



CREATOR

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MERCY FELT

The Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.
James 5:11

Jenny:¹ “Daddy, I don’t feel so good!”
Jenny wipes tears from her eyes. “I was just watching a video about the tornado that went through Moore, Oklahoma in 2013. So many people died or were injured; it had to be terrible for everyone who lived there. I suddenly started crying really hard, and I got sick to my stomach.”

Jenny’s Dad: “That’s understandable, Sweetheart.”

Jenny: “Why?”

Dad: “The account of this tragedy obviously made you quite upset. Strong emotions can affect your stomach.”

Jenny: “I’m not sure I understand.”

Dad: “Well, let me try to explain. Your stomach is like an elastic bag that helps you digest food. When you swallow something it goes from your mouth, by way of a tube called the *esophagus*, and into your stomach.”

Jenny: “But why did I get a stomachache?”

Dad: “You just finished eating lunch and your stomach had food in it, which your body was trying to digest. As you became upset at the thought of the tornado, your body automatically shut down your stomach.”

Jenny: “You mean my stomach has totally stopped working?!”

Dad: “No, not exactly—it just isn’t working as efficiently as it normally does after a meal. Jesus wired you together so that when you see, smell, or taste food, the juices in your stomach start flowing. Your body is preparing for digestion. The thought of food alone can actually cause the muscles in your stomach to start contracting. That’s why your stomach growls when it’s hungry. Using special nerves—known as *parasympathetic nerves*—your brain sends signals to your stomach to get it prepared. There is another set of nerves—*sympathetic nerves*—however, that does the exact opposite.”

Jenny: “Why do they call them ‘sympathetic’ nerves?”

Dad: “Fear, anxiety, or excitement will all trigger these nerves and decrease the activity of your stomach significantly. But so will



¹ The characters in this issue are fictitious.

strong feelings of sympathy—compassion and mercy—thus, they’re called ‘sympathetic’ nerves. When you became upset just now, your body told your stomach to slow down even though you had food in it. All that acid and food just sitting around has made you feel sick.”

Jenny: “Why would our Lord Jesus make it that way?”

Dad: “Well, normally your body has a lot to think about when you get excited or upset. During these times, it’s too busy to digest a grilled cheese sandwich. But once you’ve had time to deal with what alarmed you, and have calmed down, your stomach goes back to normal activity and you start feeling better.”

Jenny: “Daddy, how long does food stay in my stomach?”

Dad: “It depends on what you eat, Jenny. If you drink a glass of fruit juice, it takes less



than a second for the liquid to get from your mouth to your stomach after you swallow.”

Jenny: “Through the esophagus?”

Dad: “That’s right, you remembered! Often, liquids stay in your stomach only a matter of minutes before they’re passed on to your intestines. A bite of a sandwich, on the other hand, takes four to eight seconds to get into your stomach. And it may then spend anywhere from two to six hours digesting there.”

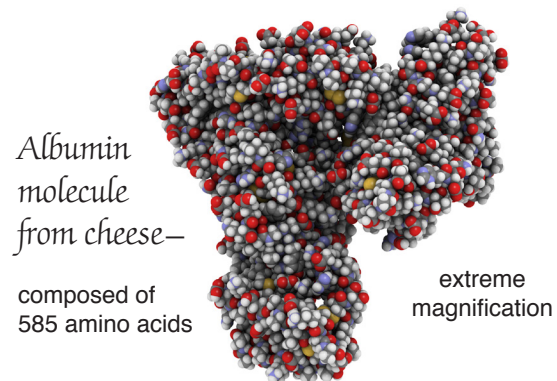


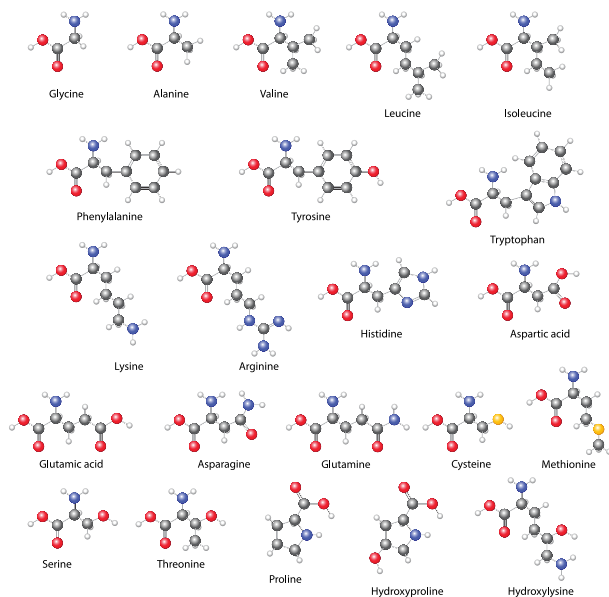
Jenny: “What happens to the sandwich while it’s in my stomach?”

