THE one year® BIBLE

The entire Message Bible in 365 readings

THE MESSAGE®

THE ONE YEAR BIBLE

The Message

THE one year® BIBLE

Arranged in 365 Readings

✦ ✦ ✦

THE MESSAGE®

✦ ✦ ✦

EUGENE H. PETERSON

NavPress®

A NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers

NavPress.com

The One Year Bible copyright © 1985, 1986, 1987, 1989, 1991, 1996, 2004 by Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

The One Year Bible reading plan copyright © 1985, 1996 by Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

The Message edition copyright © 2024 by The Navigators with permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

A NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers

The Message, *The Message* logo, *NavPress*, and the NavPress logo are registered trademarks of NavPress, The Navigators, Colorado Springs, CO. Absence of ® in connection with marks of NavPress or other parties does not indicate an absence of registration of those marks.

Tyndale and *The One Year* are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Ministries. *One Year* and The One Year logo are trademarks of Tyndale House Ministries.

Designed by Dean H. Renninger

Cover and interior illustrations by Wenjia Tang. Copyright © Tyndale House Ministries. All rights reserved.

Logo and interior date typeface Apolline copyright © by Jean François Porchez/Typofonderie. All rights reserved.

The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved.
The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language Numbered Edition copyright © 2005.

The Message text may be quoted in any form (written, visual, electronic, or audio), up to and inclusive of five hundred (500) verses, without express written permission of the publisher, NavPress Publishing Group, providing the verses quoted do not amount to a complete book of the Bible and do not account for twenty-five percent (25%) or more of the total text of the work in which they are quoted.

When *The Message* is quoted, one of the following credit lines must appear on either the title page or the copyright page of the work:

> All Scripture quotations are taken from *The Message*, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers.
>
> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from *The Message*, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers.
>
> Scripture quotations marked *MSG* are taken from *The Message*, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers.

When quotations from *The Message* text are used in nonsalable media, such as church bulletins, orders of service, posters, transparencies, or similar media, a complete copyright notice is not required, but "The Message" or "MSG" must appear at the end of each quotation.

Permission requests for commercial and noncommercial use that exceed the above guidelines must be directed to and approved in writing by Tyndale House Publishers. Send requests by email to permission@tyndale.com. Learn more about *The Message* at messagebible.com.

Published in association with Alive Literary Agency, aliveliterary.com

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at csresponse@tyndale.com, or call 1-855-277-9400.

ISBN 978-1-64158-825-6 Softcover

Printed in China

30 29 28 27 26 25 24
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Alphabetical Index to the Books of the Bible . . . . . page A7
Ways to Use *The One Year Bible* . . . . . page A9
Introduction to *The Message* . . . . . page A11
The Translator and His Friends . . . . . page A15

Genesis / *January 1* . . . . . page 1
Exodus / *January 25* . . . . . page 77
Leviticus / *February 16* . . . . . page 144
Numbers / *March 3* . . . . . page 189
Deuteronomy / *March 23* . . . . . page 254
Joshua / *April 10* . . . . . page 314
Judges / *April 23* . . . . . page 354
Ruth / *May 5* . . . . . page 395
1 Samuel / *May 7* . . . . . page 402
2 Samuel / *May 22* . . . . . page 452
1 Kings / *June 6* . . . . . page 500
2 Kings / *June 21* . . . . . page 547
1 Chronicles / *July 5* . . . . . page 597
2 Chronicles / *July 20* . . . . . page 640
Ezra / *August 5* . . . . . page 693
Nehemiah / *August 11* . . . . . page 710
Esther / *August 18* . . . . . page 732
Job / *August 21* . . . . . page 743
Psalms / *January 1* . . . . . page 4
July 3 . . . . . page 592
Proverbs / *January 1* . . . . . page 4
Ecclesiastes / *September 2* . . . . . page 792
Song of Songs / *September 6* . . . . page 804
Isaiah / *September 8* . . . . . page 813
Jeremiah / *October 3* . . . . . page 912
Lamentations / *October 29* . . . . page 1011
Ezekiel / *November 1* . . . . . page 1023
Daniel / *November 25* . . . . . page 1098
Hosea / *December 5* . . . . . page 1126
Joel / *December 9* . . . . . page 1141
Amos / *December 10* . . . . . page 1146
Obadiah / *December 13* . . . . . page 1156
Jonah / *December 14* . . . . . page 1159
Micah / *December 15* . . . . . page 1161
Nahum / *December 17* . . . . . page 1169
Habakkuk / *December 18* . . . . . page 1173
Zephaniah / *December 19* . . . . . page 1177
Haggai / *December 20* . . . . . page 1181
Zechariah / *December 21* . . . . . page 1185
Malachi / *December 30* . . . . . page 1205
Matthew / *January 1* . . . . . page 3
Mark / *February 15* . . . . . page 143
Luke / *March 13* . . . . . page 225
John / *April 30* . . . . . page 378
Acts / *June 3* . . . . . page 492
Romans / *July 12* . . . . . page 619
1 Corinthians / *August 4* . . . . . page 692
2 Corinthians / *August 26* . . . . . page 768
Galatians / *September 14* . . . . . page 837
Ephesians / *September 22* . . . . . page 869
Philippians / *September 29* . . . . . page 898
Colossians / *October 4* . . . . . page 919
1 Thessalonians / *October 9* . . . . page 940
2 Thessalonians / *October 13* . . . page 955
1 Timothy / *October 16* . . . . . page 965
2 Timothy / *October 22* . . . . . page 986
Titus / *October 26* . . . . . page 1004
Philemon / *October 29* . . . . . page 1014
Hebrews / *October 30* . . . . . page 1017
James / *November 17* . . . . . page 1076
1 Peter / *November 22* . . . . . page 1091
2 Peter / *November 27* . . . . . page 1106

1 John / *November 30*. . . . . page 1114
2 John / *December 6* . . . . . page 1131
3 John / *December 7* . . . . . page 1135
Jude / *December 8* . . . . . page 1139
Revelation / *December 9*. . . . . page 1144

The Making of *The Message*. . . . . page 1213

Alphabetical Index

TO THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

Acts / *June 3* . . . . . page 492
Amos / *December 10* . . . . . page 1146
1 Chronicles / *July 5* . . . . . page 597
2 Chronicles / *July 20* . . . . . page 640
Colossians / *October 4* . . . . . page 919
1 Corinthians / *August 4* . . . . . page 692
2 Corinthians / *August 26* . . . . . page 768
Daniel / *November 25* . . . . . page 1098
Deuteronomy / *March 23* . . . . . page 254
Ecclesiastes / *September 2* . . . . . page 792
Ephesians / *September 22* . . . . . page 869
Esther / *August 18* . . . . . page 732
Exodus / *January 25* . . . . . page 77
Ezekiel / *November 1* . . . . . page 1023
Ezra / *August 5* . . . . . page 693
Galatians / *September 14* . . . . . page 837
Genesis / *January 1* . . . . . page 1
Habakkuk / *December 18* . . . . . page 1173
Haggai / *December 20* . . . . . page 1181
Hebrews / *October 30* . . . . . page 1017
Hosea / *December 5* . . . . . page 1126
Isaiah / *September 8* . . . . . page 813
James / *November 17* . . . . . page 1076
Jeremiah / *October 3* . . . . . page 912
Job / *August 21* . . . . . page 743
Joel / *December 9* . . . . . page 1141
John / *April 30* . . . . . page 378
1 John / *November 30* . . . . . page 1114
2 John / *December 6* . . . . . page 1131
3 John / *December 7* . . . . . page 1135
Jonah / *December 14* . . . . . page 1159
Joshua / *April 10* . . . . . page 314
Jude / *December 8* . . . . . page 1139
Judges / *April 23* . . . . . page 354
1 Kings / *June 6* . . . . . page 500
2 Kings / *June 21* . . . . . page 547
Lamentations / *October 29* . . . . page 1011
Leviticus / *February 16* . . . . . page 144
Luke / *March 13* . . . . . page 225
Malachi / *December 30* . . . . . page 1205
Mark / *February 15* . . . . . page 143
Matthew / *January 1* . . . . . page 3
Micah / *December 15* . . . . . page 1161
Nahum / *December 17* . . . . . page 1169
Nehemiah / *August 11* . . . . . page 710
Numbers / *March 3* . . . . . page 189
Obadiah / *December 13* . . . . . page 1156
1 Peter / *November 22* . . . . . page 1091
2 Peter / *November 27* . . . . . page 1106
Philemon / *October 29* . . . . . page 1014
Philippians / *September 29* . . . . . page 898
Proverbs / *January 1* . . . . . page 4
Psalms / *January 1* . . . . . page 4
July 3 . . . . . page 592
Revelation / *December 9* . . . . . page 1144
Romans / *July 12* . . . . . page 619
Ruth / *May 5* . . . . . page 395
1 Samuel / *May 7* . . . . . page 402
2 Samuel / *May 22* . . . . . page 452
Song of Songs / *September 6* . . . . page 804
1 Thessalonians / *October 9* . . . . page 940
2 Thessalonians / *October 13* . . . page 955
1 Timothy / *October 16* . . . . . page 965
2 Timothy / *October 22* . . . . . page 986
Titus / *October 26* . . . . . page 1004
Zechariah / *December 21* . . . . . page 1185
Zephaniah / *December 19* . . . . . page 1177

Ways to Use
THE ONE YEAR BIBLE

The One Year Bible is divided into daily readings. For each day there is one portion each from the Old Testament, the New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs. The four separate daily readings are grouped on consecutive pages, giving freshness and diversity to each day's reading. This also makes it easy to use *The One Year Bible* in a variety of ways.

The One Year Bible has led millions of readers through the Bible in one year. Its arrangement, however, is equally useful for guiding a reader through the Bible in two years, or even longer. If you feel too rushed or want to spend more time on each day's selections, here are a few other suggested reading plans.

The Revised One-Year Plan. Schedule time in both the morning and evening. Read the New Testament and Psalms selections in the morning and the Old Testament and Proverbs selections in the evening.

The Two-Year Plan. During the first year, read the Old Testament and Proverbs selections. Then during the second year, read the selections from the New Testament and Psalms.

The Three-Year Plan. Read the Old Testament selection the first year, the New Testament selection the second year, and the Psalms and Proverbs selections during the third year.

Words of Praise and Wisdom in One Year. Read the Psalms and Proverbs selections for each day. This will take you through the Psalms twice and Proverbs once during the year, giving you words of praise and wisdom to live by each day.

You need not limit yourself to these suggested plans. The arrangement of *The One Year Bible* makes it easy to devise any number of Bible reading plans to meet your particular needs.

Introduction to
THE MESSAGE

Reading is the first thing, just reading the Bible. As we read we enter a new world of words and find ourselves in on a conversation in which God has the first and last words. We soon realize that we are included in the conversation. We didn't expect this. But this is precisely what generation after generation of Bible readers do find: The Bible is not only written about us but to us. In these pages we become insiders to a conversation in which God uses words to form and bless us, to teach and guide us, to forgive and save us.

We aren't used to this. We are used to reading books that explain things, or tell us what to do, or inspire or entertain us. But this is different. This is a world of revelation: God revealing to people just like us—men and women created in God's image—how God works and what is going on in this world in which we find ourselves. At the same time that God reveals all this, God draws us in by invitation and command to participate in God's working life. We gradually (or suddenly) realize that we are insiders in the most significant action of our time as God establishes his grand rule of love and justice on this earth (as it is in heaven). "Revelation" means that we are reading something we couldn't have guessed or figured out on our own. Revelation is what makes the Bible unique.

And so just reading this Bible, *The Message*, and listening to what we read, is the first thing. There will be time enough for study later on. But first, it is important simply to read, leisurely and thoughtfully. We need to get a feel for the way these stories and songs, these prayers and conversations, these sermons and visions, invite us into this large, large world in which the invisible God is behind and involved in everything visible and illuminates what it means to live here—really live, not just get across the street. As we read, and the longer we read, we begin to "get it"—we are in conversation with God. We find ourselves listening and answering in matters that most concern us: who we are, where we came from, where we are going, what makes us tick, the texture of the world and the communities we live in, and—most of all—the incredible love of God among us, doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Through reading the Bible, we see that there is far more to the world, more to us, more to what we see and more to what we don't see—more to everything!—than we had ever dreamed, and that this "more" has to do with God.

