



SPRING QUARTER
March, April, May 2019

YOUNG
PEOPLE'S
Bible Class

For Adults Ages 18 Through 25

Young People's Bible Class

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The Quarter Ahead	2
Editorial	3

New Teaching

UNIT I: New in Christ

Mar. 3—A New Loyalty—I Thess. 1:1-10.....	5
Mar. 10—A New Affection—I Thess. 3:1-13.....	10
Mar. 17—A New Way of Life—I Thess. 4:1-12	15
Mar. 24—A New Understanding—I Thess. 4:13—5:10.....	20

UNIT II: New Growth

Mar. 31—A Growing Confidence—II Thess. 1:1-12	25
Apr. 7—A Growing Awareness—II Thess. 2:1-12	30
Apr. 14—A Growing Resolve—II Thess. 2:13—3:5	35

UNIT III: The True Gospel

Apr. 21—Remember the True Gospel! (Easter)—Gal. 1:6-9; Matt. 28:1-7, 18-20.....	40
Apr. 28—The Source of Paul's Gospel—Gal. 1:10-24.....	45
May 5—The Gospel of Faith Foretold—Gal. 3:1-14	49
May 12—The Gospel: Faith in Christ—Gal. 3:15-25	53
May 19—Heirs Because of the Gospel—Gal. 3:26—4:7	57
May 26—The Gospel in Action—Gal. 6:1-10	61



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The Quarter Ahead

This quarter's lessons are taken from two of Paul's epistles, I Thessalonians and Galatians. Like all of Paul's writings, they are rich in doctrine and theology. The readings taken from them center on the theme of New Teaching, which is the topic for the quarter.

The new teaching in these epistles is directed at new believers—those who had come to know the Lord in areas where Paul and his missionary team passed through, preaching the very new gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Sound instruction for new believers is always of critical importance, and we are blessed to have these epistles that give us insight into Paul's thought processes as guided by the Holy Spirit.

The Thessalonian church was established in the Roman province of Macedonia. Thessalonica was a major crossroads for trade in the empire. The Via Egnatia, one of the main Roman highways, passed directly through it. Consequently, the church established there was a mix of Jews, Gentile proselytes, and pagans. The Thessalonians' embrace of the gospel was a source of joy for Paul and others in the first-century church.

The readings in I and II Thessalonians make up the first two units of study, entitled, respectively, New in Christ and New Growth.

One of the issues the Apostle Paul dealt with was the Thessalonians' perception of Christ's second coming. Some of the best biblical teaching on the return of Christ comes from the Thessalonian epistles. Nevertheless, there are some who still try setting dates for this event, the timing of

which, as Jesus told us, is known only to the Father.

Another major subject that Paul addressed in his two letters is that of godly living. Immorality was endemic in the Roman Empire. For a pagan culture whose only standard for human behavior came from the mythical stories of the gods, Paul's teaching on biblical morality was needed to reorient his readers toward a Christian ethic. The same reorienting is necessary in our culture today as modern society leans back toward the licentious behavior of Rome.

The True Gospel is the title for the final unit of readings, all of which are found in the epistle to the Galatians. The problem that the Galatian churches faced was nothing less than the loss of the true gospel of Christ. The ones causing the problems for the Galatian churches were the Judaizers. These were Jewish converts to Christ who insisted that believers must still keep the law in order to be saved. Paul came down hard on this wrongheaded notion, telling the Galatians that they had succumbed to another gospel.

The term "another gospel" perfectly fits the definition of an oxymoron, a two-word phrase that is a contradiction in terms. A strong corrective was needed, and Paul laid out a convincing case that no less a figure than Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, was made righteous by God through faith rather than works. Salvation, then, has always been a result of God's grace obtained through faith rather than works.

The quarter's readings offer a rich tapestry of doctrine for student and teacher of the Bible alike.

—James Parry.

The Return of Christ

JAMES PARRY

One of the major themes of Scripture that will be encountered in this quarter's readings is the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. The subject is, quite naturally, of great interest to believers. Because we live in a so-called Christian nation, the secular world has a passing familiarity with this Bible doctrine. Popular culture has picked up on it. We hear phrases about "the second coming of this" or "the second coming of that" bandied about quite often. Generally this is about all the non-Christian world knows about the topic.

Though there is a great interest in the Christian world over Christ's return, it is perhaps surprising how little serious study is devoted to it. We tend to get much of our information from books that are available through Christian outlets, and there is nothing wrong with this—unless they are our sole source of information.

The believers at Thessalonica were keenly interested in the Lord's return. The subject, however, had become a source of confusion for some. The idea was prevalent among them that perhaps Christ's return had already taken place or that loved ones who had died would somehow miss out on the event.

Paul had to lay these notions to rest. He did this by setting clear parameters for the Lord's return—highly visible events that would be unmistakable markers of when the Lord would come back. Paul writes that two very specific things must occur before the Lord comes back. These are found in II Thessalonians 2:3.

First there will come a falling away. The word for "falling away" that is used in the Greek text of the New Testament is the one from which we get the word



"apostasy." This term, when used in the legal sense, means "revolt"; it is the word that is generally used to describe that time period when the Lord will be forsaken even by those who claim to know him. We use the term "apostate" to describe someone who does just that. An apostate gives the appearance of being saved but nonetheless does not proceed to continue in sound doctrine.

