

ADVANCED

Bible Study



THE DARK SIDE

SECOND NATURE: CHOOSING CHRIST-CENTERED LIVING IN A SELF-CENTERED WORLD

Fall 2017

HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN

You're Invited

We all love getting an invitation. Whether it's receiving a card in the mail inviting us to an event or a phone call inviting us to meet friends for dinner, we like being included. Many of us have experienced the opposite, as well—not being included when your friends or family received an invitation to a special gathering. In those moments, we feel excluded. Left out.

An invitation waits for all of us that may seem surprising. God invites us to be a part of His family. We don't deserve this invitation; after all, we've sinned and rebelled against God, and only those without sin can be a part of His family.

Yet Jesus made it possible for us to accept this invitation. He died on the cross, taking our sin upon Himself so that we could be forgiven. Jesus also rose from the dead, making a new, eternal life possible for us.

As the Bible says: "God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). And: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (10:9).

God is waiting for you to respond to His invitation. If you would like to have a new life in Christ, repent of your sins and put your faith in Him. Admit to God that you are a sinner and ask Him to forgive you. Turn from the sin that has kept you from God and accept Jesus' gift of forgiveness. Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Express your repentance and faith by praying something like this:

"Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died on the cross to forgive me of my sins. I'm sorry for all the wrong I've done and ask You to forgive me. I now accept Your gift of eternal life. Thank You for Your love, forgiveness, and a new life in Jesus Christ. From this day forward, I choose to follow You. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Share your decision to follow Jesus with a pastor or those in your Bible study group. Get involved in a church that will help you grow in your faith. Be baptized as an expression of your faith.

THE DARK SIDE

Suggested use date:

September 3	<i>Session 1</i>	Satan <i>Revelation 12:7-12</i>	7
September 10	<i>Session 2</i>	Demons <i>Mark 9:17-29</i>	20
September 17	<i>Session 3</i>	The Paranormal <i>Deuteronomy 18:9-18</i>	33
September 24	<i>Session 4</i>	Fear Not! <i>1 John 4:1-6</i>	46
October 1	<i>Session 5</i>	Battle Armor <i>Ephesians 6:10-20</i>	59
October 8	<i>Session 6</i>	Battle Plan <i>Matthew 4:1-10</i>	72

SECOND NATURE

October 15	<i>Session 1</i>	Caleb <i>Numbers 13:26-30; 14:6-10,21-24</i>	86
October 22	<i>Session 2</i>	Solomon <i>1 Kings 3:3-14; 4:29-34</i>	99
October 29	<i>Session 3</i>	Ruth <i>Ruth 1:8-17</i>	112
November 5	<i>Session 4</i>	Barnabas <i>Acts 4:36-37; 9:26-27; 11:19-26</i>	125
November 12	<i>Session 5</i>	John <i>John 1:26-34; 3:26-30</i>	138
November 19	<i>Session 6</i>	Hannah <i>1 Samuel 1:9-11,17-18,26-28; 2:1-3</i>	151
November 26	<i>Session 7</i>	Andrew <i>John 1:35-42; 12:20-26</i>	164

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BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

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The Dark Side

Why This Study Is Important:

Satan employs two strategies. He wants us to either ignore him—even deny his existence—or he want us to be immobilized because we fear him. Satan is real and he is powerful. The presence of evil throughout our world attests to that. But we should not lose sight of an even greater truth: Jesus is greater—and He is victorious! As followers of Christ, it is essential that we know who battles against us, but we should also rest in the truth that Satan has been defeated by Christ. There is a dark side, but the light of Christ has overcome the darkness.

This study will remind us that God's Word is powerful and helps us stand against evil, temptation, and the attacks of the evil one. We'll see that to overcome evil in our lives we must die to self and follow Christ completely. Moreover, we must trust Christ to work on our behalf, knowing that He empowers us to live boldly—even in the face of opposition.

Since we need to know what we're up against before we consider how we fight it, sessions 1-3 will focus on who and what comes against us. After three weeks of focusing on the enemy, we will explore the truth that we are victorious in Christ. Finally, sessions 5 and 6 will show us what we have in Christ to combat the enemy, followed by some strategies to employ in the battle.

