



KIDPAK ADVENTURES

MONTHLY
DEVOTIONAL

*“The Lord himself will go ahead of you. He will be with you.
He will never leave you. He’ll never desert you.
So don’t be afraid. Don’t lose hope.”
Deuteronomy 31:8 NIV*



DAY ONE

THE QUEST

"The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.'" **Genesis 12:1 NIV**

Our journey officially started today. This is a personal journal I'm keeping - and if you're reading this, I guess you're along for the journey. We're after a particular item that legend has it will bring you eternal life, if you believe in that sort of thing. Me, I just think it's a bunch of hocus pocus. The item in question is called the "Light Scepter," a staff made of pure gold. I've brought a few hired hands with me to help with the digging, including a guy named Shakir and an old cowboy friend of mine named Black Bart, but the fewer people that know about our trip the better. There's bound to be some people wanting to protect the staff, but you know I always come prepared. Trust me.

After a long trip across the Persian Gulf and up the Euphrates River, we reached our destination - the probable resting site of the Lost City of Ur. That's no abbreviation. "Ur" was the name of an ancient city. In the book of Genesis, Abraham left that city to answer the call of God. It must have been tough to do. Ur had everything and everyone he needed, and he had no idea where he was about to head off to. Of course, we know now that everything turned out fine - better than fine, in fact. But Abraham didn't know that. He had to trust God no matter what.

After only a day's digging in Ur, Black Bart came across some writing on an ancient tablet that was a pain to translate, but it went something like this: "I'm walking away from my home for God's promise of even greater blessings. Do not let the comfort and security of your present position make you miss out on God's plan for you." The tablet was broken; so we might never know who wrote it, but that sounds an awful lot like something Abraham would have said. It was another tablet we found that hit the jackpot for us and our journey. It showed a picture of the Light Scepter, and along side it were two words. Translated, they were "Fallen Tower." It looks like tomorrow, we're going upriver...to Babylon.



DAY TWO

THE QUEST

“...Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him.” Daniel 2:24 NIV

I had a troubling dream this morning and can't help but think that there is danger ahead for our expedition. To confirm my worries, on our way up the river, I noticed a boat with some suspicious characters in it. They could be following us - we'll know for sure by tomorrow. I hope not. I'm not looking for trouble.

We were in Babylon today - or what used to be Babylon. This was the location of many famous historical events, including one involving another guy who had a troubling dream. His name was Nebuchadnezzar, and he was king over this area somewhere around 600 BC. It seemed that no one could tell him what his dream was about. The king got so mad; he threatened to kill all of his wise men. That's when a guy named Daniel stepped up. He told his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah to pray for him as he confronted the king. Daniel learned that prayer works, because God not only told Daniel the meaning of the dream, but the king also came to realize that God is the “Lord of kings and revealer of mysteries.”

It is a great story I hope you read for yourself in the book of Daniel. We've been praying ourselves lately for someone to reveal the mystery of the lost Light Scepter to us. Our answer couldn't have come quicker. This evening we found at the base of what used to be the Tower of Babel a scroll of ancient hieroglyphics - that's ancient writing. The good news is that next to this ancient writing was a drawing of the Light Scepter. The bad news is that nobody here could figure out how to translate the hieroglyphics. I know of an old buddy of mine who lives in Austria who can figure out what all these words are, so we'll take a quick side trip up there to visit him next. The famous Light Scepter could be right here under our noses.



DAY THREE

THE QUEST

“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” James 1:5 NIV

We left late this morning and have been traveling the past three hours by seaplane. We never saw those suspicious characters again, which of course is good. The bad is that Shakir, one of my guides, has disappeared without a trace. He was somewhat helpful, but in the long run, I think we'll be better off without him. There was something suspicious about the guy.

It takes some time to travel, but we should be at my old friend Professor Ludwig Von Wisenheimer's place in a couple of days. Professor Wisenheimer is one smart guy. We go back a long ways, he and I - to the days when we were both teaching at a local university. Though he is quite intelligent, he is even more respected for his wisdom. Wisenheimer always says it is more important to be wise than smart, and that wisdom comes from God. All you have to do to get it, he reminds me, is ask God. If there's a problem in your life or a situation that you aren't so sure about, simply ask God for wisdom. Prayer and reading the Bible are ways to get you closer to God, and the more you seek Him, the more you'll know what to do in just about any situation. That's wisdom, and God knows we all need a bit more wisdom, so maybe we all better start asking Him, right?

As we continue flying here, you might be wondering what started me on this crazy quest for hidden treasure. Well, it all started with eight words I heard from a guide on a recent expedition. He said, "I know the Secret of the Light Scepter." As soon as I understood what those words meant, I began to realize that all the fortune and glory I was chasing after really didn't add up to much in the grand scheme of things - this was something incredible. Something new.

We've got another travel day ahead of us tomorrow, so I'll fill you in on the details then. See you soon.



DAY FOUR

THE QUEST

“He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.”

John 19:39 NIV

It was last spring when I was over in Nepal with some archaic Indian artifacts in an ancient temple when the whole place began to collapse on me. Moments before, apparently in grabbing the statue, I must have set off some trap designed to scare off intruders. Well, I was the intruder and I can tell you one thing: it worked! I was scared. In my narrow escape, I quickly darted up a corridor, avoiding a barrage of poisonous arrows that shot out from a wall. Then I used my bullwhip to swing myself across what looked like a bottomless chasm. The bad part was where I landed: right next to a slithering pile of snakes. Why'd it have to be snakes? Fortunately, I was able to tip-toe out of that mess, then tumble and scamper back to safety. What a wild ride!