This is new for many of us, a different sort of book—a book that reads us even as we read it. We are used to picking up and reading books for what we can get out of them: information we can use, inspiration to energize us, instructions on how to do something or other, entertainment to while away a rainy day, wisdom that will guide us into living better. These things can and do take place when reading the Bible, but the Bible is given to us in

the first place simply to invite us to make ourselves at home in the world of God, God's Word and world, and become familiar with the way God speaks and the ways in which we answer him with our lives.

✦ ✦ ✦

Our reading turns up some surprises. The biggest surprise for many is how accessible this book is to those who simply open it up and read it. Virtually anyone can read this Bible with understanding. The reason that new translations are made every couple of generations or so is to keep the language of the Bible current with the common speech we use, the very language in which it was first written. We don't have to be smart or well-educated to understand it, for it is written in the words and sentences we hear in the marketplace, on school playgrounds, and around the dinner table. Because the Bible is so famous and revered, many assume that we need experts to explain and interpret it for us—and, of course, there are some things that need to be explained. But the first men and women who listened to these words now written in our Bibles were ordinary, everyday, working-class people. One of the greatest of the early translators of the Bible into English, William Tyndale, said that he was translating so that the "boy that driveth the plough" would be able to read the Scriptures.

One well-educated African man, who later became one of the most influential Bible teachers in our history (Augustine), was greatly offended when he first read the Bible. Instead of a book cultivated and polished in the literary style he admired so much, he found it full of homespun, earthy stories of plain, unimportant people. He read it in a Latin translation full of slang and jargon. He took one look at what he considered the "unspiritual" quality of so many of its characters and the everydayness of Jesus, and he contemptuously abandoned it. It was years before he realized that God had not taken the form of a sophisticated intellectual to teach us about highbrow heavenly culture so we could appreciate the finer things of God. When he saw that God entered our lives as a Jewish servant in order to save us from our sins, he started reading the book gratefully and believingly.

Some are also surprised that Bible reading does not introduce us to a "nicer" world. This biblical world is decidedly not an ideal world, the kind we see advertised in travel posters. Suffering and injustice and ugliness are not purged from the world in which God works and loves and saves. Nothing is glossed over. God works patiently and deeply, but often in hidden ways, in the mess of our humanity and history. Ours is not a neat and tidy world in which we are assured that we can get everything under our control. This takes considerable getting used to—there is mystery everywhere. The Bible does not give us a predictable cause-effect world in which we can plan our careers and secure our futures. It is not a dream world in which everything works out according to our adolescent expectations—there is pain and poverty and abuse at which we cry out in indignation, "You can't let this happen!" For most of us it takes years and years and years to exchange our dream world for this real world of grace and mercy, sacrifice and love, freedom and joy—the God-saved world.

Yet another surprise is that the Bible does not flatter us. It is not trying to sell us anything that promises to make life easier. It doesn't offer secrets to what we often think of as prosperity or pleasure or high adventure. The reality that comes into focus as we read the Bible has to do with what God is doing in a saving love that includes us and everything we do. This is quite different from what our sin-stunted and culture-cluttered minds imagine. But our

Bible reading does not give us access to a mail-order catalog of idols from which we can pick and choose to satisfy our fantasies. The Bible begins with God speaking creation and us into being. It continues with God entering into personalized and complex relationships with us, helping and blessing us, teaching and training us, correcting and disciplining us, loving and saving us. This is not an escape from reality but a plunge into more reality—a sacrificial but altogether better life all the way.

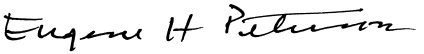
✦ ✦ ✦

God doesn't force any of this on us: God's Word is personal address, inviting, commanding, challenging, rebuking, judging, comforting, directing—but not forcing. Not coercing. We are given space and freedom to answer, to enter the conversation. For more than anything else the Bible invites our participation in the work and language of God.

As we read, we find that there is a connection between the Word Read and the Word Lived. Everything in this book is live-able. Many of us find that the most important question we ask as we read is not "What does it mean?" but "How can I live it?" So we read personally, not impersonally. We read in order to live our true selves, not just get information that we can use to raise our standard of living. Bible reading is a means of listening to and obeying God, not gathering religious data by which we can be our own gods.

You are going to hear stories in this book that will take you out of your preoccupation with yourself and into the spacious freedom in which God is working the world's salvation. You are going to come across words and sentences that stab you awake to a beauty and hope that will connect you with your real life.

Be sure to answer.



The Translator
AND HIS FRIENDS

The Message ***is a contemporary rendering of the Bible from the original languages, crafted to present its tone, rhythm, events, and ideas in everyday language.***

Eugene H. Peterson was a pastor, scholar, writer, and poet. After teaching at a seminary and then giving nearly thirty years to church ministry in the Baltimore area, he created *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*—a vibrant Bible translation that connects with today's readers like no other. It took Eugene a full ten years to complete. He worked from the Greek and Hebrew texts to ensure authenticity. At the same time, his ear was always tuned to the cadence and energy of contemporary English.

Eugene wrote more than thirty books, including *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*, *Run with the Horses*, and *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. For his work on *The Message*, he received the prestigious ECPA Gold Medallion Book Award.

Eugene served as Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, BC, retiring in 2006. He spent his final years in Montana with his beloved wife, Jan.

TRANSLATION CONSULTANTS

Peterson's work has been thoroughly reviewed by the following team of recognized Old and New Testament scholars, who ensured that it is accurate as well as faithful to the original languages.

OLD TESTAMENT TEAM

Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *North Park Theological Seminary* (chair)
Richard E. Averbeck, *Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*
Bryan E. Beyer, *Columbia International University*
Lamar E. Cooper Sr., *Criswell College*
Peter E. Enns, *Eastern University*
Duane E. Garrett, *The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*
Donald R. Glenn, *Dallas Theological Seminary*
Paul R. House, *Beeson Divinity School, Samford University*
V. Phillips Long, *Regent College*
Tremper Longman III, *Westmont College*
John N. Oswalt, *Asbury Theological Seminary*
Richard L. Pratt Jr., *Reformed Theological Seminary*
John H. Walton, *Wheaton College*

Prescott H. Williams Jr., *Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary*
Marvin R. Wilson, *Gordon College*

NEW TESTAMENT TEAM

William W. Klein, *Denver Seminary* (chair)
Darrell L. Bock, *Dallas Theological Seminary*
Donald A. Hagner, *Fuller Theological Seminary*
Moisés Silva, *Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary*
Rodney A. Whitacre, *Trinity School for Ministry*

January 1

GENESIS 1:1–2:25

First this: God created the Heavens and
Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth
was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless
emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit
brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.

3-5 God spoke: "Light!"
And light appeared.
God saw that light was good
and separated light from dark.
God named the light Day,
he named the dark Night.
It was evening, it was morning—
Day One.

6-8 God spoke: "Sky! In the middle of
the waters;
separate water from water!"
God made sky.
He separated the water under sky
from the water above sky.
And there it was:
he named sky the Heavens;
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Two.

9-10 God spoke: "Separate!
Water-beneath-Heaven, gather into
one place;
Land, appear!"
And there it was.
God named the land Earth.
He named the pooled water Ocean.
God saw that it was good.

11-13 God spoke: "Earth, green up! Grow
all varieties
of seed-bearing plants,
Every sort of fruit-bearing tree."
And there it was.
Earth produced green seed-bearing
plants,
all varieties,
And fruit-bearing trees of all sorts.
God saw that it was good.
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Three.

14-15 God spoke: "Lights! Come out!
Shine in Heaven's sky!
Separate Day from Night.
Mark seasons and days and years,
Lights in Heaven's sky to give light
to Earth."
And there it was.

16-19 God made two big lights,
the larger
to take charge of Day,
The smaller to be in charge of Night;
and he made the stars.
God placed them in the heavenly sky
to light up Earth
And oversee Day and Night,
to separate light and dark.
God saw that it was good.
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Four.

20-23 God spoke: "Swarm, Ocean,
with fish and all sea life!
Birds, fly through the sky over
Earth!"
God created the huge whales,
all the swarm of life in the waters,
And every kind and species of
flying birds.
God saw that it was good.
God blessed them: "Prosper!
Reproduce! Fill Ocean!
Birds, reproduce on Earth!"
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Five.

24-25 God spoke: "Earth, generate life!
Every sort and kind:
cattle and reptiles and wild
animals—all kinds."
And there it was:
wild animals of every kind,
Cattle of all kinds, every sort of reptile
and bug.
God saw that it was good.

26-28 God spoke: "Let us make human
beings in our image, make them
reflecting our nature
So they can be responsible for the fish
in the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,
And, yes, Earth itself,
and every animal that moves on the
face of Earth."
God created human beings;
he created them godlike,
Reflecting God's nature.
He created them male and female.
God blessed them:
"Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth!
Take charge!
Be responsible for fish in the sea and
birds in the air,
for every living thing that moves on
the face of Earth."

29-30 Then God said, "I've given you
every sort of seed-bearing plant
on Earth
And every kind of fruit-bearing tree,
given them to you for food.
To all animals and all birds,
everything that moves and breathes,
I give whatever grows out of the ground
for food."
And there it was.

31 God looked over everything he
had made;
it was so good, so very good!
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Six.

2:1 Heaven and Earth were finished,
down to the last detail.

2-4 By the seventh day
God had finished his work.
On the seventh day
he rested from all his work.
God blessed the seventh day.
He made it a Holy Day
Because on that day he rested from
his work,
all the creating God had done.

This is the story of how it all started,
of Heaven and Earth when they
were created.

5-7 At the time GOD made Earth and Heaven, before any grasses or shrubs had sprouted from the ground—GOD hadn't yet sent rain on Earth, nor was there anyone around to work the ground (the whole Earth was watered by underground springs)—GOD formed Man out of dirt from the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. The Man came alive—a living soul!

8-9 Then GOD planted a garden in Eden, in the east. He put the Man he had just made in it. GOD made all kinds of trees grow from the ground, trees beautiful to look at and good to eat. The Tree-of-Life was in the middle of the garden, also the Tree-of-Knowledge-of-Good-and-Evil.

10-14 A river flows out of Eden to water the garden and from there divides into four rivers. The first is named Pishon; it flows through Havilah where there is gold. The gold of this land is good. The land is also known for a sweet-scented resin and the onyx stone. The second river is named Gihon; it flows through the land of Cush. The third river is named Hiddekel and flows east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 GOD took the Man and set him down in the Garden of Eden to work the ground and keep it in order.

16-17 GOD commanded the Man, "You can eat from any tree in the garden, except from the Tree-of-Knowledge-of-Good-and-Evil. Don't eat from it. The moment you eat from that tree, you're dead."

18-20 GOD said, "It's not good for the Man to be alone; I'll make him a helper, a companion." So GOD formed from the dirt of the ground all the animals of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the Man to see what he would name them. Whatever the Man called each living creature, that was its name. The Man named the cattle, named the birds of the air, named the wild animals; but he didn't find a suitable companion.

21-22 GOD put the Man into a deep sleep. As he slept he removed one of his ribs and replaced it with flesh. GOD then used the rib that he had taken from the Man to make Woman and presented her to the Man.

23-25 The Man said,
"Finally! Bone of my bone,
flesh of my flesh!
Name her Woman
for she was made from Man."

Therefore a man leaves his father
and mother and embraces his
wife. They become one flesh.
The two of them, the Man and his
Wife, were naked, but they felt
no shame.

MATTHEW 1:1–2:12
The family tree of Jesus Christ, David's son,
Abraham's son:

2-6 Abraham had Isaac,
Isaac had Jacob,
Jacob had Judah and his brothers,
Judah had Perez and Zerah (the mother
was Tamar),
Perez had Hezron,
Hezron had Aram,
Aram had Amminadab,
Amminadab had Nahshon,
Nahshon had Salmon,
Salmon had Boaz (his mother was
Rahab),
Boaz had Obed (Ruth was the mother),
Obed had Jesse,
Jesse had David,
and David became king.

6-11 David had Solomon (Uriah's wife was
the mother),
Solomon had Rehoboam,
Rehoboam had Abijah,
Abijah had Asa,
Asa had Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat had Joram,
Joram had Uzziah,
Uzziah had Jotham,
Jotham had Ahaz,
Ahaz had Hezekiah,
Hezekiah had Manasseh,
Manasseh had Amon,
Amon had Josiah,
Josiah had Jehoiachin and his brothers,
and then the people were taken into
the Babylonian exile.

