

## BUILD MY LIFE "DRAWING A LINE IN THE SAND" NEHEMIAH 10:1-39

The acronym BHAG, pronounced "bee-hag," is borrowed from the business world and stands for Big Hairy Audacious Goal. Putting a man on the moon is the best and most timely example of a BHAG. Jim Collins, one of the coiners of the term, writes: "All companies have goals. But there is a difference between merely having a goal and becoming committed to a huge, daunting challenge-like a big mountain climb. Think of the moon mission in the 1960s. President Kennedy and his advisor could have gone off into a conference room and drafted something like 'Let's beef up our space program,' or some other such vacuous statement. The most optimistic scientific assessment of the moon mission's chances for success in 1961 was fifty-fifty and most experts were, in fact, more pessimistic. Yet, nonetheless, Congress agreed (to the tune of an immediate \$549 million and billions more in the following five years) with Kennedy's proclamation on May 25, 1961, 'that this Nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth.' Given the odds, such a bold commitment was, at the time, outrageous. But that's part of what made it such a powerful mechanism for getting the United States, still groggy from the 1950s and the Eisenhower era, moving vigorously forward" ([https://www.jimcollins.com/article\\_topics/articles/BHAG.html](https://www.jimcollins.com/article_topics/articles/BHAG.html)).

Long before BHAG was coined, Israel drafted a number of Big Hairy Audacious Goals of its own as a nation. Having recently returned from captivity, the returnees, following a fresh encounter with the Book

*. . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*

– Jesus

of the Law of Moses, "to bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord" (Ne 10:29).

### This Week's Core Competency

**Giving Away My Life** – I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving away one's life to fulfill God's purposes, offering one's body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (Ro 12:1), and obeying everything Christ has commanded his disciples (Mt 28:20) are corollary statements. They entail one another. What's more, each in and of itself is a BHAG all its own.

Here, of course, is where the word of God comes in. How can we keep Christ's commandments unless we know what they are, and how can we know what they are apart from the word of God—especially the Four Gospels? So how many commandments did Jesus leave his disciples to obey? Popular answers vary between thirty (see Matt Slick, "What Commandments Did Jesus Give Us?" <https://carm.org/what-commandments-did-jesus-give-us>) and fifty (see Institute in Basic Life Principles, <https://iblp.org/questions/what-are-commands-christ>), but we need not quibble over the exact number. In any case, many of them are found in his Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). For example: rejoice when people persecute you (5:12); let your light shine (5:16); be reconciled to your brother or sister (5:24); do not lust after a woman (5:28); be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect (5:48); practice secret disciplines (6:1-18); lay up treasures in heaven (6:20); seek God's kingdom (6:33); do not judge unless you want to be judged (7:1); ask, seek, knock (7:7); do unto others (7:12); watch out for false prophets (7:15); and these are not all of them.

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Then there are other commandments of Jesus scattered throughout the Gospels—well known ones like: take my yoke upon you and learn of me (11:29); deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me (Lk 9:23); forgive others seventy-seven times (Mt 18:22); be a servant like the Son of Man (20:26-28); render to Caesar what is Caesar's (22:21); to mention just a few. Of course, when Jesus was asked to identify the greatest commandment, he unforgettably reduced them all to two: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (22:37-40). And finally, before returning to the Father, he gave his disciples a new commandment. He told them: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Jn 13:34-35).

If believers were to draft a BHAG analogous to the one the returnees in Nehemiah's day drafted, namely, "to follow the Law of God . . . and to obey carefully all the commands . . . of the LORD" (Ne 10:29), it would have to be: We will follow the law of Christ and obey everything Jesus has commanded us in the New Testament. What a Big Hairy Audacious Goal that would be!

## day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

### Nehemiah 10:1-39

9:38 *"In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it."*

1 Those who sealed it were:

Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hakaliah.

Zedekiah, 2 Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah,

3 Pashhur, Amariah, Malkijah,

4 Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluk,

5 Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah,

6 Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch,

7 Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin,

8 Maaziah, Bilgai and Shemaiah.

These were the priests.

