

DECEMBER

December 1

Galatians 1-3

The people in Galatia had become Christians under Paul's preaching. They accepted the Good News that Jesus died for their sins, putting their faith in Him. God had confirmed their new life by the miraculous sign of speaking in tongues, a palpable signal that the Holy Spirit now resided in them. Paul finds it hard to believe that they now believe a later preacher, that they must observe all the Jewish laws (3:1-5).

The commands given by God in the Old Testament are a guide for life, but cannot bring eternal life---only faith in Jesus Christ can do that. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law. All the animal sacrifices that were to be a sign of repentance and forgiveness now are unnecessary, for forgiveness of sins is through Christ. The rules about circumcision don't apply, for it's the 'circumcision' of the heart that is called for ---commitment to faith in Christ. The dietary laws set God's people apart, but now the kingdom of God is for everyone; we are set apart by faith in Christ.

December 2

Galatians 4-6

Freedom in Christ is freedom from slavery to the Law, but it is not freedom from all discipline. It's freedom to love Christ and neighbor. The Holy Spirit will guide you into all righteousness, as you learn to recognize the Spirit's guidance. The fruit of the Spirit listed in 5:22 is a good indicator of whether or not one is being guided by God.

We struggle with Old Testament rules and commands. How much still applies? I wish I could make you a list! We know Jesus' life and death did away with the sacrificial system and circumcision and the kosher food requirement. Basically, the law still is a guide to abundant living, except those items that Jesus' death and resurrection "fulfilled". It never was just a test, or restrictions! The Bible is still our guide to physical and spiritual and emotional health, because God loves us and wants the best for us.

December 3

Ephesians 1-3

Paul spent more time with the church he established at Ephesus than with any other church. It became a strong church; notice that this epistle isn't filled with correction, like we read in Corinthians and Galatians. Paul goes over some basics of the faith with them.

Ephesus is not very far from the region of Galatia, where the church struggles with former Jews that want to bring Christians under the regulations of Judaism. Paul takes time to remind the Ephesian church that Jews and Christians are now one in Christ, as they accept Jesus' death on the cross as payment for their sins. Those who had been Jews and those who had been Gentiles are now on equal footing in the kingdom of God.

We are to let the Holy Spirit guide us into a greater knowledge of truth. We began our Christian journey by an act of faith in Christ, not of our own power but given the power and urging to come to belief by God Himself. It was God's plan from the very beginning to make a way to defeat sin, so that all might become sons and daughters of God. It was not predestined that only some would find Christ; it was predestined that a way would be made for all who would believe.

December 4

Ephesians 4-6

Wow! There in 4:14-15 is the description of a church with mature believers, and how to tell if your church is mature. Mature believers are not "tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming". Mature believers make for a stable church. The congregation is combining their God-given abilities to build each other up. A church that has the reputation of always having some kind of fuss going on has not grown many mature believers.

It's pretty plain here that a Christian must choose to avoid evil and to do right. It doesn't just happen. In years past, some denominations held that a person can receive 'total sanctification' from God and never be tempted to sin again. Paul wouldn't agree with this, but instead would say that you must choose righteousness every day.

The armor of God passage (6:10-18) is a favorite of many. A lot of people think about that armor every morning, visualizing putting on each piece before they go out to face the world each day. Good idea! Be ready for the battle! My only question is, why do you ever take it off?

December 5

Philippians 1-4

You would think that Paul would be a little down about being in prison! It doesn't seem to bother him at all. He sees that circumstances have not stopped him from serving Christ, so he's satisfied.

Being like-minded to Christ certainly should be our goal. We should aim to think and act in the same way Christ did, including copying His humility. He was always ready to serve others. We become like Christ as we study God's Word and act on it. We learn by doing.

Rejoice, Paul tells us over and over again. There will always be troubles, and always there will be things to worry about (if we so choose). Try to get the big picture! God has given us great riches in salvation through Jesus. We always have a reason to celebrate.