Back at camp much later, I felt a lot safer but I knew I was banged up pretty good. The bruises and scrapes of a day's adventure had taken their toll. After years of searching the world for ancient artifacts of antiquity, I was starting to feel my age. I told my guide that this latest adventure almost killed me; he then asked me if it was all worth giving my life for. I told him that there isn't much worth dying for on this planet - and he said, "I beg to differ. Jesus thought you, my friend, were worth dying for." I don't know about that, and I told him as much. That's when he told me, matter-of-factly: "I know the Secret of the Light Scepter." Of course, ancient legend has it that the Light Scepter can bring eternal life. I don't know about eternal life, but there is something else that it can bring me: fortune and glory! The Light Scepter is a legendary ancient artifact that no one has been able to track down - until now.

Our guide explained that he knew where a big clue to find the Light Scepter was and gave me specific directions to a temple in Ur (where we discovered a tablet just a few days ago). He said he knew this because he was a descendant of Nicodemus, who was a noted person from the Bible. Nicodemus himself wanted something pretty bad, and that was Jesus. He snuck in to speak with Jesus in the middle of the night, risking his reputation - and later he requested the body of Jesus after the crucifixion, certainly risking his life as a Pharisee. Seems he thought that Jesus was worth giving that up for. Nicodemus is reported to be a pretty smart guy. That means I'll have to study up more on Jesus. But not right now. Right now I need some rest. We'll be in Austria tomorrow.



DAY FIVE

THE QUEST

“David said to Saul, ‘Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.’” **1 Samuel 17:32 NIV**

When Black Bart and I arrived at the Professor’s house, we were absolutely shocked. The whole place had been ransacked; furniture turned over and papers everywhere. Someone had been there looking for something. We would have had no idea what happened if not for our discovery downstairs. It was his assistant, a kid named Robbie.

After we untied him, Robbie told us that two men had burst in the door and tied him up, and then they took the Professor off to a place in Venice, Italy - and they even left the address of where they were going. I told Robbie we’d have to go rescue the Professor.

“That’s what they’re counting on,” Robbie told us.

Black Bart said it didn’t matter: it was “hero time.” He said a hero has clarity of vision and an irresistible urge to act - something he learned recently in a church service. Black Bart explained that when David went up against Goliath, he was focused like a laser. Here was this guy who was standing against God’s people with curses and threats - yet no one was doing anything about it. David knew what had to be done and even though no one else was doing it, he stepped up and got the job done by taking out Goliath, with God’s help of course. A hero goes and gets the job done.

Black Bart was exactly right, of course. We had a job to do: we’re going to go rescue the Professor. Robbie offered to come along with us to help, and I agreed - we’d need all the help we could get if we were walking into a trap like I thought we were. Best I can tell, these bad guys are also after the Light Scepter, but I have no idea who they are or why they would want me and the Professor. I guess we’ll find out soon enough, because we’re all going to Venice. It’s hero time!



DAY SIX

THE QUEST

“But David found strength in the Lord his God.” 1 Samuel 30:6 NIV

I am writing this in the basement of a building in Venice, where things could be better. This morning, we arrived at the exact address we were instructed to come to. Somewhere in that building was Professor Wisenheimer, held captive. Walking through the front door was too obvious, so I told Black Bart and Robbie to stay put for a moment. I then snapped my bullwhip around some sort of gargoyle on the ledge of a building next door. Climbing up to that ledge, I then used my whip to swing myself across a huge gap - and through the bad guys' window. I was hoping for an element of surprise, but it didn't work.

“Don't move,” I heard a familiar voice say. It was Shakir - and he was pointing a weapon at me. So, I was right about him being suspicious after all. He was nothing but a thug. A few days ago, once he found out about the scroll of hieroglyphics and how we needed to see Professor Wisenheimer, he left us immediately to go on ahead. He must have just beat us to Professor Wisenheimer's house and taken him captive.

The bad news continued: in moments, Black Bart and Robbie next came in the room with their hands up. They'd been caught too. There was a man behind them too, also with a weapon. We were all busted! Things got worse as these thugs took the ancient scroll from us and pushed us into a downstairs room and locked the door. As these two thugs left us, I heard one call out to us, “You guys have a *blast* in there.” I don't like the way he said it.

Things were not going well, that's for sure. Robbie tried to encourage Black Bart and me. He told us a story about David, that same guy who beat the giant Goliath. Anointed to be a future king, and a brave and courageous leader, David had just suffered a terrible setback at a place called Ziklag. It was David's lowest moment - many of his loved ones were held captive, just like Professor Wisenheimer. David's own troops were talking about actually stoning him. It was David's lowest moment, but it was also his defining moment. He got through the bad times by finding strength in the Lord his God. Like David, we need to look to God for strength. That we'll do, because we're stuck here in this basement. We've got to figure a way to get out of here, get our scrolls back and rescue Professor Wisenheimer.

We'd better do it fast. Robbie just told me he heard something ticking. I hope it isn't a bomb with a timer!



DAY SEVEN

THE QUEST

*“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to his purpose.” **Romans 8:28 NIV***

Every minute counts when you're locked in a room, close to being blown up in a fiery explosion. We desperately pounded on the locked door and threw chairs and other things against it, hoping for a miracle.

One came. Professor Wisenheimer burst through the other side of our door to rescue us. He yelled, “This place is about to blow up! Come with me if you want to live!”

Robbie, Black Bart and I followed the good Professor through the building and out the door just in time - the entire place blew up in a massive explosion - sending flames, bricks and beams high into the air and down all around us. That was close!

Later, I asked the Professor how he had found us - and he filled us in on the details. He explained that some very bad men had kept him as a hostage and forced him to translate these ancient hieroglyphics on a scroll.

“That was our scroll,” I told him.

“I know,” he explained. “They told me they got it from you and that you were in a building nearby and that time was running out.”

Wisenheimer guessed correctly that we were in trouble and he managed to escape his locked room as soon as these bad guys left him. Then he saved our lives. Though these dangerous men were one step ahead of us in our quest for the Light Scepter, at least we were still alive. We should be very thankful for that, despite the bad news.

