

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

Thessalonica—a major Macedonian seaport in Paul's day—first heard the gospel during the apostle's second missionary journey (Acts 17). A dynamic fellowship developed there, becoming a continual joy to Paul. His two letters to the believers are full of commendation, encouragement, and challenge. Paul also answers questions and corrects misconceptions regarding Christ's return. In the meantime, he urges the Thessalonians to grow in their love for both the Lord and one another.

Focus	1 Thessalonians					2 Thessalonians			
Divisions	Looking to the Past: Salvation		Looking at the Present: Purification		Looking to the Future: Comfort	Return of Christ		Revelation of Antichrist	Return to Work
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	
Topics	Return of the Lord					Day of the Lord			
	Encouragement					Explanation			
Place	Written in Corinth								
Time	About A.D. 51								

The Hope of Christ's Return / 1 Thessalonians 1-5

1/2

Sat.-Sun.

December

Heart of the Passage:
1 Thessalonians 1, 4



Overview: Paul has many pleasant memories of the days he spent with the infant Thessalonian church. Their faith, hope, love, and perseverance in the face of persecution are exemplary, and Paul's labors as a spiritual parent to the fledgling church have been richly rewarded. His tender affection is visible in every line of his letter as he encourages the Thessalonians to excel in their faith, increase in their love, and rejoice always as they await the return of the Lord—an event which provides hope and comfort for believers both living and dead.

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5
Christ's Return: A Hope That Is . . .				
Saving	Rewarding	Purifying	Comforting	Sobering
Past		Present	Future	

The best way to remember people is in prayer.



Your Daily Walk: "It's 10 o'clock; do you know where your children are?" That's a healthy reminder to parents that the duty of discipline and supervision of their children is a 24-hour job. And shirking that duty can only lead to heartache in the lives of the children.

If Paul were writing a letter to you today, he might begin this way: "It's December 1, 1990; do you know where your spiritual children are?" Though Paul's converts were spread out in more than 20 different cities, he never abandoned them, but rather carried them in his heart and corresponded regularly with them.

Check Philippians 1:3-4, Colossians 1:3, and Philemon 4, and you'll find the same kind of statement that begins Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians: "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers" (1:2). Do you pray daily for your spiritual children? Do you communicate with them periodically through phone calls, visits, and letters? If not, start today! As Paul discovered, spiritual growth is nurtured best in the soil of prayer and encouragement.



Insight: Unemployment in Thessalonica
When Paul was first planting the church in Thessalonica, he preached heavily on the imminent return of Christ. He repeats his message in the famous passage on the Second Coming of Christ (4:16-17). Some of the Thessalonian believers, however, had taken his earlier preaching too far by quitting their jobs (4:11-12; 5:14).

The Coming Day of the Lord / 2 Thessalonians 1-3

Monday

December

3



Overview: Paul begins his second letter to the Thessalonians by commending them for their faithfulness in the midst of persecution and by encouraging them with the truth that present suffering will be repaid with future glory. Therefore, despite the persecution, hopeful expectation can be high. But Paul must also deal with a misunderstanding concerning the coming Day of the Lord. Despite reports to the contrary, that day had not yet arrived, and Paul recounts the events which must take place first. Laboring for the gospel—rather than lazy resignation—can be the only proper response to such truth.

Heart of the Passage:
2 Thessalonians 3

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3
Return of Christ	Revelation of Antichrist	Return to Work
Encouragement	Explanation	Exhortation



Your Daily Walk: How does the promise of Christ's return affect your daily life? Would a casual observer detect that something is different about you because of Christ's words, "I will come again" (John 14:3)?

Christ's return is a balancing doctrine. It gives both the present and the future a sense of perspective and helps us establish priorities that honor God.

Some members of the Thessalonian church viewed Christ's return as a reason to relax—withdraw from society, close down their businesses, and settle back to wait. But Paul responded sternly to such misguided laziness (3:10-14).

Have you slipped into the same error through neglect of your family, business, or spiritual duties? What better time than today to get back on target! Call a family council this evening to discuss any neglected tasks God wants you to perform until His Son returns. You might even want to make 3:13 your family motto for the week.

The crowns we will wear in heaven must be won on earth.



Insight: Two Epistles, Side by Side

1 Thessalonians:

- emphasizes faith, hope, love
- concerns the day of Christ
- offers comfort derived from Christ's return
- commends laboring saints

2 Thessalonians:

- emphasizes faith, hope, love
- concerns the Day of the Lord
- corrects misapprehensions about Christ's return
- condemns lazy saints

PAUL'S PASTORAL EPISTLES

These three letters by Paul are addressed to pastors rather than to churches. Paul's purpose in writing to Timothy and Titus was to encourage his spiritual under studies as they nurtured the churches of Ephesus and Crete. These letters focus on the challenges of church life: how to protect, proclaim, and practice the faith. Proper pastoral conduct and appropriate administration, qualified leadership and sound doctrine—all are essential for the health and growth of the body of Christ.

Focus	1 Timothy	2 Timothy	Titus	
Divisions	The Pastor and Church Government 1 3 4	The Pastor and Personal Progress 6	The Pastor and Coming Apostasy	The Pastor and Church Problems
Topics	Protecting the Faith Warning	Proclaiming the Faith Endurance	Practicing the Faith Orderliness	
Place	From Macedonia	From Rome	From Corinth	
Time	About A.D. 62–63	About A.D. 67	About A.D. 63	

Protecting the Faith / 1 Timothy 1-6

Tuesday

December

4



Overview: Timothy, a young disciple discovered by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1), enjoyed a unique relationship with the apostle. Referred to by Paul as his “beloved son” (2 Timothy 1:2), Timothy ministered side by side with Paul as a missionary and later received the challenging assignment of pastoring the church at Ephesus. Paul’s first letter resembles a manual for building church leadership. But more generally, it is a rich mine of principles for anyone who wishes to have a spiritual impact in the lives of others.

Heart of the Passage:
1 Timothy 2-3

Chap. 1	Chap. 2	Chap. 3	Chap. 4	Chap. 5	Chap. 6
Instructions for . . .			Problems with . . .		
Leaders	Ladies	Laity	Doctrine	Dependents	Debt
Organization in the Church			Operation of the Church		



Your Daily Walk: There is a dangerous disease spreading among Christians today.

Its name: “Backyardism”

Its symptoms: Preoccupation with personal pursuits; ignorance (and indifference) about how God is working around the world

Its result: a stunted prayer life

Notice Paul’s antidote in 2:1-2: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men [not just those in your church, city, state, or country]; for kings, and for all that are in authority.”

The cure for nearsighted vision is farsighted prayer.

When was the last time you prayed for your president . . . congressional leaders . . . Supreme Court justices? How about the leaders of other countries of the world? Do you know a missionary family in Africa? Australia? Asia? South America? Europe? Today as you finish your quiet time, step to a window that gives you a clear view of your back yard. As you gaze at what is familiar, ask God to lift your eyes above your own “back yard” to see what is unfamiliar and far away—but still near and dear to Him. Become a world-conscious Christian in your vision and prayers.



