

The Life Of Christ

FROM THE GOSPEL OF JOHN



POSITIVE ACTION FOR CHRIST

The Life of Christ

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To the Teacher

1. Please read the Foreword. It provides important information that you need to know to teach this curriculum effectively and efficiently.
2. When you teach the material in this curriculum, do so—
 - *Descriptively*—Equip the students to visualize each lesson.
 - *Dramatically*—Enable the students to feel each lesson.
 - *Devotionally*—Encourage the students to respond to each lesson.
3. Use visuals—maps, slides, videos, still photographs, and/or overhead transparencies—whenever possible. When you can't find appropriate visuals, paint pictures with your words! Be sure to refer the students to the appendix in the back of the student manual for many helpful maps and charts.

Foreword

Jesus Christ is the unique personality of all time. He has changed the course of history as has no other person or influence. Countless excellent books have been written about the life of Christ, offering huge amounts of information and elaborate essays on chronology and contemporaneous history, customs, and events. Thousands of teachers and preachers have offered innumerable glimpses of the many-faceted life of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet sometimes it is still easy to think of Christ as some invisible, impersonal God who is far away somewhere in space. This Bible study on the life of Christ, however, acquaints your students with the *visible* and *personal* Jesus, the Christ of God.

In these studies this year, we will present the Lord as more than a mere historical fact. We want the students to achieve the following objectives:

- To see His brilliance
- To know His compassion
- To thrill at His courage and power
- To weep over His death
- To rejoice in His resurrection

In other words, in keeping with John's stated purpose (see John 20:30–31), we want *to encourage in the lives of the students a response to Christ*.

Therefore, much is said in this curriculum about customs, geography, and dates. We put the students in Israel with Jesus during the years A.D. 29–32. We point out the seasons of the year, the time of day, and even the weather to help the students relive those exciting days when Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, walked the earth and ministered to the people in Israel. As you teach this material, keep this purpose foremost in your mind: you want to make the story of Jesus *live*.

Of the four Gospels, John's account actually contains fewer facts about Jesus' life than do the other Gospels. Why, then, use John's account as our text? Because it most clearly presents *who* Jesus is, whereas the Synoptics—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—tell what He *did*. John is more concerned with the *person* or personality of Jesus Christ. Therefore, our purpose is best served by using John's Gospel.

Features

Positive Action For Christ has published Bible study material for churches and Christian schools since 1971. Although those materials are strong in fact-finding research, the emphases of our lessons are to challenge the students and to help them apply the lessons to their own lives. So, an earmark of our studies is that they are both *God-focused* and *life-related* studies.

Teacher's Manual and Student Textbook

This teacher's manual contains the following sections for your use in preparation, instruction, and evaluation:

- Complete teacher's lesson outlines
- Masters of all chapter quizzes and unit tests
- Masters of all overhead transparencies to be used with the teacher's lessons on CD-ROM
- Complete copy of the student textbook in thumbnails, including the answers to the students' fill-in-the-blank sections

Introductory Reading

Each chapter begins with a short essay designed to frame the discussion and build a bridge between the student's 21st century world and the spiritual truths taught in the text. We recommend that you either have the students read the essay before class or provide a few minutes at the beginning of class to help their minds connect with the theme of the lesson. A brief discussion of the reading and some prospective questions will help you transition from the reading into the student work and then the teacher's lesson. Some sample transitional questions include:

- What truths do you anticipate this lesson will show about Christ?
- What aspects of our lives should be affected by the truths in this lesson?
- How will this lesson demonstrate God's glory?
- How will this lesson show God's accomplishing His purposes in the world?

Student Work

The student work in the student textbook is a unique feature of this study. Since the objective of this study is not just to fill students' minds with facts, but even more importantly to help them grow in the knowledge of their Savior, we have designed this section to help their minds ponder Him and His teaching. This may be an exercise unlike any they have tried before, so don't be surprised if you encounter resistance at first. We recommend that you provide a little more help early in the year, and give them increasing independence as the semester progresses. We have tried to start with a lower level of difficulty at the beginning and increase it as the year moves on.

Of course, you can elevate the expectations for their work by incorporating this section into their grades if you so choose. Bear in mind that many of these questions are not answered in Scripture, and a large number are highly speculative. Our intent is not to use these questions to provide definitive answers, but rather to get the students thinking about the personalities and their character qualities as well as the meaning of the text and the spiritual truths it teaches. We recommend that you discuss their answers to the student work in class as an introduction to the teacher lesson, and we have provided answers or possible answers to help you lead this discussion. Through this process the students will know many of the questions you will be answering in the teacher lesson before you begin, even though the answers they provided may not be correct.

Quizzes and Tests

Quizzes for all lessons and unit tests are provided for your convenience. You may use these evaluation tools as masters and make enough copies for each of your students. If you use the prepared quizzes and tests, be sure to review them before teaching the lesson to be sure you have drawn adequate attention to the tested content in class. Some questions are from the Introductory Reading, but none are taken from the Student Work. Answer keys are also provided. Assess student achievement according to your school's grading scale and policies.

Suggested Scripture Memory Program

In the following section (just before the Table of Contents) is a suggested Scripture memory program. If you so choose, you can assign each reference for the students to memorize during each lesson and then have them write (or recite) the verse from memory on either individual quizzes or the unit tests.

Overhead Transparency Masters

These lessons have been designed for use with an overhead projector or video equipment. The Teacher's Manual contains a complete set of overhead transparency masters and the answers with which the students will fill in the blanks in their student textbooks. In preparing for each lesson, you should use the following procedure:

1. Read through the lesson and the quiz several times to familiarize yourself with the contents.
2. Complete a full-sized paper copy of each of the overhead transparencies to be used during the lesson. Include in the margins any notes or comments that you want to add.

3. Teach the lesson using the paper overhead copy as a guide. As you teach the lesson, write the pertinent information on the overhead transparencies (or the blackboard or marker board, if you do not have an overhead projector). The students should copy the information under the heading “Notes from the Teacher’s Lesson” in the student textbook. (Printed overhead transparencies are available from Positive Action For Christ.) We have also included extra room on the margins of the student books to provide space for additional notes as you direct.

Remember that the teacher’s lesson is not so much a fact-finding and learning process as it is a challenge to the lives of the students.

Completed Student Textbook

The Teacher’s Manual contains a complete copy of the student textbook with every answer filled in except for the portions of the student work that are more speculative. This tool will certainly boost your teaching effectiveness while saving you valuable time. Each lesson of the student textbook contains an introductory reading, which you should assign as required reading before you teach the lesson. It also includes a section titled “Digging Deeper,” a list of possible activities or more in-depth studies for the students to do. Assign these at your discretion or make them additional requirements to your course if time permits. You will want to look through these projects before the semester begins to plan your strategy for using them, since some of them will be time-consuming and challenging. Several of the lessons include a section titled “Fill in the Gap,” which encourages students to research the Synoptics for events that John does not record.

