

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. All human pretensions are cast down in the presence of the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:9).
2. One day Heaven's books will be opened, and there will be no escaping their verdict (vs. 10).
3. No human dominion, no matter how seemingly impregnable, is safe from God's judgment (vss. 11-12).
4. The appearance of the Son of Man is the ultimate game changer (vs. 13).
5. The everlasting dominion that has been given to the Son of Man is our greatest and only sure hope (vs. 14).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why does the Ancient of Days wait for the casting down of thrones to sit (Dan. 7:9)? What might this symbolize?
2. What does it mean for us in our daily lives that the books of judgment will one day be opened (vs. 10)? How should we be living in light of that?
3. What purpose might there be in allowing the beasts to live for a time after their dominion is taken away (vs. 12)?
4. Why does the Son of Man seem to come from somewhere else before appearing before the Ancient of Days (vs. 13)? Where might that place be?
5. Why is there immeasurable comfort in the fact that the Son of Man's kingdom will never end (vs. 14)?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

**“His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14).**

This week's Scripture passage sounds much like the book of Revelation. The word “revelation” means apocalypse, or unveiling. In both Revelation and Daniel, the picture of Jesus Christ in His glory is unveiled for all to see.

God the Father is pictured as the ultimate Judge. He is mighty and powerful, giving out justice fairly and completely. When the ungodly come before Him, God swiftly pronounces judgment on them.

This week's passage, from Daniel 7, was given to Daniel in a dream. Although it uses beasts, the message is the same as the king's dream (Dan. 2).

In spite of any splendor and power that earthly kings and leaders may have, none will rule forever. All will die eventually. In stark contrast, there is Jesus—the Lamb who was killed for the sins of the world. Our passage presents Jesus as the King who possesses full authority. No one will ever be above Jesus in power. Only He is to be worshipped and glorified. As sovereign King, Jesus has the power to do as He wishes.

Someday in the future when Jesus' reign is fully manifest, all people will bow down to Him. Those who did not follow Him will bow down grudgingly and fearfully. They will then realize how wrong they were in ignoring or fighting against Him.

Then there will be those who love Jesus and willingly bow down and worship Him. They will praise and adore Him forever.

Which group will you be in? Have you chosen to follow Jesus as your Saviour and Lord? Trust in Him today.

—Judy Carlsen.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God's faithfulness and holiness put our sin and rebellion in their true, ugly light (Dan. 9:4-5).
2. Our sin is repugnant, and no one can escape its shame (vss. 6-8).
3. The Lord's merciful forgiveness is our only hope, but it is a glorious hope that we can joyfully embrace (vs. 9).
4. All have sinned, and the consequences are deservedly grim (vss. 10-11).
5. We have suffered no punishments we did not deserve; God is wholly just in everything He does (vss. 12-14).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. When we confess our sins, are we concerned for God's holiness and glory, as Daniel was (Dan. 9:4-5)? Do we pray mostly for our own benefit?
2. In what ways have we failed to listen to God's messengers to us (vs. 6)? How is this evidenced in our lives?
3. Why is there little sense of shame before God in contemporary praying (vs. 8)? Is this something that should cause us concern?
4. How do we embrace the hope of God's forgiveness without taking wrongful advantage of it (vs. 9)?
5. Does God still punish sin in the present life the way He did with the people of Israel (vss. 12-14)? How are things different now and yet still similar?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

**“To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him” (Daniel 9:9).**

Daniel's life was turned upside down when he was captured and taken away to Babylonia as a teenager.

Because he stayed close to his God, Daniel never lost his identity as a Jew. He knew he was one of God's chosen people.

In the golden text we see Daniel's prayer on behalf of the Jewish people. He totally identified with them, even though he himself had never bowed down to an idol.

God had chosen His people and given them many opportunities to turn from idols and follow Him. At times, they followed a godly leader and obeyed His commands against worshipping other gods. Often, though, they turned aside from God's commandments; they added other gods from neighboring countries to the one true God. God is a jealous God.

Because of their sin, the Israelites were taken into captivity, and their city and temple were destroyed. Daniel understood Jeremiah's prophecy about the end of this horrible time. God had never forgotten His people. He would lead them back to their land.