Dad: “Your stomach is a large pouch that God designed to temporarily hold and process food. Special glands in the wall of your stomach produce large amounts of *hydrochloric acid* and other chemicals which start digesting the protein in the sandwich.

“The stomach normally absorbs only small amounts of water, salt, and sugar found in food—and it can absorb a few medicines like aspirin—but its biggest job is to begin breaking down the large protein molecules found in milk, cheese, or meat. These smaller particles then pass from the stomach to the intestines, where they are broken down further into pieces called *amino acids*, which your body can absorb and use.”

Jenny: “Use for what?”





Amino acids

Dad: “The LORD uses amino acids to make new proteins, like those found in the muscles of your arms. Aside from storing food and digesting proteins, Jesus also lined our stomachs with muscles that churn and transform food into a liquid. This liquid is then passed to our intestines for further digestion.”

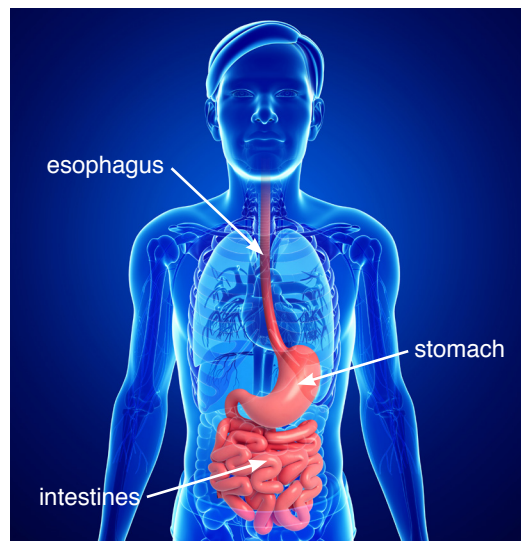
Jenny: “A liquid! How can a grilled cheese sandwich become a liquid?”

Dad: “Your stomach secretes around two quarts of gastric² juices every day. This powerful acid helps digest food, and it kills any germs you may swallow. Along with saliva, these juices get thoroughly mixed with any solid food you eat and, given enough time, your lunch turns completely liquid.”

Jenny: “I know that some acids can burn skin, so why doesn’t this acid damage my stomach?”

Dad: “Our amazing Creator is constantly creating new gastric cells; the lining of your stomach is entirely replaced every three days. This organ is also protected from the corrosive juices by a thin layer of mucus produced by other gastric glands.”

² Gastric is an adjective which means “stomach.”



Jenny: “What happens to the food after it’s been in the stomach awhile?”

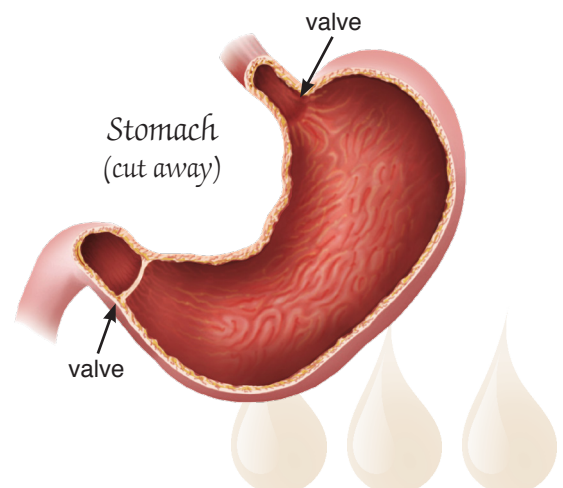
Dad: “Pressure builds up and the liquid, which is called *chyme* (pronounced kime), moves from your stomach to your intestines a small squirt at a time.”

Jenny: “Daddy, you’re kidding! My stomach squirts food?”

Dad: “Yep.”

Jenny: “How come it doesn’t come back up my esophagus then?”