SESSION 1

SATAN

THE PASSAGE

Revelation 12:7-12

THE POINT

Satan fights against us, but we can stand in Christ.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Most people are interested in the future and, based on best-selling books, the end of the world. Hal Lindsay's book *The Late, Great Planet Earth* (1970) was a huge bestseller and even had a feature-length film based on it (1979). Lindsay's book, despite some fanciful interpretations and predictions, has sold roughly twenty million copies since its release and spurred an enormous "future end-times" focus in churches and in culture. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins released the "Left Behind" series of twelve books focusing on the same theme—the future and the end of the world. It, too, sold millions of copies worldwide and was accompanied by a series of films. Despite their flaws, these books captured people's interest in the future and gave some a reason to hope.

We all want to know what will happen in the end. Christians share this concern because the Scriptures reveal the true story of the whole world, including the future. The Bible tells us what has happened, what is happening now, and what will happen in the future. It doesn't always give us all the details we would like, but it does show us the victory of God in Jesus Christ, the defeat of evil, and the renewal of all things. This three-step pattern is the heartbeat of the Christian's future hope. And that hope means that evil will not win the day. The Book of Revelation tells us that God defeats Satan through His Son, Jesus. If we look for what will happen in the end, we will hear the Scriptures testify to triumph in Jesus and the renewal of the world. This is the great story that Revelation tells.

THE SETTING

The Book of Revelation emerges out of a time of conflict. The early Christian community who followed Jesus were faithful, but aging. They had faithfully proclaimed Jesus to the world while frequently undergoing great trials and persecution. New believers experienced the radical life transformation of the gospel and committed themselves to following their Savior no matter the cost. But cost them it did.

During the period in which the Book of Revelation was written (somewhere between AD 90-95), Christians suffered under a horrific Roman emperor named Domitian. He ruled from AD 81-96 and thought of himself as a god, or at least godlike. He officially had himself named "God the Lord." He commanded that others identify him "Lord of the earth," or some other divine title. It is no wonder that Christians who professed Jesus as Lord did not prostrate themselves before Domitian. Jesus was their Lord; Domitian was not. Because

they embraced Christ and refused this false god, they experienced persecution.

From external appearances, it looked as though Rome's megalomaniac emperor would snuff out the life of the church; Domitian would win, and Jesus and His church would lose. But appearances can be deceiving. The Book of Revelation testifies that despite all testimony to the contrary, God is in control, Jesus is coming again, and Jesus' defeat of evil is without question.

The apostle John wrote this letter from the island of Patmos, a 13-square mile jumble of fertile volcanic rock just off the western coast of modern-day Turkey. He saw Jesus there and received a word of hope and encouragement that he passed on to the church.

STUDY THE BIBLE

Revelation 12:7-9

⁷ Then war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels also fought, ⁸ but he could not prevail, and there was no place for them in heaven any longer.

⁹ So the great dragon was thrown out—the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the one who deceives the whole world. He was thrown to earth, and his angels with him.

Satan Seeks to Deceive Us. Satan is “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). He wants us to think that he is more powerful than he actually is, and that we, in Christ, are weaker than we actually are. As we will see, his deceptions are empty and impotent when compared to the power of God's truth.

Revelation 12 introduces us to a battle in heaven between God and His angelic forces and Satan and his demonic hordes. War breaks out in the heavenly realm.

What is the battle about, and why did they fight? The battle, as John presented it, is about the birth of a baby: “She gave birth to a Son, a male who is going to rule all nations with an iron rod” (Rev. 12:5; Ps. 2:9). The child, of course, is none other than the Lord Jesus, the promised Messiah. The pregnant woman in 12:1-2 symbolizes God’s people. The identity of the dragon in 12:3 is revealed to be the devil in verse 9.

So, in John’s retelling, Satan opposed Jesus from the very beginning.

By bringing forward the real threat of the devil at the birth of Jesus, John showed the church that God’s plan for salvation has always been under attack. It still is today.

