

# *The Bible Standard*

... all  
them that  
sail with  
thee

# “All them that sail with thee”

— Acts 27: 24 —

THE PROVIDENCES OF GOD are the daily, hourly reminders of the Heavenly Father’s love for His children. Not that the experiences He arranges for us are always pleasant. Usually unanticipated, difficulties come upon us, disturbing our godly peace and trust and testing our mettle as followers of Christ. The hymn captures the wealth of experience of the Christian life succinctly:

*If on a quiet sea  
Toward home I calmly sail,  
With grateful heart, O God, to thee,  
I’ll own the favoring gale.  
But when the surges rise,  
And rest delay to come,  
Blest be the tempest, kind the storm,  
Which drives me nearer home.*

— No. 106, *Hymns of Millennial Dawn*

It was the rising tempest referred to in the second verse that afflicted the passage of the Apostle Paul, en route to Rome. The full account of the events leading up to Paul’s journey to Italy is found in Acts 21: 15 to 28: 16.

Having been arrested in Jerusalem, due to a misunderstanding, the Apostle was locked up by the Roman guard in the castle to protect him from an angry crowd baying for his blood. Claiming the right as a free-born citizen of the Roman Empire, Paul requested a hearing before a tribunal and was brought before the Sanhedrin. Gauging that he would most likely not receive an impartial judgment from the council, he framed his defense in such a way as to sow discord between the Sadducees and the Pharisees on the council, resulting in a noisy outburst, from which he was

again rescued by the Roman guard. The captain of the guard made arrangements for him to be transported under heavy guard to Caesarea, where he would appear before the governor, Felix.<sup>1</sup>

Paul spoke twice before Felix; two years later, before Porcius Festus (Felix’s successor); then Herod Agrippa (with Festus present). On each occasion he made a stout and persuasive defense of his mission, fulfilling that which Jesus had predicted of him — that he would carry the Lord’s name before Gentiles, Jews, and even kings (Acts 9: 15). Truly, there has been no greater witness to the words and ministry and, indeed, the very *existence* of Jesus.

## Show Me

Numerous critics of the Bible point out the lack of concrete evidence for events related in holy Scripture. But the accounts in the Old Testament contain much geographical and chronological data, such as people and place names, to buttress and confirm its veracity. Still, there is enough information left out to allow for doubt. This, of course, is to be expected: the Scriptures in general are not written for those who lack faith; but this does not deeply disturb the established faith of those who have come to know and trust God, for the narratives hang together in a sensible way and command the attention of all who inquire after God. On top of this, *the very existence* of Israel herself is the most visible demonstration of the truthfulness of Hebrew Scripture.

The perspective offered from the New Testament is perhaps an easier target for the cynic, for little direct physical proof of Jesus’ life has come down to our day. Indeed, the Gospels themselves are the accounts of witnesses — narrators who make the extraordinary claim that their Master

<sup>1</sup> In an almost accidental fashion we learn from this incident that Paul had at least one sister in Jerusalem (Acts 23: 16); it was her son, Paul’s nephew, who alerted the captain of the guard to the fact that a band of 40 extremist Jews, who bore a burning hatred of Paul, had vowed not to “eat nor drink till they have killed him.” The large military escort which accompanied Paul to the governor thwarted the plan.

“Lift up a standard for the people” — Isa. 62: 10

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*disappeared and was raised from the dead.* It is on this point that the critics of the Bible have their field day. And it was this skepticism that met the disciples in their public discourse. These rude simpletons (as they were seen) were deluded disturbers of the Greco-Roman world and Jewry, turning the settled order “upside down” (Acts 17: 6). But the Apostle Paul was different.

### From Saul to Paul

A rigorous advocate of Judaism and Jewishness, Saul of Tarsus was no shrinking violet. If we add one letter to that most fragile of flowers, we get a description of Saul’s manner toward the Christians — violent. So aggressive was he, as an agent of the Sanhedrin, that he hunted down Christians wherever he could find them, travelling from place to place in an effort to exterminate this vile sect. A hero in the anti-Christian cause, he supervised the stoning of Stephen, the first on record to be martyred for his faith (Acts 7: 59, 60). This event, and his memory of the numerous Christians he had sent to prison and, likely, to cruel deaths, haunted the converted Saul for the rest of his life, causing him to rank himself as the “chief of sinners,” no doubt conscious of the overwhelming grace which had delivered him from his former self.

It was while on the hunt for Christians in Damascus that Saul encountered the dramatic providence of God. Possibly, long nagging by his conscience had made him pensive, introspective, and he began to *doubt* that he was doing the right thing. How could these Christians be so persistent in their belief in spite of persecution? What gave them their courage? And what was it *in himself* that made him question whether or not he, too, would like to have the spirit he saw in them. We would not be surprised, had we been in his company for some weeks or months, to find that Saul of Tarsus was becoming a querulous, irritable individual, impossible to work with. For such is the unsettled conscience, as it works on the heart and mind of the sincere, and it leads to a change of direction or of action.

### Acts 9: 1-25

And so, at the most suitable moment — for God’s providences always strike at the right time — his world was shattered by the light and the voice from heaven. Fallen to the ground, humbled in the dust, he sought an answer. His question is stated in such a way as to give us a clue as to his changed viewpoint, “Who art thou, *Lord?*” Addressed directly to his unknown assailant, he received a direct, first-person response: “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.”