9 The Levites:

Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel,

10 and their associates: Shebaniah,

Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan,

11 Mika, Rehob, Hashabiah,

12 Zakkur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah,

13 Hodiah, Bani and Beninu.

14 The leaders of the people:

Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani,

15 Bunni, Azgad, Bebai,

16 Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin,

17 Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur,

18 Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai,

19 Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai,

20 Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir,

21 Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua,

22 Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah,

23 Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub,

24 Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek,

25 Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah,

26 Ahiah, Hanan, Anan,

27 Malluk, Harim and Baanah.

28 *"The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, musicians, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand—29 all these now join their fellow Israelites the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord.*

30 *"We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons.*

31 *"When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts.*

32 *"We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God: 33 for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, at the New Moon feasts and at the appointed festivals; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God.*

34 *"We—the priests, the Levites and the people—have cast lots to determine when each of our families is to bring to the house of our God at set times each year a contribution of wood to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law.*

35 "We also assume responsibility for bringing to the house of the LORD each year the firstfruits of our crops and of every fruit tree.

36 "As it is also written in the Law, we will bring the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, of our herds and of our flocks to the house of our God, to the priests ministering there.

37 "Moreover, we will bring to the storerooms of the house of our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees and of our new wine and olive oil. And we will bring a tithe of our crops to

the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work. 38 A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury. 39 The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and olive oil to the storerooms, where the articles for the sanctuary and for the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the musicians are also kept.

"We will not neglect the house of our God."

## **EXAMINE** – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

\* Circle "sealed" in v. 1.

\* Write "and" before "Zedekiah" in v. 1.

\* Underline "the priests" in v. 8, "the Levites" in v. 9, "the leaders of the people" in v. 14, and "the rest of the people" in v. 28.

\* Highlight v. 29.

\* Circle "curse" in v. 29.

\* Circle "marriage" in v. 30.

\* Circle "seventh year" in v. 31.

\* Circle "shekel" in v. 32.

\* Circle "New Moon feasts" in v. 33.

\* Circle "firstborn" in v. 36.

\* Circle "tithe" in v. 37 and "tithes" in v. 38.

## day **2** **EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Comment on the relationship of chapter 10 to chapter 9.

2. Nehemiah and Zedekiah are linked and contrasted with "the priests" named in verses 3-8. What does this indicate about them?

3. "The rest of the people" set themselves apart "from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God" (v. 28). Put what that means in your own words (cf., v. 29).

4. Identify the BHAG the Israelites set for themselves (v. 29).

5. The BHAG contained a number of specific stipulations. List them:

Regarding marriage:

v. 30

Regarding Sabbath laws:

v. 31a

v. 31b

v. 31c

Regarding the temple tax:

v. 32

Regarding contributions to the house of the LORD:

v. 34

v. 35

v. 36

v. 37

6. **Discussion:** Talk about the stipulations involved in a BHAG Christians might set for themselves.

## day **3** **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

The tenth chapter of Nehemiah flows out of chapter nine. Chapter nine concludes with these words: "In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it" (v. 38). In chapter eight, reading the Book of the Law of Moses led God's people to a recognition of their sin and renewed zeal to do the will of God. In chapter nine, reflecting on who God is and what God had done for Israel led his people to confess their sins and offer praise to their God in prayer. All that prompted them, as well, to rededicate themselves to obey the covenant between them and God. They went so far as to draft a binding agreement to be signed by their civil and religious leaders on their behalf.

The exact number of stipulations in the agreement depends on how they are grouped. According to one commentator, there are five. He provides this excellent summary of the passage: "Within this frame were then set five specific undertakings: first, to prohibit mixed marriages for both men and women; second, to preserve the holiness of Sabbaths by not making purchases from non-Israelites during them; third, to protect the poor, both by letting land lie fallow every

seventh year (when the poor could help themselves to anything growing on it, according to Exodus 23:11) and also by forgiving all debts every seventh year, according to Deuteronomy 15:1-11; fourth, to present all the firstborn, both of one's family and of one's animals, at the temple, which would mean paying a price for the former and surrendering the latter (see Num. 18:14-19); and fifth, to provide money (temple tax), wood, and tithes to support the temple services: 'We will not neglect the house of our God' (10:39; see vv. 30-39)" (J. I. Packer, *A Passion for Faithfulness*, 161-62).