Sometimes Christians put on a “happy face” and pretend that things are OK in the world. John didn’t do that. He saw real evil in the real world. One of the responsibilities God has given His people is the call to face reality squarely, confident in God and His truth. We must name evil and sin in our world and not avoid the battle. When we, the church, name things as they really are—especially when they are evil, sinful, and broken—then we find strength to face opposition and suffering. The persecuted believers to whom John was writing needed to know what they were up against so they could stand firm in the strength God would provide.

John’s message of Christ’s victory offered the church great encouragement in the face of difficulty. John did not stop at naming evil; rather, he showed how evil and sin are swallowed up in the victory of God in Jesus Christ. Whether it was Jesus under threat at His birth, or the church under threat in her apparent weakness, the same devil who threatened the Savior in His most helpless state is the same devil who

threatens the church in her most vulnerable state. And although it sometimes looks as though the dragon will win, John's revelation shows that God triumphs over darkness, the devil, and all the forces of evil.

John encouraged his readers with the supreme hope that even when it seems like the church is losing ground, God is actively strengthening her and defending her against the attacks of the enemy. Note what the text says in verses 7-9. As the dragon and his angels wage war against the child, the armies of God defeat them and cast them out of heaven. The victory is assured: **He was thrown to earth, and his angels with him.** As God defended Jesus, so He will defend His church. The devil and his angels lost the battle in heaven and they are losing it on earth. While the church seems vulnerable to attack, this vulnerability opens the opportunity for God to display His power and glory for the good of His people.

So, then, the overall message of Revelation 12:7-9 is that our enemy has been defeated by the Son. Many questions remain, however. First, who is **Michael** and what are **angels** and why or how do they operate?

In the Bible, angels are quite simply messengers of God. The Hebrew word for "angel" in the Old Testament is *malak*, which is the same word for "messenger." The Greek term found in the New Testament for angel is *angelos*, normally translated "angel." Sometimes the Scriptures describes angels with other names, such as: "heavenly beings" (Pss. 29:1; 89:6), "ministering spirits" (Heb. 1:14), "holy ones" (Ps. 89:5,7; Dan. 8:13), "watchers" (Dan. 4:13,17,23), "cherubim" (Gen. 3:24; Ex. 25:18-22; Pss. 80:1; 99:1; Isa. 37:16; Rev. 4:6), and "seraphim" (Isa. 6:2-6).

From the biblical teaching, there are a few things to remember about angels. Angels are not gods; rather, they are beings that God created at the beginning. Angels sometimes appear to be humans (though they are not, as in Gen. 18), and they do not marry (Matt. 22:30). Angels are emissaries of God, His envoys, and they do His bidding. Seraphim and cherubim surround God and protect and display His holiness (Isa. 6:2-6; Pss. 18:10; 80:1; 99:1; Heb. 1:7). Angels can sometimes appear otherworldly with wings and a semblance of human form, as in the case of the seraphim (Isa. 6:2-6). In whatever ways Scripture presents them, angels do whatever God asks of them: they announce God's plans, reveal God's work, or inform God's people of divine action. They accompany God in His work and are sometimes agents of His work. Such is the case in Revelation 12.

In Revelation 12:7-9, angels comprise God's heavenly army. In the Old Testament especially, God is described as the LORD of Armies (*Yahweh Tsebaoth*), which means that He is the ruler of the angelic forces (see Isa. 6:5; 47:4). In Revelation 12:7-9, God commands His angelic armies to wage war against the devil and his armies.

Leading God's angelic army is the angel **Michael**. He is the angel who protects the people of God in the Book of Daniel (Dan. 12:1), so it is no wonder that he is the captain of the heavenly army in Revelation 12:7. Jude 1:9 describes him as an "archangel," which means that he is a high-ranking angel with significant responsibility in the heavenly order of angels: his role is to protect the people of God. So, thus far we understand those angels who serve the Lord. However, Revelation 12:7-9 also presents another set of angels who rebel against the Lord.

