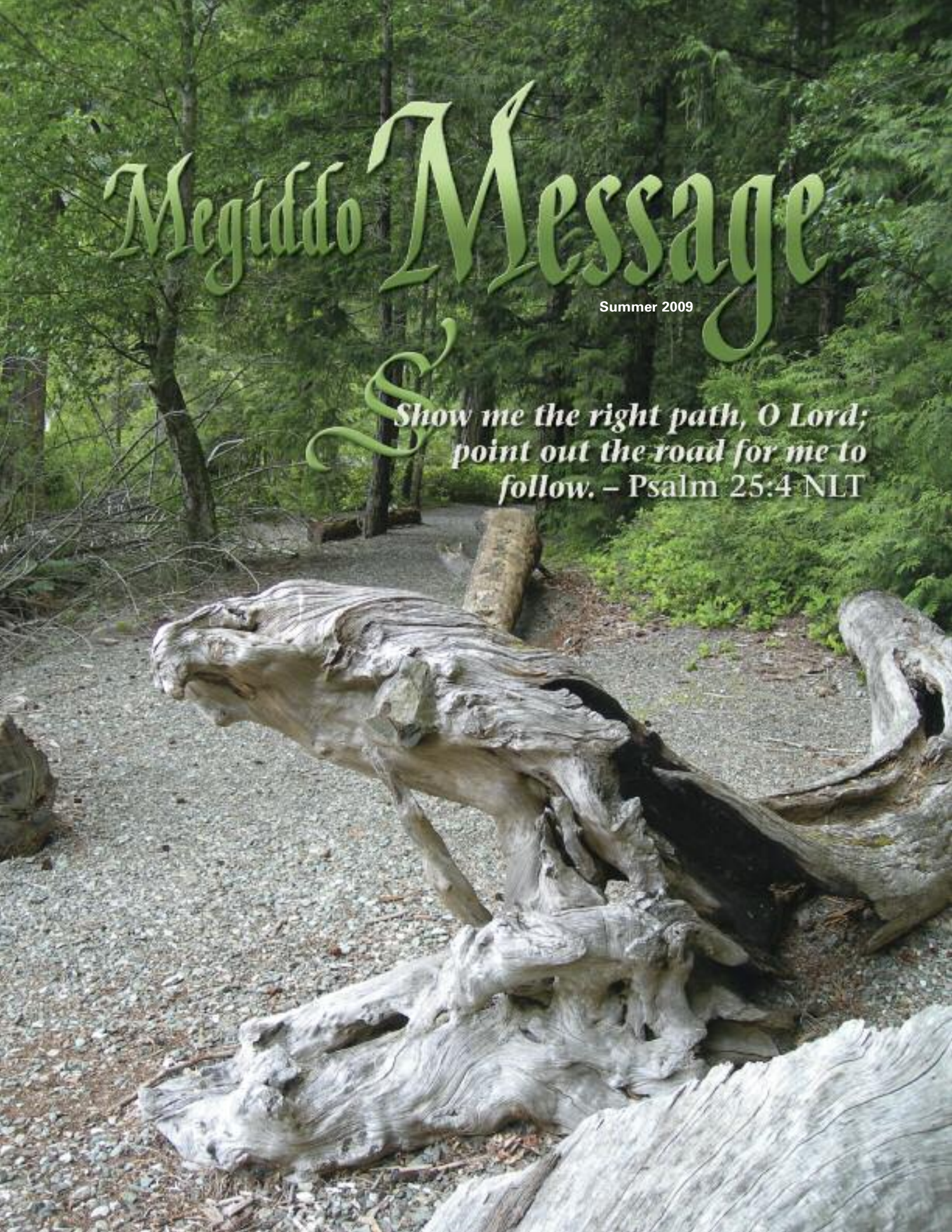


# Megiddo Message

Summer 2009

*Show me the right path, O Lord;  
point out the road for me to  
follow. – Psalm 25:4 NLT*



## SHELF LIFE: The Ultimate Test of Quality



The concept of shelf life intrigues me. My box of fresh eggs carries two dates: "Sell by mm/dd/yy" and "Best if used by mm/dd/yy". The first date tells me when the item will lose the freshness that I as a customer expect. The second date tells me when the food industry expects the product to become noticeably deficient. Every gallon of milk I buy, every package of meat, or fish, or fresh produce has a "Use by" date stamped on it. When I am shopping, I pay attention to those dates.

The food industry considers shelf life the ultimate test of quality. Seem strange? Think about it: Mr. Mini-Mart has a limited number of days to turn his purchases into a profit. That number of days is the product's shelf life. The milk must sell by mm/dd/yy. The eggs must sell by mm/dd/yy. After that, his purchase becomes a total loss. What determines the quality (the potential profitability) of his merchandise? The length of the shelf life.

In high school chemistry, we learned that every element has shelf life, even those that seem permanent and stable. A variety of compounds, particularly those containing less stable elements, become more unstable as they approach their shelf life. Certain explosives may even become dangerous and liable to explode without warning.

Ideas are also subject to the aging process. Some actually become unsuitable for use over time, much as my gallon of milk or box of cottage cheese. Other ideas may become outdated simply by disuse, or because they were displaced by another idea. Marxism and Communism were philosophies that showed lack of stability over time, because they deprived the societies that embraced them of elements necessary for survival. Even our democracy is showing signs of shelf life as little by little the moral values on which it was founded are removed.

Elements, products, concepts, ideas—everything has shelf life. The apostle Paul included it all when he wrote, *"The things which are seen are*

*temporary"* (2 Cor. 4:18). *"The things that are seen"*—including me, including you—are temporary. Is the reality unsettling? Does it stir some feeling of anxiety inside to think that even I have a date stamped on my life?

God has said it in His Word. Do we hear? *"All flesh is as grass...."* Yes, that is our experience. *"And all the glory of man [is] as the flower of the grass...."* Here today, gone tomorrow. *"The grass withers, and its flower falls away."* Life as we know it is limited, brief, here and then gone.

But does the Prophet stop there? Is that all he said? No, there is more. Listen! *"The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever"* (1 Pet. 1:24–25). *"The word of the Lord endures forever."*

"Forever." Think about that: *"The word of the Lord endures forever."* That means tomorrow, and next week, and next year, and next century, and next millennium...and the next, and the next, on and on and on. Forever.

Many people today are trying to put shelf life on the Bible, saying it is out of date, that it cannot speak to the needs of the 21st century. But their assaults change nothing. The Word of God is the one product in our world without an expiration date. It is the one product without shelf life. Can we believe it? Absolutely!

Reaching across generations, the Word of God has stood the test of time, and will continue to stand. Its principles are fixed and timeless. If we think they have changed, we are mistaken. If we are hoping modern thinkers can improve them, they can only produce a diluted or perverted text. As the Psalmist said, *"Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth... every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever"* (Ps. 119:142, 160). Notice those words: everlasting ... enduring... forever. What is the shelf life of God's law of truth? Nothing less than "forever"!

Jesus came offering this "forever" product in the form of spiritual bread. *"I am the bread of life,"* He said. What is this bread? He explained: *"The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life... I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever"* (John 6:48, 63, 51).

Here is the answer to the shelf life stamped

*The Word of God—  
the ultimate quality—  
endures for ever.*

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# WANTED: People of Integrity

A Psalm of David

*Lord, who may enter Your presence on Your holy hill?*

*Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right, speaking the truth from sincere hearts.*

*Those who refuse to gossip or harm their neighbors or speak evil of their friends.*

*Those who despise flagrant sinners, and honor the faithful followers of the Lord, and keep their promises even when it hurts.*

*Those who lend money without charging interest, and who cannot be bribed to lie about the innocent. Such people will stand firm forever.*

—Psalm 15 NLT

## IN THIS ISSUE...

- ✓ What is integrity for us? It is **Seeing Our Blind Spots** (page 5) so that we are not self-deceived.
- ✓ It is avoiding the treachery of **Gehazi “Thyself”** (page 11), a timely lesson from the days of ancient Israel.
- ✓ It is checking our own everyday convictions, and asking ourselves, “What would I, \_\_\_\_\_ (my name) do if...,” as in the youthful lessons in **“Plain Talk About Lying”** (page 9).
- ✓ It is taking to heart (whatever our age or stage in life) the lesson in **Tyler’s White Lie** and the **Grand Give-Away** (page 14) and resolving to be *totally* honest.
- ✓ Suppose a lie might save our reputation—at the cost of our integrity. Is it worth it? Never forget, **“You cannot hide from God.”**

God wants—and will have—people of highest integrity. Are we ready to answer the challenge?

—The Editor.

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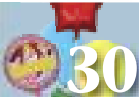
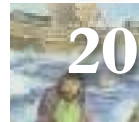
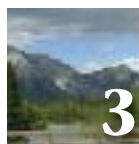
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## PUBLISHING FREQUENCY

The frequency of the **Megiddo Message** has been changed from a bimonthly to a quarterly magazine. The **Megiddo Message** is now published with the seasons—Spring (March), Summer (June), Fall (September), and Winter (December).



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**FRONT COVER PHOTO:** Cameron Lake, Vancouver Island, BC, Canada. Taken by Edward Shayler

## WE BELIEVE...

- ★ in God, the Creator and sustainer of the earth, the world, the universes, and all life, in whom we "live, and move, and have our being."
- ★ in the Bible as our only source of true knowledge about God and His purposes and plans for His creation and for the salvation of humankind.
- ★ in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin; who ministered among His brethren, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, crowned with immortal glory, and who shall shortly return to be King of the whole earth.
- ★ in the Holy Spirit, the openly manifest power of God, which God bestowed at various times and in various ways to reveal His knowledge to humankind, to support His spokesmen, to confirm His utterances, and to demonstrate His supreme power and authority.
- ★ in life as the gift of God, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.
- ★ in humankind as providing the raw material from which shall be selected and developed a superior, God-honoring people upon whom God will bestow the blessings of immortal life in His soon-coming Kingdom.
- ★ in ourselves as capable, with the help of God, of applying to our own lives the precepts and principles taught in the Word of God, in this way perfecting that high quality of moral character which God has promised to recompense with life eternal in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.
- ★ in the promise of God, that Jesus Christ will soon return to rid the earth of all sin and suffering and inaugurate an eternal and worldwide Kingdom of peace and righteousness, until God's will is done here as it is now done in heaven.



# SPOTS

Everyone has blind spots—more than we want to admit. These blind spots are not always obvious. They may be physical, mental or emotional. Do you want to “see” a physical blind spot? Do this:

Look around the room right where you are. Do you see a blind spot? No? Close one eye and look again. Still don't see it? The blind spot is too small to see? No, it is actually a BIG blind spot. Look at the + on the chart below and follow these instructions carefully.

Hold the chart at arm's length and **close your left eye**. Stare **directly** at the + in the diagram with your **right eye**. You should be able to see the ● to the right while keeping your eye fixed on the +. Be sure to keep your left eye closed and your right eye focused directly on the + at all times during this experiment. Slowly bring the + on the chart closer to your right eye. At a particular distance (probably about a foot) the ● will disappear. Continue to bring the chart closer to your right eye, and the ● will reappear. The ● disappears and then reappears as the image passes over the optic nerve head, the hole in the photoreceptor sheet.

While focused on the + we want to make one more important observation. When the chart is at the correct distance, all you see is the + on a continuous white background: you do not see the hole (or blind spot) even when

the ● disappears. What you see is something the brain is erroneously making up; the eye isn't actually telling the brain anything at all about the ●. The brain is telling you that the ● does not exist when you know it does.

Now you know you have a pretty big physical blind spot, at least as big as the ● in the chart (actually much bigger, depending on your distance from what you are viewing). Knowing about this blind spot, especially if ever you can't use one eye, could save you from injury or even death, as by being struck by a car because you did not see it coming.

## MORE BLIND SPOTS

False assumptions are BIG blind spots, and more common than we would like to think. A mechanical inspector for a precision parts manufacturer, for example, must know the accuracy of the tools being used, and his own capability in using them. This information must be factored into the data collected or he/she will make false assumptions. As a repair technician with several years experience, I had to keep reminding myself, **look for the obvious first**. The obvious so easily falls into one's blind spot.

Some years ago, when I was repairing medical equipment, an optometrist called for help. He had a problem with his project-o-chart (a type of projector that projects varying sizes of letters on a screen for the patient to read).

To “See” Your Blind Spot...



Hold this chart at arm's length and **close your left eye**.  
Stare **directly at the cross** in the diagram with your **right eye**.  
Slowly **bring the cross** on the chart **closer to your right eye**.  
The **dot will disappear** (that's your blind spot) and then reappear.