12-16 When the Babylonian exile ended,
Jeconiah had Shealtiel,
Shealtiel had Zerubbabel,
Zerubbabel had Abiud,
Abiud had Eliakim,
Eliakim had Azor,
Azor had Zadok,
Zadok had Achim,
Achim had Eliud,
Eliud had Eleazar,
Eleazar had Matthan,
Matthan had Jacob,
Jacob had Joseph, Mary's husband,
the Mary who gave birth to Jesus,
the Jesus who was called Christ.

17 There were fourteen generations from
Abraham to David,
another fourteen from David to the
Babylonian exile,
and yet another fourteen from the
Babylonian exile to Christ.

18-19 The birth of Jesus took place like this.
His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. Before they enjoyed their wedding night, Joseph discovered she was pregnant. (It was by the Holy Spirit, but he didn't know that.) Joseph, chagrined but noble, determined to take care of things quietly so Mary would not be disgraced.

20-23 While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God's angel spoke in the dream: "Joseph, son of David, don't hesitate to get married. Mary's pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God's Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus—'God saves'—because he will save his people from their sins." This would bring the prophet's embryonic revelation to full term:

Watch for this—a virgin will get
pregnant and bear a son;
They will name him Immanuel
(Hebrew for "God is with us").

24-25 Then Joseph woke up. He did exactly what God's angel commanded in the dream: He married Mary. But he did not consummate the marriage until she had the baby. He named the baby Jesus.

2:1-2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory—this was during Herod's kingship—a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. They asked around, "Where can we find and pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We're on pilgrimage to worship him."

3-4 When word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified—and not Herod alone, but most of Jerusalem as well. Herod lost no time. He gathered all the high

priests and religion scholars in the city together and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

5-6 They told him, "Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly:

It's you, Bethlehem, in Judah's land,
no longer bringing up the rear.
From you will come the leader
who will shepherd-rule my people,
my Israel."

7-8 Herod then arranged a secret meeting with the scholars from the East. Pretending to be as devout as they were, he got them to tell him exactly when the birth-announcement star appeared. Then he told them the prophecy about Bethlehem, and said, "Go find this child. Leave no stone unturned. As soon as you find him, send word and I'll join you at once in your worship."

9-10 Instructed by the king, they set off. Then the star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child. They could hardly contain themselves: They were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time!

11 They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh.

12 In a dream, they were warned not to report back to Herod. So they worked out another route, left the territory without being seen, and returned to their own country.

PSALM 1:1-6

1 How well God must like you—
you don't walk in the ruts of those
blind-as-bats,
you don't stand with the
good-for-nothings,
you don't take your seat among the
know-it-alls.

2-3 Instead you thrill to GOD's Word,
you chew on Scripture day and night.
You're a tree replanted in Eden,
bearing fresh fruit every month,
Never dropping a leaf,
always in blossom.

4-5 You're not at all like the wicked,
who are mere windblown dust—
Without defense in court,
unfit company for innocent people.

6 GOD charts the road you take.
The road *they* take leads to nowhere.

PROVERBS 1:1-6

1-6 These are the wise sayings of
Solomon,
David's son, Israel's king—
Written down so we'll know how to live
well and right,
to understand what life means and
where it's going;
A manual for living,
for learning what's right and just
and fair;
To teach the inexperienced the ropes
and give our young people a grasp
on reality.
There's something here also for
seasoned men and women,
still a thing or two for the
experienced to learn—
Fresh wisdom to probe and penetrate,
the rhymes and reasons of wise men
and women.

January 2

GENESIS 3:1–4:26

The serpent was clever, more clever than any wild animal GOD had made. He spoke to the Woman: "Do I understand that God told you not to eat from any tree in the garden?"

2-3 The Woman said to the serpent, "Not at all. We can eat from the trees in the garden. It's only about the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'Don't eat from it; don't even touch it or you'll die.'"

4-5 The serpent told the Woman, "You won't die. God knows that the moment you eat from that tree, you'll see what's really going on. You'll be just like God, knowing everything, ranging all the way from good to evil."

6 When the Woman saw that the tree
looked like good eating and realized what
she would get out of it—she'd know
everything!—she took and ate the fruit and
then gave some to her husband, and he ate.
7 Immediately the two of them did "see
what's really going on"—saw themselves
naked! They sewed fig leaves together as
makeshift clothes for themselves.
8 When they heard the sound of GOD
strolling in the garden in the evening
breeze, the Man and his Wife hid in the
trees of the garden, hid from GOD.
9 GOD called to the Man: "Where are you?"
10 He said, "I heard you in the garden
and I was afraid because I was naked. And
I hid."
11 GOD said, "Who told you that you were
naked? Did you eat from that tree I told you
not to eat from?"
12 The Man said, "The Woman you gave
me as a companion, she gave me fruit from
the tree, and, yes, I ate it."
GOD said to the Woman, "What is this
that you've done?"
13 "The serpent seduced me," she said,
"and I ate."

14-15 GOD told the serpent:
"Because you've done this, you're
cursed,
cursed beyond all cattle and wild
animals,
Cursed to slink on your belly
and eat dirt all your life.
I'm declaring war between you and
the Woman,
between your offspring and hers.
He'll wound your head,
you'll wound his heel."

16 He told the Woman:
"I'll multiply your pains in childbirth;
you'll give birth to your babies
in pain.
You'll want to please your husband,
but he'll lord it over you."

17-19 He told the Man:
"Because you listened to your wife
and ate from the tree
That I commanded you not to eat from,
'Don't eat from this tree,'
The very ground is cursed because
of you;
getting food from the ground
Will be as painful as having babies is
for your wife;
you'll be working in pain all your
life long.
The ground will sprout thorns and
weeds,
you'll get your food the hard way,
Planting and tilling and harvesting,
sweating in the fields from dawn
to dusk,
Until you return to that ground
yourself, dead and buried;
you started out as dirt, you'll end
up dirt."

20 The Man, known as Adam, named his
wife Eve because she was the mother of all
the living.
21 GOD made leather clothing for Adam
and his wife and dressed them.
22 GOD said, "The Man has become like
one of us, capable of knowing everything,
ranging from good to evil. What if he now
should reach out and take fruit from the
Tree-of-Life and eat, and live forever?
Never—this cannot happen!"
23-24 So GOD expelled them from the
Garden of Eden and sent them to work the
ground, the same dirt out of which they'd
been made. He threw them out of the gar-
den and stationed angel-cherubim and a
revolving sword of fire east of it, guarding
the path to the Tree-of-Life.

4:1 Adam slept with Eve his wife. She con-
ceived and had Cain. She said, "I've gotten
a man, with GOD's help!"
2 Then she had another baby, Abel. Abel
was a herdsman and Cain a farmer.
3-5 Time passed. Cain brought an offer-
ing to GOD from the produce of his farm.
Abel also brought an offering, but from the
firstborn animals of his herd, choice cuts
of meat. GOD liked Abel and his offering,
but Cain and his offering didn't get his ap-
proval. Cain lost his temper and went into
a sulk.
6-7 GOD spoke to Cain: "Why this tantrum?
Why the sulking? If you do well, won't you
be accepted? And if you don't do well, sin is
lying in wait for you, ready to pounce; it's out
to get you, you've got to master it."
8 Cain had words with his brother. They
were out in the field; Cain came at Abel his
brother and killed him.

9 GOD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?"

He said, "How should I know? Am I his babysitter?"

10-12 GOD said, "What have you done! The voice of your brother's blood is calling to me from the ground. From now on you'll get nothing but curses from this ground; you'll be driven from this ground that has opened its arms to receive the blood of your murdered brother. You'll farm this ground, but it will no longer give you its best. You'll be a homeless wanderer on Earth."

13-14 Cain said to GOD, "My punishment is too much. I can't take it! You've thrown me off the land and I can never again face you. I'm a homeless wanderer on Earth and whoever finds me will kill me."

15 GOD told him, "No. Anyone who kills Cain will pay for it seven times over." GOD put a mark on Cain to protect him so that no one who met him would kill him.

16 Cain left the presence of GOD and lived in No-Man's-Land, east of Eden.

17-18 Cain slept with his wife. She conceived and had Enoch. He then built a city and named it after his son, Enoch.

Enoch had Irad,
Irad had Mehujael,
Mehujael had Methushael,
Methushael had Lamech.

19-22 Lamech married two wives, Adah and Zillah. Adah gave birth to Jabal, the ancestor of all who live in tents and herd cattle. His brother's name was Jubal, the ancestor of all who play the lyre and flute. Zillah gave birth to Tubal-Cain, who worked at the forge making bronze and iron tools. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah.

23-24 Lamech said to his wives,
Adah and Zillah, listen to me;
you wives of Lamech, hear me out:
I killed a man for wounding me,
a young man who attacked me.
If Cain is avenged seven times,
for Lamech it's seventy-seven!

25-26 Adam slept with his wife again. She had a son whom she named Seth. She said, "God has given me another child in place of Abel whom Cain killed." And then Seth had a son whom he named Enosh.

That's when men and women began praying and worshiping in the name of GOD.

MATTHEW 2:13–3:6

After the scholars were gone, God's angel showed up again in Joseph's dream and commanded, "Get up. Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt. Stay until further notice. Herod is on the hunt for this child, and wants to kill him."

14-15 Joseph obeyed. He got up, took the child and his mother under cover of darkness. They were out of town and well on their way by daylight. They lived in Egypt until Herod's death. This Egyptian exile fulfilled what Hosea had preached: "I called my son out of Egypt."

16-18 Herod, when he realized that the scholars had tricked him, flew into a rage. He commanded the murder of every little boy two years old and under who lived in Bethlehem and its surrounding hills. (He determined that age from information he'd gotten from the scholars.) That's when Jeremiah's revelation was fulfilled:

A sound was heard in Ramah,
weeping and much lament.
Rachel weeping for her children,
Rachel refusing all solace,
Her children gone,
dead and buried.

19-20 Later, when Herod died, God's angel appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt: "Up, take the child and his mother and return to Israel. All those out to murder the child are dead."

21-23 Joseph obeyed. He got up, took the child and his mother, and reentered Israel. When he heard, though, that Archelaus had succeeded his father, Herod, as king in Judea, he was afraid to go there. But then Joseph was directed in a dream to go to the hills of Galilee. On arrival, he settled in the village of Nazareth. This move was a fulfillment of the prophetic words, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

3:1-2 While Jesus was living in the Galilean hills, John, called "the Baptizer," was preaching in the desert country of Judea. His message was simple and austere, like his desert surroundings: "Change your life. God's kingdom is here."

3 John and his message were authorized
by Isaiah's prophecy:

Thunder in the desert!
Prepare for God's arrival!
Make the road smooth and straight!

4-6 John dressed in a camel-hair habit tied at the waist by a leather strap. He lived on a diet of locusts and wild field honey. People poured out of Jerusalem, Judea, and the Jordanian countryside to hear and see him in action. There at the Jordan River those who came to confess their sins were baptized into a changed life.

PSALM 2:1-12

1-6 Why the big noise, nations?
Why the mean plots, peoples?
Earth-leaders push for position,
Demagogues and delegates meet for
summit talks,
The God-deniers, the Messiah-defiers:
"Let's get free of God!
Cast loose from Messiah!"
Heaven-throned God breaks out
laughing.
At first he's amused at their
presumption;
Then he gets good and angry.
Furiously, he shuts them up:
"Don't you know there's a King
in Zion? A coronation banquet
Is spread for him on the holy
summit."

7-9 Let me tell you what GOD said next.
He said, "You're my son,
And today is your birthday.
What do you want? Name it:
Nations as a present? continents as
a prize?
You can command them all to dance
for you,
Or throw them out with tomorrow's
trash."

10-12 So, rebel-kings, use your heads;
Upstart-judges, learn your lesson:
Worship GOD in adoring embrace,
Celebrate in trembling awe. Kiss
Messiah!
Your very lives are in danger,
you know;
His anger is about to explode,
But if you make a run for God—
you won't regret it!

PROVERBS 1:7-19

7 Start with GOD—the first step in
learning is bowing down to GOD;
only fools thumb their noses at such
wisdom and learning.