Who is Satan and why does he have so many names? Revelation 12:7-9 presents **the dragon and his angels** who

are cast from heaven. Who are they? These are angels that fall under the command of Satan and thus commit treason against God, their Maker. Because angels were created to serve, in their rebellion against God they began to serve Satan instead. Their rebellion is disastrous, as is Satan's. They are hurled to earth in utter ruin. Satan is described in Revelation 12:7-9 as the rival of Michael, rather than of God. This is important. Satan is not a god. He is a creature, as is Michael. He is an angelic being rather than a divine being. As such, when Satan wages war against God it is a losing battle. The likelihood of Satan defeating God and His army is the likelihood of a measly water droplet quenching the fire of the sun.

Consider the number of titles used to describe the enemy in verses 7-9: **the dragon; the great dragon; the ancient serpent; the devil and the Satan; and the one who deceives the whole world.**

A number of these terms have connections to the Old Testament. The **dragon** and **great dragon** connect back to the Old Testament prophets (Ezek. 29:3) and the Book of Psalms (Ps. 74:13-14). The image of the dragon is threatening and monstrous. Such is the reality of the enemy. He is threatening, monstrous, and terrible. Even so, we must remember that *he is not God!*

Linking the enemy with the title **the ancient serpent** is found only here, but the connection to Genesis 3 is clear. The enemy should be understood as that serpent who is the deceiver of humanity, as he was with Adam and Even in the Garden of Eden. Indeed, the enemy is **the one who deceives the whole world.** In this title, we understand the way the enemy draws others away from Christ through deception.

The term for "the one who deceives" is the Greek word *planon*. The theme of deception using this word (or

a derivative of this Greek word) emerges throughout Revelation (2:20; 13:14; 18:23; 20:3,10). Satan is the one who deceives everyone: humans and angels alike. Angels went along with Satan in rebellion against God because he deceived them. He deceives the gullible into thinking that his words and his ways are like the words and ways of God, that his words lead to life and his way leads to blessing. But the exact opposite is true. His words are death and his ways are ruin. Thus, both the angels and humanity were deceived by listening to his voice. Anyone who listens to the deceiver is bound for ruin.

The title **devil** (*diabolos* in Greek) is used rarely in the Book of Revelation, but Jesus uses the term to describe Satan's role in leading others toward sin (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8). In John's writings, those who sin are those who are the "devil's children" (1 John 3:10). So, the term *devil* is a word that describes the one who leads others away from life and the Lord and towards sin and belong to the realm of sin.

What are some lasting truths in Revelation 12:7-9?

1. We are in a fierce spiritual battle—suffering is to be expected and prepared for.
2. The unseen realm with angels and demons is real.
3. God has already won the victory over Satan and his angels; therefore, we can fight with confidence.
4. Our enemy seeks to destroy us through deception—believing God's truth is crucial to victory.

Revelation 12:10

**¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say,
The salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God
and the authority of his Christ
have now come,
because the accuser of our brothers and sisters,
who accuses them
before our God day and night,
has been thrown down.**

Satan Seeks to Accuse Us. The term *Satan* (v. 9) actually speaks more of an office rather than serves as a proper name. That is why the definite article “the” precedes the word “Satan” in the original Greek. In the Old Testament, Satan is the one who makes an accusation against God or the people of God, as in the Book of Job (Job 1–2) or in Zechariah (Zech. 3:1-2). This is likely why the title “the accuser” emerges in verse 10. Satan and **the accuser** is the one who reproaches God of injustice, impotence, or some other inadequacy; Satan does the same with humanity in that he accuses God’s people of injustice, impotence, or some other inadequacy. In Revelation 12, the accusation may be that God or the church remains powerless before Satan’s might. But Satan’s accusation and deception are empty threats. God defeats all accusation and proves Himself just and powerful to deliver those who call upon His name and trust Him.

The defeat of the devil indicates the coming of “the kingdom of our God” (v. 10). A helpful definition of the kingdom of God is God’s rule amongst God’s people in God’s world (though Satan has influence for a time). Because

the “accuser of our brothers” has been hurled down, it is evident that God’s kingdom has come, and it has come in particular in the reign of Jesus, the Messiah. The image in verse 10 is really *victory*. The word **salvation** is the Greek word *soteria*, and it indicates the *victory* of God over all rivals—here the rival forces of Satan and his evil horde. As Satan’s defeat is complete, God’s victory is assured.