The significance of their signed oath is not lost on this writer. He goes on to explain: "Over and above the intrinsic importance of these undertaking for a godly national life, they were clearly meant as tokens, guaranteeing that all the Law would be faithfully kept and demonstrating a resolved to put God first in everything. In themselves, however, they constituted an impressive expression of faith, hope, and love. For the members of an economically depressed community to forgo marrying foreign money and trading seven days a week, and to promise to pay redemption money for the firstborn (ss Num. 18:14-

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16), to work a social system that had the rich in effect giving substantially to the poor every seven years, and to tithe everything regularly for the temple was audacious, costly, and self-denying. But what it expressed in positive terms was a resolve to obey God at all costs, with no half measures, and to trust him totally to bestow shalom-peace, well-being, harmony, prosperity—on his faithful, loyal people" (162).

Of course, Christians today take a different oath—

theirs is the New Covenant—a pledge to obey everything Jesus has commanded them (Mt 28:20), as revealed in the Four Gospels and fleshed out in the teaching of the rest of the New Testament. Ironically, in their zeal to "make disciples" they often overlook their responsibility to "be disciples" themselves—to obey Jesus' commands themselves. O that our commitment to teach others to obey would be matched by our commitment to obey ourselves.

## day 4 **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

### *The Message of the Passage*

*In view of who God is and what he has done for you, devote yourself to obeying all that Jesus has commanded his disciples as it is fleshed out in the New Testament.*

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

**Draft a BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal) for Christians under the New Covenant.**

**Identify a few key stipulations entailed by that BHAG.**

**Identify one particular stipulation that you intend to make a personal objective.**

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# notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **sealed** "A seal signified a 'legal assent to a written document.' Here the 'seals' refer to the signatures of these leaders (Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, NAC, 244). "The way someone 'signed' a document in the ancient world was similar to the use of a wax seal in more recent times. A distinctive seal was pressed into soft clay [v. 1]. The pattern on the seal showed what authority issued that document" (*The Nelson Study Bible*, 803).

v. 1 **Zedekiah** "In Hebrew there is a conjunction ('and') between Nehemiah and Zedekiah, but this does not occur between the other names. Thus it sets off these two who represent the civil government. There are twenty-one priestly names, fifteen of which are names of families. Ezra probably was not named because he belonged to the family of Seraiah, as did the high priest Eliashib" (Breneman, 244; cf., Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, TOTC, 125). "Some think that Zedekiah might have been the secretary of Nehemiah. This is not impossible, but cannot be proved. He was most probably an official acting in an unstated capacity" (F Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, NICOT, 236).

v. 29 **curse** "Covenant agreements (between kings and nations) in the ancient world included blessings for keeping the covenant and curses for breaking it. God's covenant with Israel was presented in the same terms (note the curses in Deut 27:15-26; 30:19). The people followed this same pattern and took for granted that the breaking of the oath would incur a curse, which would be some punishment or judgment from God" (Breneman, 246). "The curse may refer to the cursings God stated in the Deuteronomic Covenant (Deut. 28:15-68)" (Gene A. Getz, "Nehemiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 691). "The curse is closely connected to the oath. When the oath is broken, the curse will come into effect. It is a question of cause and effect" (Fensham, 237).

v. 30 **marriage** Cf., Ex 34:16; Dt 7:3-4. "The law had strongly condemned these (not on racial but on religious ground, Exod. 34:12-16; hence the ready acceptance of Ruth the convert). But the social climb was tempting in these trying days, and marriage offered an attractive ladder" (Kidner, 126).

v. 31 **seventh year** "The laws regarding the Sabbath and Sabbatical year are based on the laws of the Pentateuch, but they define new cases. The Jews would not have bought and sold among themselves. However, living so close to non-Jews who brought merchandise to sell on the Sabbath presented a new situation. Likewise the decision about the seventh year combines older laws. Exodus 23:1-11 says the land was to rest each seventh year; Exod 21:2-6 includes the release of slaves (who were slaves because of debts); and the cancelation of debts is found in Deut 15:1-2" (Breneman, 247).