8-19 Pay close attention, friend, to what
your father tells you;
never forget what you learned at your
mother's knee.
Wear their counsel like a winning
crown,
like rings on your fingers.
Dear friend, if bad companions
tempt you,
don't go along with them.
If they say—"Let's go out and raise
some hell.
Let's beat up some old man, mug
some old woman.
Let's pick them clean
and get them ready for their
funerals.
We'll load up on top-quality loot.
We'll haul it home by the truckload.
Join us for the time of your life!
With us, it's share and share alike!"—
Oh, friend, don't give them a second
look;
don't listen to them for a minute.
They're racing to a very bad end,
hurrying to ruin everything they lay
hands on.
Nobody robs a bank
with everyone watching,
Yet that's what these people are doing—
they're doing themselves in.
When you grab all you can get, that's
what happens:
the more you get, the less you are.

January 3

GENESIS 5:1–7:24

This is the family tree of the human race: When God created the human race, he made it godlike, with a nature akin to God. He created both male and female and blessed them, the whole human race.

3-5 When Adam was 130 years old, he had a son who was just like him, his very spirit and image, and named him Seth. After the birth of Seth, Adam lived another 800 years, having more sons and daughters. Adam lived a total of 930 years. And he died.

6-8 When Seth was 105 years old, he had Enosh. After Seth had Enosh, he lived another 807 years, having more sons and daughters. Seth lived a total of 912 years. And he died.

9-11 When Enosh was ninety years old, he had Kenan. After he had Kenan, he lived another 815 years, having more sons and daughters. Enosh lived a total of 905 years. And he died.

12-14 When Kenan was seventy years old, he had Mahalalel. After he had Mahalalel, he lived another 840 years, having more sons and daughters. Kenan lived a total of 910 years. And he died.

15-17 When Mahalalel was sixty-five years old, he had Jared. After he had Jared, he lived another 830 years, having more sons and daughters. Mahalalel lived a total of 895 years. And he died.

18-20 When Jared was 162 years old, he had Enoch. After he had Enoch, he lived another 800 years, having more sons and daughters. Jared lived a total of 962 years. And he died.

21-23 When Enoch was sixty-five years old, he had Methuselah. Enoch walked steadily with God. After he had Methuselah, he lived another 300 years, having more sons and daughters. Enoch lived a total of 365 years.

24 Enoch walked steadily with God. And then one day he was simply gone: God took him.

25-27 When Methuselah was 187 years old, he had Lamech. After he had Lamech, he lived another 782 years. Methuselah lived a total of 969 years. And he died.

28-31 When Lamech was 182 years old, he had a son. He named him Noah, saying, "This one will give us a break from the hard work of farming the ground that GOD cursed." After Lamech had Noah, he lived another 595 years, having more sons and daughters. Lamech lived a total of 777 years. And he died.

32 When Noah was 500 years old, he had Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

6:1-2 When the human race began to increase, with more and more daughters being born, the sons of God noticed that the daughters of men were beautiful. They looked them over and picked out wives for themselves.

3 Then GOD said, "I'm not going to breathe life into men and women endlessly. Eventually they're going to die; from now on they can expect a life span of 120 years."

4 This was back in the days (and also later) when there were giants in the land. The giants came from the union of the sons of God and the daughters of men. These were the mighty men of ancient lore, the famous ones.

5-7 GOD saw that human evil was out of control. People thought evil, imagined evil—evil, evil, evil from morning to night. GOD was sorry that he had made the human race in the first place; it broke his heart. GOD said, "I'll get rid of my ruined creation, make a clean sweep: people, animals, snakes and bugs, birds—the works. I'm sorry I made them."

8 But Noah was different. GOD liked what he saw in Noah.

9-10 This is the story of Noah: Noah was a good man, a man of integrity in his community. Noah walked with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

11-12 As far as God was concerned, the Earth had become a sewer; there was violence everywhere. God took one look and saw how bad it was, everyone corrupt and corrupting—life itself corrupt to the core.

13 God said to Noah, "It's all over. It's the end of the human race. The violence is everywhere; I'm making a clean sweep.

14-16 "Build yourself a ship from teakwood. Make rooms in it. Coat it with pitch inside and out. Make it 450 feet long, seventy-five feet wide, and forty-five feet high. Build a roof for it and put in a window eighteen inches from the top; put in a door on the side of the ship; and make three decks, lower, middle, and upper.

17 "I'm going to bring a flood on the Earth that will destroy everything alive under Heaven. Total destruction.

18-21 "But I'm going to establish a covenant with you: You'll board the ship, and your sons, your wife and your sons' wives will come on board with you. You

are also to take two of each living creature, a male and a female, on board the ship, to preserve their lives with you: two of every species of bird, mammal, and reptile—two of everything so as to preserve their lives along with yours. Also get all the food you'll need and store it up for you and them."

22 Noah did everything God commanded him to do.

7:1 Next God said to Noah, "Now board the ship, you and all your family—out of everyone in this generation, you're the righteous one.

2-4 "Take on board with you seven pairs of every clean animal, a male and a female; one pair of every unclean animal, a male and a female; and seven pairs of every kind of bird, a male and a female, to insure their survival on Earth. In just seven days I will pour rain on Earth for forty days and forty nights. I'll make a clean sweep of everything that I've made."

5 Noah did everything God commanded him.

6-10 Noah was 600 years old when the floodwaters covered the Earth. Noah and his wife and sons and their wives boarded the ship to escape the flood. Clean and unclean animals, birds, and all the crawling creatures came in pairs to Noah and to the ship, male and female, just as God had commanded Noah. In seven days the floodwaters came.

11-12 It was the six-hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month that it happened: all the underground springs erupted and all the windows of Heaven were thrown open. Rain poured for forty days and forty nights.

13-16 That's the day Noah and his sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, accompanied by his wife and his sons' wives, boarded the ship. And with them every kind of wild and domestic animal, right down to all the kinds of creatures that crawl and all kinds of birds and anything that flies. They came to Noah and to the ship in pairs—everything and anything that had the breath of life in it, male and female of every creature came just as God had commanded Noah. Then God shut the door behind him.

17-23 The flood continued forty days and the waters rose and lifted the ship high over the Earth. The waters kept rising, the flood deepened on the Earth, the ship floated on the surface. The flood got worse until all the highest mountains were covered—the high-water mark reached twenty feet above the crest of the mountains. Everything died. Anything that moved—dead. Birds, farm animals, wild animals, the entire teeming exuberance of life—dead. And all people—dead. Every living, breathing creature that lived on dry land died; he wiped out the whole works—people and animals, crawling creatures and flying birds, every last one of them, gone. Only Noah and his company on the ship lived.

24 The floodwaters took over for 150 days.

MATTHEW 3:7–4:11

When John realized that a lot of Pharisees and Sadducees were showing up for a baptismal experience because it was becoming the popular thing to do, he exploded: "Brood of snakes! What do you think you're doing slithering down here to the river? Do you think a little water on your snakeskins is going to make any difference? It's your life that must change, not your skin! And don't think you can pull rank by claiming Abraham as father. Being a descendant of Abraham is neither here nor there. Descendants of Abraham are a dime a dozen. What counts is your life. Is it green and flourishing? Because if it's deadwood, it goes on the fire.

11-12 "I'm baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. The real action comes next: The main character in this drama—compared to him I'm a mere stagehand—will ignite the kingdom life within you, a fire within you, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. He's going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He'll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he'll put out with the trash to be burned."

✦ ✦ ✦

13-14 Jesus then appeared, arriving at the Jordan River from Galilee. He wanted John to baptize him. John objected, "I'm the one who needs to be baptized, not *you*!"

15 But Jesus insisted. "Do it. God's work, putting things right all these centuries, is

coming together right now in this baptism." So John did it.

16-17 The moment Jesus came up out of the baptismal waters, the skies opened up and he saw God's Spirit—it looked like a dove—descending and landing on him. And along with the Spirit, a voice: "This is my Son, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life."

4:1-3 Next Jesus was taken into the wild by the Spirit for the Test. The Devil was ready to give it. Jesus prepared for the Test by fasting forty days and forty nights. That left him, of course, in a state of extreme hunger, which the Devil took advantage of in the first test: "Since you are God's Son, speak the word that will turn these stones into loaves of bread."

4 Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: "It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God's mouth."

5-6 For the second test the Devil took him to the Holy City. He sat him on top of the Temple and said, "Since you are God's Son, jump." The Devil goaded him by quoting Psalm 91: "He has placed you in the care of angels. They will catch you so that you won't so much as stub your toe on a stone."

7 Jesus countered with another citation from Deuteronomy: "Don't you dare test the Lord your God."

8-9 For the third test, the Devil took him to the peak of a huge mountain. He gestured expansively, pointing out all the earth's kingdoms, how glorious they all were. Then he said, "They're yours—lock, stock, and barrel. Just go down on your knees and worship me, and they're yours."

10 Jesus' refusal was curt: "Beat it, Satan!" He backed his rebuke with a third quotation from Deuteronomy: "Worship the Lord your God, and only him. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness."

11 The Test was over. The Devil left. And in his place, angels! Angels came and took care of Jesus' needs.

PSALM 3:1-8

A David Psalm, When He Escaped for His Life from Absalom, His Son

1-2 GOD! Look! Enemies past counting!
Enemies sprouting like mushrooms,
Mobs of them all around me, roaring
their mockery:
"Hah! No help for *him* from God!"

3-4 But you, GOD, shield me on all sides;
You ground my feet, you lift my
head high;
With all my might I shout up to GOD,
His answers thunder from the
holy mountain.

5-6 I stretch myself out. I sleep.
Then I'm up again—rested, tall and
steady,
Fearless before the enemy mobs
Coming at me from all sides.

7 Up, GOD! My God, help me!
Slap their faces,
First this cheek, then the other,
Your fist hard in their teeth!

8 Real help comes from GOD.
Your blessing clothes your people!

PROVERBS 1:20-24

20-21 Lady Wisdom goes out in the
street and shouts.
At the town center she makes
her speech.
In the middle of the traffic she takes
her stand.
At the busiest corner she calls out:

22-24 "Simpletons! How long will you
wallow in ignorance?
Cynics! How long will you feed your
cynicism?
Idiots! How long will you refuse to learn?
About face! I can revise your life.
Look, I'm ready to pour out my spirit
on you;
I'm ready to tell you all I know.
As it is, I've called, but you've turned a
deaf ear;
I've reached out to you, but you've
ignored me.

January 4

GENESIS 8:1–10:32

Then God turned his attention to Noah and all the wild animals and farm animals with him on the ship. God caused the wind to blow and the floodwaters began to go down. The underground springs were shut off, the windows of Heaven closed and the rain quit. Inch by inch the water lowered. After 150 days the worst was over.

4-6 On the seventeenth day of the seventh month, the ship landed on the Ararat mountain range. The water kept going down until the tenth month. On the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains came into view. After forty days Noah opened the window that he had built into the ship.

7-9 He sent out a raven; it flew back and forth waiting for the floodwaters to dry up. Then he sent a dove to check on the flood conditions, but it couldn't even find a place to perch—water still covered the Earth. Noah reached out and caught it, brought it back into the ship.

10-11 He waited seven more days and sent out the dove again. It came back in the evening with a freshly picked olive leaf in its beak. Noah knew that the flood was about finished.

12 He waited another seven days and sent the dove out a third time. This time it didn't come back.

13-14 In the six-hundred-first year of Noah's life, on the first day of the first month, the flood had dried up. Noah opened the hatch of the ship and saw dry ground. By the twenty-seventh day of the second month, the Earth was completely dry.

15-17 God spoke to Noah: "Leave the ship, you and your wife and your sons and your sons' wives. And take all the animals with you, the whole menagerie of birds and mammals and crawling creatures, all that swarming extravagance of life, so they can reproduce and flourish on the Earth."

18-19 Noah disembarked with his sons and wife and his sons' wives. Then all the animals, crawling creatures, birds—every creature on the face of the Earth—left the ship family by family.

20-21 Noah built an altar to GOD. He selected clean animals and birds from every species and offered them as burnt offerings on the altar. GOD smelled the sweet fragrance and thought to himself, "I'll never again curse the ground because of people. I know they have this bent toward evil from an early age, but I'll never again kill off everything living as I've just done.

22 For as long as Earth lasts,
planting and harvest, cold and heat,
Summer and winter, day and night
will never stop."

9:1-4 God blessed Noah and his sons: He said, "Prosper! Reproduce! Fill the Earth! Every living creature—birds, animals, fish—will fall under your spell and be afraid of you. You're responsible for them. All living creatures are yours for food; just as I gave you the plants, now I give you everything else. Except for meat with its lifeblood still in it—don't eat that.