### The Oneness of the Brethren

That Jesus identified the persecution of His people with persecution of His own Person speaks much of the compassion that He has for His own. This principle of the unity of the Savior with His disciples is revealed in His prayer in John 17: 11:

And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.

The generous, loving carefulness which our Lord exercises to those who have come to Him is a reflection, in turn, of the love which the Heavenly Father has for His Son, and His Son’s children. “Like father, like son,” a proverb rooted in a general truth, neatly expresses the powerful — no, overwhelming — influence that the paternal God exercised on His Beloved.

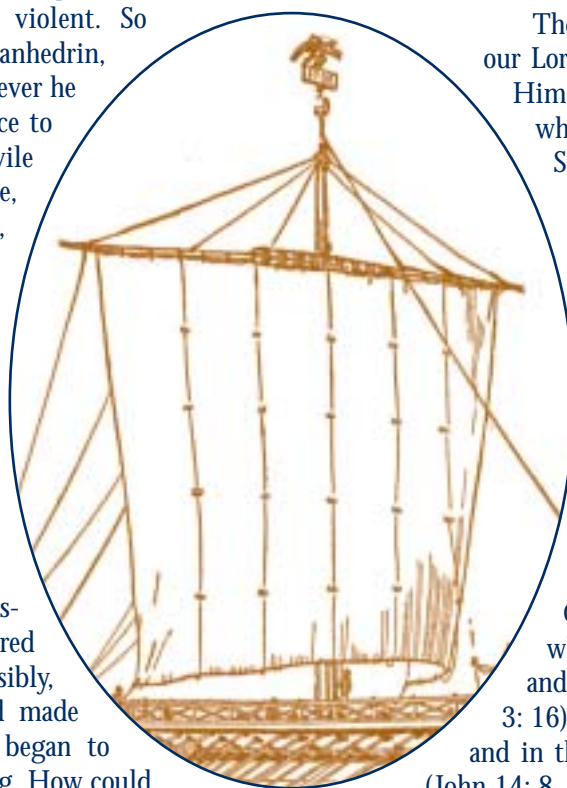
Always at His Father’s side, rejoicing in His presence, Jesus imbibed the spirit of His Father, studied Him, learned how to be like Him (Prov. 8: 30). So much so that Jesus is described as the mirror image of His Father’s character. It was this God-inspired love and compassion which impelled Jesus to descend to earth and to die that the world might live (John 3: 16). In this sense, did God “give” His Son; and in the ministry of Jesus we see the Father (John 14: 8, 9).

Perhaps these and a multitude of other truths cascaded into the mind of Saul, prostrate and waiting. And even at that moment of humiliation, the Voice from Heaven predicted his future and his mighty ministry (Acts 22: 10).

### The Ideal Witness

Prejudice afflicts all of us. We may consider ourselves to be free of it. We may say that we have no prejudice as to race or religion, and it may be true. But lurking somewhere in each of us is a pre-conceived notion, of some kind, which limits our ability to fairly evaluate an individual, a circumstance, or whatever it may be. We are conscious of the number one subject — *self*, and we see the world around us through that filter. (*Take the test:* When you are shown a group photograph from your school or college days, whom do you look for first?)

It is well known that witnesses to a traffic accident frequently differ in their accounts as to generalities and details. This could be the result of a faulty memory or understandable lack of attentiveness and the shock of the



event. Often, however, it is due to a view of events shaped by one's personality, developed over many years, which takes special notice of certain things to the exclusion of others — all of this leavened by presumptions. The jury in a court of law, valuable and necessary as it is, comprising fallible men and women, is prone to error, as the much-advertised recent miscarriages of justice demonstrate.

We have not mentioned the possibility of wilful deception, the testimony of the shyster, the “con” — but, apart from these, it is evident that the most sincere individual can be an unreliable witness. This was as true in the ancient world as it is in our own, hence the “two or three witnesses” rule (Deut. 19: 15; Matt. 18: 15-17).

The testimony of the Apostles was true. Jesus told them that He would give them words to utter when they went forth to preach Him (Luke 21: 12-15); truths that they had forgotten would be brought to their recollection (John 14: 26), and their witness would be fruitful (Matt. 28: 19, 20).

### **The Turncoat Rejected**

Saul, the unbeliever, now re-named Paul, met with unbelief when he was presented to the church at Damascus as a convert. This was no doubt a ruse, they thought. Even for these people of faith, this was too much to swallow. Their enemies may have accused them of being gullible in other matters, but this they could not accept. Distrusted by the Christian community, and now hated by those previously his allies, the Jews — who threatened to kill him — Paul, the former Pharisee, was smuggled out, ignominiously, in a basket let down over the city wall.

For some years He was lost sight of. Paul's own account of these years is in Gal. 1: 17, 18, where he says that he spent three years in Arabia. It was during these times of separation that he prepared his mind and heart for his ministry to come. After Barnabas — an early associate of Paul — sought him out at Tarsus (Paul's hometown), the Apostle began the travels which would take him around much of the known world (Acts 11: 25, 26).

