



# Explore the Bible.®

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

## *1,2,3 John; Revelation*

ePub > NIV

*Jim Shaddix, General Editor*

LifeWay | Adults

# LIFE BY DESIGN

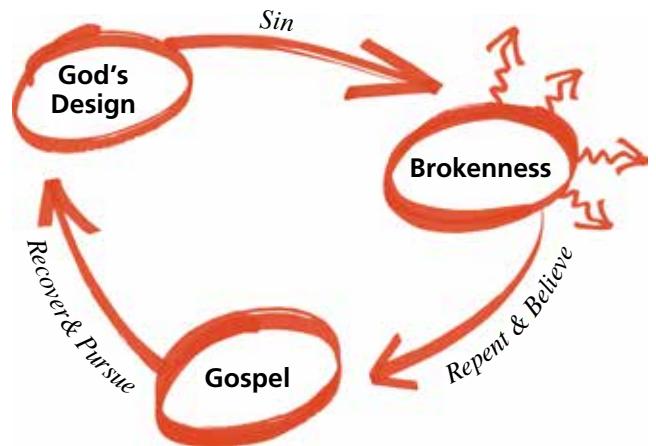
**We live in a broken world. This brokenness is seen in suffering, violence, poverty, pain, and death around us. Brokenness leads us to search for a way to make LIFE work.**

The Bible tells us that God originally planned a world that worked perfectly—where everything and everyone fit together in harmony. God made each of us with a purpose—to worship Him and walk with Him. (See Genesis 1:31 and Psalm 19:1.)

Life doesn't work when we ignore God and His original design for our lives. We selfishly insist on doing things our own way. The Bible calls this sin. Sin leads to a place of brokenness. The consequence of our sin is separation from God—in this life and for all of eternity. (See Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23.)

At this point we need a remedy—some good news. Because of His love, God did not leave us in our brokenness. Jesus, God in human flesh, came to us and lived perfectly according to God's Design. Jesus came to rescue us—to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He took our sin and shame to the cross, paying the penalty of our sin by His death. Jesus was then raised from the dead—to provide the only way for us to be rescued and restored to a relationship with God. (See John 3:16, Colossians 2:14, and 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.)

We don't have the power to escape this brokenness on our own. We need to be rescued. We must ask God to forgive us—turning from sin to trust in Jesus. This is what it means to repent and believe. Believing, we receive new life through Jesus. God turns our lives in a new direction. (See Mark 1:15, Ephesians 2:8-9, and Romans 10:9.)



When God restores our relationship to Him, we begin to discover meaning and purpose in a broken world. Now we can pursue God's Design in all areas of our lives. God's Spirit empowers us to recover His Design and assures us of His presence in this life and for all of eternity. (See Philippians 2:13 and Ephesians 2:10.)

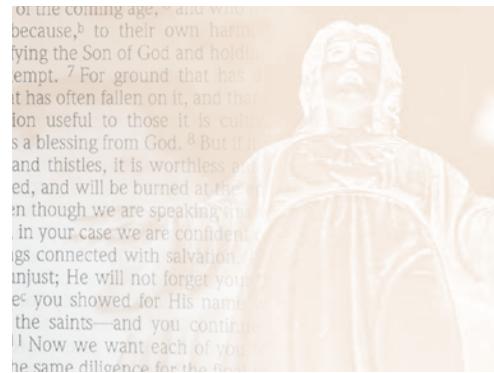
Now that you have heard this Good News, God wants you to respond to Him. You can talk to Him using words like these: My life is broken—I recognize it's because of my sin. I believe Christ came to live, die, and was raised from the dead—to rescue me from my sin. Forgive me. I turn from my selfish ways and put my trust in You. I know that Jesus is Lord of all, and I will follow Him.

Excerpted from *Life on Mission: A Simple Way to Share the Gospel*.

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\*Evangelistic Emphasis



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*Explore the Bible: Adult Personal Study Guide NIV* (2330-9504; Item 005073491) is published quarterly by LifeWay, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234, Thom S. Rainer, President. © 2015 LifeWay.

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ADULT PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

**SUMMER 2015**

VOLUME 8 • NUMBER 4

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ADULT PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE  
ONE LIFEWAY PLAZA  
NASHVILLE, TN 37234-0175

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES  
OF AMERICA

COVER & photos on pages 121, 141  
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## A WORD FROM THE GENERAL EDITOR



Have you ever misplaced an important letter under a stack of papers, or overlooked a time-sensitive email in your crowded inbox? Some Bible books are like that. They get overlooked as a result of the popularity of other books.

The apostle John wrote five books in the New Testament. His Gospel often overshadows his three Letters and Revelation. Like the Gospel, however, John's Letters and Revelation have great significance. John wrote his letters to combat false teaching that was bombarding his congregations. With pastoral oversight of the "seven churches of Asia," he wrote to protect them as they faced a crisis of confidence in Christ's salvation. He wrote Revelation a short time later to encourage believers who were experiencing intense persecution. John reminded them that the glory of God ultimately would be revealed through the victorious reign of Christ over everybody and everything for all time!

Today, ever expanding forms of media and the multiplication of world religions have intensified the onslaught of erroneous teachings against Christ's church. Agendas that pervert the blessings of personal and equal rights, as well as intolerance of the gospel's exclusivity, increasingly threaten Christians and their beliefs. Against these errors, John's Letters and Revelation give us great encouragement. I'm praying that Christ will use our study to help us remain true to His glorious gospel and anticipate with perseverance His glorious return!

### ***Jim Shaddix***



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# WORD WISE

Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

**Abaddon** [uh BAD uhn]—Hebrew word meaning “destroyer”; name of the angel king over hordes of demonic locusts in the abyss, or bottomless pit (Rev. 9:11); see also “Apollyon”

**Aegean Sea** [uh JEE uhn SEE]—body of water separating ancient Asia Minor (modern Turkey) and Macedonia-Achaia (Greece); location of island of Patmos

**Alpha / Omega** [AL fuh / oh MAY guh]—first and last letters in the Greek alphabet, which contains 24 total letters

**Antichrist** [AN tih krightst]—world leader who will arise in the end time as the avowed enemy of God; in John’s writings, can also refer to any human teacher who denies the incarnation and Christ’s divine nature

**Apocalypse / apocalyptic** [uh PAHK uh lips / uh pahk uh LIP tik]—first word in the Greek text of Revelation; literally means “an unveiling” / type of writing that employs highly figurative language to reveal a message of divine intervention; often appeared in extended times of distress or persecution

**Apollyon** [uh PAHL yuhn]—Greek word meaning “destroyer”; name of the angel king over hordes of demonic locusts in the abyss, or bottomless pit (Rev. 9:11)

**Ephesus** [EF uh suhs]—first of seven churches in province of Asia to whom Revelation was sent; see article on pages 142-143 for more on the city

**Gnostics** [NAHS tiks]—heretical groups in the late first century A.D. who claimed a special knowledge about spirit and matter required for salvation

**Laodicea** [lay ahd ih SEE uh]—seventh of seven churches in province of Asia to whom Revelation was sent; see article on pages 142-143 for more on the city

**Pergamum** [PUHR guh muhm]—third of seven churches in province of Asia to whom Revelation was sent; see article on pages 142-143 for more on the city

**Philadelphia** [fil uh DEL fih uh]—sixth of seven churches in province of Asia to whom Revelation was sent; see article on pages 142-143 for more on the city

**Sardis** [SAHR diss]—fifth of seven churches in province of Asia to whom Revelation was sent; see article on pages 142-143 for more on the city

**Smyrna** [SMUHR nuh]—second of seven churches in province of Asia to whom Revelation was sent; see article on pages 142-143 for more on the city

**Thyatira** [thigh uh TIGH ruh]—fourth of seven churches in province of Asia to whom Revelation was sent; see article on pages 142-143 for more on the city

# BIBLE READING PLAN

- 1 John 1:1-4
- 1 John 1:5-10
- 1 John 2:1-2
- 1 John 2:3-6
- 1 John 2:7-11
- 1 John 2:12-14
- 1 John 2:15-17
- 1 John 2:18-23
- 1 John 2:24-29
- 1 John 3:1-3
- 1 John 3:4-10
- 1 John 3:11-15
- 1 John 3:16-17
- 1 John 3:18-20
- 1 John 3:21-24
- 1 John 4:1-3
- 1 John 4:4-6
- 1 John 4:7-12
- 1 John 4:13-16
- 1 John 4:17-21
- 1 John 5:1-5
- 1 John 5:6-11
- 1 John 5:12-13
- 1 John 5:14-15
- 1 John 5:16-17
- 1 John 5:18-21
- 2 John 1:1-3
- 2 John 1:4-6
- 2 John 1:7-11
- 2 John 1:12-13

- 3 John 1:1-4
- 3 John 1:5-8
- 3 John 1:9-10
- 3 John 1:11-14
- Revelation 1:1-6
- Revelation 1:7-11
- Revelation 1:12-20
- Revelation 2:1-7
- Revelation 2:8-11
- Revelation 2:12-17
- Revelation 2:18-29
- Revelation 3:1-6
- Revelation 3:7-13
- Revelation 3:14-22
- Revelation 4:1-5
- Revelation 4:6-11
- Revelation 5:1-7
- Revelation 5:8-14
- Revelation 6:1-8
- Revelation 6:9-11
- Revelation 6:12-17
- Revelation 7:1-8
- Revelation 7:9-12
- Revelation 7:13-17
- Revelation 8:1-6
- Revelation 8:7-13
- Revelation 9:1-6
- Revelation 9:7-12
- Revelation 9:13-21
- Revelation 10:1-4
- Revelation 10:5-11

- Revelation 11:1-6
- Revelation 11:7-14
- Revelation 11:15-19
- Revelation 12:1-6
- Revelation 12:7-12
- Revelation 12:13-17
- Revelation 13:1-10
- Revelation 13:11-18
- Revelation 14:1-5
- Revelation 14:6-13
- Revelation 14:14-20
- Revelation 15:1-8
- Revelation 16:1-9
- Revelation 16:10-21
- Revelation 17:1-6
- Revelation 17:7-14
- Revelation 17:15-18
- Revelation 18:1-8
- Revelation 18:9-20
- Revelation 18:21-24
- Revelation 19:1-10
- Revelation 19:11-16
- Revelation 19:17-21
- Revelation 20:1-6
- Revelation 20:7-15
- Revelation 21:1-8
- Revelation 21:9-21
- Revelation 21:22-27
- Revelation 22:1-5
- Revelation 22:6-13
- Revelation 22:14-21



# INTRODUCTION TO 1,2,3 JOHN; REVELATION

John was a fisherman by trade, introduced to the business along with his brother, James, by their father, Zebedee. John and James must have possessed strong temperaments, for they bore the nickname “sons of thunder” (see Mark 3:17). Jesus gave the two brothers this name after calling them to follow Him to become fishers of men.

Together with Simon Peter, another former fisherman, John and James comprised an inner circle whom Jesus took with Him on significant occasions (see Mark 5:37; 9:2; 14:32-33). From the cross, Jesus placed His mother into John’s tender care (see John 19:26).

Conservative Bible scholars generally agree that John wrote the Fourth Gospel, the three Letters of John, and Revelation. He was a leader in the Jerusalem church until the Roman army destroyed that city and its temple around A.D. 70. John then moved to Ephesus, a major city in the Roman province of Asia (or “Asia Minor”). Not to be confused with the modern continent of Asia, the ancient province included a portion of what today is western Turkey. In Ephesus, John continued his pastoral ministry and began to write the works of Scripture for which he is known. He encouraged believers to cling to the truth and to live faithfully even in the face of persecution.

Ironically, persecution probably was the reason that an elderly John landed in exile on the tiny island of Patmos. There, however, he received the Christ-centered visions and message of victory that became Revelation, the final book in the Holy Scriptures.

## »» BACKGROUND

**Dates, Occasions, and Purposes**—The Letters of John probably were written some time between A.D. 80 and the early 90s. John had learned about false teachers who stirred up congregations and left them in confusion (1 John). He also had heard about traveling teachers who were spreading heresy (2 John), and about a domineering teacher who had taken a congregation (3 John).

At some point in the early to mid-90s, John was exiled to Patmos, an island located some 45 miles off the coast of Asia in the Aegean Sea (see p. 6 and map on p. 147). This exile likely occurred in the reign of Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81–96), who targeted Christians for

persecution. John was aware that Christians in key cities around the region of Asia also were targets. Jesus showed John a vision of His ultimate victory over evil, and John was instructed to write down the message and send it to seven churches in Asia (see Rev. 1:4).

John wrote his letters to combat false teachers and to encourage believers in their faith and fellowship. He wanted them to know the truth in Jesus, to cling to the truth confidently, and to live it out. Later, from his exile on Patmos, John wrote Revelation in obedience to the Lord's command to do so. The purpose of Revelation was to assure believers that the Sovereign and Risen Lord has control of the future. He will return one day to execute final judgment on sin, evil, and the Devil. That assurance would strengthen believers to be faithful to Christ in all circumstances.

**Interpreting Revelation**—Because of its special literary type, Revelation often presents a challenge to Bible students. Part of the challenge is that the book contains characteristics of three types of writing: the epistle (or letter), prophecy, and apocalyptic writing. Apocalyptic writing employs symbolic language and word-pictures to describe the ongoing, cosmic struggle between good and evil. Prophecy is the God-given revelation of His sovereign purposes, including insight about coming events whereby God will judge evil and deliver His people. Epistles, or letters, were written communications from Christian leaders to congregations and individuals, instructing and encouraging believers when the leader could not be present. Revelation displays features of all three types of writing. Thus it is not always easy to know if a passage should be interpreted figuratively or literally.

### »» KEY THEMES

**1,2,3 John**—Key themes in John's Letters are: (1) the incarnation of Jesus; (2) the identity of Jesus as the Messiah; (3) believers' knowing and clinging to the truth; and (4) the interconnections of faith in Christ, love for God, and obedience to His commands.

**Revelation**—Key themes in Revelation are: (1) Jesus Christ as the Creator and Ruler of all and worthy of worship; (2) Jesus' return in triumph to judge the world in righteousness; (3) the movement of history toward its consummation in Christ; and (4) the faithful endurance of Christ's followers until His coming.



# OUTLINES OF 1,2,3 JOHN; REVELATION

## OUTLINE OF 1 JOHN

- I. The Truth About Christ (1:1-4)
- II. The Believer in the World (1:5-2:27)
- III. Message for God's Children (2:28-4:21)
- IV. Final Exhortations (5:1-21)

## OUTLINE OF 2 JOHN

- I. Love, Truth, and Deception (1:1-13)

## OUTLINE OF 3 JOHN

- I. Truth and Christian Hospitality (1:1-14)

## OUTLINE OF REVELATION

- I. Vision of the Victorious Christ (1:1-20)
- II. Messages to Christ's Churches (2:1-3:22)
- III. Visions of the End Time (4:1-22:5)
- IV. Final Instructions (22:6-21)



# Session 1

## THE TRUTH PRESENTED

No one can have true fellowship with God the Father and His church without also acknowledging His incarnate Son.

### 1 JOHN 1:1-4

<sup>1</sup> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. <sup>2</sup> The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. <sup>3</sup> We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son. <sup>4</sup> We write this to make our joy complete.



DATE OF MY BIBLE STUDY: \_\_\_\_\_

11

**Observe all the phrases in which the word “we” is used in these verses. To whom might “we” refer? How does this strengthen John’s testimony about Jesus?**

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**Notice what John gave as a purpose for writing in the first part of verse 3. What was John’s purpose for testifying about Jesus?**

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## FIRST THOUGHTS

One of the key principles of the American judicial system is the concept of being “presumed innocent until proven guilty.” In courtrooms across the country, both prosecutors and defense attorneys are responsible for providing evidence to validate the claims of their clients. Often the most compelling evidence is the testimony of eyewitnesses who can testify to what they saw, heard, or experienced. Reliable eyewitness testimony could make the difference between a favorable or an unfavorable legal verdict.

***When have you been called upon to give an account of something you saw, heard, or experienced?***

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The opening passage of 1 John is one eyewitness’s personal account of what was seen, heard, and experienced about Jesus Christ. John the Apostle wrote late in the first century regarding his relationship with Jesus. John testified that he and others shared in experiencing Jesus as a real person in history. John’s testimony is significant for the Christian faith because of the importance it places on the incarnation of Jesus—that He was fully God and also was fully human.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 1 JOHN 1:1-4

There were some teachers in the time of John's ministry who were spreading false information that was grounded in several erroneous beliefs. Among the false teachings were these: (1) Salvation is obtained through a mystical spiritual knowledge, not by the atoning work of Christ on the cross; (2) Spirit and matter (flesh) are separate from one another and cannot coexist, because spirit is good and flesh is evil; (3) Since spirit and flesh are independent of each other, a person could live an immoral lifestyle and still claim to be a "spiritual" person; and (4) Jesus did not have an authentic physical body but only "seemed" to be human; therefore, Christ couldn't really die on the cross for the sins of mankind. Collectively, these heretical teachings of Gnostics (see p. 6) denied the reality of the incarnation, that God came in flesh, the physical death and resurrection of Jesus, and salvation by faith in the work of Christ on the cross.

To combat such erroneous teachings, John began his first epistle with an emphatic prologue that declared the reality of who Jesus was and of his personal experience with Jesus. John vividly presented Jesus as a real person who preexisted in heaven before He appeared on earth.

John's use of the personal pronouns "we," "our," and "us" testified that he and his contemporaries had seen, heard, touched, and beheld Jesus during His earthly ministry. John's language in 1 John 1:1-4 indicated the uniqueness of Jesus as the only way to experience eternal salvation. John explained that his purpose in writing was so that his readers could have fellowship with other believers, which comes from a proper understanding of and right relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

### KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

Christ is the eternal Son of God.



# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## WITNESSED BY MANY (1 JOHN 1:1)

### VERSE 1

**<sup>1</sup> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.**

First John 1:1 is a bold proclamation about Jesus' identity, refuting the false teachers who denied the reality that Jesus was the Son of God. John, the writer of the three New Testament epistles that bear his name, Revelation, and the Gospel of John, testified that Jesus was truly human—a Man who was seen, heard, and touched by many people.

John's opening statement that Jesus was *from the beginning* could refer to the start of Jesus' earthly ministry, but most likely it refers to Jesus' eternal coexistence with the Father prior to creation. First John 1:1 reflects the truths declared in Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1. John was aware that Jesus preexisted in heaven prior to His incarnation on earth, which is foundational to the frameworks of Christianity. John followed this declaration about the preexistence of Christ with several statements that emphatically assert the reality of Jesus in human flesh, which seem to indicate that John was focusing more on Christ Himself rather than just the proclamation of the gospel message.

In cases where the significance of historical events is lost with the passage of time, having the reliable testimony of an eyewitness can attest to the reality and confirm the importance of these events. John stated that he and his contemporaries had heard Jesus speak with their own ears, had seen Him with their eyes, and had touched Him with their own hands. The One who existed with God before creation came to earth in human form to identify with other humans. These collective statements not only emphasize John's firsthand experience with Jesus but also proclaim that Jesus had an actual physical body and was not some kind of mysterious being, as the false teachers suggested.

John described Jesus as *the Word of life*. This unique phrase could be a title for Jesus, or it could mean that the message of life is contained in the Person and work of Christ. John seemed to have in mind the eternal purpose of God that is revealed in Christ. In

Scripture's teaching, salvation is made possible by the entry of the preexistent Son of God into the human race. John and the other apostles had experienced the incarnate Son personally. Jesus came as God in human form to give everlasting life to all who believe in Him.

***John described his own personal experience with Jesus. In what ways have you experienced the reality of Jesus Christ in your life?***

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***Why is it important that Jesus' humanity has been established by many witnesses?***

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## **REVEALED AS LIFE (1 JOHN 1:2)**

### **VERSE 2**

**<sup>2</sup> The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.**

Academic knowledge can be learned, but only God can reveal spiritual truths. In the Old Testament, God revealed Himself to Moses through a burning bush and revealed His expectations for His people with the Ten Commandments. In the Person of Christ, God has made Himself known to humanity. God the Father did not present His Son as an abstract concept; neither did He disclose salvation in some mystical, mysterious way as the false teachers claimed. Rather, the Son came to earth as God in the flesh to reveal God's plan of salvation for mankind. Instead of hiding spiritual truths for all but a few people, God openly made Himself available to all people in the Person of Jesus Christ. Through the incarnation of Christ, God revealed Himself to humanity as never before.

Echoing verse 1, John stated that he and his fellow believers had encountered Jesus. Apparently John felt the need to repeat himself here due to the heretical beliefs of the false teachers, who



were claiming that Jesus was not really God's Anointed One. Their erroneous doctrine was a direct attack on the Person of Jesus, which was a denial of His Deity. If Jesus was only a man, as the false teachers believed, then He could not be fully God, nor could He atone for man's sins. John countered this unfounded belief by relating his own experience with Jesus as God's true self-revelation.

John declared that Jesus is **eternal life**. At least two significant truths for the Christian faith are found in John's statement about Jesus. First, being eternal, Jesus is unending and not bound by the restrictions of time and space. He is God and was with God from all eternity. Second, Jesus' entry into the human race revealed Him as the Source of eternal life. God disclosed in the appearance of Jesus Christ that eternal life is given to all who believe in Him. Salvation is not for a select few who have some mystical knowledge but for all who accept God's revelation of Himself in Jesus. John's focus on eternal life is qualitative as well as quantitative, affirming that eternal life is not just experienced by believers in heaven. It also is a present reality on earth. The true Source of everlasting life is none other than Jesus Christ.