Insight: “Timothy, Take a Letter . . .”

In addition to his duties as traveling companion and fellow missionary with Paul, Timothy is also named as co-author of six of Paul’s letters. Without peeking, how many can you name?

Looking forward strains the eyesight; looking upward opens heaven.

Proclaiming the Faith / 2 Timothy 1-4

5

Wednesday

December

Heart of the Passage:

2 Timothy 2



Overview: Prison is the last place from which one would expect a letter of encouragement! But that is where Paul's second letter to Timothy originates. He begins by assuring Timothy of his continuing love and prayers, and reminds him of his spiritual heritage and responsibilities.

Only the one who perseveres—whether as a soldier, athlete, farmer, or minister of Jesus Christ—will reap the reward. Paul warns Timothy that his teaching will come under attack as people desert the truth for ear-tingling words. But Timothy has Paul's example to guide him and God's Word to fortify him as he faces growing opposition and glowing opportunities in the last days.

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4
Hold Fast the Gospel	Pass On the Gospel	Protect the Gospel	Preach the Gospel
Power	Perseverance	Defense	Declaration

Storms make for strong trees; testings make for strong Christians.



Your Daily Walk: A city dweller was admiring a farmer's field. "Amazing!" he exclaimed. "Praise God for the wonders of nature." The farmer replied, "Yes, but you should have seen it when only God had it!"

What was the farmer saying? Producing a crop takes more than acknowledging the God of creation. It takes the cooperation of a person, plenty of hard work, and a great deal of time.

Growth—whether in a cornfield or a spiritual life—always involves those same three elements: time, toil, and cooperation with God. Becoming a man or woman of God doesn't happen overnight or by accident. It involves positive steps of obedience, difficult decisions, and time-consuming commitments. After you read 2 Timothy today, choose and underline one command which you will focus on this week in cooperation with God. It's one sure way to grow wiser, not merely older, in your walk with the Lord.



Insight: Passing the Truth On . . . and On . . . and On . . . Second Timothy 2:2 describes four generations in the process of passing on the Good News of Jesus Christ. The words Timothy had received ("the things that thou hast heard") came from Paul ("of me") with the command to entrust them to others ("the same commit thou to faithful men"), who would be qualified to continue the process ("who shall be able to teach others also").

Practicing the Faith / Titus 1-3

Thursday

December

6



Overview: Titus, a young minister, is left on the Mediterranean island of Crete by Paul to begin the challenging task of organizing new converts, into local churches. In this letter, Paul shares with Titus some practical wisdom regarding church organization and administration. For example: Leaders must be chosen on the basis of proven character and conduct; false teachers must be quickly detected and removed; church members of all ages must be encouraged to live in a way that is worthy of the gospel they claim to believe. Young and old, leader and laity, must demonstrate the reality of their faith by being "careful to maintain good works" (3:8).

Heart of the Passage:
Titus 2

Chapter 1		Chapter 2		Chapter 3	
Elders Designated 1 9	Heresy Described 10 16	Good Works Demanded	Heretics Denounced		
The Church Organized			The Church in Operation		



Your Daily Walk: True or False: Good works cannot save you. *True or False:* Good works for the Christian are unimportant. *True or False:* Good works come naturally for a child of God. Perhaps you found the first questions easy (the first is True, 3:5; and the second, False, 3:8). But the third one may have been more difficult!

To keep the faith we must teach the faith.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul makes it clear that a new Christian is a new creation, with new desires, ambitions, and enablement to live for God. But just as children need guidance and training by their parents if they are to develop normally, so spiritual children must be taught "sound doctrine" (2:1). New believers of all ages in the church at Crete needed instruction in proper Christian conduct.

Paul has some timely words for you as well, regardless of your age, sex, or level of maturity as a Christian. As you read, watch for his exhortations aimed straight at you and your peers. Write them in a notebook for future reference.



Insight: Parallel Epistles with Parallel Emphases

	1 Timothy	Titus
False Teachers	1:6-11, 19-20; 6:3-5	1:10-16; 3:9-11
Faithful Leaders	3:1-13	1:6-9
Faithful Believers	5:1-6:2	2:1-15

Forgive the Erring Brother / Philemon

7

Friday

December

Heart of the Passage:

Philemon 10-12, 15-18



Overview: Does Christian love really work, even in situations where one brother has sorely offended another? Will it work, for example, when a prominent Christian “employer” has been robbed by one of his most notorious “employees”? Paul has no doubt! He writes a “postcard” to Philemon, his beloved fellow worker

in the faith, on behalf of Onesimus—a deserter, thief, and formerly worthless slave, but *now Philemon’s brother in the Lord!* With much tact and tenderness, Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus back, forgiving him and treating him as he would treat Paul himself. Knowing the reality of Philemon’s faith, Paul is confident that brotherly love will carry the day.

Verses 1-3	Verses 4-7	Verses 8-21	Verses 22-25
Paul’s Preface	Praise for Philemon	Plea for Onesimus	Other Personal Greetings
Salutation	Gratitude	Grace	Benediction

Blessed is he who forgives without remembering and who receives forgiveness without forgetting.



Your Daily Walk: Reconciling a difference is never easy and seldom pleasant, but Paul’s letter to Philemon provides a much-needed model in the delicate task of asking for and accepting forgiveness.

Paul nowhere minimizes the wrong suffered. Forgiveness is not blind to the facts, and Paul does not seek to condone Onesimus’s behavior toward Philemon. At the same time, Paul pleads for forgiveness on the basis of another’s merit. Forgiving one another is possible because Christ Himself provided the model by forgiving sinful and undeserving mankind.

Paul promises to repay Onesimus’s debt. Forgiveness demands personal involvement. There is a price to be paid in terms of time, money, or inconvenience if estranged parties are to be reconciled.

After seeing Paul’s model, look at your own relationships. Should you take the first step in forgiving a brother or sister in Christ? It will never be any easier than it is today—in God’s strength.



Insight: Life-or-Death Love

Under Roman law, if Philemon pressed charges, Onesimus might have been branded on the forehead, condemned to double labor, or even thrown to the beasts in the amphitheater. Paul’s appeal, “If he hath wronged thee” (v. 18), was no mere courtesy, but a plea for the slave’s life!

HEBREWS

Many Jewish believers were tempted to renounce their newfound faith to escape persecution. Hebrews' appeal to pursue maturity is based on Christ's superiority to the Jewish religious system. Christ is better than Moses, for Moses was created by Him; He is better than Aaron, for His sacrifice never need be repeated; He is better than the Law, for He mediates a better covenant. More is to be gained by suffering for Christ than by reverting to a system He came to fulfill.