### **A New Creation**

It takes a long time and a lot of hard work to unmake a human heart, to unravel the complex web of emotions and prejudice that overlays the character. But the Lord has all the time in the world and prepares His willing vessels well. Paul, not yet known as an Apostle, had a fund of knowledge and learning and latent wisdom which he would yet bring to bear on the first-century world, turning it upside down and shaping the centuries to come. *And he would do it as a witness of a Man he had never met and to an Event that he never saw!*

What greater advocate for Christian truth could there be than one who had himself at one time not believed? Not only had he been an unbeliever, he had been a vitriolic opponent of the people of “the way” (Acts 9: 1, 2). “Much learning hath made thee mad,” utters Porcius Festus (Acts 26: 24). And so persuasive was Paul's argument that Agrippa almost yielded to its logic (Acts 26: 28).

Unlike the other Apostles, Paul was not an eyewitness of our Lord's life. Jesus was crucified and raised in A.D. 33 and Saul of Tarsus did not become Paul the Apostle until sometime after. In several places in his epistles he acknowledged that he was a latecomer. But without arrogance he says that he was not inferior to the other Apostles. This statement reflects his thorough acceptance of both his forgiven state and the certainty of his mission, as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

This certainty derived from his having “seen” — witnessed — the risen Christ *in His glory*. The other Apostles had not been given this privilege. Only the longer-lived of the company, John, in the Revelation, would witness such heavenly glories. (Perhaps Paul's exclusive privileges engendered some resentment from the other Apostles; we cannot be sure about this, but from reading the Acts and the various epistles it is apparent that there were certain tensions between Paul and several of his compatriots.)

### **“Born out of due time”**

So Paul was indeed a witness to the fact that Jesus had been resurrected and his appointment as an Apostle was, in part, predicated on this fact (Acts 22: 7, 8; 26: 19; Gal. 1: 1). His zeal for his ministry and his utter conviction of the truthfulness of what he believed impressed his hearers so greatly that his powerful influence is felt today. He has been a problem for the skeptics, the deriders of holy truth. They could not lay at his door the charge of simpleton, or naive buffoon. A highly educated doctor of the Law, a brilliant logician, Paul, the outsider, was won over to the so-called “ignominious cause” of the small first-century Christian sect, helping to transform it into history's most significant movement.

The conclusion drawn from the lengthy interrogation of Paul was that he had done nothing to deserve capital punishment, which his antagonists were urging. Again, perhaps sensing the inevitability of the witnessing work which he must yet complete, Paul asked for his case to be referred to Caesar, the ultimate authority in Rome, which was his right as a Roman citizen. Thus began his final journey, leading us to the events referred to by the text at the head of this article.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The account of Paul's journey to Rome is recorded in remarkable detail, with ports of call, weather conditions — even the name of the gale, *Euroclydon*, a strong easterly wind of the Mediterranean area (Acts 27: 14). We refer the reader to Acts 27 (entire chapter) up to and including Acts 28: 16. A detailed narrative such as this is an antidote to the often-repeated assertion of critics of Scripture that there is much invention in the Biblical accounts. The observations recorded by Luke in these chapters bring Paul's ministry to life and — to use a nautical expression — anchor one's faith.

## The Influence of Sail

Nostalgia for the beauty of sailing has inspired a revival of interest in the ancient maritime world. The “tall ships” from around the world are a popular attraction at the various ports of call. A large number of English words and expressions (*thwart, batten down the hatches, haven*) evoke the era of sailing, a powerful symbol in the days when the wealth of a nation depended on sea-bound commerce and exploration. Paul himself uses the Greek word, *nauageo*, when in 1 Tim. 1: 19 he refers to the apostates as having been shipwrecked. But for those whose daily lives depended on the sea, life aboard ship could be anything but pleasant, and it was hard work all the way.

Always at risk from inclement weather, the daily round of raising and lowering sails, navigating a true course by day or night, and accomplishing the multitude of tasks such as washing, cooking, and maintaining some semblance of sanitary conditions — the sailor’s life produced a unique individual, a “salt” of the sea, known for his coarse manner and peculiar habits. And a discontented crew made up of these rough sailors would spell deep trouble for a wayward captain. No wonder that many skippers exercised an iron discipline, often to their ruin.

### Bound for Rome (Acts 27)

Paul, legally a prisoner, was guarded by a small band of soldiers under the command of the centurion, Julius. Luke and Aristarchus also accompanied the Apostle. The company embarked on a ship from Adramyttium, a port in the Roman province of Asia, in northwestern Asia Minor.

Ships of the time lacked navigational aids, so following the common practice, the vessel carrying Paul sailed within sight of the coastline. When the ship reached Sidon, Julius, who apparently had taken a liking to Paul, allowed the Apostle to visit with friends in the area. The next leg of the journey took them to Cyprus and thence to Myra, where the company boarded a vessel bound for Italy.

### Danger on the High Sea

The weather turned nasty. Here Paul gave warning number one: he advised that the ship put into port, stay in the haven until the storm had passed, and then continue the voyage. Naturally, the prisoner had no credibility, and he was ignored.<sup>3</sup> The ship continued to its inevitable fate, for God’s providence had decreed it.

