

December 27th

Memory verse

To every thing there is a season,
and a time to every purpose under the heaven.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

This verse is the beginning of a beautiful piece of Bible poetry which is worth learning as a whole. It is also a very good passage for children to say out loud together. Younger children can learn the words in bold. Today's activity for small children is a **seasonal** one. It may help them understand the meaning of the text.

The season for hibernation – and a game for very small children

Bats, grass snakes, frogs, toads, dormice, hedgehogs... what do all these creatures have in common? The answer is that at this time of the year they hibernate.

Hibernation is a state into which some animals go in the winter season. They find a good place to hide away and then, to conserve energy during this time of year when food is scarce and temperatures are low, they begin a period of something a bit like a deep sleep. The creature usually curls up to conserve heat. Breathing and heart rate slow down and body temperature drops. Before hibernation, the creature will usually eat much more than usual to store as much energy as possible ready for hibernation.



If you find a hibernating creature do not disturb it if you can possibly help it. An animal disturbed during hibernation can use up energy moving to a new location and end up not having enough to survive the winter.¹

Animals that hibernate do so at exactly the right time or season of the year. Hibernating too early would mean a hibernation period that was too long. The animal might die from lack of stored energy. Hibernating too late would mean the animal would be exposed to food shortages and cold conditions which might also kill it.

When God created the world originally no animals needed to hibernate. The world was perfect and never became too cold. There were no food shortages. After man sinned and fell, things were different. The Flood of Noah's time brought huge changes and after it God promised that seed-time and harvest time and cold and heat would continue while the earth remains. But God in his mercy had placed in his creatures information that allowed many of them to adapt to their new surroundings – including hibernation when conditions required it.

Tiny children might like to build a place to hibernate. This can be under a big chair or a table, behind a sofa or in a corner with rugs or blankets, warm scarves or anything to make it a warm hideout where they “can't be seen”. Once they have made their hide-away the game can begin. First they must pretend to be a hedgehog looking for food – slugs, snails and beetles! If it is considered appropriate a few suitable small treats could be put down on the floor to be “found”! Once they've eaten enough the “hedgehogs” can curl up tightly in their hideout. Now they must imagine winter passing outside their den. If you can find some winter sounds for this so much the better.² When

¹ If you find a hedgehog hibernating in a dangerous place you can find out what to do here:
<https://www.stiggywinkles.org.uk/hedgehog-fact-sheet/>

² <https://seasonsyear.com/> Has a selection of sounds for various seasons.

interest is beginning to flag someone can say, “spring is here!” or some birdsong or other spring sounds can be used as a pre-arranged signal that hibernation is coming to an end. The hibernators must slowly uncurl and emerge from their den. Now, of course, they are hungry again!

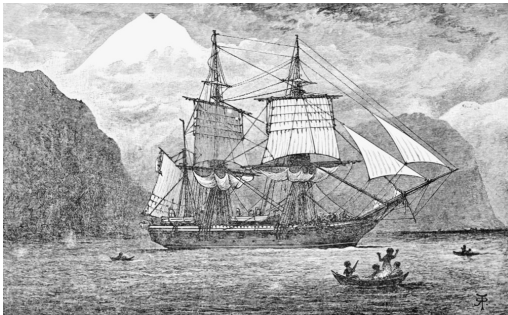
Something to read

If you enjoy boarding school stories *The Jennings Report* by Anthony Buckeridge would be a good book to read as it features a hibernating hedgehog. It is not the very best of the *Jennings* books; the ones that date from the 1950s are better, especially if you can get an old second-hand copy as the more recent editions have been slightly “updated”.

A historic voyage and its consequences³

Today is the anniversary of two different but related and very grim events. Make good use of your dictionary in reading the story that follows. I have marked some words in purple that you may need to look up.

On 27th December 1831 HMS Beagle set sail from Plymouth Sound on a voyage to chart the coastline of South America. In charge was Captain Robert FitzRoy and onboard as an unpaid naturalist was the young Charles Darwin.



It was intended that the Beagle would be at sea for two years. In the end the voyage lasted for five years. Darwin had taken Charles Lyell's book *Principles of Geology* with him to read and he absorbed Lyell's approach to the subject: the rocks and fossils we see now were laid down by processes which we see operating today, which are slow. They must therefore have taken millions of years to form. The work Darwin carried out during the voyage established his reputation as a geologist himself on his

return. The things he had observed and collected also helped him to formulate his own theory of the origin and gradual development of living things from simple to complex: evolution.

To evaluate the pros and cons of Darwin's idea is beyond the scope of this lesson but full information can be found elsewhere.⁴ It is safe to say that evolution's major appeal really lay outside science altogether and in the area of philosophy and religion. Darwin's idea allowed people to account for the origin of the world without having to recognise the existence of a creator God. As Richard Dawkins neatly put it, “Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.”