Focus	Christ, the Better Way												
Divisions	Christ, Better Than the Angels			Christ, Better Than Moses and Joshua			Christ, Better Than Aaron's Priesthood			Christ, Better Than the Old Covenant		Christ, Example of the Life of Faith	
	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	10	11	13			
Topics	A Superior Person					A Superior Priesthood					A Superior Power		
	Doctrine										Discipline		
Place	Written to Scattered Jewish Believers												
Time	About A.D. 64-68												

Christ, Better Than the Angels / Hebrews 1-2

8/9

Sat.-Sun.

December

Heart of the Passage:
Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:1-3



Overview: God spoke in times past through the prophets, but He has reserved the greatest declaration of His glory for His Son. The Son of God is greater than any prophet. He is even greater than the angels, through whom Moses' law was communicated. In order to bring salvation He willingly became a little lower than the angels. And

by His suffering and death He made it possible to lift mankind above the angels into the family of God. Because of His perfect humanity, Jesus is uniquely qualified to serve as High Priest for sinful mankind.

Chapter 1				Chapter 2							
1	A Better Prophet	3	4	A Better Messenger	14	1	A Great Salvation	6	9	A Great Sufferer	18
Christ, the Son of God						Christ, the Savior of Mankind					

Religion is mankind searching for God; Christianity is God reaching down to mankind.



Your Daily Walk: The Book of Hebrews opens with a penetrating statement: "God . . . hath . . . spoken unto us by his Son" (1:1-2). The heart and core of Christianity—and the reason for its superiority over the old Judaic system—can be summarized in a single word: Christ. The old system was built around *precepts*; the new centers around a *Person*. The old was merely a *shadow*; the new supplies the *substance*.

On what foundation are you building your life? It is easy to substitute man-made traditions and performance standards for a growing relationship with the Son of God. Evaluate the "religious rituals" of your own life. Are they advancing your relationship with God, or keeping you from getting to know Him and His Word better?

John summarizes this crucial issue well: "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12). Are you a *have . . .* or a *have not*? If the answer disturbs you, let John 1:12 point the way to a foundation that is unshakable!



Insight: Jesus Is Greater Than Angels, Isn't He? Jesus' superiority over angels (Heb. 1:4) may seem rather obvious, but to Jews angels were highly exalted beings. They helped give the Law, God's supreme revelation, to Moses at Sinai (Hebrews 1:4; Deuteronomy 33:2). Moreover, we now know from the Dead Sea Scrolls that some expected the archangel Michael to be the supreme figure in the Messianic kingdom.

Christ, Better Than Moses and Joshua / Hebrews 3-4

Monday

December

10



Overview: Those who rebelled against God in the days of the wilderness wanderings were excluded from His rest in the Promised Land. However, for the people of God today there exists an even better rest than that—the one His Son spoke about. Moses was a servant in God's household, but Christ is the divine Son over God's household. Joshua was Israel's provider of peace in the land of Canaan, but Christ will bring His people into the eternal resting place of heaven. Since the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us be careful that none of us fails to enter in and enjoy it.

Heart of the Passage:
Hebrews 3:1-6; 4:1-6

Chapter 3	Chapter 4
Past Failure Through Unbelief	Present Dangers Through Unbelief
Christ, Better Than Moses	Christ, Better Than Joshua



Your Daily Walk: Which is more deserving of praise:

- a house or the architect of the house?
- a servant or the master for whom the servant works?
- a leader of a nation or the Creator of a nation?

If you picked the second answer in each pair, you're on the same "wavelength" as the author of Hebrews. Moses was a faithful servant in the house of Israel . . . but Jesus Christ built the house. Moses and Aaron were the apostle and high priest of Judaism . . . but Jesus Christ is the Apostle and High Priest of the better way, Christianity. The children of Israel died in the wilderness without experiencing the rest God intended for them in Canaan . . . and the same danger exists today for the people who refuse to enter the rest made possible by the finished work of their High Priest, Jesus Christ.

"Jesus, I Am Resting, Resting" was J. Hudson Taylor's favorite hymn. Look it up in a hymnal, and read thoughtfully the hymn's penetrating words. It may provide just the rest you've been needing!

There may be those on earth who dress better or eat better, but those who enjoy the peace of God sleep better.



Insight: A Handy Chart to Summarize Hebrews

Chapters	Title	Focus
1	Christ, the Son of God	Deity
2-3	Christ, the Son of Man	Humanity
4-10	Christ, the High Priest	Ministry
11-13	Christ, the Better Way	Example

Christ, Better Than Aaron's Priesthood / Hebrews 5-7

11

Tuesday

December

Heart of the Passage:
Hebrews 5:1-10; 7:1-3



Overview: High priests, such as Aaron, had the divinely appointed task of building a bridge between sinful mankind and holy God. But their sacrifices had to be perpetually repeated, and sooner or later the priest died. By contrast, Jesus is the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. His priesthood has no beginning or end;

His sacrificial death is once for all time. Truly Christ is the better Priest!

Chapter 5	Chapter 6	Chapter 7
Christ, the Better Priest	Christ, the Better Foundation	Christ, the Better Priesthood
Sinless	Changeless	Timeless

*The head
that once
was
crowned
with
thorns is
crowned
with glory
now.*



Your Daily Walk: Do you understand the significance of Christ's priesthood being likened to Melchizedek's? If not, don't be disappointed. Even the writer of Hebrews admits that this is not an easily digested truth. With the help of Genesis 14:1-20, see if you can sink your teeth into these questions:

1. Who were Melchizedek's parents? _____
2. When was Melchizedek born? _____
3. When did Melchizedek die? _____
4. Who was greater, Abraham or Melchizedek?

If you answered the first three questions, "I don't know," you're right each time. And that's precisely the point. Nowhere does Scripture record that Melchizedek was born or died . . . had beginning or end. He simply appears as a timeless priest who is greater than Abraham and worthy of his honor. In the same way, Christ is eternal in His existence and worthy of honor as your great High Priest.

Tonight around the dinner table, share ways in which your High Priest is worthy of your worship. Who is He and what has He done on your behalf? What is He doing in your life right now?



Insight: Six Foundation Stones of Faith

The first two verses of chapter 6 list six "principles of the doctrine of Christ"—that is, rudimentary truths of the Christian faith: repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection, and judgment. For an excellent Bible workout, huddle with family or friends and see if you can come up with one New Testament passage that expands on each of these foundational truths. Happy hunting!

Christ, Better Than the Old Covenant / Hebrews 8-10

Wednesday

December

12



Overview: The writer concludes his argument for the superiority of Christ by pointing out that the *heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart*. The institution of Judaism and the old covenant was ineffective and inadequate because it was unable to deal permanently with sin. But God's new method of dealing with mankind—the new covenant written in Christ's own blood that He shed on the cross—makes full provision for the forgiveness of sins. Christ's death forever accomplishes what the old covenant was powerless to do.