Teaching Tips

As a result of the nature and purpose of our study, much of the material should be taught *devotionally* rather than merely factually. Dramatic narration and storytelling greatly enhance many of these lessons. Some lessons are expositional; other lessons are verse-by-verse commentaries. But for the most part, the studies tell the story so that the students can *feel* the movement and emotions of specific events.

Maps, pictures, slides, and videos also greatly enhance the students’ perception of the Lord’s day on earth. We’ve included in the overhead transparency master section some maps and pictures that you can use to supplement any slides that you might have of Israel.

Format and Grade Level

The beauty of this Bible curriculum is its versatility and adaptability. *The Life of Christ* has been successfully taught in its previous edition to grades seven through twelve. This revision is targeted to secondary grades nine through twelve. Although this is a broad range, the curriculum has been designed in such a way to maximize its flexibility. The quizzes and tests have been written to a tenth grade level, but the additional projects in the “Digging Deeper” section will allow the teacher to tailor the expectations to a higher grade level if so desired. With additional help provided by the teacher in the Student Work section, middle school classes may also be able to benefit from this study.

The Positive Action curricula fit easily into any weekly format regardless of how many days per week your Bible class meets. The student textbook can be used as in-class work, as homework assignments, or as a combination. The optional application activities (plan ahead by reviewing the section at the end of each chapter in the student textbooks titled “Digging Deeper”), combined with the teacher’s own ideas and insights, make the course easily expandable.

In any case, you need to cover only one lesson per week. Assuming that your Bible class meets from three to five days per week, the following options are available:

Three-Day Option

	Option A	Option B
Day 1	Teacher's lesson	Student work
Day 2	Teacher's lesson	Teacher's lesson
Day 3	Review/Quiz	Review/Quiz

Four-Day Option

	Option A	Option B	Option C
Day 1	Student work	Student work	Student work
Day 2	Teacher's lesson	Student work	Teacher's lesson
Day 3	Teacher's lesson	Teacher's lesson	Scripture memory/Discussion
Day 4	Review/Quiz	Review/Quiz	Review/Quiz

Five-Day Option

	Option A	Option B
Day 1	Student work	Student work
Day 2	Student work	Student work/Teacher's lesson
Day 3	Teacher's lesson	Teacher's lesson
Day 4	Teacher's lesson	Scripture memory/Discussion
Day 5	Review/Quiz	Review/Quiz

As you preview the material, you notice that there is ample material for a five-day class, especially if you add any material of your own (as we recommend you try to do, particularly examples and illustrations that will help make the principles practical for the students). We have provided you with more material than you will need. However, do not think that you must cover all of the material if your situation does not allow enough time. Adapt the study to your particular situation and needs. Above all, remember that you are not merely teaching a lesson; you are teaching individuals. Spend more time on the areas that meet the specific needs of your own students.

Future Curricula

The desire and plan of Positive Action For Christ is to continue producing Bible curricula of the highest quality and excellence. Periodically, we will revise and update our materials. We want you to be a successful Bible teacher. If you have suggestions that you think would enhance the materials, please feel free to share them with us. If you have questions or need additional help with the material as you teach it, please write to us at the following address, visit us at our web site, or call the special Help Line at the following toll-free number:

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A Final Word

As a Bible teacher, you have been given a great responsibility. To be a useful instrument in God’s hands, you must spend time in personal devotions, prayer, Bible study, and lesson preparation. The example of your life, more than anything else, will teach your students. Ensure that you offer a godly example to your students. Pray for your students. Let them know that you care about their spiritual welfare as well as their academic achievement. Spend time mastering the teaching material. Above all, remind yourself continually that your success rests with God, for it is God who communicates truth to the student’s heart by the power and working of His Holy Spirit. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths” (Prov. 3:5–6).

Recommended Scripture Memorization Program

Lesson	Scripture reference to be memorized
1	Romans 15:4
2	John 20:31
3	John 1:1–3
4	John 1:10–12
5	John 1:14
6	John 1:27
7	John 1:41
8	John 2:4
9	John 2:19
10	John 3:3, 6, 16–20
11	John 4:13–14
12	John 4:35
13	John 5:8–9
14	John 5:24
15	John 6:5–6
16	John 6:27
17	John 6:35, 37

18	John 7:17
19	John 7:38
20	John 8:12, 32
21	John 9:4
22	John 10:9–10
23	John 10:27–29
24	John 11:25–26
25	John 12:7–8
26	John 12:24–25
27	John 12: 46, 48
28	John 13:34–35
29	John 14:1–3
30	John 15:4–5, 7
31	John 17:14–18
32	John 18:36
33	John 19:11
34	John 20:29
35	John 21:22

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Recommended Reading List

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Unit 1

Background Information for a Study of the Life of Christ in the Gospel of John

Lesson 1

An Introduction to the Gospel of John

Lesson Objectives:

1. To show John's place among the four Gospels
2. To compare/contrast John with the Synoptic Gospels
3. To summarize the primary focus and contents of John
4. To highlight the characteristics unique to John
5. To challenge the students to make practical applications of the lessons in this study by coming to know and love the real person Jesus Christ

The Place of John in the New Testament (Chart 1A)

One of the four Gospels

Grouped with Matthew, Mark, and Luke, John is the fourth Gospel in the New Testament.

Ask: What is the gospel? (Discuss) The word "gospel" means "good news." The gospel is God's good news concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The gospel is defined in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4. Read and discuss this passage. Note the three main elements of the gospel:

1. Christ died for our sins.
2. Christ was buried for our sins.
3. Christ arose again the third day.

All of this was "according to the Scriptures." Those Scriptures specifically refer to the writings of Matthew, Mark, and the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. (Luke and John were not yet written when Paul wrote these words, but they are certainly consistent with Paul's description of the gospel). Since these four books detail Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, they are called "The Gospels."

One of the longest books of the New Testament

With twenty-one chapters, John is one of the longest books in the New Testament.

Ask: Which books do you think are longer? (Discuss) Only Matthew, Luke, Acts, and Revelation have more chapters, but John has more words and verses than Revelation.

The best-loved book of the New Testament

Bible students and seasoned scholars agree that the Gospel of John is the best loved and most widely read book not only of the New Testament but also possibly the entire Bible. It has been printed and distributed by Bible-believing groups all over the world. Its passages are among the most-quoted pieces of literature. No other book can match the language of such verses as the following (have individual students look up these references and read the verses aloud):

John 1:12 John 5:24 John 8:58 John 11:25
John 3:16 John 6:48 John 10:10–11 John 14:1–6
John 3:36 John 8:32 John 10:27–28 John 21:15

The Contents of John (Chart 1B)

Different from the other Gospels

Compare and contrast the four Gospels using the chart below (and on page 9 of the student book).