As Darwin's idea spread people began to draw conclusions from it. If human beings had evolved, were some “races” of people more evolved than others? If so, didn't the more evolved races have a duty to rule over the less evolved races? If evolution worked by means of the survival of the fittest, was helping the sick the poor and the weak a bad thing? Surely preserving these unfit people would weaken the human race and prevent progress. If there was no God, to whom were we accountable for our behaviour? If we were responsible only to ourselves could we do whatever we liked? Who determines what is right or wrong?

We know that truth is not determined by consensus.⁵ Many times the discoverers of important

³ For more information read <https://creation.com/deconstructing-darwin-darwins-impact>

⁴ If you are not familiar with the arguments <https://creation.com/> and <https://creationresearchuk.com/> have answers to just about everything. The flaws in Lyell's idea can also be studied using resources from these websites.

⁵ See the lessons for 13th December, 20th December and 22nd December for instance.

scientific facts such as William Harvey⁶ or Louis Pasteur⁷ have been those who, on their own, challenged the ideas of the consensus, proving them wrong. Often those who held the consensus idea were reluctant to change their opinions even in the face of the evidence. It is not only hard to admit to being wrong. The consensus is also often linked to **prestige** or even wealth.

Evolution relied – and still relies – on the consensus of scientists for its authority. There is something huge at stake that prevents thinking people from breaking away from the consensus. To let go of the idea would allow God back into the picture. This would be to return to a situation where there was an **external** control (God) on **morality** – an idea which had become unthinkable. Evolution *had* to be right for if it was not we are not free to do as we like; we are **accountable** to God.

As the twentieth century progressed the consensus around evolution became stronger even though the evidence for it had decreased if anything. Ideas drawn from evolutionary theory fuelled disastrous political movements. Germany in particular embraced evolutionary philosophy and the results were the brutal **extermination** and enslavement of (“inferior” and “less fit”) African tribes whose lands the Germans seized under Kaiser Wilhelm II. Later came **Nazism**. Nazism was built on racial theories derived directly from evolution. The Nazis were determined to keep the “superior” German race pure and believed they were following scientific principles. It took a world war to stop them but the philosophical idea supporting Nazism, evolution, was not abandoned by the victors afterwards. Tyranny and brutality continued, based on the same idea, in other parts of the world.

The Chinese leader, Mao Zedong, said Darwin and his disciple Huxley were his favourite authors. He wanted to build a happy and prosperous China on their principles. Instead he was responsible for the deaths of millions of Chinese through starvation, execution, disease or overwork.

Pol Pot, a political leader whose communist Khmer Rouge government led Cambodia from 1975 to 1979 learned his philosophical ideas while studying in Paris. Here he took in the **existential** philosophy that was a French outworking of evolutionary ideas. Pol Pot admired Mao Zedong. During his cruel rule in his native Cambodia an estimated 1.5 to 2 million Cambodians also died of starvation, execution, disease or overwork. His ideas were directly inspired by the outworking of Darwin's idea. He also admired Russia's Joseph Stalin.

Stalin was not his real name. It means “man of steel” and certainly Joseph Stalin was an unbending tyrant. Stalin had become an atheist after reading Darwin's writings. Ruthless in seeking and holding on to power, Stalin realised that atheism provides no basis for morals and he was therefore free to kill and torture to maintain his hold over Russia. As Mao Zedong was also to do, Stalin wanted to turn farming into an industrial scale, communist activity. The kulaks were the more successful, better-off, peasant farmers of Russia. Stalin decided to blame the kulaks for Russia's bread shortages and confiscate their land. In 1929 on **27th December** Stalin announced that the kulaks would be **eliminated**. This was to be the way to prosperity for Russia. The kulaks were shot, imprisoned and sent to work in forced labour camps in Siberia or in other places. The results? Death from starvation, execution, disease or overwork of millions of people.

It is horrifying to think of the misery that flowed from the ideas developed by Darwin during the voyage of the Beagle. We are not the products of chance on our way to a **utopia** that we can create for ourselves. Rather we were perfect in the beginning, made by a good God. It was man's sinful rebellion against his creator – the creator that Darwin, Hitler, Mao, Pol Pot and Stalin all tried to wipe from their consciousness – that brought misery and death into this world. Trying to build a

6 See lessons for April 1st.

7 See lesson for April 20th.

utopian society on evolutionary principles led to death from starvation, execution, disease or overwork of millions of people time and time again.

Can Christians not look forward, then, to a time when people will live in harmony with one another and in peace and plenty? Yes they can! But it will not be in a utopia of their own making. The Bible tells us that all of history is moving towards the great day when the Lord Jesus will come again. Then everything will be put right and all God's children will live praising him forever. It will be a season of rejoicing that will never come to an end!