Heart of the Passage:
Hebrews 10

Chapter 8	Chapter 9	Chapter 10
A Superior Covenant	Two Covenants Contrasted	A Superior Sacrifice
"Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many" (9:28).		



Your Daily Walk: If you knew your house was on fire right now, how would you respond? If you were convinced there was buried treasure in your backyard, how would you act? Would knowing those facts change your priorities and conduct?

In today's reading, 8:1-10:18 provides the doctrinal basis for the exhortations to proper behavior that follow in the rest of chapter 10. Because Christ is a better High Priest . . . because He has provided a better way . . . because "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many" (9:28), we should respond to those truths in specific acts of obedience.

As you read the final 21 verses of chapter 10, put each command in the first person singular: "Let *me* draw near" (10:22); "Let *me* hold fast" (10:23); "Let *me* consider how to provoke others to love and good works" (10:24). Before taking the initiative to provoke another Christian to be what God wants him to be, take stock of your own response to the truth you are about to share! Choose one of the "let us" verses in chapter 10 and make it your personal "let me" project.

There is seldom an inner urge to preach what one practices.



Insight: Christ, the Superior Sacrifice

Sacrifices Under the Law (10:1-4)

- A shadow of things to come
- Repeated constantly
- A reminder of sin
- Blood of animals

Sacrifice of Christ (10:5-18)

- The real thing
- Once for all time
- The Remover of sin
- Blood of Christ

Christ, Example of the Life of Faith / Hebrews 11–13

13

Thursday

December

Heart of the Passage:
Hebrews 11:1–12:2



Overview: Hebrews closes with an appeal for a persevering faith that relies on the promises of God regardless of the circumstances. Writing to an audience whose actions were being shaped by pressure from the world rather than promises from God, the author of Hebrews urges the kind of faith-inspired walk that characterized

so many Old Testament saints. These men and women were so convinced of God's faithfulness that they ordered their lives according to His Word. Follow their commendable example and walk by faith, not by sight!

Chapter 11	Chapter 12	Chapter 13
Patterns of Faith	Perseverance of Faith	Progress of Faith
Patriarchs	Persistence	Practice

Faith is putting all your eggs in God's basket, then counting your blessings before they hatch.



Your Daily Walk: "Seeing is believing" may be a good rule of thumb when buying a used car, but it is a poor way to live the Christian life. For the one desiring to live in a God-honoring manner, the quote might better read, "Not seeing is believing," because "faith is the . . . evidence of things *not seen*" (11:1).

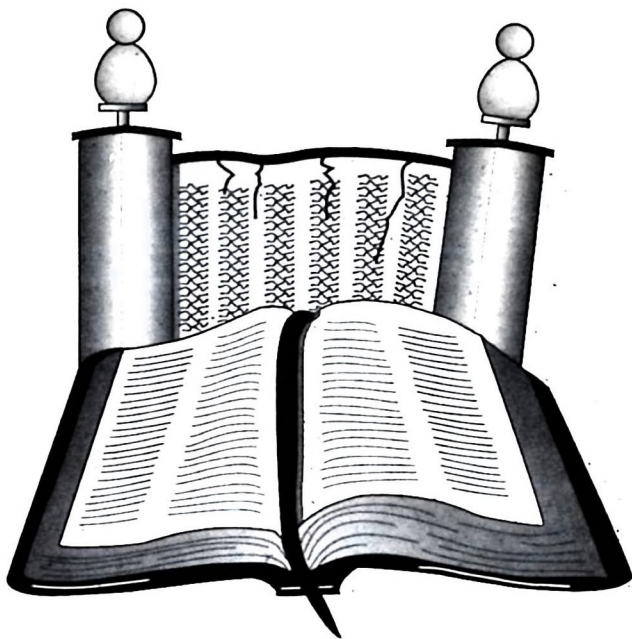
Receiving Christ as your Savior was an act of faith in which you accepted the trustworthiness and credibility of God. But the exercise of faith doesn't end at salvation, as Hebrews 11 demonstrates. By faith, God's people were courageous in battle, patient in suffering, and joyful in difficulty. They acted in response to His commands and promises, even when they could not see the reason for what they were being asked to do.

Is faith the operating principle in your life today? Or is your motto "Seeing is believing"? To help boost your faith, take a piece of paper and see if you can list at least 10 things you know are true about God but that you can't see with your eyes. For example, "God is loving . . . God works all things together for good . . ." Then think through the decisions and responsibilities you will face in the next 24 hours, and determine to put your faith to work.



Insight: The Desirable Dozen
Chapter 13 lists 12 practical suggestions for the Christian who desires to live a life well-pleasing to God. How many of the 12 faith-lifting exhortations can you find?

THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE NEW



From the very first page of Matthew to the final chapter of Revelation, the events concerning Christ and His church are constantly rooted in Old Testament promise and fulfillment. The perceptive student of the Bible will notice at least four ways that the Old Testament is employed by New Testament writers:

1. New Testament writers quote directly from Old Testament passages (1 Peter 1:24; Isaiah 40:6-7).
2. New Testament writers show how contemporary events fulfill Old Testament prophecies (Matthew 1:22-23; Isaiah 7:14).
3. New Testament writers use Old Testament events and people as types (prophetic patterns) of contemporary or future people and events (Romans 5:14; Genesis 3:1-19).
4. Occasionally, New Testament writers allegorize Old Testament events (Galatians 4:21-31; Genesis 16:15; 21:1-2).

Faith That Works / James 1-5

14

Friday

December

Heart of the Passage:
James 2



Overview: Faith without works isn't really faith. It is dead, and dead faith is worse than no faith at all. Faith must work; it must produce; it must be visible. Verbal faith is not enough; mental faith is insufficient. Faith must move into action. Throughout his epistle to Jewish believers, James

integrates true faith and everyday practical experience by stressing that true faith "works." It endures trials; it obeys God's World; it produces doers; it harbors no prejudice; it controls the tongue; it acts wisely; it provides the power to resist the devil; it waits patiently for the coming of the Lord.

Chapters 1-2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5
Faith in the Furnace	Faith in the Fellowship	Walk of Faith	Wait of Faith
Works	Words	Worldliness	Warning

Faith is daring to do something regardless of the consequences.



Your Daily Walk: Suppose you were given this rather curious assignment. A human body is stretched out before you—motionless, speechless. Your job: to determine if it is alive or dead. How would you solve the riddle?

One good way might be to check for breathing. While it is possible for a person to hold his breath for a time, sooner or later—if there is life in the body—that body will breathe.

In the spiritual life the same is true. New life demonstrates itself through spiritual breathing. And the breath of the Christian is good works. "As the body without the spirit [literally, breath] is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (2:26).

Take three deep breaths. Now map out a plan for taking a spiritual breath today! Write in the margin the names of two people you will see today and a "breath of fresh air" you can provide them: an unexpected kindness, word of encouragement, genuine compliment. It might just make them curious enough to ask, "What's wrong with you?"



