

Two Copper Coins – Much More than Two Cents Worth
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A dime and two pennies. Who would have thought three coins would mean so much? Even now, three years since a series of amazing events transpired, I am still gaining new insights into how God spoke to me through the voice of a dying man and the appearance of three simple coins.

Oh, but I'm getting ahead of myself. The story began in the late summer of 2006. My father had been diagnosed with a terminal brain disease, and in September he was already unable to walk and confined to bed. In order to receive caregiver help from my aunt, my mother moved him from Orlando, Florida, where I lived, to Tallahassee, a four-hour drive away, so I wasn't able to visit him frequently.

Since he and I have degrees from the University of Florida, we often enjoyed watching Florida Gator football games together, so I thought it would be a good idea to travel to Tallahassee to watch the Florida versus Tennessee game with him. I made the trek on the morning of game day with my wife and three youngest daughters.

Unfortunately, my father's brain disease caused him to lose touch with reality at times, and he would say things that didn't relate to the current goings on. Still, he would come back to his senses often enough for us to enjoy the game. We spent the night, and the next morning we were saying our goodbyes in his bedroom.

That's when he uttered the fateful words that have echoed in my mind ever since, "What are you going to do about the twelve?"

"The twelve?" I asked. "The twelve what?"

"The twelve people."

At this point I recognized that he had gone into one of his out-or-reality states, so I tried to reply in a way that wouldn't hurt his feelings. "I'm not sure what you mean," I said, "but I'll try to figure it out."

Then he shook his head, as if casting off a dream. "I'm sorry. I don't know what I was saying."

We finished our goodbyes and departed for Orlando. We stopped at the first gas station, maybe two or three blocks from my father's home. After filling the tank, I opened the van door and noticed three coins, a dime and two pennies, lying on the pavement at my feet. I picked them up and noted the value, twelve cents.

My father's words returned to my mind, "What are you going to do about the twelve?"

With the haunting refrain echoing, I got in the driver's seat and showed the coins to my wife, Susie. "You heard what my father said. I didn't think it was worth mentioning to you before, but the strange thing about this is, yesterday, when I filled up with gas to drive to Tallahassee, the same thing happened. I found a dime and two pennies next to the van. That's two days in a row."

As she stared at the coins, my wife's jaw dropped, and she shook her head. "No. That's three days in a row. The day before that, Hannah (our youngest daughter) and I were at Wal-mart, and she found a dime and two pennies in the parking lot next to the van."

The coins seemed to tingle in my palm. So many thoughts tumbled through my mind! Over the past few weeks, I had been trying to write Enoch's Ghost, the second book in the Oracles of Fire series, and the story wasn't working out very well. It had no heart, no passion, and I had been asking God for an idea that would add the breath of life to the tale. Could this be a sign that would lead me to the answer? But what could it mean?

Since this was the third discovery of twelve cents, my father's question had to be more than the random ramblings of a ravaged brain. We had already found twelve cents twice, so his words had true relevance.

Again, the question prodded my mind. "What are you going to do about the twelve?"

My answer was like a lament. "I have no idea!"

At this point, all I could do was tuck this triplet of findings in the back of my mind and hope for future help in solving the mystery. It wasn't long before the echoes returned in force. Soon afterward, my father passed away, but his probing question lived on. Over the succeeding weeks, I found a dime and two pennies seven more times. Almost everyone finds a penny on the ground here or there, but during these days of revelation, I was never treated to such a common discovery. It was always a dime and two pennies, and they cropped up in the strangest places—a grocery store bathroom, a forest path, and various sidewalks and parking lots. It seemed as though someone was following me around and planting these symbols of frustration, hoping to see me pull out my hair as I fruitlessly pondered yet another mysterious appearance and listened again to my father's words.

"What are you going to do about the twelve?"

All I could do was shake my head and stuff the coins in my pocket. Maybe someday God would help me decode this cryptic message.

In mid December, my youngest son, Caleb, had to travel to an orchestra convention in Chicago, so my wife and I took him to the airport at a very early hour, maybe around five a.m. On our way home, we passed by a park where we often went for our three-mile prayer walk in the morning. Although it was earlier than our usual walking time and the park was dark and deserted, we decided to stop and walk anyway. Street-style lamps illuminated the entire walking trail, so it was safe.

Soon, as we passed under the glow of a lamp, the glint of a shiny dime caught our attention. It sat alone in the center of the circular aura. We halted. As Susie stopped to pick it up, I laughed under my breath and said, “So where are the two pennies?”

In my mind, my statement was a mere joke, something to chuckle about, but as Susie bent low, she pointed toward the shadows at the side of the pavement and said, “Well, they’re right over here!”

She scooped up two pennies from the shadows and rose to her feet. Once again, there in her palm lay a dime and two pennies.

An eleventh finding. And this time we were able to predict that the apparently missing coins were likely around. Even though I had said it as a passing joke, I wondered if perhaps they might be in the area, and Susie later told me that she literally searched for the pennies, knowing they had to be around somewhere.

As I stared at the coins, I said, “I have to figure this out or it will drive me crazy. I’m going to dedicate this day to that task.”

After going home, I set out on a long run. I do some of my best thinking while I’m running. I’m alone with my thoughts, and my heart is pumping blood through my brain, so my thoughts seem clear and vibrant.

Still, no definitive answer came to mind. Several ideas popped up, but I soon dismissed them as inadequate or incomplete. Each one seemed unable to unravel this multiplicity of mysteries.