v. 32 **shekel** I.e., one eighth of an ounce (of silver?). "The Law required Israelites 20 years old and older to pay one-half a shekel as a temple tax (Exod. 30:11-16). This particular congregation only promised one-third of a shekel (v. 32). Perhaps Nehemiah reduced the amount since the returned exiles were now poor (cf. 5:1-5). Another explanation is that the people may have pledged this one-third shekel in addition to the other one-half. A third possibility is that a different system of evaluating the shekel had replaced the older one. The text is not specific on this point. In any case the people responded sacrificially" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Nehemiah," 2019 ed., 52, [planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/Nehemiah/pdf](http://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/Nehemiah/pdf)). "The temple tax had not been a specific law before Neh 13:10. In the Persian period the economy became more money based; thus temple support was needed both in cash and in kind (animals and grains). However, there is a precedent to this tax in Exod 30:11-16 and 38:25-26; in fact, the language here reflects a knowledge of the Exod 30 passage" (Breneman, 248). "Although the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes authorized regular grants from public funds for the costs of worship (e.g. Ezra 6:8-10), these could not be expected to continue indefinitely; nor (we may add) would such dependence on foreign patronage have been healthy for Judaism" (Kidner, 127).

v. 33 **New Moon feasts** Cf., Nu 28:11-15.

v. 36 **firstborn** "For the firstfruits cf. Exod. 23:19; 34:26; Deut. 26:1-11. The first born child could be redeemed by paying five shekels of silver (Exod. 13:13; 34:20). For the firstborn of cattle and sheep cf. Exod. 13:12; Num. 18:17; Deut. 12:6. For the firstborn of a donkey redemption by a lamb is prescribed, or else its neck must be broken (cf. Exod 13:13). In addition to all these, the best product of the house and farm must be brought for the temple personnel" (Fensham, 241).

vv. 37, 38 **tithe, tithes** "The tithe of the tithes (38), i.e. a tenth of the tenths, refers to Numbers 18:26, in a passage which shows that the Levites, as recipients of the tithes of all Israel, had to tithe what they received and pass on this tenth share to the priests. In Moses' day, when Levites greatly outnumbered priests, this gave a reasonable proportion to both groups, but now it bore hardly on the priests" (Kidner, 127).

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### Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

My daughter has always had her own sense of fashion. Elementary school picture day outfits included pink leggings, a green and blue floral skirt, a leopard printed shirt and an orange headband. It didn't bother her to stand out from the crowd; she blazed a trail down her own path then and still does today. Being a follower of Christ will often pull us off the trail of the cultural norm and cause us to stand out from the crowd. At the beginning of our marriage my husband and I made a commitment to glorify God and honor Him above all else. As we had children we vowed to protect our family values in light of this commitment to God. Because we committed to say "yes" to God, we had to say "no" to things many of our friends were doing. We said no to the great-big-fancy-event birthday parties because we didn't want to overextend our finances. We said no to sports because it ate away at our family time. We said no to Saturday sleepovers that prevented Sunday church attendance. The pressure to fit in and do what our friends were doing was strong, but also a beautiful opening to share what God was doing in our family. Going against the grain and choosing God above all else will make your family stand out from the crowd but it's so worth it. We are praying your family is able to stand strong as you swim upstream and say "yes" to God.

#### What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Nehemiah 10

1. What did the people decide to do (Nehemiah 9:38)?
2. List the things the people agreed to do to honor God.
3. What did the people agree to give God?

#### What Do You Think

Why do you think giving the first of what they had was important to the people?

#### What R U Going To Do

What will you put aside so you can honor God?

#### Core Comp

Giving Away My Life – I give away my life to help with God's work.

#### Memory Verse

Psalm 105:4 – *Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always.*

### KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse \_\_\_\_\_, completed *Scrolls* \_\_\_\_\_, brought Bible \_\_\_\_\_, brought a friend \_\_\_\_\_.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_ Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

*2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** *Ephesians*

*6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

**Tom Bulick** (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church in 1998. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

**Stephanie Thomas** (B.B.A. University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James, and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella, and Simon. She and James are Shepherds of the Bailey Community Group. She has attended Pantego Bible Church for more than twenty years and has been on staff for more than five years.



8001 Anderson Blvd.  
Ft. Worth, TX 76120  
1-866-PANTEGO  
Fax 817-275-6403  
[www.pantego.org](http://www.pantego.org)

The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you Belong, Become, and go Beyond as follower of Jesus Christ through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is [tbulick@pantego.org](mailto:tbulick@pantego.org).