***Why is the humanity of Jesus Christ important to the Christian faith?  
Why is the Son of God's preexistence with the Father before creation important to the Christian faith?***

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***How does John's eyewitness testimony about Jesus impact your faith in God?***

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**PROVIDED TRUE FELLOWSHIP (1 JOHN 1:3-4)**

**VERSE 3**

**<sup>3</sup> We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son.**

For a third time, John informed the reader that he had seen and heard Jesus personally. John's witness, like that of the other apostles, was credible because he experienced Jesus firsthand. He did not merely hear someone else teach about Christ; rather, he was an eyewitness of the Incarnate Word, which gave him the authority to proclaim truths about Jesus. John communicated faithfully to his readers what he and his fellow apostles had received. John stated that his purpose in proclaiming Christ was so that believers in Christ could maintain ongoing *fellowship* with one another.

With whom do you have significant relationships? People can share in relationships as spouses, parents, children, relatives, friends, classmates, and team members, just to name a few. The idea of *fellowship* here has to do with common participation or sharing among God's people. Christian fellowship is based on proclaiming the truths about Jesus and on a person's response in faith to Christ. This fellowship is available to people today.

Because all believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, Christian fellowship means more than just sharing social, cultural, or recreational interests. Christian fellowship implies a union with the Lord, meaning that believers belong to God and to one another. Such fellowship involves believers in sharing their lives with each other and with God.

John testified that fellowship among believers is made possible by a person's fellowship with the Father and the Son. Refuting the false teachers was important for John, so that believers could be sure about the Object of their faith. If believers were unsure about who Jesus was and doubted their salvation, their fellowship with God would be negatively impacted. A lack of fellowship with God leads to a lack of true fellowship with other believers.

Throughout this epistle, John used the metaphors of "light" and "love" to refer to Christian realities. God Himself is light (see 1 John 1:6-7), and love demonstrated to other believers is evidence of living in the light (see 1 John 2:9-11). Because God is love (see 1 John 4:8), the result of being rightly related to God by faith in Christ is to demonstrate love to other believers (see 1 John 4:11), which is the essence of Christian fellowship. Faith in Christ yields eternal life, which is characterized by fellowship with God the Father and Jesus His Son, enabling Christians to have ongoing fellowship.



***How would you respond to a person who believes that one can have Christian fellowship without being in right fellowship with God?***

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#### **VERSE 4**

**<sup>4</sup> We write this to make our joy complete.**

John was quite fond of the people to whom he wrote this epistle, referring to them as his “children.” In the closing verse of the prologue, he connected his joy to that of his readers. John stated that he had written these truths about Jesus Christ so that he and his readers’ **joy** would **be complete**, not lacking anything.

The message of the false teachers had led to doubt and confusion in the minds of some people, causing them to be unsure of their faith and adversely affecting their fellowship. What John had written to this point was meant to clear up any confusion about the Person and work of Jesus Christ, which would lead to unity and fellowship among believers.

The source of joy as described by John is a vital union with Jesus Christ. John had personally experienced the joy he referred to in verse 4. As a young man, John had opened his life to Christ and had walked with the Lord for many decades thereafter. As his fellowship with God increased, so did his joy. All believers can experience the kind of joy expressed by John as they abide in Christ (see John 15:4), communicate with God in prayer (see John 15:7; 16:24), and bear fruit for the Lord (see John 15:8). A joyful believer is one who obeys Christ’s commands and loves others as Christ loves them.

John was so concerned with the spiritual welfare of his readers that he could not experience true joy while they were confused in their faith. John’s repeated emphasis on the Person and work of Christ in the opening verses of this epistle gave his readers what they needed for spiritual renewal: a right understanding of Jesus Christ.

In sharp contrast to the claims of the false teachers, John affirmed that Jesus is real and available to all people. He can enrich our lives by providing continual fellowship with Him through the Holy Spirit. Moreover, fellowship with God makes ongoing fellowship with other believers a blessed reality. Being rightly related to God, which includes

believing the right things about God, opens the door for continuous fellowship with God and the Christian community, producing deep and abiding joy.

***What impact do correct teachings about God have on your fellowship with other believers?***

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***In what ways does being in a community of other believers bring a sense of joy to your life?***

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**BIBLE SKILL: *Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.***

Many Bible students have noted that the prologue of 1 John, the core passage for this session, is similar to the prologue of the Gospel of John (John 1:1-14). Read both passages and compare what each passage teaches about Jesus. Note the following terms:

1. Word
2. Beginning
3. Life
4. We have seen
5. Testify

Where do these terms occur in each prologue? What do they teach us about who Jesus is? How do these passages differ? What special terms are found only in one of the passages? (Hint: consider light, glory, joy, and fellowship). How do the two prologues give a clear picture of Jesus?

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## IN MY CONTEXT

John's eyewitness statements regarding the Person and work of Jesus Christ are important to the Christian faith. Authentic believers affirm both the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ, which enable believers to share in fellowship with God and with each other. No one can have true fellowship with God the Father and His church without also acknowledging His incarnate Son.

***How would you describe the importance of affirming Jesus' humanity and deity? What could you point to in this passage that would help you explain it to someone who rejects this truth?***

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***How is your relationship with believers an extension of your relationship with God? List steps you need to take to build your relationship with God and with other believers.***

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***In what ways can your Bible study group strengthen Christian fellowship in your church? List practical steps that your Bible study group can take to make fellowship with God and with one another a high priority.***

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## MEMORY VERSE

1 John 1:3a



## Session 2

# WALKING IN THE LIGHT

Fellowship with God is characterized by a life of holiness, confession, trusting Jesus, and obedience.

## 1 JOHN 1:5–2:6

**1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. <sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. <sup>8</sup> If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess**



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our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

<sup>2:1</sup> My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. <sup>2</sup> He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. <sup>3</sup> We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands.

<sup>4</sup> Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. <sup>5</sup> But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: <sup>6</sup> Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

*Notice the “if we claim” statements. Determine who John was speaking to or targeting when making these comments. Identify characteristics that mark genuine believers.*

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## FIRST THOUGHTS

“Actions speak louder than words.” This frequently repeated phrase emphasizes the importance of backing up our words by what we do. Parents often use the phrase to remind children that although people hear the words we speak, they’re quicker to evaluate us by our actions. Inconsistency between our statements and actions may cause others to evaluate us in a negative light. Ultimately, it’s what we do that reveals our actual values.

*Think about your actions this past week. What do they reveal about your beliefs?*

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John wrote the Epistle of 1 John to a group of confused believers in the first century. False teachers were spreading heresy about the Christian life by claiming to have fellowship with God while living in disobedience. Sensing the negative impact this could have on his readers, John wrote to give them a correct understanding of sin, the nature of God, and the work of Christ. John connected right believing with right living. He exposed the erroneous teachings of the Gnostic heretics by emphasizing core truths of Christianity, and he gave some simple tests to help his readers distinguish true believers from unbelievers. John's teachings are relevant for people today to help them determine the characteristics of true believers.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### 1 JOHN 1:5–2:14

John introduced several metaphors that relate to God, true belief, and sinfulness. John compared God to light (1:5). “Light” here refers to God as the source of all life, which is similar to how John used the word in his Gospel when referring to Jesus (see John 1:3-11; 8:12). Wherever God is, there is life, because light is the source of life. Those who wish to embrace this life must walk in fellowship with God (live in the light). Conversely, walking in darkness, according to John, means to live a sinful life that is out of fellowship with God. Since God is light, only those who walk in the light (practice holiness) have true fellowship with God.

A positive benefit of such fellowship is the cleansing of sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. John's assertions about God's nature render impossible the false teachers' beliefs that one could maintain fellowship with God yet remain in the darkness of their sinful choices.

John refuted the distinctive claims of the false teachers regarding sin, and he acknowledged that Jesus' sacrificial death satisfied God's just demand for the punishment of sins. He provided a test for people to know whether or not they are right with God: A genuine believer is one who obeys God's commands through a relationship with God. Finally, John addressed the importance of believers walking in the light of God's love as evidence that they have fellowship with Him.



# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## DEMONSTRATE HOLINESS (1 JOHN 1:5-7)

### VERSE 5

**<sup>5</sup> This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.**

John and the other disciples had heard Jesus proclaim that He was light (see John 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36, 46). John frequently used light as a metaphor to refer to God's righteousness, truth, and knowledge, while he also commonly used darkness as a way to describe lostness, sin, and ignorance. Light also refers to God's holiness.

Because God is light, or the standard of eternal truth and righteousness, He exposes the darkness of sin and falsehood. John's teachings regarding God's nature lay the foundation for a person to have fellowship with God. By His nature, God reveals His righteous character and the expectation of holiness for His people.

### VERSE 6

**<sup>6</sup> If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.**

The false teachers were notorious for making ridiculous claims about themselves. One typical statement they made was that they had fellowship with God. John's readers doubtless were confused by such an assertion, since the ungodly lifestyles of the false teachers were obvious. John's use of *If we claim* was his way of referring to the shallow statements of the false teachers.

Since God is light and thereby the standard of truth, perfection, and righteousness, no one who walks in darkness, or practices evil, falsehood, and rebellion against God can have fellowship with God. To walk in darkness is to practice a habitually sinful lifestyle, showing no reverence for God's commands.

### VERSE 7

**<sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.**

In contrast to walking in darkness, which leads to alienation from God, walking in the light, or living in obedience to God's commands, produces positive results. First, obedient Christians enjoy fellowship with God and with each other, which was a primary consideration for John in writing this epistle. The evidence of having fellowship with God is to live in obedience to His commands. To demonstrate holiness is to walk in the light of God's character (see Eph. 5:7-14; 1 Pet. 1:13-21). The evidence of true fellowship with God is obedient living to the teachings of Jesus. Only obedient believers enjoy true fellowship with God as evidenced by their submission to His commands.

A second result of walking in the light is the cleansing of sin by Jesus' blood. John's statement about obedient believers being cleansed from all sin refers to an ongoing cleansing by Jesus' precious blood. Believers who continue to walk in the light experience progressive sanctification as the stains of sin are removed and their character is changed into Christ's likeness. The mention of **all sin** means that Jesus is able to forgive whatever sin one may commit as a result of His perfect sacrifice on the cross.

***What common practices today illustrate what John meant by walking in darkness? What practices illustrate walking in light?***

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***How can you be sure that you are walking in the light of God's truths?***

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### **KEY DOCTRINE: *Justification***

Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ.



## CONFESS SIN (1 JOHN 1:8-2:2)

### CHAPTER 1, VERSES 8-10

**<sup>8</sup> If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.**

The false teachers correctly believed in the sinless nature of God. Where they fell short was with their belief that in order to have fellowship with God, a person had to be sinless, which led the false teachers to claim that they were without sin. The witness of Scripture is that everyone sins (see Rom. 3:23), and that the penalty for sin is death (see Rom. 6:23). Since everyone struggles with sin, to deny its presence in our lives is to deny the truth of the gospel.

Two aspects of salvation can be seen in John's statement in verse 9. First, salvation encompasses justification, or a person being declared righteous before God. Being declared righteous before God is the act of God attributing His righteousness to a person who acknowledges Jesus as Lord by trusting in His sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins (see Rom. 5:6-11; Eph. 1:7). Salvation also includes sanctification, or the progressive transformation of the believer into the character of Christ. God's promise, as referenced by John, is to hear the confession of sinners and on the basis of Jesus' atoning death on the cross, forgive their sins. God's faithfulness and justice are part of His nature as being light, and on these bases He offers forgiveness to those who confess their sins and acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

John's teachings do not imply that a believer can lose his or her salvation (see Rom. 8:37-39), nor do they offer a license for believers to commit habitual sins. Rather, John's message is that although we all sin, God forgives those who come to Him through Jesus. Our initial confession of Jesus as Lord is sufficient to receive eternal life. Continual confession of our sins is important to maintaining healthy fellowship with God.

John reinforced what he said in verse 8 with emphasis on the consequences of claiming to be without sin, as was the custom of the false teachers. John taught that anyone who claims to be without sin is to set oneself on an equal plane with God, which is impossible,

since His Word says that there is no one like Him (see Isa. 45:18). Whoever considers himself to be without sin is guilty of self-deception, calling God a liar, and refusing to submit to God's truths.

## CHAPTER 2, VERSES 1-2

**<sup>1</sup> My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. <sup>2</sup> He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.**

John identified his readers as his *dear children*, indicating the closeness he felt with them as their spiritual mentor. He expressed that his purpose in writing this epistle was to help his readers avoid sinning in the same way as the false teachers. Nonetheless, John provides encouragement for believers not only to confess their sins, but to be aware that *Jesus Christ the Righteous One* speaks to God on their behalf. John calls Jesus our *advocate*, which means something similar to a defense attorney, or one who represents us before the Father. Jesus' defense is based not in any ability we have to be sinless but instead on His sacrifice of Himself on our behalf.

John described Jesus as the *atoning sacrifice* for humanity's sins, which means that through His substitutionary death on our behalf, Jesus has provided the means by which all people may be saved. Jesus satisfied God's wrath against sin by taking on the punishment sin deserved. Fellowship with God is made possible because of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, but only those who turn to God through Jesus experience salvation.

***Why is ongoing confession of sin important in a believer's relationship with God?***

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***What encouragement does John give to believers who struggle with sin?***

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## SEEK TO OBEY (1 JOHN 2:3-6)

### VERSES 3-4

**<sup>3</sup> We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. <sup>4</sup> Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.**

The Gnostic heretics were fond of claiming they knew God on an intellectual level or through some kind of mystical enlightenment, which they regarded as the equivalent of salvation. However, they made no effort to practice God’s commands in their daily lives. To combat this misconception, John taught that knowing God was experiential and dynamic as opposed to just intellectual. John provided an accurate test that believers could apply to their lives to see if indeed they knew God: obeying His commands. Obeying God’s commands is not a condition of salvation but is instead a result of salvation. Thus, one’s actions confirm his or her salvation, not secure it.

Verse 4 amplifies John’s previous thoughts from a different perspective. Those who claim to know God but do not keep His commands expose themselves as liars. Regardless of what a person claims, anyone who is consistently disobedient deceives himself and reveals by his actions that he has no relationship with God.

### VERSES 5-6

**<sup>5</sup> But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: <sup>6</sup> Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.**

John concludes this section with a message of reassurance to believers: Anyone who takes God’s commands seriously and obeys them reveals that he or she has a growing relationship with God. The *love for God* referenced here can be both love for God and love that comes from God. In essence, what John taught is that genuine salvation results in a Christ-like desire to obey God’s commands. The idea of being *made complete* has to do with maturing in one’s faith (not being perfect and sinless). The more we obey God, the more we abide in Christ (see John 14:21; John 15:5), which matures our faith.

John stressed the need to back up one’s words with actions. To abide in God, one must experientially know God through a growing relationship with Him, evidenced by patterning one’s life

after Christ's. A relationship with Christ enables us to put Christ's commands into practice in our lives.

***In what ways has obeying God's commands strengthened your faith in Him?***

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***What promises can believers expect God to fulfill when they confess their sins to Him?***

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major concept.*

Light (*phos* [FOHS] in the original language) was a central symbol for John, both in the Gospel and in his first epistle. Study the following passages:

Verses in 1 John in which he used *phos*: 1:5,7; 2:8,9,10.

Verses in John's Gospel in which the apostle himself used *phos*: 1:4,5,6,8,9.

Verses in John's Gospel in which Jesus was speaking of light (*phos*): 3:19,20,21; 5:35; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9,10; 12:35,36,46.

Is John's use of *phos* in his epistle identical to or different than his use of *phos* in the Gospel of John chapter 1? Summarize the usage of *phos* for the apostle?

How did Jesus use *phos*? Is it personal or impersonal? Is it identical to or different than John's usage?

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## IN MY CONTEXT

The evidence of a Christian's fellowship with God is not sinlessness but obedience. Obeying God's commands includes confession of one's sins. When believers regularly confess their sins to God, they can be certain of God's forgiveness. Demonstrating holiness is essential in a Christian's life.

***Evaluate your life by the standard presented in this passage. If there is no evidence of fellowship with God, consider your need of committing your life to Christ and review the information on the inside front cover of this book. If you have made that commitment, then ask God to help you demonstrate evidence of fellowship with Him.***

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***What sins do you need to confess to God? Ask God to show you the sins in your life and confess that sin to Him as He reveals it.***

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***What are some ways that your Bible study group can encourage each other to live obediently to God's commands? Discuss how you can hold each other accountable in a way that demonstrates respect for each other.***

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## MEMORY VERSE

1 John 1:9



## Session 3

# DANGERS TO AVOID

Believers will be tempted by the things of this world and by the deceit of false teachers, but they can abide in the truth of the gospel by the power of God's Spirit.

## 1 JOHN 2:15-27

**<sup>15</sup> Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. <sup>16</sup> For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. <sup>17</sup> The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. <sup>18</sup> Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists**



have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. <sup>20</sup> But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. <sup>21</sup> I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. <sup>22</sup> Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. <sup>23</sup> No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. <sup>24</sup> As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. <sup>25</sup> And this is what he promised us—eternal life. <sup>26</sup> I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. <sup>27</sup> As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.

*Notice the comparisons John made in verses 15-17 between the things of the world and the things of God. What is the ultimate outcome of each?*

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*Identify characteristics pointed out by John to differentiate believers from the world.*

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## FIRST THOUGHTS

Some people have dangerous jobs. Miners may face cave-ins. Medical professionals often risk being exposed to infectious diseases. Firefighters put their health and lives at risk with every blaze, sometimes in the act of rescuing others. Those who regularly face hazards work to minimize their risks.

***What is the most dangerous physical situation you have faced? What about workplace dangers or driving dangers? What do you do to avoid danger?***

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John guided his readers along a spiritual path that would lead them away from danger. He exhorted them to refrain from becoming attached to worldly things. Moreover, John assured his readers of their connection to Christ as His followers, encouraging them to abide in the Lord. John's message is relevant today. Followers of Christ can be confident that they possess God's promise of eternal life, regardless of what others may believe, and they should do their best to avoid being attracted by worldly things. A believer's faith resides in the power of the gospel message: Christ is sufficient for both salvation and growth in holiness.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### 1 JOHN 2:15-27

Having already instructed his readers on the importance of loving fellow Christians, John used this section of his epistle to warn his audience about sinful interests that lead us away from God and toward self-centeredness. The end result of such values is destruction, but the reward of following God's path is everlasting fellowship with Him.

John identified those who taught false doctrines as ***antichrists***—misguided or deliberately evil individuals, some of whom had previously identified with the group of believers to whom John was writing. Their straying away from truth was proof that they did not know God and were, in fact, living in disobedience to God. The antichrist is someone who refuses to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and who denies both the Father and the Son. John assured his readers of their salvation by proclaiming that they were living in light of God's truths by opening their lives to the Lord. Since God is truth, He cannot lie or mislead others, like the false teachers were doing.

John reminded his readers to continue to abide in Christ, being obedient to His commands. Although human effort is important



in terms of living out one's professed beliefs, John asserted that salvation depends solely on God's faithfulness, not on human achievement. By receiving John's instruction, readers could distance themselves from the misinformation of the false teachers and experience dynamic fellowship with God.

### KEY DOCTRINE: *Holy Spirit*

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### LOVERS OF THE WORLD (1 JOHN 2:15-17)

#### VERSE 15

**<sup>15</sup> Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.**

Previously, John had instructed his readers that they should demonstrate their love for God through holy conduct (see 1 John 2:3-6). He also taught them of the importance of loving fellow believers (see 1 John 2:9-11). Here John commanded believers that they should ***not love the world*** or that which is associated with the world.

John's emphasis here is not a warning against appreciating the created world or a caution against loving other humans. Rather, believers are to refrain from attaching themselves to attitudes and values that are directly opposed to God. Such things have the capacity for absorbing and even replacing one's love for God.

Since we cannot express genuine love for God and the world simultaneously, we must acknowledge that to love one is to exclude the other (see Matt. 6:24). Love is a powerful emotion that can be either misapplied to an inappropriate object or person or expressed in ways that honor God, who is the very definition of love (see 1 John 4:8). If our affection is focused on worldly things, then we are not cultivating love for God.

## VERSE 16

**16 For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.**

According to John, the world prioritizes what the body desires, what the eyes urge to see, and all that man can possess. John simply identified these as basic ways sinful humans rebel against God. John did not mean that the created world itself was evil but that the presence of sin has caused people to worship created and man-made things instead of worshipping God the Creator.

The ***lust of the flesh*** refers to the sinful interests and desires that lead us away from God. Because of our sinfulness, humans seek to fulfill natural desires in ungodly ways. While John certainly had in mind man's sexual desires, the meaning here is more encompassing, including any human craving which man seeks to gratify inappropriately. The ***lust of the eyes*** addresses man's tendency to ascribe worth to the things we see without evaluating their eternal significance. The eyes are frequently the means by which sinful desires enter into one's mind. ***The pride of life*** is an attitude that glorifies self and worldliness as opposed to complete dependence upon God. All of these values hinder one's fellowship with God.

## VERSE 17

**17 The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.**

John pronounced the ultimate conclusion for what the world values and what God values. Whatever belongs to the worldly nature might seem important during one's life on earth, but these things will not last for eternity. Conversely, God's kingdom is eternal, and those who live for God's glory above man's sinful desires will be a part of God's eternal kingdom. The things of the world are a poor substitute for an eternal destiny of fellowship with God.

***What actions can believers take to avoid loving worldly things?***

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**How can focusing on the eternal value of an action serve as a guard against loving worldly things?**

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## ENEMIES OF THE GOSPEL (1 JOHN 2:18-23)

### VERSES 18-19

**<sup>18</sup> Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.**

John once again used the affectionate term *dear children* to refer to the believers to whom he wrote. John identified this period of history as the *last hour*. This peculiar reference, used only here in the New Testament, likely refers to the time between Christ's first and second coming and will be characterized by the coming of *antichrists*, or people who oppose God's kingdom as revealed in Jesus. The presence of opposition to the gospel validates that God's kingdom was initiated on earth in the coming of Christ and one day will be ultimately fulfilled with His second coming.