There was a serious shadow across the project-o-chart screen; he could no longer examine patients.

About an hour later I was sitting in his exam chair evaluating the situation. Immediately I saw the problem. The frame of his slit-lamp biomicroscope (another instrument) was in the path of the light from the project-o-chart. The doctor watched the shadow move off the screen as I carefully rolled this offending instrument out of the path of the projected image.

The doctor collapsed into his own exam chair pleading, "Please don't tell anyone about this!" He was horrified that his colleagues might find out, which obviously would have been very embarrassing for him. He thought the problem was so obvious anyone could spot it...except himself, the "blind eye-doctor"!

No, I'm not criticizing the doctor; actually he was very normal...including how he felt at the time.

### **BLIND SPOTS AFFECT RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS**

As Bible students we use many different tools—lexicons, dictionaries, commentaries, translations—while working with different languages (especially Hebrew, Syriac and Greek). Each of these tools has limitations (blind spots). For example, languages, while in use, are in continuous flux. Some words fall out of use, the meaning of others change, and new words are added. When trying to determine the meaning of a word used in Scripture, we must be careful to

**W**hatever keeps us from seeing and doing  
our duty to God is a blind spot.

use the meaning that was current at the time of the writing and that is appropriate in the context of Scripture. It is also becoming increasingly necessary to compare the definitions of words in our modern tools with Scripture. For example, the word "Trinity" was not in existence until many years after the Bible was completed. When a lexicon includes this word in its definition, we know to be cautious; it is a blind spot added by someone to support a popular belief. Jesus calls it "the blind leading the blind" (Matt. 15:14;

**"Do not be deceived:**

**'Bad company  
ruins good morals.'"**

**—1 Cor. 15:33 RSV**

Luke 6:39). We have to remember, when using these tools, that they are the work of human authors who were not God inspired. His Word must always be the final authority.

### **INFLUENCE OF OTHERS**

Depending on how convincing or articulate one may be, a wrong belief may sound more plausible than the truth—another blind spot that leads many into error.

There is an old adage, "If you say it often enough, others will believe it." It is also true that "What you say attracts those of like-mind." Thus we have diverse religious groups with many different beliefs. But if there is One God whose words have been recorded for us so that we may know Him and obey Him, there should be only one belief, one understanding of the Scriptures. As Paul said, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). Why was this so important to Paul? Because he knew there was only "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all" (Eph. 4:5-6). Therefore, any "divisions among them" made clear that some did not believe what was true.

Our own friends or family can be a blind spot if what they say or believe keeps us from seeing our duty to God. "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?... Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate,' says the Lord. 'Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,' says the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:14-15, 17-18).

### **SELF DECEPTION**

Perhaps the worst kind of blind spot is like the doctor's; he thought the shadow was caused by a problem with his projector. What he presumed to be fact was such a BIG blind spot that it prevented him from seeing the obvious. The important thing to remember is that these blind spots are there, and we need to take them into account.

The next time you can't find something and you know you left it there, instead of being embarrassed, think of this situation. When I was part of a team who repaired medical equipment, we had one drawer where we kept specialized

tools that the three of us used. From time to time, first one and then another of us could not find a certain tool in that drawer. One of the other two would come over and, almost always, pick it up right off the top! This is another kind of mental block (blind spot) that prevents us from seeing the obvious.

There are many forms of mental blocks (blind spots) that result in self deception in what we believe.

### PRECONCEIVED BELIEFS

We often have the mindset that “if I believe it, it must be true.” But *“the heart [mind] is deceitful above all things”* (Jer. 17:9). Therefore, *“Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths”* (Prov. 3:7, 6). To trust in ourselves or others will end in believing things of no profit (Ps. 146:3; Jer. 16:19). *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”* (Prov. 16:25). Only when we *“trust in the Lord”* (Ps. 4:5; Prov. 3:5) can we *“abide forever”* (Ps. 125:1).

Many times we believe what we want to believe. The Scriptures are rich in providing this challenge, because many passages must be understood spiritually (1 Cor. 2:13). So we pick and choose what we want to believe, interpreted “our way,” instead of letting the Bible be its own interpreter, and ignore what speaks clearly against “our interpretation.”

Why are we so prone to believe what we want to believe? Isn't it because we are looking for what will make us feel good? For example, it is almost universally taught by Christendom that God loves everyone, regardless of character, and they will be saved if they just believe, confess their sins and accept Christ's death in their place to pay the debt for their sins. But is this God's way to salvation as taught in the Bible? Christ said that His Word gives life. He came preaching repentance and the Kingdom (Mark 1:15; Matt. 4:17; John 6:63).

It is a popular belief that if it hurts, God did not command it. And it “hurts” to give up our ways. It “hurts” to exchange our ways for God's better ways that lead to eternal life. It “hurts” to give up immediate gratification for benefits that are future. It “hurts” to think beyond what gives pleasure now. But God's Word clearly commands all of these.

Are we supposed to disbelieve that God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his only son of promise as a burnt offering (Gen. 22:2)? Or are we to imagine that Abraham was overjoyed to do so? Certainly not, yet Abraham trust-

ed God and obeyed and God commended Abraham for his obedience (Gen. 22:17–18).

Did it hurt to obey the rules God imposed on Israel for the control of leprosy? When one was found to have leprosy, the command was, *“his clothes shall be torn and his head bare; and he shall cover his mustache, and cry, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’... he shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp”* (Lev. 13:45–46). Did it hurt? Certainly! It was bad enough to have the disease. To be put out by family and friends added to the pain. But the law of isolation, when obeyed kept the disease from spreading.

### PLEASURE

Pleasure is a blind spot that can separate from God, because by nature we would rather enjoy the pleasures of sin than deny a present benefit in prospect of the reward of God (Heb. 11:25–26). But who can choose the *end* of satisfying their own lusts? *“For all that is in the world—the lust of*

## YOU CANNOT HIDE FROM GOD

*You cannot hide from God tho' mountains cover you,  
His eye our secret thoughts behold;  
His mercies all our lives enfold,  
He knows our purposes untold,  
You cannot hide from God.*

*You cannot hide from God no matter what you do.  
He meets you at life's every turn,  
He knows your thoughts that blight and burn,  
He knows when you His warnings spurn,  
You cannot hide from God.*

*You cannot hide from God, but one thing you can do:  
If you would save your sinful soul,  
If you would be made pure and whole,  
If you would reach the higher goal,  
Your soul must hide in God.*

—Author Unknown



*the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever”* (1 John 2:16–17).

### EMOTION—FOR FEEDBACK, NOT GUIDANCE

Emotions are another blind spot that can be very deceptive. We cannot turn off our emotions or feelings, but we can be aware of them and factor them into our day-to-day decisions.

“Perception is reality”? This saying does not go any further than our own feelings. Feeling something is true or not true does not make it so.

Feelings do not change facts. It is said that the best decisions are usually made with 90% head and 10% heart. Emotion is a feedback mechanism, not a guidance system. When we do good things we feel good, and feel bad when

we do bad things: at least this is the way it *should* work. But feelings like jealousy or envy or hatred can interfere with our decisions. For example, if you have bitter feelings in your heart against someone, it may irk you to be good to them. You may even feel good when harming them. But when our emotions and feelings are properly informed, they are a feedback mechanism that reinforces the right behavior and discourages the bad.

As Christians, we often have to consciously overrule our feelings or emotions. We may enjoy something the Lord condemns simply because we do not use our heads to say “no” to our emotions or feelings. If our lives are run on feelings and emotions, we may make incorrect decisions and feel justified in them. But feeling right about a wrong

## Self-deception is a treacherous blind spot.

decision is a blind spot, and does nothing to change the morality of that choice.

### DENYING FACTS

Refusing to acknowledge sin in our lives is a major blind spot. Believing we are better than we are is another form of blind spot. To have a self image above what we are, we may make excuses for our wrong actions or choices. This only results in distorting the truth to align our self image with reality. It causes us to be anxious about what others think of us. In extreme cases we may even deny reality to the point of being self-destructive. Paul warned us not to think more highly of ourselves than we should (Rom. 12:3). And, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

### RECAP

What do all these examples tell us about blind spots?

Some blind spots will always be with us, like the physical blind spot we have in each eye. We will also have blind spots like the doctor who could not see the obvious because he was convinced the problem was something else. But like the mechanical inspector we can recognize these blind spots, and learn to work with them.

The most serious blind spots are those where we are deceived, either by ourselves or by others.

1) We can be deceived by others’ smooth-tongued lies

presenting error for truth. “*The Gentiles shall come to You from the ends of the earth and say, ‘Surely our fathers have inherited lies, worthlessness and unprofitable things’*” (Jer. 16:19).

2) We can deceive ourselves into believing just about anything and justifying it to ourselves.

The Psalmist recognized his blind spots when he wrote these words: “*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*” (Ps. 139:23–24).

God will not hold us responsible for what we cannot change, or for what we cannot see. But God has given us His Word to use as a guide and He will hold us responsible for the blind spots of trusting the blind to lead us and for the self deception we can change. He wants us to see around those blind spots.

How can we get rid of the blind spots that deceive us?

### STEP 1:

**Recognize the blind spots. Here are a few indicators of blind spots:**

- ◆ Ignoring what we hear in God’s Word. “*Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*” (James 1:22).
- ◆ Thinking we are intelligent, and don’t need advice. “*Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise*” (1 Cor. 3:18).
- ◆ Being high-minded, thinking self to be indispensable. “*For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself*” (Gal. 6:3).
- ◆ Thinking we can do as we please and “get away with it.” “*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*” (Gal. 6:7).
- ◆ Believing we are innocent when we are not. “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (1 John 1:8).
- ◆ Being easily swayed by others. “*But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived*” (2 Tim. 3:13).
- ◆ Believing Christ will accept us just as we are. “*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Cor. 6:9–10).

### STEP 2:

**Recognize our need for help from our Christian friends, and solicit their help.**

God knew that we would need help. That is why the book of Hebrews tells us, “*You must warn each other every day, while it is still ‘today,’ so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God.*” And, “*think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works*” (Heb. 3:13; 10:24 NLT). The apostle Paul told us to “*Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts*” (Col. 3:16 NLT).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

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you something about that gift, you could say simply, "Sorry, I can't tell you." Or, "I don't want to tell you because I want it to be a surprise."

**A:** No. Lying is wrong because God wants us to be people of truth. He has said: *"This is what you must do: tell the truth to each other"* (Zech. 8:16 NLT). He has also told us not to lie. *"Do not lie to one another"* (Col. 3:9).

**Q:** *Doesn't everybody lie, at least in little things?*

**A:** No, not all people lie. Lying is a choice that every person makes. Some people may not know the difference between telling the truth and telling a lie because they lie so often. They may even think that telling a lie is the “right” thing to do, because they see it as a way of keeping out of trouble and avoiding consequences.

Sometimes we may say something that is not true because we do not know all the facts. That is not lying. For example, we may be telling someone about an incident at school, and we say that it happened last Thursday when it actually happened on Wednesday. Our fact was wrong, but we did not intentionally distort the facts. Telling a lie is consciously holding back the facts because we do not want them to be known.

**Q:** *Is it wrong to lie so I don't get into trouble? Suppose I broke someone's window when I was throwing a stick playing with my dog. Do I have to tell them?*

If we do tell a lie, we must ask God to forgive us. But we must also go to the person to whom we told the lie and admit it, and determine not to do it again.

Why? Because God tells us that lying is wrong.

If we are telling information that we are not sure of, it is good to say, "I am not sure of this, but I think...such and such." Then those who hear us will know that we are not certain of our facts, and if we should be wrong, they will not think of us as a person who is careless with information.

**Q: *Is it all right to tell your friend you are not feeling well when you don't want to accept their invitation?***

**A:** No, it is not right to say you are not feeling well if you are. If you do not want to go to her party, you do not have to lie about it. You can thank your friend for the invitation but tell them you have something else that you really want to do at that time. Or you can explain to your friend that you do not care to accept the invitation, but you still want to be friends.

The most important point is always to be truthful. Even if your friend never finds out you did not come because you did not want to, you still must obey God's law to be right with God.

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**Q: *Is it all right to tell a lie if you plan to tell the truth later?***

**A:** This is a very common excuse for lying. "I was going to tell the truth later." That may sound right, but it is usually just one more lie. The Bible calls it "*adding sin to sin*" (Isaiah 30:1 NRSV).