5 "But your own lifeblood I will avenge; I will avenge it against both animals and other humans.

6-7 Whoever sheds human blood,
by humans let his blood be shed,
Because God made humans in
his image
reflecting God's very nature.
You're here to bear fruit, reproduce,
lavish life on the Earth, live
bountifully!"

8-11 Then God spoke to Noah and his sons: "I'm setting up my covenant with you including your children who will come after you, along with everything alive around you—birds, farm animals, wild animals—that came out of the ship with you. I'm setting up my covenant with you that never again will everything living be destroyed by floodwaters; no, never again will a flood destroy the Earth."

12-16 God continued, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and everything living around you and everyone living after you. I'm putting my rainbow in the clouds, a sign of the covenant between me and the Earth. From now on, when I form a cloud over the Earth

and the rainbow appears in the cloud, I'll remember my covenant between me and you and everything living, that never again will floodwaters destroy all life. When the rainbow appears in the cloud, I'll see it and remember the eternal covenant between God and everything living, every last living creature on Earth."

17 And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I've set up between me and everything living on the Earth."

18-19 The sons of Noah who came out of the ship were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. These are the three sons of Noah; from these three the whole Earth was populated.

20-23 Noah, a farmer, was the first to plant a vineyard. He drank from its wine, got drunk and passed out, naked in his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw that his father was naked and told his two brothers who were outside the tent. Shem and Japheth took a cloak, held it between them from their shoulders, walked backward and covered their father's nakedness, keeping their faces turned away so they did not see their father's exposed body.

24-27 When Noah woke up with his hangover, he learned what his youngest son had done. He said,

Cursed be Canaan! A slave of slaves,
a slave to his brothers!
Blessed be GOD, the God of Shem,
but Canaan shall be his slave.
God prosper Japheth,
living spaciously in the tents of
Shem.
But Canaan shall be his slave.

28-29 Noah lived another 350 years following the flood. He lived a total of 950 years. And he died.

10:1 This is the family tree of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. After the flood, they themselves had sons.

2 The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, Tiras.

3 The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, Togarmah.

4-5 The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, Rodanim. The seafaring peoples developed from these, each in its own place by family, each with its own language.

6 The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, Canaan.

7 The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, Sabteca.

The sons of Raamah: Sheba, Dedan.

8-12 Cush also had Nimrod. He was the first great warrior on Earth. He was a great hunter before GOD. There was a saying, "Like Nimrod, a great hunter before GOD." His kingdom got its start with Babel; then Erech, Akkad, and Calneh in the country of Shinar. From there he went up to Asshur and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and the great city Calah.

13-14 Egypt was ancestor to the Ludim, the Anamim, the Lehabim, the Naphtuhim, the Pathrusim, the Casluhim (the origin of the Philistines), and the Kaphtorim.

15-19 Canaan had Sidon his firstborn, Heth, the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Later the Canaanites spread out, going from Sidon toward Gerar, as far south as Gaza, and then east all the way over to Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and on to Lasha.

20 These are the descendants of Ham by family, language, country, and nation.

21 Shem, the older brother of Japheth, also had sons. Shem was ancestor to all the children of Eber.

22 The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram.

23 The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, Meshech.

24-25 Arphaxad had Shelah and Shelah had Eber. Eber had two sons, Peleg (so named because in his days the human race divided) and Joktan.

26-30 Joktan had Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab—all sons of Joktan. Their land goes from Mesha toward Sephar as far as the mountain ranges in the east.

31 These are the descendants of Shem by family, language, country, and nation.

32 This is the family tree of the sons of Noah as they developed into nations. From them nations developed all across the Earth after the flood.

MATTHEW 4:12-25

When Jesus got word that John had been arrested, he returned to Galilee. He moved from his hometown, Nazareth, to the lakeside village Capernaum, nestled at the base of the Zebulun and Naphtali hills. This move completed Isaiah's revelation:

Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
road to the sea, over Jordan,
Galilee, crossroads for the nations.
People sitting out their lives in the dark
saw a huge light;
Sitting in that dark, dark country of death,
they watched the sun come up.

This Isaiah-prophesied revelation came to life in Galilee the moment Jesus started preaching. He picked up where John left off: "Change your life. God's kingdom is here."

18-20 Walking along the beach of Lake Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers: Simon (later called Peter) and Andrew. They were fishing, throwing their nets into the lake. It was their regular work. Jesus said to them, "Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass." They didn't ask questions, but simply dropped their nets and followed.

21-22 A short distance down the beach they came upon another pair of brothers, James and John, Zebedee's sons. These two were sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, mending their fishnets. Jesus made the same offer to them, and they were just as quick to follow, abandoning boat and father.

23-25 From there he went all over Galilee. He used synagogues for meeting places and taught people the truth of God. God's kingdom was his theme—that beginning right now they were under God's government, a good government! He also healed people of their diseases and of the bad effects of their bad lives. Word got around the entire Roman province of Syria. People brought anybody with a sickness, whether mental, emotional, or physical. Jesus healed them, one and all. More and more people came, the momentum gathering. Besides those from Galilee, crowds came from the "Ten Towns" across the lake, others up from Jerusalem and Judea, still others from across the Jordan.

PSALM 4:1-8

A David Psalm

1 When I call, give me answers. God,
take my side!
Once, in a tight place, you gave me room;
Now I'm in trouble again: grace me!
hear me!

2 You rabble—how long do I put up with your scorn?
How long will you lust after lies?
How long will you live crazed by illusion?

3 Look at this: look
Who got picked by GOD!
He listens the split second I call to him.

4-5 Complain if you must, but don't lash out.
Keep your mouth shut, and let your heart do the talking.
Build your case before God and wait for his verdict.

6-7 Why is everyone hungry for *more*?
"More, more," they say.
"More, more."
I have God's more-than-enough,
More joy in one ordinary day

7-8 Than they get in all their shopping sprees.
At day's end I'm ready for sound sleep,
For you, GOD, have put my life back together.

PROVERBS 1:25-28

25-28 "Since you laugh at my counsel
and make a joke of my advice,
How can I take you seriously?
I'll turn the tables and joke about *your* troubles!
What if the roof falls in,
and your whole life goes to pieces?
What if catastrophe strikes and there's nothing
to show for your life but rubble and ashes?
You'll need me then. You'll call for me,
but don't expect an answer.
No matter how hard you look, you won't find me.

January 5

GENESIS 11:1–13:4

At one time, the whole Earth spoke the same language. It so happened that as they moved out of the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled down.

3 They said to one another, "Come, let's make bricks and fire them well." They used brick for stone and tar for mortar.

4 Then they said, "Come, let's build ourselves a city and a tower that reaches Heaven. Let's make ourselves famous so we won't be scattered here and there across the Earth."

5 GOD came down to look over the city and the tower those people had built.

6-9 GOD took one look and said, "One people, one language; why, this is only a first step. No telling what they'll come up with next—they'll stop at nothing! Come, we'll go down and garble their speech so they won't understand each other." Then GOD scattered them from there all over the world. And they had to quit building the city. That's how it came to be called Babel, because there GOD turned their language into "babble." From there GOD scattered them all over the world.

✦ ✦ ✦

10-11 This is the story of Shem. When Shem was 100 years old, he had Arphaxad. It was two years after the flood. After he had Arphaxad, he lived 500 more years and had other sons and daughters.

12-13 When Arphaxad was thirty-five years old, he had Shelah. After Arphaxad had Shelah, he lived 403 more years and had other sons and daughters.

14-15 When Shelah was thirty years old, he had Eber. After Shelah had Eber, he lived 403 more years and had other sons and daughters.

16-17 When Eber was thirty-four years old, he had Peleg. After Eber had Peleg, he lived 430 more years and had other sons and daughters.

18-19 When Peleg was thirty years old, he had Reu. After he had Reu, he lived 209 more years and had other sons and daughters.

20-21 When Reu was thirty-two years old, he had Serug. After Reu had Serug, he lived 207 more years and had other sons and daughters.

22-23 When Serug was thirty years old, he had Nahor. After Serug had Nahor, he lived 200 more years and had other sons and daughters.

24-25 When Nahor was twenty-nine years old, he had Terah. After Nahor had Terah, he lived 119 more years and had other sons and daughters.

26 When Terah was seventy years old, he had Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

27-28 This is the story of Terah. Terah had Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

Haran had Lot. Haran died before his father, Terah, in the country of his family, Ur of the Chaldees.

29 Abram and Nahor each got married. Abram's wife was Sarai; Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of his brother Haran. Haran had two daughters, Milcah and Iscah.

30 Sarai was barren; she had no children.

31 Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot (Haran's son), and Sarai his daughter-in-law (his son Abram's wife) and set out with them from Ur of the Chaldees for the land of Canaan. But when they got as far as Haran, they settled down there.

32 Terah lived 205 years. He died in Haran.

12:1 GOD told Abram: "Leave your country, your family, and your father's home for a land that I will show you.

2-3 I'll make you a great nation
and bless you.
I'll make you famous;
you'll be a blessing.
I'll bless those who bless you;
those who curse you I'll curse.
All the families of the Earth
will be blessed through you."

4-6 So Abram left just as GOD said, and Lot left with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot with him, along with all the possessions and people they had gotten in Haran, and set

out for the land of Canaan and arrived safe and sound.

Abram passed through the country as far as Shechem and the Oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites occupied the land.

7 GOD appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your children." Abram built an altar at the place GOD had appeared to him.

8 He moved on from there to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent between Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. He built an altar there and prayed to GOD.

9 Abram kept moving, steadily making his way south, to the Negev.

10-13 Then a famine came to the land. Abram went down to Egypt to live; it was a hard famine. As he drew near to Egypt, he said to his wife, Sarai, "Look. We both know that you're a beautiful woman. When the Egyptians see you they're going to say, 'Aha! That's his wife!' and kill me. But they'll let you live. Do me a favor: tell them you're my sister. Because of you, they'll welcome me and let me live."

14-15 When Abram arrived in Egypt, the Egyptians took one look and saw that his wife was stunningly beautiful. Pharaoh's princes raved over her to Pharaoh. She was taken to live with Pharaoh.

16-17 Because of her, Abram got along very well: he accumulated sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, men and women servants, and camels. But GOD hit Pharaoh hard because of Abram's wife Sarai; everybody in the palace got seriously sick.

18-19 Pharaoh called for Abram, "What's this that you've done to me? Why didn't you tell me that she's your wife? Why did you say, 'She's my sister' so that I'd take her as my wife? Here's your wife back—take her and get out!"

20 Pharaoh ordered his men to get Abram out of the country. They sent him and his wife and everything he owned on their way.

13:1-2 So Abram left Egypt and went back to the Negev, he and his wife and everything he owned, and Lot still with him. By now Abram was very rich, loaded with cattle and silver and gold.

3-4 He moved on from the Negev, camping along the way, to Bethel, the place he had first set up his tent between Bethel and Ai and built his first altar. Abram prayed there to GOD.

MATTHEW 5:1-26

When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

3 "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

4 "You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

5 "You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

6 "You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

7 "You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

8 "You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

9 "You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

10 "You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

11-12 "Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don't like it, *I* do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

13 "Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

14-16 "Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

17-18 "Don't suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures—either God's Law or the Prophets. I'm not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama. God's Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the sky and the ground at your feet. Long after stars burn out and earth wears out, God's Law will be alive and working.

19-20 "Trivialize even the smallest item in God's Law and you will only have trivialized yourself. But take it seriously, show the way for others, and you will find honor in the kingdom. Unless you do far better than the Pharisees in the matters of right living, you won't know the first thing about entering the kingdom.

21-22 "You're familiar with the command to the ancients, 'Do not murder.' I'm telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother 'idiot!' and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell 'stupid!' at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill.

23-24 "This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.

25-26 "Or say you're out on the street and an old enemy accosts you. Don't lose a minute. Make the first move; make things right with him. After all, if you leave the first move to him, knowing his track record, you're likely to end up in court, maybe even jail. If that happens, you won't get out without a stiff fine.

PSALM 5:1-12
A David Psalm

1-3 Listen, GOD! Please, pay attention!
Can you make sense of these ramblings,
my groans and cries?
King-God, I need your help.
Every morning
you'll hear me at it again.
Every morning
I lay out the pieces of my life
on your altar
and watch for fire to descend.