An experienced captain and crew of a sailing ship can make it do remarkable things, and by various tricks of the trade can send the vessel where they want it to go. All of their efforts failed in this case and they were steered to shallow, rock-strewn waters. Putting down anchor, the company

*“The Alexandrian corn-ships were evidently of considerable magnitude. That in which St. Paul sailed had 276 persons on board, and the cargo, no doubt, was large (Acts 27: 37). Josephus was wrecked in one of these vessels with 600 men on board. Such ships may, therefore, be supposed to be of 1,100 or 1,200 tons. They were the largest of their class; and of course there were many of inferior size.”*

— The Treasury of Bible Knowledge, J. Ayre

debated what should be done, apparently overnight, for Paul was given a dream by God, which he recounts in verses 24-26.

As Luke relates it, Paul was told by God’s angel that the ship would be destroyed on the rocks but that all on board would be saved uninjured. The centurion, Julius, who had come to regard Paul highly, trusted his judgment. When a number of the crew feigned attention to the anchors and attempted to get to shore in the lifeboat, Paul insisted that they stay on board, or everyone else would be lost.

We are not given the details of the angel’s revelation to Paul, and therefore cannot know why the defection of a few would penalize all, but it is sufficient to know that this was the case. Perhaps the working of God’s providence in this situation required the demonstration as the angel had outlined it. But the promise of this text — that none on board would suffer harm — has implications much wider than the immediate circumstances related in the text.

### Conversion

When we turn from sin and selfishness and commit our ways to God, through faith in His Son, our Ransomer, we may claim the privilege of God’s providence. We yield all that we have, and are, and ever hope to be, to His care, relinquishing the right to govern our own lives. In return He pledges Himself to stand on our side and to guide us in the way in which we ought to go (Rom. 8: 28; Psa. 32: 8). Were our protector not the Almighty of the universe, we would be in trouble. But we can rest assured that He will not — for He cannot — fail us. But there is more.

On the broad principle that whoever loves His Son, the Father will love, it is also true that God loves those whom we love (Matt. 10: 40-42). In the Scriptures, we frequently encounter the association “thee and thine house,” whenever the blessings of salvation are in view. The jailer at Philippi was assured of this general blessing (Acts 16: 30-34).

<sup>3</sup> The Apostle Paul was not without experience of the treachery of the sea, and the captain of the vessel may have done well to pay attention to his advice. In 2 Cor. 11: 25, after relating some of the torments he had endured at the hands of his persecutors, he states that he was shipwrecked three times and had been adrift on the sea for a “night and a day.” These events preceded the incidents of Acts 27. This almost incidental record adds to our understanding, not only of the Apostle’s tribulations, but also to difficulties faced by the average seafarer and passenger of the day.

## Psalm 107

- 23 *They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters;*
- 24 *These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep.*
- 25 *For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof.*
- 26 *They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble.*
- 27 *They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end.*
- 28 *Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.*
- 29 *He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.*
- 30 *Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.*
- 31 *Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!*

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Mankind will reach their haven in Christ's Kingdom on earth. Then there will be universal peace and rest. This prospect is stated poetically in nautical language in Isa. 33: 21:

*But there the glorious LORD will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby.*

Certainly, the great Abrahamic covenant enunciated this principle, with its blessings to "thee and thy seed" (Gen. 17: 7). The Apostle Paul tells the married believers that for their sake, their children are sanctified (1 Cor. 7: 14). There is probably no great difficulty in understanding this principle as it pertains to the Christian and those within his or her Christian orbit. But the matter of Paul and the motley ship-load of passengers presents a different picture.

Here, we are told plainly that not only Paul and Luke — God's messengers — would be saved, but that the pagan soldiers, crew, and other prisoners would be saved, too. The Roman centurion, instrument of the powerful, secular state, whose job it was to carry Paul to his eventual execution; his soldiers, descendants in kind of those who cast lots at the foot of the Savior's cross; and a belligerent, conniving swarm of hard-bitten mariners, who trusted their fates to gods and the sea and the sky — *all these would be saved, too!*

## Raining on the Just and Unjust

The principle enunciated here is affirmed elsewhere in Scripture: God's natural blessings are indiscriminate, and all, believers and unbelievers alike, benefit from them (Matt. 5: 44, 45; *compare* Acts 24: 15, where Paul, in his defense before Felix, applies the same principle to the resurrection).

When Jesus spoke in Matt. 24: 22 of the horribly destructive phase of the Time of Trouble yet to come, He injected a merciful note, one perhaps missed by the casual reader. "For the elect's sake" the trouble would be curtailed. The healing of Jairus's daughter, and of the daughter of the heathen Syrophenician woman also demonstrate the principle: as a result of the faith of the father and the mother, the child — perhaps not yet a believer — was delivered (Mark 5: 22-43; 7: 24-30).

Can we not see here the compassion of God, not merely as a reactive quality, but as an initiating power, an inherent part of His character that will surely do good for all, even though they may be His enemies? "While we were yet sinners," the Apostle Paul says, "Christ died for us" (Rom. 5: 6-11). Have we grasped the significance of this broad embrace of God's love, which will not quench the smoking flax nor break the fragile reed (Isa. 42: 1-3)?