The Professor tried to cheer us up: “Possibly the oldest book in the Bible is Job - which starts out with a lot of bad news. Job was a guy who had a lot of bad things happen to him - all in one day. He had no idea why God would let so much happen to him, but Job still never lost his trust in Him. Even when bad things happen, it is good to know that God is using it for our benefit and that God will never forget us. He has promised to never leave us and God always keeps his promises. I'll cling to that promise, despite the bad times. Things are bound to look up.”

I hope he's right.



DAY EIGHT

THE QUEST

“Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything.” 2 Corinthians 6:10 NIV

This morning, I was still downcast - these mysterious villains had been one step ahead of us and would get to the Light Scepter first. Things couldn't be worse, or so I thought.

“Be of good courage!” Professor Wisenheimer told me, “Sometimes bad things happen, but we have to be happy anyway. In the Bible, Paul said that even when we own nothing, we still have everything. We need to look at what we have instead of focusing on what we don't.”

I wish I could have shared the Professor's enthusiasm at that time, but it was difficult. I was focusing on the fact that the bad guys had our scroll and knew where to go to find the Light Scepter.

Professor Wisenheimer must have seen how downcast I was, because he blurted out immediately, “Oh, now. You don't get it, do you?”

“I'm sorry,” I told him, “but I don't know what you're talking about.”

He then exclaimed, “They're digging in the wrong place!”

“Excuse me?” Black Bart managed to say.

Professor explained, “They're digging in the wrong place. I didn't give them the entire translation - now they think they have to dig some place in France, and that's where they went to!”

This was some great news! As soon as we heard it, we all began to laugh - and laugh heartily.

“That's great, Professor,” Robbie said, “so where do we have to go?”

“I know the entire translation,” the Professor said, “The hieroglyphics explained that we must first get the Blaze Diamond and put it in the Legendary Map Room of Onesiphorus. It's in a pyramid just south of Cairo, Egypt, and not many have been there. You see, when the sunlight shines through to this map room at a certain time, a beam of colorful light will shine through the diamond and hit a point on the map. It will reveal where the resting place of the Light Scepter is.”

“That sounds familiar,” I told him. “I once did something pretty similar in the lost City of Tanis.”

The Professor nodded, and continued, “The only problem is - I'm not sure where this Blaze Diamond is.”

“I am,” I told him, “And it looks like we'll have to visit a princess tomorrow.”



DAY NINE

THE QUEST

"This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands upon you." 2 Timothy 1:6 NIV

Princess Camille received the invaluable Blaze Diamond from her father a few years ago. It was a gift to remind her of something important: Her father told her to "fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave her," and to carry with her this diamond wherever she went to remind her to be a strong witness for Christ. That diamond must be doing a good job reminding her, because Princess Camille has spent a great deal of her personal fortune helping churches all over the region. Her efforts in mission works are legendary.

Never forget where you came from or the gifting that is in you.

We spent the day first trying to find her, and then trying to convince her to let us borrow the diamond. We had some degree of success. The good news was that we would get to use the Blaze Diamond. The bad news is that she wants to come with us. I don't know about this. Regardless, whether I like it or not, tomorrow we leave for Cairo to find the Map Room of Onesiphorus.

"Where exactly is this Map Room?" Black Bart asked.

"It is inside a pyramid," I told him.

"Is that where the mummies are?" Black Bart asked fearfully.

"What's a mummy?" Robbie asked.

"It's a guy who's wrapped up in bandages," Black Bart explained.

"A mummy is a *guy*?" Robbie was puzzled, "How can that be?"

"A mummy, Robbie. A mummy! Not a mommy," Black Bart said - and sighed, "Mummies are the nice people you give cards to on Mother's Day. Mummies walk around and scare you."

"Really?" Robbie asked. He was suddenly scared.

"Black Bart, don't be silly," Professor Wisenheimer joined the conversation, "Robbie, there's no such thing as a mummy that walks around scaring people. It's all just a bunch of hooley!"

I like that Professor Wisenheimer - he reminds me of myself sometimes.



DAY TEN

THE QUEST

"All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize." 1 Corinthians 9:25 NIV

Black Bart, Professor Wisenheimer, Robbie, Princess Camille and I arrived this morning in Egypt, the land of the ancient kings. The kings were called Pharaohs of course, and they ruled the land. Some were good and some were especially bad. There was one recorded in the book of Exodus that was especially bad. He kept the Israelites as slaves, forcing them to build some of these large pyramids to honor him.

Today, these pyramids still stand as monuments. They are one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. If you're looking for the other wonders - you won't find them. They've all vanished because of fire, wind, earthquakes - you name it. The only "wonder of the world" left from that civilization are the Great Pyramids. Yet even they will vanish someday - just like the others.

You see, when it comes down to it, if you want to build a great monument to yourself, you have to do it not with bricks and stones, but with your actions. Great deeds lead to great seeds for the future. Professor Wisenheimer once explained that by sharing the story of Jesus with one person, he shared the story of Jesus with a whole bunch of people. The reason for this is that this one person in turn went and shared it with others, who then shared it with others. And so on. The story might get passed on from generation to generation and change a lot of people's lives forever. And forever, my friends, is a lot longer than the Seven Wonders of the World will last.

So keep that in mind as you travel through life. When it comes down to your life, the only things that will last forever are your words and deeds. That pharaoh may be remembered as a guy who had pyramids built, but what we really know of him is that he was a tyrant and a nasty person who got what was coming to him when he had his armies follow Moses across the Red Sea.

Tomorrow, we'll travel down to the area where this mysterious Map Room of Onesiphorus is. It is inside a pyramid, and it may be difficult to get to. There may be traps and such down there. I won't have any problems with it, but I'll have to keep an extra eye on the others.



