

13<sup>th</sup> December

Memory verse:

Out of the strong came forth sweetness Judges 14:14

Today's memory verse is very short (and sweet) and you will understand why I chose it when you read tomorrow's lesson.

Some history to read about<sup>1</sup>

After the end of the Second World War a young man from Voznesensk in the Ukraine,<sup>2</sup> Nicolay Yerofeyevich Boyko (1923-2005), returning home after being a prisoner of war in Germany, discovered to his horror that he was facing charges of having “voluntarily surrendered with a weapon in his hand”. In fact he had been captured even before he had been through the basic combat course and had not yet even been *given* a weapon! He explained all this at his trial on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1945 but it made no difference; he was found guilty and sentenced to fifteen years' hard labour, five years' exile, and five years' forfeiture of rights. Nicolay had already spent years in a German concentration camp. Now, instead of being released, he was sent to a Russian prison.



Something wonderful had happened to young Nicolay in that German concentration camp. He was made to work very hard even though he was injured and sick. Brought up an atheist, he was in despair at his miserable condition. At a camp in the German forest, he was sent to gather sticks and brushwood. One day as he hobbled about with a stick because of his wounded leg, trying to gather up firewood, he made a strange find. Here is how he describes what happened in his autobiography:<sup>3</sup>

Then, suddenly under a bush I noticed part of a dirty piece of paper. I bent down and picked up a page folded several times over. Just in case, I decided to unfold it and if it were blank to throw it away. Carefully, so as not to tear the wet paper, I unfolded it. Something was written, and in Russian at that! I looked around—would anyone see? And I began to read “Our Father...”—the Lord’s Prayer! From the crown of my head to the soles of my feet an unexplainable joyful quiver ran through my whole being. I read it, savouring literally every word. I staggered at this prayer. I wept. It meant that doomed people such as I had a Father in Heaven! From this thought I felt an inner strength I had not known before. A feeling of joy mysterious to me poured into my soul worn out with suffering. To this day I cannot find words to express the blessedness of spirit I sensed at that moment as I held that homely piece of paper with its priceless words! “There is a God!” my heart triumphed. “There is a God!” This was the turning point in my life. I could not call this priceless find a coincidence! ...

Carefully folding the damp page, I hid it in my shirt pocket. When I arrived back at the barracks, the first thing I did was to memorize that prayer, for the paper might be confiscated but who could snatch it from one’s memory? And I not only memorized it, but morning and evening prayed this prayer of God. This was my first deliberate turning to God. I was actually afraid to forget to pray. As I recited the words of this extraordinary prayer, I felt how tenderly the Lord was touching my heart.

Several days I diligently, without mistakes, repeated the words that had become precious to me and then started to think deeply about their meaning. What strength flowed from every word!

1 Information from <http://rusbaptist.stunda.org> and other sources. For more on this topic see the lesson for February 7<sup>th</sup>.

2 Ukraine was ruled by Russia at this time.

3 Nikolay, Y. Boyko, *I Believe in Life After Death* (Portland, n.d.) edited.

Nicolay's life had been, and was to be, a very hard one but this was the turning point. Despite the terrible hardships of prison life in Soviet Russia that followed, God provided him with a Bible and Christian fellowship in the prison camps. He grew in grace and began to witness to others around him in various prisons and labour camps. Then seemingly, inexplicably, seven years before the end of his prison term he was retried and was handed this sentence: “for lack of criminal content and for [a] conscientious attitude towards work, the remaining term of punishment is hereby removed.”

Nicolay was released after spending three years and ten months in German concentration camps as a POW<sup>4</sup> and eight years and nine months in Russian prison camps in Vortuka. Now for the first time in his life he was able to go to a church service. In 1955 in a freezing river with ice on the surface and snow on the banks, he was baptised. He returned to his native Voznesensk where he joined the local church and together with other young believers carried out evangelistic work in the local villages. The youngsters would travel on foot to villages over ten miles away to hold evangelistic services. He married, and eventually found a job as a water and heating engineer. The evangelization efforts produced fruit and the churches grew.

Then the old pastor of the Voznesensk church became blind. A new pastor came and at once told the youngsters to stop their evangelistic work. Any youngster who asked to be baptised suddenly received a visit from a KGB<sup>5</sup> agent, who threatened him and urged him to give up religion. Anyone under 18 years old was forbidden to come to church. All this was being carried out through the church leadership which consisted of godly men most of whom had been in prison for their faith before the war. How could such a state of affairs happen?