Insight: Poison from a Triple Tongue
Slander has been called the third tongue, inflicting injury on three people at once: the one who utters it, the one who hears it, and the one about whom it is told. According to James 3:9-12, as you are pouring forth praise to God, it is impossible to be poisoning others with your tongue. Try it! You might want to start by reading Psalm 146 out loud. It's good exercise for the tongue!

PETER'S EPISTLES

Clusters of persecuted Christians were scattered throughout five Roman provinces of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). The Apostle Peter, aware of their travail, wrote two letters, each with a different focus. The first letter, full of encouragement for suffering Christians, urges them to stand fast in the grace of God as faithful witnesses for Jesus Christ. The second letter warns believers about false teachers and scoffers who would seek to lead them astray and destroy their faith.

Focus	1 Peter					2 Peter			
Divisions	Christian Suffering		Christian Living		Christian Service	True Knowledge	False Teaching		Final Hope
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	
Topics	Words of Comfort					Words of Caution			
	Courage amid Suffering					Holiness amid Heresy			
Place	Rome								
Time	About A.D. 63–64					About A.D. 64–66			

Courage in Suffering / 1 Peter 1-5

15/16

Sat.-Sun.

December

Heart of the Passage:
1 Peter 2



Overview: Persecution can cause you either to grow or grumble in the Christian life. It all depends on your response! In writing to Jewish believers struggling in the midst of persecution, Peter reminds them of their roots. They have been born again to a living hope, and therefore both their character and conduct can be above reproach as they imitate the Holy One who called them. The fruit of that proven character will be actions rooted in submission: law-abiding citizens, obedient employees, submissive wives, loving husbands.

Chapter 1	Chapters 2-3	Chapters 4-5
Called to Salvation	Called to Submission	Called to Suffering
Belief	Behavior	Buffeting

Getting into hot water occasionally has a way of keeping a person clean.



Your Daily Walk: The Book of 1 Peter might well be titled "A Survival Manual for Suffering Saints." It presents God's time-tested strategy for holding up, rather than folding up, in the midst of difficulties.

If you want to get in shape physically, there are some helpful steps you can take: Eat properly, get adequate sleep, take a multivitamin capsule every day. But in the final analysis, there is no substitute for exercise—working against a resistance. The same is true in the Christian life. Proper nourishment from the Word is essential, but so too is "exercise"—in God's strength, facing and conquering trials and difficulties. God, the perfect Coach, knows the perfect "workout" you need in order to turn an area of weakness into an area of Christlikeness.

Before you go to bed this evening, write out the words of 1 Peter 1:7 and place them in one of the shoes you'll wear tomorrow. When you awake, let that note remind you that God wants to tone up your faith today—and trials may well be part of the workout!



Insight: The All-Important Cornerstone

Peter makes an obvious allusion to Christ when he quotes Isaiah 28:16, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone" (2:6). In Biblical times a stone was put where two walls met. More than being just a foundation, the cornerstone helped align the building horizontally and vertically and held it together. Thus, Christ is the all-important One on whom we, as "living stones," are built into a spiritual house.

Holiness amid Heresy / 2 Peter 1-3

Monday

December

17



Overview: Peter writes his second letter to warn believers about the danger of false teachers who are peddling damaging doctrine. The Christian walk demands diligence in pursuing moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and selfless love. By contrast, the false teachers Peter warns against are sensual, arrogant, greedy, and covetous. They scoff at the thought of judgment and live as if the present will always be the pattern for the future. Such individuals may prosper for a time, Peter reminds his readers, but their ultimate end is sure.

Heart of the Passage:
2 Peter 1

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3
Growing in Grace	Growing in Knowledge	Living in Hope
Walking	Warning	Waiting



Your Daily Walk: Imagine for a moment that you are living your final 24 hours on earth. The last words of encouragement you will ever speak will be spoken *today*. The last letter you will ever write will be written *today*. The last friendly visit you will ever make to a lonely person needing a spiritual lift will be made *today*. The last opportunity to provide direction and correction for your children will happen *today*. Would that change the way you approach the next few hours?

The Book of 2 Peter was the apostle's swan song, the last piece of inspired correspondence he would send to his spiritual children. In it Peter speaks of facing death joyfully . . . of defending the faith vigorously . . . of standing against the enemy faithfully. Though Peter would be gone, his inspired words would live on, providing hope and help for all who would read them.

What will you leave behind as your legacy to other Christians when your days are through? Now is the time to be speaking, writing, visiting, and doing other things before it's too late and you discover that your swan song has already been sung!



Insight: Peter's Letters, Side by Side

1 Peter

- emphasizes suffering
- speaks of present groaning
- uses *Christ* (10 times)
- offers consolation

2 Peter

- emphasizes false teaching
- speaks of future glory
- uses *Lord* (14 times)
- urges caution

Encouragement is oxygen to the soul.

JOHN'S EPISTLES

Though his gospel has an evangelistic thrust (John 20:31), John's letters are designed to bring his readers into a true knowledge of what faith implies (1 John 1:3). His first letter describes God as light, love, and life. Fellowship with Him demands a walk of holiness and undiluted devotion. The other two letters—resembling postcards because of their brevity—stress the importance of avoiding fellowship with false teachers and of cultivating fellowship with true believers.

FOCUS	1 John	2 John	3 John
DIVISIONS	Prerequisite of Fellowship Pattern of Fellowship Proof of Fellowship	Walk in the Truth Watch Out for False Teachers	Duty of Hospitality Danger of Haughtiness Demonstration of Humility
TOPICS	1 Promoting Christian Living 2 3 4 5	1 Combating False Teaching 6 7 13 1	8 9 Commending Christian Hospitality 10 11 15
PLACE	Written in Ephesus		
TIME	About A.D. 90		

Promoting Christian Living / 1 John 1-5

Tuesday

December

18



Overview: The Apostle John, who is enjoying a delightful fellowship with God, earnestly desires that his spiritual children enjoy that same fellowship. And, so he writes a letter telling them, "Here's how!" God is *light*, and therefore to engage in fellowship with Him means walking in the light of His commandments. God is *love*, and thus His children must walk in love. Those who do not love do not know God, for that is His very character. God is *life*, and those who desire fellowship with Him must possess that same quality of life—spiritual life, which begins with spiritual birth through faith in Jesus Christ.

Heart of the Passage:
1 John 1

Chapter 1	Chapters 2-3	Chapters 4-5
Prerequisite of Fellowship	Pattern of Fellowship	Proof of Fellowship
Confession	Conduct	Confirmation



Your Daily Walk: Make a list of all the qualifications you need in order to be called as a witness in a court trial. You probably came up with a very short list—one item long! "All I need to be called as a witness is firsthand knowledge of a crime." And you are right! Now listen to these words from 1 John 1:3: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us." Being a witness for Christ is as simple as sharing the firsthand knowledge you enjoy about the Savior. Have you been a spectator to a miracle of rebirth in your life? Then you are a Christian—and a candidate to be a witness. Write in the margin the name of one person with whom you will share that firsthand knowledge today. That's how the Good News gets around!