DAY ELEVEN

THE QUEST

*"After she had given him a drink, she said, 'I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have finished drinking.'" **Genesis 24:19 NIV***

It has been a long journey by camel - and you know how I feel about camels. I prefer a horse any day, and I even told Robbie, "*No camels!*" Yet Robbie couldn't find any horses - so here we are at camp with a bunch of stinky, smelly camels around us. I won't go into the details about the stink - there are some things best left to your imagination.

It takes a lot to feed these camels. At camp tonight, Professor Wisenheimer led us in a quick devotional about an occasion in the Bible where a young lady named Rebecca did something extraordinary for a complete stranger in need. This stranger had traveled a great distance, and had taken with him a large number of camels that needed water. Here's the amazing part - Rebecca gave water to each and every one of these camels. Now, before you go thinking that isn't a big deal, let me explain further. We're talking gallons and gallons of water. And the water wasn't just from a sink or a hose. This water had to be drawn up from buckets in a well way down deep in a hole.

She really worked hard for a complete stranger, and God knew her character - so He rewarded her. It turned out this stranger worked for a rich guy named Isaac. Soon Rebecca and Isaac met, fell in love and were married - and lived happily ever after.

Professor told us that God sees our character, that is, what we're like in our hearts. Would you go the extra mile to help someone else out, even a complete stranger? We all need to be a little more like Rebecca and make this world a better place.

Our journey continues tomorrow - we've got a valley to go through and then we'll be at the pyramid where the Map Room of Onesiphorus is.



DAY TWELVE

THE QUEST

“Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.’” **Ezekiel 37:4-5 NIV**

We reached a really tough spot today after traveling across a long stretch of barren wilderness. Robbie imagined he saw a large ice cream shop right there in the middle of the desert - but it was just a mirage. Sometimes when you are crossing a desert as flat and hot as this, you begin to see things. I kept thinking I saw water ahead of us, but it never happened. Not here.

It was brutally hot too. Robbie was complaining a bit too much, but all that got real quiet when Princess Camille turned to him and smiled sweetly.

I know that smile. I've seen it too many times. But it was too late to warn him.

“Robbie, keep a positive attitude,” she told him.

“But we’re in the middle of the desert!”

“I know a place nearby that’s cooler,” she suggested.

“Where’s that?”

“We could always bury you really deep in the sand,” she told him, still smiling, but staring him down.

He quieted down quite a bit after that. On second thought, I think I’m glad we brought this Princess along after all!

Just when things looked their worst, that’s when we saw something eerie: bones. After hours of riding our camels through hot sun and sand, we had reached a valley, and in it rested many, many dry bones, scattered around all over the ground. Perhaps they were there to scare off intruders, but of course, we had no idea why or how they got there. To be honest, I really didn’t want to find out. I’d seen this sort of thing before, but the Princess and Robbie were scared silly. They thought that they would die here in the middle of the desert, so I had to be quick to encourage them.

I explained a passage from the Bible to them. It was in the book of Ezekiel, where the Old Testament prophet spoke of something he saw. He too saw a valley of dry bones that God miraculously brought back to life right before his eyes. I told them that God has the power to take lives, dreams or anything else, and bring them back to life just like he brought back to life those dry bones Ezekiel saw. That’s the kind of God we serve.

Professor quickly chimed in and explained that if God can resurrect all these dry bones, then surely he can see us through our journey. I have little doubt of that, and I also know that by this time tomorrow we should be closer to water and the great pyramid that houses the Map Room of Onesiphorus.



DAY THIRTEEN

THE QUEST

"But anyone who hears my teaching and ignores it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand." **Matthew 7:26 NIV**

To everyone's delight, we began to see signs of life later this afternoon. We saw palm trees and what appeared to be an oasis. It was not a mirage. It was the real thing. There was much rejoicing.

Black Bart was first to hop off his camel and run towards the water. Professor tried to warn him of something, but Black Bart didn't hear. I myself had no idea what the Professor was trying to say when suddenly I saw Black Bart actually get stuck and begin sinking right there in the sand. I quickly dismounted my camel, as did the others. Black Bart had walked right into quicksand! Quicksand is something you have to be careful around - you don't want to get stuck in it, or you'll sink right down to the bottom and never be heard of again.

"Stay absolutely still," Professor Wisenheimer called out to the sinking Black Bart, "or you'll sink even faster!"

Black Bart looked like he was about to go under. I had to act fast. As quickly as I could, I pulled out my trusty bullwhip, held on to one end and threw the other end to Black Bart, who grabbed it carefully. The sand was up to his chin! He held on tight to the whip as I slowly began to pull him back to safety. That was close - we almost lost a good cowboy today.

Shifting sand is tough to stand on, as Black Bart learned today. You've got to stand on something more solid. Robbie pointed out that he heard one time about a parable similar to what happened today. Jesus explained that anyone who didn't listen and obey his teachings was like someone who built his house on shifting sand, sort of like the stuff Black Bart got into. And we all know what happened to Black Bart. That's why we have to build our lives on something more solid, like the words and teachings of Jesus. There is no foundation more solid, Robbie told us all.

It seems like Jesus had a lot of good things to say, so I promised myself to read into his words a little more later on. But right now, it is time to rest. Tomorrow we have a big day planned, heading into a pyramid and finding this hidden map room.



DAY FOURTEEN

THE QUEST

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” **Matthew 7:13-14 NIV**

We entered the pyramid this morning, in search of the Map Room of Onesiphorus. It was dark and creepy, the kind of place I’m used to walking into in order to find mysterious artifacts made of gold. Large spiders crawled along the walls and I thought at one point I heard the sound of snakes slithering about. This was not the kind of place to go on a picnic.

Robbie told us he’d wait outside, but Black Bart made him come in. Professor was utterly fascinated by the markings on the wall, but we were all stumped when we reached a place where we had to go either left or right. Left was a much wider pathway, and right was a straight, narrow one. Robbie was about to run up the wider pathway when I grabbed him by the back of his shirt and stopped him from moving.

“This place could be full of traps,” I warned, “Running up some path like that could be dangerous.”

