

That You May Know

Today In Your Reading...

We read the first half of the first letter of John, one of the disciples of Christ. The key to understanding John's letter is found in the second half which we will read tomorrow — "I write this to you who believe in the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life" (5:13). John met the deceptions of false teachers and converts in his day and helped genuine believers discern the truth. One way he developed discernment in his readers was that he provided certain "tests" that enabled them to identify true and false converts. These tests are still helpful today, as many people claim to be Christian and yet they believe and live in ways that are inconsistent with the message and example of Christ. Let's consider some of these traits.

First, **one cannot be a follower of Christ and deny the existence of sin in his life.** "If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that His Word has no place in our hearts" (1:5-10).

Second, **obedience to Christ is evidence of salvation.** "If someone says, 'I belong to God,' but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and does not live in the truth. Those who obey God's Word really do love Him. That is the way to know whether or not we live in Him" (2:3-6).

Third, **followers of Christ are obvious by the love they have for people.** "If anyone says 'I'm living in the light' but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is still living in darkness" (2:7-11; 3:11-18).

Fourth, **those who are redeemed will show signs of resistance to the world.** "Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers; for when you love the world, you show that you do not have the love of the Father in you" (2:15-17).

Fifth, **those who deny the claims of Christ make God out to be a liar.** "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God. Those who don't believe this are actually calling God a liar..." (5:1-12).

Sixth, **those who are truly saved will not exhibit a pattern of sin in their lives.** "We know that those who have become part of God's family do not make a practice of sinning" (5:18-20).

Daily Reflection

These "tests," of course, are not exhaustive. There are more ways to tell if someone is saved, but John gave us a place to start. Can you think of anything that you would add to the list?

Which "test" is most helpful? Explain why.

What precautions should you use when trying to determine one's salvation?

Take a minute to evaluate your own life based on John's tests. Would others be able to identify you as a genuine follower of Christ?

Deceivers and Unbelievers

December 25 — 1 John 4:7-5:21; 2, 3 John

Day 359 — 6 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We managed to finish John's first letter as well as read his second and third letters. Since we focused on John's first letter yesterday, I'd like to turn our attention to his other letters today.

In his second letter, John commended the "chosen lady" on the fact that her children walked in truth, meaning that they were obvious believers by the things that they said and did. He then followed his commendation with a warning, "**Many deceivers have gone out into the world.** They do not believe that Jesus Christ came to earth in a real body. Such a person is a deceiver and an antichrist... Don't invite him into your house or encourage him in any way. Anyone who encourages him becomes a partner in his evil work" (7, 10, 11).

It is important to note here that *John was not instructing Christians to avoid unbelievers.*

Deceivers are not the same as unbelievers.

We are commanded by Christ to go into all the world and make disciples, to befriend unbelievers and lead them to Jesus. However, we are to avoid deceivers.

Deceivers are those who propose a different "gospel," a different way to be saved. A false gospel is one that does not hold that Jesus was the God-man (i.e. Gnosticism, Islam, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.). John calls proponents of false gospels "deceivers and antichrists," those who go too far, and warns his readers not to extend hospitality to them. **Deceivers are not seekers looking to come to God; they are liars looking to lead people away from God.**

In John's third letter, he highlighted three men — the godly Gaius, the devilish Diotrephes, and the devout Demetrius. Gaius and Demetrius exhibited a lifestyle that was commendable, but

Diotrephes exhibited a lifestyle that was deplorable. John exposed him as a church tyrant; his dictatorial control over that local body was hindering the gospel.

Daily Reflection

Have you ever read a book, listened to a preacher, followed a person, or believed in a doctrine that was deceiving? It was clearly out of line with the truths of God's Word but you didn't notice it at first? Explain.

We know that those who are truly saved cannot lose their salvation, so then what do you suppose John meant by writing, "Watch out so that you do not lose the prize for which we have been working so hard. Be diligent so that you will receive your full reward. For if you wander beyond the teaching of Christ, you will not have fellowship with God" (2 John 8, 9).