What are some lasting truths in Revelation 12:10?

1. Satan is real, as are the demonic forces that wage against Christ and His church. However, these evil forces are not equal to either God the Father or His Son, Jesus Christ. Rather, the Lord is matchless and powerful, tossing down would-be rivals with complete authority.
2. Satan is a liar and a deceiver. We would do well to drown out his lying words by attending to the voice of God, especially in Scripture.

Revelation 12:11-12

**¹¹ They conquered him
by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony;
for they did not love their lives
to the point of death.**

**¹² Therefore rejoice, you heavens,
and you who dwell in them!
Woe to the earth and the sea,
because the devil has come down to you
with great fury, because he knows his time
is short.”**

Satan Is Relentless—But He Is Defeated. These verses, along with verse 10, reveal the heavenly proclamation of the victory of the kingdom of God and the defeat of the devil. In fact, they are a hymn of praise to God.

For those who were accused by Satan “day and night” (v. 10), the voice declares the *source* of their victory. Their victory over Satan is found in **the blood of the Lamb** (v. 11). This language, when it is used in Revelation, depicts the sacrifice of Jesus, particularly on the cross (Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9). It is through Jesus’ shed blood on the cross that humanity has forgiveness from sin and victory over Satan’s accusations. Although Satan accuses perpetually, the blood of Jesus gives victory, enabling those who embrace Jesus to *conquer* Satan’s accusations.

The victory of the “brothers and sisters” (v. 10) is by the blood of the Lamb, but it is accompanied by **the word of their testimony**. What does the word of their testimony mean? The Greek syntax of the phrase (*dia ton logon tes marturias auton*) indicates that their testimony is their word about the faithfulness of Jesus and His blood shed on their behalf. They faithfully witness to the victory they have in that blood, and their true testimony about Jesus is praised. As Stephen Smalley says of verse 11: “The believers who testify to the gospel of the Lord, and in this way share in His victory, are commended because ‘they did not cling to their lives in the face of death.’”¹

This affirmation of the martyrs leads to verse 12, which is a call to praise and a warning. Essentially this verse calls the heavens to rejoice because of Jesus’ victory. Jesus has already won; Satan is a desperate, defeated foe whose time is short. One of John’s major purposes in Revelation is to instill and encourage faithfulness in Christ’s church. These verses do just that.

With all rival powers defeated, God's reign on the earth is manifested in the authority that He gives to His King, Jesus the Messiah. The New Testament presents the work of Jesus as a fundamental change in time: from the old age of the power of sin and death and the devil to the new age of the coming of the kingdom of God. The full work of Jesus—His life, death, resurrection, and ascension—mark the ushering in of the kingdom of God. Because God's kingdom has arrived in Jesus, life and forgiveness are possible. But the Book of Revelation testifies to Jesus coming again. Jesus rose from the grave and ascended into the heavens, but He promised to return. Our great hope is the "second coming of Jesus Christ." The transition between the old age and the new age of the coming of the kingdom of God has already begun and will reach its consummation upon the return of Christ in great glory and judgment.

What are some lasting truths in Revelation 12:11-12?

1. Satan is neither omniscient nor omnipresent. He is not the evil counterpart to God; he is a limited being who has been defeated and will be completely defeated in the future.
2. Those who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus and trust Him, even in the face of threat, have hope that they will live through catastrophe, even if it costs them everything. The life God provides may not mean prosperity while on earth, but it will mean eternal life with Him.
3. We overcome evil in our lives as we die to self and follow Christ completely.
4. We experience victory in Jesus.

LIVE IT OUT

As you reflect upon this lesson, consider the following thoughts:

How do you experience Satan’s deceptions in your life?

How does Satan most often accuse you? _____

How does Satan tempt you away from faithfulness to the end? _____

What does it encourage you to know that Jesus has already won the victory over sin, death, and Satan?

¹ Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005), 328.