There is no greater affirmation of the love of God for mankind than in the sacrifice of His Son. As recorded in the book of Isaiah the chastisement of our peace was laid upon Him (53: 5). In the Suffering Servant's sacrifice we behold the perfect accomplishment of the Father's will through the Son. As a result of the joyful, loving, eager obedience of Jesus to do His Father's will, a whole world — past, present, and future — estranged from the holiness of God, has been offered life abundant (John 10: 10). At the time appointed, in Christ's Kingdom on earth, this truth will be demonstrated, and then all the inhabitants of the earth will know of God and His powerful love and be offered salvation (Isa. 25: 8, 9).

## The Widening Circle

It is an interesting and comfortable thought that living our lives in a Christ-pleasing way may bring blessings to those around us. Caught in the umbrella of providence which surrounds us, those who associate with us may receive grace and mercies of which we ourselves are unaware. When we travel on an airplane, committing our flight to God's providential protection in these uncertain days, do we thereby secure the safety of all those in the craft? We may not know. But it is certainly our responsibility, under the terms of our consecration, to live a sanctified life, to suppress fleshly and worldly tendencies, to magnify the place of Christ in our lives, to be at all times, an influence for good — not our own good, but in the sense that we fairly reflect the grace and glory of God.

The Hippocratic Oath requires that the doctor "do no harm." This is a noble ideal, but perhaps, for the Christian,

it is too passive a statement. Our effort should be directed toward doing positive good. The Apostle Paul said that he exercised much “labour and travail night and day” on behalf of the brethren (2 Thes. 3: 8).

In another place he speaks about being “baptized for the dead” and standing “in jeopardy every hour,” thereby revealing a deep truth: that the suffering of the Church in its individual members throughout the centuries has developed them to be associates with Christ in His Kingdom to come (1 Cor. 15: 29, 30). In being faithful to their calling *as individuals*, the Church of Christ has been developed collectively into the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ. She will one day lavish blessings all around, on a waiting world (Rom. 8: 19).

Under the sweet influences of Christ, mankind in the Kingdom to come will see thousands and millions of Saul-like conversions, when the peoples of the world, now tossed on the vicious waves of trouble, enter their haven (Psa. 107: 23-31). The deliverance of these future believers will come as the result of the great gift of Christ’s ransom-sacrifice laid down for them in anticipation of that day. And the work of all those who carried out the Great Commission over the centuries, who lived under persecution or died because of it, will have borne fruit.

Let us each do our part to preach the word of Truth, as witnesses to what we believe and why we believe it. This requires familiarity with the Scriptures and, most importantly, living our lives consistent with its principles. Then, God granting it, like the Apostle Paul we may shed a wide circle of blessings wherever we are and whatever we do.

\* \* \*

## LONGITUDE

**Navigation around the ocean** has always been difficult. For most of maritime history, sailors relied on observation of the moon and stars at night and the sun by day. Dependent on the weather, this was often a hit-or-miss affair and many lives and ships were lost at sea. No accurate way existed for calculating the adjustment of time necessary for east-west travel. It was not until the early 18th century that a practical and reliable method was discovered.

The practice of the day was the *Lunar Phase Method*, which combined observations of the moon’s traverse and the use of existing astronomical tables, but this did not provide the accuracy required. The trick was to determine local time and compare it against a known meridian and thus determine the distance travelled and predict the vessel’s course and time of arrival at port. The clocks then in use did not perform well aboard ship, being adversely affected by the motion and constantly changing humidity of the vessel.

As its maritime commerce and empire expanded around the globe, Britain needed to find a solution to this problem. Parliament launched a competition in 1714 to find a practical means of ascertaining longitude within a half-a-degree (as calculated from the prime meridian at Greenwich) during a test voyage from London to the West Indies. The prize was £20,000, an unimaginable fortune for the day. John Harrison, a Yorkshire carpenter and maker of wooden-g geared clocks took up the challenge. In 1762, after years of trial and error, Harrison and his apprentice son eventually produced a chronometer — known simply as H4 — which performed so well on the West Indies trial that it lost only about 5 seconds. Several years of disappointment lay ahead before his chronometer was fully endorsed by Parliament.

The innovations which Harrison employed to counter the effects of pitch and roll, and varying climatic conditions on board ship, are still in use today. His invention has saved countless lives at sea. Four of his models have survived, along with a number of his wooden clocks.

The lesson which we are warranted in gathering from this circumstance is a very comforting one; namely, that God is not unwilling to let some droppings of His favor fall upon those associated with His saints — not because they know Him or seek His favor, but because He so loved the world that He not only gave His Son to redeem them, but He thus sends to them His living witnesses to bear testimony of His love and grace and to call them to repentance, that they may place themselves in a proper attitude to receive His favor. This remarkable interposition on behalf of Paul and his fellow-passengers was an impressive lesson never to be forgotten — a testimony to the power and love of God.

In view of God’s willingness, thus manifested, to show favor to those associated with His people, even though they know Him not, it is plainly our privilege to request such favor toward our dear ones who are yet aliens to the commonwealth of Israel, and even enemies.

But in so doing, let us not forget that severe chastenings of such are often, necessarily, the only marks of favor which Divine wisdom can bestow for the good of the wandering and erring. And for these we should therefore be thankful, and not repine against the kind Providence which discerns such necessity. While the heavy strokes of discipline fall upon the erring for their correction, God’s children, through whose interposition they are thus specially brought under Divine supervision, must endeavor to take God’s standpoint in viewing the necessities of the case, and thankfully say, Amen! to all His wise, though often severe measures.