**Q: *Is it wrong to tell a lie, then say, "I was only joking"?***

**A:** A lie is a lie, whether it is said as a joke or whether it is stated as fact. It is all the same in God's view.

Very often a joke is merely a covered means of saying what one wants to say. Or a person may say what he intends to say, then if he realizes the consequences will not be good, he adds, "I was only joking," in an effort to reverse the damages. If it was not intended as a joke, then the statement contains two lies instead of one. When God tells us in the Bible that lying is wrong, He means *all* lying, even "joking around" or "just fooling."

One more issue: "just fooling" or "joking around" is wrong in God's view because it is justifying a behavior that often hurts other people intentionally. The Bible says even "*the thought of foolishness is sin*" (Prov. 24:9). It also condemns "*foolish talking*" along with jesting (Eph. 5:3-4). As Christians we must say what we mean, and mean what we say. And we must be always kind. This principle is fundamental to being truthful people of God.

**Q: *What should I do if someone lies to me? Should I tell them that lying is wrong?***

**A:** That depends on who that person is, and your relationship to that person. It may be your responsibility to tell them they have done wrong. Or you may not need to say anything. If it is a friend who is looking for a response from you, you may be right in saying, "Can I really believe you? I didn't think it was that way." Or if it is a situation you were involved in, you can say clearly, "That is not the facts. It was this way," and tell the facts.

You are always responsible for what you do. You are not always responsible for what the other person does. Sometimes, though, taking responsibility for your own words includes telling the other person where you stand.

It is very important always to be truthful, then others will know you as a person of truth and will be able to depend on what you say. If you know someone is not being truthful, you may even want to warn them that people will not believe them if they do not tell the truth.

A lie is a serious offense and often makes trouble worse.

**Q: *How can I keep a secret and not lie?***

**A:** Most of the time you can keep a secret just by not answering a question. You always want to tell the truth, but telling the truth does not mean you tell

everything you know. You may simply say that this is a secret and you are not free to tell them.

If you can't share the information, be very careful what you agree to keep secret. You should never agree to keep a secret that is hurtful information. If someone wants to confide information to you that you sense may be hurtful, it is best to tell them even before they tell you what it is that you cannot promise to keep it secret.

**Q: *If you have promised not to tell some information, and then realize you should tell, what do you do then?***

**A:** It is best (if you can) to go back to the person who told you the secret and tell them you are going to tell it because it is the only right thing to do. You can even mention that you are telling it to help them avoid serious trouble.

**Q: *Should I tell the truth to someone even if they won't like it?***

**A:** Yes, you should tell the truth even if someone will not like it. In fact, sometimes we have to expect them not to like it—or us. One time the apostle Paul said to some people who had been his friends, "*Have I now become your enemy because I am telling you the truth?*" (Gal. 4: 16).

Sometimes the truth will hurt. It may hurt your friend. But if you decide to be untruthful, you hurt both yourself and your friend. If you hold to what is true, your friend may not like what you say, but it may be what he or she needs to hear from you.

Being honest and truthful is not being cruel if done kindly and appropriately. It is being kind and loving. But be sure it is truth that needs to be heard, not something that is only an opinion. You don't have to tell your friend, "You're too fat", or "Your drawing is ugly." If you are talking about someone's drawing, you can just as well say, "I don't like this one as well as your other ones."

Be careful of your words. Words can hurt, and if it doesn't need to be said and isn't kind, it is better left unsaid, even if it is the truth.

**Q: *My friend wants me to write his essay paper for him. I owe him a favor and want to help him out. Our English teacher is real mean and we have to write at the end of each paper, "I wrote this paper" and sign it. My friend knows the material, but he can't write, so isn't it all right to help him out?***

**A:** No, that is not the right way to help your friend even if you owe him a favor. You both will be dishonest. Besides, there are many reasons to write your own papers. A person develops writing skills while compiling, organizing and presenting the material. You can help your friend by working with him to gather and organize his information. But you will need to write it using his own words. Then it will truly be *his* paper. **MM**

# GEHAZI "THYSELF"

Beware of *THYSELF*, GEHAZI

Characters:

GEHAZI  
THYSELF  
ELISHA  
NAAMAN

## SCENE 1: The room of Gehazi, servant to the prophet Elisha

*[Gehazi on stage, seated. Table and two chairs, center. Gehazi is slumped in his chair, a petulant frown on his face.]*

GEHAZI: Ah, me, what a life is this! Almost better no life at all. Little to eat, nothing fit to wear, no one even to talk to but my master Elisha, who seems always sufficiently pleased to talk only to himself and God. If one must be a servant, it would at least be more pleasant to live in a big house and share existence with others like oneself.

*[A knock at the door.]*

GEHAZI: Who can this be? A stranger, surely. *[He opens the door and THYSELF enters. He is like Gehazi, but smaller. His expression is crafty and his manner sly. Even when he smiles, he is unpleasant.]*

THYSELF: This is the room of Gehazi, servant to the prophet Elisha, isn't it? *[Seats himself, seeming very much at home.]*

GEHAZI: Why, yes. What do you wish of me, stranger?

THYSELF: Stranger? *[He laughs.]* You do not recognize me, Gehazi?

GEHAZI: No sir?

THYSELF: Why, we should be great friends, for my name is like your own—Gehazi—though to my intimates I am known jestingly by another name—Thyself. Quaint, isn't it? But let us skip on. I have come to talk to you about your welfare.



GEHAZI: My welfare?

THYSELF: Yes, Sir Echo. Weren't you longing for the company of your own kind but a moment ago?

GEHAZI: Truly, I was, but how did you know?

THYSELF *[looking steadily at Gehazi]*: My master is a mighty king. Many things are known to him—even wishes whispered in secret; even the unspoken intents of the heart. He sent me, his messenger, to you.

GEHAZI *[shuddering]*: This is all very strange. I do not understand. Yet, it seems you are not unsympathetic. I am glad for your company, Gehazi Thyself.

THYSELF: Now tell me, what so weighs down your spirits, my friend?

GEHAZI: Trouble, sir. Trouble enough, for poverty is nothing but trouble, and my master and I have nothing but poverty. The worst of it is, we could have gold and to spare, but no, my good master Elisha will have none of it.

THYSELF: How so, my friend?

GEHAZI: Many rich men come to my master for healing and advice, for surely he is a wise man and the prophet of the Lord. Often I have seen them go away, cured and happy—and their camels and donkeys loaded with gold and silver and gems, and fabric enough to conjure the heart out of your bosom.

THYSELF *[aside]*: I think they've conjured yours!

GEHAZI: What did you say?

THYSELF: Nothing, I only thought aloud. Rich men, you say?

GEHAZI: Yes, rich—and liberal. They have offered my master gold, enough to keep us in luxury all our days, but not one penny will Elisha take.

THYSELF: And why?

GEHAZI: He thinks we have enough.

THYSELF: Have you ever been hungry, Gehazi?

GEHAZI: No—o—o—but—

THYSELF: Or cold? Or overworked?

GEHAZI: No—o—o—and yet—

THYSELF: And yet that is not enough. If a man has no gold in his heart, it's well that his purse be thickly lined with it—Say on!

GEHAZI: For instance, there is Naaman, the Syrian, a mighty man, and high in the esteem of his King. Yet he is—or was—a leper.

THYSELF: A leper! How horrible! Yet rich—that atones for much.

GEHAZI: Oh no, gold could not reconcile a man to leprosy—

that living death with which one rots by inches and his dearest flee him. Naaman's gold could not heal him, but he came to my master Elisha and was cured.

THYSELF [*scornfully*]: Yes, but how?

GEHAZI: The method merits your scorn, Gehazi Thyself. My master might have sold him a formula or an ointment even for ever so little a part of his gold—but, no, he sent word by me to the Syrian to go to the river Jordan, bathe seven times, and his flesh would come again whole and clean. I tell you, that Syrian was angry that my master had sent such simple instructions—and by his servant, not even in his own person. He was so angry he would have turned and gone home, but that those nearest him reasoned with him and persuaded him to do as my master had said. I saw them go—and, in a little time, I saw them return again.

THYSELF: And the leper—?

GEHAZI [*reverently*]: A leper no longer, but a man as whole and sound as myself, and with a happiness in his face that no words can rightly tell. Truly, the one and living God works through His prophet, my master Elisha.

THYSELF [*slyly*]: A wonderful man, my friend. Too bad he does not look the part.

GEHAZI: So have I often thought, and have sometimes tried to tell him so—though tactfully. It is not fitting for a great prophet to live so shabby and in such poor surroundings. Yet he will take nothing from these men who have so much—no, not even when they almost force it on him. And without money one can do little to make a good appearance. This man Naaman, of whom I have told you, would have given all he owned for very joy! But not one copper would my master take. “No,” said he to Naaman, “what I have given you is a free gift not for sale. Go back to your people. Show them that there is a prophet in Israel, the servant of the one true God, and give Him the glory.”

THYSELF: What a pity that a great man should be so careless of his own welfare and that of those who depend on him. But, Gehazi, you have a head on your shoulders. Why not look out for THYSELF—and your master? There is a way.

GEHAZI: What do you mean?

THYSELF [*confidentially*]: Just this. Naaman is but a short time gone. I know the way he must go. It's a two day journey, and by nightfall he must stop. There is an inn along the way. Surely he will stay there. A man on a fast horse could overtake him, and—

GEHAZI: And what?

THYSELF: Tell him—your master changed his mind about the gold. Recover at least some of it. So you shall do your master a service—and THYSELF.

GEHAZI: It's a daring plan. If I thought I could—

THYSELF: I tell you, you can! Very simple. A stout heart and some haste are the only things needed. So, come. Lose

no time. The day is quickly spent, and tomorrow is too late. To your horse—at once—and follow the Syrian [*He draws Gehazi to his feet and to the door.*] Too long you have delayed already. How many golden opportunities have thus slipped away? See, there is your horse, and the trail of the Syrian's party still plain to follow. Go quickly and keep your heart high for the prize that awaits you.

GEHAZI: You are right, dear friend. I'll go. Farewell. Await my return, and I shall reward you well.

[*Exit Gehazi. Thyself watches him out of sight, then gives a short, mocking laugh.*]

THYSELF: Farewell. And may my master, the devil,\* speed you on your way!

## SCENE 2: An inn

[*Chairs, tables, and draperies ready to welcome guests. Onstage, center, Gehazi, very nervous and ill at ease.*]

GEHAZI: My heart almost fails me, yet, having come so far, I cannot turn back. What if he should refuse me?— But, no, he will not.

[*Enter Naaman. He is well dressed, wears some jewelry, and is commanding and cultivated in manner.*]

NAAMAN: You wished to see me?



GEHAZI [*faltering*]: Yes, sir, I—I—but I find my mission—difficult.

NAAMAN: Difficult? What is your problem. Who are you? — though, wait—I think, your face is familiar. Ah—you are the servant of the great prophet Elisha, of Israel. Am I right?

GEHAZI [*smiling*]: Yes, lord. I am the one who rejoiced for you this very morning when you were—healed!

NAAMAN: It is a marvelous thing, past all telling, which your master has done for me. But a few short hours ago I

\*The only devil is the evil or temptation in our own hearts, here illustrated as “Thyself.” As Jesus said (Mark 7:21–23), “For from within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness,…” and all the evils that defile us.

was a loathsome thing, avoided by all men everywhere; dying by inches—a walking corpse—a leper. And now, thanks be to your God, I am well and whole, free from my disease. Once again I find life worth living. To him and his God be the praise—his God, and mine from henceforth. But what is your mission, fellow? A message from your master?

GEHAZI [*eagerly*]: Yes, lord, a message. My master, I believe, refused all payment from you?

NAAMAN: Yes, he did. Rare indeed are such gifts as these. Your master is a wise man, for he knows the true value of gold.

GEHAZI: On this I cannot agree with you. That is why he has sent me after you to—to—

NAAMAN: Why are you so pale? Why do you stammer and halt so in your speech?

GEHAZI: It's the chill night air, my lord, after riding so hard.

NAAMAN: Then out with it. What do you want?

GEHAZI [*desperately*]: Just this, sir. My master spoke too hastily. We are very poor, sir. Scarce have we eaten enough this twelve month to keep body and soul together. And see my clothing, how shabby and full of holes it is. My master's is much worse.

[*To himself, in some surprise.*] It's true, mine is better than his.

[*To Naaman.*] And now—an emergency. Guests are coming who must be taken care of. So he sent me post-haste after you to ask if you could spare a little something—enough to tide us over—say, a talent of silver and two changes of garments.

NAAMAN [*gravely*]: I offered him my whole fortune. It is still his if he but ask.

GEHAZI: No, master, not so much. But this little, if you would.

NAAMAN [*drawing a well-filled bag from the folds of his cloak*]: You have asked for a talent of silver. Here are two talents, and two of my servants shall return with you to carry the garments you select—as many and as fine as you will choose. Say also to your master that all I have is his to command, now and forever.

