

Chapter 1
The Book of Hebrews

MINI BIBLE COLLEGE

**Hebrews, James,
I and II Peter,
I, II, III John, Jude and
The Revelation**

STUDY BOOKLET #15

We have now finished surveying the letters of the Apostle Paul and we are approaching the General Epistles, so called because these letters were addressed to general, rather than specific groups of believers. We begin with The Book of Hebrews. We do not know who wrote this book. Paul has been suggested, but the first word in this letter is not "Paul" as it often is in his letters. There are many good reasons why scholars do not believe Paul wrote the Book of Hebrews.

As we have seen so far in our survey of the Bible, the important thing about any book in the Bible is this: "What does the book say?" "What does that mean?" and "What does that mean to you and me?" The important thing about the Book of Hebrews is the truth that is taught in it and the personal application of that truth to your life and mine.

Whoever wrote this book was an eloquent scholar who understood what the Old Testament and the New Testament had to say about Jesus Christ. The primary contribution of the book is that more than any other book of the Bible, Hebrews ties together the Old and the New Testaments. Have you ever wondered why we no longer offer animal sacrifices for our sins? This book will answer that question and many other questions like that one.

The Argument of the Book of Hebrews

As you read Hebrews, realize that this book has an argument that is presented with profound logic from the first verse to the last. Try to follow the inspired logic of the author as you read this book. Try to read the book in one sitting if you can block out the time to do that. As you read, looking for his argument, make the observation that there are three words that can guide you. The first word is "better," the second word is "believe" and the third word is "beware."

The author is writing to Jews and he wants them to realize that Jesus Christ is better than all the things they revere. He will essentially write, "You cherish the prophets, but Jesus Christ is better than the prophets. Jesus is the Prophet. God has spoken through prophets but now God has spoken through His Son. His Son is better than all the prophets.

In the first two chapters of this book, the author points out that Jesus Christ is better than angels. The Jews who were conservative and orthodox, like the Pharisees, believed in angels.

The Jews also revered Moses, so he writes that Jesus Christ is better than Moses. The author gives us this word picture: A house has value, but the builder of a house is of more value than the house. Moses built the house, the Hebrew nation, but Jesus Christ is the Son Who lives in that house.

Then the author argues that Jesus Christ is better than Joshua who led the children of Israel into the Promised Land and gave them

rest. Jesus, however, gave them a rest that far exceeds the rest they received when they entered the Promised Land.

Then he argues that Jesus Christ is better than all their priesthoods. These Jews valued their priesthoods. Beginning in chapter five, he argues that Jesus Christ is better than all those priesthoods.

After the priesthoods, he refers to the covenants. There was a covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. God made many covenants, but the author argues that Jesus is better than all those covenants.

Finally, the author of Hebrews makes reference to the tent of worship in the wilderness. You may remember that the temple of Solomon was built on the same pattern as the tent of worship they used while they were wandering in the wilderness. As we might expect, the author argues that Jesus Christ is better than the Tent of Worship. He writes to his Jewish readers, "Listen, that Tent of Worship, that Temple of Solomon, and all the patterns of worship that were there, were just a copy, just a visible expression of a heavenly worship tent that exists in heaven, a worship tent not made with hands." (Hebrews 9:11,23-26)

Once a year, the high priest would go into the inner tent that was called the "Holy of Holies." He would take sacrificial blood into the Holy of Holies where he offered that blood for the sins of all the people. All of this was a pattern of what happened in heaven when Jesus Christ died on the cross. It was as if He was the Great High

Priest and interceded for the sins of the whole world with His own precious blood. His sacrifice fulfilled and validated all those animal sacrifices that were offered to God through priests and that sacrificial system, which existed from Moses to Jesus. This author ties the two testaments together when he writes that after Jesus died on the cross, there should be no more sacrifices offered for our sins.

Chapter 2

You'd Better Believe It!

The next two key words are “believe” and “beware.” The author gives many warnings about the subtlety of apostasy - taking a stand at one point in your journey of faith and then later, to take another stand away from your original position. The author’s concept of apostasy is not so much that of a person who has the wrong theology, but one who has all the right theology and does not do anything about it.

Hebrews is filled with exhortations and warnings. Another word that often accompanies these warnings is the word "lest" sometimes expressed as – “so that” or “in case” (Hebrew 2:1, 3:13, 4:1, 11). Many of the warnings relate to the work of Christ in us, or with the work of Christ through us. The exhortations in Hebrews

frequently follow the words "let us". (Hebrews 4:1, 11, 10:22, 23, 24)

As you read Hebrews, consistently try to focus the argument of the book. When you understand that argument, you will also understand the mission of the Book of Hebrews, which is to encourage Jewish believers who were suffering, discouraged to the point that they were about to throw away their faith. His mission objective was also to encourage Jewish people who had not yet placed their faith in Jesus to step across the line and make a real commitment of faith. While he is addressing those who had not yet come to authentic faith, he obviously wants to strip away false assurance from those who had not yet made a genuine commitment of faith.

The author’s warnings continue as he focuses an event in Hebrew history that is recorded in the fourteenth chapter of Numbers. When the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years, ten times God challenged them to believe Him by performing miracles for them. He was trying to give them the faith to invade the fortified cities of Canaan.

God reached the point with that generation where in effect, He said, "I have had it with you. You are never going to enter the Promised Land. The only two men from among all of you who are going to enter the Promised Land are Joshua and Caleb because they believed Me." The author warns them not to imitate their ancestor’s

lack of faith, but to enter into their spiritual Promised Land, which he calls “rest.” (Hebrews 3:7-4:1)

In chapters three and four, the author in essence writes: "If you can still hear the voice of God but you will not listen to it, you are just like those people in the wilderness who went around in circles for forty years. The day will come when you will not hear the voice of God anymore. God will turn away from you and you will fail to enter into the Promised Land of abundant living in Christ because the voice will get quieter and quieter."

In chapter five, the author wants to address a subject that is very difficult to understand. He is about to show that Jesus Christ is better than all the previous priesthoods. Jews would expect the author to show that Jesus was a priest of the order of Aaron or Levi. To begin his presentation, he wants to make the point that Jesus is a special priest from the order of Melchizedek.

At that point, he puts a parenthesis in place and writes, “I would like to tell you more about Melchizedek, but I cannot.” Within his parentheses, he laments the fact that they have not grown in their understanding of Scripture to the point that they would understand what he wants to tell them about Melchizedek. He profiles the kind of spiritual diet they need to grow up spiritually. (Hebrews 5:11-14)

When you go to church, your pastor, who has digested some spiritual food from the Scriptures, teaches you what he has spiritually digested. That is like drinking milk, which is a predigested food for

babies who have not yet develop a digestive system of their own. If the only Scripture you know comes to you through a pastor who has predigested that Scripture that makes you a spiritual baby.

However, if you come to the Scripture alone, if it is only you, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible, and the Holy Spirit teaches you out of the Scripture, you are now eating spiritual meat for your spiritual nourishment.

According to the Apostle John, as a result of your being born again, Christ has come to live in your heart. You have received an “anointing” from the Holy Spirit. John wants you to realize that "You need not that any man teach you because the anointing that is in you can teach you everything you need to know." (I John 2:2-27)

The sixth chapter of Hebrews has some verses that have troubled devout souls for many centuries (Hebrews 6:4-12). Some believe this passage is teaching that we as true believers can lose our salvation. I disagree. He writes: "We are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation." When he writes about being enlightened, tasting, and partaking, he is not describing the believer who has experienced regeneration – the “new birth”. He is describing the person who is being enticed by the Holy Spirit to the point that they taste, or partake, but they have not really stepped across the line of faith and been born again.

I remind you again that one of the objectives of this book is to exhort Jews, who have not yet trusted Jesus Christ, to make a definite commitment of faith in Christ. The purpose of the argument of this

book is to challenge them to stand up and suffer with Jesus Christ, to come out and make an authentic commitment to their Messiah and then be assured of their salvation. I believe that is the objective of the message of this very difficult exhortation in the sixth chapter of the Book of Hebrews.

Chapter six, verses four to six, must be interpreted in the context of the total argument and mission objective of the Book of Hebrews. According to the author he is not addressing things that accompany salvation. His exhortation throughout the book is directed to professing believers who have not yet been born again because they are stopping short of saving faith in their commitment to Jesus Christ. The author is warning these people that they are like those who go to a marketplace and look - and look - and look, but never buy anything. His warning here in this passage is that an egg reaches a point where it either hatches, or it becomes a rotten egg.

Building on the metaphor of Jesus, what the author of Hebrews wants for his readers is for them to be born again. His point in this difficult passage is that once they are born again, they will not lose their salvation. But before the new birth happens, there can be such a thing as a spiritual "miscarriage". These people are in danger of being "aborted" while they are in a period of spiritual "gestation".

Chapter 3

Focus on Faith

The real heart of this author's message is found in the eleventh chapter of the book. The eleventh chapter of the Book of Hebrews is known as the "faith chapter" of the Bible. The chapter actually begins near the end of the tenth chapter when he begins to give his readers a cluster of reasons why they should not throw away their faith (Hebrews 10:35). He writes that they should not throw away their faith because faith had saved them. He exhorts them to think back to that time when they first believed and were saved. This is the thrust of his argument - do not throw away your faith because your faith has saved you!

They had apparently experienced an authentic conversion to Christ that was accompanied by a fervent first love for Christ. He reminds them of that experience, how they had endured the loss of all things, knowing that in heaven they had a better reward. Now, the author is saying, think back to that initial experience of faith and salvation and think of what it meant to you. Realize that you were saved by your faith. Therefore, whatever you do, do not throw away the faith that saved you.

Then, in verse thirty-eight of chapter ten, he quotes the prophet Habakkuk, "The just shall live by faith." (Habakkuk 2:4) In this context, he essentially writes: "You can't throw away your faith

because you are going to need your faith. You are not only saved by faith; you must live by faith."

Faith is very difficult to define, but you can describe it. He writes: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Hope is the conviction that something good exists in this world and someday you are going to intersect that good. Old Testament believers referred to seeing the good. David challenged failures and fugitives with this question: "Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good?" He then answered his own question by issuing this invitation: "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" (Psalm 34:12, 8) For faith to be faith, there has to be some evidence to support the conviction that something good is going to happen.

