

Running With Lemmings

By Daryl Wingerd

Lemmings are small rodents that live in northern regions of the world. They look a lot like fat, furry hamsters. One variety of lemming, the Scandinavian lemming, has become a sort of zoological legend for doing something strange, even disturbing. Every three or four years, when the lemming population becomes too great for the local food supply, Scandinavian lemmings spontaneously migrate in huge numbers. There is no particular leader of this mass exodus. Thousands of individual lemmings simply become parts of a moving crowd. They run as a group, all going in one direction, passing through meadows, woods, and even towns. In the process, they leave the safety of their burrows, exposing themselves to predators like foxes, owls, etc.

Most amazing is the fact that if migrating lemmings come to a large body of water, even to the ocean, they plunge right in and swim away from the shore. They apparently believe they can make it to the other side, even though the other side is nowhere in sight. One follows another as the whole crowd desperately tries to reach the unreachable. They can swim, but not for long. Most that are not eaten by seals, sea birds, or large fish, drown.



As futile as the lemmings' behavior might seem, people often imitate them, blindly adopting the beliefs of those around them, even when those beliefs are not grounded in reality. Think about the people of Copernicus' time. You know who he was, right?

Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) was the astronomer who insisted that the sun does not revolve around the earth, but rather, the earth revolves around the sun. His news not only rocked the scientific world, it also embarrassed the established church, the leaders of which officially denounced his theory as heresy. And more than a half-century later, the leaders of the church were still so committed to the traditional (although totally incorrect) view that they formally ordered Galileo, another famous astronomer, to stop defending Copernicus' theory.

You see, at that time, everyone just *knew* that the sun orbited the earth. It was a no-brainer. It was simply the only way to think. But do you know what? Everyone was absolutely wrong. People were so determined to go with the crowd, to conform to the normal, longstanding system of thought, that they were unwilling to believe the truth. Copernicus himself succumbed to the social and religious pressures of his day, refraining from publishing his discovery until a few weeks before he died.

Before you condemn the people of Copernicus' day, think about how often and easily *you* are deceived. Think about how often *you* blindly follow the crowd, whether that means observing religious customs, conforming to social norms, or succumbing to peer pressure. It's almost as though we can't help ourselves. We are like thoughtless lemmings heading for the ocean, exposing ourselves to physical or spiritual danger, and all because everyone else is going in that direction.

We who have the Bible cannot say we were never warned. In the Old Testament Moses wrote, "You shall not follow the masses in doing evil" (Ex. 23:2). And the Apostle Paul instructs us to "walk no longer as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind . . ." (Eph. 4:17). In other words, stop following the crowd! The broad road through life leads the masses to destruction (Matt. 7:13). Like lemmings, they think they will find satisfaction when in reality, their efforts lead to death (see Prov. 16:25).

To contradict some marketing genius, perception is not reality. *Reality* is reality. People once *perceived* that the earth was the center of the universe, but they were wrong. Lemmings *perceive* that they will survive and satisfy their desire for food if they swim out to sea, and yet they die.

Jesus Christ and His message of salvation by grace through faith, on the other hand, is not merely a theory or someone's *perception* of truth. As Jesus said of Himself, "I *am* the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). In the midst a world of people who are desperately pursuing freedom in all the wrong ways and seeking satisfaction in all the wrong places, the message of Christ crucified is the *only* truth that can set you free (John 8:32). When we believe in Him, and when we demonstrate our faith and love by obeying His commands, we are the happiest, freest, most satisfied people on the planet. But if we continue to think and live like the world around us, we are still running with the lemmings.

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