Who or what is your idol? Is there a person or an activity that is more important to you than God? Does it get more of your time than He does?

You may be a believer in Christ. But have you confessed those sins that have crept into your life? Do you have a clean slate today?

None of us deserve God's forgiveness; we all are sinners saved by His grace. Let us honor Christ today as His people, His church, and His body.

—Judy Carlsen.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Without authoritative interpretation, visions are of little value (Dan. 8:19).
2. Kingdoms rise and fall not of their own accord but subject to purposes they can never guess at (vss. 20-22).
3. We should not be surprised or alarmed at the prosperity of wicked and terrible rulers (vss. 23-24).
4. Evil is given a time to strut, but it will be destroyed in due course (vs. 25).
5. Even with revelation we will not understand all that will take place in God's plan and purpose (vs. 26).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why was it important that Daniel understand what was coming in the time future to him (Dan. 8:19)? Why is such information not routinely granted to us?
2. Why do the prophecies end with long-ago empires and not continue with what happened in later centuries (vss. 20-22)? What were these events pointing toward?
3. By what power, if not "his own" (vs. 24), did the terrible ruler become strong? How does this help us keep things in perspective?
4. How can any ruler be so foolish as to "stand up against the Prince of princes" (vs. 25)?
5. Why was Daniel told to seal up the vision (vs. 26)? What does that imply for our understanding of these passages?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

**"The vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days" (Daniel 8:26).**

Have you ever been in a situation when you wanted to know something, but you really did not want to know? It might have been whether or not your mother has cancer. It could have been finding out someone you admired had sinned, falling off that pedestal on which you had placed him.

This ambivalence was part of the situation in which Daniel found himself in this week's passage. The vision God gave Daniel was so compelling that he became sick and fainted afterward.

God gave Daniel a vision about a ram and a goat. He then sent the Angel Gabriel to explain its meaning to Daniel. God's use of this mighty messenger showed how important the vision was. God told His prophet that earthly kings would be overturned, one by one. He named the empires and told of their demise. Then he explained how one man would rise up in power and battle the Lord's people.

We understand this prophecy to have a double fulfillment. In Old Testament times, Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated God's temple by placing a statue of himself there and sacrificing a pig on the altar.

In the future, the antichrist will rise up and exalt himself as one to be obeyed and even worshipped. He will impress and mislead people with his demonic power to heal, do miracles, and even seemingly rise from the dead himself.

Are you sometimes tempted to think that shunning sin does not really matter in the long run? Giving in to "little" sins may not seem that bad today, but every sin is still sin and needs forgiveness.

—Judy Carlsen.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Jesus is still denying Himself for us until we can share His joy with Him (Luke 22:14-16)!
2. Jesus is waiting for us to join Him; let us not fail to remember what He did for us (vss. 17-20)!
3. It is good to examine our hearts lest we do anything to betray our Lord (vss. 21-23).
4. No one is greater than Jesus; if He could serve, we must never think serving is beneath us (vss. 24-27).
5. The reward for sticking with Jesus is far greater than anything we might give up for Him (vss. 28-30).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What fulfillment was Jesus looking for in connection with eating the Passover and drinking the fruit of the vine (Luke 22:15-18)?
2. Why did Jesus connect the bread and the cup with remembering what He did for us on the cross (vss. 19-20)? How does communion help us remember in ways mere words might not?
3. In what ways is it possible to betray the Lord today (vss. 21-22)?
4. What does the timing of the argument over who was greatest tell us about our spiritual condition (vs. 24)?
5. How can many believers shirk service as menial and still profess to honor the One who said, “I am among you as he that serveth” (vs. 27)?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

**“He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve” (Luke 22:26).**

Do you like to serve others? Or do you find it difficult to put yourself in a “lowly” position? If we admitted the truth, most of us would rather be served than serve.

The disciples were human, just as we are. They had the mistaken idea that Jesus was going to lead an uprising against Roman rule. With Jesus as the new King, they would, of course, be rulers along with Him. Who, they asked, would be the greatest ruler among them? This led to an argument.

Jesus knew their thoughts and understood their failings. He told them that in His kingdom, each would serve the other, not rule over others. This idea went against everything they thought about being a leader. After all, a person needs to step over others to become the ruler, does he not?