But here, the context of the argument is "Don't throw away your faith because of what faith is. Faith is the substance of your hopes or the foundation that makes your hopes believable. Faith is the evidence of things not seen, that is, the unseen object of your faith.

When your faith is biblical faith, the object of your faith must be unseen. You eliminate the need for faith when you have and can see the object of your faith. When faith is biblical faith, the object of your faith is unseen, but there is evidence that supports the conviction that the unseen object is there. It is like the aroma of a favorite meal that you have not yet seen, but the aroma is evidence that the meal is about to be served. Therefore, a good definition of

faith might be: "Faith is an act of belief in something, or Someone, you cannot see, which is based on evidence."

In this case, the unseen object is God. And the author is saying that the greatest evidence in the world that there is a God is the person who has faith. According to the New Testament, faith is the gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8; Philippians 1:29) Therefore, the one who has faith is the greatest evidence on earth that the Giver of faith exists. He writes, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Among other things, the writer of this profound document is telling us that faith, itself, is the evidence that demonstrates the existence of the unseen God.

He gives his readers yet another reason why they should not throw away their faith when he writes: "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that would come to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6)

Hold on to the logic of his argument, which is all the reasons why they should not throw away their faith. He is making the point that they should not throw away their faith because without faith they cannot come to God, or please God. He then tells them (and us) about people who pleased God because they had faith.

Enoch was such a man who was taken because of his faith. It's as if Enoch walked so close to God that one day God said to Enoch, "Enoch, we are a lot closer to My house now than we are to yours; why don't you just come on home with Me?" God just took

Enoch home to heaven because Enoch walked with God and pleased God (Hebrews 11:5).

Then, he gives examples of godly people who had faith. Go through Hebrews chapter eleven and underline all the verbs, the words of action. All of them were heroes of faith because they did something. That is why I say faith is an act of belief in Someone, or something, you cannot see, that is based on evidence.

When God commissioned Noah to build an ark, it had not yet rained on earth. This author describes that challenge to Noah's faith as, "Things not seen as yet." Noah had never seen rain. The story of Noah, which covers four chapters in the Book of Genesis, is described in one profound verse of this faith chapter: "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." (7)

Noah was a preacher of righteousness during the 120 years he spent building the ark. The only way you could be saved was to be in that ark. Peter tells us that the ark is a picture of salvation. In this chapter we are told that Noah is a picture of faith and of what faith can mean and of what faith can do.

Many people believe the metaphor the author presents in 12:1-2 is that we are the athletes running in a race while in the stadium watching us run our race is "a great cloud of witnesses". They have already run their race. Do you believe it is possible that

people who are deceased, those who have gone on before us, know what is happening in our lives today? The author of Hebrews may be adding to his argument here in the faith chapter, that we should not throw away our faith because a great cloud of witnesses is watching and cheering us on as we run our race of life.

You are a child of God and because you are, when you disobey Him, He will correct you. According to this author, if you are suffering because you are being chastened, your suffering is an affirmation of your being a son (or a daughter) of God. He writes: "Do not despise the chastening of God. When you are chastened by God, that only proves that you are His child. Chastening will result in your becoming a partaker of His holiness." The author also tells us that chastening yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

The author closes this profound document exhorting us to be hospitable. He writes in his last chapter, "Entertain strangers because some have entertained angels unawares." Then he tells us to remember the prisoners as if we were in prison with them. Many of the early church members were in prison. The author also closes this masterpiece with an exhortation to obey those spiritual shepherds who are responsible for our spiritual well being.

Chapter 4

The Letter of James

The Epistle of James is intensely practical, referred to by some as “The Proverbs of the New Testament”. It is like a running commentary on the teachings of Jesus Christ, especially the Sermon on the Mount. You can find at least ten examples where specific teachings of Jesus are amplified and applied by James.

Many scholars believe that the James who wrote this epistle was the earthly half-brother of Jesus Christ. He did not believe in Jesus while Jesus was having His three years of public ministry. After the resurrection, we are told that Jesus made a special appearance to Peter and James, this James, His earthly brother (I Corinthians 15:7).

It is intriguing to observe that after James was converted, he is almost immediately appointed to be one of the great leaders of the New Testament church. James is the one who presides over that council at Jerusalem described in Acts 15.

This is the James that the apostle Paul refers to in his letter to the Galatians when he writes that when he went up to Jerusalem, there were three men who seemed to be pillars in the Jerusalem church - John, Peter and this James.

Tradition tells us James was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple and then clubbed to death by the high priest. When this happened, tradition says that the Jewish religious community

revolted against the high priest and ran him out of office. When the Roman emperor, Titus, destroyed Jerusalem, in 70 A.D. many of the devout Jews, who did not become followers of Jesus, believed that it was a judgment of God upon the city for the martyrdom of this godly man, James.

Since James is a General Epistle, it comes at the end of the New Testament with the other General Epistles. Most scholars believe this book is the earliest of all the New Testament writings.

The Message of James

When you study the content of this epistle, you will see why some believe James was trying to bring balance to the teaching of the Apostle Paul. They tell us that Paul comes on real strong with his justification by faith and not by works. In the second chapter of this letter, James will tell us emphatically that we are not justified by faith alone, but by works also. But, even though this epistle of James comes at the end of the New Testament, Paul’s letters were written after the Epistle of James. Many scholars believe James wrote before there were any Gentiles in the church. That is why the Epistle of James seems so Jewish and almost legalistic.

Two Kinds of Temptation

In the first chapter of this epistle, we learn that James is a man who is not so much concerned with the surfaces of things (how things appear) but with the sources of things (how things really are).

James is very much like Jesus in this regard. Jesus emphasized the inward man and the inward issues. Jesus also emphasized our attitude toward things and the motive that drives our actions. The essence of the Epistle of James parallels these values that Jesus emphasized in His teaching.

In his first chapter, James tells us about the sources and the sequences of our trials. In some translations, these trials are described as temptations. He will make a distinction later between these two kinds of temptation, but in this case he is referring to their trials of suffering. In his opening words, James writes: "count it all joy" when you experience your trials. James tells us we should rejoice in our trials because: "The test of faith is intended to lead us to the trust of faith. If we will allow the test of faith to lead us to the trust of faith, then we will experience the triumph of faith, which James calls 'the crown of life'."

When you have a storm in your life, that trial will very often will bring you to the place where you just don't know what to do. You realize that you need wisdom beyond yourself. James writes that we must let the test of faith lead us to the trust of faith. When we lack wisdom, we must ask God, Who will be delighted to share His wisdom with us.

The Anatomy of a Sin

James then profiles a kind of testing in which we should not rejoice. God is not the source of the temptation to sin. In the second

half of the first chapter of his letter, James gives us what we might call "The Anatomy of a Sin". As he emphatically teaches that the temptation to sin does not come from God, he informs us that this kind of temptation does not even come from the devil. The temptation to sin comes from within you and me.

It works this way: The sequence is, first, there is something you see. Then there is lust, or a strong desire for what you saw. It is as if what you saw is a piece of metal and your lust is like a powerful magnet. If you do not do something to break up that magnetic field between your lust and that object of your lust, one day there will be the confrontation of temptation.

According to James, temptation is not sin. You have not sinned just because you have been tempted to sin. We are told that our Lord was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). It is not a sin to be tempted, but temptation very often leads to overt acts of sin. When we yield to temptation and actually sin, the consequences of sin is always death. (Romans 6:23)

The point to this anatomy of sin is; if you do not want to sin you must win your battle with sin at the levels of lust, before you face the confrontations of temptation. Jesus taught us to pray every day, "Lead us not into temptation." (Matthew 6:13)

In Summary

In his first chapter, James is telling us how God can grow us spiritually in all our trials. James is also saying there is this other

matter, the temptation to sin. God is not the source of the sequence of temptation that leads to sin and to death. There is nothing good about sin. A summary of the first chapter of James could be: tested to life, tempted to death and taught the difference.

Chapter 5

Two Kinds of Religion

James tells us that the Word of God is the divine agent of God that can create spiritual life in your heart and give you the experience of regeneration. Regeneration can then give you the power to live above sin.

After his teaching in chapter one where he shared the bad news about temptation and sin, James shared the good news of how God works the miracle of salvation in our hearts. James writes that the Word of God is where we find the solution for our problem of temptation and sin. He gives a strong exhortation that continues on through chapter two about the importance of obeying the Word of God. Having told us that the implanted Word of God is the divine agent that can facilitate our regeneration if we respond to it properly, James gives a great exhortation in the form of a beautiful metaphor: "The Word of God is like a mirror."

The purpose of a mirror is to show your imperfections so that

you can make the necessary adjustments. When you look into God's perfect Mirror, the Scripture, it will show you the law of sin and death in your life, so you will do something about what you see in the mirror.

James agrees with his brother Jesus when he tells us here that if we will respond to the Word of God the way we respond to a mirror, we will discover that the Word of God is alive. That is why we have this strong exhortation from James to respond to the Word of God properly. James makes fun of the man who reads the Word, but does not obey it by saying he is like a man who looks in a mirror every morning. After seeing flaws in his appearance, he just goes to work and does nothing about what he saw in his mirror.

When believers do not become doers of the Word, they produce a phony religion that is not true religion. True religion obeys the Word of God by visiting widows and orphans and by holy living.

Two Kinds of Faith

In the second chapter of his letter, James begins by writing of what we might call "the phony face" and "the true face." The word "person" means "face" and relates to our externals. James writes that if we evaluate others on the basis of their external status symbols, or lack of status symbols, that is a sin, because God evaluates people on the basis of what is in their hearts. According to the Word of God,

“... the Lord does not see as man sees: for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (I Samuel 16:7)

Then, James addresses the phony faith and the real faith. This leads him into one of the most controversial passages in the New Testament (2:14-26). Although some see contradictions between James and Paul’s emphasis on grace, they are only apparent contradictions. Jesus agreed with James when He said, “By their fruits, you shall know them.” (Matthew 7:20) Jesus also emphatically taught that the man who hears His teaching and does not obey it, is building his house (life) without a foundation. James is in agreement with his half-brother when he writes that works are the fruit that always grows on the tree of faith.

Somebody has put it this way: "Faith alone can save, but the faith that saves is never alone." We are saved by faith alone, but our works prove that our faith is authentic, because works always accompany and validate true faith.