GEHAZI [*bowing low*]: A thousand thanks, my good lord, a thousand thanks. God bless you for your generosity—and now farewell.

[*Exit backward, bowing.*]

### SCENE 3: The room of Gehazi

[*Curtain rises on an empty stage. Gehazi enters smiling, carrying the silver, and several cloaks over his arm. He deposits these on the table and stands back to gloat over them, rubbing his hands together.*]

GEHAZI: Ah, is not that a good night's work! Two whole talents of silver, and much fine raiment, finer than I have ever had. Ah, it does my heart good. These are things worth having. And so easily come by! Now, to spend

the money and wear the garments without my master being the wiser, will be another matter—or—or now, with so much money, why should I not leave his service, and, perhaps—get myself a servant?

[*Enter Elisha.*]

ELISHA: Gehazi!

[*Gehazi whirls around, and, placing himself between Elisha and the table, attempting to hide its contents.*]

ELISHA: Where have you been this night, Gehazi?

GEHAZI: I—I—

ELISHA: Yes?

GEHAZI: My head did ache most abominably, Master. I—I— have been out in the night air to cool its fever.

ELISHA: And yesterday afternoon—where were you then?

GEHAZI [*glibly*]: I was down in the town, and two men near me entered into a fight, and the soldiers came and took them to prison and me with them, but, after a few hours, let me go. 'Twas this, and anxiety to get home, which did make my head ache so.

ELISHA [*coming closer*]: And did the soldiers, Gehazi, give you these robes, out of remorse?

GEHAZI: I—I—Master—

ELISHA [*picking up the silver*]: And this bag of silver? Silver with the stamp of Syria on it?

GEHAZI: Master—hear me—

ELISHA: Lies!—All lies! Gehazi, you have been false to me and falser to Thyself.

GEHAZI: Thyself! Myself? Gehazi—what was it he said?

ELISHA: You talk wildly, Gehazi, but perhaps with cause. Do not think to deceive me. You followed Naaman, the Syrian, and lied to him for the sake of a little silver, selling my good name and your own honor—priceless things—for things with a price. And what a dreadful price! You would leave my service? Then go, and go quickly, for, hear me—about the garments of Naaman still clings the taint of leprosy, and I—I would not have about me—a leper!

[*Exit Elisha.*]

GEHAZI [*frightened*]: A leper! Surely he jested! Yet. Perhaps the garments are accursed. I'll have none of them. But the silver—ah!

[*Enter Thyself, quietly. His face is powdered very white, and he wears a ghastly smile.*]

THYSELF: Gehazi. My dear friend! [*He comes forward to embrace Gehazi, who shrinks back.*]

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18



## TYLER'S <sup>White</sup> LIE

### Beware of Deception

(oh, how it can backfire!)



#### HOW ABOUT YOU?

Have you ever told a lie and then had to keep lying to hide the truth? The longer you hide a lie or any other sin, the harder it becomes to make it right. First, you may need to confess your sin to others asking their forgiveness, and then you want to confess to God. Take care of it right away before it has a chance to grow.

*"Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to heed than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22).*

Tyler paced his room. For several days he had meant to confess something to Mom. It grew harder to do each day he put it off. "I sure hate to tell her now," he thought. "But I might as well do it and get it over with." With a big sigh, he went to look for her.

When Tyler reached the kitchen, he saw that the refrigerator was out in the center of the floor. Mom was kneeling behind it with a bucket of water and a scrub brush. "What are you doing?" Tyler asked.

Mom sighed. "I'm trying to scrub away the dirt that's collected on the floor back here," she said. "It's been hidden behind the refrigerator so long that it's really hard to scrub off. I should have gotten at it sooner." She stood up and stretched. "Do you need something?"

Tyler took a deep breath. He felt tears fill his eyes. "I... I have to tell you something." He hesitated. "Remember when my Sunday school teacher called last week? Well... he reminded me about a Sunday school picnic on Friday night. But I had a game I wanted to go to instead, so I told him you were sick and Dad and I had to take care of things around the house." Mom frowned and Tyler hurried on. "Todd came by this morning and brought a get-well card for you. He said they collected money to get you a gift, too."

There was a moment of silence. "I didn't know what to do, so I took the card. I... I already asked God to forgive me, but I didn't know how to tell them not to buy you a gift. I'm afraid it might already be too late. They might already have one."

"Well, Tyler, I am thankful to God that I wasn't sick. But you'd better call Todd right away and explain what you did!" exclaimed Mom. She pointed to the floor. "The longer I let this scum hide behind the refrigerator, the worse it gets and harder to clean up, right?" Tyler looked thoughtful.

"It's the same with your lie," continued Mom. "You lied, and then the problem grew bigger when you took that card. Now it's going to be harder to scrub it away. You'll have to work things out with your class, Tyler. The only right thing to do is to pay them the money for the card and for the gift, too, if they've already bought one." Tyler nodded, then sighed. He knew his mother was right.

## GRAND GIVE-AWAY

The junior high Sunday school class was getting geared up for it's annual "Summer Give-Away." Each year, members of the class brought books, games, and other articles that they were no longer using to give to the Pine Crest Children's Home.

"What can I give this year?" Owen asked his mother as he fumbled through his closet. "With Dad out of work part of the year, we barely had enough money to get the things we needed, let alone anything extra."

Mom smiled. "Oh, I'm sure you can come up with something," she said. "Maybe there's something in your locker at school."

The next day, Owen searched hopelessly through his locker. Lots of old papers, broken pencils, and even a dirty pair of gym socks were soon piled up on the floor. Then he spied a baseball that he had borrowed from Randy long before. Randy's probably forgotten about this — he's got more baseballs than anyone I

## Always Obey God

### HOW ABOUT YOU?

*Are you ever tempted to steal or disobey in some way in order to do what seems to be a good thing? God doesn't want you to decide whether or not to obey His commands, depending on your situation. When God says "don't steal" and "keep yourself pure," that's exactly what He means. Always obey Him!*

know, Owen thought, pulling the ball from the back of his locker. He tucked the ball in his jacket pocket and headed home.

That evening Owen showed the ball to his dad. "I'm going to help old Randy do a good deed," he told Dad. "I'm going to give this to the boys at the home. Randy will never miss it."

Dad frowned. "Whoa!" he said. "You can't give something that isn't yours."

"But it's for a good cause," insisted Owen.

"Doing something wrong can't be justified by saying that you're doing it for God," Dad told him.

"Remember King Saul, in the Bible? He tried to do that.

God had told him to destroy everything in a certain city, but King Saul kept some of the best animals—he said to sacrifice to God. But God was not pleased. He'd rather have Saul obey Him than offer sacrifices. And God would rather have you obey His command to not steal than to give away Randy's ball—even for a good cause!" **MM**

The above stories are adapted from *KEYS FOR KIDS* 1997.

## GARBAGE IN THE TEMPLE

*"Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." —Isaiah 52:11*

In July of 1989, a U.S. House Panel heard testimony that truckers sometimes haul garbage in the same refrigerated trucks that transport food. Part of the problem is that trucks making long trips cannot afford to return empty. According to the truckers, who testified behind a screen to protect their identities, some see garbage as a dream commodity. They are paid to transport something that cannot be damaged. At the same hearings, a Penn State University food science professor compared the problem to serving potato salad from a cat-litter box.

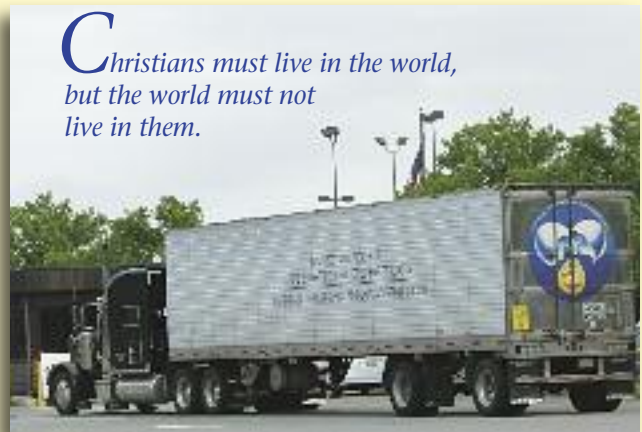
This pollution for profit business is nothing compared to what Jesus cast out of the Temple. What was wrong with exchanging one type of money for another in the Temple, where the money was being used for legitimate purposes? The money changers were making gain from the exchange, and were corrupting His Father's house. Were not the excessive gains, the abuses, the greediness completely out of character with the intent of Jewish sacrifices?

The apostle Paul warned about polluting the temple of our bodies with thoughts and practices that God forbids. He said, "Do you know that you are the temple of God?... If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Cor. 3:16-17). That is why the law was: "Be clean, you who bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isa. 52:11).

Do we think we are getting ahead by carrying the garbage of selfish, self-seeking thoughts in our minds? Our bank account may be better, but our account with God will suffer. The garbage of this world is contaminating. It will make our "temple" unfit for God's use.

When you are tempted to take a magazine from the grocery store rack, or flip through the stations on the television, think about those truckers using their refrigerated rigs to carry garbage. What are you putting into the mind that God gave you, that awesome mind that can store the thoughts you need to live by, the thoughts you need to work, and serve, and grow a godly character? What are you putting in your mind—garbage or heavenly treasure? **MM**

*Christians must live in the world,  
but the world must not  
live in them.*



## Why did Jesus say, “Behold I come quickly”?

**WHY DID JESUS SAY, “BEHOLD I COME QUICKLY”?**

**Seven times in the book of Revelation Jesus says, “Behold, I come quickly.” Did Jesus mean He was coming soon—i.e., during the first century? Two thousand years have gone by. Is He still coming?**

The original Greek word translated “quickly” is *tachu*. This word, or some form of it, is used about 36 times in the New Testament. One of its meanings is “in a short time, soon.” But the Greek-English Lexicons give other meanings, which are: “without delay, quickly; at a rapid rate; swiftly,” and the word seems to be used more often with these latter meanings than with the former. *Tachu* suggests quickness, swiftness, haste, speed. It is used in Luke 18:8, “He will avenge them *speedily*”; in Acts 12:7, “Arise up *quickly*”; in Acts 22:18, “Get thee *quickly* out of Jerusalem.” The same word occurs in Luke 14:21, “Go out *quickly* into the streets”; and in John 11:31, “She rose up *hastily* and went out.”

This same word *tachu* is often used in combination with other words to suggest speed. For example, *tachu* plus “runner” is a fast runner. *Tachu* “fruit” is fruit that ripens quickly. *Tachu* “writing” is speedwriting. *Tachu* “work” is work done quickly. *Tachu* “death” is quick or sudden death. *Tachu* plus “sailing” means to sail fast. *Tachu* plus “motion” means to move fast. The idea is consistently one of speed, swiftness, haste.\*

If we apply this meaning to Jesus’ words in Revelation, “Behold, I come quickly,” or “the time is at hand,” we do not have a statement of *when* He will come but of *how*. He will come as He described it Himself when talking to His disciples: “For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matt. 24:27).

Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance adds still another thought to the meaning of “quickly” which makes Jesus’ words even more comprehensive. *Tachu*, rendered “quickly,” may mean “by surprise, suddenly.” In other words, “Behold I come suddenly.” One moment everything is business as usual; the next moment He will be here among us. As one commentator says, “By ‘quickly’ is not meant that the Second Advent would occur soon after John completed the writing of this book. Rather, it means that the events of the Second coming will occur so fast, one event quickly following another, that many will be taken completely by surprise” (Wycliffe Commentary, page 1105).

Many times Jesus warned that His coming would be a surprise, sudden, and coupled His statement with a

warning to extreme watchfulness. For example, “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matt. 24:44). Again, “Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming ... lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” (Mark 13:35–37). Again, “Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is” (Mark 13:33). In His last message, He was still warning: “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments” (Rev. 16:15).

The apostle Paul wrote something similar in a letter to the Thessalonians. “You yourselves know perfectly,” he said, “that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.” (1 Thess. 5:2). They knew perfectly, but the warning was so important that he repeated it yet again and added, “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober” (vs. 4–6). But we should keep in mind as we read these verses that Paul was writing by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that his words were to warn and encourage believers in all ages to come. And his illustration of Christ’s coming “as a thief” carried no suggestion of when Christ would arrive but only of the manner of His coming. It would be sudden, a shocking surprise to those not ready; hence his admonition: “Let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (vs. 6).

We cannot fail to admire the lively expectation of those zealous first century Christians who knew that the Day was yet far in the distance. Could we have done as well? How much easier should we be able to maintain an attitude of expectancy. To no other people has the great event been nearer than it is to us this very moment. Suppose the Judge lifts the latch on our door this very day and steps across the threshold into our presence. How would we feel?