Dad: “Good question. Located at either end of the stomach are special valves. Where the esophagus meets the stomach is a valve called the *lower esophageal sphincter* . . . but don’t worry about remembering its name. As we discussed, when you swallow food it goes



down your esophagus. Just before it reaches your stomach, this valve opens, allows the food in, and then closes automatically.”

Jenny: “Wow, God is so smart!”

Dad: “He certainly is. There’s another valve between your stomach and your intestines. Normally both valves stay closed so that food doesn’t exit the stomach while it’s being digested. When the stomach is done digesting your grilled cheese sandwich, it opens the



second valve and lets nourishment flow into your small intestines.”

Jenny: “You mean squirt?”

Dad: “Yes, that’s right, squirt.”

Jenny: “What happens to the chyme after it goes into the intestines?”

Dad: “That’s kind of complicated, and a discussion best saved for another time. Our Heavenly Father uses His Son’s creation of our stomachs to teach us that He is a God of tender mercies. You became sad . . . and this led to your stomachache. The Bible likens compassion to a person’s stomach and bowels being upset. In the book of James, God describes Himself as having His stomach and bowels moved to mercy. In verse 5:11, there are two Greek words to describe God’s compassion, *polysplanchnos* and *oiktirmon*.³ Together they literally mean, “many bowels of tender mercy.” God does not have a stomach or intestines, but uses this phrase to communicate His love to us in a way we can understand.”

Jenny: “Oh, Daddy, I do understand!” A huge smile comes across her Dad’s face.

3 πολὺσπλαγχνός and οἰκτίρων

REFLECTIONS OF A SOUR STOMACH

Two men busily adjust settings on a strange-looking instrument-pack strapped to the abdomen of Peanut, a six month old Gordon Setter. The dog looks quite unconcerned as the scientists busy themselves around the examination table. She sits quietly as veterinarian Dr. John Stedman listens to her stomach with Professor Seismo’s latest invention.

Peanut



Professor Seismo: “What’s her stomach saying, John?”

Dr. Stedman: “I can’t quite make it out. I thought I heard the word ‘Help!’? Hans, why don’t you turn up the gain on the amplifier and switch to external speakers?”

Professor Seismo adjusts some settings and flips a switch on the control panel.

Peanut’s Stomach: “DOC, GET ME OUTTA HERE, I’M GOING CRAZY!”

Professor Seismo’s face turns bright red.

Peanut’s Stomach: “Just this morning

Peanut ate a bar of soap! Now, how am I supposed to digest that? You should see all the bubbles in here.”

Dr. Stedman barely suppresses his laughter.

Dr. Stedman: “Well, our Lord Jesus has given many animals very unusual appetites. Lugworms eat sand, pandas eat bamboo, and numbats eat termites. I’m certain, however, that the Lord doesn’t expect you to digest a . . . a bar of soap. Uh, how long has Peanut been consuming such strange things?”

Peanut’s Stomach: “All her life. I’m being truly abused, Doc. She drinks out of the toilet, she digs through the garbage, and she eats whatever looks yucky or has a bad odor. Yesterday, I was quietly trying to digest a dog biscuit when all of a sudden I smelled something really awful. Peanut was licking someone’s feet—AGAIN! Doesn’t this pup have any pride?”



Vulture

Dr. Stedman: “You must remember that the God who made you also created the vulture. It’s capable of eating just about anything. A vulture can dine on a diseased carcass and stay perfectly healthy. Our Creator placed strong acids in its stomach to kill almost every germ imaginable. Say, speaking of weird meals, did you know that scientists once found a roll of tar paper, a keg of nails, and a carpenter’s square in the stomach of a shark?”

Peanut’s Stomach: “That’s not very comforting, Doc. You get to eat people food, I get bugs.”

Dr. Stedman: “What do you mean?”

Peanut’s Stomach: “So, the other day I smelled dirt. Now I knew what that meant; Peanut had just eaten another grub⁴—*really gross*. I almost got sick! Later that same day, I realized it had been several hours since Peanut had eaten a decent meal. I was really hungry, but I was also afraid to let Peanut know. I thought to myself, ‘I guess I’ll have to take my chances.’ So I called out, ‘HEY PEANUT, I’M REALLY HUNGRY. CAN YOU FIND SOME FOOD TO EAT—REAL FOOD?’ An hour later I’m staring at two grasshoppers, a spider, several pieces of tree bark, and a chewed-up lid to a plastic milk jug. I know that some animals can survive by eating only wood, Doc, but Peanut’s not one of them.”