John knew about a final embodiment of evil, the Antichrist (see p. 6), who would arise in the end time (see 2 Thess. 2:1-12). But John was more concerned at this point to warn about the anti-Christian teachers of his readers' time. The *antichrists* to which John referred had once been affiliated with believers in the church. Their presence in the church caused dissension, and they eventually removed themselves from fellowship with believers. As John put it, *they went out from us*. Their departure from orthodox Christian beliefs was proof that they were never genuine believers.

### VERSES 20-23

**<sup>20</sup> But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. <sup>21</sup> I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes**

from the truth.<sup>22</sup> **Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son.** <sup>23</sup> **No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.**

In contrast to the enemies of the gospel, who hold to their false teachings about Jesus, believers are blessed with an **anointing** from God. Both the Spirit and the Word work in harmony to reveal God's truths, affirming the gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Thus, John could say confidently that believers know the truth, as opposed to the heretics, who claimed knowledge but only deceived themselves. Since genuine believers know God, they are able to distinguish God's truths from the lies of false teachers. As a result, there is no need to try to supplement the Christian faith with any kind of mystical experience or insights available only to a select few. Rather, authentic believers know enough of God's truths to spot counterfeit teachings when they arise.

John labeled the false teachers as liars for failing to acknowledge the truth about Jesus Christ. The heretics apparently taught that fellowship with God was possible without affirming Jesus as Lord. Such a view distorts the gospel message, relegating Jesus to merely a religious figure without accepting His lordship. John exposed their hypocrisy, as well as the absurdity of their message, by stating that Jesus and the Father are distinct but inseparable: to be in fellowship with one is to be in fellowship with the other, and to deny one is to deny the other. One must either confess Christ or deny Christ; there is no middle ground.

***What anti-Christian influences do you see prevalent in today's world? What can a person do to minimize the influence in his or her life of those who oppose the gospel?***

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***What standards does John give for Christians to evaluate themselves?***

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## FAITHFUL TO THE GOSPEL (1 JOHN 2:24-27)

### VERSES 24-25

**<sup>24</sup> As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. <sup>25</sup> And this is what he promised us—eternal life. <sup>26</sup> I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.**

After addressing some important dangers to avoid, John instructed his readers to remain faithful to the gospel message. The idea of remaining (abiding) in Christ was central to John's theology. Believers initially open their hearts to Jesus Christ at the moment of salvation, but this is not the end of the Christian faith, only the beginning.

A relationship with God must be cultivated daily in order to grow as a Christian. Jesus stressed the importance of believers abiding in Him (see John 15:5), which highlights the importance of a thriving relationship with Christ. Being faithful to biblical teachings and abiding in Christ give reassurance to believers of their salvation.

The reward for trusting one's life to Jesus is eternal life, which is based on God's faithfulness, not on human achievement. Christians can trust in God's promises because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which both secures our salvation and empowers us to overcome sin in the world. God's promise of eternal life for believers is both a future expectation in heaven but also a present reality as believers remain in fellowship with Christ.

### VERSES 26-27

**<sup>26</sup> I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. <sup>27</sup> As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.**

The false teachers were trying to lure believers away from faith in Jesus Christ through heretical doctrine. Just as in John's day, false teachers exist today, threatening to sway believers from their faith in Christ through persuasive, worldly arguments that may be popular but are ultimately destructive. By remaining in Christ, believers can

distance themselves from these erroneous teachings propagated by those who demonstrate by their actions that they do not have a relationship with God.

Depending on the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God and remaining obedient to the gospel message strengthens believers to resist false teachings. The false teachers had depicted themselves as the only ones who had true knowledge of God. Their goal was to lead believers away from the true gospel message by claiming that they had special insights or new revelations about God and that their beliefs were to be followed.

In contrast, John reminded the believers that since they had received God's gift of the Holy Spirit, their salvation experience was legitimate. Since the Holy Spirit reveals the truth about salvation in Jesus Christ, believers do not need additional teachings invented by misguided humans.

***According to John, what realities will believers experience when they remain faithful to the gospel message?***

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***In what ways have you experienced the Holy Spirit teaching you truths about the Christian life?***

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**BIBLE SKILL: *Take seriously all biblical commands for Christian living.***

Read 1 John 2:15-27 and identify the commands. (Hint: look at the first and last verses.) Paraphrase them for today, using other words to express the same instruction. Reword any negative commands into a positive. Think of reasons for these commands, damage that might be caused by ignoring them, and benefits from obeying them.

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## IN MY CONTEXT

Believers must be careful to refrain from embracing the world's beliefs and values. No matter how glamorous and convincing any worldly philosophy may sound, following the appeal and allure of this world will lead to destruction. Eternal life can be found only in the timeless truths of the gospel. By rejecting the world's values and distancing themselves from false teachings, believers can remain faithful to the gospel and strengthened in their faith.

***Review the actions you listed earlier for avoiding loving the world and identify one action you need to take. List the steps you will take to complete that action.***

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***Consider how worldly influences impact your life. Identify at least one action you will take to minimize these influences, replacing it with a godly influence of some type.***

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***What role should the Bible study group play in helping each other avoid the allure of worldly beliefs and values? Identify actions the group can take to foster faithfulness.***

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## MEMORY VERSE

1 John 2:15



## Session 4

# IS THIS OF GOD?

Believers must be ready to test and affirm what is truly from God by looking at the doctrine and practice of those who claim to know the truth.

## 1 JOHN 4:1-6

**<sup>1</sup> Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world <sup>2</sup> This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup> but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already**



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in the world. <sup>4</sup> You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. <sup>5</sup> They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. <sup>6</sup> We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

*Look for criteria a person should use to “test the spirits” in determining whether or not they are from God?*

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*According to 1 John 4:1, why is it important for a person to know if a spirit or teaching is from God?*

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## FIRST THOUGHTS

Evaluations are a routine part of our lives. Teachers judge students’ progress, coaches appraise players’ performances, and employers evaluate employees to determine whether they are deserving of promotions and pay increases. Usually these estimations and judgments are based on measurable, objective standards. Without having specific indicators to go by, people’s assessments would be highly subjective and potentially wrong. Similarly, people must also make evaluations regarding matters of truth. The Epistle of 1 John provides help for believers to practice correct discernment.

*What are some things that you’ve had to evaluate recently, and what standards did you use to make these evaluations?*

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John was concerned about the spiritual welfare of his readers. They were being exposed to numerous false teachings from •Gnostic heretics (see p. 6), and they had difficulty determining truth from

falsehood. Rather than leaving his readers to subjective speculation regarding matters of spiritual importance, John set forth objective standards by which believers then and now could determine whether or not a teaching is from God.

Having confident assurance that one is traveling down the correct spiritual path is important, and Christians must depend on the Holy Spirit to lead them, so that their lives are obedient to God's revelation in Scripture. God's Spirit will never contradict His Word. Conversely, any spiritual teaching that does not align with God's truth as revealed in Scripture and in the Person of Jesus Christ is nothing more than false doctrine.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### 1 JOHN 4:1-6; 2 JOHN; 3 JOHN

Throughout his epistle, John drew lines of distinction: light and darkness, love and hate, Christ and antichrists, and obedience and disobedience, to name a few. False teachers were infiltrating the church, espousing false doctrines. John considered it important to warn his readers not to be deceived by those who profess to be believers but actually teach and practice something that does not resemble biblical truth. Even 2 John and 3 John record instruction regarding the importance of living in spiritual truth. False prophets were a threat to the growth of the church and the fruitful living of many first-century believers.

Antichrists had gone out into the world, attempting to distort spiritual truths. John insisted that authentic spiritual teachings would align with the biblical truth that Jesus is God's One and Only Son (see John 3:16). Any teaching that does not confess Jesus as Lord could not possibly be from God, since God would never contradict Himself. Therefore, false teachings come from none other than the spirit of the •Antichrist, who opposes God.

John reassured his readers that they could live confidently, knowing they were abiding in Christ, and Christ's Spirit was abiding in them. Moreover, Christ's Spirit is greater than the spirit of the Antichrist. People who received John's teachings were to be considered fellow believers, while those who rejected them should be considered enemies of the gospel.



# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## BE DISCERNING (1 JOHN 4:1)

### VERSE 1

**<sup>1</sup> Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.**

John acknowledged his fondness for his readers by calling them *dear friends*, emphasizing his special relationship with them. John cared deeply about these believers, which motivated him to be concerned with their spiritual well-being. John admonished his readers to exercise judgment regarding spiritual matters. Wise discernment was needed because of the presence of false teachers. John issued a warning about being influenced by false prophets.

John's warning in verse 1 emphasized that within every teaching is the presence of a spirit, but not every spirit is of God. Rather than being known for gullibly accepting anything they were taught as being true, John desired for his readers to exercise wisdom as Christian disciples. Before placing one's faith and confidence in a particular teaching, he or she should be sure about the origin of the particular teaching. John desired that his readers judge whether someone was speaking under the leadership of the Holy Spirit or under the influence of a demonic spirit. John stressed that *many false prophets* had been trying to sway believers from valid Christian doctrine.

A common practice in the first century was that of itinerant teachers going from place to place, seeking to speak a message in various churches. Instead of receiving anyone and everyone as a true messenger of God, John's exhortation here was for believers to put these messengers to the test (see 2 John 1:10) by comparing their teachings to those of John and other apostles of Christ.

### KEY DOCTRINE: *Education*

The freedom of a Christian teacher is limited by the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ and by the authoritative nature of the Scriptures.

In the Old Testament, God's people were to test a prophet's message by seeing whether or not the message came true. If not, then that person was considered to be a false prophet (see Deut. 18:22). Likewise, if a prophet appeared and proclaimed a message or performed a miracle, then tried to lead the people into following after other gods, such a person was to be ignored (see Deut. 13:1-5).

In the New Testament, Paul admonished the Corinthian believers not to ascribe to God every teaching or utterance, but to test these messages by evaluating what was said to determine if it is from God (see 1 Cor. 12:1-3; 14:29). Not only was John dealing with a similar problem in Asia Minor when he wrote 1 John, but his language in 4:1 indicates that all believers are to exercise the responsibility of discerning truth from error.

As in the first century, believers today must weigh every teaching carefully to know whether or not it aligns with biblical revelation. False teachers operate in a world that is dominated by sin, hostility toward God, and the influence of Satan. Because of these realities, believers must diligently examine teachings presented as truth and reject any message that does not match the Scriptures.

***Is John's advice to "test the spirits" mainly something Christian leaders and pastors are to do, or do you think it applies to all believers? Why do you say so?***

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***What popular teachings of today do you believe to be contrary to the teachings of Scripture? Explain.***

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## **TEST THE MESSAGE (1 JOHN 4:2-3)**

### **VERSE 2**

**<sup>2</sup> This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,**



John set forth the chief question for believers to ask in testing various teachings: What do the teachings reveal regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ? In the first century, a false teaching arose that attacked both the divinity and humanity of Jesus. Some false teachers believed that Jesus was not really the Son of God, while other heretics did not believe that Jesus, as God's Son, could embody a human form. Both of these teachings were in error, as each attempted to distort the reality of who Jesus Christ truly was.

In John's theology, teachers were to be judged by their confession about Jesus and the content of their message. John maintained that God's Spirit would influence any teachings regarding Jesus. John stressed the importance of one's confession in relation to Christ. The verb **acknowledges** in verse 2 points to one's outward confession of his or her true beliefs. To be regarded as an authentic Christian teacher, the teacher must acknowledge that Jesus Christ was both human and divine without either being compromised.

John's specific language in this verse is important because he accentuated the incarnation by using the words **Jesus Christ** to refer to the Risen Lord. The incarnation is essential to the Christian faith but was a subject of attack for the heretics of the first century. Some of the Gnostic heretics believed that Jesus was merely a human who experienced the Spirit of God coming upon Him after His baptism and leaving Him just before His death on the cross. Authentic Christianity, however, teaches that the Son of God came to earth fully God yet fully man, a truth revealed by **the Spirit of God**. Regardless of how eloquent their speech or how persuasive their message, teachers should be evaluated primarily by their beliefs regarding Jesus Christ. Affirmation of Jesus' Deity and humanity is essential for true Christian faith (see 2 John 1:7,9-11).

### VERSE 3

**<sup>3</sup> but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.**

While God's Spirit reveals the truth about Jesus, spirits who are hostile to God cannot confess Jesus Christ as Lord. John gave a clear indication of how to tell if someone is following the teachings of the Antichrist: **every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from**

**God.** The spirit of the Antichrist is focused on denying Jesus Christ as God's Son, the Savior of the world. The false teachers of John's day could not bring themselves to confess Jesus as Lord, because they were led by a spirit that opposes Christ. John had previously warned his readers that the spirit of the Antichrist was lurking in their midst, attempting to deceive them and rob them of their faith in God. Consequently, the first century believers were to neither be surprised nor caught unaware by the false teachings that were confronting them.

Some religions today teach that Jesus might have been a good man or a prophet from God, but He was not God's Son. John's instructions to the first-century believers still apply to believers today: Reject any teaching that does not honor Jesus as Lord. The spirit of the antichrist that was active in John's day is still active today and will remain so until Jesus Christ will be revealed in glory (see 1 John 2:28-3:3).

***What distortions about Jesus do you hear being taught today? How are these distortions similar to the false teachings addressed by John?***

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***Based on John's statements in 1 John 4:3 and 2 John 1:10-11, how should Christians react to false teachers seeking a platform for their beliefs?***

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**OBSERVE THE AUDIENCE** (1 JOHN 4:4-6)

**VERSE 4**

**<sup>4</sup> You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.**

Perhaps sensing his readers' discouragement regarding deceptive doctrines, John wrote words of comfort and encouragement in the context of his relationship with them. Here he addressed them as



*dear children*, reminding them of his constant affection for them. He went on to underscore that his readers had already experienced victory over the forces of evil because of their connection to Jesus Christ. The idea of believers conquering evil indicates a past victory that extended into John's day and even into the future. John reminded them of the true Source and secret of their victory over evil: the indwelling Spirit of God. John's reference to ***the one who is in you*** is a direct reference to the Holy Spirit given to every believer at the moment of salvation.

The reality of opposition to the gospel from false teachers is a sobering thought for many Christians. The world is the Devil's temporary realm, and its values support his agenda. Although he seeks to kill, steal, and destroy (see John 10:10), he is rendered powerless by the power of God. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be with believers forever (see John 14:16). Because Christ has overcome the world and its opposition to the gospel, His victory has become our victory because He abides in us (see John 16:33).

#### VERSE 5

**<sup>5</sup> They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them.**

John emphasized that false teachers speak from a worldly perspective, and their message confirms their source: the Devil. Because false teachers promote worldly values, the world listens to them. The audience of a teacher reveals a great deal about his message; an audience dominated by worldly individuals indicates questionable teaching. Spiritual deception is more attractive to the unbeliever than the gospel message. An example of this can be found in 3 John 1:9-10, where a person named Diotrephes, a church leader, was abusing his power and engaging in self-centered practices that John condemned. People who are spiritually dead are not naturally attracted to Christian teachings because they can neither understand nor accept them (see 1 Cor. 2:14).

#### VERSE 6

**<sup>6</sup> We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.**

In contrast to the false teachers, John affirmed that believers are **from God**, which manifests itself in the teachings to which believers subscribe. Moreover, the teachings promoted by genuine believers will be attractive to those persons who seriously seek to follow God's commands. Just as false doctrines are embraced by those who are hostile to God, valid Christian teachings will be received joyfully by those whose delight is in the Lord.

The simple reality of people either clinging to false doctrines or true Christian teachings is a key indicator of spiritual maturity. By examining a teacher's audience, one can better determine whether or not that teacher is a genuine believer or a spiritual impostor, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can discern truth from error.

***In your experience, how accurate is it to assert that the audience of a teacher reveals much about the truth of his or her message?***

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***Why is it important to observe a teacher's audience that accepts his or her message?***

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**BIBLE SKILL: Create a contrast chart to study a passage.**

On one side of a vertical line, list all the words and phrases from 1 John 4:1-6 that describe teachers and teaching from God. On the other side of the line note words and phrases that describe teachers and teachings that are not from God. Use the chart to develop ways for you to discern truth from deception in teachings (and teachers) of today.

TEACHINGS FROM GOD

TEACHINGS NOT FROM GOD

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



## IN MY CONTEXT

Believers must be discerning about the teachers and teachings they follow. Teachers of the truth will affirm the deity and humanity of Jesus. Teachers of the truth will attract believers, while false teachers will attract people who do not reflect godly lifestyles. Believers have a responsibility to know, practice, and teach God's truths.

***Consider your responsibility regarding things taught as spiritual truth. Determine actions you will take to test the teachings of others and to help others do the same.***

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***How would you define the beliefs about Jesus that are essential to the Christian faith? With whom can you share these essential beliefs in the next few days?***

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***Lists ways your Bible study group can identify and resist false teachings today. As a group, determine actions the group will take to encourage each other to remain faithful to the gospel teachings.***

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## MEMORY VERSE

1 John 4:2-3a



## Session 5

# REAL LOVE

God is love, as seen in His character, His saving activity in the world, and in His people.

## 1 JOHN 4:7-21

<sup>7</sup> Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.  
<sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.  
<sup>9</sup> This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Dear friends, since God



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so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. <sup>13</sup> This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup> And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup> If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. <sup>16</sup> And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. <sup>17</sup> This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup> And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

*Identify a Christian's motivation for loving God and for loving others.*

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*Notice the results of believers practicing God's love in their various relationships with others.*

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## FIRST THOUGHTS

A case could be made that among all the words in the English language, “love” is among the most casually used words. For example, people say they love their cars, a favorite dessert, a popular vacation destination, a hobby, or delightful weather. While love certainly involves emotional attachment and excitement, there’s much more to it than that. Although contemporary society sends mixed messages regarding love’s meaning, there’s a universal standard for love.

John reminded Christians in 1 John 4:7-21 that God is the standard and Source of love. Affirming the expressions of God's love can enable believers to practice loving others the way He does.

***If someone were to ask you to define love, how would you respond?***

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Love was a central component in John's theology. In order for the believers to whom John wrote to grow in their Christian experience, they needed some instruction regarding the nature of God's love. John emphasized that authentic love comes from God, because God is love. John testified that all three Persons of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—demonstrated love. These various expressions of God's love were to be emulated by God's people out of obedience and reverence to Christ (see John 13:34-35). Love was not some abstract concept to John but was instead the visible manifestation of God's character, as exhibited in all of our relationships. God's love is transformational, and the demonstration of God's love toward others validates a believer's profession of faith in Christ.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### **1 JOHN 2:28–3:24; 4:7-19**

The concept of love was important to John. All of his writings in the New Testament convey the significance of love, particularly God's love for people (see John 3:16; 1 John 3:16), Jesus' love for His disciples (see John 17:23), and people expressing love to God (see John 14:15, 21). In his three epistles, John used some form of the word *love* approximately 50 times (over 40 times in 1 John alone). Love is the chief theme of 1 John 4:7-21, and it was also a dominant component of two other sections in 1 John (see 1 John 2:7-11 and 3:11-24).

John credited God as the true Source of love, illustrating his teaching by describing how the three Persons of the Trinity demonstrated God's love. John first related how Jesus, as God's Son, demonstrated God's love to rebellious humanity by giving His life as a sin offering. Second, John described how the Holy Spirit empowers



believers by His abiding presence, enabling them to mature in God's love. Third, John conveyed how God the Father is the very definition of love, because love is a primary attribute of God.

John desired for his readers to practice God's love in their relationships with others. Without love for other believers, one's own relationship with God is called into serious question. God's love for us makes possible the ability to demonstrate selfless love toward others. God's love at work in a believer's life transforms the believer, replacing sinful selfishness with Christlikeness, which is to be displayed in a believer's words and actions. God's love is not a fleeting emotion but a life-changing reality, allowing believers to live without fear of judgment and enabling believers to love others.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**SEEN IN THE SON** (1 JOHN 4:7-11)

### VERSES 7-8

**<sup>7</sup> Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.**

**<sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.**

Once again, John expressed his affection for his readers with endearing terms. John also used this section of the epistle to challenge his readers to love others. Three times in this chapter, John used the phrase ***let us love one another*** as an instruction of Christian duty and God's ideal for all believers. John was not just exhorting Christians to love fellow Christians, but to demonstrate love for all people, including unbelievers.

The basis for John's teaching here is none other than the amazing reality that authentic, selfless love comes from God. The Bible does not teach here that anyone who loves is a child of God. Rather, it expresses that only those who have been ***born of God*** are capable of loving like God does, referring to those who have been regenerated by Christ. Negatively stated, the absence of genuine love for others is proof that one does not truly know God.

### VERSES 9-11

**<sup>9</sup> This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and**

**only Son into the world that we might live through him.** <sup>10</sup> **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.** <sup>11</sup> **Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**

God's love is not an abstract concept but was manifested in His Son, Jesus Christ. John described the uniqueness of Jesus as God's **One and Only Son**, a phrase John used that referred exclusively to Jesus and nobody else. John affirmed that God sent Jesus into the world to give His life in order to bring lost sinners back to God, as John 3:16 and 1 John 3:16 both attest.

Spiritual death was the result of man's fall in the garden of Eden, and this condition has been inherited by all humans ever since. God sent Jesus so that the curse of sin could be destroyed permanently and that humans could inherit eternal life through a relationship with Him. Such an amazing act was motivated not by man's ability to love God but solely because of God's incredible love for people. Jesus was the **atoning sacrifice for our sins** because only His sinless life could appease God's righteous requirements for an everlasting sin offering. Through Jesus' submission and sacrificial death, people can be made aware of real love.