Those who revolt spiritually in this way and who attempt to deceive others are described as "false prophets" in II Peter 2:1. They were warned against as early as the time of Moses (cf. Deut. 13:1-3). Peter says that they will deceive many (II Pet. 2:2). What this tells us is that the falling away—the apostasy that will occur—will be a widespread event, not merely some localized phenomenon. Jesus warned His disciples of this very same thing in His Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:11-12).

This widespread falling away has

been interpreted in a number of different ways, including one fanciful interpretation where the falling away is seen as the effects of gravity giving way as individuals are raptured from off the earth. It seems clear, though, that a spiritual rebellion is what is in the minds of the biblical writers.

The widespread apostasy will be followed by a second event of earth-shaking magnitude—the revelation of the man of sin, the antichrist (cf. Dan. 7:24-25). This is the individual (apparently the ruler of some kind of universal government) who, inspired by Satan, will lead the armies of the world against Christ (Rev. 19:19). Paul uses the terms “man of sin” and “son of perdition” to describe him (II Thess. 2:3). Judas is the only other individual identified by the term “son of perdition” in Scripture.

Various individuals in history have been popularly identified as the antichrist—Antiochus Epiphanes, Nero, Hitler, and a host of others. None of them, obviously, turned out to be the antichrist. What can be said of each is that they were precursors to the actual antichrist. They had the spirit of antichrist in their rebellion against God and their egregiously sinful behavior. It is understandable that those living at the time who were victims of their evil would have seen such individuals as the prophesied antichrist.

In his hatred of God, the antichrist will persecute all those who love the Lord, His saints (Rev. 12:17). But like all those who preceded him, the antichrist will be doomed in his rebellion against God. He will be destroyed by Christ and consigned to the lake of fire (Rev. 19:19-20).

Much of the confusion concerning the timing of Christ’s return could be cleared up if these two markers that Paul delineated as precursors to His coming were kept in mind. It seems that many individuals—even godly, Bible-believing Christians—cannot resist the tendency to set dates

and pinpoint the exact time when the Lord will return.

One recent attempt to do this used the supposed date of the worldwide Flood of Noah (4990 B.C.) as the starting point for calculating the exact time until the end of the world—seven thousand years from this date, the year 2011. Calculations were based on a year consisting of 365.22 days. Since we are reading this after the fact, we know that this attempt to predict the time of Christ’s return failed, as have all the previous ones.

It should have been obvious to the one who made the attempt that the exact time of the Flood cannot be known with certainty and that the precise number of days in a year is an irrational number with many decimal places. In other words, even these supposed exact figures were only estimates, and so a final product based on these would not give the anticipated results.

All one really has to do, however, is keep in mind Jesus’ words—that no one but the Father knows the day and hour of His return. How foolish it is to not simply take Jesus’ words at face value and believe them!

At the heart of all these attempts to predict the time of the Lord’s return is pride. We may not want to acknowledge this, but it is an inescapable fact. And this points out another truth to us—our hearts can easily deceive us.

Why is it possible for even the heart of the believer to deceive him or her at times? The short answer (which is also the long answer) is sin (Jer. 17:9). While we are still on this earth, we are subject to the vicissitudes of our fallen, sinful human nature. We should take nothing for granted, but realize that we are all prone to stray.

The antidote is to ground ourselves in the Word. The Bible, like a mirror, reveals the good, bad, and ugly of our world and of ourselves. Let us stay close to it and cherish it as God intends for us to do

Scripture Lesson Text

1 THESS. 1:1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;

3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;

4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:

7 So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

NOTES

A New Loyalty

Lesson Text: I Thessalonians 1:1-10

Related Scriptures: Acts 17:1-4; Romans 6:17-23;
I Corinthians 2:1-5; Ephesians 2:1-13

TIME: A.D. 51

PLACE: from Corinth

GOLDEN TEXT—"They themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (I Thessalonians 1:9).

Lesson Exposition

In the Apostle Paul's day, Thessalonica was an important city in the Roman Empire. A major Roman road, the Via Egnatia, passed through the city. This, in combination with the city's seaport, made Thessalonica a major center of trade.

Paul and his companions had founded the church during his second missionary journey. Thessalonica was one of the cities where they faced opposition. Paul's purpose in writing to the believers there was to correct certain misconceptions they had concerning the end times. His letter also addressed the issues of godly living and idleness among the believers.

PAUL'S GREETING—I Thess. 1:1

Paul began his letter as he did a number of others by offering his hearers grace and peace. He wanted the Thessalonians to know that they could have the peace of God even as they worked through some issues that were troubling them.

In his use of the words "grace" and "peace," Paul was combining a Greek greeting with a Hebrew one. Grace

(*charis*) was used instead of the typical Greek greeting *charein* ("Greetings"), and peace represented the typical Hebrew greeting *shalom* (Rydelnik and Valaningham, eds., *The Moody Bible Commentary*, Moody).

PAUL'S THANKS—I Thess. 1:2

Paul was thankful for the Thessalonian Christians. Even though he and Silas had been forced to leave the city due to persecution, a church with both Jews and Gentiles had been founded (Acts 17: 4) and was continuing to flourish.

In addition, Timothy had recently brought Paul good news concerning the faith of the Thessalonians (I Thess. 3:3-7), and Paul was grateful that despite the persecution they evidently were experiencing, the church was continuing to persevere.

FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE— I Thess. 1:3-4

The Thessalonians were excelling in Christian virtues. The three mentioned here are also discussed in the famous love chapter, I Corinthians 13. They