— *Selected*



**Q** Jesus said to Saul on the road to Damascus, “it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (Acts 9: 5 and 26: 14). What does this expression mean?

**A** Acts 9: 3-8 gives an account of Saul struck down by a blinding light and his subsequent conversion. Actually, the last clause of Acts 9: 5 which reads, “it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks,” and the first half of verse 6 are not in the oldest Greek manuscripts. However, when the Apostle Paul later recounts this experience before King Agrippa, he did use this phrase (Acts 26: 14).

In order to understand our Lord’s words to Paul, we need to study the meanings in the Greek. The word “kick” is translated from the Greek word *laktizo*, and means *to exercise stubborn resistance to*, and *to defy authority or guidance*.

The other word, “pricks” is the translation of the Greek word, *kentron*. A synonymous word is *goad*. In the Bible, goads were sharpened rods, usually around eight feet long, primarily used to control oxen, though they also made effective weapons (Judges 3: 31). In a sense, the words of the wise are like goads in that they appeal to facts, evidence, and one’s conscience, and in so doing, stimulate thought in the direction of truth, righteousness, and holiness (Eccles. 12: 11).

#### **Conversion of Sinners versus Paul’s Conversion**

Usually, we think of conversion as a sinner’s repenting and coming into a new relationship with God through Christ. Paul’s conversion, though it caused a tremendous change in his life, was not quite like that.

He had been born and raised a Jew, of the sect called the Pharisees — a holiness sect that was most exact and rigid in respect to the Divine Law. Likely he had been consecrated to God since his youth, and at the time of his encounter with the risen Lord was a zealous servant of God. Had he not been at heart honest and sincere, he may not have been dealt with in such a miraculous way.

Paul’s conversion was the opening of his spiritual eyes to see the truth concerning Jesus as Israel’s Messiah and as the Savior of the world, a conclusion he had been resisting for some time. Though Paul’s loyalty to God remained, his zeal became focused in the opposite direction. Instead of being the chief enemy and persecutor

of the early Church, he (eventually) became its chief servant under the Lord.

#### **“You are only hurting yourself”**

*The Living Bible* paraphrases our Lord’s words to Paul in Acts 26: 14 thus, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? *You are only hurting yourself*” [italics ours — Ed.].

Saul was persecuting Jesus, not personally, but indirectly through his persecution of the Church, for the Lord is intimately associated with His footstep followers. By doing so, Saul was working against himself, for he was placing himself in opposition to the Lord. All opposition to the Lord and truth is doomed to failure.

We can be sure that the Lord did not intervene in Paul’s life without first preparing him. What was the nature of the preparation? Most likely some of the “pricks” or “goads” that the Lord used — and that Paul had been contending with for some time — included his own observation of the beautiful Christian characters of those he was persecuting. Certainly that would have worked on his conscience, and made him feel uncomfortable.

We have no record of any details concerning Paul’s contact with Christians before his conversion, other than the occasion of Stephen’s death. Saul, as a member of the Sanhedrin, was probably present at Stephen’s trial, where he witnessed Stephen’s conduct before his accusers. Stephen was apparently so filled with love and joy that his face shone as “the face of an angel” (Acts 6: 15).

Saul heard Stephen’s sermon as he recounted God’s promises, past works, and His dealings with His people, and how they all pointed to Jesus. He listened to Stephen’s sharp rebuke, in laying the responsibility of the prophet’s deaths upon the Jewish clergy — that they, themselves, were guilty of the death of Jesus. Saul witnessed Stephen’s dying testimony as he committed his future to his Lord, and prayed for his murderers (Acts 7: 59, 60).

No doubt these events put their mark on Saul’s conscience and bore fruit in his conversion and ministry. For this, we all owe a debt of gratitude.

\* \* \*



## The Hairs of Your Head

“There shall not an hair of your head perish.”

— Luke 21: 18 —

**THE PARTICULARITIES OF** God’s watchful care over His people are frequently stated in a manner which provides the most consolation and assurance to the timid soul. The text at the heading of this article is a good example: “There shall not an hair of your head perish.” The same promise was made by the Apostle Paul to the crew of the ship which was about to run aground (Acts 27: 34). An angel of God conveyed this promise to Paul while he was en route to Rome under armed escort. The ministry of angels is the guardian care of God’s people, and on this occasion the Heavenly messenger had assured Paul that all aboard the vessel would have their lives spared, though the ship itself would surely be broken up.

It is unlikely that in either text we are to attach a literal meaning. Throughout the Scriptures we can trace the use of poetic exaggeration, or literary license, or *hyperbole*. This does not mean that the statements are not true. Rather, they reflect the language in use at the time, the words designed to address the feelings and emotions of the audience — the hearts of the readers and the listeners.

### How many hairs?

This particular expression, minutely identifying the hairs on the head, conveys, in so many words, the promise, “you will not suffer any essential injury.” Were we to superimpose on it a mathematical meaning we would strain the bounds of our own credulity. We might, for example, be forced to the conclusion that Christians could not become bald, or that bald people could not be Christians! No, the impact of the promise is that the “you” — the individual personality in question — would be delivered from otherwise damaging or deadly consequences.