I had no idea which way to go, when suddenly Princess Camille said something profound that made me even more glad we brought her along. She told us quite simply that we need to take the straight and narrow path.

“She’s right,” Professor Wisenheimer said. “In the Bible, Jesus told us to take the straight and narrow path. He said that many people will go down the broad path, but it leads to destruction. The right way to go is narrower and more difficult. Fewer people choose it, because sometimes being a Christian can be difficult. But the reward is at the end of the narrow path.”

“So who wants to go down the path that leads to destruction?” I asked everyone.

Since there were no takers, we took the straight and narrow path. It was a difficult one, as Professor Wisenheimer promised, but it led to a narrow gate through which we found the Map Room. We’ll have to wait here until sunlight tomorrow before we can use the Map Room, but at least we found it.



DAY FIFTEEN

THE QUEST

“This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”

Genesis 9:12-13 NIV

We finally made it to the Map Room of Onesiphorus today, after an incredible journey across the desert and into an ancient pyramid. The Map Room was not really a map at all, but a series of shapes and symbols written all over the ground around us. There were pictures of mountains, animals, boats, cities and other things - all of which made little sense to me.

Here, according to Professor Wisenheimer’s earlier translations, all we had to do to reveal the resting place of the Light Scepter was simple. We had to place the diamond that the Princess carries into a certain spot. Thanks to the Professor being here, we were able to find that spot quickly. Professor also translated what time the sunlight would come shining through a hole above us in the ceiling. That light was supposed to shine through the hole, through the diamond and onto the map, telling us where we needed to go.

When that time came, we had the Blaze Diamond in place. We waited. And waited. And suddenly, a shaft of light came down through the ceiling. We all rose to our feet in anticipation. The shaft of light from the sun hit the diamond - and created a beautiful rainbow on the map below us. The rainbow created a perfect arc right above a picture of a large boat: an ark. It couldn’t be clearer. The rainbow was above a picture of Noah’s Ark.

“Mt. Ararat,” Professor blurted out, “We need to find Noah’s Ark. That’s where the Light Scepter is. We find Noah’s Ark - and we find the Light Scepter. And we’ll find it on Mt. Ararat, the final resting place of Noah’s Ark!”

Mt. Ararat is the last place we hear about Noah’s Ark in the Bible. God had shown a rainbow to Noah for the first time there, as a promise that He would never destroy the entire earth with water again. In fact, every time we see a rainbow, that is a reminder of God’s promise, His covenant with us. God always keeps His promises, even though we sometimes don’t. Professor says there are a lot of other promises in the Bible too. We just need to sit down and read them!

I’ll do that. We’ve got some spare time as we travel back to Cairo and make preparations to go to Mt. Ararat. I know a good pilot up there - we’ll have our treasure soon enough!



DAY SIXTEEN

THE QUEST

*“Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the spirit in the wilderness.” **Luke 4:1 NIV***

We stocked up, fed the camels this morning - and prepared to head back to Cairo. It was late this afternoon when we crossed the valley where we saw all those dry bones. You may find this hard to believe, but they were all gone without a trace.

“Maybe God brought them back to life again,” Robbie joked with us.

I’ve seen a lot of stranger things in my adventures, so I thought little more about it. In fact, I was utterly fascinated by some of the things that Professor Wisenheimer was reading to me on the way back. Riding our camels across the desert, we began to get pretty hungry for a good meal. The problem was, we were out of food until we reached our destination later that night.

Professor chose that moment to tell us the story about Jesus willingly going into the desert wilderness to fast for forty days. That means he didn’t eat for forty days. He was simply praying and fasting - and being tempted to eat. As hungry as we were at that moment, I found the very idea incredible. Jesus was just baptized, and his ministry was about to start - but the first thing he did was go to the wilderness to spend time alone fasting and praying to God. If the Son of God stopped everything and spent that time alone talking with God, shouldn’t we do the same? It is important to spend time alone with God, Professor told us.

It made perfect sense, and though our stomachs were empty, our minds were filled with the wisdom shared with us that day - and our hearts were filled with intentions to spend more time alone with God.



DAY SEVENTEEN

THE QUEST

"Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him."

Luke 22:39 NIV

We arrived safely in Cairo, where we added yet another member to our party today, a guy who goes by the name of Cookie. No one knows his last name - and not many can understand a word he says sometimes. But there's one thing that we all agree on: No one flies a plane better than Cookie. He was a flying ace during the war, and holds impressive records that still stand to this day. We call him Cookie, because he likes to cook for everyone. He opened a restaurant three years ago and business is booming. "Cookie's" happens to be the place where many come to eat - where locals frequent, where tourists come to dine, where shady deals sometimes take place, and where everyone enjoys the big band shows at night.

The quickest way for us to get to Mt. Ararat without any entanglements was to get Cookie to fly us up there, and fly us "below the radar." Fortunately, he agreed. He left his restaurant in good hands with his assistant, and got us all on board his plane. He was ready for a vacation, he explained. Plus, he was interested in finding this lost artifact.

Robbie, Black Bart, Professor Wisenheimer, Princess Camille and I loaded into his plane and were fit snug in there. His plane looked like an old converted cargo plane and it didn't look too safe. Believe me; we were saying our prayers extra hard before takeoff.

A good prayer life isn't about just praying when you have an emergency or think you really need God. The truth is, we all really need God every single day. Professor reminded us yesterday as we traveled by land that Jesus went to a place of prayer each and every morning, as was his custom. With all the danger going on around us, we've been doing a lot of praying lately. It's a habit we're sure to keep up. We'll make it *our* custom too.



DAY EIGHTEEN

THE QUEST

“For as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: ‘To an Unknown God.’ This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I’m telling you about.” Acts 17:23 NIV

Our flight path took us over Greece, home of many stories of Greek gods such as Zeus and Poseidon, and heroes such as Jason and the Argonauts or Hercules. Of course, these stories are myths - which means they aren’t real. But I still had a good time sharing them with the other passengers on the plane.