The Church is not exempt from troublemakers, dictators, or bullies. Proudful people, who must be the center of attention and who must control everyone around them, damage the effectiveness of the gospel and hamstring a church's ability to minister to the community. It is vital to confront such people before they cause irreparable harm.

To the Victorious...

Today In Your Reading...

We were alerted once again of false teachers, this time by Jude, the brother and servant of Christ. He challenged his readers to “defend the truth of the Good News, because godless people have wormed their way in...” (3, 4). Jude’s counsel was to “continue to build your lives on the foundation of your holy faith, to pray as you are directed by the Holy Spirit, to live in such a way that God’s love can bless you, and to show mercy to those who are wavering” (20-23).

The second half of our passage today was John retelling of “everything he saw” of the revelation of Jesus Christ while on the island of Patmos. Not only was he allowed to see into heaven and behold many wondrous things, he was given messages for the churches in Asia Minor, as well as glimpses of events in the future. While these things are difficult to interpret and understand, “God blesses the one who reads them, listens to them, and obeys them” (Revelation 1:3).

The Lord’s messages to the seven churches have been interpreted by scholars in three ways, as messages meant for each individual church for that time, as descriptions of issues that every local body of believers faces, and, finally, as depictions of distinct eras in Church history. For example, as William McDonald suggests, the message to Ephesus describes the first century, as the Church was just getting started. The message to Smyrna describes the first to fourth centuries, when Christians experienced Roman persecution. The message to Pergamum describes the fourth and fifth centuries, when Christianity became the official religion of the Empire. The message to Thyatira describes the sixth to fifteenth centuries, when the Roman Catholic Church dominated the Western world. The message to Sardis describes the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries after the Reformation. The message to Philadelphia describes

the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the great revival and missionary movements. Finally, the message to Laodicea describes the modern era, in which the Western Church is apathetic and corrupted in its doctrines, practices, and associations.

Daily Reflection

Whatever the correct interpretation of these letters to the churches, one thing is true — *we are battling the same issues today*. Which letter, so far, describes your church best? Explain why.

Did you notice that, at the end of each letter, Christ promised something to **“everyone who is victorious.”** What were they?

“Everyone who is victorious” refers to those faithful followers of Christ who fight through the challenges that face the Church. **God rewards faithfulness!** What challenges are facing your church? How can you be used of God to battle through them and gain victory over them?

Worth-ship

December 27 — Revelation 3:1-6:17

Day 361 — 4 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We entered a definite transition period in John's vision (between *Revelation 3, 4*), turning from the messages to the seven churches to "what must happen after these things" (4:1). John got a glimpse of the Lamb of God opening a scroll with seven seals, events which mark the beginning of the end of life on earth, the wrath of God poured out in judgment for the sins of men.

It is interesting to note the two names for our Lord in this vision — **the Lamb of God** (5:6, 12) and **the Lion of Judah** (5:5). The Lamb had been sent by God to be sacrificed for the sins of the world (*John 1:29, 36*). By doing so, He earned the name that is above every name, that at His name every knee will bow and every mouth will confess that Jesus is Lord of all (*Philippians 2:9-11*). Because of His sacrifice as the Lamb, Christ is seated at the right hand of God and given authority to rule over all the earth. He will put all things in subjection under His feet (*Ephesians 1:20-23*). In other words, **Christ's role as the Lamb**, at His first coming, **earned Him the reign as the Lion** at His second coming. His assignment now is not to save the world from sin but to judge the world because of sin. Therefore, He opened the scroll.

As these things unfold, John witnessed an incredible worship service in heaven. To the One seated on the throne, the four living creatures repeatedly said, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, the One who always was, who is, and who is still to come" (4:6-8). Likewise, the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped. As they laid their crowns before the throne, they said, "**You are worthy**, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created everything, and it is for Your pleasure that they exist..." (v.9-11).

Then, as the Lamb took the scroll, everyone began to sing, "You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it. For You were killed and Your blood has ransomed people for God" (5:9, 10). Finally, every creature in heaven and on earth, including millions of angels, joined in a chorus. "**The Lamb is worthy**, the Lamb who was killed. He is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing" (v.11-14). What an incredible scene!