The Gospel of John, though one of the four Gospels, is different from all of the others. Compare and contrast the four Gospels using Chart 1B, helping the students fill in the blanks as you point out the following:

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Portrait of Christ	King	Servant	Man	God
Prominent Words	Fulfilled	Straightway/ Immediately	Son of Man	Believe
Audience	Jews	Romans	Greeks	All People
Emphasis	Words	Works	Humanity	Deity
Outstanding Sections	Sermons	Miracles	Details of Birth and Crucifixion	Claims to Deity
Basic Characteristics	Historical	Historical	Historical	Spiritual

Portrait of Christ

Each author presented a different aspect of Christ. The Lord is so awesome in His character that no single portrait can adequately explain what He is like. Therefore, it took four men to show four different views of Christ. Interestingly, there is a parallel in these four views. Think in terms of a chart—a king is “high”; a servant is “low.” A man is lowly, but God is exalted. Therefore, we see Christ as the High King, then the lowly servant, next as a lowly man, and finally as the Exalted God.

Prominent words

Matthew emphasizes the word “fulfilled” showing that Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies of Israel’s coming King. Mark’s word is “straightway” which means “now” or “immediately.” He presented Christ as servant, and when you order a servant to do something, you want it done *now*. Luke’s key phrase was “Son of Man” because he was emphasizing His humanity. John’s key word was “believe” because it was difficult for men to believe that a man they had touched was actually God. John’s whole purpose, as we have seen, was to cause men to believe that Jesus was not just a king or just a servant or just a man. He intended to prove that this same man, servant, and king was the very God who had made the world!

Audience

Matthew was written to the Jews, so he presents Christ as king because the Jews were looking for a king. Mark was written to the Romans, whose culture revolves largely around the master-slave relationship. Therefore, he presented Christ as servant to the Romans. The Greeks were interested in humanity—the body, life, and death. So, Luke, writing to the Greeks, presents Christ as the Son of Man. John, however, has a different audience—all people. He wants the whole world to see Christ as God.

Emphasis and outstanding sections

Think for a moment. What are you most interested in about a king? His words! When the king speaks, everyone listens. Therefore, Matthew emphasizes the words of Christ, in particular His sermons. The deeds of a servant are most important, so Mark emphasizes the works of Christ, particularly His miracles, as he presents Christ as Servant to the business-like Roman citizens. Luke, on the other hand, is a doctor. A doctor is more concerned with life and death. Writing to the humanistic Greeks, Luke emphasizes the humanity of Christ and gives the greatest details concerning Christ’s birth and crucifixion. In fact, Mark and John don’t even mention Christ’s birth! Why? No one is interested in the genealogy and birth of a servant, and as God, He always existed. Matthew and Luke, however, do detail his birth because one is very interested in the birth of a king and the birth of a man. Finally, John’s emphasis is on Christ’s deity, and as such the most outstanding sections of John are those in which Christ claims to be God either in His words or in His miracles. John mentions only a few of the forty miracles Christ did, but He chose those that best revealed Christ’s deity.

Basic characteristics

John is basically a spiritual book. Its purpose is evangelistic—to cause men to believe. The other three Gospels are all historical in nature. Their main objective is to document the events of Christ’s life.

Other points you can make related to this chart:

- John records less about the life of Christ than do the other Gospels.
- John records fewer movements of Jesus, and the actual events he discusses are much more limited.
- John is more concerned with who Jesus is than with what He did.
- John seeks to prove that Jesus is God Himself and Israel’s Messiah.

Answers the questions posed by the Synoptics

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are considerably different from John. In fact, they are so much alike that they are called the Synoptic Gospels.

Ask: What does “synoptic” mean? Answer: “Synoptic” comes from the Greek “syn” and “optic.” “Syn” means “together” or “alike.” “Optic” means “to see.” Therefore, synoptic means “to see alike” or “to see together.” The Synoptic Gospels (Matt., Mark, Luke) all present Christ largely as a historical figure. They are trying to provide first-hand accounts of the events that took place and spread this story far and wide. In fact, they share a large portion of the same material. For example, 92% of Mark is found almost word-for-word in Matthew.

John, however, is different. His goal is distinctly evangelistic—to cause men to trust God for salvation. Many of John’s readers may have already been familiar with one of the other Gospels.

We could therefore say that John answers the questions raised by the Synoptic Gospels:

- Matthew presents Christ as King and John tells us that this king is the Son of God!
- Mark presents Christ as Servant, and John tells us that this servant is God!
- Luke presents Christ as Man, and John tells us that this “man” is the Creator of the universe!

The Unique Characteristics of John (Chart 1C)

The book of John is unique, differing from Matthew, Mark, and Luke in several ways, including the following:

John emphasizes evangelism.

Whereas Matthew, Mark, and Luke are primarily historical in nature, John seems to have a more spiritual focus. The Synoptic Gospels emphasize historical incidents whereas John, though he recounts some of the events, emphasizes the importance of believing in the person at the center of those incidents. John challenges the reader to believe in that person (read John 20:30–31), and he demands a verdict.

John records only seven miracles.

Jesus performed many (at least forty) miracles, as the Synoptic Gospels point out. John chooses from among those many miracles only those that best suit his purpose: proving that Jesus is Israel’s divine Messiah and causing men to believe in Him.

John focuses on Judea rather than on Galilee.

This specific geographic focus might be because John also makes clear the fact that God’s gift of salvation reaches beyond the Jews and extends to everyone who believes. The central crossroads of the Middle Eastern world was Jerusalem, which was in the heart of Judea, and peoples of every tongue and nation were represented in that area.

John emphasizes Jesus’ own words concerning Himself.

Whereas Matthew, Mark, and Luke emphasize the words and works of Christ from a historical viewpoint, John shows us *who Jesus Himself said He was. John is not trying to prove Christ’s deity so much as he is letting Jesus Christ prove His own deity!*

[Have the students memorize the preceding italicized sentence.]

John 8:25 is a good example of this truth. (Read this verse aloud.) Compare the way John used Christ’s own words to prove His deity by describing the difference between two salesmen—one who tries to sell his product and another who lets the product sell itself.

Another interesting point to note in this regard is how John keeps himself out of his account of the life and work of Christ. Note how seldom we see John in the Gospel and how little John says about himself. Noted author and Bible teacher Oliver B. Greene wrote in this regard, “We read very little of what John himself said or did during the Lord’s ministry, but he listened to Jesus and watched Him so closely that invisible glory possessed by the Saviour but hidden from others was seen by John. He heard words with a deeper meaning than did the others who followed Jesus.”

See also Chart 1D for additional comparison and contrast between John and the Synoptics.

John is not trying to prove Christ's deity so much as he is letting Jesus Christ prove His own deity.

As we progress through our study of this Gospel, we will see that John's strategy is simple. He lets Jesus speak for Himself by quoting His words and recording His works.

The Application of the Gospel of John (Chart 1E)

The basic question of the book of John is "Who is Jesus Christ?" Perhaps we should make it more personal and ask ourselves, "Who is Christ to me?"

Our one great aim in the lessons in this study is to make Jesus Christ real to each of us. As He becomes real to us, we will learn to love and admire Him more than ever before.