Professor Wisenheimer then asked me if I had ever heard of the Greek “Unknown God.” I had no idea what he was talking about. It was then the Professor’s turn to impress us with a story from Greek history.

One day while in Athens, Greece, the apostle Paul noticed an altar with an inscription on it: “To an Unknown God.” It was at that moment that Paul got a brilliant idea. He used the things in their Greek culture to communicate the gospel to those who needed to hear it. It was smart thinking, and here’s how he did it. He used the Greek altar to an “Unknown God” to explain that this God is the One he himself served. Their “Unknown God,” he reasoned, was the one that made the world and everything in it, including us. He then went on to use this Greek altar to explain that God is not made of gold, silver or stone - or designed by a craftsman. It was all a very stirring sermon Paul preached, respectful of his Greek audience and apparently quite convincing. Some Greeks became Christians right there on the spot. Some laughed at Paul, but the very beginnings of the Greek Church in Athens have their roots in what Paul said that day.

Professor explained that we need to use what we have around us to get the gospel out. Some could use sports, while others could use the arts. Paul used an empty altar right there on the spot.

It was a good story the Professor told, but we had to land in order to refuel, and that cut things a little short. Tomorrow, we’ll be approaching Mt. Ararat.



DAY NINETEEN

THE QUEST

"So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadow-boxing."

1 Corinthians 9:26 NIV

Remarkably, we landed the plane safely at an airstrip just south of Mt. Ararat. I can see it even now, looming on the horizon, amongst some of the other high peaks. It is a cold and rocky place, quite a lot different from the barren desert wasteland we left just days ago. Somewhere on that mountain may rest Noah's Ark. It will be difficult, between the chilling weather and rocky terrain. I'm not going to let that stop us though. All six of us have agreed to go on this adventure, and we'll get there, no matter what. Even Princess Camille wants to go with us.

"It'll probably be pretty frozen up there," I warned her.

"The cold never bothered me anyway," she said, smiling. And then like the others, she began packing her things and getting ready for this new adventure up the mountain.

As Professor talked yesterday about Paul's sermon in Athens, it sounded like I would like this guy Paul. He was determined. He talked about life as if it were a race, and how we all must get to our goal at the finish line. He was serious about his goals, and every step he made, he took it with his goal in mind. Professor Wisenheimer explained that our goal was heaven, and bringing more people to church that they may know Jesus.

Paul was determined. We're determined too. We will reach our goal, somewhere on top of that mountain. Today, we purchased our climbing gear and got ready to embark upon a mission that would take us back in time over 4,000 years. Noah's Ark awaits us. Robbie is bringing his camera in case you don't believe us.



DAY TWENTY

THE QUEST

"...Jesus took Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain to be alone."

Mark 9:1 NIV

Climbing began today, and though things started easily enough, it began to get more and more difficult to climb. A wise man once explained that there are three types of people in the world: quitters, campers and climbers.

Quitters are those who easily give up. Unfortunately, these are the type who are full of regrets about what might have been, and gave up because things got too tough. Paul the apostle was not one of these, this much is certain.

Campers are those who reach a certain point, but decide to camp out there, never to see any further heights in life. Though campers reach a certain level of success, they never go higher - and instead watch everyone else continue climbing on. Know anyone like that in your life? Again, how awful it is to sit and watch everyone else go higher as you yourself sit there thinking of what might have been.

The Bible talks about climbers. Elijah climbed mountains. So did Moses. And so did Jesus. Their destination was the peak of the mountain, where they would have an encounter with God. In our lives, the climbing never ends. We are constantly reaching forward to move upwards and get closer to God. Some think it is too hard - they take the broader path and quit. Some get a little success, but don't want to get any closer to God. They camp out, and stay where they are.

But then there are the climbers, those who never stop until they reach the top. That's where you and I want to be, isn't it? Though it is okay to be content with where you are, we should always be ready to climb further and further.

Climbing this mountain today has indeed been tough. The weather is getting colder and the rocks can be slippery. But we're going to press on, refusing to stop until we've reached our goal. We're climbers.



DAY TWENTY ONE

THE QUEST

"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

John 15:13 NIV

A bizarre twist of events has landed us in deep, deep trouble. We had reached a certain plateau on our journey - that's a flat spot halfway up this mountain - and believe it or not, we found a tribe of natives living here. The good news was that they were preparing dinner. The bad news was that they decided to make *us* the dinner. Not good!

This strange tribe is going to sacrifice us to their gods, and things are not looking too good for us. Nobody does a sacrifice anymore - hasn't anyone told these people that? Apparently not.

Why even do a sacrifice? In the Old Testament, people in Israel had to sacrifice animals to God as atonement for their sins. From the very first time there was sin, there would always follow death as atonement. That meant big trouble for us, right? Because who among us hasn't sinned? The answer is no one. All have sinned and fallen short.

We were feeling pretty low, but Professor Wisenheimer explained to us the good news of the gospel: Although we deserved death, Jesus, the Son of God, came down from heaven to take our place. He himself became the offering to atone for our sins if we would only believe in him. That is great news of the gospel.

It was an amazing revelation, and my heart filled with joy immediately at the good news. Many days ago, a guide tried to tell me that Jesus died for me - but I never knew why. Now I do: Jesus died for me, so that I could live. There can be no greater love, I know this. And even though we are facing certain doom tomorrow, I feel alive with happiness in the knowledge that God loves us this much.



DAY TWENTY TWO

THE QUEST

"For God gives to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge."

Ecclesiastes 2:26 NIV

You won't believe this, but I'll try my best to explain it. Last night, we were praying for wisdom to get out of this situation. Still tied up, we were brought out - closer to the cooking fire. We somehow figured out that the chief had intended to make us a burnt offering tonight at dinner - and there would be a dinner buffet with our names on the menu. Out of nowhere, Cookie began to speak, and I was absolutely stunned to discover that Cookie spoke their language. It sounded like they were mumbling to each other - and yet, somehow they were communicating. The next thing I knew, this strange tribe of people were untying us.