December 6

Colossians 1-4

The greetings and closings in Paul's letters always include those working closely with him. He saw himself as part of a team, with a particular call to preach salvation to the Gentiles. Most of Paul's letters were written by a 'secretary' he dictated to; occasionally he'll add a personal note at the end by his own hand.

Paul's experience has taught him not to take for granted that a church will flourish after he's gone on to another city. He thanks God that this church has done well.

I love the phrase in 1:27, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." It reminds me of all that Jesus has done and *will* do. Christ died for my sins (and yours) and has come to reside in me because I accepted His payment for me. As I continue to recognize His presence in my life day to day, it makes the assurance of heaven more real to me.

Paul speaks of doing hard work for the Colossians (2:1-5) from his present location (probably the Roman prison). Epaphras is also struggling for them (4:12-13) at the same city. How? By prayer. They pray for the spiritual growth of both this church and the one at Laodicea. I believe in this type of labor!

December 7

I Thessalonians 1-5

Sometimes we get discouraged, thinking we just aren't maturing in our Christian lives very fast. It sure helps every once in a while to get a compliment on our faith from someone else. That's the kind of encouragement Paul gave to the

believers in Thessalonica. Not only had Paul heard of their strong faith to Christ, but he said word of it was everywhere he went!

We are called to make disciples. It just makes sense, then, that our faithfulness can be judged by the spiritual growth of the disciples we've made, more so than by our own spiritual maturity. How do your disciples look?

Paul needed to reassure his church in Thessalonica about the return of Christ. Many thought, "He should have been here by now!" But there really was no hurry; the dead in Christ will rise first, and the rest of us who are in Christ will be right behind!

December 8

II Thessalonians 1-3

There is never a reason for a Christian to retire from serving God. We always have people to bring to Christ, and we can always grow closer to God ourselves. "Christian" is not what you do, but who you are.

Christ wants to find us working when He returns, just as He was even reaching out to others being crucified as He himself was dying on the cross. If we have His heart, we just can't stand to see others lost.

We need to wrap our minds around the idea of life not ending. We don't have to get everything done, we don't have to make a name for ourselves, we can get our minds on helping other people. Christians are the best source of 'lubrication' for the world---- if everyone were only thinking of themselves, life would chew people up and spit them out.

December 9

I Timothy 1-6

Timothy is in a tough position, as pastor of the church at Ephesus. Paul had spent a lot of time here, and was well-respected by the people. Timothy is young, younger than many of the elders in the church. He is called to lead them forward in their faith journey, in spite of his age. Paul's advice is to not be afraid to correct the elders, but do it in a loving manner and with respect for their age. The best thing Timothy can do is live a Godly life in their midst, gaining their respect by his faith in God.

Any leader in the church should be seeking after God's heart. So often, especially in small churches, we fill leadership positions as best we can, sometimes with people whose only qualification is that they are willing to have their name written down. It would be better to leave the position open! Much harm can be

done to believers by church officers who seem to be Godly, but are unwilling to accept God's guidance for their lives.

Church leaders who are holy and seeking to live close to God are precious, and we should make sure that they are recognized from time to time. Not only will this encourage them, but it will also encourage younger believers to pattern their lives in the same way.

December 10

II Timothy 1-4

As is so common in the pastorate, Timothy has been worn down by the hard work of leading the church. The fire that once burned brightly in him has been dimmed a little by controversy and criticism. Paul urges him to "fan the flame" of the gift God has given him; "so do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord." You may have noticed this in pastors in the past. It's a tough job, not to be entered into without God's call, so determine that you will do your best to encourage your spiritual leader at all times.

Paul is not able to tell Timothy that the work will get easier. Paul is in a Roman prison! However, he does remind him of a heavenly reward, and of the noble cause they both serve. The future may not be easy, but Timothy is doing exactly what God wants him to be doing, and so is faithfully following the example of Paul.