The author of this thirty-five lesson study readily admits that the more he studied the personality, feelings, and emotions of Christ, and the more clearly he saw the heart of Christ, the more real Jesus became as an actual, flesh-and-blood person, and the more he fell in love with the Christ who walked on this earth more than two thousand years ago.

As we study the life of Christ in the Gospel of John, we cannot help seeing as well how John himself experienced spiritual growth as *he* came to know Christ better. His faith in and love for Christ eventually mastered his life. Such can be *your* experience, too, if you will apply yourself to these lessons.

Present a final challenge by noting the difference between Christ's being a real *fact* and a real *person*. George Washington and Benjamin Franklin are only facts of history, but *Jesus Christ still lives!* He's a *real person*, and He should be as real to us as the friends we know. Let's get to know Him!

Although the lessons in this study will teach facts, our aim is not to learn *about* Jesus but to get to *know Him*, to feel *Him*, to know *His* heart, to feel *His* gentleness, to experience *His* compassion, to admire *His* brilliance, and to love *His* person.

Ask: Is He real to you, or is He just a fact?

1

An Introduction to the Gospel of John

All of the other apostles were dead. John was the last of the original Twelve who could give an apostle's eyewitness account of Christ's life on earth. Heresies about Christ were creeping into the church. In light of these facts, John's writings could not only present a true account of what Christ had done, but also combat the false teachings about His life and doctrines.

But John's primary reason for writing his Gospel was different. He stated in John 20:30: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book..." But his purpose was not to tell *what Christ did*. In fact, John chose to write about only seven of Christ's miracles. Rather, it was to tell *who Christ is*, as is stated in vs. 31: "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name."

We are about to embark on a study of one of the most precious, most important, and most powerful books of the Bible. Although the vocabulary and style of writing used by its author are simple, leading some scholars to refer to it as the "simple Gospel," his simple style and elementary vocabulary are a bit deceptive because the Gospel of John is the most profound of the four Gospels. Its message is so theologically deep in some places that Bible scholars have studied it for centuries in attempts to understand fully its meaning and implications, and they still don't know it all.

Various scholars have referred to the Gospel of John as "the heart of Christ." D. A. Hayes called it "the worthy and adequate picture of the life of Jesus among men." A. T. Pierson said, "John leads us past the veil into the Holy of Holies." Jerome said, "John excels in the depths of divine mysteries."

Although the book recounts the events of the ministry of Christ, it also teaches some very profound doctrines that provide the heart of the gospel of salvation. In his Gospel, John states a glorious *principle*: people's souls can be saved by believing in Christ and His atoning work on the Cross. John reveals a glorious *person*: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God in the flesh. Although this doctrine of the deity of Christ is in the forefront of the book, it does not lose sight of the humanity of Christ. But John's Gospel also shows a glorious *privilege*: one can have eternal life through believing on Jesus Christ.

Other interesting facts concerning the book of John include the following.

- Surprisingly for a book with the deity of Christ as its theme, the name *Jesus* is used more often than the name *Christ*.
- The word *Jew* occurs more than sixty times in John.

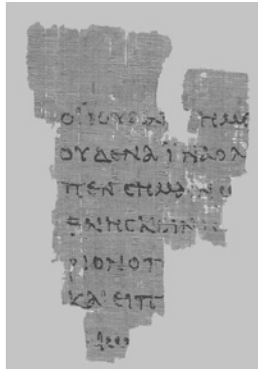


- The word *believe* is used almost one hundred times in John, whereas it appears only about forty times in the other three Gospels.
- The word *faith* does not occur even once in John.
- *Eternal life* appears thirty-five times in John but only twelve times in the other Gospels.

The Gospel of John is one of four books in the Bible that depict the life of Christ. Of the four Gospels, John's message is the most profound, its task and purpose the loftiest, and its passages among the most treasured. Before we begin our study of the book of John, however, we must consider some of the background of the book so as to better understand what we do study.


The Date of Its Writing


The date when the book of John was written has been much disputed. (A sampling of sources indicate the following suggested dates: A.D. 150 "or a little earlier" [Oxford], "late first century" [Thompson], A.D. 90–94 [Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown], about A.D. 90 [Eerdman's Dictionary], and not later than A.D. 85–90 [Unger].) Interestingly, those who think that the book was written sometime well into the second century would eliminate John the Apostle as its author because he would have been long dead! More recent discoveries, however, affirm the date of the Gospel's writing to be during the last quarter of the first century, probably around A.D. 80–90 (see note at right). In fact, the oldest surviving copy of any portion of Scripture is a fragment from John's Gospel.



During the 1800s an influential group of liberal theologians in Germany began to question whether the Apostle John actually wrote the Gospel that bears his name. They believed that the book was not written until A.D. 160 or later. In 1934 C. H. Roberts noticed that a small shred of ancient paper in a famous library contained a few verses from John's Gospel. When he studied the style of the Greek writing, he discovered that it matched the style used in Egypt in the first half of the second century (A.D. 100–150). Since John was written from Ephesus, several hundred miles away from Egypt, John's original must have been written some time earlier. This 2.5" by 3.5" fragment, designated "P52," is the oldest surviving manuscript of the New Testament discovered to date, and it provides important evidence that the Gospel of John is an eyewitness account of the life of Jesus Christ.

The Author

 Read John 21:20, 24. According to these verses, who clearly wrote this Gospel? The disciple Jesus loved

 According to Luke 6:14–16, who were the disciples? Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, Simon, Judas, and Judas Iscariot

(Note that Bartholomew was probably the same person as the man called Nathanael in John 1:45.)


How We Got Our Bible

No one has discovered the original copies of Scripture written by John, Paul, and others, but at this time we possess well over 5,500 handwritten copies of different portions of Scripture. Some of these manuscripts are as old as the second century A.D. The oldest manuscripts have been found in the warm, dry climates of Northern Africa and Palestine, but the vast majority of what we have today were created in Eastern Europe and Turkey in the ninth century or later.


At first, individual believers labored over their work, using primitive ink pens to write on stretched animal skins or paper made from reeds. Later, when the number of Christians grew, the demand for more copies led to the development of scriptoria. In these rooms, one man read from the manuscript while several copyists recorded the words, thereby making new copies. These scriptoria were most common around Byzantium, the capital of the Eastern Empire (today's Istanbul, Turkey). In Byzantium, Greek was still the dominant language, so the Church aggressively produced copies in the original language of the New Testament.


The number of copies of Scripture we have today is overwhelming compared to all the other pieces of literature written about the same time as the New Testament. Although none of these manuscripts match perfectly because of human copying errors, the level of agreement far exceeds other ancient writings. Almost all of these inconsistencies are obvious and easily corrected. These manuscripts prove that our Bible is a reliable record of the inspired Word of God.

The author of this Gospel was one of those twelve men, but he never used his own name in his Gospel account. We can, however, by process of elimination, determine who the author was *not*.