Daily Reflection

To worship means "to adore, to pay divine honors to, to reverence with supreme respect and veneration" (*Webster's 1828 Dictionary*). Literally, worship is "worth-ship," that someone is deserving of such high praise. **No one is more worthy of your praise** than the One who bore your shame on the cross and paid the penalty for your sins. Because of His sacrifice, you are free from the judgment and wrath of God. Though you will one day worship Him in person, you can begin by worshiping Him now.

What are some ways that you can worship the Lamb of God today? What do you have to offer Him that is worthy of all that He has done?

Whatever you endure on earth for His sake, He is worth it! Whatever He asks for you to do, He is worth it! **Because of what He did for you, He is worth all that you do for Him** and more. Praise the Lord! He is worth your worship!

The Wrath of God

Today In Your Reading...

We watched with John as the Lamb of God broke the last of the seven seals, which introduced seven angels who were given seven trumpets (Is there something special about sevens?); and when these trumpets were sounded, all manner of death and destruction unfolded, from hail and fire to volcanoes and earthquakes, from falling stars to the bottomless pit, from long-haired locusts that sting like scorpions to 200 million troops riding into battle! At one point in there, I thought I was observing a scene from a “Lord of the Rings” book!

One thing is quite clear — *bad things are happening*. In fact, John wrote, “In those days people will seek death but will not find it. They will long to die but death will flee away” (9:6). What is going on here? It appears that the wrath of God is being poured out on the earth for the multiple generations of wickedness and sin. “God will wait no longer! His mysterious plan will be fulfilled. It will happen just as He announced to His servants the prophets” (10:6, 7).

Wait a minute. Isn’t God full of love and mercy and long-suffering? Why is He punishing these poor innocent people? Why is He destroying the earth? Aren’t these acts descriptive of a God of hate and madness? Where is the New Testament God of peace, joy, and kindness?

Daily Reflection

You may have heard similar questions when the critics of Christianity balk at scenes like these. How would you answer them?

While God is, indeed, characterized by the aforementioned traits, He is also characterized by traits that some people would rather overlook, such as righteousness, justice, and wrath. In the English language, we separate the words righteousness and justice, but in the languages of the Bible (Hebrew and Greek), these two words are one. They go hand in hand. **God always does what is right and just; He never acts against His moral character.**

Apply these qualities to a judge in a court of law. We should expect that a good judge will do what is right and just, meaning that he would be impartial and give what is due to those who break the law. **A good judge would not allow law-breakers to go unpunished.** Is God not a good Judge? Should He allow wicked men to go unpunished?

God hates all sin and, therefore, **His nature requires Him to punish all sinners**. Imagine if God did not punish sinful men. What would that say about Him? Either He takes pleasure in sin or sin does not offend Him. While many people would prefer that kind of god, that is no god at all. The God of the Bible is righteous, just, and expresses His wrath against those who disdain His law. He gives to sinners what is due them. He is a good Judge, and we should be thankful when He demonstrates His wrath.

When would you be right to demonstrate the same type of wrath in your life? At what point would your wrath become sinful?

The Woman and the Dragon

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December 29 — Revelation 11:1-14:20

Day 363 — 2 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We dove deep into a great deal of imagery and symbolism, describing the events surrounding the future attack and deliverance of God's people, the Jews. While the details can be overwhelming, the story is quite simple. Satan is given unprecedented control over the people of the earth, whom he uses to rally against the people of God. However, the Lord Jesus rescues them with a great victory over their enemies.

Israel is pictured in the story as the **Pregnant Woman**, who has a crown of twelve stars. "She cried out in the pain of labor as she awaited her delivery" (12:1, 2), meaning that she waited a long time for the promised Messiah to come. She finally gave birth to the Savior, "the boy who was to rule all nations with an iron rod. He was snatched away and caught up to God and to His throne" (v.5).

The large red **Dragon**, of course, is Satan. "There was a war in heaven. Michael and the angels fought the Dragon and his angels; and the Dragon lost the battle and was forced out of heaven. This great Dragon, the ancient serpent called the Devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world, was thrown down to the earth..." (v.7-9). After falling to the earth, the Dragon waged war against the Woman, "all who kept God's commandments and confessed that they belonged to Jesus" (v.17).