Chapter 6

Two Kinds of Wisdom

In chapter three of his letter, James focuses the sources of the spiritual disciplines that make it possible for us to walk the walk of faith. He writes that a good place to begin practicing spiritual

disciplines is to learn to discipline your tongue. The only way to do that is to understand what he calls "the meekness of wisdom".

I am sure you remember that I observed earlier that “meekness” means “tameness.” Before a horse is tamed, it is a powerful animal. When that horse is tamed, it is still a powerful animal but it can be described as “strength under control”. And so, the expression "meekness of wisdom" means, “wisdom in control”. When you receive this wisdom from God, you are to ask God the Holy Spirit for the grace and discipline to apply this wisdom. In other words, you must submit your life to the control of God, as God reveals His wisdom to you, the way a horse submits to the bit, bridle, and the control of the one who is training or riding the horse.

That beautiful expression leads James into a discussion of wisdom. James tells us there are two kinds of wisdom in this world. One comes from the devil and the other comes from God. The fruit they produce in the “garden” of our lives identifies their source.

In Summary

James wants us to understand the sources of the forces that influence our lives. If we are tempted to sin and we suffer all the consequences that go with it, that kind of testing is not coming from God. You can be brought into a relationship with God through His Word that can make it possible for you to rise above those forces that are determined to destroy you spiritually. Through the implanted Word of God, James exhorts us to experience the wisdom that comes

from God and to sow it in the garden of our lives.

Chapter 7

The Sources of the Solutions

James has been telling us about the sources and the sequences of sin and salvation. Now he wants to tell us about the sources involved in our sanctification – the ultimate solution to the problem of sin. James has sanctification on his heart as he writes chapters three and four of his letter.

This part of the letter is filled with applications. Observe the things James tells us to do. Submit to God. If you want to understand the key to sanctification, which is the solution to the subtleties and seductions of sin, then submit to God. Submission to God is your spiritual offensive.

Then, listen as James describes your defensive spiritual strategy when the devil tempts you to sin. Clearly, James is saying, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and God will draw near to you." (James 4:7)

When James gives us that practical application to his teaching, he is again paralleling the teachings of Jesus, his earthly half-brother. Jesus taught that great parable of the Prodigal Son,

which pictured God and the love of God as an old man running to embrace his son who was returning home after living in the far country of sin.

While the prodigal son is out in the far country, the father permits the son to experience the awful consequences of his sinful choices. However, when that son takes his first step toward returning to his father's house, that old man running to greet him is a picture of the love of God.

There is nothing more undignified than an old man running, but that is the way Jesus pictures the love of God for a prodigal who decides to come back to his father. Therefore, the exhortation of James, as he parallels his brother Jesus is, "Draw near to God and God will draw near to you." James tells us that when we take one step toward God, God will come running to us. In principle, Jesus taught that same truth when He taught the Prodigal Son parable.

Do you really believe God loves you? Some of us have such a poor view of ourselves; we have great difficulty believing anybody could love us, especially God, Who knows everything about us there is to know about us. When we add grievous sin to that mix, then we find it almost impossible to believe the love that God has for us.

I am here to tell you, on the authority of the Word of God, God loves you! The love of God for you is like an old man running to affirm His love for his son. No matter how you feel about yourself, God loves you anyway!

In the fourth chapter of his very practical epistle, James eloquently holds forth his exhortations, applications, and parallels with Jesus. It's almost like a running commentary on the teachings of Jesus.

One beautiful exhortation is in where he reminds us that we are in God's hands; our times are in His hands; everything about us is in His hands. We should realize that if He does not give us the grace, the health, and the life, we might not be doing anything next year.

In the remaining part of the letter, James gives us what you might call "The Sequences of God's Solutions." James addresses the subject of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Like the apostles, he tells us it is going to be the ultimate solution to all of the problems we have here on earth. Every time these prophets or New Testament authors tell us about the coming of Jesus Christ, the application is always very practical. What kind of person should you be, right now, in light of the fact that Christ is coming?

At the very end of the letter, he writes a beautiful passage on what we might call "The Body Life of the Church." That is what we call it today, by which we mean the life of the body, the church. In the New Testament, all the members of the body are exhorted to minister to all the other members of the body. All the gifts of the Spirit are designed to edify the church.

This closing chapter also gives us a great passage on healing. James teaches us that healing should take place when those who are in the body of Christ meet together. This needs to be said today loud

and clear. I believe in faith healing. I believe God can heal. I do not believe it is always God's will to heal, but I believe God can heal and God does heal. The healing James describes and prescribes does not take place in the context of a large gathering with a faith healer leading the healing. The healing is to take place in the context of a house church.

The one who is sick must have enough faith to call for the elders of the church. Then the elders of the church must have enough faith to come when they are called. When the elders come, they are instructed to lay hands on the sick person and anoint him or her with oil. According to James, it is not the oil that heals the sick person. James says, "The prayer of faith will heal the sick." (It is also interesting to note the word for oil is the word for medicinal oil. So, we could say: take your medicine and pray.)

James goes on to tell us, that if the sick person has committed sins, his sins are to be confessed and the sick person must be convinced that his sins have been forgiven. Sometimes, the guilt of sin that has not been confessed or forgiven can be a critical part of the illness.

There are so many practical principles in this little letter of James. Read it, study it and ask God to apply it to your life and the life of your church.

Chapter 8

The Letters of Peter - The Three Peters

In the New Testament we meet three different Peters. There is the Peter we meet in the Gospels; the Peter we meet in the Book of Acts, and there is the Peter we meet in his two letters. In the Gospels, Jesus says, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you are converted, strengthen your brethren." (Luke 22:31-34)

This is an intriguing part of the dialogue between Jesus and Peter because of the word "converted" and raises two questions: What is conversion and when was Peter converted?

Converted means: "to have a complete turnover". Conversion is not joining a church or being baptized. Conversion is the experience of being turned right side up. After Peter denied Jesus, he went out and wept bitterly. He learned that he was nobody without Christ.

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to Peter. That was when Jesus asked, "Do you love Me more than these other men?" Seven of the men who were present in the upper room when Peter boasted that they might deny Jesus but he never would, were present when Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love Me more than these other men?" Jesus used the Greek word "agape" which means the total commitment kind of love.

Peter replied in the affirmative, using the Greek word "phileo" by which he was saying, "You know that my love for You only amounts to friendship." Peter is not boasting now because he is a broken man. Jesus responds, "Feed My sheep, Peter!" What Jesus is saying is, "I want somebody like you, who knows what it is to fail feeding My sheep."

Then the Lord asked him, "Peter, do you love Me?" Not more than these others, but just do you love Me? Again Jesus used the word "agape." Peter answered, "You know the answer. You know my love for You is just phileo love." The Lord said, "Shepherd My sheep, Peter." Again, Jesus is saying, "I want someone who knows what failure is as a shepherd for My sheep."

The third time the Lord used the word "phileo." In other words, "Peter, do you even phileo Me – love me like a friend? At that point Peter's spirit was broken and he said, "Oh, You know that I at least phileo You." Again, the Lord said to Peter, "Feed My sheep, Peter!" When Jesus appeared to Peter after the resurrection and convinced him that even though he had failed, he was qualified to shepherd and feed His sheep, Peter learned that he was somebody.

In the Book of Acts, Peter and the whole world discovered what God could do with somebody who has learned that he is nobody. Why did the Holy Spirit use Peter on the Day of Pentecost? Because Peter knew these four spiritual secrets better than anyone else present:

“I’m not but He is, and I am in Him and He is in me.” “I can’t but He can, and I am in Him and He is in me.” “I don’t want to, but He wants to, and I am in Him and He is in me.”

“I didn’t but He did, because I was in Him and He was in me.”

We have three distinct Peters in the New Testament. The spiritual life of the Peter in the Gospels is full of ups and downs, but then the Peter we meet in Acts is very different. This Peter is very stable. After Pentecost, Peter does not seem to have a down side.

I have said all that to say: As you read the Epistles of Peter you meet a third Peter. This is the old man Peter. Peter has known that he is nobody and he has known what God can do through somebody who knows that he is nobody for a long, long time. He is an old pastor when he writes these letters.

He is writing to the Jewish followers of Christ who are scattered all over Asia Minor, in what is today Turkey. They have been scattered by persecution. Peter is in Rome. When Peter makes reference to Babylon, he really means Rome. Peter knows that the persecution in Rome is getting worse and that it is going to spread to those provinces where the Hebrew followers of Christ have been scattered. Peter’s primary reason for writing is that, as a pastor, he wants to comfort and console those people in their suffering. That seems to be the major emphasis of both these letters.

Before you read the letters of Peter, I would like to share one more insight with you. Peter could not read or write. That is why he has to say to us at the end of one of these letters: "By Sylvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly." (I Peter 5:12)

As you read Peter’s letters, you will not find a systematic argument. Look for some beautiful, profound, devotional, spiritual nuggets of truth that address the reality of knowing God and Jesus Christ. Peter sometimes jumps from subject to subject and sometimes Peter shares spiritual truths that are very difficult to understand.

For example: Peter presents Jesus preaching to the spirits in prison. Martin Luther said, "Nobody knows what this passage means." After writing this difficult passage, Peter suddenly changes the subject and talks about Noah and the flood. That leads him to the subject of baptism. He shares with us his inspired reflections on baptism. Remember, Peter is not writing; he is just sharing out of his heart.

John is the apostle of love. Paul is the apostle of faith. But Peter is the apostle of hope. The letters of Peter give hope to people who are suffering.

The Peter we meet in the Gospels was probably a profane man when he met Jesus. "Precious" is not one of the words he would have used at that point in his life. The word “precious” is a word an old man would use. The Peter we meet in his two letters is the old

pastor Peter to whom God is precious, the Word is precious, salvation is precious, and the people of God are precious.

Chapter 9

The First Letter of Peter

Peter is writing to Jewish Christians who were scattered throughout Asia Minor. Peter's ministry is primarily to Jewish believers. Peter is trying to encourage them and comfort them in their suffering. He gives them some wonderful insights into why God permits His people to suffer.