John emphasized that God's love as demonstrated through Christ is the motivation for Christians to love others. Loving others properly is a debt that can never be fully repaid and an action that cannot be delayed. Once a person understands the seriousness of sin and the high price Jesus paid to redeem humanity, he or she will be compelled to demonstrate selfless love to others.

***In what ways is God's demonstration of love in Jesus Christ different from human emotions associated with love?***

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***How would you describe the connection between loving God and loving other people?***

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## KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

In His substitutionary death on the cross, Jesus made provision for the redemption of men from sin.

### PERFECTED BY THE SPIRIT (1 JOHN 4:12-15)

#### VERSES 12-13

**<sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. <sup>13</sup> This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.**

John was quick to indicate that nobody had ever *seen God*. To gaze upon God's perfection, if it were possible, would mean certain death. Jesus taught, however, that whoever had seen Him had seen the Father, which meant that the Son made the Father clearly known (see John 1:18; 14:9). But what John was referring to here was a person seeing God in His unveiled splendor, majesty, and glory. No human is able to behold God in such a way, even though God revealed Himself to some Old Testament persons through partial, temporary revelations by visible means (see Ex. 32:33; Isa. 6:1).

Since God has demonstrated Himself in Christ to those who love Him, He rightfully expects His love to be revealed through those who bear His name. Christians are able to love because of God's love being *made complete* in them. This perfecting of God's love in a believer not only refers to the elimination of inadequacies but also to the achievement of a goal—in this case, God's goal of believers loving others.

John asserted that the Holy Spirit has provided *assurance* that we remain in God and He in us. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit (see John 14–16), and when a person opens his or her life to the Lord, God indwells that person by His Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit includes reminding believers of Jesus' teachings, convicting the world of sin, producing spiritual fruit in believers, and affirming believers' salvation. The Spirit of God enables believers to commune with God by His abiding presence and helps them show God's love to others.

### VERSES 14-15

**14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.**

Many of John's readers had never seen Jesus, but they had believed the apostolic message, primarily because of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit enables people to confess that ***Jesus is the Son of God***. The Spirit also confirms the reality that God indwells believers, and believers abide in God. The Source of empowerment for believers to exercise God's command to love one another is the Holy Spirit. Because of God's Spirit, believers can have an abiding, continuous, and growing relationship with God, in which they learn to submit to His authority and obey His commands.

***How would you explain the importance of the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer?***

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### DEFINED BY THE FATHER (1 JOHN 4:16-18)

#### VERSE 16

**16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.**

John connected two words to describe God's love: ***know*** and ***rely on***. John used both of these words in the perfect tense, which indicates that both knowledge and belief yield an abiding reality. As a person comes to know or experience God by faith, the result is more love for God. The more we love God, the more we understand Him and His ways, which leads us to trust Him more, thereby increasing our faith. In love, God inhabits His people, making it possible for them to love each other.

#### VERSES 17-18

**17 This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.**

**18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because**



**fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.**

God's love is fully expressed, or *made complete*, in us when we confess Jesus as Lord and experience the mutual abiding in God and He in us. As we mature in God's love, we can face the future judgment with confidence. All believers will stand before the Lord to give an account of their works. As Christians, we can have confidence as we stand before the Lord based on Jesus' atonement for our sins. When we stand before the Lord, He will receive us as those who are covered by and filled with Jesus' righteousness.

John affirmed that the reason believers should have no fear of judgment was because our relationship with God is based on love, and in love there is *no fear*. John's claim here makes love and fear mutually exclusive: to possess one is to not possess the other. Love and fear cannot coexist in a believer's life because *perfect love drives out fear*. Any believer who fears Christ's evaluation is not yet perfected in God's love, because God's love has a maturing effect in a believer's life, casting out all fear of standing before the Lord. God's amazing love gives us confidence, not fear.

***In what ways has God's love affected your life? How does the reality of God's love impact how you view your accountability before Christ?***

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**IMITATED BY HIS PEOPLE** (1 JOHN 4:19-21)

**VERSE 19**

**<sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us.**

We have no reason to doubt God's love because His love for us was prior to our love for Him, making a relationship with Him possible. God proved His love for us by sending Jesus to die for us (see Rom. 5:8). Love for others is the proper response to God's love for us.

**VERSES 20-21**

**<sup>20</sup> Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they**

**have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.<sup>21</sup> And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.**

Heretics were claiming to love God without demonstrating love for others. John exposed the absurdity of such a claim. Love for God and love for others are mutually inclusive: to have one is to have the other. In this case, because believers are being perfected by God's love, they can show the same kind of selfless love to others.

Anyone can profess love for God, because God cannot be seen, but the evidence of such a profession is demonstrated by how they treat others. The visible evidence of an individual's love for God will be manifested by love for people, who can be seen. Love for God and hatred for others cannot coexist in the same heart because they are completely incompatible.

***What would you say to a Christian who claims to love God but carries a strong grudge against a fellow believer?***

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Notice repeated words or phrases in a Bible passage.*

Biblical writers sometimes used repetition of key words to emphasize a theme or message. John certainly used word repetition in this session's passage. He repeatedly spoke of *agape* [ah GAH pay], or God's kind of love.

In your Bible (or in a printout of 1 John 4:7-21), mark all the times "love" appears. Distinguish between noun forms and verb forms. Consider what the repetition of "love" helped John communicate in the passage. What can you learn about the source of love, the nature of love, and the expression of love? Develop your own definition for love without using any form of the English term "love."

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## IN MY CONTEXT

Love originates in God and is what transforms believers from self-serving individuals to people who become concerned with the interests of others above their own. Believers are to demonstrate the same kind of love as seen in the Son. As believers yield to the Spirit who lives in them, they demonstrate God's love in deed and witness. Believers can live in light of the assurance of God's love through faith in Jesus.

***List ways believers express God's love toward other believers and toward unbelievers. Select one item from the list and determine how you will express love in that way in the next week.***

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***Reflect on how God reveals His love for you. Record a prayer expressing your gratitude to God for His love for you.***

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***How can your Bible study group express God's love corporately? Commit to doing one of these actions as a group this week.***

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## MEMORY VERSE

1 John 3:16



# Session 6

## JESUS ALONE

Only by trusting the Savior Jesus Christ can one be freed from the bondage of sin and death, and be brought into eternal life with God.

### 1 JOHN 5:1-12

<sup>1</sup> Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. <sup>2</sup> This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. <sup>3</sup> In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, <sup>4</sup> for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is



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it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. <sup>6</sup> This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. <sup>7</sup> For there are three that testify: <sup>8</sup> the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. <sup>9</sup> We accept human testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. <sup>10</sup> Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. <sup>11</sup> And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup> Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

*Identify words and phrases that point to Jesus being the only way to the Father.*

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*Look for the relationship between obedience to God’s commands and victorious Christian living.*

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## FIRST THOUGHTS

Imagine being part of a hiking expedition in the wilderness. Instead of listening to your expedition guide, you decide to venture off on your own. Without a guide or tracking device, you find yourself lost and badly injured from a fall. Unable to walk, you realize that you will not be rescued as a result of your own efforts. Thankfully, your guide finds you, takes care of your injuries, and carries you to safety.

*What would it be like to be lost with no way of rescuing yourself?*

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John knew that the Gnostic heretics (see p. 6) were spreading false doctrines about the nature of salvation, potentially threatening the spiritual growth of first century believers. Doubtless, John knew that unless his readers were confident of their victory over sin through Jesus Christ, they would be like lost people trying to save themselves by their own efforts yet unable to do so. Because Jesus conquered sin, His power over sin is available to all who receive Him as Lord and rely on His sacrifice through faith, not on their own efforts. John attested to the unique nature of Jesus and His saving work.

### **KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation***

There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

## **UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

### **1 JOHN 4:20–5:21**

False teachers were spreading heretical doctrines about Jesus, which negatively affected the faith community. Apparently some believers were unsure of their status in Christ and of the impact of Christ working in their lives through faith. The false teachers denied the true nature of Jesus and made light of His crucifixion, yet John affirmed that it was strictly because of Jesus and His sacrificial death that people can experience life. Faith in Christ is essential for salvation from sin, and faith is demonstrated by obedience to God's commands.

John testified of the baptism and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. He witnessed at least one of these events, so he certainly could have stressed his own testimony about Christ. Yet John emphasized the testimony of the Holy Spirit as One who validated the Person and work of Jesus. Both Jewish and Roman law depended on clear testimonies from witnesses to determine facts in a legal case. John presented not only the testimony of believers regarding Christ, but he also highlighted the Holy Spirit's testimony, which is more significant.

The Holy Spirit acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God who died for the sins of mankind. Moreover, whoever embraces Jesus as



Lord receives the gift of eternal life through Him. Unlike the Gnostic heretics' claims that some mystical experience could enable a person to know God, John stressed that intimacy with God comes only by faith in Christ, who is the only Source of eternal life.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### JESUS ALONE OFFERS VICTORY (1 JOHN 5:1-5)

#### VERSE 1

**<sup>1</sup> Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.**

John repeated his emphasis on believing in Jesus as the Messiah (see 1 John 4:2,14-15). He stated that all who acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah are **born of God**. Faith in Jesus is evidence of belonging to God, and the result of such faith is not only loving God, but loving all God's children. The true test of a regenerate heart is love for other believers. John's language here indicates that the past action of being transformed by Jesus will show itself in the present, continuous action of loving others.

#### VERSES 2-3

**<sup>2</sup> This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. <sup>3</sup> In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,**

John stressed the importance of being transformed by God's love and demonstrating His love to fellow believers. When a person experiences salvation by faith in Christ, the presence of Jesus in that person's life enables him or her to grow in love for God, which manifests itself in love for others. Love for God and love for others are interrelated. Each supports the other.

One's love for God is proved genuine by keeping God's commands. John stressed that God's commands **are not burdensome**. John meant that God's precepts are not oppressive or crushing, nor are they a restrictive weight that people cannot bear. While the Pharisees of Jesus' day imposed harsh, irrelevant traditions on others that they

themselves didn't keep, John implied that God's commands direct our hearts to Him—changing us from within. Jesus Himself declared that His burden was light (see Matt. 11:28-30). Thus, Christians discover freedom in Christ to experience victory over sinfulness.

#### VERSES 4-5

**<sup>4</sup> for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.**

John directly referenced that anyone born of God *overcomes the world*. The new birth experienced at salvation gives a believer the presence and power of God to overcome all negative influences that hinder his or her obedience to God. Without the presence of Christ in our lives, we would succumb to disobedience. In John's Gospel, Jesus declared that He had overcome the world (see John 16:33). The Spirit of Jesus, who resides in believers, is greater than the evil that is present in the world (see 1 John 4:4). Believers experience victory over the world because of appropriating faith in Christ in their daily lives, which leads to love, obedience, and righteousness.

John asked a rhetorical question regarding the identity of the one who overcomes the world and the means by which this is possible. Genuine saving faith is founded on the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. By rejecting the shallow arguments of the false teachers and holding to the apostolic message, the believers to whom John wrote could be assured of victory in Christ, and so can believers today.

***How do you connect faith, obedience, and love in your life? Which of these three is the most difficult for you personally? Why?***

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### JESUS ALONE IS THE SON OF GOD (1 JOHN 5:6-10)

#### VERSE 6

**<sup>6</sup> This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.**



The importance of a reliable testimony is seen in John's language in 1 John 5:6-12. He used a form of the word "witness" (or "testify") no fewer than nine times to authenticate that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

John gave an unusual description regarding Jesus in verse 6, saying that He had come by both **water** and **blood**. John's original readers no doubt understood exactly what he meant, but interpreting this verse is more difficult for contemporary believers. Given that John was confronting Gnostic heresies throughout this epistle, this reference probably refers to the baptism ("water") and crucifixion ("blood"). In other words, Jesus' earthly ministry as Son of God was confirmed by both His baptism and His crucifixion.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit **testifies** that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. The Spirit's testimony is trustworthy because He speaks the truth and is the truth (see John 14:17; 16:13). The Holy Spirit testifies through God's Word that Jesus is the Son of God. The Bible reveals the uniqueness of Jesus Christ; the Holy Spirit, speaking through Scripture, convinces people that Jesus is Lord.

#### VERSES 7-8

**<sup>7</sup> For there are three that testify: <sup>8</sup> the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.**

Some Gnostic heretics of John's day actually believed that the Spirit of God descended upon the human Jesus at His baptism and left Him shortly before the crucifixion. Had these false teachers been allowed to spread their heresy in the church, their message would have reduced Jesus to a mere human. To combat these heretics, John connected Jesus' baptism, His crucifixion, and the Holy Spirit's testimony together in verses 7-8 as three credible witnesses.

In the Old Testament, two or three witnesses were needed to establish the merit of a legal case (see Deut. 19:15). John was probably influenced by this historical precedent when referring to the witnesses he mentioned in verse 8. He gave the Holy Spirit priority here, perhaps because it is the Holy Spirit who testifies through both Jesus' baptism and crucifixion that Jesus is the Son of God. Far from contradicting each other, these three witnesses all point to Jesus as the Messiah and God's Only Son.

## VERSES 9-10

**<sup>9</sup> We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. <sup>10</sup> Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.**

If human testimony can be used to establish a legal case, then God's testimony is certainly reliable. God's testimony is superior to man's testimony because it is more trustworthy than man's. God offers three witnesses to prove His case, and these are the Holy Spirit, Jesus' baptism, and His crucifixion. God has testified about Jesus through these three witnesses, and His testimony is still valid.

### **BIBLE SKILL: *Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.***

Some Bible verses reveal a passion and urgency in the inspired writer. Part of understanding and following Scripture is to evaluate your emotional response to such a verse.

Focus on 1 John 5:4. Read the verse aloud several times. Each time, emphasize different words or phrases as you read. For example, in one reading, emphasize "born of God." Then read the verse again and emphasize forms of "conquer" or "victory" wherever they appear. Emphasize still other words (such as "world") in a third reading. Take note of your thoughts. How does the verse move you emotionally? What feelings were evoked by the different words and phrases as you emphasized them?

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In John's reasoning, one could arrive at only one of two conclusions: either belief or unbelief regarding God's testimony about Jesus. Whoever concludes that Jesus is God's Son will have the inner witness of the Holy Spirit to confirm his belief in Jesus. By accepting the external evidence regarding Jesus, one's belief in God



is strengthened by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God confirms that having faith in Jesus is the correct response to God's testimonies regarding Christ. Conversely, those who refuse to accept God's testimony about Jesus confirm that they do not believe God but consider Him to be unreliable. A person cannot legitimately claim to believe in God yet reject God's teachings about Christ.

***What might you say to someone who claimed that Jesus was just a religious teacher, one of many leaders who taught about God?***

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***How has the Holy Spirit affirmed your faith in Jesus as the Son of God?***

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## **JESUS ALONE OFFERS ETERNAL LIFE** (1 JOHN 5:11-12)

### **VERSE 11**

**<sup>11</sup> And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.**

John was exclusive in his theology, declaring that eternal life is found only in Jesus Christ. Eternal life comes from God and is available to people only through faith in Christ. There is no other way. God's testimony is that eternal life is available in **His Son**, which rules out all other supposed paths to God. Jesus promised that all who received Him would become God's children (see John 1:12-13), and He declared that whoever believes in Him would receive eternal life (see John 3:16). Moreover, Paul proclaimed that the Holy Spirit confirms believers as God's children (see Rom. 8:16). Believers can be confident that, in Jesus Christ, they have received God's free gift of salvation (see Rom. 10:9-10).

### **VERSE 12**

**<sup>12</sup> Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.**

John concluded this section with a bold statement that confirmed everything he previously stated. Eternal life is a certainty for believers in Christ. To trust in the Son is to possess eternal life in its fullness. Jesus said He came to give abundant life (see John 10:10), and this life is not just a future expectation but also a present reality. The present tense John used here indicates that eternal life is realized the moment one places his or her faith in Christ, not just in eternity. Eternal life is both quantitative, in that it lasts forever, and it is qualitative, in that it produces peace, power, holiness, and love. Eternal life is a gift of God that cannot be earned or deserved; it is only received through faith in Jesus. Truly, what one believes about Jesus makes all the difference, for both time and eternity.

To reject God's Son is to also reject the eternal life that God gives. One cannot obtain eternal life on one's own, nor can one experience eternal life apart from accepting God's testimony about Jesus. To claim to believe in God and simultaneously reject Jesus as His Son proves that one really does not even know God. Whoever rejects God's Son also rejects God (see 1 John 3:36). Jesus claimed that He was the only way to God and that no one could come to the Father unless they came through Him (see John 14:6). Refusing to believe in Jesus means that one refuses to experience the power of Christ. Failure to open one's life to the Lord means that he or she considers God to be false. There is no middle ground: You either believe in Jesus as God's Son and receive eternal life, or you do not believe and fail to receive eternal life. Jesus is the only Source of eternal life.

***Why is it important for Christians to be exclusive regarding their belief about salvation in Jesus Christ?***

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***How should the fact that Jesus is the only way to the Father impact how we pray, what we share, and how we live?***

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## IN MY CONTEXT

Self-sufficiency is an admirable characteristic in some respects, but one cannot depend on oneself for salvation. When we trust in Christ, we live victoriously over sin by loving God and obeying His commands. A victorious spiritual life is found only in Jesus, the Only One who can free us from the bondage of sin and death and bring us into eternal life with God.

***Reflect on evidence in your life of God's salvation as identified in 1 John. If you do not see evidence, review the information on the inside front cover to discover how to receive Jesus' forgiveness.***

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***Identify ways this passage addresses the teaching of many ways to the Father or that all religions are equal. How can you use what you have discovered to help someone understand the truth about Jesus being the only way? Who can you share this with?***

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***In what ways can your Bible study group encourage each other to experience victory in Christ this week? Identify actions the group can take this week to live out the truth of 1 John 5.***

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## MEMORY VERSE

1 John 5:4



# Session 7

## JESUS' REVELATION

Jesus Christ is the Alpha and Omega—the complete revelation of God to the entire world.

### REVELATION 1:1-8

<sup>1</sup> The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup> who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. <sup>4</sup> John, To the seven churches in



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the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne,<sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,<sup>6</sup> and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.<sup>7</sup> “Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen.<sup>8</sup> “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

*Identify references in this passage to the three Persons of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Take note of the descriptors of each Person.*

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## FIRST THOUGHTS

Have you ever thought about what it would be like to be marooned on a deserted island? In the year 2000, the film *Cast Away* gave moviegoers a chance to imagine that very experience. Stranded alone on a tiny South Pacific island after surviving a plane crash, the movie’s main character struggles to accept his desolate situation, to learn how to survive, and to find hope for rescue.

***What two items would you most want to have with you on a deserted island? How would these items give you a sense of hope?***

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Around the end of the first century A.D., the apostle John found himself stranded on the small, barren island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea (see p. 6 and map on p. 147). The Roman authorities exiled him

there because of his faith in Jesus and his influence in the region around Ephesus. We know little about what John's resources were on the island, but likely they were few. We do know this, however: he wasn't alone, and he wasn't without hope. In the midst of exile and desolation, John experienced the powerful presence of the Lord God. And out of that experience came the message of eternal hope we know as the Book of Revelation. The book is a vision of God's complete victory over sin, death, and the Devil. It is also God's promise of ultimate rescue and victory for all who follow Christ.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### REVELATION 1:1-20

The New Testament period is set in the context of imperial Rome. The Roman Empire already dominated the world politically and militarily when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea around 4 B.C. (see Luke 2:1-7). Rome continued to dominate the world near the end of the first century A.D., when it is likely that the apostle John was exiled to Patmos for preaching the gospel. Some Roman emperors—Nero (A.D. 54–68) and Domitian (A.D. 81–96) in particular—specifically targeted Christians for persecution. Emperor Domitian did so in part because he wanted people to worship him as a god. When Christians refused to do so, they were persecuted. Some were martyred.

John's exile on Patmos may well have been a direct result of Domitian's targeting of Christian leaders. Yet John could be found worshipping the Lord on his island of exile. One Lord's Day, John received a vision of the Risen Christ standing victoriously among His churches (see Rev. 1:9-16). The vision terrified John at first, but the Lord comforted His apostle and instructed John to write down the prophecy (see 1:17-20). He was to send it to seven churches in the province of Asia, where believers were facing persecution for their confession of the gospel. The Revelation would help them resist false teachings as well as live faithfully for Christ in spite of persecution.

John described the Revelation as a message of prophecy (see 1:3). Yet he wrote it using a style known as apocalyptic (see p. 6), whereby truths are expressed in symbols familiar to readers but unfamiliar to opponents. Additionally, John used elements of ancient letter writing, including a greeting (see 1:4-5) and a closing (see 22:21).



# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## REVEALED (REV. 1:1-3)

John assured his readers in the introduction that the prophecies he was about to share were revealed to him by God. John testified both to what God said and to what he saw, so that readers could hear and respond to God's message.

### VERSES 1-2

**<sup>1</sup> The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup> who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.**

The Greek word translated *revelation* means “an unveiling.” God pulled back the curtain, so to speak, of time and space to give John a clear glimpse of the final picture. Notice that God the Father gave the prophetic message through **Jesus Christ** the Son. All of history and all of God's salvation plan centers around Jesus. To know Him is to know God. To believe in Him is to be right with God and to see what God is doing to restore His fallen creation (see John 14:1-7).

In turn, the Risen Lord Jesus unveiled God's message to John about the future by means of an *angel*, or heavenly messenger. In the Old Testament, the Lord sent the angel Gabriel to Daniel with a prophetic message about the end time (see Dan. 9:20-27). The angel sent to John on Patmos isn't identified, probably because John's focus was on the Source of the message, not the messenger.

John described himself and other Christians using a word that literally means “bond-slave.” It's the same word the apostle Paul used at times to describe his relation to Christ as Lord (see Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1). It refers to ownership, not employment. The Roman emperor might be able to banish John to an island prison, but he didn't own John. Jesus did! The emperor might insist on his subjects professing that “Caesar is lord.” However, John and other believers confessed the truth: “Jesus is Lord!”