The **Beast** rising up out of the sea refers to the one-world government that will rule the earth in the end times. "The Dragon gave him his power and throne and great authority. He was allowed to rule over every tribe and people and language and nation" (13:2, 7). The second Beast refers to the **False Prophet** who is to come. "He will require all the earth and those who belong to this world to worship the first beast. He also required everyone to be marked" (v.12, 16-18).

As war rages against God's people, the **Son of Man**, Jesus Himself, appears carrying a sickle, "for the time has come for Him to harvest; the crop is ripe on the earth" (14:15). So the Son of Man will swing His sickle and the whole earth will be harvested. "The grapes will be trodden in the winepress outside the city and the blood will flow from the winepress in a stream 180 miles long and as high as a horse's bridle" (v.16, 20). Here is described the final battle between the Lord and His enemies at **Armageddon**.

Daily Reflection

What can we possibly apply from these scary scenes? First, **they are part of the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15**, the first prophecy about this battle. Remember, God told the serpent in the Garden, "I will cause hostility between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

Second, **God is sovereign**. Though it may seem that chaos reigns on the earth, **God is in control**. His plan will unfold just as He willed from the beginning. Nothing will happen that He has not already ordained. All will occur in His timing and in His way. We can rest in the knowledge that God is sovereign.

Third, **God is faithful**. He will complete all that He has promised. Though His people have been devastated over the ages, He will win in the end. His enemy will be vanquished and His people will be avenged! Be glad you are on His side.

Where will you be in the midst of these things?

Babylon Has Fallen

Today In Your Reading...

We witnessed the rise and fall of the Great Prostitute and the city of Babylon. What you may not realize is that the Bible has come full circle. It is ending the way that it began. What do I mean?

Let's go back to the start. Shortly after the Great Flood, the Lord told Noah and his sons to "multiply and fill the earth" (*Genesis 9:1*). In other words, God was telling them to spread out, to disperse. However, a mighty warrior named Nimrod refused this command and, instead, established an empire. "He built the foundation of his empire in the land of Babylonia" (*10:9, 10*).

Eventually, Nimrod convinced everyone to live together, to disregard God's command. "As the people migrated eastward, they found a plain in the land of Babylonia and settled there..." Soon they said, "Let's build a great city with a tower that reaches to the skies, a monument to our greatness. This will bring us together and keep us from scattering all over the world" (*11:1-4*). Of course, the Lord would have to divide the languages and enforce His command.

The incident at the Tower of Babel was **the first attempt of Satan's to centralize all of mankind under one ruler**. If he had his way, every nation would surrender its independence and sovereignty and yield itself to the will of an all-powerful ruler or governing body, so that he could have complete control of every man, woman, and child on earth.

Though God has hindered Satan's globalist plans by separating the languages, **the enemy has done his best to capture all nations under his rule**. Consider the pattern of empires in man's history and the pervasive desire that our leaders have to obtain global power and subject all nations to their control.

The emphasis to create a New World Order in our time is just Satan's old strategy in a new guise. Whether it hides behind the mask of the United Nations, the European Union, or some other international coalition, he is still attempting a hostile take-over of the world's great nations. Thus, we can see a clear trend today to establish a one-world government, a one-world economy, and a one-world religion.

While these particular phrases may not be used in Scripture, **the prophecies are clear that a global system of government, currency, and worship will take place** (*Daniel 2:41, 42; 7:16-24; Revelation 13:1-4*). Even in our passage today, the hints were not subtle. "This woman you saw represents the great city that rules over the kings of the earth. The waters where the prostitute is sitting represents people of every nation and language" (*17:15, 18*).

Daily Reflection

What signs can you identify that a one-world government, economy, and religion are coming?

Should God's people give into or resist the movement towards a one-world government? Explain your answer.

Can these things take place while Christians are here on the earth or will we depart first?

The Beginning and the End

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December 31 — *Revelation 19:1-22:21*

Day 365 — The End!

Today In Your Reading...

We closed John's book of *Revelation* and with that we closed the Bible. The Lord Jesus, who existed before time and who started this story in *Genesis*, is the One who writes the final chapter. He describes Himself by saying, "**I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End**" (22:12).