 Read the following verses and write the names of the disciples who could *not* have written this Gospel:

- John 1:40— Andrew, Simon, Peter's brother
- John 1:41— Simon
- John 1:43— Philip
- John 1:45— Nathanael
- John 6:70–71— Judas Iscariot
- John 11:16— Thomas
- John 14:22— Judas, not Iscariot


 Eliminating these men leaves only five possibilities. Who are they? James, John, Bartholomew, Matthew, and James the son of Alphaeus

 It must be one of the seven disciples in John 21:2, but of those men, three mentioned by name we have already eliminated. That leaves four, two of whom are identified as the sons of Zebedee. Who are those two men? James and John

The other two are simply called "two other of His disciples."

 Read John 21:2–7. Was the disciple whom Jesus loved one of these four? Yes

So, this exercise gives us a good idea of who the author of this Gospel was. We conclude that John was the author because he is the most likely possibility among the five remaining disciples. All the historical accounts point to John. The most compelling is that Ignatius knew Polycarp, and Polycarp studied under John. Ignatius wrote that Polycarp said John had written the Gospel.

 Based on your reading of the following verses, record the instances in which the author of this Gospel refers to himself by stating the event, the circumstances, and what he was doing.

- John 1:37–41— Andrew and the author heard Jesus, followed Him, and stayed with Him.

(In this passage, the author records the name of only one of the two disciples, the unnamed one being the author himself.)

- John 13:23— The disciple whom Jesus loved leaned on Jesus' breast.
- John 18:15–16— Simon Peter and the author followed Jesus; the author went in with Jesus.
- John 19:16–27— The disciple whom Jesus loved stood by Jesus' mother beneath the cross, and Jesus instructed him to look after her.
- John 20:2–10— Mary Magdalene told Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved that Jesus was gone.
- John 21:2, 7, 20, 24— The disciple whom Jesus loved told Peter that it was the Lord, and Peter jumped into the water and swam to shore.

Predominant Thinking Patterns

To understand the Gospel of John properly, we must understand the thinking patterns of the people to whom it was written.

Gnosticism

Gnosticism (pronounced nos'-ti-sis-im) was a rapidly developing philosophy in John's day. Gnostics believed that God was absolutely good and that matter was absolutely evil. A good God, they taught, could not create evil matter, so there must be other beings descending from God in a chain. These beings were called aeons (pronounced ay'-ons), and each one had a little less deity than the one above it. The last aeon they called Christ.





The Gnostics were divided into two groups, the Docetists and the Cerentians. The Docetists taught that Christ did not have a flesh-and-blood body; He only *seemed* to have one. The Cerentians, however, taught that Christ neither was born nor died. They believed that the aeon Christ came upon Jesus at His baptism and left Him at the Cross.

The Mosaic System

The Mosaic system of laws and regulations influenced the thinking of the people of John's day. The Jews followed the Old Testament Law of Moses and rejected the idea that the Messiah would establish salvation for the whole world. Instead, He was to come for only the Jews. This view, of course, explains why the Jewish rulers were so upset at Jesus' teaching that "God so loved the *world* . . . that *whosoever* believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Such teaching opened the door of salvation to everyone, Gentiles (non-Jews) as well as Jews.

John's Attack

In his Gospel, John attacked the popular thinking of the time. In the first eighteen verses of his Gospel, he served notice that both Gnosticism and the reliance upon the Mosaic system for salvation were incompatible with Christian doctrine.

-  Read John 1:1–3. How did John attack the Gnostic idea of a creator being who was less than God but more than man? He wrote that the Creator was in the beginning with God and was God.
-  How did John answer the Docetic beliefs in John 1:1–14? He wrote that the Word was made flesh.
-  How did John prove that the Mosaic system was replaced by Christ in John 1:1–18? He wrote that although Moses gave the law, Christ brought grace and truth.
-  What did John write about the Jewish belief that Christ was to come for only the Jews? He came to them, but they did not receive Him; however, whoever did receive Him became the sons of God.



Notes from the Teacher's Lesson

An Introduction to the Gospel of John

The Place of John in the New Testament

- One of the four Gospels
- One of the longest books of the New Testament
- The best-loved book of the New Testament

The Contents of John

- Different from the _____ **other Gospels** _____
- Answers the questions posed by the _____ **Synoptics** _____
 - Who is this great King? _____ **Matthew** _____
 - Who is this great Servant? _____ **Mark** _____
 - Who is this great Man? _____ **Luke** _____

The Unique Characteristics of John

- John emphasizes _____ **evangelism** _____ .
- John records only _____ **seven** _____ miracles.
- John focuses on Judea rather than on _____ **Galilee** _____ .
- John emphasizes Jesus' own _____ **words** _____ concerning Himself.
 - John is not trying to prove Christ's _____ **deity** _____ so much as he is letting Jesus Christ prove His own _____ **deity** _____ .

The Application of the Gospel of John

- Jesus Christ ought to be more real to each of us, and we should love and admire Him more than ever before.
- Jesus Christ is more than a fact in history. He still lives! He longs for us to know Him, not just to know about Him.

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Portrait of Christ	King	Servant	Man	God
Prominent Words	Fulfilled	Straightway Immediately	Son of Man	Believe
Audience	Jews	Romans	Greeks	All Men
Emphasis	Words	Works	Humanity	Deity
Outstanding Sections	Sermons	Miracles	Details of Birth and Crucifixion	Claims to Deity
Basic Characteristics	Historical	Historical	Historical	Spiritual



Digging Deeper

1. Conduct a study of the life of John the Apostle. Specifically, describe his position among the other eleven disciples and his relationship to Christ. Write a brief biography of John. Include in the biography information concerning other books of the New Testament he wrote and the circumstances surrounding them. (You might want to consult such resources as Herbert Lockyer's book *All the Men of the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958], pp. 196–197.)
2. Select one major incident in the life and ministry of Christ, then consult a harmony of the Gospels (e.g., Benjamin Davies, ed., *Harmony of the Gospels* [Greenville, S.C.: BJU Press, 1976]), comparing and contrasting the four authors' accounts of that event. Report your findings to the class.
3. Conduct a more detailed study of Gnosticism, describing its major points. Show on a two-column chart how each major teaching of that philosophy is unscriptural. (In the first column, write the belief of the Gnostics; in the second column, write out the verses of Scripture that refute that belief.)
4. Obtain a harmony of the Gospels, a book such as that suggested in item 2 of this list of activities which compares and contrasts the four Gospel accounts, for use during our study of John. You will find it helpful in putting together a complete picture of Christ's ministry on earth.

Lesson 2

The Purpose of John's Gospel

Lesson Objectives:

1. To establish John's two-fold purpose for writing his Gospel account of the life of Christ
2. To help the students understand when John wrote his Gospel and when the events of which he wrote took place
3. To show the importance of the four Passover feasts to John's chronology of Christ's ministry
4. To challenge each student to ensure that Christ is the Lord of his or her life

This lesson deals with the purpose and outline of the Gospel of John. In the previous lesson, we learned why we chose John as our text rather than one of the Synoptic Gospels.