Paul sees that the end of his ministry is in sight, so he feels compelled to call Timothy to him one more time. He's got to make sure the Gospel is in good hands, and that he has equipped Timothy to carry on without him. He encourages Timothy, too, to make sure he is passing on his ministry to trustworthy men. We can't just be satisfied with our own righteousness, but must be sure we *make disciples* who will carry on the Good News when we cannot.

December 11

Titus 1-3, Philemon

Titus, as Timothy was earlier, is called Paul's "son" in the faith. I like this image! A father ideally passes on many things to a son, both intentionally and unintentionally. We want to pass on only the best things. We must live our lives to the highest standards, because our "sons and daughters" will turn out to be a lot like us.

Paul came to Crete as an evangelist, and brought many to Christ. Now Titus is given the follow-up task of bringing order and discipline to the church. A key element to this is finding Godly leaders for each church; leaders must be held to a

higher standard of spirituality than the bulk of the attendees. Each believer, though, must discipline his life to the goal of righteous living, so that following Christ might be attractive to unbelievers.

Paul writes a personal letter to Philemon concerning his slave, Onesimus. The slave ran away from his master, but when he receives Christ as his Savior, he is convinced by Paul that he must return to his master. Paul writes a letter of recommendation to ease the return.

I guess the biggest point made by the book of Philemon is that we must give our whole life to Christ, not saving any part of us that only meets the standards of the rest of society.

December 12

Hebrews 1-4

Think of Hebrews as a sermon, one continuous speech. It's not certain who wrote (or spoke) it, but scholars are pretty sure it wasn't the same author as of any of the other New Testament books because of word usage and style.

The author makes the case that Jesus was the Son of God, one with God and with God from the very beginning of time. It's hard for us to understand how the two can be the same yet different. The author continues with an even harder concept, that Jesus was both completely human and completely divine. In our rational way of thinking, you must be one or the other. Faith requires us to believe that it's possible to be both; it's beyond our understanding but, hey, if we could understand everything about God, God wouldn't be that much greater than us!

Jesus understands us. He lived on this same planet, and felt all the emotions we do, like anger, frustration, disappointment, joy, satisfaction, sorrow, even fear. Jesus knows us completely. My prayers are to One who has been in my shoes.

Chapter 3 describes "the unforgivable sin", as mentioned in Mark 3:29, which is turning away from the Holy Spirit. This is the only thing that will keep a person out of Heaven. What is it? Not accepting Jesus as Savior when the Holy Spirit urges you to!

The author confuses me a little in Chapter 4, equating Sabbath rest with accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Does this mean that saved persons need not observe the Sabbath. No, I take it to mean that the one who first believes receives the same kind of refreshment that the Sabbath brings, a renewed commitment to God that gets you through life.

December 13

Hebrews 5-7

The author doesn't try to settle the validity of 'once saved, always saved'. Can a person, once they become a Christian, fall away and end up in Hell? The author does say that such a one is "in danger of being cursed", and that one who has fallen away after having tasted the riches of the Kingdom is impossible to bring back. Don't rest on your past righteousness--- why take chances with eternity? Your relationship to God should be a living commodity, not dead.

We don't know much about Melchizedek. He appeared out of nowhere as Abraham returned from rescuing Lot (and several kings and other people) from being captive in a regional battle. Abraham had much to be thankful for, because he and 300 household servants had just defeated thousands and took plunder. As a representative of God in a pagan land, Melchizedek became an opportunity for Abraham to give something back in thankfulness to God, for only God could have blessed Abraham against such overwhelming odds.

Jesus is both the one who gives us blessing and the one who becomes our opportunity to show thankfulness to God. As we give ourselves to Christ, we recognize God has provided a way of salvation through Him.

December 14

Hebrews 8-10

There's always been the need for a new covenant, since the days of Moses, or maybe even since Adam and Eve. The sacrificial system was inadequate to pay for our sins. Jesus represents a new covenant that *works*. Micah, as well as several other of the minor prophets (see Micah 6:6-8), made it clear that no amount of animal sacrifice would be enough; something had to change our hearts.