Not so, according to Jesus. To make His point clearly, Jesus took on the servant’s role and washed the disciples’ feet. He told them that age and position had nothing to do with being a servant in His kingdom.

Instead of a chore no one wants, serving should be considered a privilege. It is a tangible way to show others that we love and care for them. It can be taking a meal to someone who is ill or volunteering to clean the church kitchen. Serving can be helping in the church nursery or singing in the choir.

As part of God’s family, it is our privilege to serve as He leads us. Jesus gave us tremendous examples of service while He was on earth. Instead of asserting Himself as Lord, He purposefully served.

—Judy Carlsen.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We often fail to see the great things God is doing right in front of us (Luke 24:13-16).
2. How foolish we so often are to assume that God is unaware of what we are concerned about (vss. 17-18)!
3. Lack of faith causes us to become disillusioned about things we ought to have been ready for (vss. 19-21).
4. We may be slow to perceive, but the Lord knows how to break through our dullness (vss. 28-31).
5. When we truly encounter the Lord, we just have to tell others (vss. 32-35)!

—Kenneth A. Sponser.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why do you suppose Jesus chose two lesser-known disciples to be among the first He approached after His resurrection (Luke 24:13-15)?
2. Why did Jesus play along with the two disciples' assumption of His ignorance (vss. 18-19)? What was His objective?
3. The disciples claimed to have trusted in Jesus' mission (vs. 21), but their faith was clearly lacking. In what way did it need readjusting?
4. Since these two disciples had not been among the Twelve, why was Jesus' breaking of bread so powerful in bringing recognition to them (vss. 30-31)?
5. If you had been there, would you have hurried back that very night or thought the news could wait till morning (vs. 33)?

—Kenneth A. Sponser.

## GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

**“As he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him” (Luke 24:30-31).**

Have you ever lost all hope? Maybe you are experiencing hopelessness today. Perhaps you have lost a beloved family member, your job, or your home; or you have a terminal illness.

At times, life can be bleak. Bad things happen to those who love God—and also to those who do not.

As awful as life can be at times, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead should give us hope. That is why Easter is the most important day that ever occurred on earth. Without Jesus' miraculous rising from the dead, everything He taught and said would have been a lie or the crazy words of a delusional man.

Two of Jesus' followers were dejected as they walked home to Emmaus. They had truly believed Jesus was the Messiah. They could not understand what had happened. To their way of thinking, the Messiah could not die. So was He really who He said He was? They may well have concluded that the answer was no.

Jesus met these two on the road. He knew they had given up hope. So He explained from the Law and Prophets about God's plan and how it had led up to this point.

When Jesus stayed for dinner with them and asked God's blessing on the food, suddenly their eyes were opened. As if scales had fallen off their eyes, they knew that this was Jesus—back from the dead!

Jesus' death and resurrection for our sin is the cornerstone of our faith. Death is no longer the final answer. Instead, Jesus is the Victor over death. Hope is truly restored.

—Judy Carlsen.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. If we think all our doubts would be resolved if we could just see Jesus, look at the Eleven (Luke 24:36-38)!
2. Jesus shows incomparable patience in overcoming our doubts (vss. 39-43).
3. When we get rattled by the seemingly unexpected, Jesus carefully reminds us of the mission (vss. 44-48).
4. The promise of the Father comes to those who obediently wait for it in faith (vs. 49).
5. Although Jesus is not physically with us now, we are continually surrounded by His presence and joy (vss. 50-53).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How does the fact that the disciples thought they were seeing a ghost attest to the reality of the resurrection (Luke 24:37)? How might conspirators have written this account?
2. Was the risen Jesus actually hungry when He asked for food (vs. 41)? What was His likely purpose in making the request?
3. Since Jesus' explanation of the Scriptures was not recorded for us, how can we be enlightened as the Eleven were (vss. 44-45)?
4. How well have we been doing in the preaching of repentance and remission from sin in Jesus' name throughout the world (vs. 47)?
5. How was Jesus' ascension—a departure from His people—in reality a great blessing for them (vss. 51-53)?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

**“These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44).**

The military has a saying: “Mission accomplished.” This means they have completed what they were ordered to do. Finishing their task brings a mixture of fulfillment, joy, and relief.

