

PART II

THE PLACE OF THE EPISTLE IN THE CANONICAL PLOT

Probably one of the first things overlooked by the interpreter today is that John's epistle was not written as a list of doctrines that could be applied to any age (e.g., principles for living a good life). John's writings occur in a particular time in the Biblical Story, and as such, must be understood in their unique era. They are written during the "church age." This age is post-crucifixion, post-resurrection, and is totally different than any age previous or future.

For instance, most would agree that the church is not under the Law (at least in some form or another). That has clearly changed. All would agree that the church is not in the eschatological kingdom as the believer is still capable of sin. The reason that these things change from age to age is because of the Biblical plot. From Adam in the garden and his unique temptation by a snake, through Moses and the Law and the people's failure to keep it, to this age where one is still frail and mortal yet not under the requirement of the Law, to the kingdom and the perfection of the resurrected body, it is clear that God's Biblical plot is moving toward the enthronement of His Son in the eternal kingdom. And being a plot, the times and conditions are, and have, changed.

So what is different in this age called the church? It has been established that the believer is not under the Law, at least in some way. Does that mean that the believer is "lawless," that he can do whatever he pleases? Obviously, the answer is, "no." So what has replaced this guideline of the Law that kept man walking the straight and narrow? It is, very simply, that the Law has been placed in his heart, meaning the character of the Law, which was God's righteous character, has been placed through imputation into the believer (Jeremiah 31:31-34). It is called "eternal life," and is a new character unlike the character received from Adam. It is the same character that Jesus demonstrated on earth, and as such it cannot sin and will live into eternity. It is again, the righteous character of God, placed in the believer.

However, since this will be dealt with in this article later, suffice it to say that things have changed in the believer, and John is going to deal with that change. To ignore the significance of the epistle's place in the Biblical Plot is to invite error. In other words, John is not going to write to tell the believer the same things that he might tell someone who was under the Law, who was born before Christ died and was resurrected. He is going to tell him how to operate under this new condition, the condition wherein the believer has "eternal life." And John will show that he didn't invent this concept (as the Law-keepers aver). He will claim that it has always been the goal of God in the story to bring this about "from the beginning."

This is the major difference between the "how" of interpreters. The majority today uses definitions of terms and phrases that come from their contemporary input, their present theology, perception of historical backgrounds, etc. However, John's

definitions come from the Old Testament plot, from the prophecies that are now present and fulfilled in the believer. And to miss that simple fact brings forth errant interpretations and conclusions.

In summary, this is important. If one does not understand the Biblical plot “from the beginning” in Genesis 1—4, as well as the prophecies in Ezekiel 36 and Jeremiah 31, that John claims have come true, then they will misunderstand John’s point in 1 John 1—3. But this will not be developed here, as this is one of the major points that will follow.

The Purpose of 1 John

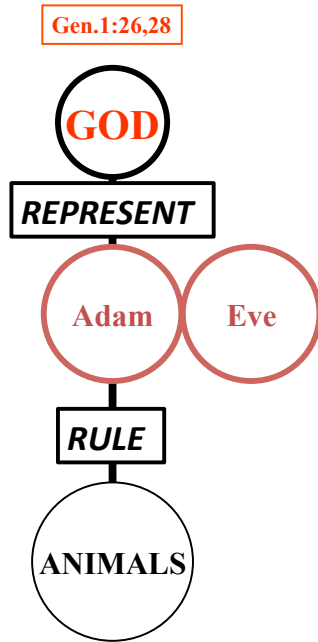
John’s purpose is rather simple. Yet, while simple, it is also all encompassing, as it includes the whole of the Biblical Story. Thus to understand the purpose of John’s epistle one must go to the plot of the Biblical Story, particularly the setting, conflict and the promise that will resolve the tension, in Genesis 1--4.

Note: If one does not understand John’s references to the Biblical Plot from Genesis in the Old Testament, then they will errantly assign the definitions that John intends.

The Purpose of God in the Beginning: Man to Represent God’s Desires³

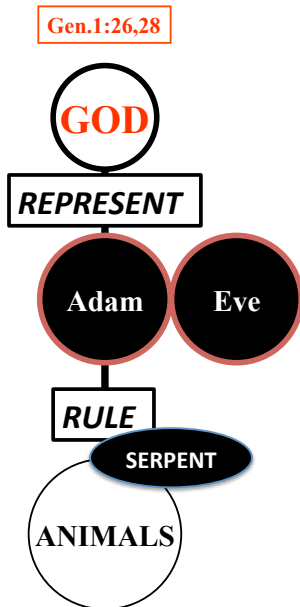
Since the beginning of the story of the Bible the goal of God for mankind was that man was to represent Him (Genesis 1:26, 28).