\*5035. *tachu*, takh-oo; neut. sing. of 5036 (as adv.); shortly, i.e. without delay, soon, or (by surprise) suddenly, or (by impl. of ease) readily:—lightly, quickly.

5034. *tachos*, takh-os; from the same as 5036; a brief space (of time), i.e. (with 1722 pref.) in haste:— + quickly, + shortly, + speedily. (Strong, J. (1997, c1996). *The new Strong’s dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words* (H8674). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.)

5035. *tachu*; neut. sing. of *tachus* (5036), prompt, swift, used as an adv. Quickly, speedily, with haste (Matt. 5:25; 28:7, 8; Mark 16:8 [TR]; John 11:29; Sept.: 2 Sam. 17:16); suddenly (Rev. 2:5 [TR], 16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20; Sept.: Ps. 102:3). (Zodhiates, S. (2000, c1992, c1993). *The complete word study dictionary : New Testament* (electronic ed.) (G5035). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.)

## WHAT FORGIVENESS COMES FIRST?

***In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He said that we get forgiveness from God only as we forgive the one who wrongs us. If we don't forgive, we will not be forgiven. However, when Paul speaks of our being forgiven, he says it is already done, when we receive Christ, so we should therefore forgive others. I don't understand how both statements can be correct.***

Jesus taught conditional forgiveness. What was the condition? The passage reads: *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* (Matt. 6:14–15). Our receiving forgiveness from God for our transgressions *depends* on our forgiving those who offend us.

Here you raise a valid question: If our forgiveness is conditioned on our forgiving others, wasn't Paul teaching another gospel when he wrote that we ought to forgive others since Christ forgave us? (Eph. 4:32). This makes the forgiveness we receive from Christ into an accomplished fact, and removes all the contingency Jesus placed on our receiving forgiveness.

What is the cause of the discrepancy? When we read Scripture, we must remember that we are reading a translation of another language, and translation is always to some extent an interpretation. When Jesus said that we will receive forgiveness only as we forgive others, the word He used was *aphiemi*, which has for one of its definitions, "to forgive, pardon—Matt. 6:12; Luke 23:34." It is the verb form of *aphesis*, the term used for forgiveness of sins (see Acts 5:31; 13:38; 26:18).

When Paul said, *"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you"* (Eph. 4:32), the word he used for "forgive" was *charis* the verb form of grace, which is a courtesy phrase, such as we would say to someone, "Pardon me," or "Excuse me." The word was also used of a kindness or something given as a favor. It was not a term used for forgiving a sin or an offense. Therefore Eph. 4:32 could read; *"And be kind to one another, tender hearted, [being gracious one to another,] just as God for Christ's sake is gracious to you."*

Understanding the meanings of the two different words translated "forgive" completely removes the incongruity. Jesus' words stand, that we receive forgiveness from God for our sins only as we forgive the one who offends us. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, was urging them to be kind to one another, just as God has shown kindness to us.

How do we get forgiveness for our sins? By confessing and forsaking them. Proverbs 28:13 reads, *"He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."* *"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon"* (Isa. 55:7).

God wants us to repent and turn from our sins, *then* He will forgive us. John the Baptist came preaching, *"Repent."* Jesus came preaching, *"Repent."* The apostles went out preaching, *"Repent."* Repent means "a complete change of attitude and thought; to change one's mind or purpose," turning from sin and toward God (*DBL Greek Dictionary*). Peter said, *"Repent ... and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19).

When we repent and turn, God will forgive, and part of that turning is to forgive those who wrong us. **MM**

*The unexamined life is  
the wasted life.*

*Of all sins of the  
flesh self-deception is the  
most dangerous.*

## SHELF LIFE: THE ULTIMATE TEST OF QUALITY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

on our heads: the *"bread of life"* that we can eat and live forever!

Why the comparison to bread? Because just as bread supports life, so Christ's spiritual "forever bread" supports the life of the "new Man." And when Christ returns, He will give "forever" life to those who eat it (who take His words into their minds) and digest and assimilate it (apply His words in their lives).

Even when everything around us has shelf life, we can fasten our hopes on the *"living and abiding word of God,"* the "forever" bread that Jesus handed out. The words of life He taught give solid hope of future life in Christ's Kingdom. Whatever anyone may do or say, those words are true and will last.

God means what He says. His purposes will accomplish what He has intended. Our Creator purposes to fill this earth with a blessed, happy people who will *"be all righteous"* and *"inherit the land forever"* as *"the branch of [His] planting, the work of [His] hands, that He may be glorified"* (Isa. 60:21).

At a time when everything seems shaky and uncertain, go to the Word of God. Buy "forever" bread from Jesus. It is the only product in the world that has lasting quality and can deliver us from the woes of shelf-life. Go for it now, before your shelf-life runs out. It is the only product with no expiration date. **MM**

## "Seeing" Our BLIND SPOTS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Knowing we have blind spots that can result in self deception, we realize the importance of associating with others in the Faith; they can often see blind spots we cannot see and kindly alert us to the danger. Such a friend is of incalculable worth, "*closer than a brother*" (Prov. 18:24).

Never underestimate the value of a true friend in the Faith; and never overestimate your own ability to sense your own blind spots.

### STEP 3:

#### Develop an unbreachable faith in God.

The author of Hebrews tells us that "*Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him*" (Hebrews 11:6). How do we acquire that faith so vital to salvation? "*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17).

### STEP 4:

#### Take advantage of everyday circumstances.

Everyday circumstances can provide lessons that will foster Christian growth if we are alert to them and have a receptive attitude. It is a good way to monitor our emotional feedback system. Oftentimes our emotions are determined by our attitude.

An honest checkup may reveal that we often use excuses when we do wrong. For example, when we speak sharply to someone, we excuse our conduct with "I was tired," or "everything has gone wrong today," or "I didn't sleep well last night." But serious reflection

may reveal that we need an attitude adjustment. Or we may need to change some long-standing habits.

### STEP 5:

#### Sincere, heart-felt prayer

Prayer is a privileged communication between us and the highest Authority in the universe. God has the power to bring about His righteous will, and prayer brings us closer to God if we pray within His will. It also helps us to be more aware of our own faults that we can change, and helps us meditate on His Word. If we really believe that He is and that He will reward those who diligently seek Him and live according to His precepts, we cannot come to Him in prayer without feeling the guilt of wrong doing and desiring to correct the wrong.

Prayer can shine light on our blind spots and help us see ourselves more clearly. Prayer can help us keep a check on self-deception and strengthen our determination to be an overcomer.

Physical blind spots will (like the doctor's, for example) be with us all our lives, but these blind spots need not be a hindrance. Our concern is the spiritual blind spots, but with the help of trusted brothers and sisters in the faith, the support of prayer, and the Word of God, we can see—and eradicate—them. This can be a humbling experience, but well worth it!

"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise.... Understand what the Lord's will is" (Eph. 5:15, 17 NIV). Ignorance of God's will is one *BIG* blind spot we can eradicate. How? "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Tim. 2:15). In other words, study, learn, and apply the Word of God. Then you can see. **MM**

## GEHAZI "THYSELF"

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

GEHAZI: Don't touch me, stranger. You are leprous. Keep your distance, unclean one!

THYSELF: Stranger? Unclean? Do you speak so to THYSELF?

GEHAZI [*beginning to suspect*]: Thyself?

THYSELF: Yes, Thyself! Do you not know THYSELF, O fool? Can you not recognize the face of your soul?

GEHAZI [*shuddering*]: Oh, horrible, and more than horrible! Frightful and more than frightful! Leave me, creature, leave me!

THYSELF [*with mock tenderness*]: No, I shall never leave you—until death tears us apart. We shall be closer than bones and flesh—constant companions in thought and deed, knowing each other as we are—two made one in love.

GEHAZI: Love! Love! How dare ye speak of love, you accursed thing? A living dead man! A leper! Unclean! Take your frightful face and go.

THYSELF [*quietly*]: Does my face, then, so much offend you?

GEHAZI: Who would not turn in loathing from such a horror?

THYSELF: Yet, brother, you are too hasty in your judgment, for see—if you will but pull back the sleeve of your robe—

[*Gehazi stares at him, aghast. Thyself comes close and turns it back for him. From elbow to wrist it is dead white. Gehazi stares at his arm, speechless.*]

THYSELF: You will turn from me no more—Gehazi, for on your flesh is written the evil of your soul for all the world to see. You would rob Naaman. You would betray your good master. You would think to deceive even your God. Now you have your reward. You are not Gehazi the rich man but—Gehazi the leper!

GEHAZI: Oh, accursed garments! Oh, hateful silver! Unclean! Unclean! Outcast for ever! Oh, Naaman—Oh, Elisha—Oh, God of Israel—you are all avenged. [*He hides his face in his hands and sobs.*] Unclean! Unclean! **MM**

From "*Twenty Minute Bible Plays*" by Edna Watson, published in 1936 by Eldridge Entertainment House, Franklin, OH.



## JESUS' MIRACLES

1. What was Jesus' first miracle?
2. Whose mother-in-law did Jesus heal of a fever?
3. As Jesus and His disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat, a terrible storm arose and threatened to drown them. What did Jesus do?
4. Whose daughter did Jesus bring back to life?
5. When Jesus fed 5000 men, plus women and children, how many loaves and fish did He start with?
6. What disciple walked on the water with Jesus?
7. When Jesus healed the man who was blind from birth, He made mud with His spit and put it on the man's eyes. What did He tell the man to do then?
8. Whom did Jesus raise from the dead after he had been dead four days?
9. Jesus healed a blind man from Jericho. What was his name?

6. True or False? Jesus said that all we need do to enter the Kingdom is to call on Him.
7. If we are weary and heavy-laden and need "rest" from our sins, what was Jesus' advice?
8. True or False? Jesus taught that we must forgive in order to be forgiven.
9. True or False? The angel told Mary before Jesus' birth that she would be the mother of God.
10. According to Jesus, what is the right master to choose, riches or God? Why?
11. What did Jesus teach about praying publically?

## THE EXODUS

1. Where was Moses when God called him?
2. In what way did the Lord appear to Moses when calling him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt?
3. Why did God instruct Moses to perform the miracles?
4. Who was Moses' spokesperson?
5. How many plagues did God send on the Egyptians?
6. Name the plagues.
7. How did the Israelites avoid the last plague?
8. Which Jewish feast day had its origin in the Israelites' departure from Egypt?
9. How many years were the Israelites in Egypt?
10. What did Pharaoh say to Moses after the last plague?
11. How many Israelites left Egypt?
12. What was the first miracle Moses performed after they left Egypt?

## JESUS TEACHES

1. What was the main theme of Jesus' teaching/preaching?
2. Which did Jesus say was the most important of all the commandments in the law?
3. How did Jesus teach His disciples (and us) to address God?
4. According to Jesus, how do we show our love for God?
5. What character trait of the Pharisees did Jesus condemn so harshly?

ANSWERS ON PAGE 27

# FAITH in Action

Acts 27:21-26 NKJV

21 But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss.

22 And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.

23 For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve,

24 saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.'

25 Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.

26 However, we must run aground on a certain island."

by RUTH E. SISSON

## HOPE IN THE MIDST OF THE STORM

 Read Acts 27:21-26

The storm was at its height. Morale was at its depth. All sense of direction was lost. No one had a stomach for food, and the vessel continued to lurch and plunge. Dreadful days followed appalling nights, and gale force winds continued to howl like a roaring nightmare.

At this dramatic moment, Paul came and stood in the midst of them. We cannot be sure exactly who was in Paul's audience on this occasion, but he likely asked the centurion to give him an audience with the captain and those in charge of the ship.

Paul began by reminding them that they had failed to follow his advice before (27:21). *"You should have listened to me, and not have loosed from Crete."* Everybody knew that; it did not even need to be said. But by getting them to admit (in their minds) that he had been right before, they would be more inclined to listen to him now. Paul was far above the "I told you so" mentality.

There had been a prolonged period of general fasting. Who could eat when the vessel was continually lunging day and night, and there was no place dry or clean? Even the odor from the presence of so much seasickness would have killed the appetite for those who were not seasick. And besides, much of the food supply was likely spoiled or swept overboard by the storm.

Yet Paul had something good on his mind. Anyone looking at him could see the light in his eye.

1. What was Paul's message to those on board? What did he predict about the ship, and about their lives? (27:22) \_\_\_\_\_



### Fourteen days of drifting ...

Luke's details add credibility to the account (Acts 27:27). It has been estimated that the speed of the drifting in a wind of this nature would be between one and a half and two miles per hour, while the direction of the ship would be approximately eight degrees north of west.