He is writing from Rome where followers of Christ are being persecuted. He knows this persecution is going to get worse and spread to the provinces where the recipients of his letters are living. The church in its first generation experienced great persecution. In fact, for the first three hundred years of church history, it was illegal to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Peter gives two perspectives on the suffering of those to whom he is writing. One is, "if need be". He believes God must sometimes permit us to suffer because we need to suffer. His second observation about suffering is that some suffering is, "for a season". In other words, much suffering is only temporary.

He makes a third observation about suffering when he relates

their precious faith to gold. Gold is a precious metal and gold is purified through the testing of fire. As God looks down on their lives, the things that really matter to Him are their faith and their spiritual growth (I Peter 1:6-7).

When Peter focuses the subject of salvation, he then addresses the concepts of being born again and election. The prophets had prophesied the salvation that was preached on the Day of Pentecost. He makes the interesting observation, that when they wrote, even though they wrote in the power and the inspiration of the Spirit, they did not understand what they were writing about. He observes that in the day and time in which his readers were living, this salvation had been fulfilled, which was clearly written in the prophetic literature of the Word of God.

We are very short on the historical perspective that appreciates the number of people who had to die so that we could have many of the spiritual blessings we enjoy today. For example, consider the Scripture, the written Word of God. When we began this course, I shared a few thoughts about how the Bible was put together. A simple study of how we got the Bible will help you to realize how indebted you and I are to the people who gave their lives that you and I might have the Word of God the way we have it today.

As we gain historical perspective on the subject of salvation, Peter reminds us that we owe much to a great many people. If it is harvest time today, remember that many, many people suffered to sow the seed so that you and I might reap the harvest we are reaping

today (John 4:36-38).

Peter reminds us of what we learned when we studied the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Ruth, when he writes that Jesus was our “Goel,” or our “kinsman redeemer.” Just as Boaz did for Ruth, Jesus bought us back to God by His death, and brought us back to God through His resurrection by establishing a relationship with us (I Peter 1:18,19).

Reflections on Regeneration

When you are born again, it is not necessary to understand that experience before it happens to you. You did not need to understand your physical birth to be born into this world. Your physical birth happened to you. Your physical birth was a passive experience for you - you were born. The new birth also happens to you and then, as you look back and reflect, you understand what happened to you.

The important thing about any subjective spiritual experience is not the details but the results of that experience. That is the way this great Apostle profiles the new birth for us: "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the Word of God which lives and abides forever." (I Peter 1:22,23)

Peter compares spiritual birth with physical birth. He tells us that when we were born again, the seed (the Greek word is sperm) was an incorruptible seed. Peter tells us that incorruptible “seed” was the Word of God, and our faith was like an “egg.” When we responded to the Word of God in faith that Word of God was like an incorruptible “sperm” that fertilized the “egg” of our faith. Spiritual life was conceived in us when we believed the Word of God.

Peter also gives us several spiritual insights into the “how to” of the new birth when he tells us that we were being born again when we purified our souls by hearing, believing, and responding to the Word of God with obedience.

Have you ever wondered what the relationship of the New Testament church is to the Old Testament people of God? Here is a passage that brings the two together. In the Old Testament, God clearly wanted to have a kingdom, but the people of Israel came to Samuel and told Samuel they did not want God to be their King.

After all of that kingdom disaster, captivity, and 400 years of silence, Jesus and John the Baptist came preaching the Good News of the kingdom of God, which was like saying, "God is willing to be your King again." Jesus explained, "When I speak of the kingdom of God, it is within every individual who will submit to God, crown Him the King of their life, and become His loyal subject." (Luke 17:21; John 3:3-5)

Writing to Hebrew followers of Christ who were scattered all over Asia Minor, Peter tells them they are a holy nation and that they

are the people of God. He also tells them that they a royal priesthood (I Peter 2:9,10). A priest is someone who goes into the presence of God and intercedes for other people. These people were also priests. They had been sent out by God all over that part of the world to make disciples for Jesus Christ and to intercede with God on behalf of those who became disciples.

He also writes, "You are a chosen people" and "you are like aliens and strangers in the world." In addition to being a holy nation, a royal priesthood, and a chosen people, these people are aliens and strangers in this world.

The Marriage Model

In the third chapter of First Peter, we find some of the best marriage counsel in the Bible. Both Peter and Paul say, essentially, "Women, do you see that model of Christ and the church? In that model, you are the church. Men, do you see that model of Christ and the church? That is the inspired model for marriage, and in that model, you are Christ."

Peter addresses his inspired marriage counsel to the woman who has a husband who does not obey the Word. That may mean she is married to an unbeliever and he does not obey the Word, or he could be a believer but does not always obey the Word.

In the marriage counsel of Peter and Paul, the woman is told to be submissive to her husband as the church is submissive to Christ. It is not easy to be submissive, but that is not really the

biggest problem in the marriages of believers. The biggest problem is men who will not assume their responsibility to shepherd wives and children as Christ shepherds the church.

Peter also counsels the woman to win her husband without a word. Peter says; Her husband is not obeying the Word, which means he is not standing in his place in their marriage. Before he writes one verse to such a husband, Peter counsels such a woman to be spiritual, be submissive, be sweet and be silent.

Focus on this word "submissive" as we consider the model for marriage Peter is presenting. At the end of chapter two, Peter makes reference to Jesus Christ and His death on the cross as the Suffering Servant Who is prophetically profiled in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

His last words refer to Jesus Christ as the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. Then he points to that model of Jesus Christ shepherding the church, and he begins his counsel to this woman with the word, "likewise." He is telling this woman that she should submit to her husband, as the church is submissive to Christ.

This word "submissive" in the context in which Peter uses it really means "let your husband shepherd you." God has given your husband a great responsibility. Your husband is being commanded to shepherd you the way Christ shepherds the church. That means your husband is to love you as Christ loves; he is to give to you as Christ gives; he is to be to you even as Christ is. Paul gives the very

same marriage counsel in his letter to the Ephesians (Ephesians 5:22-25)

In the military, you have one commanding officer. You cannot have two commanding officers. He may delegate the authority to other people for many things. However, he never delegates the responsibility. If anything goes wrong, he alone is responsible.

In the marriage counsel of Peter and Paul, and throughout the Bible, God delegates the responsibility for the marriage and the home to the husband when He commands men to shepherd their wives even as Christ shepherds the church. At the same time, God commands the women to let their husbands be responsible for them and their children. Responsibility does imply that you cannot have two commanding officers. Someone must have the responsibility and God assigns that responsibility to the man.

The first word with which Peter begins his counsel to the men in verse seven is the same word with which he began his counsel to the women. When we men read the word “likewise” again, we should ask the question, “Like what, Peter?” Peter answers us: “Go back and look at the inspired model for marriage. Do you see Christ and the church in the last verse of chapter two? Husbands, in that model you are Christ. Dwell with your wives just as if you were Christ. You love them even as Christ loved the church. Give yourselves to your wives even as Christ gave himself for the church. And you be to your wives even as Christ is to the church.”

“Likewise, you husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge.” (Peter 3:7) Peter did not tell the husbands to understand their wives. It may be that we men and women who are married do not even understand ourselves. Peter actually tells the men, “Dwell with them according to knowledge.” You may not understand your wife but you can know your wife.

Peter gives the husbands some practical advice when he writes: “Dwell with them.” That means make time for them. Make them a priority and then make time for them. You may think this is unnecessary counsel, but the hard reality is that many husbands dwell everywhere but at home with their wives and children.

In Summary

When Gideon defeated the Midianites, we read that he and his 300 “stood every man in his place” and that was the key to God giving them their incredible victory (Judges 7:21). This is what Peter is saying in his great marriage counsel. Each person in a marriage should stand in his or her place. There is a place for the woman to stand. She has a role, she has a function, she has a ministry, and she has a place. There is a place for the man to stand. He has a role, he has a function, and he has a ministry and that is the place where he should stand. When the man is out of place, the wife should not push, pull, scold, or preach him into place. She should stand in her place, and if anything will move her husband into his place it will be her loving example.

Do you see that model, women? You are the church. Stand in your place. Be to your husband as the church is to Christ.

Do you see that model, men? You are Christ. You be to your wife as Christ is to the church. By the grace of God, both of you stand in your place. The roles Peter assigns to both require grace from God to fulfill. The greatest challenge is given to the husbands, because they are to be Christ to their wives.

Difficult passages of Peter

Peter concludes his second letter with the observation that there are many things written by Paul that are difficult to understand. I imagine that the Apostle Paul has already asked Peter about some passages I would now like to consider. I begin by considering the most difficult passage in the letters of Peter (3:17-4:2).

In just eight verses, Peter refers to ten major subjects. He tells us that when Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world, though His body died, His Spirit lived on, and it was in the Spirit that He visited the spirits in prison and preached to them - spirits of those who had refused to listen to the Gospel when they had a chance, as in the day of Noah.

Apparently, after Christ died on the cross, before His ascension, He had a ministry in the spirit world. According to Peter, Christ had a ministry of deliverance in the spirit world. This passage is describing things “the angels desire to look into” to use the words of Peter, so it’s hard to say with certainty.

Peter the pastor shares that the end of all things is near and in light of that, what kind of holy people they should be. Here Peter gives us some interesting insight into the spiritual gifts and the ministries that are made possible by those spiritual gifts.

According to this practical spiritual giant, whatever your gift is, that is what your ministry pattern should be. If your gift is preaching, then preach. The popular trend is that you prove your humility by being willing to do everything. Everybody does everything. But that is not what the Scripture teaches. All the teaching in the Scripture about spiritual gifts reminds us that they are diverse and bestowed on each believer as it pleases God. They are given by the Holy Spirit to hold up Christ, and to encourage the body of Christ. Through your spiritual gifts you minister to me and through my spiritual gifts I minister to you.

As Peter goes on in chapter four, he gives more advice about suffering. If you are suffering, Peter says again, "Don't think it is strange that you are suffering. Don't be bewildered by the fact that you have problems or that you are suffering." (1 Peter 4:12) We think problems and suffering are intruders, calamities, and catastrophes that are not supposed to happen. We cannot understand why they ever happened to us. In most of the world, people are more realistic. They know suffering is a part of life. And, really, the one thing that distinguishes one person from another is not whether or not they are suffering, but how they cope with their suffering.