³ This discussion can be referenced in the Genesis Commentary, and in a shorter form, under “Finding Jesus in the Old Testament.” All these can be accessed at www.TheBiblicalStory.org/baylis/resources/



The Deception of Eve by the Serpent (Satan):

The serpent then entered the scene and *deceived* Eve away from the truth of God's revelation and Adam and Eve chose their own way (Satan's) and would come under the judgment of death.



The “Seed of the Woman:” The Christ and Followers (The “Children of God”)

God then promised that He would bring forth a New Adam, called the “Seed of the Woman,” the Christ, who would represent Him fully, unlike the first Adam. This “Seed of the Woman” would come and would execute judgment on the old creation, Satan, and all his followers. However, prior to that judgment, this Seed of the Woman would be struck by Satan and would substitute for the penalty of the old creation.

Love of God in the Messiah: Yet when Adam failed, God’s plan was to reconcile man back to Himself. God prophesied His Messiah, a New Adam, called the “Seed of the Woman,” would give Himself to die for the sins of the world. He would give them His new life, called “eternal life.”

Judgment: The “Seed of the Woman” would then ultimately return, strike Satan and his followers, and establish His kingdom on earth along with His followers (i.e., believers) who would be called the true “Children of God.”

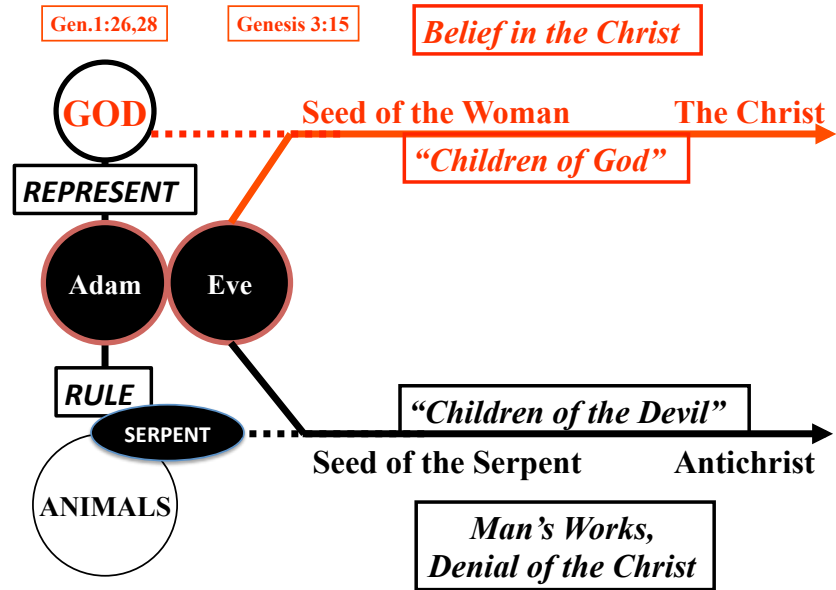
The “Seed of the Serpent:” Satan and his Followers (“Children of the Devil”)

But the serpent (Satan) and his followers would remain. Thus, these unbelievers who trusted in their own dying works, would be called “Children of the Devil.”

Deceit: Like their father, Satan, the followers would try to deceive mankind into following them and their good works (e.g., of the Law) and rejecting the Messiah.

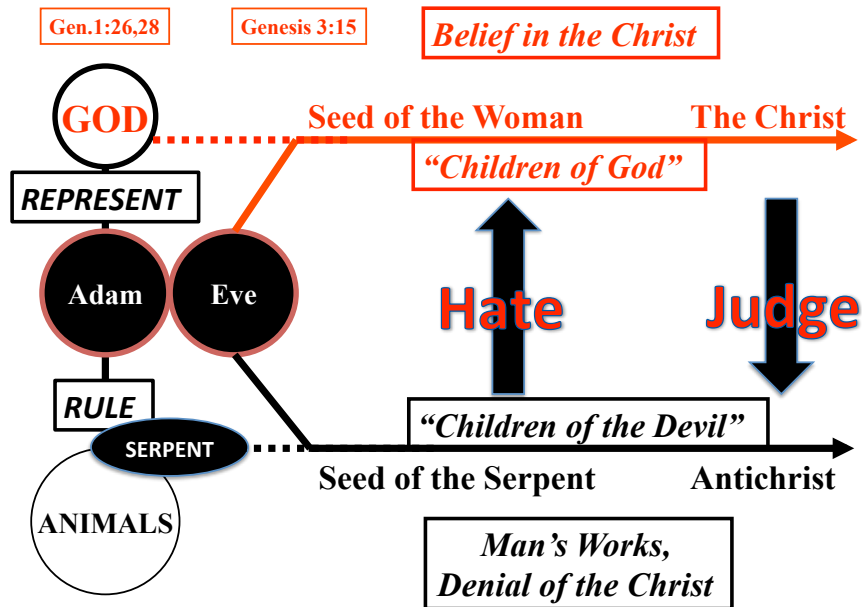
Hate: To the faithful believers they would hate them because they rejected their self-works as a means to access the Father.