Given these calculated rates, if the ship was near the island of Claudia towards the evening of day one (Acts 27:16), fourteen days later it would be near Malta, a distance of about 476 miles.

Here again, Luke's reporting proves accurate.

2. What was the authority behind this prediction? (27:23) \_\_\_\_\_

3. What was the reason Paul gave for the deliverance? (27:24) \_\_\_\_\_

By this time, many on the ship had recognized the cheerful kindness, steady respectful attitude, and good will of Paul and his two friends. The testimony of his life had earned him their regard. And so they listened.

What did Paul say in essence? "You should have listened to me before, so please, listen to me now." He wanted their full attention because this message was not just common sense; this was a message from God about what lay ahead for them.

"Take heart," he began, then told them they would all survive, but the ship would be lost.

How did he know? Was he just guessing? No, because *"there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar'"* (Acts 27:23–24).

Paul was not just being blindly optimistic. Paul had something solid on which to base his words of encouragement and cheer. He had had a visit that very night from the angel of God!

Think about it. Nobody on board the ship in that wild, angry sea, had any idea where the ship really was. No one on land knew where they were. But the angel of God knew! The angel knew the exact latitude and longitude of the ship, and had come that night to stand by the Apostle, to give him and his two faithful companions courage and hope, and a message for all on the ship. Even in the depth of the storm, the three Christians had not been out of God's sight!

What was the reason the angel gave Paul for the sure deliverance? *"You must be brought before Caesar"* (Acts 27:24). *"You must."* The storm had not changed God's plans.

In the midst of panic and despair, Paul was calm, confident, and full of hope—because He had full confidence in God to bring him through.

4. What did the angel say about everyone else on board the ship?

(27:24) \_\_\_\_\_

Because there was one man on the ship who must see Rome, all would escape with their lives! The angel had said, *"God has granted you all those who sail with you"* (27:24). So Paul knew, on the highest authority, that even though the boat continued to heave and the winds howled, all would be well. They were not just waiting for the ship to sink. Somehow, somewhere there would be an escape to safety. God wanted Paul to get to Rome, and He was not going to let him—or Luke or Aristarchus, or Julius, or anyone else on board—be lost at sea.

5. What was Paul's final reassurance to everyone (27:25–26) \_\_\_\_\_

See Paul's radiant face as he spoke those powerful words, *"I believe God."* That was the challenge. Paul was absolutely sure that it would be just as God's angel had said. Even though there was no immediate evidence of deliverance, Paul believed God.

6. Where did Paul say they would land?

(27:26) \_\_\_\_\_



#### Insight

##### "I Believe God..."

Hear the challenge in those words. Paul had absolute confidence that what God had promised would happen just as He had said. So while he gathered the people on the ship and stood clinging to a post, while the vessel was still creaking and heaving wildly in the tempest, he shouted above the noise of the storm, "I believe God."

"I believe..." speaks volumes, but the issue is in whom? Whom are we believing? Are we trusting the thoughts of a human mind—maybe even our own—or is our confidence in the God who made us, the supreme Creator who knows the end from the beginning?

When Paul said "I believe God," the storm was still raging. But Paul knew that it would end well for them. The same Paul had written, *"I know whom I have believed..."* (2 Tim 1:12).

We today can have this same level of confidence in the integrity of the Bible and the God who authored it. Every believer today can stand on the heaving deck of the ship of this world and declare with Paul, *"I believe God!"* For that confidence is not founded on a wish or a whim or an emotion, but on the solid foundation of evidence.

Let others listen to whom they will among the voices of this world. Every true Christian can take a stand with the apostle Paul and say with total confidence, *"Be of good cheer, I believe God!"*



#### Acts 27:27–32 NKJV

27 Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land.

28 And they took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found it to be fifteen fathoms.

29 Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come.

30 And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow,

31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved."

32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off.

They would run aground on a certain island. It would wreck the ship, but that island would be the means to safety. There was no need to despair. *"Take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me"* (Acts 27:25).

#### Land!



Read Acts 27:27–32

The wind was still hammering at the creaking ship and its weary passengers. The ship was still bobbing like a cork. There was no immediate sign of change. Did anyone on board—outside Paul and his two brothers in Christ, and perhaps the centurion—really believe they would all be saved? Did they really believe God? Still, they could not miss the calm, steady example of the three Christians.

7. What was happening on day 14 of the storm? (27:27) \_\_\_\_\_

Luke's description of the ship being *"driven up and down"* is clear evidence that Luke was a doctor, not a seaman. True enough, the ship seemed to go nowhere but up and down, but it was drifting rapidly, completely at the mercy of wind and wave.

Where was the Adriatic Sea? Today, the Adriatic Sea is a body of water between Italy and the Balkans. But in ancient times, the term referred to a more extensive area as far south as Sicily and Crete.

8. What was the first sign that the ship might be nearing land? How did the sailors confirm it? (27:27–28) \_\_\_\_\_

How did the sailors sense in the dead of night that they were nearing land? Luke does not tell us, but one possibility is that they heard the sound of breakers crashing against rocks. This is confirmed by their fear that they might run aground on rocks (Acts 27:29). Since the land they were nearing was the island of Malta, and the area where the ship wrecked is a rocky coastline, this is a possibility.

Sounding the depths, they found that the depth of water was rapidly decreasing. They needed to anchor the ship until they could see what type of shore they were approaching. In the darkness they could only imagine their ship being crashed upon some jagged outcropping of rock.

9. What two steps did they take to lessen the chance of being dashed upon the rocks? (27:29) \_\_\_\_\_

When they had lightened the ship by throwing out gear earlier in the storm, they had kept their anchors—trained sailors knew that they could still need their anchors.

Here is another evidence that Luke was an on the scene witness. *"They cast four anchors out of the stern."* Anchoring the ship from the stern, we are told, was not normal, either in ancient times or modern, because it is impossible to maneuver a ship that is anchored from the stern. But in this case, anchoring from the stern made sense because the wind would then swing the front of the ship around and point it directly into the bay where they hoped to take the ship at daylight.

So they anchored. Then Luke tells how they prayed for daylight. Sailors were not men noted for praying. But in a desperate



**A Roman cargo or merchant ship.**

At dawn they threw the wheat into the sea to lighten the ship, then made for the shore. The ship ran aground and was lost, but the 276 persons on board were saved.

situation, prayer is natural. What else could they do? The situation was filled with unknowns. What kind of coastline was it? How deep, or how sloping? What type of sea floor? They could only guess—and pray for daylight so that they could see where they were.

### **An attempt to escape**

The thought of land and the inevitability of shipwreck set some passengers thinking another direction: Escape! Flee!

10. While the focus was on anchoring the ship at the stern, what was happening under cover of darkness in the bow of the ship? (27:30)

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11. Who picked up on the scheme? (27:31) \_\_\_\_\_

12. What did he do about it? (27:32) \_\_\_\_\_

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Times of peril bring out the best in some, and the worst in others. Some of the sailors, intent on saving their own lives at all costs, pretended they were making the ship more secure by throwing more anchors from the bow. To do that, they said, they would need the ship's launch. Since this activity could not possibly have been concealed from the officers, given the situation, it seems they may have been party to it.

Paul had had word from God that all would be saved. At the same time, he knew that those on the ship needed to cooperate with the plan. Did the Holy Spirit alert him to the intentions of those trying to escape? Or was Paul alert to what he felt might interfere with their safe escape? We do not know, but in either case Paul did not stand back and say, let them do whatever they please; God will save us. Paul knew that maneuvering the ship needed the hands of the crew.

Even though Paul had Divine guidance and help, he also knew that men must do what they can for themselves. God would not send His angel to do what the crew on the ship should do. Paul's words to the centurion and the soldiers was blunt: "If you want to be saved, don't let those men get away."

13. How did the centurion respond to Paul's warning? (27:32) \_\_\_\_\_

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Action was quick and decisive. On command from the centurion, the soldiers cut the ropes holding the dingy, and it was swept away. No one could bring it back. If the sailors were angered by their plot being foiled, they had nowhere to turn.

Here is another evidence that the ship was under the direction of the centurion, not the captain. The crew went back to their duties, and the soldiers no doubt maintained a watchful guard against any further treachery.

### **Paul takes the lead to safety**



Read Acts 27:33–44

14. As it began to get daylight, what action did Paul take? (27:33–34) \_\_\_\_\_

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Now that the actual shipwreck was imminent,

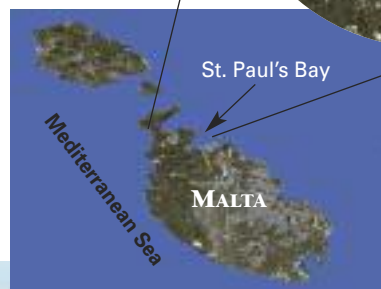


**A closer look**

#### **Kill the prisoners?**

We cannot blame the soldiers who wanted to kill the prisoners. In a shipwreck situation, who could know how many might escape? Roman law was without mercy. The Roman soldier charged with the safekeeping of any prisoner was required to pay with his own life if the prisoner escaped.

We also have to admire Julius' willingness to take the risk to save his special prisoner—Paul. Even though Julius did not know Him, Paul's God was in control, even of the prisoners.



St. Paul's Bay looking toward the island of Malta.

Acts 27:33–44 NKJV

33 And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing.

34 Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you."

35 And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat.

36 Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves.

37 And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship.

38 So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.

39 When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible.

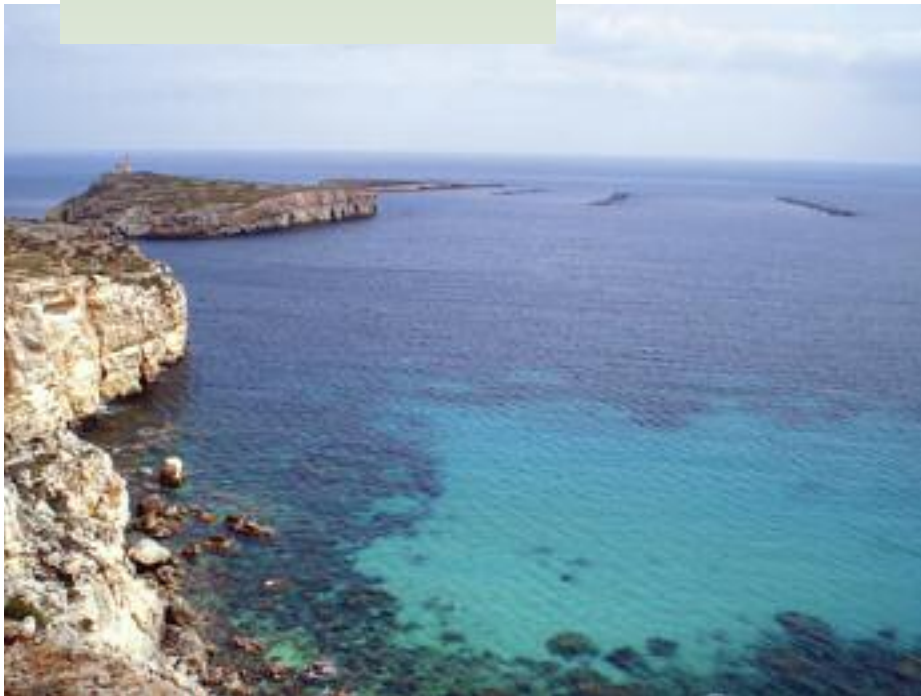
40 And they let go the anchors and left them in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore.

41 But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves.

42 And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape.

43 But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land,

44 and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.



Malta's beautiful St. Paul's Bay looking toward the two Islands called St. Paul's Islands. This area is thought to be the site of the shipwreck.

Paul, looking ahead, took the lead and urged everyone to eat. Fourteen days had gone by while they endured the ravages of the waves and winds, too distraught, too tossed, too overworked or frightened or seasick to eat. Both the crew and passengers were starving and weak. Paul spoke not as a worried passenger but as one in command of the situation. He was appealing to their common sense. They had food at hand now which might not be available on the island. They needed to eat. *"This is for your health."* He reminded them again that every one of them would be saved. It was one more way of breathing hope and courage into his fellow mariners.

15. What example did Paul set before he began to eat? (27:35) \_\_\_\_\_

Paul never forgot his gratitude to God. *"He took bread, and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all."* He was not ashamed to give thanks and to honor the God who was saving them. For Paul, giving thanks for his food was a life-long habit. This was no time to break it. Could anyone miss the fact that these Christians had a stabilizer, a strength of character, and a strong support in suffering which they lacked?