*We were
not
converted
to be
intro-
verted.*



Insight: First John, the Purposeful Epistle
Tucked away in John's first epistle are at least five statements describing why he wrote the letter (which shouldn't surprise you, since he stated his purpose so clearly in the gospel that bears his name, John 20:31). Can you complete each of these five purpose statements?

- 1:3—That you may have _____ .
- 1:4—That your _____ may be full.
- 2:1—That you might not _____ .
- 2:26—That you might not be _____ .
- 5:13—That you may know _____ .

Combating False Teaching / 2 John

19

Wednesday

December

Heart of the Passage:
2 John 4-6



Overview: John addresses this brief letter to a chosen lady and her children, commending them for walking in the truth and encouraging them to remain faithful in their obedience to God. John takes nothing for granted. Realizing that standing is just one step removed from falling, he issues them a reminder: Love one

another. While this is not a new command, it is important enough to bear repeating. Loving one another is equivalent to walking according to God's commandments. But this love must be discerning. Biblical love does not embrace false teachers who deny that Christ has come in the flesh.

Verses 1-6	Verses 7-11	Verses 12-13
Walk in the Truth	Watch Out for False Teachers	Watch for My Visit
Commendation	Condemnation	Comfort

It's important to be on the right track, but don't just sit there or you'll likely be run over.



Your Daily Walk: Ask the average parent to tell you the happiest moment of the parenting years, and chances are good that the day the child first learned to walk will be high on the list. There is something magical about a little tyke taking those first wobbly steps. John would understand those emotions, for he found his greatest fulfillment in watching his spiritual children learn to walk.

1. John's spiritual children were *loving in the truth* (v. 1). Their love was discerning and was based on a common faith in Christ.

2. His children were *walking in the truth* (v. 6). They incarnated the truth they believed in their daily words and deeds.

3. His children were *abiding in the truth* (v. 9). Their faith was grounded in the objective statements of God's Word.

What progress have you made during the past year in learning to love, walk, and abide in the truth? Where do you want to be next year at this time? Set some specific goals today; place them in your Bible; pray about them daily; and grow daily in the truth.



Insight: A Postcard . . . to Whom?

Who were the original recipients of this short epistle from John? Two views have been proposed: (1) "The elect lady and her children" refers to an actual (but unnamed) mother and her children; (2) the "elect lady" refers to a local church or group of churches, and her "children" are the members of the church.

Commending Christian Hospitality / 3 John

Thursday

December

20



Overview: In 1 John the apostle discusses fellowship with God; in 2 John he forbids fellowship with false teachers; in 3 John he encourages fellowship with Christian brothers.

John voices his joy that Gaius is persistently walking in the truth and showing hospitality to the messengers of the gospel. But John cannot commend certain others in the assembly. Diotrephes, for example, has allowed pride to replace love in his life. Everything that Gaius is, Diotrephes is not! John uses this negative example as an opportunity to encourage Gaius. Godly character and loyalty to the truth are never easy, but they bring God's richest commendation . . . and John's as well!

Heart of the Passage:
3 John 5-8

Verses 1-8	Verses 9-10	Verses 11-14
Duty of Hospitality	Danger of Haughtiness	Demonstration of Humility
Gaius	Diotrephes	Demetrius



Your Daily Walk: True or False: If you do not have a particular spiritual gift (such as the gift of evangelism), then God does not hold you responsible for performing that ministry (i.e., the work of an evangelist).

It may surprise you to realize the number of times in the New Testament that Christians are commanded to do something *regardless of whether they have that gift or not*. For example, "Do the work of an evangelist" (even if you are not gifted as an evangelist, 2 Timothy 4:5). "Teach all nations" (whether or not you have the gift of teaching, Matthew 28:19). "Use hospitality one to another" (even if hospitality is not your gift, 1 Peter 4:9). Concentrate on this last area today. How can you learn from the example of Gaius to make your home a God-honoring haven of hospitality? Invite a church leader and family over for dinner as an expression of thanks for their labors.



Insight: Gaius, the "Mr. Smith" of the New Testament Whereas 2 John is addressed to a woman, 3 John is addressed to a man, Gaius. It is impossible to identify exactly who this Gaius was since the name was one of the most common in John's day. Four other men named Gaius are found in the New Testament: Gaius of Macedonia (Acts 19:29), Gaius of Derbe (Acts 20:4), Gaius of Corinth (Romans 16:23), and Gaius who was baptized by Paul (1 Corinthians 1:14).

It is a sin against hospitality to open your doors and shut up your countenance.

Contending for the Faith / Jude

21 Friday
December



Overview: When the truth of God is under attack, it is time to enter the spiritual battle and fight for the faith. But beware! Only believers who are spiritually in shape will be ready to answer the summons. Jude begins a letter about the mutual mercy, peace, and love shared by all believers. But instead he feels compelled to

challenge them to contend for the faith. The danger is real: False teachers have crept into the church, turning God's grace into unbounded license to do as they please. Jude reminds such people of God's past dealings with faithless Israel, disobedient angels, and wicked Sodom. In the face of such warnings, Christians have no excuse for being caught off guard.

Verses 1-4	Verses 5-16	Verses 17-25
Announcement of Apostasy	Anatomy of Apostasy	Antidote for Apostasy
Emergency	Examples	Exhortations

Lay hold on the Bible until the Bible lays hold on you.



Your Daily Walk: With a stamp, sheet of paper, envelope, and pen before you, prayerfully read the following:

"If Christ comes to rule the hearts of men, it will be because we take Him with us on the tractor, behind the desk, when we're making a sale to a customer, or when we're driving on the road."

—Alexander Nunn

"The deathless Book has survived three great dangers: the negligence of its friends, the false systems built upon it, and the warfare of those who have hated it."

—Isaac Taylor

"I have a very simple thing to ask of you. I ask every man and woman that from this day on they will realize that part of the destiny of America lies in their daily perusal of this great Book."

—Woodrow Wilson

Is the faith of our fathers worth proclaiming? Take 10 minutes right now . . . and write someone a letter about it!



Insight: Triads of Trouble

Jude illustrates his message in threes: three examples of judgment (Egypt, angels, Sodom); three declarations of woe (Cain, Balaam, Korah); and three exhortations to caution (what are they?).

REVELATION

Just as the first book of the Bible—Genesis—provides the opening chapter of God’s redemptive program, so the last book—Revelation—supplies the conclusions as it describes the return of Jesus Christ and the creation of a new heaven and earth. Revelation portrays Jesus Christ as the victorious King and coming Judge. Using colorful and symbolic language, John captures the awesome holiness of the Lamb of God coming to judge the world in perfect righteousness.