The author tells us that the sprinkling of blood on all the sacred objects in the Tabernacle, and later in the temple, was to make them ceremonially clean. (Imagine the germs! But God can handle that.) This was actually an image or foreshadowing of how Jesus would make us ("temples of the Holy Spirit") clean, through His blood, by dying on the cross. Therefore, we can go forth with confidence, knowing we can face any ordeal for Christ, who has bought us for his own by His blood.

Verses 4:13-17 remind us that our plans and goals can get in the way of doing good. We get focused on what we must do to reach a certain goal or milestone, and pass up doing some good thing that is right before us. Try to see your life from God's perspective; that little interruption might have been the best thing you did in God's service all day, or all week.

December 15

Hebrews 11-13

If Hebrews, as many have said, is one sermon, then we must be getting to the climax! You'll hear a lot about faith in these final chapters

Verse 11:6 defines faith as believing in God, with the confidence that He will reward earnest seekers. Verse 11:15 expands this to include the reward of a heavenly home.

Jesus has earned our trust, and has proven Himself to be who He said He was: Son of God, one with the Father forever. The author of Hebrews leads us to the inevitable conclusion that we can and must have faith in Christ now and into eternity.

December 16

James 1-5

The most likely author for this book is Jesus' own brother. He was a Resurrection convert, it seems, since the few references to James prior to Jesus' death indicate he saw his brother as nothing special, at best, or crazy, at worst. Early in the book of Acts, James is mentioned as the leader of the church in Jerusalem .

Maybe it's understandable, then, that James believes your faith ought to change you. How can anyone really have faith in Christ if it doesn't cause them to do His works? Belief that doesn't make a difference inside or out is "dead", he says, and I certainly agree.

Anyone that keeps the Law, James says, must keep all of it or be guilty of breaking it all. This seems severe! He is writing to those brought up as Jews, but maybe you can see the relationship to our present time. If anyone sees 'right living' as a matter of not breaking any rules, he/she has missed the point: Live by the Spirit of righteousness, of being in right relationship with God, and that is being saved and being guided by God's Holy Spirit within you.

Chapter 3 begins with warnings about "the tongue", called untameable and "a restless evil". Whew! Isn't *that* the truth!? We see examples every day of folks who have caused a world of trouble by not keeping their big mouths shut at the proper time. It can happen to *you*, too. Learn to be careful about what you say, and be quick to apologize for saying the wrong thing.

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your life from God's perspective; that little interruption might have been the best thing you did in God's service all day, or all week.

December 17

I Peter 1-2

Peter seems to write with a gentler tone than Paul. He begins with compliments about how these Christians have rejoiced in their faith, even though they've had to face some persecution. "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him," (1:8) is a great definition of what faith is.

Peter goes on to talk about the faith of the prophets, believing in the One to come for the benefit of these present believers. In the same way, our faith benefits those younger than us, even those not yet born---we leave a legacy of faith. Many a person who comes to love Jesus starts on that path because of a Sunday School teacher or a sweet and gentle older person in the church, and are even influenced by glowing words about a saintly person who died before they came along.

The first few verses of chapter 2 have been some of my favorites for a while now. The image of letting ourselves be built into a spiritual house speaks of God's willingness to make great things of us, and a great life for us, if we'll cooperate! God has always wanted what is best for us; we get in the way of our own great future.

In his gentle way, Peter encourages these believers to live a life that is spotless and pure. I suppose Paul would have been telling them to 'shape up or ship out'! It's the old debate between encouragement by 'the carrot' or 'the stick'. There may be an appropriate time for both, but I think most of us prefer the gentler, 'carrot' type of encouragement.