This week's passage tells of Jesus' time with His disciples after He rose from the dead. It was a time of great joy and renewed hope for His followers, who earlier that very day had been totally hopeless, disillusioned, and frightened. They were behind closed doors, fearful that the next knock would mean arrest, torture, and death for them.

When Jesus suddenly appeared, they could not believe it was truly He. Jesus invited them to touch His hands and feet so that they would know it was He. He ate food with them as well.

Then Jesus explained fully what had happened—how He had died on their behalf and for the sins of the world. He pointed out Scriptures from the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets that foretold all that had happened. One example of these prophecies is the picture of the Suffering Servant found in Isaiah 53.

Now Jesus reminded them of all He had told them before—how He would be betrayed, suffer, and die but then also rise again. Jesus told them that His mission was accomplished. He had done what He came to do. He was indeed the long-awaited Messiah, sent from God.

Jesus came to earth at just the right time—God's time. God kept His promises; He always does. Do you trust Him to keep His promises to you?

—Judy Carlsen.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The Spirit manifests Himself in the time and manner of His choosing; this may seem surprising and unnerving to us (Acts 2:1-3).
2. The Spirit will always enable us to speak of Jesus (vs. 4).
3. When the truth is proclaimed in the power of the Spirit, it gets people talking and asking questions (vss. 5-8).
4. No group is too far from God for the Spirit to reach them with the truth (vss. 9-11).
5. Even a miraculous presentation of the truth will be met with scoffing and skepticism by some (vss. 12-13).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What made the sound of wind and the appearance of fire so appropriate for the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-3)?
2. Why was it important that *all* of the disciples be manifestly filled with the Spirit at this time (vs. 4)?
3. Why was it so amazing for the visitors to Jerusalem to hear their own languages being spoken (vss. 5-6)? What fact about the speakers made this so significant (vs. 7)?
4. How did the people of various languages know that the *others* were hearing the words in their own languages (vss. 8-9)?
5. Why should we never be shocked when the world mocks and scoffs at the great things God does among us (vs. 13)?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

**“They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4).**

The funny thing about electrical appliances is that they will not run unless you plug them in! It sounds so simple; but maybe you have experienced a “dead” toaster or coffeemaker, only to find out that it was unplugged. The electrical power is still there behind that wall socket, but you were not connecting with it.

Regrettably, Christians sometimes try to live like that nonfunctioning appliance. We have access to God’s power to live a Christian life through the work of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, but we do not seek for Him to do that important and necessary daily work.

This week’s passage tells about God’s Pentecost fulfillment of the promise to send the Holy Spirit. For fifty days, Jesus’ followers waited in Jerusalem as He told them to do. Jesus had promised a Comforter who would come and be with them always after He went back up to heaven. This Third Person of the Godhead is just as much God as the Father and the Son.

Suddenly the Holy Spirit arrived with wind and fire, filling the 120 and giving them the ability to speak in tongues they had never learned. The city was teeming with God followers from all over the known world. They suddenly heard people talking in their native language about Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah. Quite a crowd gathered, as you can imagine!

God the Holy Spirit gave Peter a mighty sermon to preach about Jesus’ being the Messiah, who died for their sins and rose again. Over three thousand people responded and believed when Peter was finished.

—Judy Carlsen.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The Lord is gracious to assure us of the blessed future in store for us and for all who have gone before in Him (I Thess. 4:13-15).
2. The Lord's return for us is not something we can possibly miss or overlook (vss. 16-18).
3. Complacency is the most dangerous position for the world to be in (5:1-3).
4. Since we *are* children of light, we are to *live* like children of light (vss. 4-8).
5. Whatever happens in the short term, our permanent outlook is blessed fellowship with our Lord (vss. 9-11).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What fear did Paul's readers have regarding their loved ones who had died (I Thess. 4:14-15)? Why might they have been subject to this fear?
2. What arguments over the timing of the rapture have the potential to distract us from important truths about it (vss. 16-17)? What are those truths? What was Paul's main concern (vs. 18)?
3. Why do so many people still get hung up over "the times and the seasons" (5:1)? What can we do to avoid this?
4. In verses 6-8, what does it mean to "sleep" and "be drunken" and, conversely, to "watch" and "be sober"?
5. How should the fact that we are "not appointed . . . to wrath" (vs. 9) affect our daily living? Does it?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

**"God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thessalonians 5:9).**

Life without hope is life without meaning. A person who has no hope for today—not to mention for a future—will say and do things without caring about the consequences.