Apparently, Cookie talked them all into a deal. He would prepare them dinner. If they didn't like it, then the natives could eat us in the morning. Otherwise, we'd all enjoy a great dinner and go on our ways. That night, Cookie made a dinner unlike any other I have ever seen before. I'll just spill it: this dinner was absolutely loaded with baked beans, the only supply he had with him at the time. Still, it was new to these strangers, and they absolutely loved it. Go figure!

Still, we all know what baked beans can do to a person. The village was filled with music that evening - and I don't mean the kind of tooting you hear on an instrument!

So miraculously, this tribe is no longer hostile towards us. In fact, they are now our friends, oddly enough.

But we've got to move on. Cookie asked the chief if they knew where the ark was. The Chief evidently knew exactly where this "boat on a mountain" was, because he assigned us a guide that will take us straight there first thing tomorrow.

It says in the Bible that we should ask God for wisdom, and that he will give it to us. Though your name might not be on a menu for dinner, there are some things in your life that pop up that may stump you on what you should do. Your Bible says you should pray for wisdom and that God will give it to you.

After the events of today, I'll have to agree entirely.



DAY TWENTY THREE

THE QUEST

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:29-30 NIV

It seems we cannot go through a single day without some sort of extreme danger surrounding us. Our guide was leading us along a narrow ledge when the worst thing that can happen on a mountain occurred: an avalanche! First, we heard it - and then we saw it. It was a mass of snow and ice that came crashing down toward us at a furious pace. There was no hope in outrunning it, but Robbie found a few crevices in the rocks that we quickly piled into so that none of us would be swept away by the avalanche.

It was thunderous and loud, and we hoped desperately that the small crevices where we were hiding would not be covered up by tons of snow and debris. When the noise stopped, we knew it was safe to come out. Unfortunately, when we did, we found our guide trapped behind a massive rock that had lodged itself directly in front of him.

Black Bart immediately attempted to help push the rock aside, but it was too heavy. Only with the efforts of all of us combined were we able to rescue our poor guide from being trapped forever under that heavy burden. Black Bart noted how much easier the weight of that rock was when we carried it together.

As I sit here tonight writing this, I am reminded that no one should carry any sort of burden completely alone. Even if it is not a physical burden, we need to be able to share our burdens with someone else. God will help us with our burdens. We just need to be willing to share them with Him or others.

I asked Robbie how he thought so quickly to run to the clefts in the rock. He told me that when the avalanche first started to occur, a scripture from the Bible quickly came to his mind: "For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock."



DAY TWENTY FOUR

THE QUEST

“But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Isaiah 40:31 NIV

Our traveling was slower today, but at least it was fairly uneventful. Our guide kept us on track in the right direction, though the climbing was very difficult. Cookie's meals for us have consisted largely of beans, much to my disappointment. It was all he could carry with him. We still say the blessing over our meals, as we are grateful to still be alive and well enough to eat.

Black Bart spied an eagle and we were all immediately envious. To fly about like that eagle would get us to our destination so much quicker - yet here we were plodding along the ground.

“Don't you wish you could be like that eagle, and not trying to climb these hard, cold, slick rocks?” he asked us.

“Anything would be better than being here, stuck on the side of this mountain like this,” Robbie agreed.”

It was then that Princess Camille gave us yet another quote from the Bible to encourage us. She said, “Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

It was just what we needed to hear. Though we knew we couldn't fly about as an eagle, we did find strength in the words the prophet Isaiah spoke. We would get to our destination, no matter what. We would not grow weary, we would walk and not be faint. We are going to make it!

Our guide told us that we would probably see our destination tomorrow. We just have to keep climbing.



DAY TWENTY FIVE

THE QUEST

"But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD." Genesis 6:8 NIV

We arrived at our destination late this evening and have been overwhelmed ever since. Robbie has been snapping a ton of photos. If I didn't see this for myself, I wouldn't believe it - but there it is, resting less than one hundred feet from us: Noah's Ark. Or, at least, what's left of it. The extreme temperatures and rocky surroundings have preserved a large portion of this wooden structure for the past 4,000 years - and yet not many have ever been able to see it. Our guide and his tribe have always known about this boat, but have never known what its meaning is.

I was happy to explain it to him. Long ago, the earth was filled with wicked people. All except one, whose name was Noah. God chose to spare Noah and his family. He had them build a massive ark to contain two of every animal on the earth. As Noah, his family and two of each animal went into the ark, God shut the door of this massive boat.

How strange it must have been to see so many animals pile into a large wooden boat, when there was no sign of water around - and no rain. Yet God did send the rain and the earth was flooded for over a year. Eventually, the water began to subside. Noah's Ark's final resting place was right here on this spot on Mt. Ararat, where I'm assuming it has remained ever since.

If God were looking for just one righteous person in all the earth, would he find you? In what ways do you look or act different from those around you? As I think about that, I also think about what an incredible day awaits us all tomorrow.

Tomorrow, our guide will head back down the mountain to return to his tribe. I thanked him for his services, because we know the path now. Tomorrow, we'll go into the ark.



DAY TWENTY SIX

THE QUEST

“Enter His gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name.” Psalm 100:1 NIV

Princess Camille, Professor Wisenheimer, Cookie, Robbie, Black Bart and I walked up to the ark this morning - very much aware that we were standing on holy ground. No need for concern about traps, spiders, snakes or anything of the kind here.

The large door on the side was shut and we spent a great deal of time speculating how exactly we were going to get the thing open. I had devised a plan to get some rather large rocks and pry it open, but a most amazing thing happened before we got that far.

Princess Camille said with wonder, “I am so thankful I am here to see this.”

Immediately, the ground rumbled. The large door creaked and began to open outward, moving an inch and then stopping.