December 18

I Peter 3-5

We have been prepared by God to be the 'lubricant' of this world, keeping life bearable when others would 'grind' on you and each other. Peter boldly claims that by replacing malice with love, we'll see a better life in this world, though rewards in eternity would be enough. By responding with love to those who are treating you harshly, you follow directly the example of Jesus Christ, who gave His life for the unrighteous that they might be made alive in Him.

Peter speaks to believers who have suffered persecution because of their new beliefs. That's good, he tells them, for it means there is a sharp contrast between

their present lives and the lives of the sinful people around them (who they used to be like). It is always uncomfortable to be confronted with personal sin; righteous people help sinners see their wicked ways, by being like a mirror in which they can see who they really are as compared to who they ought to be.

Peter calls these believers to a higher standard. They are to live a life pleasing to God, steadfastly resisting the devil. Earthly standards are not good enough, superceded by the standards of God. In the same way, we should never settle for being good in the eyes of our culture; being holy in God's eyes is where we'll find the 'abundant life' Jesus spoke of.

December 19

II Peter 1-3

Peter recognizes the advantage he has over other believers. He actually walked with Jesus Christ and heard His words with his own ears. Peter was one of the few who was on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, hearing God's voice with his own ears, saying, "This is my son, in whom I am well pleased." He wants to tell about these things over and over, for when he is dead and gone, they'll need to remember.

The best insurance against believing false teaching is to be a *growing* Christian. Peter indicates that Christians who aren't seeking to grow more into the image of Christ are easy prey for teachers who teach destructive ways. These teachers are seeking their own profit, not the benefit of their followers. He recommends the letters of Paul as difficult words that they should seek to understand. Never stop growing! If you are not moving forward, you are more easily steered in the wrong direction.

When will the second coming of Christ be? No one knows! Since that is true, always be living your life in a way that Christ would be proud of. It could be today, or any day!

December 20

I John 1-3

John, as with Peter, finds it compelling that he must pass on the Good News of Jesus Christ because he has been with Jesus personally. It's not theoretical with him. He has heard and seen and touched Christ. Now that Jesus has ascended to

heaven, John summarizes that Jesus, Son of God, was completely “light” and sin is completely “dark”.

John talks in absolutes: Either you’re free from sin, and in the light, or you still love the world, in which case Christ is not in you. Taken out of context, John’s statements can be used in dangerous ways, wielded like a flaming sword. The truth of the matter is, though, that John knows people sin and must constantly seek forgiveness. (2:1-2) John pushes us, as his readers, to make a clean break from our former life of sin---Christ has provided a better way for us.

A sure sign of a Christian is his love for other Christians. I understand that at times we won’t agree with all that our sisters and brothers in Christ say and do, but we must be gentle in our disagreeing and in our correction. Love includes guiding our fellow Christians into righteousness, and sometimes this may seem harsh to them, but we must always leave lines of communication open, never embarrassing or belittling. We are our brother’s keeper.

December 21

I John 4-5

There were many ‘offshoot’ cults after Jesus died, that were *almost* Christian. (The Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed were written as attempts to get the basic Christian beliefs in writing, to help believers recognize the heresies in these cults.) John gives his readers a few basic guidelines here: If a religious teacher does not recognize Christ as the Son of God, have nothing to do with him. If he doesn’t teach and practice love that is willing to be self-sacrificing, stay away.

John, of course, was with his brother James and Peter when Jesus was “transfigured”, and heard God’s voice saying, “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.” It was a profoundly moving experience for all of them. John tells us that we all can have this same kind of testimony from God (not in so many words) when we become a Christian, for God’s Spirit testifies about Christ to our inner being.

Faith is believing in the unseen God, and that God seeks the best for us. John pushes our understanding of this: If you believe that God hears your prayers, and that God answers your prayers, then you should believe that you have received your request as soon as you pray. If you’re waiting to see visible proof before you start celebrating, is that really faith?