After the wrath of God has been poured out on the earth and all things are devastated or destroyed, the One sitting on the throne says, "Look, I am making all things new" (21:5). The storyline of history comes to a close, and the characters, conflicts, plots, and problems that were introduced in the beginning (*Genesis*) are brought to completion in the end (*Revelation*).

For example (as William McDonald points out in his excellent commentary), in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, but in the end God destroys and replaces them with a new heavens and new earth (21:1). In the beginning, sin and death are introduced, but in the end, sin is eradicated and death is banished (21:4, 27). In *Genesis*, creation was cursed; in *Revelation*, the cursed is removed (22:3). Satan began his reign in the beginning, but, in the end, both he and all his cohorts will be cast in the Lake of Fire (20:10). In *Genesis*, man was removed from Paradise (Eden) and his access to the Tree of Life was denied; in *Revelation*, man is welcomed back to Paradise (heaven) and given access to the Tree of Life forever (22:1-7, 19). Finally, at the beginning, we witnessed the first marriage (the First Adam), but at the end, we will witness the last marriage, the Marriage of the Lamb (Second Adam, 19:7).

Another event that we should notice is the final judgment of the dead, great and small, at the throne of God (20:11-15). Just as God kept Adam and Eve accountable to their sin in the Gar-

den of Eden, so also will He keep all men accountable for their sins. No one will escape. "They will be judged according to the things written in the books (of sin), according to what they had done... and anyone's name who is not found in the Book of Life (none of these will be found there) will be thrown into the Lake of Fire.

Daily Reflection

Praise God, you and I will not be standing in line at this judgment. Those who have given their lives to Christ will have their names written in the Book of Life and will escape this final judgment. Instead, we will be enjoying the wedding feast of the Lamb (19:6-9). **We will be with Christ!** We will be part of the "vast crowd in heaven shouting, 'Hallelujah! Salvation is from our God. Glory and power belong to Him alone. His judgments are just and true'" (19:1, 2).

While all of these things sound surreal, too difficult to imagine, much less believe, we must remember who it is that gave John these insights — Jesus Himself. They are part of God's Word, and we hold God's Word as authoritative and true because of the trustworthiness of the Author. *God is not a man; He cannot lie.* All that He has said is true and will be fulfilled.

How are you supposed to reconcile these visions of John with everyday life? How should your knowledge of the end affect how you live now?

After all that we have read this year, and after all that has transpired just in our lifetime, I hope you will join me in saying, "**Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly!**"

Congratulations! Now What?

You Did It! — *Way to Go*

Well Done!

If you truly finished the *One Year Chronological Bible* and *Daily Reflections*, you are part of a rare breed. Pat yourself on the back, because **you have read the Bible cover to cover!** That is a remarkable achievement! I am impressed and you are to be congratulated. I applaud your courage and diligence; and, I trust that God has blessed your time and efforts in His Word.

What is something new or fresh that God taught or reminded you about Himself this year?

What were some things that God taught you about yourself this year?

How would you describe your discipline with finding time to read each day — swimming nicely, treading water, or drowning? Explain.

Describe your experience with the *Chronological Bible* and *Daily Reflections*. Would you recommend them to someone? Why or why not?

The big question after finishing a huge endeavor like this one is **“What should you do next?”** Perhaps you could go back and take your time reading and studying a part that you would like to know more about. You could start another devotional or Bible study, or you could start over and read through the Bible in a year again!

Whatever you do, **don't lose the momentum** that you have right now. The enemy wants to see you get away from God's Word. No matter what you decide to do next, make sure to stay in the Bible and become a student of Scripture!

I Would Like to Hear from You

Please let me know that you completed the *One Year Bible* and *Daily Reflections*. I want to know you made it! Please email me at this address — **aferguson@biay.org**.

I Need Your Help

I am always looking for ways to improve this devotional; and, now that you are one of the victors, no one is more able than you to provide me with helpful feedback. You can either email me at the address above or visit my website — **BiAY.org** — and leave feedback there. Please let me know how to make this experience better for the next Bible student.