16. How did Paul's suggestion and the food change the atmosphere? (27:36–37) \_\_\_\_\_

Food was brought, and people began to eat. They probably didn't realize how hungry they were. No one could miss the change in the atmosphere. It had gone from gloom to hope. We can imagine a new optimism, and even a little general buzz of conversation. Were Paul's words of hope beginning to seem real?

Paul was not simply talking his religion. He (along with Luke and Aristarchus, we can be sure) was showing the power of real faith in God applied in real life.

17. After they had eaten, what did they throw into the sea? (27:38) \_\_\_\_\_

Here we learn that the most precious cargo of the ship had been held as long as possible: its wheat. Now it, too, had to go overboard to lighten the ship. They were doing everything that seamanship and common sense could suggest.

18. What action did they take when it was day and they could see the shore line? (27:39) \_\_\_\_\_

Our knowledge of Melita (Malta) today gives us a picture of rocky crags and little beach. The ship would have been dashed to pieces, had it not been prudently anchored the night before. But given the hard clay sea bottom, the anchors held fast, even in the storm.

To everyone's relief, the island had a creek with a sandy beach. Sighting the creek, they lifted their anchors, raised the steering paddles, and hoisted the main sail to the wind. The ship lurched

toward the shore (27:40). It was the ship's last brief voyage.

Driven by the wind, the forepart of the ship rammed solidly aground and stuck fast in the sand (clay), while the back part was broken with the violence of the waves—this is Luke's report of the working out of the promise God made to Paul: There would be no loss of life, but only of the ship. Who but God could have planned that the ship would crash so near a protected, hospitable shoreline to which all could escape?

19. What dangerous advice did the soldiers give as the ship ran aground? (27:42) \_\_\_\_\_

After Paul had been the instrument of saving every life from the violence of the sea, now the stern code of Roman soldiery was threatening his life, along with that of all the rest of the prisoners.

20. What action did the centurion take? Whom did he want to save? (27:43)

21. What command did he give everyone about how to exit the ship? (27:43) \_\_\_\_\_

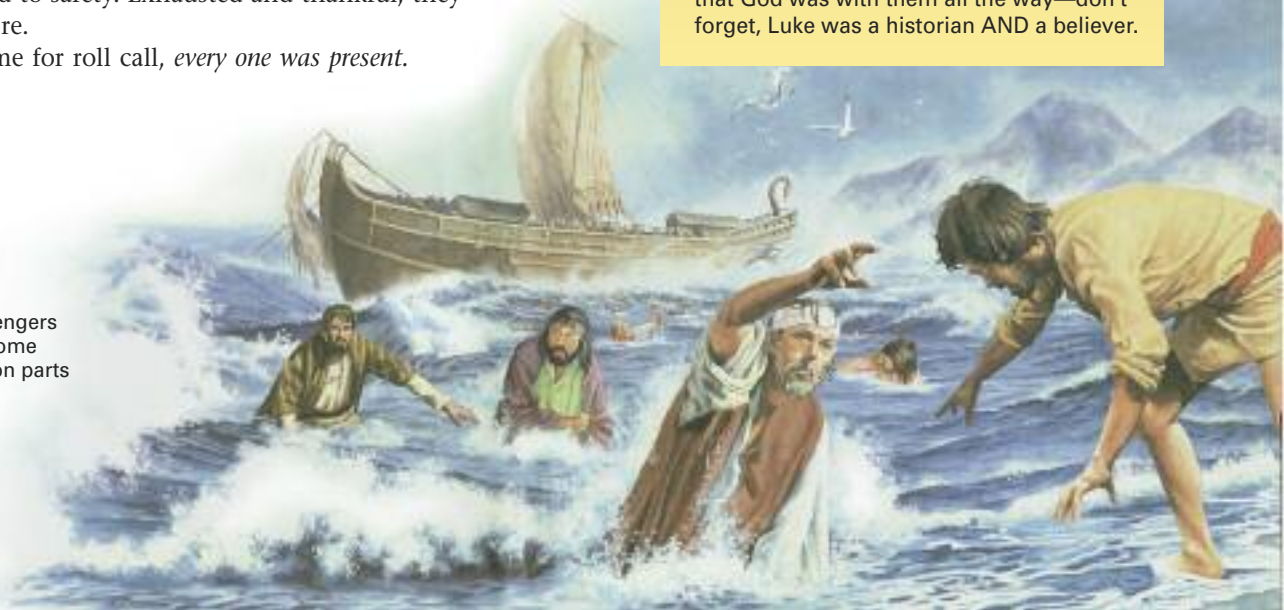
Apparently Paul's example had made such a deep impression on the centurion that he was determined to save Paul, even at the risk of losing some of the other prisoners. The centurion gave immediate orders for all under his care to abandon the ship and make for the shore, by whatever means. The prisoners' chains were cut, and all on board hurled themselves into the sea, those who could swim leading the way. The centurion was willing to risk escapees to save his prisoner Paul.

22. How many escaped safely to land? (27:44) \_\_\_\_\_

Picture that desperate scene—swimmers battling giant breakers, and finally managing to scramble onto shore; non-swimmers clinging to pieces of the wreckage being tossed about on angry waves that carry them towards shore. Above the crash of waves and sounds of the storm can be heard the calls and cries of desperate men. Those who make it to shore turn back to assist the island's natives who have come to help. Finally the last half-drowned man is pulled to safety. Exhausted and thankful, they all collapse on the shore.

When the time came for roll call, *every one was present*.

All 276 crew and passengers make for the shore—some swimming and some on parts of the ship.



#### A closer look

##### Why so much detail?

Why did Luke give so much time and space to Paul's journey to Rome? Why so much detail? The route followed, the landmarks passed, and the time elapsed are all considered important. Why? Because details can testify to accuracy. And Luke had the details because he was an on-the-scene reporter all the way! Luke had a ready pen for anything that would further Christ's cause.

In the mid-nineteenth century a Scotsman named James Smith, who lived in various parts of the Mediterranean world, undertook a serious study of the region's weather patterns and geography. As a result of his investigation, he concluded that the account in Acts 27 was unquestionably the product of an eyewitness who was not himself a sailor. Smith wrote, "No sailor would have written in a style so little like that of a sailor; no man not a sailor could have written a narrative of a sea voyage so consistent in all its parts, unless from actual observation" (*The Voyage and Shipwreck of Saint Paul*, by James Smith, published in 1848). He concluded that Luke's terms are accurate as to the route the ship took, ancient navigating skills, details of the ship's physical construction, and the way in which the sailors tried to cope with the storm.

Smith is right. Luke was not a sailor. By profession he was a physician, and on the side he was a historian. He was out of his element on the high seas. But he was there, though we know it only because of his use of the first plural pronoun "we."

Why the detail? So that we, reading the account twenty centuries later, could share their unforgettable experience—and see that God was with them all the way—don't forget, Luke was a historian AND a believer.

#### Acts 28:1–6 NKJV

1 Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta.

2 And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold.

3 But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

4 So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live."

5 But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm.

6 However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.



#### Safe on Malta

The island of Malta, called Melita (in Acts 28:1), is the largest of a group of islands, lying about 56 miles south of the southern extremity of Sicily, making it about mid-way between the mainland coast of Italy and the African coast. The island itself is small, having a total area of less than 100 square miles, but its central position in the Mediterranean Sea gave it great importance as a naval station. Probably first a Phoenician colony, it later came under the domination of the Greeks, from whom the Romans captured it in 18 BC, placing it under the jurisdiction of the province of Sicily.

Under Roman rule, the island became famous for its textile fabric, which was sold to Rome for expensive clothing and furniture coverings.

As for government, the administration was in the hands of a deputy referred to as the Protos Melitaion (Act 28:7), the position Publius occupied. A bay 2–1/2 miles northwest of Valetta, facing southeast, is thought to be the place where the vessel shipwrecked that brought Paul and company ashore. The description of the bay tallies admirably with the description of the locality in Acts. Even today, charts indicate that near the west side of the entrance to the bay, the depth is first 20 feet, then 15 feet, while the rush of the breakers in front of a little island in the bay make it suited to the reference of a place "where two seas met" (Acts 27:41).

Today the inlet is called the Bay of St. Paul.

EVERY ONE. They were a bedraggled group, but not a single life was lost. All 276 survived. God's promise had come true. Two weeks of terror ended in a safe landing—and, one would hope, there were more than three prayers of thanks (from Paul, Luke and Aristarchus) rising to the God of heaven!

#### Safe on Malta



Read Acts 28:1–6

What was the name of the land mass where the stranded victims came ashore? It was the island of Malta, an island well-known to sailors of the Mediterranean. Part of the Roman Empire, it was under the jurisdiction of the ruler of Sicily.

23. What was the attitude of the people of the island toward the new arrivals? (28:2) \_\_\_\_\_

Luke, in keeping with Greek custom, called the people "barbarians," not because they were uncivilized or uneducated but simply because they did not speak Greek.

One can imagine that the sudden arrival of 276 persons on an island this size, given the rainy, cold weather conditions, created some excitement. But the Maltese knew how to build a good fire to warm the victims and dry their clothes. The kindly reception was a stroke of good fortune, as the majority of the sailors and prisoners would have viewed it, and a blessing from heaven for Paul and his friends. Who could guess what might have come of these people had the island been desolate and uninhabited, or had it been occupied by a hostile race.

24. Almost immediately, what calamity befell Paul? (28:3) \_\_\_\_\_

Paul was not one to stand by and watch others work. He was gathering sticks himself to add to the fire. He could have felt that such work was beneath his dignity, or he could have pleaded exhaustion and fatigue. Or he could have complained about the rain, the wind, and the cold, and sat down close to the fire while others gathered wood. But no, Paul was up helping with the task at hand.

Suddenly as Paul threw a bundle of wood on the flames, a poisonous snake fastened itself on his hand. Atheists and scholars challenge this point as evidence that the narrative is not accurate. But just because there are no venomous snakes on Malta today does not prove that none were there 2,000 years ago. Luke, who was a physician by profession, recognized the snake as poisonous, and he doubtless had some practical knowledge of treating snake bites. The natives of the island also recognized the snake as poisonous and were alarmed. Should we nearly 2,000 years removed from the event think that we know more than they?

25. What was the immediate conclusion of the islanders regarding Paul? (28:4) \_\_\_\_\_

The horrified natives could only conclude in line with their beliefs—that vengeance seeks out those who offend. Paul, having escaped the vengeance of the sea, was a murderer yet to be punished by the gods. It was a matter of justice.

Did Paul understand the conversation of the natives about his snake bite? Even if he did not, he could likely read their body language, and see the horror on their faces. But all the while Paul knew he was in God's hands. He could still hear the promise of the angel: "You must be brought before Caesar" (Acts

27:24). His work would not be complete until he had reached Caesar's court. Neither storm nor human enemy or viper could interfere with that certainty.

26. How did Paul respond to the snake bite? What were the aftereffects?

(28:5) \_\_\_\_\_

The natives watched Paul. And watched. And watched. And watched. Nothing happened. Probably no one watched him more intensely than Luke, Paul's personal attending physician. There was concern on Luke's face, but not alarm, for he, too, knew the promise of God, that Paul would live. But if Paul had needed his services, Luke was ready to provide them, though he would have to depend on the natives for materials.

27. When Paul did not drop dead, what was the next conclusion of the natives? (28:6) \_\_\_\_\_

So sure were the natives that Paul would drop dead, that when it failed to happen, they immediately concluded—not that the snake was not poisonous, but that the mysterious traveler that landed on their island was a god! Acquainted only with their own version of magic and their superstitious beliefs, they had no knowledge of the God of heaven and His awesome power.

TO BE CONTINUED



The apostle Paul shakes off the poisonous snake and to everyone's amazement has no ill effects from its bite.

*I never did, or countenanced, in public life, a single act inconsistent with the strictest good faith; having never believed there was one code of morality for a public, and another for a private man.*

—Thomas Jefferson, 1809

#### ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 19

##### JESUS' MIRACLES

1. At Cana turning water into wine (John 2:1–11)
2. Simon Peter's (Matt. 8:14–15)
3. Jesus rebuked the wind and waves and the storm ceased (Mark 4:35–5:1)
4. Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:21–24, 35–43)
5. 5 loaves and 2 fishes (Matt. 14:13–21)
6. Peter (Matt. 14:25–32)
7. Wash in the pool of Siloam (John 9:1–11)
8. Lazarus (John 11:1–44)
9. Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46–52)

##### JESUS TEACHES

1. The Kingdom of God (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14; Luke 8:1)
2. Love for God, and secondly, love for one's neighbor (Matt. 22:36–40)
3. Our Father (Matt. 6:9–13)
4. To keep His commandments (John 14:23)
5. Jesus despised hypocrisy—outward show of religion without heart (Matt. 6:1–7; 23:23)
6. False. In Matthew 7:21, Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will

enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven."