“What just happened?” I asked.

“The door budged for some reason,” Black Bart answered, “I have no idea why, but it didn’t open all the way.”

“We should be thankful it didn’t open up too fast and land on one of us,” Robbie said.

Immediately, the door opened another inch.

Professor Wisenheimer blurted out, “That’s it! Don’t you get it? Each time someone says they are thankful for something, the door opens a little further. It says in the Bible that we should enter His gates with thanksgiving. Evidently, there’s a similar force at work here. All we have to do to enter these gates is be thankful for something. Let me try: ahem, I’m thankful we can eat Cookie’s beans and aren’t starving.”

The door creaked open further again, and immediately each one of us began to state all the things we were thankful for. Within moments, we were inside the ark, where another puzzle awaited us. I’ll let you know tomorrow - hopefully we’ll have figured it out by then.



DAY TWENTY SEVEN

THE QUEST

"He replied, 'If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!'"
Luke 19:40 NIV

As soon as we made our way through the entrance yesterday, we entered a large room. Within it were rocks of various sizes, a mallet on the ground, and there was a door. It was a big one. Unfortunately, it was locked. For a moment, I was terrified that we'd have to go searching for some key somewhere on another continent. But Professor Wisenheimer found a message inscribed to the right of the door that read in Aramaic, Greek and Hebrew: "If they kept quiet, the stones would cry out."

"What does it mean?" Black Bart thought out loud.

"It's from the Bible," Professor Wisenheimer said, "In the book of Luke, Jesus entered Jerusalem to the sound of great cheers. The Pharisees wanted quiet, but Jesus told them that if they were quiet, the rocks would instead cry out."

"So what does it mean?" Black Bart asked again.

Suddenly, a musical tone filled the room. I turned to see what it was, and saw that Robbie had struck one of the rocks with the mallet.

"Where'd you get that?" I asked him.

"It was just lying here, so I used it on that rock," Robbie answered.

"I got it!" I told them, really excited now, "To open the door, we must let the rocks 'cry out.' Robbie, can you play an old hymn on those rocks?"

Robbie asked, "What do you want me to play?"

"Anything! Try Amazing Grace!"

Within moments, we were all silent, except for the tones of Amazing Grace being played by the sound of Robbie striking various rocks to create the melody. It wasn't perfect, but something was in fact triggered by his playing a worship song on those rocks. We heard the heavy sound of the door unlatching. I took a deep breath, approached the door, and grabbed the handle. We were going in.

You're not going to believe the room we're in now - you'll just have to read about it in my next entry tomorrow.



DAY TWENTY EIGHT

THE QUEST

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 NIV

I have it. I have it in my hands. The Light Scepter - which many have believed for so long has the power to eternal life in it. Last night, we walked straight into this room, where we've been ever since. Just beyond us, a wall of gems glows brightly, like that from a description of heaven - and a shaft of light shines down on the place where the Light Scepter once was. But now, it lies in my hand.

All of us who made the journey here have been fascinated by various objects placed within this room. Through translations on the wall, Professor Wisenheimer discovered that descendants of Nicodemus had discovered Noah's Ark, and kept this Light Scepter and other precious artifacts here within this room. Only those familiar with certain Biblical passages were assured to get here, and those who were not familiar would be dependent on others who would be sure to share these Biblical passages along the journey.

It was a set up. It seems like a long time ago that the guide in Nepal, a descendant of Nicodemus himself, told me he knew the secret of the Light Scepter. First, he tried to tell me that Jesus thought I was worth dying for. At the time, I didn't believe it. And that's why he told me the secret that sent me on this journey.

But the pieces are coming together now. Inscribed on the Light Scepter are the most famous words from the Bible, words that were spoken to Nicodemus almost 2,000 years ago: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." The Light Scepter really can give eternal life. Knowing that you are a sinner and that the only way to heaven is through faith in Jesus who died on the cross to take punishment for our sins means we will live forever with Him.

If not for my companions of this journey, I myself would not have made it - nor would I have heard the messages God had been speaking through them all along. No trinket, artifact or jewel I've ever traveled great distances for can ever come close to the value of what I've learned along this mission. And nothing will ever be equal in your lives to the power of that one phrase spoken to Nicodemus so long ago: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not die, but have eternal life."



DAY TWENTY NINE

THE QUEST

"Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you." 2 Thessalonians 3:16 NIV

It has been a couple of days since I've written and a lot has taken place since my last entry. We made it back down the mountain safely. It was a long and dangerous journey, though not as eventful as our trip up. The only tragedy was Robbie's camera. On the way down, he dropped it off the side of the cliff. Though he was initially upset, he still was at peace, because nothing will ever take away from the joy of our experience on top of the mountain.

I left the Light Scepter there in the ark, along with most of the treasures. We all agreed before leaving the ark that the real treasure of our expedition was our journey there, and that we had all already received something more valuable than any jewel, artifact, or golden scepter. I have received peace and joy that passes all understanding.

We made it back down to the plane and have flown back here to Cookie's restaurant in Cairo, where together we were sitting one last time before parting ways. It was an incredible journey we just shared, and we were each grateful for the experience.

I told them this much, how their friendship was valuable and how much of a great adventure it was.

But suddenly, a waiter approached us with a package addressed to me. I quickly opened it, and inside found a letter from an old friend now living in Italy. It read, "We are fairly certain we know where the ancient menorah is, but we'll need your help."

The letter went on - it sounds like the menorah he spoke of may be the very one that was used in God's Temple in the Old Testament. Now that, my friends, would be quite a find! At the table, I asked those there if they would like to come along for another adventure, and everyone there looked at each other. And then back to me.

"YES," they practically screamed.

It looks like we'll be off again soon, but I will leave that adventure for another journal! As I leave you for now, I will write what Paul wrote in the end of his letters: "May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way." I wish you and your family that peace. God bless!



THE QUEST

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