Ask: What was the reason? (Review the previous lesson, including the answer to this question.) The Synoptic Gospels deal with what Jesus did, whereas John tells us who He is.

In this lesson, we will note three major emphases of John's Gospel:

1. To prove the deity of Jesus Christ
2. To cause men to believe in Him and live
3. To supplement the Synoptic Gospels, supplying the details that they do not mention

We will also learn the purpose of John and look at the time line of the book.

John's Two-fold Purpose (John 20:30–31) (Chart 2A)

John was selective in what he recorded. Read John 20:30 and 21:25 aloud.

Ask: Why did John choose certain facts and omit others? (Discuss) He chose only those facts that aided his purpose.

To cause us to believe that Jesus is the Christ (20:31)

Ask: What does the word Christ mean? (Discuss) It means “the Anointed One.” It is the Greek word for Messiah.

Ask: Why is it important to prove that Jesus was the Messiah? (Discuss) The Jews had rejected the idea that He was the Messiah. Imagine it. For two thousand years they had waited for the Messiah, but when He came, they rejected Him!

Ask: Why? (Discuss) It was because of their spiritual blindness, their following religious ritual rather than the truth of God’s Word.

To show us how to obtain life through His name (20:31)

As we stated in the previous lesson, John’s Gospel was written to draw a response from men. Whereas the Synoptic Gospels present *historical facts*, John demands a *spiritual response* to Christ.

Ask some students individually: Do you know the president of our country? (Some will say yes, thinking that you mean, “Have you ever *heard* of him or know his name?” Others will say no, thinking that you mean, “Do you know him personally?”) This question and the various responses illustrate the world’s stance on Christ: many people know *about* Him, but few people know Him *personally*.

It is not what you know *about* Christ, but your *response* to Him that counts. Many people know *about* Christ. They know all of the *facts* and *historical data about* Him, but they are not *saved*. Only when one trusts in Him as Lord and Savior and his heart is moved to cling to Him alone for salvation is a soul saved. This belief produces everlasting life. Therefore, a soul saved has real life.

Ask: Have you trusted Him alone for salvation, or have you just believed about Him?

The Four Passovers (Chart 2B)

As we noted, John’s Gospel revolves around the four Passovers occurring during the time of Christ’s public ministry. Jesus’ ministry *began* just before a Passover feast and *ended* with a Passover.

Interestingly, Christ attended only three of these Passovers. (Some Bible scholars believe that the feast mentioned in John 5:1 was also a Passover, in which case Jesus’ ministry covered four Passovers, although He did not observe the third one. This position, however, is neither supported nor rebutted by the Scripture text itself. We simply don’t know which of the many feasts it was.) Jesus missed the Passover of A.D. 31. Staying in Galilee, He fed the five thousand during that Passover season.

Passover one—A.D. 29: Jesus is Lord of the temple (John 2:13–14)

During this Passover, Jesus proved Himself to be *Lord of the temple*. Arriving in Jerusalem, He found the sheep and oxen that were to be used in the sacrifices being sold in the temple. He overturned the tables of the merchants and money changers and drove them out.

Ask: What does this event tell us about the Lord? (Discuss the students’ responses before offering the following points.)

1. Christ’s courage

Think of the odds against Him. Imagine a man walking into our classroom and overturning all of the tables!

Ask: Would you have this much courage to do what was right?

2. *Christ's power and strength*

Men evidently cowered before Christ. There must have been something powerful and awesome about His person. Remind the students of how Christ's enemies fell over each other when His enemies came to arrest Him in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Ask: Could they not have surrounded Him at the temple and arrested Him? (Discuss)

3. *Christ's manliness*

There was nothing sissy about Christ! He constructed a whip and literally drove them as cattle from the temple area! Contrast this demonstration of masculinity with the world's view of Jesus Christ as a quiet, emaciated weakling.

4. *Other traits (Let the students add their thoughts.)*

Ask the students to suggest other traits of Christ. Write them on Chart 2A where it says "Other traits." (Answers will vary.)

Passover two—A.D. 30: Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath (John 5:1)

During this Passover, Jesus proved Himself to be *Lord of the Sabbath*. He healed a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years. A fact that further complicated His having healed the man was that He did so on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath!

Ask: What does this prove? (Discuss before offering the following points.)

1. *He made the days and can do as He pleases on them!*

After all, He *is* God!

2. *Man's needs are more important than the Law.*

For example, fire trucks and ambulances break laws to save lives.

Ask: How do they sometimes break the law to save lives? (Discuss such things as running stop signs or red lights, exceeding the speed limit, traveling in the wrong lane to get around traffic, etc.)

We learn an important lesson here: we should obey all laws unless the law makes us break God's Word. *God's Word supersedes all man-made laws.* (Read Acts 4:18–21; 5:25–29.)

Ask: What would you do if owning Bibles was illegal, church attendance was banned, and witnessing was declared a crime? (Discuss) Note for the students the difference between a conviction and a mere preference or opinion.

Passover three—A.D. 31: Jesus did not attend (John 6:4)

Jesus did not attend this Passover feast. He fed the five thousand during this time.

Passover four—A.D. 32: Jesus is Lord of life (John 18–19)

During this Passover, Christ proved Himself to be *Lord of Life* through His death and resurrection.

Ask: Is He Lord of your life? Does He rule supreme in your heart?

He died for you, and He arose from the grave. The same power that raised Him from the dead He offers to you.

Ask: Is He Lord of your life?

The Timeline of John's Gospel (Charts 2C & 2D)

Have the students refer to the timeline on pages 276 and 277 appendix of their textbooks as you use an overhead projector and the appropriate transparency to discuss the timeline of events in the book of John. Beginning with lesson four in the student textbook, the students should refer to this chart to date properly the events they are studying. Warn the students that they must be familiar with this timeline for the test.

The dates of Christ's ministry (Chart 2C)

Jesus' ministry stretched into five years, although His ministry was only three and a half years long.

John recorded certain events beginning in the fall of A.D. 28. We can divide Jesus' years of ministry as follows:

- The first three months (fall of A.D. 28)
- The first year (beginning with our January, A.D. 29)
- The second year (A.D. 30)
- The third year (A.D. 31)
- The last months (January to March/April, A.D. 32)

The dates of the events that John records (Chart 2D)

Gaps of time between chapters and verses

- Between 2:12 and 2:13—a gap of five months
- Between chapters 4 and 5—a gap of nearly one year
- Between chapters 5 and 6—a gap of one year
- Between chapters 6 and 7—a silence of six months
- Between 10:21 and 10:22—a gap of three months
- Between 10:39 and 10:40—a silence of two months
- Between chapters 11 and 12—a silence of two or three months

The events that occurred during these gaps are supplied in the Synoptic Gospels. John chooses the events he records and omits others to serve his specific purpose for the book.