7. Come and learn from Him (Matt. 11:28–30)
8. True. Jesus said, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." (Matt. 6:14–15)
9. False. The angel told Mary that her child would "be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35)
10. God, because one cannot serve two masters, God and riches (Matt. 6:24)
11. We must be sincere when we pray, not pray just to be seen by men (Matt. 6:5)

##### THE EXODUS

1. On the backside of the Midian desert, near Mt. Horeb (Mt. Sinai), in the land of Midian (Ex. 3:1)
2. The angel of the Lord spoke to him from a burning bush (Ex. 3:2–12)
3. To convince the Israelites and Pharaoh that God was backing Moses (Ex. 4:1–9)
4. Aaron, Moses' brother (Ex. 4:10–16)

5. Ten (Ex. 7:14–12:29)
6. Water to blood, frogs, gnats or lice, flies, diseased livestock, boils, thunder and hail, locusts, darkness, death of the firstborn (Ex. 7:14–12:29)
7. They obeyed God's command to mark the doorframe of their houses with the blood of the lamb they had killed for the Passover feast (Ex. 12:21–23)
8. Passover (Ex. 12:14–20)
9. Four hundred and thirty years (Ex. 12:40)
10. "Rise up, get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel; and go, worship the Lord, as you have said." (Ex. 12:31–32)
11. About 600,000 Israelite men, plus women and children, with their livestock, departed Egypt on their journey to the Promised Land (Ex. 12:37–38)
12. Moses parted the waters of the Red Sea so the Israelites could escape the pursuing Egyptian army. Then he again stretched out his rod over the sea and the waters returned, drowning the Egyptian army. (Ex. 14:21–29)

## A Closer Look at The AWESOME 'Roo



Imagine the reaction when the first explorers to the Australian Continent returned to Europe describing an animal that had a head like a deer (without antlers), that stood upright like a man, and hopped like a frog, and sometimes was seen as having two heads! Can we wonder the reports were dismissed as travelers' tales?

These awesomely designed creatures are different from anything that lives anywhere else in the world. Their heads do look similar to that of a deer. They do stand upright on large powerful legs and feet especially designed for leaping, and the female may appear to be two-headed when seen with a "joey" looking out of her pouch.

Kangaroos are native to the continent of Australia. A family of macropods (meaning 'large foot'), they include the Red Kangaroo, the Eastern and Western Grey Kangaroos, and the Antilopine Kangaroo, along with many smaller animals such as the wallabies, wallaroos, tree-kangaroos, pademelons and the Quokka. Altogether there are 62 known types of kangaroos in this family. All are marsupials, and all are hoppers.

### ***Awesome mobility***

Kangaroos are the only large animals that get around by hopping (a kangaroo can weigh up to 200 pounds). For the Red Kangaroo, a comfortable hopping speed is about 13–16 miles an hour—a speed they can maintain for hours. For short distances they have been known to travel at speeds up to 43 mph. At normal cruising speed the kangaroo covers 5–6 feet of ground with each leap.

Does the kangaroo get excessively tired when hopping? Actually, given the design of the animal's legs, hopping is a highly energy-efficient means of travel. Like a coiled spring, the tendons in the kangaroo's hind legs are especially constructed to store energy. The more the tendons are compressed, the greater the energy released with each hop, so that the kangaroo expends less energy to cover the distance.

To keep its balance while it is flying through the air, its Designer has equipped the kangaroo with a long, extremely muscular tail. When traveling fast, the kangaroo is airborne about 70% of the time. The kangaroo has yet another amazing means of saving energy. Its hopping and breathing are linked so that as its feet leave the ground, air is expelled from the lungs. The act of bringing the feet forward ready for landing refills the lungs. (Did such an ability just happen?)

Why is the kangaroo so well equipped to cover ground efficiently? Because often it must travel long distances to find enough food and water to survive. The Great and Wise Creator designed the kangaroo to meet the challenges of its environment.

When the kangaroo wants to move more slowly, as when grazing, it uses its front legs and tail as a tripod arrangement to move its hind legs forward (it can't move its back legs independently on land). It then moves its front legs and tail forward. It can move its legs independently in the water, though, and kangaroos are very good swimmers.

### ***What's for dinner?***

Kangaroos live on plants. Well adapted to survive in drier regions, they also get most of the water they need from plants.

To masticate the plants and grasses they live on, kangaroos are very dependent on their specialized teeth. Their incisors chop the grass close to the ground, and their molars grind the grass. The silica in the grasses they eat is abrasive and wears down the molars. But God designed the kangaroo with a special provision for that problem. Each kangaroo is equipped with four pairs of teeth. As their front teeth on each side become worn and fall out, the back teeth move forward.



Kangaroos carry their babies in body pouches. This cuddly-looking joey when born was a blind and deaf bare-skinned baby, weighing just 1 gram and measuring less than 1 inch long.

Like cows, kangaroos regurgitate and chew their cud. Also like cows they have sectioned stomachs with bacteria in them to help break down their coarse food. As a byproduct of digestive fermentation, kangaroos, like most ruminants, produce large quantities of methane gas. And—can you imagine—the kangaroo is equipped with the means of converting this gas into acetate, which the animal uses to produce additional energy! Isn't this a marvelous gift from the Creator to a creature that lives in a harsh, arid land where food and water are not plentiful!

### *It's time for the joey(s)...*

All kangaroos are marsupials. That means the young are born at a very early stage of development and nurtured in a special pouch until they are ready to be on their own. Gestation time is relatively short (about 31–36 days), but if food sources are scarce, the mother can “suspend” the birth of the infant until food is more available. (How did the mother “learn” to do this?)

The tiny infant, about the size of a lima bean, is mostly head and fore-limbs at birth. Sightless and hairless, the newborn must crawl through its mother's fur for a distance of about 6” to reach the pouch. There it attaches itself to one of four nipples and for three months it never lets go while it is nourished on the mother's rich milk. The fragile little joey, as young kangaroos are called, must make this journey across its mother's abdomen without any help from its mother. Any extra exposure to sun or wind could kill it, and if it should stray, its mother will not redirect it. This journey has been compared to a human newborn crawling up a steep 10 foot hill, through tall grass, with its eyes closed and using only its arms, and all in about 30 minutes—quite a feat!

When the joey emerges from its mother's pouch about 6 months later, it is a bright-eyed, fuzzy youngster eager to meet the world. It will move in and out of the safety of the pouch and will continue to nurse at will for the next few months. It will stay with its mother until it is 18 months old. The amazing thing is that once it starts to come and go from the pouch, this joey may be sharing the pouch with a younger sibling. The milk the older joey gets is carbohydrate rich milk, while the milk needed by the tiny new joey is much richer in fats. The mother can produce both kinds of milk at the same time to meet the needs of each of her young. Amazing?! How could this selective production be the result of unguided evolution and blind natural selection? Only an Omniscient Creator designed such a provision.

And this is not all. When a joey is born, another joey (#3) is conceived within a matter of days. But its development is paused until joey #1 is no longer coming to the pouch for nourishment and joey #2 is big enough to start leaving the pouch on occasion. Then the development of joey #3 moves forward—who could imagine such order and design! And all for the survival of the common kangaroo!

I cannot understand how such intricate design could be the product of chance! We can only give glory to God for all His works. This same Creator has a plan for this earth. His plan is to have a righteous people inhabiting the earth forever, and He is inviting all who will meet His standard of character to be part of that family.

Let us be inspired by what we learn of God's creation to be the very best we can be, assured that if we do on our part, He can do for us just as surely as He provides for the lowliest of His creatures! **MM**

Sources: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kangaroo>  
<http://outback-australia-travel-secrets.com/kangaroo-facts.html>  
*Zoobooks, Kangaroos*

Joey gets a drink. He may continue to suckle even after a blind, bumblebee-size brother inherits the pouch.



Despite his size, the 12-pound joey still commutes between pouch and outside world. When there is danger, he may somersault back into the pouch and then contentedly stick his head out to graze like an adult.

Kangaroos have two special bones unique to marsupials that support the pouch.



To mother's pouch

The newborn kangaroo is only the size of a bumblebee. But at birth to survive, the baby must immediately climb up some six inches through the mother's fur to the safety of her pouch. Inside the pouch it clamps onto a teat, where it stays attached for 3 months.

About 6"



In one hop, a Grey Kangaroo can jump as much as 44 feet. And when it really gets going, it can leap more than 11 feet off the ground. In open places the big kangaroos can travel 40 miles an hour for short distances.



# THE WORLD FOR SALE!

Printed in 1864 in *Sander's Fourth Grade Reader*

*THE WORLD FOR SALE!—Hang out the sign:  
Call every traveler here to me.  
Who'll buy this brave estate of mine,  
And set me from earth's bondage free?  
'Tis going!—yes, I mean to fling  
The bauble from my soul away.  
I'll sell for any price it brings,  
The World at Auction here today!*

*It is a glorious thing to see—  
Ah, it has cheated me so sore!  
It is not what it seemed to be:  
For sale! It shall be mine no more.  
Come, turn it round and check it well,  
I would not have you pay too high;  
'Tis going! GOING! I must sell!  
Who bids? Who'll buy the tears and sigh?*

*Here's WEALTH in glittering heaps of gold—  
Who bids? But hark! I must be fair,  
A baser lot was never sold;  
You're buying heavy heaps of care,  
See here, spread out in broad domain,  
The goodly landscape all may trace;  
Hall, cottage, tree, field, hill, and plain;  
Come, buy yourself a burial place!*

*Here's LOVE, the dreamy potent spell  
That beauty flings around the heart;  
I know its power, alas! too well;  
'Tis going. Love and I must part!  
Must part? Whatever can be wrong with love,  
Enchanting love that comes to reign?  
'Tis plumeless, like a dying dove,—  
An hour of bliss—an age of pain!*

*The world has hurt me,  
I can't even talk it up...  
I've left it... for the  
KINGDOM OF GOD!*

*And FRIENDSHIP, rarest gem of earth,  
Say, who can claim the jewel is his?  
Frail, fickle, false, and little worth,—  
Who bids for Friendship as it is?  
'Tis going! GOING!—Hear the call:  
Once, twice, three times—the price is low,  
'Twas once my hope, my stay, my all—  
But now the broken staff must go!*

*FAME! Hold the brilliant meteor high;  
See every dazzling gilded name!  
You millions, now's the time to buy!  
How much for Fame? How much for Fame?  
Hear how it thunders! Would you stand  
On high Olympus, far renowned?  
Now purchase, and a world command! —  
And be with this world's curses crowned!*

*Sweet star of HOPE! Your brightness shine  
In every faint and worried heart  
Except this fearful heart of mine,—  
Come, claim your friend, and never part!  
If mine were not a bankrupt life,  
This treasure I would grasp and hold;  
But Hope and I are now at strife;  
My bitterness cannot be told.*

*And SONG! For sale my tuneless lute;  
No solace sweet is mine to hold;  
The chords that charmed my soul are mute;  
I can not wake the notes of old!  
For even if with wizard shell  
I chained a world with rapture high,  
Yet now my sad farewell!—farewell!  
Must on its last faint echoes die.*

*AMBITION, FASHION, SHOW, and PRIDE—  
I part from all forever now;  
Grief in an overwhelming tide  
Has taught my haughty heart to bow.  
Poor heart! Distracted, ah, so long—  
Must still its throbbing heartache bear;  
How broken what was once so strong!  
How heavy what was free from care!*

*Gone! Gone for me life's fitful dream;  
Bright vision has been swept away;  
'Tis well, I've found a deeper stream;  
My sinking soul a surer stay.  
Before Death leaves me all bereft,  
I weep, yet humbly kiss the rod—  
I'll use each moment I have left  
To seek the Kingdom of my God!*

—by Ralph Hoyt



**W**hat does the true Christian get in exchange for giving up "the world"?

Peter asked Jesus this question: "See, we have left all and followed You."

What was Jesus' answer? "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:28–30).



*Giving all diligence,*  
*add to your faith* **VIRTUE,**  
*to virtue* **KNOWLEDGE,**  
*to knowledge* **SELF-CONTROL,**  
*to self-control*  
**PERSEVERANCE,**  
*to perseverance* **GODLINESS,**  
*to godliness*  
**BROTHERLY KINDNESS,**  
*and to brotherly kindness* **LOVE.**

*2 Peter 1:5–7*