4-6 You don't socialize with Wicked,
or invite Evil over as your houseguest.
Hot-Air-Boaster collapses in front of you;
you shake your head over Mischief-Maker.
GOD destroys Lie-Speaker;
Blood-Thirsty and Truth-Bender disgust you.

7-8 And here I am, your invited guest—
it's incredible!
I enter your house; here I am,
prostrate in your inner sanctum,
Waiting for directions
to get me safely through enemy lines.

9-10 Every word they speak is a land mine;
their lungs breathe out poison gas.
Their throats are gaping graves,
their tongues slick as mudslides.
Pile on the guilt, God!
Let their so-called wisdom wreck them.
Kick them out! They've had their chance.

11-12 But you'll welcome us with open arms
when we run for cover to you.
Let the party last all night!
Stand guard over our celebration.

You are famous, GOD, for welcoming
God-seekers,
for decking us out in delight.

PROVERBS 1:29-33
29-33 "Because you hated Knowledge
and had nothing to do with the
Fear-of-GOD,
Because you wouldn't take my advice
and brushed aside all my offers to
train you,
Well, you've made your bed—now lie
in it;
you wanted your own way—now,
how do you like it?
Don't you see what happens, you
simpletons, you idiots?
Carelessness kills; complacency
is murder.
First pay attention to me, and then
relax.
Now you can take it easy—you're
in good hands."

January 6

GENESIS 13:5–15:21
Lot, who was traveling with Abram, was also rich in sheep and cattle and tents. But the land couldn't support both of them; they had too many possessions. They couldn't both live there—quarrels broke out between Abram's shepherds and Lot's shepherds. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living on the land at the time.

8-9 Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have fighting between us, between your shepherds and my shepherds. After all, we're family. Look around. Isn't there plenty of land out there? Let's separate. If you go left, I'll go right; if you go right, I'll go left."

10-11 Lot looked. He saw the whole plain of the Jordan spread out, well watered (this was before GOD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah), like GOD's garden, like Egypt, and stretching all the way to Zoar. Lot took the whole plain of the Jordan. Lot set out to the east.

11-12 That's how they came to part company, uncle and nephew. Abram settled in Canaan; Lot settled in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent near Sodom.

13 The people of Sodom were evil—flagrant sinners against GOD.

14-17 After Lot separated from him, GOD said to Abram, "Open your eyes, look around. Look north, south, east, and west. Everything you see, the whole land spread out before you, I will give to you and your children forever. I'll make your descendants like dust—counting your descendants will be as impossible as counting the dust of the Earth. So—on your feet, get moving! Walk through the country, its length and breadth; I'm giving it all to you."

18 Abram moved his tent. He went and settled by the Oaks of Mamre in Hebron. There he built an altar to GOD.

✦ ✦ ✦

14:1-2 Then this: Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim went off to war to fight Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that is, Zoar.

3-4 This second group of kings, the attacked, came together at the Valley of Siddim, that is, the Salt Sea. They had been under the thumb of Kedorlaomer for twelve years. In the thirteenth year, they revolted.

5-7 In the fourteenth year, Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him set out and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh Kiriathaim, and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as El Paran on the far edge of the desert. On their way back they stopped at En Mishpat, that is, Kadesh, and conquered the whole region of the Amalekites as well as that of the Amorites who lived in Hazazon Tamar.

8-9 That's when the king of Sodom marched out with the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that is, Zoar. They drew up in battle formation against their enemies in the Valley of Siddim—against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings against five.

10-12 The Valley of Siddim was full of

tar pits. When the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, they fell into the tar pits, but the rest escaped into the mountains. The four kings captured all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, all their food and equipment, and went on their way. They captured Lot, Abram's nephew who was living in Sodom at the time, taking everything he owned with them.

13-16 A fugitive came and reported to Abram the Hebrew. Abram was living at the Oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and Aner. They were allies of Abram. When Abram heard that his nephew had been taken prisoner, he lined up his servants, all of them born in his household—there were 318 of them—and chased after the captors all the way to Dan. Abram and his men split into small groups and attacked by night. They chased them as far as Hobah, just north of Damascus. They recovered all the plunder along with nephew Lot and his possessions, including the women and the people.

17-20 After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and his allied kings, the king of Sodom came out to greet him in the Valley of Shaveh, the King's Valley. Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine—he was priest of The High God—and blessed him:

> Blessed be Abram by The High God,
> Creator of Heaven and Earth.
> And blessed be The High God,
> who handed your enemies over
> to you.

Abram gave him a tenth of all the recovered plunder.

21 The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me back the people but keep all the plunder for yourself."

22-24 But Abram told the king of Sodom, "I swear to GOD, The High God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, this solemn oath, that I'll take nothing from you, not so much as a thread or a shoestring. I'm not going to have you go around saying, 'I made Abram rich.' Nothing for me other than what the young men ate and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; they're to get their share of the plunder."

✦ ✦ ✦

15:1 After all these things, this word of GOD came to Abram in a vision: "Don't be afraid, Abram. I'm your shield. Your reward will be grand!"

2-3 Abram said, "GOD, Master, what use are your gifts as long as I'm childless and Eliezer of Damascus is going to inherit everything?" Abram continued, "See, you've given me no children, and now a mere house servant is going to get it all."

4 Then GOD's Message came: "Don't worry, he won't be your heir; a son from your body will be your heir."

5 Then he took him outside and said, "Look at the sky. Count the stars. Can you do it? Count your descendants! You're going to have a big family, Abram!"

6 And he believed! Believed GOD! God declared him "Set-Right-with-God."

7 GOD continued, "I'm the same GOD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldees and gave you this land to own."

8 Abram said, "Master GOD, how am I to know this, that it will all be mine?"

9 GOD said, "Bring me a heifer, a goat, and a ram, each three years old, and a dove and a young pigeon."

10-12 He brought all these animals to him, split them down the middle, and laid the halves opposite each other. But he didn't split the birds. Vultures swooped down on the carcasses, but Abram scared them off. As the sun went down a deep sleep overcame Abram and then a sense of dread, dark and heavy.

13-16 GOD said to Abram, "Know this: your descendants will live as outsiders in a land not theirs; they'll be enslaved and beaten down for 400 years. Then I'll punish their slave masters; your offspring will march out of there loaded with plunder. But not you; you'll have a long and full life and die a good and peaceful death. Not until the fourth generation will your descendants return here; sin is still a thriving business among the Amorites."

17-21 When the sun was down and it was dark, a smoking firepot and a flaming torch moved between the split carcasses. That's when GOD made a covenant with Abram: "I'm giving this land to your children, from the Nile River in Egypt to the River Euphrates in Assyria—the country of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites,

Perizzites, Rephaim, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites."

MATTHEW 5:27-48

"You know the next commandment pretty well, too: 'Don't go to bed with another's spouse.' But don't think you've preserved your virtue simply by staying out of bed. Your *heart* can be corrupted by lust even quicker than your *body*. Those ogling looks you think nobody notices—they also corrupt.

29-30 "Let's not pretend this is easier than it really is. If you want to live a morally pure life, here's what you have to do: You have to blind your right eye the moment you catch it in a lustful leer. You have to choose to live one-eyed or else be dumped on a moral trash pile. And you have to chop off your right hand the moment you notice it raised threateningly. Better a bloody stump than your entire being discarded for good in the dump.

31-32 "Remember the Scripture that says, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him do it legally, giving her divorce papers and her legal rights'? Too many of you are using that as a cover for selfishness and whim, pretending to be righteous just because you are 'legal.' Please, no more pretending. If you divorce your wife, you're responsible for making her an adulteress (unless she has already made herself that by sexual promiscuity). And if you marry such a divorced adulteress, you're automatically an adulterer yourself. You can't use legal cover to mask a moral failure.

33-37 "And don't say anything you don't mean. This counsel is embedded deep in our traditions. You only make things worse when you lay down a smoke screen of pious talk, saying, 'I'll pray for you,' and never doing it, or saying, 'God be with you,' and not meaning it. You don't make your words true by embellishing them with religious lace. In making your speech sound more religious, it becomes less true. Just say 'yes' and 'no.' When you manipulate words to get your own way, you go wrong.

38-42 "Here's another old saying that deserves a second look: 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.' Is that going to get us anywhere? Here's what I propose: 'Don't hit back at all.' If someone strikes you, stand there and take it. If someone drags you into court and sues for the shirt off your back, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. And if someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.

43-47 "You're familiar with the old written law, 'Love your friend,' and its unwritten companion, 'Hate your enemy.' I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the supple moves of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that.

48 "In a word, what I'm saying is, *Grow up*. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you."

PSALM 6:1-10

A David Psalm

1-2 Please, GOD, no more yelling,
no more trips to the woodshed.
Treat me nice for a change;
I'm so starved for affection.

2-3 Can't you see I'm black-and-blue,
beaten up badly in bones and soul?
GOD, how long will it take
for you to let up?

4-5 Break in, GOD, and break up this fight;
if you love me at all, get me out
of here.
I'm no good to you dead, am I?
I can't sing in your choir if I'm buried
in some tomb!

6-7 I'm tired of all this—so tired. My bed
has been floating forty days and
nights
On the flood of my tears.
My mattress is soaked, soggy with
tears.

The sockets of my eyes are black holes;
nearly blind, I squint and grope.

8-9 Get out of here, you Devil's crew:
at last GOD has heard my sobs.
My requests have all been granted,
my prayers are answered.

10 Cowards, my enemies disappear.
Disgraced, they turn tail and run.

PROVERBS 2:1-5

1-5 Good friend, take to heart what I'm
telling you;
collect my counsels and guard them
with your life.
Tune your ears to the world of Wisdom;
set your heart on a life of
Understanding.
That's right—if you make Insight your
priority,
and won't take no for an answer,
Searching for it like a prospector
panning for gold,
like an adventurer on a treasure
hunt,
Believe me, before you know it
Fear-of-GOD will be yours;
you'll have come upon the
Knowledge of God.

January 7

GENESIS 16:1–18:15

Sarai, Abram's wife, hadn't yet produced a child.

She had an Egyptian maid named Hagar. Sarai said to Abram, "GOD has not seen fit to let me have a child. Sleep with my maid. Maybe I can get a family from her." Abram agreed to do what Sarai said.

3-4 So Sarai, Abram's wife, took her Egyptian maid Hagar and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. Abram had been living ten years in Canaan when this took place. He slept with Hagar and she got pregnant. When Hagar learned she was pregnant, she looked down on her mistress.

5 Sarai told Abram, "It's all your fault that I'm suffering this abuse. I put my maid in bed with you and the minute she knows she's pregnant, she treats me like I'm nothing. May GOD decide which of us is right."

6 "You decide," said Abram. "Your maid is your business."

Sarai was abusive to Hagar and Hagar ran away.

7-8 An angel of GOD found her beside a spring in the desert; it was the spring on the road to Shur. He said, "Hagar, maid of Sarai, what are you doing here?"

She said, "I'm running away from Sarai my mistress."

9-12 The angel of GOD said, "Go back to your mistress. Put up with her abuse." He continued, "I'm going to give you a big family, children past counting.

From this pregnancy, you'll get a son:
Name him Ishmael;
for GOD heard you, GOD answered
you.
He'll be a bucking bronco of a man,
a real fighter, fighting and being
fought,
Always stirring up trouble,
always at odds with his family."

13 She answered GOD by name, praying to the God who spoke to her, "You're the God who sees me!

"Yes! He saw me; and then I saw him!"

14 That's how that desert spring got named "God-Alive-Sees-Me Spring." That spring is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

15-16 Hagar gave Abram a son. Abram named him Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar gave him his son, Ishmael.

✦ ✦ ✦

17:1-2 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, GOD showed up and said to him, "I am The Strong God, live entirely before me, live to the hilt! I'll make a covenant between us and I'll give you a huge family."

3-8 Overwhelmed, Abram fell flat on his face.

Then God said to him, "This is my covenant with you: You'll be the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Abram, but Abraham, meaning that 'I'm

making you the father of many nations.' I'll make you a father of fathers—I'll make nations from you, kings will issue from you. I'm establishing my covenant between me and you, a covenant that includes your descendants, a covenant that goes on and on and on, a covenant that commits me to be your God and the God of your descendants. And I'm giving you and your descendants this land where you're now just camping, this whole country of Canaan, to own forever. And I'll be their God."