The phrase **what must soon take place** points to future developments or events that *must* occur. There is a certainty to these events because God has decreed them. The adverb *soon* can refer either to an imminent time of fulfillment or to the sudden and rapid

unfolding of events in God's sovereign timing. Regardless of the timing, believers are called to urgency about the prophecies contained in the Book of Revelation. In relation to eternity, our time on earth is extremely brief (see Ps. 39:4-5).

The angel would show John numerous signs, symbols, numbers, and sounds. Out of the many signs, however, John would "see" and testify of the two most important things: ***the word of God*** and ***the testimony of Jesus Christ***. God's word is truth (see John 17:17). When God sends out His word, it always accomplishes His purpose (see Isa. 55:11). Jesus embodied the Word of God; thus He alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (see John 1:1; 14:6). John wanted believers to know with confidence that his testimony was a sure word from God about Jesus Christ.

### **KEY DOCTRINE: *The Scriptures***

All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

### **VERSE 3**

**<sup>3</sup> Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.**

John promised a blessing to all who read the Book of Revelation. What a wonderful promise to us today! We are assured that reading and studying this great book of Scripture will be rewarding. God will never fail to bless His people through His Word.

The promise of blessing may have held extra meaning for persons in ancient times who read the Scriptures aloud in church gatherings. Copies of New Testament writings were already being distributed to churches by the end of the first century. However, few if any believers had personal copies of the Scriptures as we do today. Most people in the first-century learned the Scriptures by hearing them read aloud when the church met for worship (see Col. 4:16; 1 Tim. 4:13). In fact, a single copy of the Book of Revelation probably was transported to each of the seven churches of Asia in turn. The reader or pastor read



the document aloud to the worshipers; then it was sent to the next church addressed in Revelation 2–3.

John also promised a blessing to everyone who hears and takes seriously—that is, obeys—the Book of Revelation. John’s twofold emphasis on hearing and obeying the Scriptures echoes the command in James 1:22 for believers to be doers of the word and not hearers only. Now, all the more than it was in John’s day, *the time is near*.

***Why is it vital to know that prophecy, indeed all Scripture, comes from God? What are some dangers of hearing God’s Word but not obeying it?***

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***What does Jesus being revealed tell us about His nature? How is Jesus revealed in other parts of Scripture?***

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#### **REVERED** (REV. 1:4-6)

John continued his introduction by declaring two key reasons that Jesus—and not the Roman emperor—is worthy of reverence. John focused on who Jesus is and what He has done.

#### **VERSES 4-5a**

**<sup>4</sup> John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, <sup>5a</sup> and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.**

John addressed the Revelation to real congregations of believers, *the seven churches in the province of Asia*. The biblical message is vital for all churches of all times, but these seven churches were actual congregations in the region where John lived and served Christ for more than 20 years. His base church appears to have been in the city of •Ephesus, followed by a circuit of congregations at •Smyrna, •Pergamum, •Thyatira, •Sardis, •Philadelphia, and •Laodicea (see

p. 6 and the article on pp. 142-143). John loved these churches, considering himself a brother and coworker with them in the gospel (see Rev. 1:9).

The greeting ***grace and peace*** was common in letters of John's day, but for Christians then and now, the two terms hold deep meaning. While John wrote the greeting, the ultimate Source of grace and peace is God Himself. In Christ, God poured out His grace on us as sinners (see Rom. 5:15). Through faith in Christ we receive genuine peace with God (see Rom. 5:1). When we as believers greet one another with the words *grace* and *peace*, we are confessing our faith in Jesus. When we experience God's grace, we also know His peace.

Notice that in verses 4-5a John greeted his readers on behalf of the three Persons of the Trinity. As a Jew, John would have been quick to affirm there is one and only one God (see Deut. 6:4). As a follower of Christ, John could testify firsthand about the eternal Son of God whom he heard, saw, observed, and touched with his hands (see 1 John 1:1). Moreover, John was among those in Jerusalem who experienced the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (see Acts 2:1-4). John knew for certain that the one God existed in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and that all three Persons are eternal and equal. They work in perfect unity in all divine activity.

John described God the Father as ***him who is, and who was, and who is to come***. This is another way of saying that God is eternal (see Ps. 90:2). The description has overtones of God's covenant name in the Old Testament, *Yahweh* [YAH weh] (see Ex. 3:13-15). The name encourages believers who are uncertain about the future to remember that God rules the past, present, and future.

The phrase ***the seven spirits before His throne*** describes the Holy Spirit, who is a distinct Divine Person and yet able to indwell fully each of the seven churches—indeed every church and every individual believer! Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would teach believers all they need to know, constantly reminding them of Jesus and of all that Jesus said (see John 14:26; 15:26).

Verse 5a tells us several things about Jesus. He was ***the faithful witness*** to God during His time on the earth. He also is ***the firstborn from the dead***, which means that He is supreme in life. His resurrection from the dead is the basis of our hope of resurrection and everlasting life. Moreover, Jesus is ***the ruler of the kings of the***



**earth.** The Roman emperor liked to think that he ruled the earth. Believers, especially those who suffered from the emperor's targeted persecution, needed to remember that they belonged to the King of kings who possesses all sovereign authority (see Matt. 28:18).

#### VERSES 5b-6

<sup>5b</sup> **To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,**  
<sup>6</sup> **and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.**

What has Jesus done that makes Him worthy of our reverence? John focused on two things. First, Jesus **loves us** so much that He shed His precious blood on the cross to free us from the penalty and power of sin (see Rom. 5:8). By His sacrificial death Jesus absorbed God's wrath against our sins, so that we might be made right with God through faith in Him.

Second, Jesus **made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.** As priests in God's kingdom, we as believers have direct access to God through Jesus Christ (see Heb. 10:19-22). We serve as priests when we tell others of God's great works of grace and salvation (see 1 Pet. 2:9). What a privilege we have as Christians to be citizens and priests in God's kingdom!

John erupted into praise as he thought about who Jesus is and all that He has done. He declared that all glory and power belong to Jesus forever. Truly He is worthy of our reverence.

***How should our understanding as believers of the reality that Christ has freed us from sin impact our worship of Him?***

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#### RETURNING (REV. 1:7-8)

##### VERSE 7

<sup>7</sup> **“Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen.**

Here John introduced one of the central themes of the Book of

Revelation, Jesus' return. John nailed down three important truths about it. First, His return will be public and universally witnessed. **Every eye will see him.** Jesus' lordship will become inescapably evident to the whole world when He returns.

Second, many families and tribes of people on earth **will mourn because of him.** If this seems to be a strange response, it is because these are people who will be terrified by Jesus' return. In their arrogance and unbelief, they refused to humble themselves before God while they had the opportunity.

Third, Jesus' return is certain. John added to his note of certainty the emphatic affirmation **Amen**, which means "so be it." One day Jesus will return, and the waiting will be over.

**BIBLE SKILL:** *Observe the occasion and purpose of a New Testament passage that includes an Old Testament quotation.*

Use a concordance to identify the Old Testament passages used in Revelation 1:7. Read the passages in their Old Testament context. What factors are different in the old and new contexts? What factors are the same or similar? How do the passages help you better understand Jesus' return?

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**VERSE 8**

**<sup>8</sup> "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."**

John closed his introduction to Revelation with an affirmation that sets everything he said so far about the Lord in context. *Alpha* and *Omega* are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet. John used them to emphasize that God spoke the first word of creation and will speak the final word of the new creation. He is Almighty God!

***What areas of your life reflect the kind of certainty that John had of Jesus' return? What areas may need to be adjusted to reflect that certainty?***

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## IN MY CONTEXT

Truth is found in Jesus and His revealed Word. Jesus provides salvation to all who trust in Him. Believers can be assured that Jesus will return in glory. Jesus is omnipotent, sovereign, infinite, and has no beginning or ending.

***What are some things you have learned about Jesus from this passage that strengthen your faith in Him? Identify one step you can take this week that demonstrates your confidence in Jesus.***

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***How can your group use these verses to share the good news of Jesus with others? List the names or initials of people with whom the group can share. Pray for opportunities.***

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***Record how you came to understand your need to believe in Jesus. If you have not yet discovered that need, review the information on the inside front cover of the personal study guide. Make an appointment to visit with your Bible study leader about questions or concerns you might have. If you are already a follower of Christ, take time to thank Him and praise Him for your salvation.***

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## MEMORY VERSE

Revelation 1:8



Session 8

# LET THEM HEAR

They that overcome by faith in Jesus Christ will reign with Him in eternity.

## REVELATION 2:7,11,17,26-29; 3:5,12,21

**<sup>7</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. ... <sup>11</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death. ... <sup>17</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of**



the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it. ...<sup>26</sup> To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—<sup>27</sup> that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I have received authority from my Father.<sup>28</sup> I will also give that one the morning star.<sup>29</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. ...<sup>3:5</sup> The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. ...<sup>12</sup> The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. ...<sup>21</sup> To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.

*Highlight statements in which Jesus promises to give something to believers who endure in faith. How are the promises similar? Different?*

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## FIRST THOUGHTS

If you struggle with hearing loss, you might find yourself having to ask others to repeat themselves or to speak louder on the phone or in a conversation. In a restaurant you might find it difficult to pick out what someone is saying amidst all the noise. Sometimes we don't appreciate the ability to hear until hearing loss becomes a problem.

*How would a sudden loss of hearing impact your daily life? What are some things that can get in the way of hearing clearly?*

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In Revelation, the risen Lord Jesus addressed letters, or messages, to His churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. In each letter, Jesus challenged believers to listen to what the Holy Spirit was saying. There are truths in the letters and in the book as a whole that cannot be understood in terms of human wisdom; they are spiritual truths (see 1 Cor. 3:12-13). Hearers had to deal with background noise from the culture around them—and from problems within some congregations—that demanded careful listening to know what the Spirit was teaching.

Believers in our age face challenges similar to those faced by the churches in Revelation 2–3. If we listen carefully to what the Spirit said to the churches in the first century, we will hear Him speaking to us today as well.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### REVELATION 2:1–3:22

One approach to interpreting the Book of Revelation understands the seven churches to represent not only all types of churches but also seven distinct stages of church history. That is, the letters show a progression of the Church’s response to its mission in the world from the first century until the return of Christ. That being said, it’s important for us to remember that Jesus initially instructed John to send the Revelation to seven actual congregations in the Roman province of Asia. Each congregation faced some challenging circumstances at the close of the first century A.D.

Despite the presence of young Christian congregations in various cities, the province of Asia was dominated by paganism at the end of the first century. One evidence of this was the state-supported cult that actively promoted the worship of the Roman emperor as a god. The churches in provinces such as Asia faced the threat of persecution if they refused to acknowledge or participate in the state “religion.” The letters in Revelation 2–3 also address specific concerns in each church’s local context—concerns such as false teachers, conformity to the world, and spiritual complacency.

The letters follow a pattern. The pattern includes (1) a description of the Sender; (2) a compliment to the recipients and/or (3) a criticism; (4) a command for action; and (5) a promise to all who overcome.



### **BIBLE SKILL:** *Create a comparison chart to understand a passage.*

As noted in “Understand the Context” (see p. 83), the seven letters share a pattern. Create a table or grid on a sheet of paper. Down the left side, list the seven cities, beginning with Ephesus. Across the top of the page, write the following column headings: Sender, Compliment, Criticism, Command, and Promise. Read Revelation 2–3 and complete the grid.

Which of the churches is most like your present congregation? Why? Which church would you most like to be part of? Why?

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## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### **PROMISE OF LIFE** (REV. 2:7,11,17; 3:5,12)

This section of our study will survey promises Jesus made concerning those who overcome. These promises are drawn from the letters to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Sardis, and Philadelphia.

### **CHAPTER 2, VERSE 7**

**<sup>7</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.**

Jesus commended the believers in Ephesus for persevering in their faith and for refusing to tolerate wicked persons and false teachers in the church (see 2:1-4). Yet, He also rebuked the church for forgetting their “first love.” They were doing right things but were no longer doing them out of love. They needed to repent (see 2:5-6).

In verse 7, Jesus issued the first of seven challenges (one in each letter) for Christians to hear and obey the voice of the Spirit in God’s Word. In this context, to have an ear means to recognize that Jesus Christ, the Lord and King, is speaking. Thus hearers are to listen in faith and respond in obedience. It is sobering to think that a person

can be where God's Word is read and taught and still not hear God (see Matt. 13:15).

Victors, or overcomers, in Scripture are not people who save themselves or live in their own strength. Rather, victors are those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus and live by faith in Him (see 1 Pet. 1:18-20). Later in the Revelation, John saw believers overcoming Satan by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony (see Rev. 12:11). The blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin; through faith Christ puts us in a right relationship with God, so that we can be overcomers now and forever.

Jesus promised the victors in Ephesus that He would give them access to ***the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God***. The ancient Persian word for *paradise* referred to a beautiful garden. Significantly, the worship of the pagan goddess Artemis [AHR tih miss] thrived in ancient Ephesus (see Acts 19:26-28). It featured a large tree-shrine in the center of the temple garden. Yet from their Old Testament roots, Christians knew of a genuine tree of life that was located in the garden of Eden (see Gen. 3:24). Access to that tree had been lost when Adam and Eve sinned. However, Jesus promised believers that in Him access to the real tree of life would be restored.

## CHAPTER 2, VERSE 11

**<sup>11</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.**

Jesus assured the church at Smyrna that He knew they were being targeted for persecution, probably by Jews from the local synagogue. Jesus warned that for a time His followers would be subjected to imprisonment or worse. He encouraged them to remain faithful even to death. The crown of life would be their reward (see Rev. 2:8-10).

Jesus further promised that His faithful followers would ***not be hurt at all by the second death***. In Scripture, the first death is physical death, when our bodily functions cease. Jesus taught His disciples not to fear the one who can kill the body, but to fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell (see Matt. 10:28). This is the second death. It is also referred to as the lake of fire, the final destiny of all whose names are not found in the book of life (see Rev. 20:14-15). Those who trust in Jesus will never have to face the second death.



## CHAPTER 2, VERSE 17

**17 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.**

This promise is part of Jesus' message to the church in Pergamum. Emperor worship was strong in this city. Believers already had suffered backlash for refusing to participate in it. At least one faithful Christian had been killed (see 2:12-13). On another front, however, the church at Pergamum received Jesus' criticism for tolerating false teachers and doctrines. They needed to repent (see 2:14-16).

Jesus promised overcomers in Pergamum at least two things. First, He would give them *some of the hidden manna*. Manna was the food God miraculously provided for the Israelites during their years in the wilderness (see Ex. 16:31-35). Christ assured His faithful followers that He would likewise provide for their needs in ways they perhaps couldn't see at the time.

Second, Jesus promised to give victors *a white stone* with *a new name* written on it. In ancient times, judges used stones to indicate a verdict. A white stone meant the accused was pronounced "not guilty." Similarly, Jesus assured His people they would stand justified in the court that counts most. Human judges might convict them on trumped-up charges, but they would one day stand before God and display the purity of Jesus' righteousness (see Rom. 3:24-26).

The name on the white stone points to Jesus' return when He has a name known only to Himself (see Rev. 19:12). In antiquity, a person's name represented one's character or authority. Engraved in the believer are the character and authority of Jesus which He—and no one else—will recognize. The name speaks of the intimate, unbreakable relationship between Christ and His followers.

## CHAPTER 3, VERSE 5

**3:5 The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.**

Jesus had strong words of rebuke for the church in Sardis. It had a reputation for being alive, but in reality it was a "dead" church (see Rev. 3:1-3). Jesus didn't mean there were no genuine believers in the

church (see 3:4). Rather, He probably meant the church as a whole made almost no impact on the community around it. It was in real danger of dying as a congregation.

Yet there was still time for the church to repent and thrive. Jesus promised overcomers in Sardis that he would give them **white** clothing to wear. Sardis was famous for its textile industry, yet the city's best fashions could not cover sin. White clothes represented the righteousness of Christ given to believers. Furthermore, Jesus promised that the names of the faithful would never be erased from **the book of life**. Can you imagine the thrill as a believer of having Jesus stand beside you in heaven, introducing you to the Father and His angels? What a glorious and humbling day that will be!

### CHAPTER 3, VERSE 12

**<sup>12</sup> The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name.**

The church in Philadelphia received only commendation from the Lord. It was probably a small congregation, but the church's devotion to Christ was powerful. The Lord opened new doors for the church that no one could shut. Jesus assured His faithful followers they would be protected in regard to the testing that would come on the world (see Rev. 3:8-10). He urged them to persevere (see 3:11).

Jesus promised overcomers in Philadelphia several things. First, each victor would become **a pillar in the temple of my God**. Second, the overcomer would never leave God's house. Third, Christ will inscribe on the pillar—that is, on the victorious believer—three names: God's name; the name of God's heavenly city, **new Jerusalem**, and Christ's own **new name**. Taken together, these promises indicate the absolute certainty and permanence of the believer's standing before God. Those who have experienced new life in Christ will never have that life taken away.

***Of the promises made to overcomers, which one most appeals to you at this time? Explain.***



## **PROMISE OF PURPOSE** (REV. 2:26-29; 3:21)

In this section of our study, we will focus on statements Jesus made in His messages to the churches of Thyatira and Laodicea. Overcomers in faith receive not only the promise of life but also the promise of participating in God's saving purpose both now and in the future.

### **CHAPTER 2, VERSES 26-27**

**<sup>2:26</sup> To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— <sup>27</sup> that one 'will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery'—just as I have received authority from my Father.**

The spiritual growth of believers in Thyatira greatly pleased Jesus (see Rev. 2:19). However, the church desperately needed to call to account a false teacher who was leading some believers into dangerous spiritual compromise (see 2:20-23).

Jesus first promised overcomers in Thyatira that they would receive **authority over the nations**. He further explained that authority by using language from Psalm 2:9. Psalm 2 was used at the coronation of Israelite kings, yet it also foreshadowed the Messiah's coronation as the eternal King of kings. Thus Jesus promised His faithful followers a role of tremendous authority in His coming kingdom. Overcomers will participate in Jesus' messianic rule over the nations.

It is important to note that victorious believers will exercise the power of a shepherd, not that of a military conqueror. The Greek verb translated *will rule* refers literally to tending and guiding sheep. Thus overcomers will find their authority not in the steel sword but in the sword of the Spirit, God's Word (see Eph. 6:17). This is the same authority Jesus received from the Father and exercised during His time on earth (see John 17:13-19). It is an authority that can shatter spiritual opposition as if it were brittle pottery. Exactly what this rule will look like is not explained, but it is amazing to think that the King of the universe desires His people to share with Him in the work of overseeing His kingdom!

### **VERSES 28-29**

**<sup>28</sup> I will also give that one the morning star. <sup>29</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

Second, Jesus promised to give victors in Thyatira ***the morning star***. Based on a reference to Jesus in Revelation 22:16 as “the bright Morning Star,” the phrase here likely points to Jesus as well. His return and the establishment of His eternal kingdom represents the dawn of a bright new age. In other words, when Jesus returns and His kingdom is established forever, He will give us Himself as our King.

Jesus concluded the promise section to Thyatira with His repeated call to hear what the Spirit was saying. He wanted the churches to grasp the urgency of His counsel, to listen carefully, and to obey.

### **CHAPTER 3, VERSE 21**

**3:21 To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.**

This verse is part of Jesus’ message to the church of Laodicea. This congregation received severe criticism from the Lord for being lukewarm in their faith. They had grown self-sufficient to the point of blindness concerning their need for Christ. They needed to repent, to learn from God’s discipline, and to open their hearts again to Christ as their Lord and Provider.

Jesus promised that overcomers in Laodicea would sit with the Risen Lord on His throne. This is similar to the promise to Thyatira that faithful believers will participate with Jesus in His messianic rule. Surely it is one of the most staggering promises in the Bible. Jesus not only wants to give eternal life to all who believe, He intends for His people to rule with Him in His kingdom.

***How does the promise of a purpose in Christ’s kingdom impact your view of the work you do today?***

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***How does each promise made to the overcomer compliment the others? In what ways do the promises offer hope and encouragement?***

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## KEY DOCTRINE: *Last Things*

The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.

## IN MY CONTEXT

Believers overcome this world through faith in Jesus Christ. Believers can live in the security of knowing they have eternal life. Believers can live in light of a future responsibility in Jesus' reign.

***What do we need to do right now to be sure we can hear what the Spirit is saying to our church or to our group? Identify roadblocks that may need to be removed and the steps needed to remove those roadblocks.***

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***Review the promises made to overcomers. Which promises about life do you especially need to be encouraged by today? Spend time in prayer, thanking God for the promises you identified.***

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***What challenges to your faith are you experiencing today? Which of the promises made address the challenges you are facing? How can you demonstrate confidence in God and act on the promises made?***

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## MEMORY VERSE

Revelation 3:22



## Session 9

# GLIMPSE OF THE THRONE

God alone is worthy of the worship of all creation.

## REVELATION 4:1-11

<sup>1</sup> After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” <sup>2</sup> At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. <sup>3</sup> And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. <sup>4</sup> Surrounding



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the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. <sup>5</sup> From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. <sup>6</sup> Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. <sup>7</sup> The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. <sup>8</sup> Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.” <sup>9</sup> Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: <sup>11</sup> “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”

*Ponder the breathtaking scene John described in these verses as though you were standing before a masterpiece painting. What objects are in the scene? What beings? Identify colors. What emotions are evoked?*

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## FIRST THOUGHTS

God’s people desperately want to know that heaven is real and that God is on His throne. They long to be sure God will prevail over His enemies and the enemies of His people, no matter how bleak things look from an earthly perspective.