Focus	Judge	Judgment		Jubilation			
DIVISIONS	Seven Letters	Seven Seals	Seven Trumpets	Seven Signs	Seven Plagues	Seven Dooms	Seven New Things
TOPICS	Heavenly Vision on Earth	Horror from Heaven to Earth		New Heaven and Earth		“... things which thou hast seen ... which are ... and ... shall be” (1:19)	
Place	Aegean Island of Patmos						
Time	About A.D. 95–96						

Seven Letters for Seven Churches / Revelation 1-3

22/23

Sat.-Sun.

December

Heart of the Passage:
Revelation 1



Overview: After greeting the seven churches in Asia Minor, John describes how he received his orders to write. Each church needs a particular message, and John is commanded to tailor his exhortation to fit each spiritual need. Each message begins with the expression, "I know thy works"; each contains a promise "to him that overcometh"; each concludes with the warning, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." In short, John sends words of reproof and reassurance from Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega, to each of the seven churches.

Chapter 1	Chapters 2-3
Greetings to the Churches	God's Word to Seven Churches
Candlesticks	Correspondence

Unless the rising of the sun reveals God, the rising of the Son of Man from the dead cannot reveal God.



Your Daily Walk: Which book of the New Testament do you find the most challenging to understand?

Now find a dictionary and look up the word "revelation."

Can you discover two synonyms?

It is ironic that Revelation (which literally means "disclosing" or "unveiling") is viewed by many Christians as the one indecipherable book of the New Testament. What makes Revelation so challenging is the more than 300 symbols contained in its pages. Just as the deaf have a sign language in which each gesture is filled with meaning, so John has a purpose and meaning behind each symbol he employs. Our challenge: to interpret those symbols the way John (and the Holy Spirit) intended!

Your local Bible bookstore would be an excellent place to find a commentary or study guide on the Book of Revelation. And your minister or Sunday school teacher would be delighted to suggest a few titles you might want to consider. There's a blessing in store for you during the next few days. And that's a promise from God (1:3)!



Insight: The Seven Churches

Although much of Revelation is symbolic, we do know that these churches did exist when John was having his visions. They may have been postal centers for seven geographical regions, and apparently each one received a copy of the whole Book of Revelation (1:11). Flip to the map section in the back of your Bible and try to locate these seven cities. (Hint: you'll find them in the western part of modern-day Turkey.)

Seven Seals / Revelation 4-6

Monday

December

24



Overview: John describes an amazing series of visions depicting activities in heaven and on earth. God, majestically enthroned, holds a scroll written on both sides and sealed with seven seals. No one is found worthy to break the seals and reveal the contents of the scroll except the Lion of Judah. As the first six seals are broken, calamities break forth upon the earth involving warfare, famine, death, earthquakes, and heavenly disturbances. The kings of the earth know only too well the explanation of it all: "For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (6:17).

Heart of the Passage:
Revelation 4-5

Chapter 4	Chapter 5	Chapter 6
A Sacred Throne	A Sealed Scroll	A Seven-Sealed Judgment
Worthy Lord	Worthy Lamb	Wrathful Lamb



Your Daily Walk: Here is a question worthy of your consideration: In your estimation, how *worthy* is Jesus Christ? Is He *worthy* of your unquestioning obedience, even when the whys and whens of His will aren't readily apparent? Is He *worthy* of your worship, affection, and devotion? Is He *worthy* of your trust that, as your loving Savior, He wants the best for your life?

What you worship determine what you become.

Three times in chapters 4 and 5 the elders and angels proclaim to the Lamb of God, "Thou art worthy" (4:11; 5:9, 12). And you can join their chorus of praise today. Use this sentence to verbalize the desire of your heart: "With God's help, today I will show the world the worthiness of my Savior by _____." Regardless of the action you consider, you can count on this: He is worthy!



Insight: Five Songs Worth Singing

When completed, the following chart will provide a concise summary of the five songs in today's section. Try it!

Passage	Who Sang?	How Many Sang?	About Whom?
4:8	_____	_____	_____
4:10-11	_____	_____	_____
5:8-10	_____	_____	_____
5:11-12	_____	_____	_____
5:13	_____	_____	_____

Seven Trumpets / Revelation 7-9

25

Tuesday

December



Overview: Before the seventh seal is opened, John sees four angels place a seal upon 144,000 “servants of . . . God”—12,000 from each of the 12 “tribes of the children of Israel” (7:3-4). In contrast to this carefully numbered multitude, John next sees a great multitude “which no man can number,” taken from “all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” (7:9). John—who wonders about the identity of this vast multitude—learns these are “they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14). The seventh seal is then broken, revealing seven trumpets. As each is sounded in turn, natural and heavenly disasters once again result: hail, fire, falling stars, death, darkness, torment—plagues which cause people to “seek death, [but] not find it” (9:6).

Heart of the Passage:
Revelation 8-9

Chapter 7			Chapters 8-9			
1	A Sealed Multitude	8 9	17	8 1	8 5 8 6	9 21
			A Numberless Multitude	The Seventh Seal		The Seven Trumpets
Interlude			Intensified Judgment			

We are often so caught up in our activities that we tend to worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship.



Your Daily Walk: What exactly does it mean to worship God?

How would you define worship for a new Christian who has never been to church, never sung a hymn, and never prayed before?

A good place to begin might be Revelation 7:11-12: “And all the angels . . . and the elders and the four beasts . . . fell before the throne on their faces, and worshiped God [how?], saying ‘Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.’ ”

Take each of the seven elements mentioned in those verses (blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and might) and use it to complete this sentence: “Today I will worship God by bringing _____ to Him in my speech, deeds, and attitudes.” At day’s end, evaluate how you did.



Insight: Egyptian Plagues Revisited

Commentators have long noted the similarity between the judgments described in Revelation, and the 10 plagues brought against Egypt in the days of Moses. Scan Exodus 7:12-12:36 and see how many of the trumpet judgments in today’s reading have a counterpart in the days of Egyptian bondage.

Seven Signs / Revelation 10–13

Wednesday

December

26



Overview: John sees a mighty angel carrying a little book. John is not permitted to record part of the angel's message, but he is instructed by the angel to eat the book, which proves sweet to the taste but bitter to the stomach. Next John is told to measure the temple, altar, and courtyard in preparation for the arrival of two witnesses who will prophesy, perform miracles, and finally suffer martyrdom for their testimony. The seventh and last trumpet sounds, ushering in a grand chorus of praise. Then the scene shifts to heaven, where a mighty conflict takes place involving a woman, a dragon, a child, and Michael the archangel. The section closes with a description of two beasts: the first, a warring beast with seven heads and ten horns, and the second, a deceiving beast with two horns, great power, and a name whose number is 666.