9-14 God continued to Abraham, "And you: You will honor my covenant, you and your descendants, generation after generation. This is the covenant that you are to honor, the covenant that pulls in all your descendants: Circumcise every male. Circumcise by cutting off the foreskin of the penis; it will be the sign of the covenant between us. Every male baby will be circumcised when he is eight days old, generation after generation—this includes house-born slaves and slaves bought from outsiders who are not blood kin. Make sure you circumcise both your own children and anyone brought in from the outside. That way my covenant will be cut into your body, a permanent mark of my permanent covenant. An uncircumcised male, one who has not had the foreskin of his penis cut off, will be cut off from his people—he has broken my covenant."

15-16 God continued speaking to Abraham, "And Sarai your wife: Don't call her Sarai any longer; call her Sarah. I'll bless her—yes! I'll give you a son by her! Oh, how I'll bless her! Nations will come from her; kings of nations will come from her."

17 Abraham fell flat on his face. And then he laughed, thinking, "Can a hundred-year-old man father a son? And can Sarah, at ninety years, have a baby?"

18 Recovering, Abraham said to God, "Oh, keep Ishmael alive and well before you!"

19 But God said, "That's not what I mean. Your wife, Sarah, will have a baby, a son. Name him Isaac (Laughter). I'll establish my covenant with him and his descendants, a covenant that lasts forever.

20-21 "And Ishmael? Yes, I heard your prayer for him. I'll also bless him; I'll make sure he has plenty of children—a huge family. He'll father twelve princes; I'll make him a great nation. But I'll establish my covenant with Isaac whom Sarah will give you about this time next year."

22 God finished speaking with Abraham and left.

23 Then Abraham took his son Ishmael and all his servants, whether houseborn or purchased—every male in his household—and circumcised them, cutting off their foreskins that very day, just as God had told him.

24-27 Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised. His son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised. Abraham and Ishmael were circumcised the same day together with all the servants of his household, those born there and those purchased from outsiders—all were circumcised with him.

✦ ✦ ✦

18:1-2 GOD appeared to Abraham at the Oaks of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of his tent. It was the hottest part of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing. He ran from his tent to greet them and bowed before them.

3-5 He said, "Master, if it please you, stop for a while with your servant. I'll get some water so you can wash your feet. Rest under this tree. I'll get some food to refresh you on your way, since your travels have brought you across my path."

They said, "Certainly. Go ahead."

6 Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. He said, "Hurry. Get three cups of our best flour; knead it and make bread."

7-8 Then Abraham ran to the cattle pen and picked out a nice plump calf and gave it to the servant who lost no time getting it ready. Then he got curds and milk, brought them with the calf that had been roasted, set the meal before the men, and stood there under the tree while they ate.

9 The men said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?"

He said, "In the tent."

10 One of them said, "I'm coming back about this time next year. When I arrive, your wife Sarah will have a son." Sarah was listening at the tent opening, just behind the man.

11-12 Abraham and Sarah were old by this time, very old. Sarah was far past the age for having babies. Sarah laughed within

herself, "An old woman like me? Get pregnant? With this old man of a husband?"

13-14 GOD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh saying, 'Me? Have a baby? An old woman like me?' Is anything too hard for GOD? I'll be back about this time next year and Sarah will have a baby."

15 Sarah lied. She said, "I didn't laugh," because she was afraid.

But he said, "Yes you did; you laughed."

MATTHEW 6:1-24

"Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won't be applauding.

2-4 "When you do something for someone else, don't call attention to yourself. You've seen them in action, I'm sure—'playactors' I call them—treating prayer meeting and street corner alike as a stage, acting compassionate as long as someone is watching, playing to the crowds. They get applause, true, but that's all they get. When you help someone out, don't think about how it looks. Just do it—quietly and unobtrusively. That is the way your God, who conceived you in love, working behind the scenes, helps you out.

5 "And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for fifteen minutes of fame! Do you think God sits in a box seat?

6 "Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.

7-13 "The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this:

Our Father in heaven,
Reveal who you are.
Set the world right;
Do what's best—
as above, so below.
Keep us alive with three square meals.
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.
You're in charge!
You can do anything you want!
You're ablaze in beauty!
Yes. Yes. Yes.

14-15 "In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you do. You can't get forgiveness from God, for instance, without also forgiving others. If you refuse to do your part, you cut yourself off from God's part.

16-18 "When you practice some appetite-denying discipline to better concentrate on God, don't make a production out of it. It might turn you into a small-time celebrity but it won't make you a saint. If you 'go into training' inwardly, act normal outwardly. Shampoo and comb your hair, brush your teeth, wash your face. God doesn't require attention-getting devices. He won't overlook what you are doing; he'll reward you well.

19-21 "Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.

22-23 "Your eyes are windows into your body. If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust, your body is a musty cellar. If you pull the blinds on your windows, what a dark life you will have!

24 "You can't worship two gods at once. Loving one god, you'll end up hating the other. Adoration of one feeds contempt for the other. You can't worship God and Money both.

PSALM 7:1-17

A David Psalm

1-2 GOD! God! I am running to you for dear life;
the chase is wild.

If they catch me, I'm finished:
ripped to shreds by foes fierce as lions,
dragged into the forest and left
unlooked for, unremembered.

3-5 GOD, if I've done what they say—
betrayed my friends,
ripped off my enemies—
If my hands are really that dirty,
let them get me, walk all over me,
leave me flat on my face in the dirt.

6-8 Stand up, GOD; pit your holy fury
against my furious enemies.
Wake up, God. My accusers have
packed
the courtroom; it's judgment time.
Take your place on the bench, reach
for your gavel,
throw out the false charges
against me.
I'm ready, confident in your verdict:
"Innocent."

9-11 Close the book on Evil, GOD,
but publish your mandate for us.
You get us ready for life:
you probe for our soft spots,
you knock off our rough edges.
And I'm feeling so fit, so safe:
made right, kept right.
God in solemn honor does things right,
but his nerves are sandpapered raw.

11-13 Nobody gets by with anything.
God is already in action—
Sword honed on his whetstone,
bow strung, arrow on the string,
Lethal weapons in hand,
each arrow a flaming missile.

14 Look at that guy!
He had sex with sin,
he's pregnant with evil.
Oh, look! He's having
the baby—a Lie-Baby!

15-16 See that man shoveling day
after day,
digging, then concealing, his
man-trap
down that lonely stretch of road?
Go back and look again—you'll see
him in it headfirst,
legs waving in the breeze.
That's what happens:
mischief backfires;
violence boomerangs.

17 I'm thanking God, who makes
things right.
I'm singing the fame of heaven-high
GOD.

PROVERBS 2:6-8
6-8 And here's why: GOD gives out
Wisdom free,
is plainspoken in Knowledge and
Understanding.
He's a rich mine of Common Sense for
those who live well,
a personal bodyguard to the candid
and sincere.
He keeps his eye on all who live
honestly,
and pays special attention to his
loyally committed ones.

January 8

GENESIS 18:16–19:38
When the men got up to leave, they set off for Sodom. Abraham walked with them to say good-bye.

17-19 Then GOD said, "Shall I keep back from Abraham what I'm about to do? Abraham is going to become a large and strong nation; all the nations of the world are going to find themselves blessed through him. Yes, I've settled on him as the one to train his children and future family to observe GOD's way of life, live kindly and generously and fairly, so that GOD can complete in Abraham what he promised him."

20-21 GOD continued, "The cries of the victims in Sodom and Gomorrah are deafening; the sin of those cities is immense. I'm going down to see for myself, see if what they're doing is as bad as it sounds. Then I'll know."

22 The men set out for Sodom, but Abraham stood in GOD's path, blocking his way.

23-25 Abraham confronted him, "Are you serious? Are you planning on getting rid of the good people right along with the bad? What if there are fifty decent people left

in the city; will you lump the good with the bad and get rid of the lot? Wouldn't you spare the city for the sake of those fifty innocents? I can't believe you'd do that, kill off the good and the bad alike as if there were no difference between them. Doesn't the Judge of all the Earth judge with justice?"

26 GOD said, "If I find fifty decent people in the city of Sodom, I'll spare the place just for them."

27-28 Abraham came back, "Do I, a mere mortal made from a handful of dirt, dare open my mouth again to my Master? What if the fifty fall short by five—would you destroy the city because of those missing five?"

He said, "I won't destroy it if there are forty-five."

29 Abraham spoke up again, "What if you only find forty?"

"Neither will I destroy it if for forty."

30 He said, "Master, don't be irritated with me, but what if only thirty are found?"

"No, I won't do it if I find thirty."

31 He pushed on, "I know I'm trying your patience, Master, but how about for twenty?"

"I won't destroy it for twenty."

32 He wouldn't quit, "Don't get angry, Master—this is the last time. What if you only come up with ten?"

"For the sake of only ten, I won't destroy the city."

33 When GOD finished talking with Abraham, he left. And Abraham went home.

19:1-2 The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening. Lot was sitting at the city gate. He saw them and got up to welcome them, bowing before them and said, "Please, my friends, come to my house and stay the night. Wash up. You can rise early and be on your way refreshed."

They said, "No, we'll sleep in the street."

3 But he insisted, wouldn't take no for an answer; and they relented and went home with him. Lot fixed a hot meal for them and they ate.

4-5 Before they went to bed, men from all over the city of Sodom, young and old, descended on the house from all sides and boxed them in. They yelled to Lot, "Where are the men who are staying with you for the night? Bring them out so we can have our sport with them!"

6-8 Lot went out, barring the door behind him, and said, "Brothers, please, don't be vile! Look, I have two daughters, virgins; let me bring them out; you can take your pleasure with them, but don't touch these men—they're my guests."

9 They said, "Get lost! You drop in from nowhere and now you're going to tell us how to run our lives. We'll treat you worse than them!" And they charged past Lot to break down the door.

10-11 But the two men reached out and pulled Lot inside the house, locking the door. Then they struck blind the men who were trying to break down the door, both leaders and followers, leaving them groping in the dark.

12-13 The two men said to Lot, "Do you have any other family here? Sons, daughters—anybody in the city? Get them out of here, and now! We're going to destroy this place. The outcries of victims here to GOD are deafening; we've been sent to blast this place into oblivion."

14 Lot went out and warned the fiancés of his daughters, "Evacuate this place; GOD is about to destroy this city!" But his daughters' would-be husbands treated it as a joke.

15 At break of day, the angels pushed Lot to get going, "Hurry. Get your wife and two daughters out of here before it's too late and you're caught in the punishment of the city."

16-17 Lot was dragging his feet. The men grabbed Lot's arm, and the arms of his wife and daughters—GOD was so merciful to them!—and dragged them to safety outside the city. When they had them outside, Lot was told, "Now run for your life! Don't look back! Don't stop anywhere on the plain—run for the hills or you'll be swept away."

18-20 But Lot protested, "No, masters, you can't mean it! I know that you've taken a liking to me and have done me an immense favor in saving my life, but I can't run for the mountains—who knows what terrible thing might happen to me in the mountains and leave me for dead. Look over there—that town is close enough to get to. It's a small town, hardly anything to it. Let me escape there and save my life—it's a mere wide place in the road."

21-22 "All right, Lot. If you insist. I'll let you have your way. And I won't stamp out the town you've spotted. But hurry up. Run for it! I can't do anything until you get there."

That's why the town was called Zoar, that is, Smalltown.

23 The sun was high in the sky when Lot arrived at Zoar.

24-25 Then GOD rained brimstone and fire down on Sodom and Gomorrah—a river of lava from GOD out of the sky!—and destroyed these cities and the entire plain and everyone who lived in the cities and everything that grew from the ground.

26 But Lot's wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt.

27-28 Abraham got up early the next morning and went to the place he had so recently stood with GOD. He looked out over Sodom and Gomorrah, surveying the whole plain. All he could see was smoke belching from the Earth, like smoke from a furnace.

29 And that's the story: When God destroyed the Cities of the Plain, he was mindful of Abraham and first got Lot out of there before he blasted those cities off the face of the Earth.

30 Lot left Zoar and went into the mountains to live with his two daughters; he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He lived in a cave with his daughters.

31-32 One day the older daughter said to the younger, "Our father is getting old and there's not a man left in the country by whom we can get pregnant. Let's get our father drunk with wine and lie with him. We'll get children through our father—it's our only chance to keep our family alive."