***When you think about the worst problems and crises life has to offer, what do you anticipate most about God and heaven?***

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A world where God exists but is neither powerful nor particularly caring would be a pretty hopeless place. Just like today, most people in John's day were not atheists. In the first-century world dominated by Roman culture, most people believed that many gods existed and that these gods ruled over various parts of the seen and unseen world. Some gods were powerful, but none had absolute control over everything. In fact, ancient Roman culture held that the gods often fought with one another and were characterized by the same moral vices and failings as humans. People prayed to their favorite deities, but there was little expectation the gods wanted to help or could help the people who were praying.

In Revelation 4, John described a vision in which the one, true and living God opened the door of heaven for the apostle to get a glimpse of the throne room. The impact of that vision was life-changing! John saw that heaven is real and that the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is sovereign and has the creation's future in His hands.

## **UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

### **REVELATION 4:1-11**

In Revelation 1, John introduced the prophetic message by describing a Lord's Day worship experience in which he saw the Risen Christ standing among seven gold lampstands. The Lord's appearance was dazzling and powerful, and the lampstands represented the seven churches to whom John was to send the Revelation (see 1:9-20).

Chapters 2–3 are comprised of seven individualized letters, or messages, to the seven churches, all of which were real congregations in the Roman province of Asia. These churches were facing real challenges, including persecution from without and false teaching from within. Jesus loved these churches, as did the Lord's apostle, who had served Christ among them for more than 20 years. The letters expressed Jesus' commendation for faithfulness, rebuke for



any spiritual compromise, and promises for those who repent and walk with the Lord as overcomers.

Revelation 4:1 begins and ends with a phrase that reads literally, “after these things.” The phrase signifies a shift in thought and, for John, a shift in vision. What he would “see” from this point forward until chapter 22 concerned the future. And he would see it from heaven’s perspective! God showed John in a vision what must happen in the conclusion of God’s sovereign plan for His creation. The vision opens with a breathtaking glimpse of heaven’s throne room, where John saw the glory of God as King (4:1-6a), the awesome holiness of God (4:6b-8), and God’s worthiness to be worshiped (4:9-11).

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### GOD’S GLORY (REV. 4:1-6a)

We as sinners cannot look on the face of Almighty God and live (see Ex. 33:20). We could easier step out of a spaceship and view the sun from a hundred feet away. Neither can we burst into His throne room uninvited. We are able to encounter God’s presence only on His terms and by His invitation. On Patmos, John received such an invitation.

#### VERSE 1

**<sup>1</sup> After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”**

Bible students differ on the exact meaning of the phrase *after this*. Some understand it to be a literary cue. That is, it was John’s way of introducing a new section or theme. Others understand the phrase to signify a shift in time. That is, in 4:1 John began to describe the time of Christ’s return and other end-time events. Similarly, others understand the phrase to signify the rapture of believers and conclusion of the church age.

In any case, verse 1 moves the scene from earth to heaven by means of dual invitations, one visual and the other vocal. John first saw in heaven **a door standing open**. He didn’t pry it open; it was opened for him. Thus he was invited to enter it. Then John heard a voice. It was the same trumpet-like voice that previously had directed

him to write down what he saw and to send it to the churches (see 1:10-11). The voice issued a clear invitation for John to **come up** to the heavenly throne room and learn **what must take place** in the future.

### VERSES 2-3

**<sup>2</sup> At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. <sup>3</sup> And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.**

The phrase **in the Spirit** (see also 1:10) means that the Holy Spirit brought John into a realm of spiritual vision to see what cannot be seen with physical eyes. Just as the Spirit equips believers to hear and understand spiritual truth (see 2:7), He likewise opens the eyes of our minds and hearts to see and understand the powerful, majestic work of God (see Eph. 1:18-22).

The object that dominated John's vision of heaven was **a throne**. This was significant, because life on earth for believers at this time seemed to be dominated by the emperor's throne in Rome. God wanted His people to see through John's eyes that a far greater, far more dominating throne stands forever in heaven. It was the **one who sat** on the throne who overwhelmed John's vision.

We can imagine John struggling mightily to find words that might capture the scene. He was attempting to describe the Indescribable One. The best he could do was to compare God's appearance with priceless, brilliant jewels. In color, clarity, and value, the **jasper** and **ruby** speak of highest royalty. A **rainbow** with the sparkling luster of an emerald encircled God's throne, bathing it in light.

### VERSE 4

**<sup>4</sup> Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.**

John then saw 24 other thrones that surrounded the central throne. These thrones were occupied by **elders**; each elder was **dressed in white** and wore a gold crown. While some Bible students identify the elders as angels, their precise number and description as **elders** suggest they are the 12 sons of Jacob, or "Israel," and the 12 apostles of Christ. These elders represent the faithful from both the Old



Testament age and the church age who have been given authority to participate in the governance of God's kingdom. White garments are a cue that the elders' spiritual authority grew in respect to their faithfulness (see Matt. 25:19-23).

#### VERSES 5-6a

**<sup>5</sup> From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. <sup>6a</sup> Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.**

John's attention returned to the central throne. He saw streaks of lightning radiating from it and heard booming thunder that signified God's awesome, terrifying presence (see Ex. 20:18-19; Rev. 11:19). Seven blazing ***lamps*** positioned in front of the throne revealed the perfect presence of the Holy Spirit, who convicts the world of sin and enlightens God's people with the truth (see John 16:8-13). John also saw what appeared to be ***a sea of glass*** in front of the throne. The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel also had seen this gleaming, crystal-like expanse in a vision of God's glory (see Ezek. 1:22). Its purpose isn't stated, but likely it served to magnify God's majesty and holiness.

We need to see that God is the same today. We may be enduring great difficulties in a fallen world, but God is on His throne. Our problems may be over our heads, but they are always under His feet.

***What visual element described by John best conveys God's glory to you? Explain. How can John's vision of heaven's throne room strengthen believers in times of suffering? How does it strengthen you?***

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### GOD'S HOLINESS (REV. 4:6b-8)

#### VERSES 6b-7

**<sup>6b</sup> In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.**

**<sup>7</sup> The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.**

As John continued to take in all the sights and sounds in his vision of heaven, he noticed **four living creatures** hovering round about God's throne. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah saw similar creatures in a vision of God's throne room and identified them as a type of angel (see Isa. 6:3). Ezekiel was given a vision of such creatures too; he also identified them as a type of angel, different from the type that Isaiah saw (see Ezek. 10:3-14).

The features of these beings, though extraordinary, signified great purpose. They served the Lord God, guarding His throne and fiercely proclaiming His holiness. Having multiple sets of **eyes in front and in back**, they possessed a vigilant awareness of God's kingdom work.

The four creatures also displayed four different forms of appearance: (1) **a lion**, perhaps representing wild beasts; (2) **an ox**, signifying domesticated creatures; (3) a creature with a human-looking face; and (4) an **eagle**, representing creatures that fly. It is best to understand these creatures simply in the context in which John saw them. They are heavenly beings that stand ready to do God's bidding in any form their service might need to take.

#### VERSE 8

**<sup>8</sup> Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."**

Along with their superior features, the four creatures carried out a single, constant act of worship. Day and night they never stopped proclaiming God's supreme holiness, sovereign power, and eternal nature. These attributes were the first John heard declared in God's presence. They set the stage for God's authority and power to judge the earth and to deliver His people.

***How does the scene described in these verses compare to the description given by Isaiah (see Isa. 6:1-4) and Ezekiel (see Ezek. 1:4-25)? How do all three of these descriptions emphasize God's holiness?***

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use a Bible dictionary to learn about an attribute of God.*

Use a Bible dictionary (either print or on the Internet) to discover references to God as being holy or having holiness. Compare these verses to other verses that point to holy things or holy people. How is God like (or different from) “holy things” or “holy people”? How would you define “holiness” as an attribute of God?

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**GOD’S SUSTAINING POWER** (REV. 4:9-11)

John’s vision of God on His heavenly throne continued to progress. It moved from a revelation of God’s glory and holiness to a declaration of His sustaining power.

**VERSES 9-11**

**<sup>9</sup> Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: <sup>11</sup> “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”**

John then watched in wonder as the 24 elders responded each time the four creatures proclaimed their three-part harmony of worship to **him who sits on the throne**. The elders immediately responded in worship, falling prostrate before the throne in submission, reverence, and gratitude to the Living God. Their worship proclaimed the great worth of God above all else. Their crowns were God’s crowns, so they cast them at the foot of His throne, thereby humbly submitting to the Lord as their one and only King.

As previously suggested, the 24 elders may represent all the redeemed people of God from the Old Testament and church eras. If so, their expression of worship in verse 11 welled up from hearts overwhelmed by grace. The phrase **our Lord and God** speaks of the

intimate covenant relationship between the Lord and His redeemed people (see Ex. 19:4-6; Jer. 31:33; Eph. 2:11-22; 1 Pet. 2:10). The elders constantly proclaimed that God alone is worthy of worship. They acknowledged in their praise that God created and sustains all things, giving everyone and everything a holy reason for existing.

These are exactly the words John needed to hear in his time of crisis and suffering at the hands of Roman authorities. Nothing in creation exists by its own will. God alone wills what is. Before the heavens and earth were created, there was only the eternal, Triune God. Everything in creation had a beginning point in His spoken word and will (see Gen. 1:3-31). The Bible tells us also that Jesus is the Son of God through whom all things were made (see John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6), including earthly thrones or dominions (see Col. 1:15-16). Jesus Christ is also the One who holds all things together, including us (see Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3).

Whatever we face in our times, we need to remember what John heard and saw. The God who made everything is forever the Lord of all He has made! All earthly powers exist by His will, and they will be made to acknowledge this one day (see Phil. 2:10-11). We should fear God but never fear man.

God in Christ has saved those of us who are believers, and He will sustain us through every day He has appointed for us (see Ps. 139:16). We may experience trials and suffering in a fallen world, but we must never forget that Jesus has overcome the world (see John 16:33). We are more than conquerors through Him (see Rom. 8:37).

***How does God's sustaining power serve as motivation for your worship?***

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### **KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Father***

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace.



## IN MY CONTEXT

The awesomeness of God’s glory serves as motivation to worship the Almighty. The Holy God must be approached with reverence. In light of God’s sustaining power, believers should respond by offering their all to God as an act of worship. We can be assured that God is always in control, regardless of how we may perceive the situation.

***Take time to examine your understanding of God. Compare your understanding with how God is revealed in Revelation 4. Determine ways John’s vision affirms your understanding as well as challenges it. What adjustments do you need to make to your understanding of God?***

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***Consider ways that looking at life from the vantage point of God’s throne room in heaven can help you face challenges. What steps can you take to face a personal challenge in light of God’s glory, holiness, and power?***

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***An awareness of God’s glory, holiness, and power serves as motivation to worship Him. What can your group do to help one another be mindful of all He is as God?***

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## MEMORY VERSE

Revelation 4:8b



Session 10

# THE WORTHY LAMB

Jesus Christ is the only salvation for the world.

## REVELATION 5:1-14

**<sup>1</sup> Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. <sup>2</sup> And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” <sup>3</sup> But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. <sup>4</sup> I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. <sup>5</sup> Then one of the elders said to**



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me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”<sup>6</sup> Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.<sup>7</sup> He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.<sup>8</sup> And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people.<sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.<sup>10</sup> You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”<sup>11</sup> Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.<sup>12</sup> In a loud voice they were saying: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”<sup>13</sup> Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”<sup>14</sup> The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

*Take note here of titles and descriptors used for Jesus. Compare with those found in Revelation 1:12-20 (see PSG, p. 72). Highlight new titles/descriptors and consider how they add to your understanding of Jesus.*

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## FIRST THOUGHTS

Most countries have documents that specify the qualifications of their leaders. These qualifications usually represent the minimum requirements as opposed to what the people of that country might expect and hope their leaders will be. Many may meet the minimum but the one who becomes the leader is the one who meets these second set of higher requirements or at least comes close.

***What qualifications and characteristics would you list as needed for a person to lead your country's government? What would you do if no one met your requirements?***

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We seek to elect trustworthy leaders, because to have leaders assumes that people and events move toward a goal. Time moves in one direction: forward. History has an end toward which it is steadily marching. Consequently, we long for wise leaders who can guide us into a better future for our families and for our country.

That's a tall order for a leader, isn't it? Can any one person possibly meet that expectation? An old gospel song reminds us that while we may not know what tomorrow holds, we can know who holds the future. As the apostle John's vision of heaven's throne room continued, the prophet saw a staggering picture of the One who not only knows our future but holds it in His hands.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### REVELATION 5:1-14

John was in exile, banished by Roman authorities to the island of Patmos. He was physically removed from the young Christian congregations that he had helped guide in the faith. The churches were facing struggles too—persecution from without and false teachings from within. In that context, John received from the Lord the prophecy that we know as the Book of Revelation. It began with a vision of the Resurrected Jesus, who instructed John to write down



the prophecy and send it to seven churches in the province of Asia (see Rev. 1). The opening vision was followed by seven letters from the Lord Jesus to the seven churches. In the letters, the Lord encouraged, commended, confronted, and challenged His followers to hear and obey the Holy Spirit (see Rev. 2–3).

Beginning with chapter 4, John received prophetic insight about the future, including the end time, from the vantage point of heaven's throne room. Before John saw that future unveiled, however, he saw an overwhelming scene of the One who rules over the past, present, and future. He saw God Almighty, seated on the throne, accompanied by the Holy Spirit, and surrounded by living creatures and elders who constantly worship Him (see Rev. 4).

In chapter 5, John focused on two other striking features in the throne room. One was a sealed scroll (see 5:1-4), and the other was a Person (see 5:5-14). This Person turned out to be the only One worthy to open the sealed scroll and look into it. Only this Person could guide John (and can guide us) to know the end of history and the working out of God's judgment against evil and salvation of God's people.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### THE SEARCH (REV. 5:1-4)

#### VERSE 1

**<sup>1</sup> Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.**

John noticed that the Lord God held *a scroll* in His hand as He sat on the throne of heaven. John made several observations about the scroll. First, the scroll was in God's *right hand*, which signified His power and authority to execute its decrees. Second, the scroll contained writing on both the front and back sides, a detail that signified completeness and comprehensiveness. The prophet Ezekiel was shown a similar scroll in a vision; the words on that scroll were words of lamentation, mourning, and woe—that is, judgment prophecies (see Ezek. 2:9-10). Peeking ahead at Revelation 6, we discover that the scroll John saw also contained words of woe and judgment. Third, the scroll was *sealed with seven seals*. A seal often consisted of a droplet of wax on which the sender stamped

an identifying image as the wax hardened. The seal secured the document and testified of the genuineness and authority of its contents. The scroll John saw in God's right hand had seven seals.

### VERSES 2-3

**<sup>2</sup> And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" <sup>3</sup> But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.**

As John continued to view the scene, *a mighty angel* thundered an announcement that was designed to make John (and us) think about who Jesus is. For the angel to ask if anyone was *worthy* to open the scroll was the same as asking if anyone had the authority to carry out the decrees written on its front and back.

In other words, the angel was asking John (and us) to think deeply about who rules the creation. Was the Roman emperor an all-powerful king? Did he rule the universe? Did he hold its future in his hands? And what about today? Does the nation with the strongest military control the future? Do the wealthiest tyrants? The most wicked terrorists? While human entities and governments may seem at times to possess supreme power—and may wield that power to target believers for persecution—none of them have the power to decide our ultimate destiny. No angel of *heaven*, no human ruler *on earth*, and nothing from *under the earth* was (or is) worthy to open the scroll in God's hand or even to look in it.

### VERSE 4

**<sup>4</sup> I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.**

Grief and confusion overwhelmed John momentarily. Perhaps it was grief that mirrored his uncertainty about what the churches of his day were facing and what he too was facing on Patmos. Why did God let John experience such intense grief? Likely He did it for John's benefit, to help him appreciate more fully what it means that Jesus is worthy to open the scroll and to carry out its decrees. John needed to be reminded that God is in control. God alone has the power to execute judgment against His enemies and to bring salvation to His people.



**Why is the question of who is in ultimate control of the future important for people to think deeply about? What emotions might accompany these thoughts for a believer? For an unbeliever?**

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## **THE DISCOVERY (REV. 5:5-7)**

### **VERSE 5**

**<sup>5</sup> Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”**

As John’s vision continued, one of the 24 elders comforted John by pointing out the One who is worthy to open the scroll and to carry out its decrees. The elder identified the Worthy One as ***the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David***. These are messianic titles from the Old Testament that pointed to Jesus. In a blessing pronounced over his 12 sons, the Old Testament patriarch Jacob called his son Judah “a young lion” and prophesied that one day a King would come from Judah’s tribe who deserved everyone’s obedience (see Gen. 49:9-10). The second title, *the Root of David*, is a reference to a prophecy about the Messiah from the prophet Isaiah (see Isa. 11:1). Both titles point to the promise of a King who will triumph over His enemies. Paradoxically, Jesus triumphed over Satan and sin not with a sword but through His death on a cross (see Col. 2:14-15).

### **VERSE 6**

**<sup>6</sup> Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.**

Verse 5 appears to focus on Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Verse 6 adds the New Testament dimension. In verse 5, the Messiah is acclaimed as a Lion; in verse 6, Christ has the appearance of ***a Lamb ... slain***. The scene reminds us that Jesus’ worthiness to open the scroll stems not only from who He is as God’s Son. Jesus’ worthiness also arises from His death on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (see Isa. 53:7; John 1:29).

In verse 5, the Messiah's descent through Judah and David emphasizes His human origins. In verse 6, Christ's Deity is the focus. Christ stood in the midst of the scene that included the throne, the four living creatures, and the 24 elders—a position that emphasizes His oneness with God the Father. The presence of **seven horns** emphasizes His authority and perfect power. The **seven eyes** identify Christ's oneness with the Holy Spirit and emphasize Christ's commissioning of the church to take the gospel to the ends of the earth in the power of the Spirit (see John 14:16; Acts 1:8).

#### VERSE 7

**<sup>7</sup> He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.**

With no hesitation or objection, the Risen Lamb of God approached the throne and took the scroll from the Father's hand. This action affirmed the Father's decree to give all authority for the execution of judgment and salvation to Jesus (see John 5:22,27; 1 Cor. 15:20-28).

***What characteristics come to mind when you think of Jesus in terms of a lion? A root? A sacrificial lamb?***

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#### KEY DOCTRINE: *Jesus' Work*

Jesus will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission.

#### THE HONORING (REV. 5:8-14)

#### VERSE 8

**<sup>8</sup> And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people.**



When the Risen Lamb took the scroll, the same groups who constantly exalt the Father on the throne immediately worshiped the Lamb as well, bowing before Him in humble submission. The creatures and elders held harps, a common instrument used in worship (see Ps. 33:2). They also held incense-filled vials, or bowls, that represented believers' prayers. This is a vivid reminder that our sincere prayers always make their way into the throne room of God.

**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major theme.*

One of the under-appreciated aspects of Revelation is the poetry it contains. These poems—often songs or hymns—have been a great source for Christian praise and worship through the centuries. Use a Bible that typesets poetry in a poetic format and scan Revelation 5 for poetry. Compare the different poems by identifying the speaker(s), the person(s) addressed, and the subject matter. Consider ways of using Scripture's poetry in worship.

**VERSES 9-10**

**<sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. <sup>10</sup> You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."**

The heavenly worshipers sang ***a new song***. The song's title might well be called "Worthy is the Lamb!" Stanza one proclaims that Jesus laid down His life on the cross as our Atoning Sacrifice. By shedding His blood, He ***purchased for God persons***. Jesus became a curse for us (see Gal. 3:13) and paid the penalty for our sins (see Rom. 6:23; Mark 10:45). He alone opened the way for people of all tribes, languages, people groups, and nations to be saved.

Stanza two of the *new song* declares that Jesus transforms the redeemed from diverse backgrounds into ***a kingdom and priests*** who

serve God. This means that believers in Jesus share in His rule when we declare His praises to a world that needs Him (see 1 Pet. 2:9).

#### VERSES 11-12

**<sup>11</sup> Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.**

**<sup>12</sup> In a loud voice they were saying: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”**

The four living creatures and the elders were joined in their song of praise by the voices of *many angels*. The number of angels was so great that no human could count them. They proclaimed the worthiness of the Lamb, who gave His life as our Atoning Sacrifice. They exalted Him with a sevenfold description of His attributes as Lord: *power ... wealth ... wisdom ... strength ... honor ... glory, and praise*. Jesus possesses these attributes in His eternal nature as the Son of God. We can't give them to Him. However, we can and should worship Him as the Worthy Lamb and Perfect Savior.

#### VERSES 13-14

**<sup>13</sup> Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” <sup>14</sup> The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.**

Finally, John saw the circle of worshipers grow to universal proportions. Their expressions of praise and submission reached a crescendo. *Every creature* in all the creation joined to confess the worthiness of God the Father on His throne and the Risen Lamb of God, who stood ready to open the scroll and execute its decrees.

These creatures ascribed a fourfold chorus of praise to God and the Lamb, focusing on four of the seven attributes expressed by the other groups (although the word in verse 13 rendered *power* is a different Greek term than the one used in verse 12). The thunder of their praise reverberated everywhere in creation. The four living creatures declared an *Amen* of agreement, and the 24 elders once again bowed in humble submission and worship.



***What do these verses teach about the nature of worship? What do they say about the motive for worship? What attitudes should be carried when we enter into the presence of God through worship?***

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## **IN MY CONTEXT**

All of creation searches for One worthy to be their Savior. However, only Jesus is qualified to be the Savior. Believers can rejoice in the redemption provided by faith in Jesus.