Keeping his composure, Dr. Stedman gives a glance towards Peanut’s face as he listens to her stomach. She has a blank, but happy, puppy grin, tongue hanging out. He can’t believe he’s actually talking with her stomach.

Dr. Stedman: “Our Creator is absolutely sovereign—you’re a testimony of that. And His commands are to be obeyed.”

Peanut’s Stomach: “You mean He wants me to survive on soap and plastic?”

Dr. Stedman: “Well, no, but He did make you and the rest of Peanut exactly the way He had planned . . . you can’t change that; she is a dog. Christ fashioned each of His creatures unique in every way. Let me explain while you enjoy the suds.”

Peanut’s Stomach: “Very funny.”

Dr. Stedman: “Our Lord Jesus Christ created the stomach of each animal unique, from the tiniest insect to an enormous elephant. He could have made them pretty much all the same, but He didn’t. Like I said, He’s sovereign in countless marvelous ways.”

4 A grub is the worm-like larva of a beetle.



“Most creatures have just one stomach, but the honeybee has two, the whale—three, and the cow—four. In some beaked whales, the third stomach is also divided into twelve compartments for a total of fourteen stomachs in all.



“God is also sovereign when it comes to gastric size. The stomachs of some insects are so small you can barely see them with a magnifying glass. In contrast, the stomach of an adult elephant is over four feet (1.2 m) long and weighs 100 pounds (45 kg). And that of the blue whale is so big that it can accommodate up to a ton of food at a time.

“Normally, a dog’s stomach can hold about a half gallon of liquid. But even when you’re full, you make up only a small portion of Peanut’s entire body. Not so with mosquitoes and ticks. A female mosquito can drink an amount of fluid *equal* to her body weight, and certain female ticks can consume 600 times

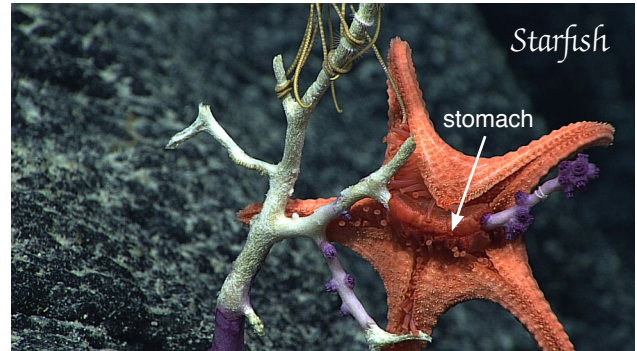


their weight in blood. That would be like Peanut ballooning to the size of a dinosaur if she ate that much.”

Peanut’s Stomach: “She would if she could.”

Dr. Stedman: “The abdomen is the usual location for most stomachs; Jesus placed one of the two stomachs of the lobster, however, in its head, just behind its eyes. Not only that, this stomach contains teeth, which it uses to chew its food!

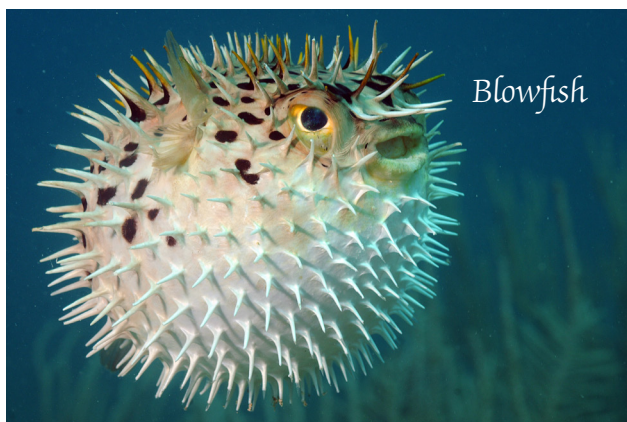
“Not all stomachs function exactly the same way . . . consider the starfish. It also has two stomachs and is able to push one of them outside its body, turning it inside-out.”



Peanut’s Stomach: “Oh, that makes me hurt just to think about it!”

Dr. Stedman: “When hungry, the starfish wraps itself around coral, a clam, or an oyster. It then forces its stomach out, allowing the starfish to digest food outside its body. Other creatures, like spiders, flies, and scorpions, also digest things outside their bodies by secreting digestive juices from their mouth, but none of them can push their stomach out. A spider, however, has what’s called a ‘pumping stomach,’ which helps it to forcefully suck in liquid nutrients from its prey.