You are responsible for yourself. You may not be responsible for all the things that happen to you, but you are responsible for what you are going to do about them. The issue is how are you going to respond to all your problems?

We all have storms of life but we also have the grace and power of God to get through them. God has given us the Word of God, which is our belief system. When we process our storms through that belief system, through the Word, God can give us the wisdom to cope with our problems. He can also give us the grace to apply that wisdom. That leads to what Peter would call our "witness". God permits the storm because God wants us to be a witness for Him. We can be good witnesses, or we can be poor witnesses, but we are all witnesses.

For the faithful follower of Christ, suffering is a calling. You were saved because Somebody suffered. You have been called to follow in His steps. You are identified with Him - a partner in His suffering. Some say God never wants His people to suffer. But here, Peter clearly says, that sometimes, it is the will of God, and even your calling that you should suffer." (1 Peter 4:19)

A Word for the Elders

Chapter five is addressed to the elders of the church. "Now, a word to you elders of the church. I, too, am an elder." Peter is humble, an elder along with other elders. As we looked at the three Peters in our introduction to the writings of Peter, we understand

why. He tells them that they should take the shepherding responsibility of the church, not as lords, but as examples.

When you study the leadership structure of the church, you will not find anything in this world to compare with the church as an organization. The church should not be like a company with a president, owner, and employees. The only influence an elder has in a church is his example. If his example impresses people, they will come to him, seek his counsel, and take his counsel. That is the influence the shepherds have in the church, not authority like in the military, or in a business.

The Man who trained Peter said this: "They love to be greeted with respect in public places, and to have men call them 'Rabbi'. Do not ever be called 'Rabbi'. You have one Teacher and all of you are brothers. Do not call any human being 'Father', for you have one Father and He is in heaven. You must not let people call you 'leaders' because you have one Leader, Christ. The only superior among you is to be the one who serves the others. Everyone who promotes himself will be humbled; and everyone who learns to be humble will find promotion." (Matthew 23:7-12)

Peter closes his first letter with a capsule autobiography of his life. He writes: "But may the God of all grace, Who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." (I Peter 5:10) After Peter had suffered awhile, then God made Peter perfect, mature or complete.

God established Peter, God strengthened Peter, God settled Peter down. And it is that third Peter who writes these words.

That one verse is the story of Peter's life. Peter is saying, "Here is the purpose of some suffering: God is just trying to grow you, and so, this calamity, this catastrophe that you are going through simply means that after awhile, God will come and pick you up and put you firmly in place and make you stronger than ever because you have been through this experience of suffering."

Chapter 10

The Second Letter of Peter

Peter knew he was going to die when he wrote his second letter. Just as the Apostle Paul gave us his last will and testament in his second letter to Timothy, Peter shares his last words to the sheep he promised his lord he would shepherd in his second letter.

"Repetition is the essence of education." I once heard an educator put it that way. Knowing that his days are numbered, the old pastor folds his arms and shares out of his heart some of the things he knows his readers already know that he wants them to remember.

Peter tells us in the opening verses that grace and peace can be multiplied to us through the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ

our Lord. In verse three of his opening statement, he reminds the sheep of something he probably told them many times: "His divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness." Peter then tells his readers how they can get them: "... through the knowledge of Him Who has called you to glory and virtue." That leads Peter into this statement: "God has given us exceedingly great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of the divine nature."

These things that pertain to life and godliness come to us as a result of our relationship with God and Christ. According to Peter, those are precious promises and by the implementation of those precious promises, we can be partakers of the divine nature.

We believe today that knowledge is virtue. However, in spiritual things, the Scriptures tell us what we heard from the prophets, from Jesus, and we hear now from the Apostle Peter - that knowledge is not virtue. The application of knowledge is virtue. Make the observation that Peter does not write, "Add to your faith knowledge." Peter writes, "Add to your faith virtue."

Virtue is the application of your faith that simply amounts to goodness. Virtue is character. When you have succeeded in adding virtue, or Christ-like character to your faith, then, you add knowledge. That's why our emphasis should be upon the application of the Scripture. The important thing is "What does this passage say? What does it mean? What does it mean to you? And how do you apply this passage to the practical areas of your life?" It is in the

application of the Scripture that the Scripture will become the spiritual force it is designed to be. According to Peter, we must add to our faith virtue, and then to our virtue knowledge.

Peter goes on, "Add to your knowledge temperance", or self-control. "Add to temperance patience, add to patience godliness, add to godliness brotherly kindness and then, add to your brotherly kindness love." These additions to faith represent one of the finest passages in the Scripture on the subject of spiritual growth. Then, if disciples experience these additions to faith, we have these promises: "If you do add these things to your faith, by the grace of God, you will grow spiritually, you will be fruitful and useful. You will be able to live a strong and good life for the Lord and you will prove that you are among the called of God. You will make your calling and election sure. You will enter heaven and, until you do enter heaven, you will never stumble."

Peter begins his final words of wisdom with a word of personal testimony: "I was on the Mount of Transfiguration and I saw our Lord Jesus Christ transfigured." Essentially, Peter tells us, "Even though I have had the ultimate in experience, I want to tell you something. The Word of God that has come to us through this process of inspiration is a more sure Word from God than my experience on the Mount of Transfiguration."

Peter tells us that we would do well to come to that Word of God as if you were coming to a Light shining in a dark place. While we are coming to that light, something happens in our hearts. Peter

describes it beautifully: "The day will dawn and the Morning Star will rise in your heart." What is that Morning Star that rises in your heart? That Morning Star is the risen, living Jesus Christ. Peter is telling us again how Christ is born in us.

It is interesting that Peter and Paul both give us great statements about the Word of God in their last words to the church and the world. Peter does this in the first chapter of his second letter and Paul does the same in the third chapter of his second letter to Timothy. Paul tells us the Word of God is inspired, and Peter tells us what inspiration is. Peter tells us those who wrote the inspired Scriptures were moved by the Holy Spirit the way wind moves the sails of a ship. Peter relates his statement about the inspiration of Scripture to the new birth experience.

Chapter two is very much like the Epistle of Jude, so we will not spend a lot of time with it. Like Jude, Second Peter chapter two is a rebuke of false teachers. In the third chapter, Peter writes about "the Day of the Lord".

"The Day of the Lord" is one event among a series of events that are referred to collectively as "The Second Coming of Jesus Christ". The Second Coming of Jesus Christ is not one event; it is a series of events, including the Rapture of the church, the Great Tribulation, the kingdom of God on earth, and resurrections. But the last of all those events called "The Second Coming of Jesus Christ" is "The Day of the Lord".

“The Day of the Lord” is a cataclysmic event that was preached by many of the prophets and involves the absolute dissolving of every material thing on earth. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away." Peter clearly states that the earth and the heavens are all going to be destroyed. They are going to melt with fervent heat.

Since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we know that man can do what Peter and the prophets predicted. God did it once by water and He is reserving it now for this great fire. According to Peter, it is going to happen just as the prophets said it would happen.

We are not to think He is slow in coming because time is relative to God. So, why does He wait? The only reason Christ has not come and started this chain of events that will culminate in “The Day of the Lord” is that God wants to get the Gospel out to a lost world. He is not willing that any should perish. Because He loves mankind, He wants to give a few more the opportunity for salvation.

Peter says we can hasten this day along as we witness for Christ and present the Gospel to people who have never heard it. The question we should ask, as we look at this awesome account of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is: What manner of persons ought we to be seeing that all these things are going to be destroyed?

Chapter 11

The First Letter of John

I call the first sixteen verses of First John “The Assurance Compass”. Assurance is the theme of this entire letter. Do you have the absolute assurance that your sins are forgiven and that if you died today, you would be in heaven? If you lack that assurance, then you must read this letter.

This author, who also wrote the Revelation, and two other very short letters that are named for him, always tells us why he is writing. He wrote the Gospel of John that we might believe and have eternal life. He writes this letter to those who believe, that they might know, and then really believe. In other words, he is writing to those who are looking for assurance, the assurance of their salvation. If you are insecure spiritually, and you do not have the absolute assurance of your salvation, John is saying, "I wrote this for you." (John 20:30,31; I John 5:13)

"If a man knows not, and knows not that he knows not, he is a fool. Shun him. If a man knows not, and he knows that he knows not, he is a child. Teach him. If a man knows, and he knows not that he knows, he is asleep. Wake him. But if a man knows, and he knows that he knows, he is a leader. Follow him." John is writing this letter to people who know that they might know that they know they have salvation.

The first sixteen verses of First John, present to us, just as the Gospel of John did, a kind of overview of what John is going to tell us. We all need a spiritual compass. We will find that Assurance Compass in this inspired epistle of assurance. Just as there are eight points on a compass, here are the eight points I find on the assurance compass of the Apostle John: The first point on this Assurance Compass is the Gospel facts.

John tells us that faith is based on facts. Faith is not a step in the dark or a leap in the light. As we learned in the faith chapter of the Bible, faith is based on evidence. Faith gives substance to our hopes. That is the difference between hope and faith. Without evidence that gives us a basis for our hope, all we can do is just hope. But faith always has a foundation of evidence on which it is founded.

John is writing about the risen Christ when he begins this letter by essentially telling his readers, "Listen, we are eye witnesses and we have actually seen Him up close. We put our fingers in the nail prints in His hands; we put our hand in His side. Our faith in a risen Christ is based upon facts."

When you compare books like the Gospel of John and the other books of the New Testament, there are two Gospel facts that emerge: the death of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul essentially wrote the Corinthians: "Jesus Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; Jesus Christ rose from the dead, according to the Scriptures. That is the Gospel. That is what I preached to you in Corinth. That is what you believed and believing

that is what saved you." (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

The next point on the "Assurance Compass" is faith. You must put faith in those two Gospel facts. The second point is faith in the facts. The third point is the result of putting faith in the fact of the death of Jesus, which makes all the difference in the world! Your sins are forgiven!

What John is building for us here in this Assurance Compass is simply this: If you really have faith in the fact of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, then you have forgiveness. The result of putting faith in the fact of the death of Jesus Christ is forgiveness. I mean absolute forgiveness.

In the Greek language, present tense represents continuous time. Therefore, anytime you have present tense you can inject the word "continuously." "If we continuously confess our sins, He continuously cleanses us. The blood of Christ just keeps on cleansing us from all unrighteousness." Forgiveness is the result of believing in the death of Jesus Christ.