***Reflect on your search for a Savior. Recount the emotions you experienced when you believed in Jesus. If you have not committed your life to Christ, review the material on the inside front cover and talk to a trusted Christian about this decision.***

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***Write a poem or paragraph expressing your understanding of who Jesus is in light of this passage. Take time to thank Him, using what you wrote.***

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***How can your group utilize the portrait of worship in Revelation 5 to inform and shape your approach to worship as a group? What steps can the group take to incorporate that understanding?***

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## **MEMORY VERSE**

Revelation 5:12



# JESUS SAVES

Session

11

## REDEEMING JUDGMENT

Jesus Christ will both judge the world in righteousness and save the faithful by grace.

### REVELATION 9:1-12

<sup>1</sup> The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. <sup>2</sup> When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. <sup>3</sup> And out of the smoke locusts came down on the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. <sup>4</sup> They were told not



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to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

<sup>5</sup> They were not allowed to kill them but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes. <sup>6</sup> During those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them. <sup>7</sup> The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. <sup>8</sup> Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. <sup>9</sup> They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. <sup>10</sup> They had tails with stingers, like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. <sup>11</sup> They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer). <sup>12</sup> The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.

*Highlight images in these verses that can evoke a sense of dread, panic, or destruction. What emotional response do you have in reading the verses?*

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## FIRST THOUGHTS

Sometimes you see or hear things that immediately strike fear in your heart. Maybe you're driving home and spot a dark, billowing plume of smoke in the direction of your neighborhood. Or you get jolted awake from a night's sleep by a crashing sound. Or you hear a breaking news report that a contagious virus has spread to your community. In the ancient world—and in some areas today—the appearance of a locust swarm could create a similar sense of dread.

Biblical locusts weren't the modern bug-eyed, noisy, yet basically harmless cicadas that emerge from the ground every few years to

repopulate. Rather, locusts were voracious grasshopper-like insects that moved across an area in a giant swarm of destruction. When locusts swarmed, they couldn't be stopped. They stripped the land of crops and other plant life. Agriculture was central to most nations' economies in Bible times. So when a swarm of locusts approached, people stared in dread, because they knew there was nowhere to hide.

***What specific fears might an imminent threat of natural disaster raise in people's minds? Why do you think some people have difficulty connecting natural disasters with divine judgment?***

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Beginning with the plagues against Egypt in Moses' day, locust swarms have been associated with the wrath of God in Scripture (see Ex. 10:1-20). The prophet Joel observed locusts invading Judah. The swarm was so big that it blotted out the sun. God showed Joel that the locust plague was a harbinger of His wrath that was coming on the Day of the Lord (see Joel 1:2-15).

Centuries after Joel, the apostle John saw a vision of the ultimate fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. The locusts Joel saw were mere insects that ate crops but did not attack humans. However, the locusts John saw were demonic creatures that God will unleash in end-time judgment against the wicked and unrepentant.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### REVELATION 6:1–9:21

In Revelation 6, after the coronation of the Lamb, Jesus began to open the seals on the scroll. John saw that as Jesus broke open the first four seals, agents of divine judgment emerged to pour out God's wrath on the earth (see 6:1-8). The fifth seal revealed a divine act of assurance for martyred believers (see 6:9-11). The sixth seal revealed natural upheavals that caused panic and dread, because people understood the disasters to be God's judgment on them (see 6:12-17).

Revelation 7 describes a period before the opening of the seventh seal, which occurs in 8:1. During this period, God's angels sealed



144,000 of the Lord's servants from every tribe of Israel (see 7:1-8). Then John saw a vast crowd of people from every nation, tribe, people, and language who had come out of the great tribulation. They stood before the throne and the Lamb, and they gratefully ascribed their salvation to God and to the Lamb (see 7:9-17).

John then saw Jesus open the seventh seal. A brief period of silence in heaven gave way to a new round of God's judgments, signaled by the blowing of trumpets (see 8:1-5). The first four trumpet blasts revealed a series of disasters that will fall on the earth, destroying a third of everything. The fifth and sixth trumpet blasts revealed even more severe judgments, including a swarm of demonic locusts that will arise from the bottomless pit (see 9:1-21).

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### LOCUSTS UNLEASHED (REV. 9:1-3)

#### VERSE 1

**<sup>1</sup> The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss.**

When the fifth trumpet sounded, John saw *a star* that fell to earth. Stars, of course, are celestial bodies that God created (see Gen. 1:16). This star, however, represents some type of being—probably an angel—since he was given *the key to the shaft of the Abyss*.

The identity of this *star* has long been debated. One possible view is that the star simply represents one of the angels dispatched by God to execute His wrath. In this view, the angel is given authority to unleash a devastating, demonic locust swarm that torments the people on earth who are not sealed as God's people.

Another view is that the angel is Satan. Jesus once told His disciples of having watched Satan fall from heaven (see Luke 10:18). Before that, the prophet Isaiah appears to have received prophetic insight concerning Satan's fall (see Isa. 14:12). If the star is Satan, it is important to note that *the key to the shaft of the Abyss* is put under his control only for a time. It's loaned to him; he doesn't own it. In Revelation 20:1, an angel comes down from heaven with the same key and locks Satan himself in the abyss for 1,000 years!

## VERSE 2

**<sup>2</sup> When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss.**

The angel acted within strict limits set by God. God has complete control over all aspects of His creation, including its times and its places. The term *abyss* refers to the place where evil spirits are imprisoned (see Luke 8:31). John then saw thick, dark **smoke** belching up out of the *abyss* so that the sky was darkened. The rising smoke foreshadowed the true terror about to come on the earth.

## VERSE 3

**<sup>3</sup> And out of the smoke locusts came down on the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth.**

As John watched, suddenly **locusts** emerged from the smoke onto the earth. These locusts, however, possessed a different nature than the grasshopper-like insects that devour plant life. These locusts possessed the power to sting like **scorpions**, injecting a torturous, toxic venom into their human victims. That the locusts arose out of the *abyss* suggests they are demonic in nature.

The cumulative effect of John's vision emphasizes the terrifying reality of God's wrath (see Heb. 10:31). God's wrath is more than just a topic of debate or a doctrine to be studied. It is a coming event to be terrified of. Only the seal of God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ can seal, or rescue, the sinner from God righteous wrath.

***How do these verses point to God's sovereign rule over the Devil and his demonic forces? How would you explain this truth to a non-Christian?***

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## BELIEVERS PROTECTED (REV. 9:4)

### VERSE 4

**<sup>4</sup> They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.**



John further specified the divine restrictions placed on the locusts that were unleashed from the *abyss*. First, they were told not to target plant life. Again, this description indicates that these locusts were of a different nature than the typical plant-destroying insects. These locusts were instructed to target human life.

Second, the locusts were not allowed to target all human beings. Swarms of plant-eating locusts will completely strip a field of all vegetation, leaving nothing behind but chaff and stubble. The locusts from the *abyss* were permitted to harm only ***people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads***. That is, they were to distinguish in their attacks between people who belonged to God and those who didn't belong to Him. This divine instruction is reminiscent of the ways God protected the Israelites from the plagues that struck the people of Egypt (see Ex. 8:22; 9:4,26; 11:7).

How will God “seal” those people in the end time who belong to Him? The use of an actual physical mark on the forehead might be meant. The apostle Paul spoke of the physical marks on his body from persecution that expressed the depth of his relationship to Christ (see Gal. 6:17). Yet, the New Testament also teaches that it is part of the work of the Holy Spirit to seal believers for the day of redemption (see Eph. 1:13; 4:30). Perhaps, then, we are to understand that the demonic locusts in the end time are able to attack only those who do not have the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit ably protects God's people from demonic attacks.

***In what ways can this verse motivate believers to point unbelievers to faith in Jesus Christ?***

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### **KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Holy Spirit***

The Holy Spirit seals the believer unto the day of final redemption.

## DEATH SOUGHT (REV. 9:5-6)

### VERSE 5

**<sup>5</sup> They were not allowed to kill them but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes.**

The locusts from the *abyss* were allowed **to torture** their victims for a period of **five months**, but not to kill them. This feature of John's vision may be meant to emphasize that the demonic locusts' activity, while agonizingly painful, will be limited in duration.

What is the torment to be? John described it this way: **like that of the sting of a scorpion**. In other words, John may have been referring either to actual physical torment caused by the demonic locusts or to a deep spiritual agony that compares to a scorpion's venomous sting. Whether the pain is physical or spiritual, the point is clear. God is in control, even in ordering the demonic forces of the *abyss* to execute His judgments on an unbelieving world.

Second Peter 3:9-12 reminds us of these sobering truths about the end time. First, the Lord is patient with sinful humanity at present, because He wants people to repent rather than to perish. And second, the Day of the Lord, when God's wrath will be poured out in full measure, will surely come one day. It's not a question of if, but when.

### VERSE 6

**<sup>6</sup> During those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.**

John saw a vision of tragedy at its utmost. Here were people suffering beyond description from demonic attack. Yet their hearts were so dark that they preferred death over repentance. This is the picture of a stunning reversal of the natural order of things. We go to great lengths to flee from death. Tragically, here were people who longed to die but could not. Death fled from them.

***How would you compare and contrast any suffering a believer might face in this life with the suffering described in these verses?***

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## JUDGMENT ADMINISTERED (REV. 9:7-12)

### VERSES 7-9

**<sup>7</sup> The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. <sup>8</sup> Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. <sup>9</sup> They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle.**

The first point to notice in these verses is that John used a number of comparisons. The demonic locusts must have been grotesque in appearance; they certainly were frightening and powerful-looking. John could only say what their features resembled.

Overall, the locusts looked like mighty war *horses* decked out for battle. They wore something like gold *crowns* on their heads, signifying the power to conquer. Yet their *faces* resembled human faces, signifying intelligence and cunning. Their *hair* was long and flowing, like a woman's hair, but their vicious looking *teeth* reminded John of a lion's fangs. Their chests had the appearance of *breastplates of iron*, signifying invincible strength, and their *wings* created a deafening noise like that of a horde of war chariots charging into battle. It was a scene that would strike terror in the heart of anyone!

### VERSE 10

**<sup>10</sup> They had tails with stingers, like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months.**

John concluded his description by noting again that these demonic locusts were *like scorpions* in that they were able to sting their victims. Likewise, John repeated the restriction that the locusts were not allowed to kill. The repetition served to underscore the point. The locusts could inflict great pain on their victims for only *five months*.

### VERSES 11-12

**<sup>11</sup> They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer). <sup>12</sup> The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.**

As John observed the horde of demonic creatures streaming out of

the *abyss*, he recognized that they had an angelic **king**. I am among those Bible students who differentiate between this angelic leader of the demonic locusts and the “star fallen from heaven” in 9:1. This angel appears to have been locked in the *abyss* with the rest of the demonic creatures who come out of it to torment the unbelieving world. Other Bible students, however, identify the *king* of the *abyss* as Satan because of his nature, as signified by his names. What all can agree on is that the king of the demonic locusts leads the way in tormenting the wicked at this time. John identified the locust king’s name in Hebrew as **•Abaddon** (see p. 6), which means “Destroyer.” To underscore the king’s wicked nature, John also gave the angel’s equivalent name in Greek: **•Apollyon** (see p. 6).

**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.*

Revelation 9 describes a locust army sent as divine judgment. Read about two Old Testament accounts of locust plagues in Exodus 10:1-20 and Joel 1:1-12; 2:1-11.

Compare these accounts with Revelation 9. Seek insight into the following questions: Who were the objects of judgment? How was it made clear that God was the Source of the judgment? What was the intention of the judgment? What was the result of the plague, if stated?

John closed this scene by informing his readers that this was but the first of three **woes** that he saw as the Risen Lord unveiled the scroll of destiny. The sense of John’s statement is that as bad as things were during the plague of locusts, they would get far worse. Yet, people would still refuse to repent of their wickedness (see 9:20-21).

God’s mercy and desire to see people avoid His coming wrath is made clear by His giving us the Book of Revelation. His warnings call unbelievers to repent and trust in Jesus. They also call Christians to a sense of urgency to share the gospel with others.



***What do these verses teach about Satan's true opinion of humanity and what he wants to do? How can you use these verses to warn others of Satan's nature and desire to destroy them?***

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## **IN MY CONTEXT**

God's judgment is terrible and sure. Jesus rescues from judgment those who are His. Failing to repent of sin and turn to Jesus when facing God's judgment will only lead to greater frustration.

***Why is it important to remember God's warnings about His coming judgment on the wicked? How can you use those warnings as motivation to remain faithful to Christ and encourage others to do the same?***

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***List ways your group can utilize the image painted by John to create an appropriate sense of urgency. Identify appropriate actions for the group to take in the coming week, adapting them to the group's practices.***

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***Consider the difficulties you are facing, asking God to reveal any rebellion and sin He is trying to warn you about. Record your prayer, including a commitment to repent of any sins He reveals.***

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## **MEMORY VERSE**

Revelation 7:10



Session 12

# JESUS DEFEATS SATAN

Jesus Christ is the Lord of heaven and earth who will make all things new.

## REVELATION 12:1-17

<sup>1</sup> A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. <sup>2</sup> She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. <sup>3</sup> Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. <sup>4</sup> Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the



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woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. <sup>5</sup> She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. <sup>6</sup> The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. <sup>7</sup> Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. <sup>8</sup> But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. <sup>9</sup> The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. <sup>10</sup> Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. <sup>11</sup> They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. <sup>12</sup> Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.” <sup>13</sup> When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. <sup>14</sup> The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent’s reach. <sup>15</sup> Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. <sup>16</sup> But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. <sup>17</sup> Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

***If you watched Revelation 12 as a “movie,” who would be the main players? How many scenes appear, and what main actions occur in each scene? When does tension build? What other emotions arise? How would you describe the way the “movie” ends?***

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## FIRST THOUGHTS

How often do you go to the movies or attend a play? Many people do so on a weekly basis. As human beings, we’re truly fascinated with the telling and acting of stories. We’ve been listening to and watching them for thousands of years. The grandest structure that archaeologists unearthed in the ruins of ancient Ephesus was an outdoor theater capable of seating 25,000 patrons!

***What do you like best about reading or hearing a story, or watching a movie or play? How important is it to you that a story have a happy ending? What makes for a happy ending?***

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We don’t know if the apostle John ever attended the great theater while he lived in Ephesus in the first century A.D. But we can safely assume that he knew about it. He also knew that the Roman emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96) often exploited the mythical tales of Greco-Roman gods to promote his own claim of divinity. These tales may well have been dramatized on the stage at Ephesus.

For John and other believers, however, the cultural pressure to worship the emperor was a non-starter. Christians worshiped the one true and living God. They confessed only one Lord, Jesus Christ. Consequently, the officials of the emperor cult often targeted believers for persecution. In fact, that’s probably the reason John was confined to the island of Patmos. Yet God used that confinement to show John—and through him to show all of us—the true story of what God has done, is doing, and will do to bring His creation to its full purpose. Revelation 12 portrays that story in a dramatic fashion.



# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## REVELATION 10:1–20:15

To say that Revelation 10–20 covers a lot of territory is an understatement! Among the scenes and events in these chapters of Revelation, John saw a mighty angel and a small scroll (10); the martyrdom and resurrection of two “witnesses” (11); the dramatic conflict between a red dragon and a male Child, His mother, and her other offspring (12); the rising of two beasts, one from the sea and the second from the earth (13); the Lamb with His redeemed and sealed people as a great harvest takes place on earth (14); a third round of judgments, poured out of bowls (15–16); the judgment against the “great prostitute” and the beast (17–18); a celebration in heaven and the marriage of the Lamb, as the Rider on a white horse conquers the beast (19); and the binding, releasing, and final crushing of Satan, followed by the great white throne judgment (20). In this panorama of events, chapter 12 may be seen as a pivotal chapter, a microcosm of the entire story of creation, salvation, and restoration from heaven’s viewpoint.

### KEY DOCTRINE: *Last Things*

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end.

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## SATAN DEFEATED (REV. 12:1-9)

### VERSES 1-2

**<sup>1</sup> A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. <sup>2</sup> She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.**

The phrase ***a great sign*** signaled to John that what he was about to see pointed beyond itself to a deeper, divine story. A number of

characters would appear in the drama, but the story would be God's story. The action would take twists and turns, but the outcome would always be in God's hand.

The first sign that John saw was a pregnant **woman** in the throes of labor pains. The woman's celestial clothing and the **crown of twelve stars** are clues to her identity, yet Bible students differ in their conclusions. One view is that the woman represents Israel. This view finds support from the Old Testament in references such as Genesis 37:9, where the sons of Jacob, or Israel, are depicted as "stars." The woman's pregnancy points to Israel as the people through whom the Messiah came into the world.

A second view suggests that the woman represents not just ethnic Israel but "ideal" Israel. That is, she represents all the redeemed people of God under the Old and New Testaments. Israel longed for the Messiah and His deliverance before Jesus' first coming; likewise, the church longs for Christ's return in glory and final victory.

#### VERSES 3-4

**<sup>3</sup> Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads.**

**<sup>4</sup> Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born.**

John then saw **another sign**, a **enormous red dragon**. The dragon's grotesque features spoke volumes about his character. His red color suggested a bloody, murderous nature. Many scholars understand the **seven heads** to speak of wisdom, the **ten horns** to be power (see Dan. 7:23-25), and the **seven crowns** to be authority. All of these attributes were grossly corrupted by the dragon's killer nature.

In verse 4a, John described the dragon as having swept away **a third of the stars out of the sky**. Some Bible students connect this scene to the rebellion of Satan and other angels in heaven and their subsequent banishment from there (see Luke 10:18; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Other interpreters take the description as a general reference to Satan's violent nature and the wanton destruction he seeks to unleash on every good thing God has made or done. In verse 4b, John described a repulsive scene in which the dragon positioned himself at the



birthstool, ready to devour the woman's newborn Child. It's not difficult to see in this description an allusion to Herod's murderous decree when Jesus was born (see Matt. 2:16-18).

#### VERSES 5-6

**<sup>5</sup> She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. <sup>6</sup> The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.**

The male Child born to the woman clearly refers to Jesus Christ. John described Him as the One who will ***rule all the nations with an iron scepter***. This is a picture drawn from Psalm 2, a messianic psalm extolling the rule of God's Son, the Messiah (see Ps. 2:9). Christ is the third Character in the drama and the Hero of the story. The dragon's evil scheme to destroy Jesus was thwarted when the Son was ***snatched up to God and to his throne***. That is, all that happened to Jesus in His incarnation, life, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension was by the will and power of God, not by the schemes of Satan. Indeed, by these actions Christ defeated Satan, sealing the Devil's ultimate doom!

Verse 6 is a vivid picture of God's providential protection of His people. Most interpreters who understand the woman to represent Israel explain this scene as God's special protection of Israel during the time of the tribulation, much like God had protected His people in the wilderness after the exodus. Other interpreters see the picture as representative of God's providential care for His people during any time of persecution, including at times leading up to Christ's return.

#### VERSES 7-9

**<sup>7</sup> Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. <sup>8</sup> But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. <sup>9</sup> The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.**

In the next scene, John saw ***war*** break out in heaven. ***Michael*** is the only “archangel” (ruling angel) mentioned in Scripture (see Jude 9;

compare Dan. 10:13; 12:1). John saw Michael lead an army of God's angels against the dragon and the dragon's angels. It is hard to know with certainty when this war takes place. Some interpreters see it as occurring in the end times. Others see it as a "flashback" to the angelic rebellion in which Satan was cast down to the earth. Still others see the scene as a general reference to the ongoing cosmic conflict between God's servants and the enemies of God. In all the views, the point is clear. Satan is no match for God.

Interestingly, John made clear in this scene the identity of the dragon. He named him. The Greek term for **devil** means "slanderer." The Hebrew term for **Satan** literally means "accuser." These names well describe Satan's desire to deceive and destroy **the whole world**. Thankfully, because of Jesus Christ, the accuser is a defeated foe.

***How do these scenes help you understand the nature of spiritual warfare as compared with how Paul described it in Ephesians 6:11-12?***

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## **THE LAMB PRAISED** (REV. 12:10-12)

### **VERSES 10-11**

**<sup>10</sup> Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. <sup>11</sup> They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.**

In this scene, John heard a proclamation ring out. He focused on the loud, clear message, not on the announcer. The proclamation declared vocally the same reality that John saw in 12:7-9. From heaven's viewpoint, the war has been decided. It's over. Satan and his evil minions are defeated and doomed. The one who unceasingly accuses God's people before the Lord has been conquered.

That victory didn't come by human cunning or strength. It came through God's **salvation ... power ... and authority** in the saving work of **his Messiah**. Because Jesus died on the cross and rose again,



Satan can no longer accuse God's people (see Rom. 8:32-33).

Moreover, as Revelation 12:11 declares, the redeemed share in the reality and power of Christ's victory by their faith in Jesus. They conquer Satan **by the blood of the Lamb**. They defeat the Devil's schemes **by the word of their testimony**. That is, by their enduring confession of Jesus as Lord and their obedience to Him, believers taste the sweet victory of Christ (see Rev. 2:10).

**BIBLE SKILL: Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.**

Focus on Revelation 12:11. Read the verse aloud several times. Each time, emphasize a different word or phrase as you read. Take note of your thoughts. How does the verse move you emotionally? What feelings were evoked by the different words and phrases as you emphasized them?

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**VERSE 12**

**<sup>12</sup> Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."**

As said before, Bible students differ about the precise time of the events in Revelation 12, yet they often agree on the events' meaning and impact. Jesus' atoning death and victorious resurrection conquered the Devil, stripped death of its sting, and nullified sin's curse. In this verse, John saw that Christ's victory prompted rejoicing in heaven. Yet it signified a short time of increased woe on the earth. As though he were watching the "replay" of a fiercely fought contest, the final result was already known, although the struggle would continue to play out until the final horn.