December 22

II John, III John, Jude

This is a short letter; evidently John decided to send it off quickly. This “chosen lady” was obviously a mainstay in one of the churches, and some of her children brought word to John that she was either starting to be sympathetic to some false doctrine, or some teachers with suspect theology were heading that way. John doesn’t specifically name any teacher to stay away from; he trusts here judgment. He just reviews some of the criteria with which to judge doctrine.

III John is a similar letter. It is sent to encourage Gaius, who is commended by others concerning his hospitality and spiritual walk. It seems John would rather not do his teaching by mail; he again says (as in II John) that he has much to say, but would rather do it in person. That sounds similar to present-day preachers who would rather visit in person rather than by phone or email. I’ll bet John couldn’t keep as many churches going as Paul!

Jude was attributed to Jesus’ brother, who like brother James came to belief that Jesus is the Christ after Jesus died. He warns against letting persons be leaders in the church that are not mature in their faith. We need to pay attention to this! We so often let persons lead just because they can speak in front of other people. Those with important positions in the business world are often asked to be leaders in the church. That’s not necessarily good qualifications! Let the spiritual ones be the church leaders, lest we are all led away from the narrow path!

December 23

Revelation 1-2

John was in exile on Patmos because he stood up for God, much the same as when John the Baptist was imprisoned for criticizing Herod’s sinful lifestyle. While on Patmos , God gave John a grand vision of future events. Some of what John saw had symbolic meaning that made much more sense in his own era. Though mysterious, Revelation is a powerful encouragement to us: At the end of time, God wins!

John knew Jesus personally when He walked the earth, and was present when the resurrected Jesus ascended into heaven. What did Jesus now look like, at His Father’s right hand in heaven? John’s vision is consistent with what prophets had reported God looked like, yet Jesus also still resembled the earthly Man John had known. There was no doubt in John’s mind---this was Jesus speaking to him!

Jesus begins with a message for seven particular churches. Though He has gone to heaven, He knows all about their present situations. They are commended, but warned to continue and strengthen their faithfulness.

The Nicolaitans held to dangerous beliefs that compromised the Gospel. They wanted to live with one foot in sinful culture and the other in Christian teachings. You can't ride the fence---eventually you'll fall off! This world is temporary, but the Kingdom of God is eternal.

December 24

Revelation 3-5

Jesus speaks to seven individual churches through John's vision. Just as in our day, churches could become like clubs, where members enjoy being together but never do much good for others. Jesus called Sardis "dead", meaning they were no different now from the culture around them. Laodicea was "lukewarm", not passionate either for or against Christ. Neither one was any good for expanding God's kingdom. Still, Jesus loved them and was encouraging them to make an effort to turn things around. It was not too late!

John was fortunate now to actually see God, but not able to put into words what he saw. Most every description of God is similar to this: The observer sees lots of light, and usually compares God to the greatest jewels they've ever seen. So why does our culture usually depict God as an old man?

The four living creatures seem to symbolize four main attributes of God: Power, faithfulness or steadfastness, intelligence, and sovereignty. This transcends our way of thinking, for we demand that they either be part of God or separate. This is one of the cases where you can't fit it into a box

There will come a time eventually when God will declare that the end has come. A great sequence of disasters will take place as a last extreme effort to turn people to God's plan of salvation. In John's vision of the future, the end times now begin.

December 25

Revelation 6-8

Incredible natural disasters begin to occur, as God begins a final push to bring people to Himself. The four horsemen represent war, social unrest, economic depression, and death. The fifth and sixth seals bring persecution and natural disaster. In the last verse of chapter 6, people are beginning to recognize that this can only be God's doing, and are bowed down to Him. Those that are bowed in worship can be saved, but those bowed in fear haven't yet gotten the point. Talk about hard-headed people!

The first verse of chapter 7 tells of a sudden stillness---no wind anywhere on earth! It is obvious that something terrible is about to happen, and many turn to

the Lord. Most Bible scholars take 144,000 to mean a very large number, not an exact count.

The disasters continue to worsen. Surely some of these stubborn persons left will repent and worship God! If not, they have made their choice and will face eternal torment and separation from God.