The next point on this compass of assurance is the result of believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ - you can know Him and have fellowship with the living Christ.

The word fellowship means something like partnership or being in the ship together. Just as Jesus got in Peter's little ship and then filled Peter's ship with fish, Jesus Christ can get in your ship - your life - with you. It means that everything He has in the way of resources is yours. If you are in a fellowship with Him, then

everything you have is His too. Fellowship is the fourth point on the Assurance Compass.

The fifth point on the Assurance Compass is following Christ. When people told Jesus they believed in Him, He always said, "Follow Me." John is going to say again and again, "Hereby we know, because we keep His commandments and do the things that He commanded us to do." (2:6) That is how we know that we know we have authentic faith and eternal life.

After following, the next point on the compass is freedom. In so many words, Jesus said in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John, "If you believe in Me, then continue in My word and become My disciples indeed." Following, or discipleship validates and grows faith. But then He describes the result of following Him. He said, "If you continue in My word (He did not say how long), you will know the truth (and He used a word that means "to know by relationship") and when you know the truth, the truth will make you free." (John 8:30-35)

John says, "I am writing these things to you that you sin not. If you do sin, the good news is you have an Advocate with the Father, and there is forgiveness. But I am writing these things to you that you sin not." (1 John 2:1) You see it is possible to be set free from sin.

Another point on the Assurance Compass is what we might call "fullness". In 1:4, John says, "I am writing to you that your joy might be full." What we have is real and what we have is good, but

there is more. John wants us to have the full experience. We might refer to that as "fullness."

I call the eighth point on the Assurance Compass fruitfulness. Jesus told the apostles how they could be fruitful because He wanted their joy to be full. (John 15:11) John believes some fruit for God in our experience of Christ will bring assurance to our journey of faith.

We come to a spiritual experience the way we come to everything else, with a self-centered way of thinking. What is in it for me? But as we saw in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, we are really mature when we ask this question: "Lord, what do You want me to do for You?" As the Lord answers that question for us, the Bible calls that "being fruitful".

In summary, the eight points on the Assurance Compass are: facts, faith, forgiveness, fellowship, following, freedom, fullness and fruitfulness. If you find that you are not fruitful, or that you do not have the fullness, then go back to the beginning of this compass and check all eight points on your compass again.

Chapter 12

The Anointing that Assures

In chapter two, John continues to tell us how we can know that we believe and have eternal life. He tells us that we can know

we believe when we love our brother. "He who loves his brother," John writes, "This person is in Christ. This person is truly a believer. But the man who does not love his brother is still walking in darkness."

He then tells us that we know we have authentic faith and eternal life when we love the Father more than we love the world. The world system is what John has in mind here. The world has a belief system that involves a set of secular values, a lifestyle, and a way of thinking. John is telling us here that if we live for and love this world, then we do not love God.

As John continues, he gives us more ways we can affirm our assurance. "We know that we know," John tells us in chapter two, "because the Holy Spirit keeps us doctrinally pure." There is a sense in which what John is really saying here is "You know that you know because you know."

John tells us in verse 20, "You have an anointing from the Holy One and you know all things." Then in verse 27 he essentially writes, "This anointing which you have in you, that you have received has taught you." To paraphrase and summarize, John is saying, "This anointing can teach you. And when this anointing that you have in you teaches you spiritual things, you have another affirmation of your faith and eternal life. You could not possibly know the things that anointing teaches you if you did not have eternal life in you. If the Holy Spirit is living in you and teaching you, you

have discovered yet another key to the assurance of your faith and eternal life.

One of the functions of this Anointing Who lives in us is to teach us spiritual truth. It seems that the doctrinal basis of fellowship in the New Testament church was very basic. Paul wrote: "No man can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." John tells us that this is the doctrinal test by which you should examine people: Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? That is the appropriate question to ask when you need to discover where people are doctrinally.

I have had people respond when I have asked that question, "He was not the Christ. He had some of the Christ in Him, but so did Buddha, so did Gandhi. A lot of people have had the Christ in them, but Jesus was not the Christ." John writes that if we say Jesus was not the Christ, we are antichrist, and a liar because Jesus is the Christ. (I John 2:22)

In chapter three, John tells us we have two kinds of people in this world. We have sons of God and sons of the devil. John tells you that if you want to tell the difference, it is pretty simple. John just puts it this way, in chapter three: "The children of the devil sin." They definitely habitually, continuously sin. It is their practice to sin. But the children of God do not habitually sin. The children of God do not make it a practice to sin. Their pattern is not a continuous, habitual pattern of sin.

As I observed in chapter one, in the Greek language, the present tense represents continuous time. John is not saying that the children of God cannot sin, or that they will never sin. He means that when they sin, they fall into sin. Sin is not natural for them. The children of the devil continuously, habitually sin. The children of God do not continuously habitually sin. When we see that the pattern of our life has dramatically changed and that pattern is not to sin, we know that we believe and have eternal life.

At the end of chapter three, John writes another great passage on assurance. When you are depressed or, as John puts it here, "When your heart condemns you", are you lost because of your feelings? When your heart does not condemn you, are you assured of eternal life? No! When your heart condemns you, remember this: God is greater than your heart. God is bigger than the way you feel. Your salvation is not based upon something as fickle as how you feel. Your salvation is based on the solid reality that you believe - and that you obey your Lord (3:19-22).

Chapter 13

The Confession That Confirms

In the opening verses of chapter four, John tells us how to test the spirits. He warns us that many false spirits are in this world and he shows us how to know the difference between good and evil spirits: "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God but is the spirit of anti-Christ."

How does a spirit confess that Jesus is come in the flesh? The Apostle of love answers that question. When we love one another, we are confessing that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. In this way, John is telling us that when we experience the Spirit of Christ loving in and through our mortal flesh, we have found another way we can know that we have faith and eternal life. He agrees with the Apostle Paul that the fruit of the Spirit is love. (Galatians 5:22,23)

He then gives us ten reasons why we must love one another (4:7-21). First of all, we must love one another because love is of God. Only those whose spirits are confessing the love of Christ can love because real love is of God.

We must love because this is how you can tell the authentic disciples of Christ from those who merely profess to be His disciples: those who love are born of God. Those who do not love are not born of God. That makes testing the spirits very simple.

John's third reason why we must love comes in verse eight of chapter four. We must love because God is love. Love is the essence of what God is. Love is the essence of God's being. If you say that you are born of God, then your credential must be love.

In verses ten and eleven, John says we must love because we have been given the great example of love. John points to Jesus Christ dying on the cross and he says, "Herein is love. ... If He so loved us, we ought also to love one another." So, you show that you have embraced the Gospel when you love with agape love.

In verse sixteen, John writes: "God is love and he who dwells in love dwells in God and God dwells in him." Think of God as being all around you, as a loving God Who wants to love hurting people through you. Love is what God is. God is love. Therefore, if you dwell in this love that God is, you will dwell in God and God will dwell in you. When that happens, believe me, you will find another way you can know that you believe and have eternal life.

John says in verse 17 of chapter 4 that we must love one another because if we do, we can have boldness when we are judged in the eternal state. As you think about judgment, do you think that you will approach the judgment seat of Christ with boldness? John tells us that if we love as we should, we could approach judgment with boldness.

John writes in verse seventeen, we must love because "as He is, so are we in this world." We are, in this world, the essence of Christ. If Christ is in us and this agape love is revealing itself and

expressing itself through us, then this will be true, "as He is, so are we in this world."

John tells us in verse 18 of First John chapter 4 that we must love one another because "perfect love casts out fear." If you loved perfectly, you would eliminate fear. When you understand the love of Christ, and especially what it means to love God and love your brother, you will understand how perfect love can cast out fear. We fear losing our lives and all that we have. If we love God completely, we have already surrendered our lives to God and have given everything to Him. What then what have we to fear?

Then John tells us, in verse twenty of chapter four, that we must love one another because the vertical love for God and the horizontal love for the brother are inseparable. The man who claims to love God but hates his brother is a liar. We must love one another because he who loves God must love his brother also.

John's tenth reason why we must love one another is in the form of a commandment: "This commandment have we from Him, that He who loves God, love his brother also." There is a sense in which John's tenth reason why we should love one another should be the only reason John needed to give us: Jesus commanded that we love one another.

In chapter five, John tells us that faith is the key to our assurance when he writes: "Faith is the victory that overcomes the world." We overcome the world with our faith. And if you have this overcoming faith, that is another affirmation of your assurance.

In chapter five, John tells us there are three witnesses in our experience that give us assurance. When John references the water, he is probably referring to water baptism. The essence of water baptism is that it makes it impossible to be a secret disciple of Jesus Christ.

The Second and Third Letters of John

In Second and Third John, the emphasis is on the truth that Christ taught. John sounds like a theologian in Second and Third John because he is concerned about the truth Jesus taught and our standing fast in your commitment to that truth. He has no greater joy than hear that his little children walk in the truth taught by Jesus. That truth was already being distorted and perverted when John wrote these short letters.

This apostle of love exhorts the leaders to whom he writes to be very hard on the people who do not teach what Jesus taught. Heresy, or the perversion of the teaching of Jesus, began very early in church history because in these little epistles you will hear this apostle of love say, "If people do not believe that Jesus is the Christ, if they do not pass that doctrinal test, do not even invite them in for lunch. Do not even bid them Godspeed. Have nothing to do with them."

As John writes these letters, he addresses Second John "To

the elect lady". If you take that literally, this is the only book in the whole Bible addressed to a woman. Apparently, John had a pastoral relationship with this elect lady.

But John also had problem people, like Diotrephes, "who loved to have the preeminence", according to John. He describes this man in verses nine and ten of Third John. Pastors today may find consolation in the fact that this beloved old Apostle John had a man in his church who must have been a perpetual pain to him.

Chapter 14

The Letter of Jude

In the inspired letter of Jude, we find a one-chapter book that is very similar to the second chapter of Second Peter. The concern of the one who writes this very short letter is heresies, or false teachers. A man named Judas wrote this letter. Scholars conclude that this man was another one of the earthly half-brothers of Jesus.

Jude tells us that he had planned to write a treatise on salvation, but he changed his mind because some people were not teaching the right doctrine. They were teaching that because God is a gracious God, God would never discipline His children. Jude is concerned about people who seem to be falling away from faith because they have heard and believed this teaching.