33-35 They got their father drunk with wine that very night. The older daughter went and lay with him. He was oblivious, knowing nothing of what she did. The next morning the older said to the younger, "Last night I slept with my father. Tonight, it's your turn. We'll get him drunk again and then you sleep with him. We'll both get a child through our father and keep our family alive." So that night they got their father drunk again and the younger went in and slept with him. Again he was oblivious, knowing nothing of what she did.

36-38 Both daughters became pregnant by their father, Lot. The older daughter had a son and named him Moab, the ancestor of the present-day Moabites. The younger daughter had a son and named him Ben-Ammi, the ancestor of the present-day Ammonites.

MATTHEW 6:25–7:14

"If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds.

27-29 "Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion—do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them.

30-33 "If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with *getting*, so you can respond to God's *giving*. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

34 "Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.

7:1-5 "Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging. It's easy to see a smudge on your neighbor's face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, 'Let me wash your face for you,' when your own face is distorted by contempt? It's this whole traveling road-show mentality all over again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your part. Wipe that

ugly sneer off your own face, and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbor.

6 "Don't be flip with the sacred. Banter and silliness give no honor to God. Don't reduce holy mysteries to slogans. In trying to be relevant, you're only being cute and inviting sacrilege.

7-11 "Don't bargain with God. Be direct. Ask for what you need. This isn't a cat-and-mouse, hide-and-seek game we're in. If your child asks for bread, do you trick him with sawdust? If he asks for fish, do you scare him with a live snake on his plate? As bad as you are, you wouldn't think of such a thing. You're at least decent to your own children. So don't you think the God who conceived you in love will be even better?

12 "Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for *them*. Add up God's Law and Prophets and this is what you get.

13-14 "Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention.

PSALM 8:1-9
A David Psalm

1 GOD, brilliant Lord,
yours is a household name.

2 Nursing infants gurgle choruses
about you;
toddlers shout the songs
That drown out enemy talk,
and silence atheist babble.

3-4 I look up at your macro-skies,
dark and enormous,
your handmade sky-jewelry,
Moon and stars mounted in their settings.
Then I look at my micro-self
and wonder,
Why do you bother with us?
Why take a second look our way?

5-8 Yet we've so narrowly missed
being gods,
bright with Eden's dawn light.
You put us in charge of your
handcrafted world,
repeated to us your Genesis-charge,
Made us stewards of sheep and cattle,
even animals out in the wild,
Birds flying and fish swimming,
whales singing in the ocean deeps.

9 GOD, brilliant Lord,
your name echoes around
the world.

PROVERBS 2:9-15

9-15 So now you can pick out what's true
and fair,
find all the good trails!
Lady Wisdom will be your close friend,
and Brother Knowledge your
pleasant companion.
Good Sense will scout ahead for danger,
Insight will keep an eye out for you.
They'll keep you from making wrong
turns,
or following the bad directions
Of those who are lost themselves
and can't tell a trail from a
tumbleweed,
These losers who make a game of evil
and throw parties to celebrate
perversity,
Traveling paths that go nowhere,
wandering in a maze of detours and
dead ends.

January 9

GENESIS 20:1–22:24

Abraham traveled from there south to the Negev and settled down between Kadesh and Shur. While he was camping in Gerar, Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She's my sister."

2-3 So Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent for Sarah and took her. But God came to Abimelech in a dream that night and told him, "You're as good as dead—that woman you took, she's a married woman."

4-5 Now Abimelech had not yet slept with her, hadn't so much as touched her. He said, "Master, would you kill an innocent man? Didn't he tell me, 'She's my sister'? And

didn't she herself say, 'He's my brother'? I had no idea I was doing anything wrong when I did this."

6-7 God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know your intentions were pure, that's why I kept you from sinning against me; I was the one who kept you from going to bed with her. So now give the man's wife back to him. He's a prophet and will pray for you—pray for your life. If you don't give her back, know that it's certain death both for you and everyone in your family."

8-9 Abimelech was up first thing in the morning. He called all his house servants together and told them the whole story. They were shocked. Then Abimelech called in Abraham and said, "What have you done to us? What have I ever done to you that you would bring on me and my kingdom this huge offense? What you've done to me ought never to have been done."

10 Abimelech went on to Abraham, "Whatever were you thinking of when you did this thing?"

11-13 Abraham said, "I just assumed that there was no fear of God in this place and that they'd kill me to get my wife. Besides, the truth is that she is my half sister; she's my father's daughter but not my mother's. When God sent me out as a wanderer from my father's home, I told her, 'Do me a favor; wherever we go, tell people that I'm your brother.'"

14-15 Then Abimelech gave Sarah back to Abraham, and along with her sent sheep and cattle and servants, both male and female. He said, "My land is open to you; live wherever you wish."

16 And to Sarah he said, "I've given your brother a thousand pieces of silver—that clears you of even a shadow of suspicion before the eyes of the world. You're vindicated."

17-18 Then Abraham prayed to God and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his maidservants, and they started having babies again. For GOD had shut down every womb in Abimelech's household on account of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

✦ ✦ ✦

21:1-4 GOD visited Sarah exactly as he said he would; GOD did to Sarah what he promised: Sarah became pregnant and gave Abraham a son in his old age, and at the very time God had set. Abraham named him Isaac. When his son was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him just as God had commanded.

5-6 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born.

Sarah said,

> God has blessed me with laughter
> and all who get the news will laugh
> with me!

7 She also said,

> Whoever would have suggested
> to Abraham
> that Sarah would one day nurse
> a baby!
> Yet here I am! I've given the old man
> a son!

8 The baby grew and was weaned. Abraham threw a big party on the day Isaac was weaned.

9-10 One day Sarah saw the son that Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham, poking fun at her son Isaac. She told Abraham, "Get rid of this slave woman and her son. No child of this slave is going to share inheritance with my son Isaac!"

11-13 The matter gave great pain to Abraham—after all, Ishmael was his son. But God spoke to Abraham, "Don't feel badly about the boy and your maid. Do whatever Sarah tells you. Your descendants will come through Isaac. Regarding your maid's son, be assured that I'll also develop a great nation from him—he's your son, too."

14-16 Abraham got up early the next morning, got some food together and a canteen of water for Hagar, put them on her back and sent her away with the child. She wandered off into the desert of Beersheba. When the water was gone, she left the child under a shrub and went off, fifty yards or so. She said, "I can't watch my son die." As she sat, she broke into sobs.

17-18 Meanwhile, God heard the boy crying. The angel of God called from Heaven to Hagar, "What's wrong, Hagar? Don't be afraid. God has heard the boy and knows the fix he's in. Up now; go get the boy. Hold him tight. I'm going to make of him a great nation."

19 Just then God opened her eyes. She looked. She saw a well of water. She went

to it and filled her canteen and gave the boy a long, cool drink.

20-21 God was on the boy's side as he grew up. He lived out in the desert and became a skilled archer. He lived in the Paran wilderness. And his mother got him a wife from Egypt.

22-23 At about that same time, Abimelech and the captain of his troops, Phicol, spoke to Abraham: "No matter what you do, God is on your side. So swear to me that you won't do anything underhanded to me or any of my family. For as long as you live here, swear that you'll treat me and my land as well as I've treated you."

24 Abraham said, "I swear it."

25-26 At the same time, Abraham confronted Abimelech over the matter of a well of water that Abimelech's servants had taken. Abimelech said, "I have no idea who did this; you never told me about it; this is the first I've heard of it."

27-28 So the two of them made a covenant. Abraham took sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech. Abraham set aside seven sheep from his flock.

29 Abimelech said, "What does this mean? These seven sheep you've set aside."

30 Abraham said, "It means that when you accept these seven sheep, you take it as proof that I dug this well, that it's my well."

31-32 That's how the place got named Beersheba (the Oath-Well), because the two of them swore a covenant oath there. After they had made the covenant at Beersheba, Abimelech and his commander, Phicol, left and went back to Philistine territory.

33-34 Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and worshiped GOD there, praying to the Eternal God. Abraham lived in Philistine country for a long time.

✦ ✦ ✦

22:1 After all this, God tested Abraham. God said, "Abraham!"

"Yes?" answered Abraham. "I'm listening."

2 He said, "Take your dear son Isaac whom you love and go to the land of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I'll point out to you."

3-5 Abraham got up early in the morning and saddled his donkey. He took two of his young servants and his son Isaac. He had split wood for the burnt offering. He set out for the place God had directed him. On the third day he looked up and saw the place in the distance. Abraham told his two young servants, "Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I are going over there to worship; then we'll come back to you."

6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and gave it to Isaac his son to carry. He carried the flint and the knife. The two of them went off together.

7 Isaac said to Abraham his father, "Father?"

"Yes, my son."

"We have flint and wood, but where's the sheep for the burnt offering?"

8 Abraham said, "Son, God will see to it that there's a sheep for the burnt offering." And they kept on walking together.

9-10 They arrived at the place to which God had directed him. Abraham built an altar. He laid out the wood. Then he tied up Isaac and laid him on the wood. Abraham reached out and took the knife to kill his son.

11 Just then an angel of GOD called to him out of Heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Yes, I'm listening."

12 "Don't lay a hand on that boy! Don't touch him! Now I know how fearlessly you fear God; you didn't hesitate to place your son, your dear son, on the altar for me."

13 Abraham looked up. He saw a ram caught by its horns in the thicket. Abraham took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

14 Abraham named that place GOD-Yireh (GOD-Sees-to-It). That's where we get the saying, "On the mountain of GOD, he sees to it."

15-18 The angel of GOD spoke from Heaven a second time to Abraham: "I swear—GOD's sure word!—because you have gone through with this, and have not refused to give me your son, your dear, dear son, I'll bless you—oh, how I'll bless you! And I'll make sure that your children flourish—like stars in the sky! like sand on the beaches! And your descendants will defeat their enemies. All nations on Earth will find themselves blessed through your descendants because you obeyed me."

19 Then Abraham went back to his young servants. They got things together and

returned to Beersheba. Abraham settled down in Beersheba.

✦ ✦ ✦

20-23 After all this, Abraham got the news: "Your brother Nahor is a father! Milcah has given him children: Uz, his firstborn, his brother Buz, Kemuel (he was the father of Aram), Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel." (Bethuel was the father of Rebekah.) Milcah gave these eight sons to Nahor, Abraham's brother.

24 His concubine, Reumah, gave him four more children: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

MATTHEW 7:15-29

"Be wary of false preachers who smile a lot, dripping with practiced sincerity. Chances are they are out to rip you off some way or other. Don't be impressed with charisma; look for character. Who preachers *are* is the main thing, not what they say. A genuine leader will never exploit your emotions or your pocketbook. These diseased trees with their bad apples are going to be chopped down and burned.

21-23 "Knowing the correct password—saying 'Master, Master,' for instance—isn't going to get you anywhere with me. What is required is serious obedience—*doing* what my Father wills. I can see it now—at the Final Judgment thousands strutting up to me and saying, 'Master, we preached the Message, we bashed the demons, our super-spiritual projects had everyone talking.' And do you know what I am going to say? 'You missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. You don't impress me one bit. You're out of here.'

24-25 "These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock.

26-27 "But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards."

28-29 When Jesus concluded his address, the crowd burst into applause. They had never heard teaching like this. It was apparent that he was living everything he was saying—quite a contrast to their religion teachers! This was the best teaching they had ever heard.

PSALM 9:1-12

A David Psalm

1-2 I'm thanking you, GOD, from a full heart,
I'm writing the book on your wonders.
I'm whistling, laughing, and jumping for joy;
I'm singing your song, High God.

3-4 The day my enemies turned tail and ran,
they stumbled on you and fell on their faces.
You took over and set everything right;
when I needed you, you were there, taking charge.

5-6 You blow the whistle on godless nations;
you throw dirty players out of the game,
wipe their names right off the roster.
Enemies disappear from the sidelines,
their reputation trashed,
their names erased from the halls of fame.

7-8 GOD holds the high center,
he sees and sets the world's mess right.
He decides what is right for us earthlings,
gives people their just deserts.

9-10 GOD's a safe-house for the battered,
a sanctuary during bad times.
The moment you arrive, you relax;
you're never sorry you knocked.

11-12 Sing your songs to Zion-dwelling GOD,
tell his stories to everyone you meet:
How he tracks down killers
yet keeps his eye on us,
registers every whimper and moan.