Blowfish

“God primarily designed the digestive tract of most animals to process food, but the blowfish can use its stomach to scare off enemies as well. When frightened, the blowfish increases the size of its body immensely by sucking in a large amount of water using its elastic stomach.”

Peanut’s Stomach: “That’s amazing! Say, I know many animals eat bugs, but this bark in here doesn’t seem very nutritious.”

Dr. Stedman: “Normally it isn’t. In Christ’s sovereignty, however, He created some creatures with the ability to digest *cellulose*, the tough material found in bark, wood, grass, and leaves. In this way, the cow and the termite share something in common. Both possess special microorganisms in their guts



Cow

that produce an enzyme (cellulase) capable of breaking down cellulose. Thus, the termite can eat wood, and the cow can live a perfectly healthy life by consuming mostly grass.



Termites

“Unlike Peanut, who will eat just about anything, some creatures are very picky eaters, again revealing God’s sovereignty. The Everglade Kite (Snail Kite), which is a bird that lives in southern Florida as well as Central and South America, will dine only on one type of freshwater snail.⁵ And some



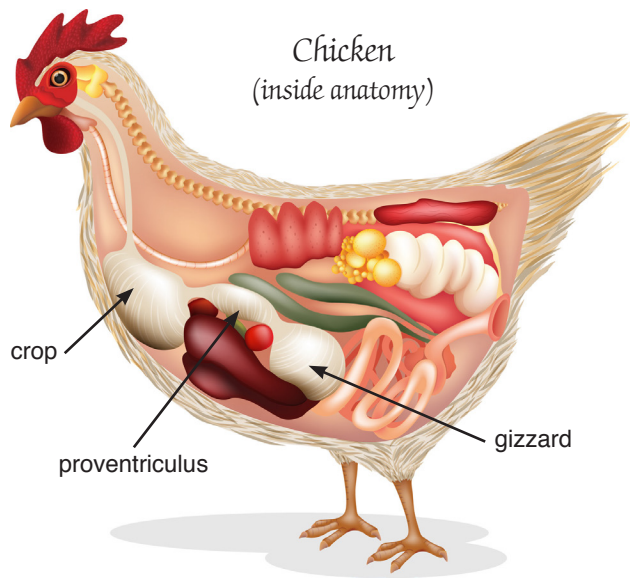
Snail kite

animals eat only ants. In God’s vast wisdom, He provided the anteater a stomach with a generous coating of keratin—the same material He uses to make fingernails.”

Peanut’s Stomach: “Why did He do that?”

Dr. Stedman: “The tough lining of keratin allows the animal to eat thousands of ants without being harmed.

⁵ *Pomacea*, commonly known as the apple snail.



“The Lord’s design of a bird’s stomach is also fascinating. Most birds have a *crop*, located in their throat, plus two additional stomachs. The crop is actually part of the esophagus and functions as a pouch in which the bird can store seeds or other grain. This is especially important when food is scarce. As needed, food then passes from its crop to its stomachs, the *proventriculus* and the *gizzard*. The first stomach, the *proventriculus*, is like you—it produces acid and digestive enzymes. The problem is that many birds eat tough seeds, which are hard to digest, so the Lord also gave them a gizzard. The gizzard is a muscular organ with a hard lining, often containing grit or fine stones. The grit acts as the bird’s ‘teeth,’ allowing the muscular gizzard to grind seeds and grain so that they can be digested. It takes only a few minutes for seed to be ground up and passed to the *proventriculus* for further digestion.”

Peanut’s Stomach: “So a bird’s stomach contains rocks?”