During the Second World War, Stalin, the communist dictator of Russia, wanted to rally all sectors of Russian opinion behind him in the fight against Nazi Germany. The purges<sup>6</sup> had removed most of the intellectuals and even the ablest men in the communist party itself. Collectivisation<sup>7</sup> of agriculture, the shock of the German invasion – all these things lowered morale and threatened collapse of the nation.

Stalin decided to appeal to patriotism. To do this he had to make concessions to the Russian Orthodox<sup>8</sup> church. He bargained with Orthodox leaders and its theological colleges were reopened, its magazine republished and the consecration of its bishops was again allowed. The price paid by the Orthodox church was probably some form of state control. As far as evangelical Christians were concerned, Stalin had some of the leaders released from prison before they had finished their sentences in order to negotiate with them and use them to form the state-controlled All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (AUCECB).

This organisation was used to dominate the churches and attempt to control them. It continued to do this until the end of communism in Russia, ensuring that young people were discouraged from attending meetings, removing from office pastors who were effective and useful, urging compliance with laws forbidding the Christian teaching of children, closing churches if they were growing and providing information to the persecuting authorities about everything that went on in church and who was involved. However, when *during the war*, churches were reopened under the auspices of the AUCECB believers generally greeted this with enthusiasm, not seeing what was to come.

Christians like Nicolay Boyko eventually formed unregistered churches free from AUCECB control. These churches were illegal. Their members were persecuted, imprisoned, tortured and had

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4 Prisoner of War

5 Russian secret police

6 Public Trials in which anyone who was a threat to Stalin's power was falsely accused and sentenced to death.

7 Turning farms into state run organisations.

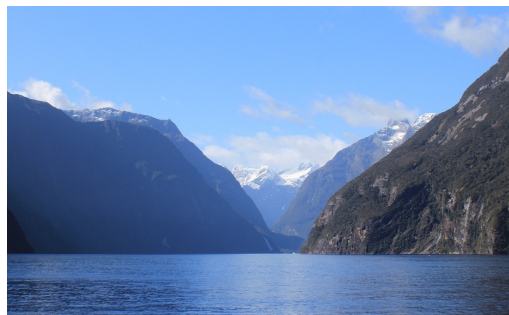
8 The Russian Orthodox church is similar in many ways to the Roman Catholic Church.

their children taken from them with unparalleled brutality. Nicolay went on to spend many more years in Soviet prisons and in exile just for being a Christian. In communist Russia exile did not mean being sent abroad. Exiles were punished by being sent into what was called “internal exile” in the cold and inhospitable Siberian part of Russia.

In 1988, during the turmoil that preceded the dissolution of the USSR, Nicolay Boyko was released for the last time and was free to serve the Lord in the church as an evangelist again as he had as a young man. He was able to preach and tell the remarkable story of how God had saved him and how God had kept him throughout all those years of prison and exile.

### Some geography.

On December 13<sup>th</sup> 1642, a Dutch navigator, Abel Janszoon Tasman, sighted New Zealand, “a large land, uplifted high”. As he sailed along the coast the Maoris appeared hostile so he did not land. He was the first European to sight New Zealand.



Tasman's name for the newly discovered land was *Staten Landt*. This was in honour of the Dutch parliament, the “States General”. An earlier Dutch explorer had found an island just east of *Tierra del Fuego*, now known as *Staten Island*. Tasman thought his newly discovered land might be joined to this.

“We believe that this is the mainland coast of the unknown Southland,” he wrote, thinking he had probably found the western side of *Terra Australis*. This was the land that geographers thought stretched as a great continent across the Pacific to near the southern tip of South America. You can see it on the map below marked *Terra australis nondum cognita* – South land not yet known.



Tasman's suggestion that New Zealand was the western side of that Southern Continent confirmed the consensus of map makers of the time. For a hundred years New Zealand was shown on maps as the west coast of *Terra Australis* rising gradually from the waters around *Tierra del Fuego*. It was not until Captain Cook circumnavigated New Zealand in 1769 this consensus view was disproved and the maps were re drawn.

Find the places marked in green in your atlas.

### Something to think about

“In science, just because 'the majority' believe it does not make it true. Science does not depend on consensus...”<sup>9</sup> How does the story of *Terra Australis* demonstrate this? Can you think of any other ideas, believed by a consensus of scientists today, which Christians know are not true?

9 <https://creation.com/why-consensus-science-is-anti-science> and <https://creation.com/can-they-all-be-wrong>