Judge: They would hate the “Seed of the Woman” and His followers (believers) and would persecute them and kill them.



The followers of Satan would hate, persecute, and finally kill the Messiah (and His followers) as they executed judgment on them.

However, God’s judgment would be delayed until Messiah appeared, substituted Himself for the mankind and paid for the sins of the world, and then He would return and judge the serpent and His followers.



In the mean time, and this is important, those who believe in the Christ will be hated by those who follow the serpent and trust in their own works (e.g., of the Law). These “antichrists” will try to deceive the believers but will threaten them, persecute them, and ultimately try to kill them.

The believers, however, must stay faithful (“abide”) to their trust in Messiah as He will ultimately come and judge these serpent-followers and deliver the true “Children of God” into the Kingdom.

The Gospel of John’s Purpose: Eyewitness Jesus as the “Seed of the Woman,” “The Christ,” so Men Might Believe and Be Reconciled to God (“Children of God”)

After the long wait in the Old Testament, Jesus had appeared and John had eye-witnessed His Messianic words and works. John then told what he had seen, and recorded it in the gospels so that men might believe in Him and have this “eternal life” (John 20:31).

As predicted in Genesis 3:15, there were two sides, the seed of the serpent (Satan and his followers) and the Seed of the Woman (the Messiah and His followers). However, each would claim that they had their own way to God. Each would claim to be the “Children of God.”

The Seed of the Woman side would believe that it was only through the Christ, the New Adam, that anyone would get new life. The other side, the seed of the serpent, would claim that they could get to God through their own good works, through self-effort. Thus, John must establish between the two claimants, who are truly the “children of God.”

The “Children of God” (“Seed of the Woman”) as Those with God’s New Birth (“Eternal Life”)

“Eternal life” through this Messiah with the “forgiveness of sins” was the very means by which believers would be reconciled back to God. “Eternal life” is the life that is with the Father (1 John 1:2), His righteous character. The Son had this character and demonstrated it as perfect on earth. It is to be given through belief in the Son. This new character, this “eternal life,” believers have through the “new birth.” Thus they are in the family of God, or are the “children of God.”

The “Children of the Devil” (“Seed of the Serpent”) as the Descendants of Adam from Satan (“Death”)

During Jesus' life John also had seen Satan's forces, the Pharisees and Jews, who had opposed this Messiah and crucified Him. They felt that they did not need Jesus since they could get to God through their own works of the Law. Thus they also claimed to be "Children of God," by performance of the old man apart from the new life. John pointed out that righteousness was never gained through the works of the Law, but "from the beginning" salvation was always and ever through God's Messiah, the Seed of the Woman, the New Adam, prophesied in Genesis 3:15. If one was not "born again" (or "born from above," or "born of God") they would remain with their old condemned Satanic character and would suffer the wrath of God (John 3:35-36).

The Epistle of John's Purpose: To Reassure Believers that Eternal Life, Access to God ("Children of God") is Through Jesus as the Christ.

Yet now several years after the penning of his gospel, John has found that things have regressed once more. The evil antichrists predicted in Genesis 3:15 to oppose God's Messiah, like the Pharisees of the Gospels, are once more threatening the stability of those who have trusted (1 John 2:18-23, 4:1-6). Like those in the Gospel they claim that one can be a "child of God" through the works of the Law. They felt that the "works of the Law" were the only way to appease God's wrath.

So John writes once more to show that the Old Testament always prophesied a single Messiah who would die for sins and return one day to rule and crush the enemies. This Christ and His sacrifice was the only thing that would be the propitiation for sinners. It had always been and would always be what defined the true family of God, "The Children of God."