It is a generally accepted rule of interpretation that Scripture texts should be taken at face value, unless to do so would contradict other Scriptures adjudged by the same standard, or if the resulting interpretation would create an absurdity. Some examples:

- When the Psalmist David exhorts the waters to “clap their hands” the reasonable mind understands this to be symbolic — a poetic application (Psa. 98: 8).

- In His prophecy relative to the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus says that there “shall not be left here one stone upon another” (Matt. 24: 2), yet history demonstrates that there were — the existence of the Wailing Wall and the Temple Mount today provide clear proof.

- “There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling” (Psa. 91: 10). Would that this were literally true, but such an application runs counter to the experience of the Christian who is obliged to “endure hardness,” to bear chastisements gracefully (2 Tim. 2: 3; Heb. 12: 3-8). None of God’s people have been given an easy road, free of personal or physical distress.

Jesus, as the potential Savior, was guaranteed God’s providential care, to bring Him to the beginning of His ministry. “He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Luke 4: 10, 11).

The Adversary, who quoted this text to Jesus in the wilderness, would certainly have been deeply gratified to succeed in destroying the Son of God. The devilish attempt to take His life even as a babe, in the massacre ordered by Herod, was another indication of Satan’s malign objective. But nothing would be permitted to foil God’s purpose relative to His Son’s ministry, and Jesus Himself affirmed that if need be, the Father would provide “more than twelve legions of angels” for His protection (Matt. 26: 53). The beloved Son, in Whom God was well pleased above all others, was assured of the Divine love and care.

### To what extent does the Lord protect us?

No doubt there are instances when our lives have been spared — perhaps in ways unknown by us. We may have been brought through a potentially deadly illness, or the Lord has perhaps rescued us from our own self-destructive tendencies — alcoholism, gambling, or the drug habit. Even after conversion, the Lord’s people do fall into sin. We slide back. Maybe our zeal has cooled or we have yielded to the flesh or the world and have been overcome. In such circumstances our prayers for forgiveness and recovery enlist the Lord’s merciful help. His love is greater than mother love. “He first loved us,” the Apostle John tells us (1 John 4: 19). Though the theory of “once in grace, always in grace” is not taught in Scripture, it is true that once we have become one of the Lord’s own, He does not easily let us go.

The famous hymn, built on Christian experience, beautifully expresses this thought:

*O Love that wilt not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in thee:  
I give thee back the life I owe,  
That in thine ocean depths its flow  
May richer, fuller, be.*

*O Light that followest all my way,  
I yield my flickering torch to thee:  
My heart restores its borrowed ray,  
That in thy sunshine’s blaze its day  
May brighter, fairer be.*

*O Joy that seekest me through pain,  
I cannot close my heart to thee:  
I trace the rainbow through the rain,  
And feel the promise is not vain  
That morn shall tearless be.*

*O Cross that liftest up my head,  
I dare not ask to fly from thee:  
I lay in dust life's glory dead,  
And from the ground there blossoms red  
Life that shall endless be.*

— G. Matheson

The case of Peter is one of several Biblical examples of recovery from destructive sin. Having denied His Lord, Peter faced a black despair, which would have crushed him to death, had Jesus not forgiven him. What anguish Peter endured through the hours and the days following our Lord's crucifixion we can only imagine. Obsessed with his inner grief, empty, and facing a future tormented by his conscience, he sought some measure of consolation and normality in his life of fishing.

And it was while pursuing this that he met His Savior again. What passed in full between Jesus and Peter on that occasion we may never know. What is recorded is enough for us to see that the Savior had not given up on his impetuous disciple. How comforting this is to us! How many times we have disappointed our Lord (and ourselves) by our failures to honor Him. And yet, how sweet is the thought: we are forgiven!

#### Divine Providence

As the Lord told Peter He had prayed for him, so we, too, are supported and directed in our Christian walk; and

when we yield ourselves to God's will, He posts His sentinels, so to speak, to watch for our welfare. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Psa. 34: 7).

How it enlarges our confidence as Christians to realize that though earthly powers may oppose us, and our own faults and failings distress us, greater is He that is for us than all that be against us. To have the proper course in life, to be able to meet the trials and difficulties as they come, in the proper spirit, it is necessary that we trust implicitly in the caring concern of our Heavenly Father, and He will never suffer us to be plucked out of His hand against our will.

He uses various providences to accomplish this, and we need not lie awake at night worrying whether we will fall victim to some terrible accident. It is not this short life that is at stake. It is our *eternal welfare* that matters, and the ways in which God brings us to that desired haven we may safely leave in His hands.

Our consecrated heart, mind, and will is under the governorship of the Lord of Heaven. We may suffer loss because of our backsliding. He may ask us to bear burdens that we feel could break us. But the promise is sure: if faithful, we shall be preserved for His glory, no matter what earthly loss we may suffer.

\* \* \*

## of interest . . .

**Energy pioneers** have launched the world's first offshore tidal energy turbine, one mile off the Devon coast in England. The £3m (\$5m) turbine currently has a single 11-meter-long rotor blade that will be capable of producing 300 kilowatts of electricity. The Project developers hope to have the turbine hooked up to the national grid by the end of August.