Jude focuses on the fourteenth chapter of the Book of Numbers, where we read that a whole generation of God's chosen people died in the wilderness. They went around in circles for forty years because they did not have the faith to invade Canaan. God makes two exceptions. Caleb and Joshua entered the land of Canaan because they wholly believed and followed the Lord.

Jude reminds the false teachers about the death of that generation. These false teachers were telling the people that you can do as you please and God will not do anything about it, as if God were some kind of old grandfather. Scriptures teach us that there is another side to the loving character of God - one of wrath and judgment - because God is a holy God.

Another example Jude gives is of the fallen angels. Jude writes that the fallen angels were cast into the bottomless pit. God did not just sit by and watch the angels who did not do His will, without doing something about it.

Jude's third example is of Sodom and Gomorrah - how Sodom and Gomorrah perished in fire and brimstone. Jude is emphasizing the judgment of God through these examples he is sharing with these false teachers and the people who believe their false teaching.

Jude tells us these false teachers are like "dirty foam along the beach left by wild waves." They are like "fruit trees without fruit." They are like "wandering stars that streak off into the dark gloom that

God has prepared for them." The fate of the wandering stars parallels the fate of the fallen angels.

Jude is very concerned about those who have been victims of this false teaching. He writes that we are to try to reclaim these people. We should try to snatch them out of the fire without getting burned ourselves.

Jude concludes his letter with some exhortations for those people who have been reclaimed. These are plain and practical exhortations about staying true to the faith. I like these exhortations of Jude. Jude says, "Learn to pray in the strength and the power of the Holy Spirit." And then, I like this one: "You should stay always within the boundaries where God's love can reach and bless you."

For many centuries, pastors have used his closing benediction to close their services: "Now to Him Who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen." (Jude 24,25)

Chapter 15

The Book of Revelation

In the opening verses of the Book of Revelation, we read that the Apostle John was on the Isle of Patmos because of his faith. Comparing Scripture with tradition, we conclude that John was exiled to this remote island. Scholars disagree about whether he was there alone or as a slave laborer. While he was there, he experienced a revelation of Jesus Christ. The word "revelation" comes from the Greek word "apocalypses" which means, "to pull back a veil".

The Sign Language of the Savior

This revelation was "signified" to John, which means it was given to John in "sign language." The Jews had a beautiful biblical "sign language" and we see that sign language demonstrated in the Book of Revelation. You will remember that the word "sign" is one of John's favorite words (John 20:30,31; 2:11; 21:25). In the Revelation, these symbols, or signs, are biblical signs. You will find them elsewhere in the Bible, and if you find them where they occur elsewhere in the Bible and understand them there, that can help you understand what they mean in the Book of Revelation.

As you study the Revelation, make a chart for yourself. Since you will need many pages for this chart, I recommend a large notebook with many pages. Draw vertical lines on this chart creating several columns. In the first column of this chart, write the word

"Signs". List the signs or symbols that are found in this book in column number one - for example: the white horse, the sea of glass, the four beasts, the seven candlesticks, etc.

In the second column, put at the top of the column "Personal Revelation". Ask the Holy Spirit to pull back the veil for you and show you what the signs mean. Put your own personal revelation in the second column.

At the top of the third column, write: "Biblical Reference", and list where this particular sign is found elsewhere in the Bible. If you have access to some good commentaries, in the next column write what they tell you each sign means.

Then, in the last column of this chart, put your final conclusion. If you do this assignment completely, you should have a 150-page chart for the Book of Revelation.

Keys that Unlock the Book of Revelation

When you appreciate the beautiful sign language of the revelation given to John, you will realize, that it is almost as if this is a book written from God to the people of God in code. As with any coded message, to understand this coded message, you must have the keys that break the code.

THE FIRST KEY

The first key is the Holy Spirit. You cannot understand spiritual things without the Holy Spirit. That is especially true when

you come to the Book of Revelation. Jesus told the apostles that He was giving them the Holy Spirit, Whom He called a Comforter, and that He would tell them about things to come.

THE SECOND KEY

The second key to this coded message is that these symbols, or signs, are biblical symbols. If you were a Jew, familiar with the Old Testament, these signs would not be foreign to you. For example, in chapter four, a door opens in heaven and you see somebody sitting on a throne. He is like a jasper and a sardis stone, and around the throne on which He is sitting there is a rainbow like an emerald.

A Jew would know that in Exodus chapter 28, the high priest was to wear a breastplate embedded with a jewel for each of the 12 tribes of Israel. The first jewel was a sardis. That represented the oldest tribe of Israel - the tribe of Reuben. The last jewel was a jasper. That represented the tribe of Benjamin. The emerald was the seventh jewel, representing Judah. In Hebrew, these names mean something. Reuben means, "Behold, My Son!" Benjamin means "son of my right hand" and Judah means, "praise". Therefore, what you have here in sign language is this: when we look through the door into heaven, there is a throne and the One sitting on that throne is described by these jewels which say to us, "Behold, My Son, the Son of My right hand! Praise Him!"

There is a phrase that is found many times in the last book of the Bible: "I am Alpha and Omega." The first letter of the Greek alphabet is alpha; the last is omega. That is usually interpreted for us, "I am the beginning and the end." We are going to have a revelation of the One, Jesus Christ; Who Himself is the beginning and the end.

Eternal Worship

In chapters four and five, you have a beautiful time of praise and worship taking place in the eternal state. Something beautiful is happening there. God the Father is directing the center of worship in heaven away from Himself to His Son, the Lamb, Who looks as if He has been slain. God is saying, "Worship My Son. Worship My Son because of what He has done, in light of what He was, what He is, and what He ever shall be, worship My Son!"

Since these symbols are biblical symbols, you can see why the people who organized the books of the Bible placed the Book of Revelation last. The prerequisite to understanding the Revelation, the last book of the Bible, is to understand the other sixty-five books of the Bible.

There are some other biblical symbols I would like to use as an illustration of this important key. Observe for example, in Revelation 1:4, 4:5 and 5:6 you have mention of "the seven spirits of God."

People who attach great significance to numbers in the

Scripture tell us that the number seven is the number of perfection, or completeness. This would suggest that the seven Spirits of God represent the composite, comprehensive, complete Spirit of God, or the perfect expression of God. In His essence, God is spiritual. However, many scholars believe that this expression, "the seven Spirits of God", takes us back to a prophecy of Isaiah.

In the prophecy of Isaiah, the prince of the prophets gave us a great Messianic prophecy that profiles seven Spirits of God. Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in this revelation given to the Apostle John about the seven spirits of God. Isaiah wrote: "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse and from its roots a branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him. (1) The spirit of wisdom, and (2) of understanding, (3) the spirit of counsel, and (4) of power, (5) the spirit of knowledge, (6) the spirit of the fear (or reverence) and (7) the spirit of worship of the Lord. In the next verse, Isaiah goes on to say that His delight would be in the Spirit of worship." (Isaiah 11:1,2,3)

Isaiah is telling us that when the Messiah comes, Jesus Christ will be the complete expression of God, Who, in His essence, is a Spirit. According to Isaiah, Jesus Christ will not only express this seven-fold spiritual essence of God, but will also, in His humanity, profile a Life that is truly Spirit-filled or Spirit-controlled. John is telling us that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus came.

We see seven lamps standing before a throne in heaven. We are told that these seven lamps represent the seven Spirits of God.

Then we read: "I saw a Lamb standing as though it had been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth." (5:6)

Scholars believe that horns represent power and eyes represent wisdom in the Scriptures. Therefore, this Lamb Who looked as if it had been slain, is an expression of the seven spirits of God. And this seven-fold expression of the Spirit of God also expressed the perfect power and wisdom of God when He was slain.

The Spirit of the Lord was very important in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus had the Spirit of knowledge, meaning He had a perfect knowledge of the Word of God. He also had the Spirit of understanding, meaning He had a perfect understanding of the Word and the will of His Father.

Jesus also had the Spirit of wisdom because He perfectly lived out the Word of God, and taught others how to apply God's Word. And then, the Spirit of counsel is part of this perfect expression of the Spirit of God. As Jesus shared the Word of God and its application to the lives of the people He interviewed, He was demonstrating the Spirit of counsel. When He shared the Word of God with people and they applied God's Word to their lives, the Holy Spirit anointed that Word with great power. That is when the Spirit of might was expressed through Jesus.

And then the Spirit of worship was so very obvious in the life of Jesus. Isaiah tells us His delight was in the Spirit of worship. When we read the four Gospels, we read that when Jesus was not

ministering to people, He was in solitude all night, or rising before daylight in worshipful prayer to His Father.

A Door Open into Heaven

In chapter four, verse one, we read that when John had the invitation extended to him to "come up here and I will show you things to come", it was the voice of a trumpet that ushered John into his revelation of heaven. Many believe this is a biblical symbol that signals the rapture of the church. The Apostle Paul writes that the rapture of the church will be announced by the sound of a trumpet. (I Thessalonians 4:16; I Corinthians 15:52)

When John looks through this open door into heaven, he sees a throne that is the central symbol in heaven. In front of that throne in heaven John sees a sea of glass. In the tent of worship and the Temple of Solomon, there was a laver where a priest cleansed himself in his intercessory approach to God in behalf of a sinner. The message was that we must be cleansed before we can approach a holy God. The priests continuously repeated this approach to God on behalf of sinners because sinners habitually needed forgiveness. In this sea of glass before the throne, the water is solidified into crystal, which represented a permanent and eternal cleansing.

In chapter five, there is a book sealed with seven seals and all those in heaven are trying to find someone to break the seals and open the book. No one is qualified or willing to open this book. This biblical symbolism takes us back to the Book of Ruth and the

concept of a kinsman redeemer. When a man like Boaz wanted to redeem a woman like Ruth, the woman's debts were sealed in a scroll. He was not permitted to break the seals and look in the scroll until he demonstrated his qualifications and declared his willingness to redeem her.