This hopeless living is sad and dreary. It goes against everything we as Christians believe.

A hopeless life is a dark one. Because Jesus is the Light, He gives light to lead us each step of the way. As children of light, we follow the One who knows what is ahead.

Of course, all of us experience difficult times when we need comfort and help from the Lord and from other people.

Believers can help each other and build each other up in the faith. We can remind each other that Jesus is our living hope. He died on our behalf, but He rose again and conquered the power of death. Because of His sacrifice, we too can have the assurance that although our present physical bodies will die, our resurrection bodies—promised to us by Jesus—will never die.

These truths should give each believer a life of hope. Certainly the tough times will come while we live in this fallen world; but we have that blessed hope, that calm assurance from God, that He is always there, ready to guide and help us. He loves each of us so much that He sent His only Son to die on our behalf. We can trust God to do what He has promised. Someday He will send His Son back to earth. This time, though, Jesus will come as conquering King in all His glory, gathering His children and taking them home.

—Judy Carlsen.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We can safely ignore false prophets of doom, for we have been given the truth of God (II Thess. 2:1-3).
2. Satan's counterfeit miracles will deceive only those who have refused to love the truth (vss. 9-10).
3. To delight in wickedness is to condemn oneself to delusion (vss. 11-12).
4. Because we have been set apart for glory, we can stand firm in the truth (vss. 13-15).
5. Our encouragement comes not from spurious sources but directly from Christ Himself and the Father (vss. 16-17).

—Kenneth A. Sponser.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What could lead some believers to think that the day of Christ had already come (II Thess. 2:1-3)? What did their fear involve?
2. Why is Satan allowed to perform signs and wonders to deceive people (vss. 9-10)? What ultimate good is accomplished through this?
3. Is it wrong for God to send a strong delusion to induce people to believe falsehood (vs. 11)? Why is it right for Him to do this?
4. We all took pleasure in wickedness to some extent before we were saved. Why are not all of us condemned (vs. 12)?
5. What are the "traditions" (vs. 15) to which we are to hold firmly? How does the encouragement of Christ and the Father (vs. 16) help us do this?

—Kenneth A. Sponser.

## GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

**"Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, . . . comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work" (II Thessalonians 2:16-17).**

Have you ever been fooled by a smooth-talking salesperson into buying something you did not really need? Or did you pay more than you should have? This kind of transaction makes us feel embarrassed, disappointed, duped, taken.

Make no mistake—the antichrist will be convincing. He will do counterfeit miracles to persuade people, even seemingly rising from the dead.

Those who are Christ followers, though, need to be alert to Satan's deceptions. Satan is working today to steer people away from God. He uses every means at his disposal to cause the seeds of the gospel to wither and die so that they will not take root. Satan loves to twist the biblical truths in people's minds just enough that they will be deceived into believing they are following God.

As believers, it is important that we know God's Word. We must not just read it at church; we must feed on it daily and think about what it means for our lives each day. We can learn much through godly teachers and pastors who help us and also through friends who are grounded in the faith.

We need to stand firm in the truth, not wavering or drifting like a boat without an anchor. We should bring our doubts to God and ask for help in believing. He is always there to show us the true and perfect way.

If we listen to the world's way, we will live a life like the house built on shifting sand. If we live the life God wants, we will stand firm in a life of hope, doing His work on earth.