***How does knowing about Satan's ultimate defeat give you confidence each day in living for Christ? How does this reality combat the sting of death for the believer?***

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## THE DRAGON REGROUPS (REV. 12:13-17)

### VERSES 13-14

**13 When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14 The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach.**

When *the dragon*, who is Satan, could not destroy Jesus or foil the Savior's mission of salvation, he turned his rage on *the woman*. For those who interpret the woman as Israel, verse 13 provides a backdrop for the long, sordid history of some groups' bitter hatred of Israel. Yet John saw also that in the providence of God, the woman found a refuge from the dragon in *the wilderness*.

Bible students who understand the woman to represent the entire people of God interpret this scene as describing Satan's move to persecute the followers of Christ, both during the church age and especially during the end time. In either view, the emphasis is on God's providential protection for His people. John needed to hear this truth in his circumstances. We need to hear it today too.

### VERSES 15-16

**15 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. 16 But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.**

John switched in 12:15 to the description of Satan as *the serpent*, reminiscent of the tempter in the garden of Eden (see Gen. 3:1-5; Rev. 12:9). Perhaps no specific historical reference is to be attached to the torrent of water rushing *like a river* from the serpent's mouth. It could be a general reference to satanic opposition to God's people throughout history, and especially before the end. God can use even the natural world to help His people in times of persecution.

### VERSE 17

**17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's**



## **commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.**

This verse offers a sober warning to every generation of Christ's followers, including believers today. Satan has declared war on us, because we belong to Christ. We confess that Jesus is Lord and Savior. Consequently, our obedient lifestyles and **testimony about Jesus** make us targets for the Devil's rage. We must resist the Devil (see Jas. 4:7). Our accuser is cunning and angry, but Christ defeated him.

***What do we need to remember about God when our testimony of Jesus is met with hostility?***

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## **IN MY CONTEXT**

Satan is a defeated foe and can be overcome through faith in Jesus. Jesus' death and resurrection give hope to all who trust in Him. Jesus can be trusted even when facing persecution.

***List situations in which you need to see Jesus as victorious and Satan as defeated. What actions can you take to live in light of Jesus' victory?***

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***Define how this passage gives hope to believers facing difficult challenges in their faith. Identify one or two such believers with whom you could share this passage. Outline the steps you will take to do so.***

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***How can your Bible study group support the church worldwide in places where believers are suffering for their testimony about Jesus?***

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## **MEMORY VERSE**

Revelation 12:11



# Session 13

## THE FINAL ACT

God began the story of creation and will consummate it. He invites all to join Him.

### REVELATION 21:1-7

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with



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them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ <sup>5</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” <sup>6</sup> He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. <sup>7</sup> Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

*Identify in these verses all the things John described as “new.” Then highlight all the actions that God will take on behalf of His people.*

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## FIRST THOUGHTS

Of all the rituals and ceremonies in which people participate, few are as beautiful or meaningful as a wedding. Guests and family dress in their Sunday finest. Splendidly arrayed wedding attendants enter and carefully arrange themselves to focus on the bride and groom. The groom’s eyes gleam with happiness, mixed perhaps with a bit of nervousness as he waits. Then the moment of greatest excitement comes: the bold chords of the wedding march are sounded, the audience rises, and the radiant bride makes her way to the altar. There she joins her groom to start a new life together as husband and wife.

***Why do you think people are so captivated at weddings when the bride makes her entrance?***

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After the solemn vision of the culmination of judgment described in Revelation 20:11-15, the scene shifts in Revelation 21 to a celebration of God’s renewal of all things. John saw something that made him stop in wonder. The Holy City, New Jerusalem, had arrived.

It must have been a captivating sight. John beheld a portrait of God's people and their dwelling place, holy, spotless, resplendent in beauty. And as the vision unfolded, a realization surely dawned on John. He was a part of the New Jerusalem, the people of God coming down from heaven. God showed the exiled apostle what His people can expect in the life to come, when everything will be made new. That had to be encouraging in light of the trials John was enduring.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### REVELATION 21:1–22:21

We need to remember where John was when Jesus gave him the visions that we've been studying in the Book of Revelation. John was in exile on the island of Patmos, banished there by a Roman government that rejected him and his witness to Jesus. He was in a long season of suffering, and his only option was patient endurance (see Rev. 1:9-10).

If you as a believer are facing hostility as a result of your confession of Christ, you can relate to John's experience. What is it that can strengthen you to endure patiently, even joyfully, to the end of your journey, no matter how difficult the way? The answer, according to Revelation, is confidence that God will provide for and protect His people. He will bring all things to their appropriate end.

Moreover, consider that at the end of the Book of Revelation things do not merely work out. They turn out far better than we can imagine or dream. John saw things so great that human words are insufficient to fully describe them. We as believers are heading for what John saw, when all things will be made new.

First, John saw a vision of the new heaven and earth and heard God declare the culmination of His purpose to renew all things (see 21:1-8). Next, one of God's angels took John to a location where the apostle could see the exquisite beauty, design, and population of the new holy city, Jerusalem (see 21:9-27). This was followed by a vision of a river of living water that flowed into new Jerusalem as well as the presence there of the throne of God and of the Lamb (see 22:1-5). Revelation ends with a series of exhortations, blessings, and invitations to hear and respond to the prophecies in the book (see 22:6-20). A final salutation of grace closes the book (see 22:21).



# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## GOD'S NEW PROVISION (REV. 21:1-2)

### VERSE 1

**<sup>1</sup> Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.**

After the great white throne judgment (see 20:14-15), the scene changed to something completely new. John saw ***a new heaven and a new earth***. He noted that the first heaven and first earth had passed away, and the sea no longer existed.

The text does not clearly indicate whether John meant that the old order of things was destroyed or completely transformed. In 2 Peter 3:10-13, the apostle Peter described the Day of the Lord as a time when the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be burned with fire. Peter's description indicates that it will be catastrophic for the old order, which gives support to the idea that the old order will be destroyed and replaced.

On the other hand, there appears to be some continuity between the old order and the new order as described in Revelation 21-22. Much of what John saw in the new order has parallels in the present order. The difference is that John saw these entities as purged from all the effects of the fall. Today creation groans under the curse of sin (see Gen. 3:17; Rom. 8:20-22). At the renewal of all things, creation may be as it was in the garden of Eden, before sin entered the picture.

What did John mean by the statement that ***there was no longer any sea***? If the statement is to be understood literally, then it shows how radical the break is from the old order to the new. However, it could also be understood in figurative terms to emphasize that the threat represented by the sea will be eliminated. In John's day, people often viewed the sea as a terrifying place that swallowed its victims. Another possible emphasis is that the sea signified social and political upheaval among nations. The renewal of all things will include healing for the nations (see Rev. 22:2). This makes it possible to understand the absence of the sea as a way of saying that strife will end on the day when everything is made new. We might never fully understand the meaning of this phrase until the day it comes to pass.

## VERSE 2

**<sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.**

Next, John saw *the holy city, the new Jerusalem*, coming down out of heaven from God. It was prepared *as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband*. The term *new Jerusalem* can refer here to two realities. First, it can refer to the eternal home of God's people. The apostle John had heard Jesus tell His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them (see John 14:2). Here John saw into the future when that eternal place of abode was ready.

Second, the term also can refer to the people of God. This is especially emphasized by John's comparison of the new city to a bride. Previously in Revelation, John had spoken of the redeemed as the wife of the Lamb (see Rev. 19:7). In the Old Testament, God spoke of Himself as Israel's Husband and of Israel as His bride (see Isa. 54:5-6). The prophet Isaiah also spoke of Jerusalem in the new creation as a place of joy and its people as a delight (see Isa. 65:17-18). Like Isaiah, John saw God's people and their eternal home in their perfected state.

Take note that John saw the new Jerusalem coming down to the earth. Once heaven and earth were made new, the holy city did not remain in heaven. The future, eternal home of God's people is described here as a new earth in a new cosmos that are united. This picture may be difficult for us to envision. Yet it is the vision that John was given of the new creation and the heavenly state.

***What unique ideas do the images (city and bride) suggest about the Christian life? To what common reality do both images point?***

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### **KEY DOCTRINE: *The Kingdom***

The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.



## GOD'S PRESENCE CELEBRATED (REV. 21:3-4)

### VERSE 3

**<sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.**

Next John heard a loud voice from the throne declaring that ***God’s dwelling place is now among the people***. In Revelation, when a voice was heard it was usually either one of the elders or living creatures, or an angel speaking. Here it appears to be God Himself who declares from His throne the wonderful news that His dwelling is with His people. The word for ***dwelling place*** calls to mind the sanctuary God gave the Israelites for their journey from Sinai to the promised land (see Ex. 25:8-9). John used a verbal form of this word in his Gospel to declare that the Word became flesh and dwelled (tabernacled) among us (see John 1:14). When all things are made new at the consummation of history, God and His people will be united forever.

The prospect of God dwelling with His people in this way would have been unimaginable to many people in John’s day. The false gods worshiped by the Greeks were believed to be aloof, and their dwelling places were unattainable by mortals. To the Jews, God’s holiness formed an impenetrable barrier between God and people. The blood of sacrifices was constantly needed to repair the relationship broken by the people’s sins. However, the death of Christ opened up access to God and brought us as believers near to Him (see Heb. 10:19-22; 1 Pet. 3:18). On this side of the renewal of all things, we still “see” God indistinctly, as in a mirror. Yet John saw the day when we will see God face to face and be with Him forever (see 1 Cor. 12:12).

At the renewal of all things, another promise made and reaffirmed throughout Scripture will be fulfilled. God promised Israel under the old covenant that they would be His people, and He would be their God (see Ex. 6:7; Lev. 26:12). God maintained this promise under the new covenant (see 2 Cor. 6:16). It stressed God’s personal identification with His covenant people and His desire that they would know Him in a personal way. While we are able to know God through His Spirit dwelling in us, there are aspects of this promise that are yet to be fulfilled.

#### VERSE 4

**4 ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’**

The promises in verse 4 are some of the most cherished in the Scriptures. They reveal the tenderness of God’s care for His people. God promised to **wipe every tear** from His people’s eyes. The tender picture evokes the love of a father for his hurting child, or of a husband who tenderly cares for his wife. Our tears of sorrow move God with compassion.

Also **death**, the great enemy and equalizer of every person, will no longer exist. Never again will people fear disease, aging, violence, war, or other things that threaten to end our lives. Death will be swallowed up in victory (see 1 Cor. 15:54)! Grief, crying, and pain will no longer exist. These are things we experience in a fallen world under the old order of things. When all things are made new, the heartaches of life will be forgotten (see Rom. 8:18).

***How would you describe the relationship between the presence of God and the absence of tears, death, and pain?***

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#### THE PROMISE FULFILLED (REV. 21:5-7)

#### VERSE 5

**5 He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”**

The next words that John heard coming from the throne declared a fulfilled promise. God was making everything new. These words must have echoed across the universe. There is joy and excitement in God’s voice. That God invited everyone to look with Him indicates His desire to share His joy with others.

God assured John that what had been revealed to the exiled apostle was **trustworthy and true**. This statement tells us something about the importance of Scripture and how God inspired



it. God did not give John a vision and leave it to be spread only by human memory and word of mouth. God wanted it written down. Having God's Word in writing ensures its preservation and trustworthiness. God's written Word serves as the objective standard for faith and life in every generation.

Notice also that God used John in the process of revealing His Word. God did not set aside John's mind when He told John to write down the Book of Revelation. In other words, God worked through His people and utilized the methods of writing common at the time to produce His written Word. We learn in other places that all Scripture is God-breathed (see 2 Tim. 3:16) and that the people of God who wrote Scripture spoke from God (see 2 Pet. 1:21). In His sovereignty, God made sure that what was written was exactly what He wanted said. For this reason, we can be absolutely confident that His Word is trustworthy and true (see Ps. 19:7-11; John 17:17).

#### VERSE 6

**<sup>6</sup> He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life."**

The next promise fulfilled is contained in the words, "***It is done!***" The reason God could say this, even though these events were still in John's future (and ours), is that God is ***the •Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.*** Using the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet, God said that He rules history past, present, and future. God is from everlasting to everlasting (see Ps. 90:2). He makes known the end from the beginning (see Isa. 46:10). We cannot see the future, but the eternal, Sovereign God reigns before, above, during, and beyond history. He can speak of our future because He's already there!

This is one of the most encouraging truths in Scripture for believers who are enduring difficult times. We can rest in the confidence that God already reigns in the future, just as He does in our current situations. He will write the conclusion to our history.

God declared the fulfillment of yet another promise in 12:6b. He promised to give ***water*** from ***the spring ... of life*** to those who are thirsty. God often compared Himself to a fountain of water for His people (see Jer. 2:13). During the Israelites' time of living in the wilderness, God allowed Moses to obtain flowing water from a

rock—a foreshadowing of Christ’s giving the water of life (see Ex. 17:1-6; 1 Cor. 10:4). Jesus offered the woman at the well in Samaria water that would satisfy her soul (see John 4:13-14; compare John 7:37-38). Notice that in Revelation 12:6b God promised to give living water to the thirsty. The “thirsty ones” are those who recognize their desperate, needy condition and cry out for the Savior (see Matt. 5:6).

**BIBLE SKILL:** *Analyze the imagery in a passage and discover what it communicates.*

John was given four picturesque images in Revelation 21:1-7: a bride adorned for her husband; tears being wiped from people’s eyes; the thirsty receiving the gift of living water; and God adopting believers as His children.

What emotions are carried by each image? How does each image compliment the others? What do these images communicate to you about the believer’s future dwelling with God in heaven? What picture do you find the most appealing? Why?

**VERSE 7**

**<sup>7</sup> Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.**

In verse 7, two more promises are affirmed as fulfilled. First, **those who are victorious** will inherit everything that God promised in Revelation 20:1-6. The victor is the person who perseveres in faith, even amidst suffering and possible martyrdom. Our confidence as believers is that in Christ we are already more than conquerors (see Rom. 8:37). We rest everything in God, who is always in control.

The second promise fulfilled is the assurance that the covenant relationship between God and His people will never be broken. Using the language of covenant means that in Christ, God does more than rescue us from danger. He also adopts us into His family. We become His children (see John 1:12), with Jesus as our Lord and Brother (see Rom. 8:29). We experience this by faith now, but when all things are



made new, the meaning and magnitude of our adoption into God's family will be fully realized.

***How could you use the image of thirst to explain a person's need for Christ? How would you explain how Christ provides the solution for our spiritual thirst?***

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## IN MY CONTEXT

While we deal at present with physical pain, emotional turmoil, and the sorrow of losing loved ones, we can be strengthened by the fact that one day all these tribulations will be gone. The promise of a new heaven and earth are a source of hope and joy for the believer.

***What situations are you currently facing in which your identity as a follower of Christ might evoke opposition or hostility? Take time this week to pray the promises of God in Revelation 21:1-7 and submit those situations to His care.***

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***When you consider the strife around you in the world, how do the promises in Revelation 21:1-7 generate hope for the future? Identify a neighbor with whom you can share this hope this week.***

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***How can your Bible study group be agents of hope in your circles of influence in the coming week? Commit to take one action as a group to demonstrate hope to one person known by a group member.***

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## MEMORY VERSE

Revelation 21:3

away, because,<sup>6</sup> to their own harm crucifying the Son of God and holding him to contempt. <sup>7</sup> For ground that has rain that has often fallen on it, and that has vegetation useful to those it is cultivated receives a blessing from God. <sup>8</sup> But if it has thorns and thistles, it is worthless and will be cursed, and will be burned at the end of the age. <sup>9</sup> Even though we are speaking this to you as friends, in your case we are confident that God will do whatever things connected with salvation. He is not unjust; He will not forget your love<sup>c</sup> you showed for His name when you served the saints—and you continued to serve them. <sup>11</sup> Now we want each of you to demonstrate the same diligence for the final goal of your hope, <sup>12</sup> so that you won't be like those who inherit the promise without imitators of those who inherit it through faith and perseverance.

*Inheriting the Promise*

<sup>13</sup> For when God made



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# THE CITIES OF REVELATION

By George W. Knight

»» The seven cities mentioned in Revelation 2–3 were located in the western part of Asia Minor (in what today is western Turkey). At the end of the first century A.D., each was a place of importance and was the site of a young Christian congregation. Located on a major trade route, these cities were in easy reach of each other.

## EPHESUS

The city was founded in a prime location on the western coast near a gulf on the Aegean Sea close to the mouth of the Cayster River in a hilly valley. The main roadway that led to the east began in Ephesus. Because of its location, Ephesus grew to be the largest trade center in Asia.

Ephesus served as the capital of the province and prospered as a business, religious, government, and education center. A major feature of the city that played a role in early Christianity was the temple of Diana, known to the Greeks as Artemis. This temple was known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

## SMYRNA

Smyrna was located on the western coast north of Ephesus. It was situated on a major highway leading from Ephesus north and was the beginning of a major roadway leading east. Its location gave it many advantages because of the fertile farmland nearby, its access to trade by sea, and easy travel and commerce.

Smyrna became the first city of Asia Minor to establish a temple to the goddess Roma. This favorable relationship with Rome brought a “free city” status. The imperial cult had a long and continuous history here. Smyrna also had a large Jewish community that was actively opposed to the Church.

## PERGAMUM

The northernmost of the seven cities, Pergamum was located about 15 miles from the Aegean coast. The city was founded on a hill 1,300 feet high. This location made the city secure when fortified, leading to the city’s name, a Greek word for

“fortress.” It became one of the most important centers for the imperial cult and also boasted of a great and ancient temple of Asklepios, the god of healing.

### THYATIRA

Thyatira was situated in the Lycus River Valley on the road between Pergamum and Sardis. It was known as a city of trade guilds led by wool and linen merchants, supported by dyers. In the New Testament, Thyatira was named the home of Lydia, the dealer of purple in Acts 16:14.

### SARDIS

Sardis was the ancient capital of the kingdom of Lydia. The city was divided with the acropolis heavily fortified on the side of Mount Tmolus and the walled lower city below. It became best known in ancient history as the city of King Croesus. In A.D. 17, Sardis was severely damaged by an earthquake, but was rebuilt with the financial assistance of emperor Tiberius. It was a city of power, wealth, and influence.

### PHILADELPHIA

The ancient city of Philadelphia stood on the river Cogamus. It was a fertile, productive farming area yielding many crops, including grapes used for wine. Its location

made it a center of communication and business. Yet the city was frequently damaged by earthquakes and was almost destroyed by the great quake of A.D. 17.

### LAODICEA

The southernmost of the seven cities was located on the Lycus River at the junction of the highway from Ephesus on the west and from Philadelphia to the north. Situated on a fertile plateau above the river, Laodicea was about 10 miles west of Colossae and 6 miles south of Hierapolis. The area was well-known for a magnificent black wool used for garments as well as carpets. Another source of income was the medical community, where special medicines were made for eye and ear diseases. The city's commerce led to its becoming a financial and banking center. The city's water supply came from a spring six miles away and was transported by a stone aqueduct. When compared to the wonderful cold spring water of Colossae and the therapeutic hot water of Hierapolis, Laodicea's tepid water was considered inferior and was perhaps the city's one weakness.

This article is adapted from an article that appeared in the Winter 1999-2000 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. At the time of first publication, George W. Knight was Cook-Derrick Professor of New Testament and Greek at Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene, Texas.



# COMING NEXT QUARTER

## GENESIS (PART 1)

- Session 1**    **God Creates** > *Genesis 1:1-5,26-31; 2:1-3*
- Session 2**    **Made in His Image** > *Genesis 2:4-9,15-18*
- Session 3**    **Humanity's Fall** > *Genesis 3:1-7,14-19*
- Session 4**    **God Saves** > *Genesis 6:11-18; 7:11-14*
- Session 5**    **A Fresh Start** > *Genesis 8:15-22; 9:1,11-16*
- Session 6**    **Scattered!** > *Genesis 11:1-9*
- Session 7**    **When God Calls** > *Genesis 12:1-9*
- Session 8**    **Waiting for the Promise** > *Genesis 15:1-7,13-16*
- Session 9**    **A New Name** > *Genesis 17:1-8,15-22*
- Session 10**    **Where Wickedness Rules** > *Genesis 18:20-25; 19:12-16*
- Session 11**    **Keeping His Promise** > *Genesis 21:1-8*
- Session 12**    **The Faith Test** > *Genesis 22:1-14*
- Session 13**    **God Provides** > *Genesis 24:1-17*

# MEMORY VERSES

1

»» We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. —1 John 1:3a

2

»» If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. —1 John 1:9

3

»» Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. —1 John 2:15

4

»» This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. —1 John 4:2-3a

5

»» This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. —1 John 3:16

6

»» Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. —1 John 5:4

7

»» "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." —Revelation 1:8

# MEMORY VERSES

8

»» Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. —*Revelation 3:22*

9

»» Day and night they never stop saying: “‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,’ who was, and is, and is to come.” —*Revelation 4:8b*

10

»» In a loud voice they were saying: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” —*Revelation 5:12*

11

»» And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” —*Revelation 7:10*

12

»» They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. —*Revelation 12:11*

13

»» And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. —*Revelation 21:3*

# Churches of the Revelation



John writes 1, 2, and 3 John while at Ephesus

John writes Revelation encouraging Christians to remain faithful

# 1,2,3 John; Revelation

He loved to fish. He, along with his father and brother, made a living doing what they loved. A good living. Then one day Jesus of Nazareth stepped onto the shores of Lake Galilee and into the life of John Ben Zebedee. Jesus called out, "Come! Follow Me!" John leaped from the boat, splashed ashore, and was never the same again. He still fished. But now he cast the gospel net, drawing people to Jesus Christ, where they could find eternal life in Him.

John gave the remainder of his long life to proclaiming the gospel, building up churches in the truth, and writing Holy Scripture. In addition to the Fourth Gospel, he wrote three epistles, or letters, warning believers about false teachers. Then while exiled for the faith on a small, barren island, John wrote Revelation, a vision of Christ's return and complete victory over evil.



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