The message of this heavenly scene is that heaven is filled with people who need redemption, but there is no one there who is qualified or willing to redeem them. John wept much because there was no redeemer. Then, we hear the good news, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to lose its seven seals." The meaning of this symbolism is that He is qualified, He is willing, and He has prevailed to redeem us. He has redeemed us." (5:5)

When the door opens into heaven we read that there are four and twenty little thrones around the throne that is in heaven, and on these little thrones are seated twenty-four elders. These elders represent the leadership of the people of God - perhaps the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles.

THE THIRD KEY

The third key, which helps us to break the code of this coded message from God to the people of God, is the assignment that was given to John. That assignment forms the outline of the Revelation received by John on the isle of Patmos. Chapter one, verse nineteen, gives us that assignment and that outline. John was instructed to

“Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.”

In the first chapter of the Revelation, we read about John’s experience. What John saw in chapter one profiled the first part of his assignment when he was told to “Write the things which you have seen” and address that written revelation to the seven churches that were in Asia Minor at that time.

John was turned aside to see, just as Moses was turned aside to see God at the burning bush in the wilderness. (Exodus 3:3,4) John turned aside to see the voice that was speaking to him, and when he turned to see, the voice spoke with him. Observe the verbs John uses as he describes his experience for us. "Being turned," he says, "I saw. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead." The symbolism seems to be that the prerequisite to having a deep experience with God is to turn aside.

The Apostle John was completing the first part of his assignment when he recorded that experience. After John was told, to “Write the things which you have seen,” then he was instructed to, "Write the things which are." John completed the second part of his assignment in chapters two and three when it he wrote the letters to the churches in Asia Minor.

In summary, chapter one relates to the things John saw when he had his experience. Chapters two and three are the second part of his assignment, which was to "Write the things which are", that is, the things that existed in the seven churches. These churches,

Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, were real churches.

Remember that in chapter one of the Revelation, John saw seven gold lamp stands? His revelation of Christ was that Christ was in the midst of these lamp stands. John is told that the lamp stands are the churches. John is also told that the One in the midst of the lamp stands is Christ. Though those churches have many, many problems, the risen, living Christ is in the midst of His churches. No matter how far short of what they are to be these churches may fall, never forget this: Christ was in the midst of His churches.

The letter to the church at Ephesus essentially reads: "You do not love anymore." That intrigues me because Timothy was the overseer of that church. Paul told the Philippian church that he was sending Timothy to them because he knew no one who loved as Timothy loved. He was just naturally others-centered. Now, it seems as if the letter to the church under the oversight of Timothy is being asked by the risen Christ, "What happened to your love?" If you feel that you are a person through whom the Lord loves people, never forget you can lose that experience of being a vehicle through whom Christ loves the people He has given you to love with His love.

THE FOURTH KEY

The largest part of the assignment given to John begins at the beginning of chapter four: "Write the things which shall take place

after this." The great bulk of the Revelation has to do with the things that shall take place in the future.

To focus key number four you must understand the chronology of chapters six through nineteen in the Book of Revelation. Chapters four and five are very beautiful sign language that describes the worship that will take place in heaven. But when you get to chapter six of the Revelation, the tone changes and it becomes very difficult to understand.

The series of events known as the Second Coming of Jesus Christ cover a long period of time. Much time is covered from the first event until the last event has taken place. Exactly how much time depends on how you interpret these events and on how you arrange them chronologically. One of the shortest events is the seven-year period known as "The Great Tribulation". Jesus described it in His Mount Olivet Discourse. (Matthew 24:21-29)

Many scholars believe the Great Tribulation is to be a seven-year period. This Great Tribulation is what chapters six through nineteen of the Revelation are describing. All those chapters, from chapter six, when those horses come riding out, all the way up to the middle of chapter nineteen, are focusing one little seven-year period from among all these events called "The Second Coming of Jesus Christ".

The Great Tribulation is pictured in this part of Revelation as a series of judgments. As you read John's revelation of these judgments, seven seals are broken. Each time a seal is broken, there

is an awesome, terrible judgment! Then you read about seven trumpets. Each time one of these seven trumpets blow you have an awesome judgment.

The seals are broken in chapter six, the trumpets blow in chapters eight and nine. Then, in chapter sixteen, you read about seven bowls. These bowls are poured out and each time a bowl is poured out, there is judgment.

Some believe these judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls, are consecutive judgments. Others believe one period of judgment is being described in three different ways. In between these three judgments, you have information, which apparently is added commentary about the judgments. However, these commentaries, in chapters seven, ten through fifteen, and seventeen to nineteen, are definitely not in chronological order.

THE FIFTH KEY

The fifth key that unlocks the message of this revelation is: be humble about the chronology of all these events that are covered in the Revelation. I am very humble about the possible chronology that I suggest. According to Jesus, no one knows the day and hour when the end will come - not the angels, no, not even God's Son. Only the Father knows. (Matthew 24:36) When the apostles and early disciples asked Jesus about His agenda for restoring the kingdom to Israel, He essentially responded that it was not for them to know the times or seasons of these events because the Father has decided to

keep that to Himself. (Acts 1:7) Now, so help me, if the angels do not know, if the Son of God said He did not know, if only the Father knows, how can we be anything but humble when we attempt to put together a chronology of "the times and seasons" of these events?

One of these events is the Rapture of the church. After the church is taken out of the world, as we might expect, there is Great Tribulation on earth. Then you have the actual Second Coming of Christ where He returns, not to take His church out of the world, but to earth with His church to reign. Some believe that reign will be a literal kingdom that will last for a thousand years. Believers are divided in the way they interpret these events. Whatever chronology you work out and interpret these events, many believers will disagree with you. Be humble about your chronology and interpretation of these events.

THE SIXTH KEY

Our objective in reading the Book of Revelation should be to worship rather than to understand when we read this book. This is so very important. A blessing is promised upon the one who reads this book and who keeps the sayings of this book. (22:18) There are many devotional truths in this book - especially in the letters to the churches - that are instructional and devotional. There is much truth in the Revelation that we do understand and we are exhorted to obey. Believers have a tendency to worship the understanding of this book rather than God and the risen Christ Who gave this revelation to

John.

The beloved Apostle models this key on two occasions near the end of the book. We read that John fell at the feet of the angel who interpreted all these symbols for him and worshiped that angel. We can certainly understand why he would, but the angel said, "No, do not do that. I am a servant of God, just as you and your brothers and sisters are who testify of their faith in Jesus." (19:10, 22:8)

This is a clear statement of the purpose for reading the Book of Revelation. That purpose is not to understand it all, but to read the Book of Revelation the same way you read the Gospel of John - to see Jesus. Then worship the Jesus you see, and worship God! Let the Revelation increase your sense of awe, wonder and worship. And as you read this book, come into the presence of God.

THE SEVENTH KEY

The seventh key is to ask the question, "Why has God told us these things about the future?" As we have seen so many times before, when God pulls back the veil and tells us something about how it is all going to end, He has a purpose for pulling back that veil.

The application seems to be this: "In light of the fact that what I have showed you behind the veil is going to happen, what kind of people should you be right now in this present dimension? What holy lives you should be living!" God wants to have an impact upon our present, daily lives in light of all He has revealed in this last book of the Bible.

THE EIGHTH KEY

Beware of wishful thinking as you look behind the veil and see what is going to happen as far as the eternal state is concerned. The Scripture tells us all about life beyond the grave by using symbols. Many interpret this kind of Scripture the way they want the eternal state to be. The truth of this revelation is not determined by our wishful thinking. If you really want to know about life beyond this world and the grave, you must read this book with an open mind.

THE NINTH KEY

We find key number nine in chapters four and five. As you look through the opened door into heaven, make the observation that every symbol mentioned in those two beautiful chapters is described relative to its position to that throne which is the centerpiece of heaven. The Lamb is standing in the midst of the throne. The four and twenty little thrones are around the throne. Lightning and thunder are coming out of the throne. The seven lamps of fire are before the throne; the sea of glass is before the throne. The voice of many angels was heard around the throne.

In chapters four and five, you have saints around the throne of God singing a new song. That is beautiful! However, you also have sinners saluting the Lamb Who is on that throne, but they are given no location relative to the throne. We must conclude that the sinners are saluting Him from hell, because they are not in heaven. That is awesome!

THE TENTH KEY

Observe in the Revelation that two dramas being told simultaneously. A heavenly drama is told in chapters 4, 5, 19, 20, 21 and 22, and, at the same time, you have an earthly drama being told in chapters 6, 8, 9, 16, 19 and 20. Chapters 19 and 20 divide right down the middle as they tell both dramas.

THE ELEVENTH KEY

This is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, not the Book of Revelations. From chapter one through twenty-two, this is one continuous revelation of Jesus Christ. Just as you looked for Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John and even in the Old Testament, look for Jesus Christ in the Book of Revelation. See Christ revealed as the absolute King of kings and Lord of lords.

THE TWELFTH KEY

John was told that he was going to have a revelation of things, which must take place after this. (4:1) Since Almighty God is a just God, and there is so much injustice in this world, there has to be an ultimate justice like the judgments described in this Revelation given to the Apostle John.

THE THIRTEENTH KEY

Even though we should read to worship rather than to understand, read this revelation realizing that there is much you can understand. A blessing is promised if you read this book, really hear the message of this book and then apply that message to your life. (22:18)

THE FOURTEENTH KEY

Once you have read this last book of the Bible, compare this book and all of its passages that are eschatological, (which have to do with last things), with all the other passages of Scripture that tell us about the last things. All these passages of Scripture, from the prophets to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, will challenge you with the question: "How has what you have learned about the absolute nature of things to come impacted what you believe, and your values, as you live your life today?"

We learn from this revelation that the saints who sing their new song around the throne will be from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. (5:9) When you think about how they got there, how does that impact your perspective on the Great Commission of Jesus Christ and the work of the Lord Who is building His church all over the world today?

The Word of God begins with God asking man the question, "Where are you? The Bible closes facing us with another awesome question: where will you be when all the events described in this

awesome Revelation of Jesus Christ take place? There are really just two possibilities. You will either be in heaven with saints singing around that throne or you will be with the sinners saluting the Lamb from Hell. Where you will be then is determined by where you are now in your response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Throughout the centuries of church history, millions of people have been moved to faith by reading the last book of the Bible. My prayer is that if you have not trusted Jesus Christ to be your Savior and crowned Him as your King of kings and Lord of lords, this brief survey of the Revelation will move you to make those decisions that will determine the quality of your eternity.