When I arrived home again, I said to Susie, “Let’s sit and brainstorm for a while. I had a few ideas that weren’t quite right, but maybe—”

“No,” she said, raising her hand. “Before you say anything else, I have to tell you what happened while you were out running.” She related that Hannah had been searching for her wristwatch. She looked under her bed and in her closet, and in her rummaging she came across an old purse she hadn’t seen for months. When she opened the purse, she found a dime and two pennies ... and nothing else. The ubiquitous three coins were all that lay inside. Yet, these three coins stood out from the others. The dime was silver, and the two pennies were the old, wheat-back variety. All three coins were over fifty years old.

Yet again the three coins lay in my wife’s palm. I stared at them, transfixed. Their age seemed to communicate something more than the mere value. Twelve cents. “Twelve people,” my father had said. And suddenly the answer stormed into my mind.

“I know what it all means,” I said in a near whisper. In words that seemed to tumble out unbidden, I explained the secret that had eluded us for weeks.

Moses sent twelve spies into the promised land. Ten of them came back with this report: “The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. There also we saw the Nephilim; and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.” And they caused all the people to grumble, saying, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! And why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?”

These ten spies brought back a report laced with faithlessness, a message that spread fear and doubt. After all they had seen of God’s great works, they still didn’t believe in His power and protection.

People who lack faith, people who don’t trust in God because they fear men more than they fear the Lord, are easy to find. They are as plentiful as sand on the beach. As the idiom says, “They’re a dime a dozen.”

Ten faithless spies. Ten cents. Cheap and easy to find. They’re a dime a dozen. I had my answer for the mysterious dime.

The two other spies were Joshua and Caleb. They cried out to the people, saying, “The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it to us—a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they shall be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.”

Yet the people wanted to stone them for daring to oppose the majority, the dime a dozen crowd who believed that the popularity of an opinion carried more weight than the promises of God. Surely God wasn’t so powerful that He could destroy this unconquerable foe.

Two faithful spies. Two cents. Yet, what parallel existed between the spies and the two pennies? This mystery, too, was unveiled.

One day Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and watched the multitude bringing their offerings, and many rich people were putting in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two copper coins, two lepta. Then Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on.”

Ever since that day, two copper coins have come to symbolize an offering of faith, the giving of all you have. The widow didn’t know where her next meal was coming from, yet she gave every penny she had. She trusted God to provide, to be her power, to be her protector, to be her provider. Joshua and Caleb did the same. They wanted to give all they

had, their very lives, in charging into the land, trusting in God to be their swords and shields.

I had the meaning in my grasp. The faithless are many, and, even knowing the power of God, they turn back in fear from the giants in their lives. The faithful are few, and, trusting in God's powerful hand, they march forward, knowing that the Lord will be there to protect them in spite of how desperate the situation appears to be.

In my ongoing dragons story, I already had Nephilim. In previous books, Nephilim threatened to take over the world, so all I had to do was bring in ten people who knew the Scriptures and the history of God's saving ways. Like the faithless spies, they would fear to complete a dangerous assignment that God called them to do. They were my dime-a-dozen pretenders, those who honored God with their lips, but whose hearts were not holy.

I also assigned two of my smallest and weakest heroines to replace them and accomplish the mission at the cost of their lives. They were the two copper coins, a pair of precious pearls who fearlessly carried out God's every command, and gave their lives in the process.

Not only that, I had a character who had never been willing to surrender to God two wonderful gifts she had acquired because of her dragon heritage. During the story, two pennies symbolized these gifts, and as she gave them, and her heart, to God, the pennies burned holes in her palms, showing that she bore the wounds of Christ and was willing to die with Him.

The story turned out to be one of the most powerful I had ever written. I am so thankful to God for giving me this amazing theme!

So, what happened later? Was that the end of the tale? In one way, yes. You see, after I figured out the mystery behind the coins, I never found a dime and two pennies again. It was fitting that our twelfth discovery, the final three coins, were old and valuable. My father was an avid coin collector, so God speaking through him with a question about people, represented by coins, seemed appropriate and profound. As I pondered these miracles over the months, more observations came to mind. This series of events was like a fantasy story come true. God told me a story infused with fantasy elements.

I think writing in the fantasy genre is the most powerful way to communicate spiritual truth. It opens our eyes to things that lie beyond the physical. Since my mind has been exercised by fantasy stories, I naturally look for invisible reasons behind visible realities. What is God trying to say? Why has He allowed something to happen?

I could have picked up the coins at the gas station, stuffed them into my pocket, and ignored the "coincidence." Instead of searching for reasons behind my father's cryptic words, I could have dismissed them as the ramblings of a tragically crippled brain.

Yet, my mind, trained to see beyond the physical, ready to believe what my faith-energized perception discerned, knew there had to be more. Therefore, I searched. I asked for more. And God provided more. He honored my inquiry and led me to an understanding that I likely could never have reached if not for this mind-bending journey.

Now, as a result of that adventure, through *Enoch's Ghost* and during my many talks to students, I ask, "What are your two copper coins? What do you need to surrender to God? Are you, like Joshua and Caleb, marching boldly into the Promised Land? Are you like the widow who gave all she had at the altar? Or are you still holding on to your two pennies?"

When strange events take place in your life, will you look beyond the physical senses in order to discern how God might be working behind the scenes? Will you seek the hidden meanings that enhance spiritual development and help wisdom flourish? As the Bible says, we wrestle with spiritual forces in heavenly places, so it is essential that we look into that realm for understanding. Since God wants to give you insight that will exercise your spiritual perception, you can believe that He will provide opportunities to grow in that area. Look for them. Your ability to see the difference between a coincidence and a divine mystery will quickly take shape.

I urge you to search your heart and listen to the voice of God. He calls us to cast away all fear and march with Him into the Promised Land. He tells us not to fear, not to listen to the faithless cries of the majority. He will give us the power to fulfill that calling.