A marine current turbine looks like a smaller version of a modern windmill and the principle is the same. But whereas a windmill draws energy from the movement of air, the marine turbine uses currents in the water. The turbine's proponents believe the concept can become a rival to wind power because ocean currents are more reliable than wind and also because they are less obtrusive: the structure is built on the seabed and projects just a few meters above the surface. Furthermore, there is little danger to fish, because the blades rotate quite slowly — about 20 revolutions per minute. If it performs as expected, the consortium behind it hopes to build a set of turbines in the area — a tidal farm.

— *British Broadcasting Corporation*

**Senior scientists and economists** of the Nuffield Council on Bio-ethics, recently released a study to coincide with a national genetically modified (GM) food debate in the U.K., on the potential of technology to produce modified crops that will increase crop yields, and improve the livelihoods of poor people. The need to feed an ever-increasing global population is the genetically modified lobby's most powerful argument for why European nations should invest in research into GM and open up their markets to GM products. European consumers are reluctant to buy GM foods, and it is feared by some advocates of the technology that this could delay the benefits to developing, needy countries. Many aid agencies have voiced skepticism, arguing that such "technical fixes" take the focus away from the structural problems that cause poverty.

Meanwhile, the commercial growing of a genetically modified potato which contains nutrients lacking in the diets of many of the poorest is expected to be approved in India within a few months, and will be given free to millions of poor school-children through the government's mid-day meal program to try to reduce the problem of malnutrition in the country. The "protato," as it has become known, contains a third more protein than normal, including essential high-quality nutrients, and has been created by adding a gene from the protein-rich *amaranth* plant. The team that created the *protato* says it now plans to use genetic engineering to develop cereals, fruits, and other vegetables rich in protein.

— *British Broadcasting Corporation*

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**Nigeria:** *Danfodio Road Primary School, Aba*, Abia State, November 28-30

**Poland:** *Rzeszow*, July 12-14; *Krakow*, July 15-17; *Lodz*, July 18-20; *Bydgoszcz*, July 21-23

**United Kingdom:** *Hyde*, England, August 1-3; *Sheffield*, Oct. 25, 26

**United States:** *Philadelphia Area*, July 3-6; *Ohio*, August 15-17; *Illinois*, October 3-5; *Oklahoma*, November 7-9

*Details*

#### United States

*Philadelphia Area (Lionville)*, July 3-6 (Thursday-Sunday)

*Site:* *The Inn at Chester Springs* (formerly known as *Best Western*), Route 100 (south of route 113), Lionville, PA 19353; telephone: (610) 363-1100 *Rates and Reservations:* For 1-4 people, \$71.00 plus \$5.68 tax. ***Please make your reservations for all four nights through our office; and make your check payable to LHMM.*** Our address is 1156 Saint Matthew's Road, Chester Springs, PA 19425-2700; telephone: (610) 827-7665

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#### The General Editor, Bernard W. Hedman

Philadelphia Area Convention, July 3-6

#### Associate General Editor, John Davis

Philadelphia Area Convention, July 3-6; Hyde, England Convention, August 1-3

#### Carl W. Seebald

Minneapolis, August 2, 3

#### Ralph Herzig

Philadelphia Area Convention, July 3-6; Auburn, Massachusetts, September 14

#### Richard Blaine

Philadelphia Area Convention, July 3-6

#### Robert Herzig

Philadelphia Area Convention, July 3-6; Springfield, Massachusetts, August 3

#### Jan Wojnar

Philadelphia Area Convention, July 3-6; Boston, Massachusetts, August 24

#### John Detzler

Germany, July 5-6; Rzeszow, Poland, July 12-14; Krakow, Poland, July 15-17; Lodz, Poland, July 18-20; Bydgoszcz, Poland, July 21-23; France Convention, August 1-3

#### Leon Snyder

Philadelphia Area Convention, July 3-6; Chicago, August 9, 10; Minneapolis, September 20, 21

#### Baron Duncan

Springfield, Massachusetts, September 7

#### Tom Cimbura

Philadelphia Area Convention, July 3-6; Muskegon, Michigan, July 19; Grand Rapids, Michigan, July 20

#### Don Lewis

Philadelphia Area Convention, July 3-6; Grand Rapids, Michigan, September 6; Muskegon, Michigan, September 7

#### Marek Piotrowski

Seattle, Washington, July 26, 27

#### Evangelists' Services

**Robert Branconnier**, Chicago, Illinois, July 19, 20; Pittsfield, Massachusetts, August 10; Norfolk, Virginia, August 23, 24; Colorado, August 30, 31

**Jon Hanning**, Louisville, Kentucky, July 19; Cincinnati, Ohio, July 20; Derry, Pennsylvania, September 20, 21

**Harry Hammer**, West Frankfort, Illinois, July 20 (Revised)

**David Lounsbury**, Reidsville, North Carolina, July 9

**Dan Herzig**, New Haven, Connecticut, August 17

**Wakter Markiewicz**, Moscow, Idaho, September 13, 14; Eugene, Oregon, September 27, 28

**Harold Solomon**, Colorado, August 17

**Robert Steenrod**, N. Canton, Ohio, August 24

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