—Judy Carlsen.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The world's richest billionaire cannot come close to the inheritance we have in Christ (I Pet. 1:3-4).
2. Any sufferings we might endure now are nothing compared to the joy in store for us (vss. 5-6).
3. Trials are the fire that refines our faith into preciousness beyond compare (vs. 7).
4. It is not nearly so important to see Jesus as it is to believe in Him with joy (vss. 8-9).
5. In Christ we are privileged beyond even the prophets and the angels (vss. 10-12).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What is the “lively hope” (I Pet. 1:3) that we have been born into? How does the resurrection of Jesus Christ bring about this new birth in us?
2. What salvation will be revealed “in the last time” (vs. 5)? Do we not have salvation now in Christ? Explain.
3. Since gold is a metal that does not corrode, what could Peter have meant in speaking of “gold that perisheth” (vs. 7)?
4. How is it that we can love Someone we have never seen (vs. 8)?
5. What advantage do we have over even the Old Testament prophets (vss. 10-11)?
6. If angels long to look into the truths that have been revealed to us (vs. 12), how can we dare take them for granted? What is our responsibility?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

**“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (I Peter 1:3).**

It is human nature to wonder about the future. Whom will I marry? Where will I live? What kind of work will I do? Will I have children?

Even if we could know the future, we might be sorry that we did. We might not be ready to handle being a doctor or living far away from our family.

God knows our future. He knows our past. He knows it all because He is the eternal God who has always existed. He has been there throughout all eternity, and He always will be.

This truth is beyond our human brain's capacity to understand. Because our life on earth is finite, we cannot understand infinity.

God gives us His light to follow each step of the way in our lives.

One of the major facts we need to understand is how important Jesus' resurrection is. If He had remained dead, He could not have been God, and our faith in Him would be misplaced and worthless. He would have been just like any other man. The whole Christian faith would be false.

But Jesus did rise from the dead! He appeared to many people afterward. He wanted eyewitnesses who could say with firm conviction, “Yes, I saw Jesus alive.”

Jesus is our living hope. He conquered sin and death by rising again.

God has given us a picture of the future. He shows us that He is in control of our lives and wants the best for us. He will take His children to be with Him in heaven.

—Judy Carlsen.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We should never complain that the Christian life is too hard; we have been given all we need to live it gloriously (II Pet. 1:3).
2. God has given us His nature; we must live it out in practice (vss. 4-7).
3. To neglect the qualities of the Spirit that we have been given is to inexcusably rob ourselves (vss. 8-9).
4. Living daily in God's power brings assurance that we are really His (vss. 10-11).
5. We will never outgrow the need for reminders of the truth (vss. 12-14).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How do God's promises make us partakers of His nature (II Pet. 1:4)? What is our part in this relationship?
2. How do we add to our lives virtues that can be received only from God (vss. 5-6)?
3. Why does love stand last in Peter's list while it is first in Paul's (II Pet. 1:7; cf. I Cor. 13:13)? Is there any discrepancy here? Why, or why not?
4. What is the spiritual condition of a person who has forgotten that he has been cleansed from past sins (II Pet. 1:9)?
5. How is it possible to make our "calling and election sure" (vs. 10)? Is that within human capacity? Explain.
6. What can we do to refresh each other's memory of the truths we have received (vs. 13)?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

**"His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (II Peter 1:3).**

The motto Be Prepared is a good one to follow. It takes planning and preparation to do most worthwhile tasks.

Consider a camping trip. A family will need a tent or trailer in which to sleep, sleeping bags, clothing, food, an ice chest, lantern, stove, first-aid kit, and so forth. There are lots of details to consider in order to be ready for the trip.

This week's passage tells of Christian virtues God has given His people so that they will be equipped to live holy lives. In fact, our verse says God has given us all we need. By knowing Him and believing His promises to us, we have escaped the world's clutches of bondage to sin.

Peter's list of holy qualities reads similarly to the fruit of the Spirit that Paul wrote about in Galatians 5. These qualities are essentially God's character living through His children.

As we grow in our knowledge of Christ and learn to love Him more, we will be prepared to live the kind of godly life that pleases Him.

The immature believer tries to live a godly life without the Holy Spirit's power. He just tries hard in his own strength. He has forgotten that he is free from the bondage of sin and its power.

Christians need to be diligent, watchful, prayerful, and prepared for Satan's fiery darts. Too often we forget we are at war with Satan.

Paul wrote in Ephesians about the armor of God that Christians need to wear every day. We need to put on these pieces of armor, which really stand for God's character living within us.