Heart of the Passage:
Revelation 10–11

Chapter 10	Chapter 11	Chapter 12	Chapter 13
Signs Involving . . .			
A Book	A Bugle	A Baby	Two Beasts
Second Interlude in the Judgments			



Your Daily Walk: What is your response when confronted with a critical deadline?

Do you (a) panic? (b) begin frantic activity? (c) get angry? (d) do all of the above? (Pick one.)

Did you know that Satan is no different? In his vision John heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "The devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time" (12:12). He is facing a deadline—a time after which he will no longer be able to roar, prowl, or seek whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).

Better check up on your spiritual defenses.

- Is your armor in place (Ephesians 6:10-18)?
- Do you remember the devil's schemes (he only has three, you know—2 Corinthians 2:11; 1 John 2:16).
- Are you watching out for his snares (1 Timothy 3:6-7)?



Insight: History's Most Overworked Number (13:18)

The famous number 666 has been identified with almost all the historical tyrants of the past 19 centuries. Symbolically, 6 has often been called the number of fallen mankind, and 666 an emphatic form depicting the "super fallen man." Exactly who this verse refers to, however, will not be known . . . until he is revealed.

Satan is never too busy to rock the cradle of a sleeping saint.

Seven Plagues / Revelation 14-16

27/28

Thurs.-Fri.

December

Heart of the Passage:
Revelation 14



Overview: Once again the 144,000 appear in John's vision, this time singing a new song before God's throne. Angels in the midst of heaven announce news that the hour of judgment is come. The Son of Man arrives to begin the harvest of the earth, and those ripe for judgment are cast into the winepress of God's wrath. Seven

angels emerge with the seven last plagues, which involve boils, blood, scorching heat, darkness, pain, earthquakes, hailstones, and a titanic confrontation at a place called Armageddon.

Chapter 14	Chapter 15	Chapter 16
Here Comes the Judge	Here Comes the Judgment	Judgment Is Here
Two Harvests	Seven Vials	

For the Christian, death does not extinguish the light. It puts out the lamp because the dawn has come.



Your Daily Walk: The Bible contains a number of statements about "blessed" people, statements that at first glance don't make good earthly sense!

"Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . they that mourn . . . the meek . . . the merciful . . . the pure in heart . . . the peacemakers . . . they which are persecuted" (Matthew 5:3-10). Clearly God's concept of heavenly "blessedness" differs from the world's concept today!

In the midst of his visions of divinely sent death and destruction, John hears a voice from heaven declaring, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord" (14:13). Only a Christian can look at death, not as a calamity, but as a commencement—the beginning of rest and reward for faithful service.

Paul told his spiritual children at Philippi, "To me . . . to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). The psalmist declared, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15). And David's familiar words in Psalm 23 have provided comfort for countless thousands: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me."

Those who view death as a blessing are those for whom death is not an end, but a beginning. Do you share that joyful hope? Have you shared it recently? Won't you share it with someone today?



Insight: The "Greatest" Story Ever Told

The vividness of John's apocalyptic visions is suggested by the fact that the word *great* appears 72 times in the book!

Seven Dooms / Revelation 17-19

Sat.-Sun.

December

29/30



Overview: Following the catastrophic judgments of the seven vials, John sees the doom of Babylon the Great predicted and brought to pass. While Babylon is suffering a shameful demise on earth, a great multitude in heaven sings praises to God in anticipation of the marriage supper of the Lamb. A white horse emerges, mounted by the King of Kings who destroys the beast, false prophet, and their army. The “dead, small and great” are judged at the great white throne (20:11-12), setting the stage for the coming of a new heaven and earth.

Heart of the Passage:
Revelation 19

Chapter 17	Chapter 18	Chapter 19
Babylon's Doom Predicted	Babylon's Doom Produced	Babylon's Doom Praised
"Almighty!"	"Alas!"	"Alleluia!"



Your Daily Walk: Doomsday is a frightening thought even to those who face crisis as a way of life. No one wants to admit that he or his family or his nation might be doomed.

In the space of three chapters, John sees and records seven major events of doom which unfold in the drama of Revelation: (1-3) the doom of Babylon ecclesiastically, 17:1-18, commercially, 18:1-24, and politically, 19:1-18; (4) the doom of the beast and false prophet, 19:19-21; (5) the doom of the nations, 20:7-9; (6) the doom of the devil, 20:10; (7) the doom of the lost, 20:11-15.

God's judgments are sure. Though He is a patient, loving God who is “not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9), people will perish if they do not heed His call to repentance.

How about you? Is your name written in the Book of Life? Have you experienced God's mercy—or are you in line for God's judgment? What better time than on the threshold of a new year to come to God, so that you too can sing, “Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God” (19:1).



Insight: Marriages Old and New
The Bible begins with a marriage (Genesis 2:8, 21-25) and also ends with a marriage (Revelation 19:9, the marriage supper of the Lamb). Christ's first public miracle took place at a marriage (John 2). And for the Christian, marriage is to be a sacred picture to the world of Christ's love for His bride, the church (Ephesians 5:25-33).

The saddest thing from birth to sod is a dying man who has no God.

Seven New Things / Revelation 20-22

31

Monday

December

Heart of the Passage:
Revelation 21:1-8;
22:16-21



Overview: In one sentence John sums up the end of this present world: "The first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea" (21:1). He then describes the breathtaking splendor of the new heaven and earth, God's new order in which "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be

with them, and be their God" (21:3). Once again God and His people live in intimate, unbroken fellowship. Revelation closes with Christ's thrice-repeated promise: "Behold, I come quickly" (22:7, 12, 20) and John's refrain, "Even so, come Lord Jesus" (22:20).

Chapter 20	Chapter 21	Chapter 22
Doom of the Devil and Death	Delight of the New Heaven and Earth	Declaration of Christ's Coming
Lake of Fire	City of Gold	Tree of Life

Satan never fears the Christian whose Bible is covered with dust.



Your Daily Walk: Tuesday is an important day on the calendar as we enter a new year. But it could never compare with the glorious age Christ will usher in when He comes.

By reading through your Bible with the aid of this devotional guide this past year, you have no doubt gained a greater love for God and a greater sense of anticipation for Christ's return. Ask yourself these questions: How will 1991 be different from 1990 because of the time I spent in God's Word these past 12 months? What new lessons have I learned? Where have I experienced growth in my Christian life?

Take a moment right now to seal the decisions of 1990. Ask God to help you build upon those steps of growth in 1991.

C. H. Spurgeon once said, "Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the Book widens and deepens with our years." Why not make it your New Year's resolution to walk through the Bible again in 1991. And challenge two friends to read along with you!



Insight: A Cube in the Old, A Cube in the New
The cube has special significance in the Bible. In both the tabernacle and Solomon's temple, the Holy of Holies was a perfect cube. And the New Jerusalem is described as a perfect cube measuring 12,000 furlongs (1,500 miles) on a side.