December 26

Revelation 9-11

The horrors of the locust plague, and the loss of one third of all humans in war was still not enough for people to be persuaded to turn to God. God is really trying to get their attention, but some people have just set their minds to never submit to God. It's crazy!

God spent centuries attracting people to His offer of salvation through His Son's death and Resurrection, lovingly wooing them. Now in the end times, God is using force, and it's not pleasant. Still God will do anything that the world might be saved.

In chapter 10, John is given a new call as a prophet. Though he is now in exile on Patmos, God gives him a message ("scroll") to deliver at some future time.

What else might God do to change the minds of the stubborn people still alive and on earth after Christ's Second Coming? God will send two powerful evangelists ("witnesses") who do signs and wonders, and even come back from the dead when killed. We see that thousands are actually converted by this (11:13). Glory be to God!!!

December 27

Revelation 12-13

It's not too difficult to see that 12:1-6 is about Jesus. He was born from the nation of Israel (woman with 12 stars in her crown). The devil sought to destroy him even at his birth, but God snatched him away to a safe place.

The devil is at constant battle with God for all people. The devil can never win in this battle. There will be empires and kingdoms that arise, totally opposed to God (the beast here represents the Roman Empire). but they will not be able to overcome God's saints.

December 28

Revelation 14-16

The beast has become strong in the earth, gathering many followers. This is some ruler or nation or ideology that exalts itself against God. It could be capitalism, or communism, or a group of countries. God says that any adherents to "it" cannot enter His kingdom. Immediately there comes a harvest, or judgment. Some of the 'hard heads' are still being saved, causing great rejoicing. Will there be any more chances? Watch carefully to see if anyone else will be saved!

December 29

Revelation 17-18

The prostitute in this part of John's vision represents Satan. The beast is explained in 17:9; it represents the Roman Empire (Rome was the city built on seven hills) with its succession of emperors. Satan controlled the Roman Empire, which was in cruel opposition to the fledgling Christian movement.

I really doubt this is saying the Roman Empire will rise again during the end times. Without trying to explain the details, I think the point being made is that great empires will come and go, with some bringing great persecution for Christians (such as the U.S.S.R. and its Communist Bloc countries of Eastern Europe), but that God will conquer them all.

Chapter 18 speaks of the downfall of Rome and the Roman Empire. At the height of its power, it seemed invincible. Its merchants traded with the whole known world, so its collapse would be felt a long ways. In our present interconnected world, when a major trading country suffers an economic catastrophe (such as 9/11 in the U.S.), shock waves are felt around the globe.

December 30

Revelation 19-20

This is it! The end of the battle of people versus Satan is over, for Jesus has come to make short work of him. There is an incredible celebration in all of heaven, with angels and all the saints of all time joining in worship. There is not the tiniest doubt how the battle will go.

Satan is bound for 1,000 years, and life on earth is perfect, as it was originally intended to be. Everyone loves God and one another. Imagine!

After 1,000 years, Satan is released to gather whatever army he can for one last assault on God. He does gather a huge army, but there really is no great battle, for God sends fire from heaven to devour Satan's army in no time flat.

After Satan is defeated, we all face judgment for all the sins we've ever committed. Any one of our sins should bring us the death sentence, but we are saved by having our names written in "the Lamb's book of life". We need to face this, to understand how we were saved from eternal death by God's grace.

December 31

Revelation 21-22

After the final battle, we will not spend eternity in Heaven but in a new and better Heaven. Everything will be made of the best materials, and all sadness will cease. There will be no sun or moon to provide light, for God's glory will be all the light needed. Once Jesus lived amongst us, but now God Himself will live with us (and Jesus, too!).

How could anyone pass up Heaven? The best things we have on earth are just pitiful compared to our eternal home. Even more important, how could we be convinced of all these wonders and let our family and friends miss it?

Congratulations! You have read God's Word, cover to cover.