—Judy Carlsen.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Suffering has the signal benefit of greatly weakening the hold of sin over those who endure it (I Pet. 4:1-2).
2. Those caught in the grip of sin cannot understand why anyone would want to avoid it (vss. 3-4).
3. Judgment holds terror for sinners but life for those who have been rescued from it (vss. 5-6).
4. Prayer, love, and hospitality should mark our lives in the world (vss. 7-9).
5. Spiritual gifts must be used in service to others and for the glory of God (vss. 10-11).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. If, as I Peter 4:1 says, a person who has suffered “hath ceased from sin,” should we seek out suffering? How could this verse be misused?
2. Why do unbelievers not see the value in being set free from sin and, instead, heap abuse on those who have been (vs. 4)?
3. In what way was the gospel preached to the dead (vs. 6)? Does this imply that everybody gets a second opportunity after death? Why or why not?
4. In what way does love cover a multitude of sins (vs. 8)? In what way do we want to avoid misusing this truth?
5. What are some practical ways to make sure we use our spiritual gifts to serve others rather than call attention to ourselves (vs. 10)?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (I Peter 4:10).

On Jesus’ last night before His death, He did something that amazed His disciples. Jesus served them by washing their feet. This job was a servant’s chore. After all, who would want to clean off dusty, smelly feet?

Jesus performed this lowly act because He wanted to prove a point. He wanted to give His example of what true service means. Rather than lord Himself over them—as He had every right to do—Jesus knelt down and cared for each one in a humble, loving, tangible way.

Peter was the one who protested Jesus’ service that evening. He considered it beneath Jesus and said so. Jesus’ response that Peter needed to allow Him to minister in this way or he would have no part with Him completely changed Peter’s attitude. He then asked Jesus to wash his whole body. No halfway following for Peter! He wanted to be in all the way!

When Peter wrote this week’s passage, it is possible that he thought back to that amazing night. Jesus had given a shining example of what it means to be a servant.

Jesus suffered as a servant, and we as His followers will also. Those who are not saved will think Christians are strange.

Christians should live as Christ did, serving each other by using the spiritual gifts He has given us. Whatever those gifts may be, we are to minister to one another as good stewards.

In serving each other as Christian brothers and sisters, we glorify our Heavenly Father. We honor and magnify Him before the world.

—Judy Carlsen.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We should never be rattled by scoffers; they are simply fulfilling Scripture (II Pet. 3:3-4).
2. The willful ignorance of unbelievers keeps them totally unprepared for the coming judgment (vss. 5-7).
3. The Lord operates on His own time schedule; our part is simply to stay ready (vss. 8-10).
4. Attachment to this world is foolish in light of its coming destruction (vss. 11-12).
5. Setting our minds on the new creation will help us be ready for it (vss. 13-15).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What is the apparent strength of the scoffer's argument against Jesus' coming again (II Pet. 3:3-4)? What is its fatal weakness?
2. Why is such a skeptic not likely to be impressed by reference to the Genesis Flood (vs. 6)? Why does that not matter in the end?
3. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (vs. 8). What is the critical significance of that statement for us?
4. What is the import of the statement that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief (vs. 10)?
5. How can we, on a daily basis, be looking for "new heavens and a new earth" (vs. 13)? What would our lives be like if we consistently did so?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

**"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9).**

Sometimes we wonder about God's patience. The world is deteriorating before our eyes; people are getting worse and worse. They have forgotten God is even there. Why does He allow evildoers to flourish? Why is He taking so long to come again and rescue us from this sinful planet?

There are many who scoff that God is not really there at all. They say He does not even exist.

God has His own timetable. He is reserving a day for judgment. It will come when He chooses. Our passage this week says that God is waiting so that more people will come to Him.

Judgment, though, is a sure thing. God will judge when He is ready. As Christians, we need to live holy, godly lives as we wait for the fulfillment of God's promises. He says there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

Christians need to live their lives in the hope of His coming. This is not an I-hope-so kind of feeling. Instead, it is a calm assurance and belief that God will do as He has promised. We are to be diligent and ready, as good soldiers for the Lord, living holy, blameless lives for Him.

God's patience with people means salvation. He waited for each of us to see the light and follow Jesus. He wants to bring more into the fold.

When this old earth comes to an end, it will mean a new beginning for us with God. The Lord is coming back again to gather up His own people. That is His promise to us. That is the blessed hope of His coming.

—Judy Carlsen.