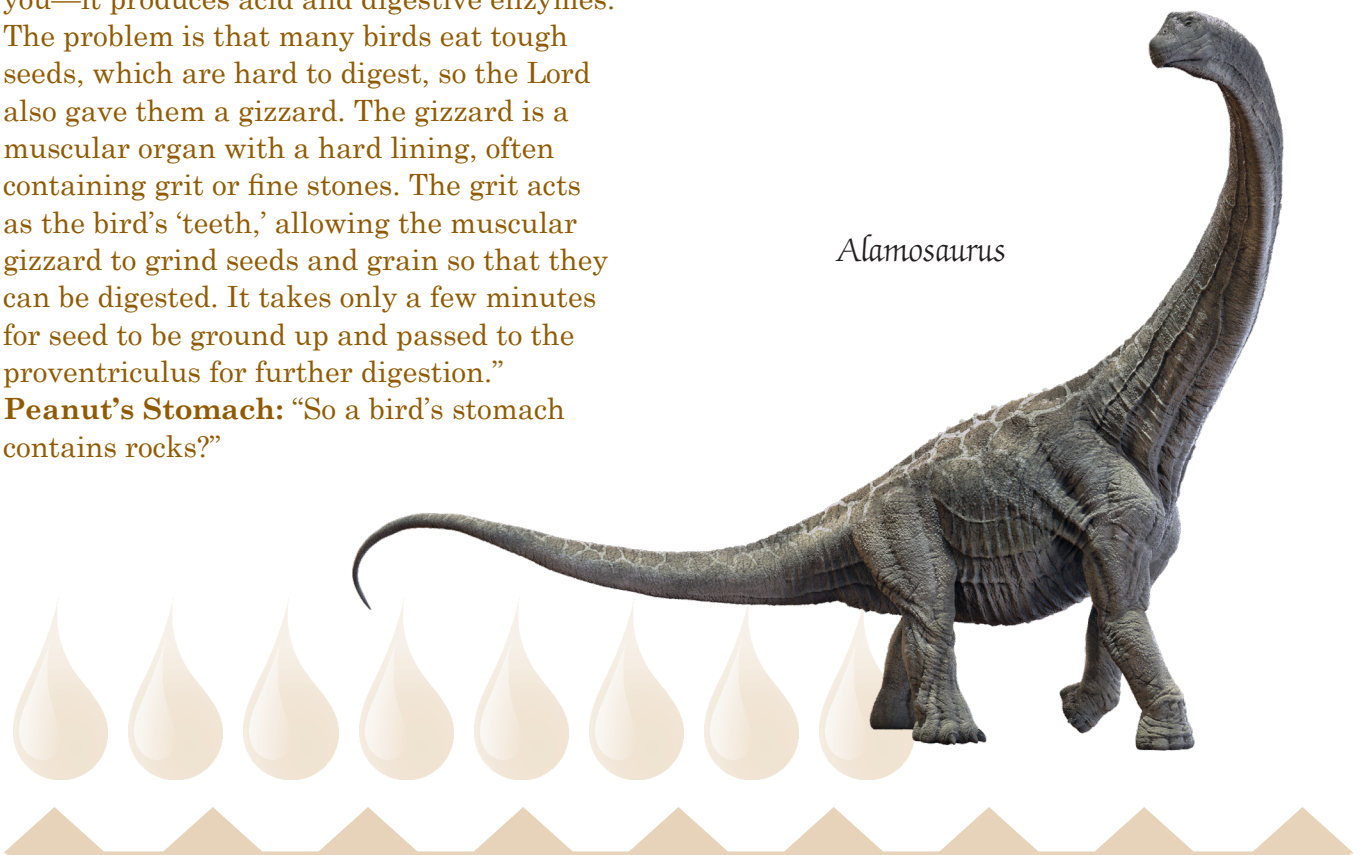
Dr. Stedman: “Oh, yes, many animals have stones in their digestive tracts. For instance, the stomach of a crocodile or a seal usually possesses pebbles or stones. And it is thought that several dinosaurs, like *Brontosaurus*, had large stones in their guts to help grind up tough plant material.”

Peanut’s Stomach: “I have to admit that Peanut has never eaten rocks.”

Dr. Stedman: “Certain birds of prey, like owls, have a different way of handling their food. Because owls lack teeth with which to chew, they usually swallow their prey whole. If they eat a mouse, for instance, the entire animal goes into its stomach. There, soft parts of the animal are dissolved. The owl, however, can’t digest the fur, bones, and teeth of a mouse, so its stomach packs these indigestible parts into a tough, oblong ball, called a *pellet*. Once or twice a day—approximately eight to twelve hours after eating—the owl regurgitates the pellet onto the ground. It then goes about its business of hunting.”