The bulk of John's Gospel

Ask: With which month does the bulk of John's Gospel deal? (Discuss) March/April, especially March/April, A.D. 32. The Jews call this month Nisan (Nis'an).

The vast majority of the book (chapters 13–20) deals with the last day of Christ's life before His death on the cross.

Note that he mentions events happening in March/April in A.D. 29, A.D. 30, and A.D. 32 .

Ask: Why was John preoccupied with every Nisan in Christ's ministry? (Discuss) The reason is that John builds his book around the Passover feast. This feast occurred on Nisan 14 (during our March/April period, and it was the day on which Jesus would be crucified in A.D. 32).

Lessons for Our Lives (Chart 2E)

- Christ is the central person in history.
- The cross and resurrection is the central truth in history.
- Salvation by faith alone in Christ alone is the central message in history.
- Proclamation of the gospel is the central responsibility of believers.


2

The Purpose of John's Gospel


In this lesson, we probe deeper into the reason why John wrote this Gospel and get an overview of the topics he emphasizes in the book. (You read a little about his reason in the introduction to the preceding lesson.)

The Gospel of John Proves the Deity of Christ


Purpose

 John stated his reason for writing the book in John 20:30–31. Why did he record these events? so that the readers might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God


Selective evidence

 John was selective in what he included in his book. According to John 20:30–31 and 21:25, did he record everything that Jesus did? No


He chose only those signs that magnified adequately the deity of Christ (i.e., the fact that He was God).

 John recorded seven key miracles by Christ. Read the following passages and write down beside the reference the miracle of Christ that John reported.

- John 2:1–11— changed the water into wine at the wedding of Cana
- John 4:46–54— healed the nobleman's son
- John 5:1–27— healed the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda
- John 6:1–14— fed the five thousand
- John 6:15–21— walked on the water; calmed the storm
- John 9:1–41— healed a blind man
- John 11:1–57— raised Lazarus from the dead


 Eleven times the Lord used the peculiar phrase *I AM* (the name of Jehovah and a claim to deity). These eleven uses of that phrase or name reveal fourteen different things the Christ claimed to be. Read the following passages and write down what each reveals.


- John 4:25–26—“I AM the Messiah .”
- John 6:35—“I AM the Bread of Life .”
- John 8:58—“Before Abraham was I AM.”
- John 9:5—“I AM the Light of the world .”
- John 10:7—“I AM the Door of the sheep .”
- John 10:11—“I AM the good Shepherd .”
- John 11:25—“I AM the Resurrection and the Life .”
- John 13:13—“Ye call me Master and the Lord .”
- John 14:6—“I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life .”
- John 15:1—“I AM the true Vine .”
- John 18:5—“I AM He,” meaning Jesus of Nazareth .


 John recorded the testimony of seven people who stated that Jesus was God. Look up each of the following verses. For each verse, name the person who stated Christ's deity and summarize his or her testimony of Christ's deity. (Note: Be sure to distinguish the difference between the person in “a” and the one in “g.”)

Reference	Person/Witness	Testimony Regarding Christ's Deity
a. John 1:34	John the Baptist	"This is the Son of God."
b. John 1:49	Nathanael	"Thou art the Son of God, the King of Israel."
c. John 6:69	Peter	"We believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of God."
d. John 10:36	Jesus	"I am the Son of God."
e. John 11:27	Martha	"Yes, Lord, I believe thou are the Christ, the Son of God."
f. John 20:28	Thomas	"My Lord and my God."
g. John 20:31	John the Apostle	"These are written that we might believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God."

John Wrote to Cause Men to Believe and Live

 According to John 20:31, what active response must men have to the doctrine of the deity of Jesus? _____ **believe it** _____

 What are the results of their taking this action? _____ **have life** _____

 Forms of the word "believe" appear nearly one hundred times in the Gospel of John. The words *live* or *life* also occur fifty-two times in the book. Merely knowing about and being convinced of the deity of Christ is not enough; one must _____ **receive** _____ Him as his or her personal Lord and Savior (John 1:12), trusting Him for eternal life. This is the purpose for which John wrote his Gospel. Therefore, it is an excellent book to use in witnessing.

John Also Wrote to Supplement the Other Three Gospels

The Synoptic Gospels

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the "Synoptic Gospels." The word *synoptic* means "to see together." These three books contain much of the same material, even though each book was written for a different purpose.

(Refer to the chart used in Lesson 1 for a comparison/contrast of the various Gospels.) According to *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, "All three agree extensively in the order of the events they describe" and "in the stories and traditions they share in common." Also, all three of them focus on Christ's Galilean ministry. The book of John, however, supplies information not given in the other three Gospels, thereby complementing, or completing, the biblical picture of Christ.

John was written after the Synoptic Gospels

John was written *after* the Synoptic Gospels. Even where John parallels the Synoptic Gospels, the author includes details not found in the other three Gospels. The majority of John deals with the Judean and Jerusalem ministry of Christ, which is not mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels. (The Synoptic Gospels record only one visit of Jesus to Jerusalem, which is when the Jews crucified Him.) John, however, supplies the missing details, describing four additional visits of Christ to Jerusalem (spring, A.D. 29; spring, A.D. 30; fall, A.D. 31; and winter, A.D. 31) before His final visit there.

John centers on major Jewish feasts

The Gospel of John is built around the major feasts of the Jews. These feasts were the reasons why Christ was in Jerusalem on each of those occasions. These feasts, combined with John's use of the phrase *the next day*, are also good reference points for understanding the order in which the events of the book occurred. John presents the events logically and chronologically and places great emphasis on geographic locations in which the events took place.

John completes the Gospels' scope of Christ's ministry

Taken together, the four Gospels present the entire scope of Christ's earthly ministry in Judea, Jerusalem, and Galilee.

John shows us the time of Christ's ministry

The primary month of Christ's greatest ministry was the period that we call March–April, which the Jews called *Nisan*. Nisan was the first month of the Hebrew calendar (see Neh. 2:1; Esther 3:7).

The Timeline of the Book of John

A timeline and outline of the Gospel of John will help us understand the book. The timeline in the appendix will be helpful as you study through each lesson. Know the eight major divisions of the outline in the chart on the facing page.

The timelines

Found on pages 276–277.