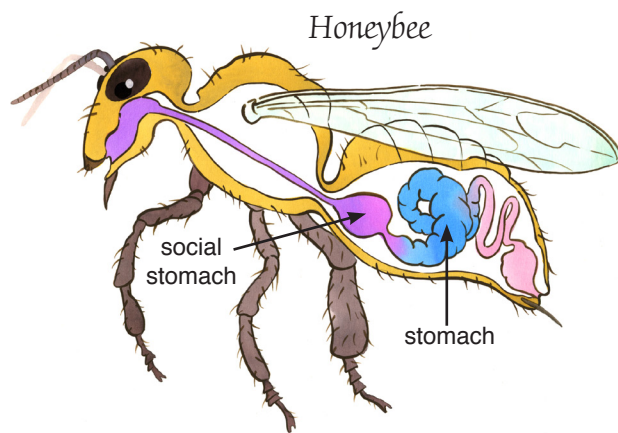
Peanut’s Stomach: “Whoa, I’m sure glad God doesn’t make me do that!”

Alamosaurus





Dr. Stedman: “There are other animals that regurgitate food stored in their stomachs so that it can be shared with the rest of their family. Birds, such as pigeons, are famous for doing this with their chicks. Honeybees are probably the most altruistic of animals when it comes to food. The Lord God expects people to be willing to share the food they have with others in their home; a honeybee, however, shares the food *it has eaten*. One of its two stomachs was designed specifically to store nectar, to be divvied up later with its sisters back at the hive.⁶ Scientists call it the bee’s *social stomach*.



⁶ Bee hives are composed mainly of female (sister) bees.

“I know you don’t always enjoy what Peanut eats, but at least you have a job. If Peanut were a type of fish called a *lamprey*, you wouldn’t even exist.”

Peanut’s Stomach: “You mean the lamprey doesn’t have a stomach?”

Dr. Stedman: “Yes, that’s right.”

Peanut’s Stomach: “I feel pretty bad that I’ve complained about what Peanut has been eating.”

Dr. Stedman: “Well, I’m going to recommend to Peanut’s owners that they feed her a slightly different dog food, one higher in protein and calcium. I hope that will decrease her craving for unusual food.”

Peanut’s Stomach: “Oh, thank you, Dr. Stedman, thank you!”

Dr. Stedman: “Remember, you’re a unique creation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the way He made you reflects His sovereignty. Come on, Hans, let’s get lunch!”

LIVING BREAD

O taste and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! Psalm 34:8

Sin is like the deadly poison strychnine. A starving man can take a small dose of strychnine and experience a sense of energy or stimulation, even though it has no nutritional value. One hundred years ago, athletes sometimes did this in an attempt to improve performance. The same can be said of sin—it often provides short-lived excitement or pleasure. But if the starving man continues to administer strychnine to himself, he will die. And the same is true for the person who continues to willingly sin against the Law of God.

For the wages of sin is death . . .

Let's say that this same starving man has food available to him, but refuses it, preferring the poison. Does this seem reasonable? Is it sane? Yet that is exactly what all who reject Christ are doing. They are starving themselves to death. Why? Because they would rather die than have Jesus as Lord.

All humanity actively sins against our holy Creator. The end result is death—both spiritual and physical. The person without Christ is without hope. They are alive physically, but dead spiritually (Ephesians 2:1, 5). In God's great mercy, He offers us Life.

*but the free gift of God is eternal life
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23*

Jesus is Eternal Life. He is the food needed for everlasting salvation. Christ plainly proclaimed, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst" (John 6:35). This is why the Psalmist encourages us to "taste and see that the LORD is good." By obeying His Heavenly Father while on Earth and dying for the sins of His people (John 10:11), Jesus shines the goodness of God!

But how does one "consume" Christ Jesus and obtain life everlasting? *By believing in Him* and what He has accomplished.

*For this is the will of My Father,
that everyone who beholds the Son and
believes in Him will have eternal life. John 6:40*

Faith is beholding Jesus with the eyes of our heart (Ephesians 1:18; Hebrews 12:2). At the same time, God allows us to see the wretchedness of our sins, just as Peter did (Luke 5:8). The Gospel message is this: "Repent and believe" (Mark 1:15). If we do this, we will truly be blessed because we can take refuge in Christ (Psalm 34:8). But why is this important?

God's anger at our sin is very real and His wrath against our world can clearly be seen all around us (Romans 1). Our only hope is Christ's perfect obedience and His death on the Cross for our sins. Every other "remedy," philosophy or religion is a deadly poison.

Thus tasting and seeing that the Lord is good is inseparable from finding refuge in Him (Psalm 2:12). God is merciful and just—please repent of your sins and receive Christ today!

*If you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.
1 Peter 2:3*

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