The outline

Topic/Event	Scripture Passages	Lessons in the Textbook
A. Prologue	John 1:1–34	4–6
B. First Months of Christ's Ministry	John 1:35–2:11	7–8
C. First Year of Christ's Ministry	John 2:12–4:54	9–12
D. Second Year of Christ's Ministry	John 5:1–47	13–14
E. Third Year of Christ's Ministry	John 6:1–10:39	15–23
F. Final Three Months of Christ's Earthly Life	John 10:40–11:46	24
G. Last Six Days of Christ's Earthly Life	John 11:47–19:42	25–33
H. Resurrection and Post-resurrection Appearances of Christ	John 20:1–21:25	34–35

Notes from the Teacher's Lesson**The Purpose of John's Gospel****John's Two-fold Purpose**

- To cause us to believe that Jesus is the Christ (20:31)
- To show us how to obtain life through His name (20:31)

The Four Passovers

- Passover one—A.D. 29: Jesus is Lord of the temple (John 2:13–14)
- Passover two—A.D. 30: Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath (John 5:1)
- Passover three—A.D. 31: Jesus did not attend (John 6:4)
- Passover four—A.D. 32: Jesus is Lord of life (John 18–19)

The Timeline of John's Gospel

- The dates of Christ's ministry
 - The first three months (fall of A.D. 28)
 - The first year (beginning with our January, A.D. 29)
 - The second year (A.D. 30)
 - The third year (A.D. 31)
 - The last months (January to March/April, A.D. 32)
- The dates of the events that John records
 - Gaps of time between chapters and verses
 - The bulk of John's Gospel
 - Deals mostly with the month Nisan
 - Deals mostly with the year A.D. 32
 - Chapters 13–20 deal with the last day of Christ's life

Lessons for Our Lives

- Christ is the central person in history.
- The cross and resurrection is the central truth in history.
- Salvation by faith alone in Christ alone is the central message in history.
- Proclamation of the gospel is the central responsibility of believers.

**Digging Deeper**

1. Research and report on the Passover. What did it symbolize? When was it instituted? What did it foreshadow in the ministry of Christ?

In what ways is the Passover like the Lord's Supper? (Consult Victor Buksbazen, "Passover and the Lord's Supper," in *The Gospel in the Feasts of Israel* for details on this topic.)

2. Select one of the miracles of Christ for closer study. Describe it and compare/contrast it with other miracles that He performed.
3. Compare and contrast the "I AM's" of Christ.
4. Using the timeline as a basis, prepare a summary of other "secular" events that were occurring throughout the known world at the time of the life of Christ. As part of your summary, explain how the Scriptures (specifically Gal. 4:4) can truthfully say that Christ's first coming to earth was "in the fullness of time." What was going on in the world that made this the ideal time for the appearance of the Messiah?

Lesson 3

The Geographical and Political Situation at the Time of Christ's Ministry

Lesson Objectives:

1. To provide the students with knowledge and understanding of the geographical features and the political situation at the time of Christ sufficient to understand their role in the events recorded in the Gospel of John
2. To apply the lessons of the Dead Sea to the life of a believer who is not living a life in service to God
3. To encourage the students to give out to others the truths they have learned and are learning in service and witness to others around them

This lesson deals with the geography of Israel and the political realities of the time of Christ's ministry. Although it is more factual than inspirational, the lesson provides a proper assessment and visual picture of Jesus' movements throughout Israel that we will cover in subsequent lessons. As you teach each point, use the maps in the back of the student and teacher books for a good visual presentation and, if possible, show slides or videos of some of the terrain and other physical features described in this lesson.

Size and Location of Israel (Charts 3A.1-2)

Israel is a small country, only about 390 miles long and ranging from 30 to 80 miles wide. It is roughly the size of Massachusetts and Connecticut combined.

Israel has long been called the center of the world and, as far as land mass is concerned, this claim is amazingly true. There, at the center of the world, God designed the perfect country.

Physical Features: The Perfect Country (Charts 3B.1-7)

Varied climate

God blessed this tiny country with every imaginable type of climate, from snowy Mount Hermon to the tropical Dead Sea region. City dwellers can leave Jerusalem with snow on the ground, drive east less than thirty miles, and get a suntan on the beach of the Dead Sea. Or they can drive less than five hours north and go skiing on the slopes of Mount Hermon.

Varied geography

The Mediterranean Sea and three thousand foot high mountains are only miles apart. Beautiful, lush, green valleys are about two hours' drive from hot, arid, and barren desert. Within two hundred miles of each other are Mount Hermon (9,232 feet high) and the lowest point on earth, the Dead Sea, at an amazing 1,292 feet below sea level. (In contrast, Death Valley, the lowest point in the United States, is only 280 feet below sea level.)

Varied crops

The plains of Sharon (the coastal plains just south of Mount Carmel) yield the world-famous Jaffa oranges and bananas. Galilee offers grapes, cucumbers, and almost any other type of vegetable imaginable. Nowhere else on earth can such a variety of food be grown in such a small area.

Political Division of the Land (Chart 3C)

Three major areas

The three major political areas of Israel are Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. These three divisions also existed during the time of Christ.

Roman provinces

Rome ruled Israel at the time of Christ's ministry. Rome divided the land into the following three political areas, or provinces.

1. Judea and Samaria

During Christ's time, seven different men ruled this area. It is an area of broken hills and valleys. It is good for grazing herds and flocks. The city of Jerusalem was a natural focal point of the area.

2. Galilee and Perea

Herod Antipas ruled this area. During biblical times, the area was heavily wooded. It is well supplied with water from 25 inches of annual precipitation and runoff from Mount Hermon, so the soil is very rich and fertile.

3. Iturea and Trachonitis (Northern Galilee)

Philip ruled this area. Trachonitis was located northeast of the Sea of Galilee. Because the Itureans were nomads, it is difficult to specify precisely where Iturea was.

4. Decapolis

A fourth region, although not officially a Roman province, was under Rome's partial control or influence (hegemony). Comprising ten Greek cities, it was called Decapolis (*deca*, "ten"; *polis*, "city"). Coins of these cities were often stamped with words that indicate that they were, at least to some extent, autonomous, independent, sovereign, or dedicated cities.

Geographical Divisions (Chart 3D)

Israel comprises six distinct geographical areas.

The Coastal Plain

Stretching along the Mediterranean coast to Mount Carmel (the only major variation in the otherwise straight coast line) and ranging from six to twenty miles wide, lies the fertile farmland of the Coastal Plains. This area contains some of the richest soil in the world. In fact, a large part of the most desirable land in Palestine is in this narrow area.

The Shephelah

Between the Coastal Plain and the central hills is a series of foothills called the Shephelah. This area corresponds to almost any “rolling hills” section of North America, with low hills ranging from 500 to 1,000 feet in elevation. This area is particularly suited for growing olives, grapes, and grain and for pastoral farming activities. It once served as a buffer zone between the Philistines, who lived on the coast, and the Israelites, who lived in the mountains. It was a much-disputed area.

The Cis-Jordan Hills

These hills are commonly associated with Israel’s history. Most of Israel’s cities and people are located in this area. The hills range from 1,500 to 3,000 feet high. The elevation increases to the north, and the hills become the Lebanon Mountains in northern Galilee. The mountains rise to an elevation of 10,000 feet.

The Jordan Valley

The Jordan Valley stretches from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. However, it is only a small section of one of the most remarkable geographic depressions on the earth. In its full extent it is known as the Afro-Arabian Rift Valley. This system is the most important continental rift system known to modern geologists.

Two continental plates meet along this rift, with the land to the east of the rift moving northward about one centimeter per year, and the land to the west of the rift drifting south about 1/2 to 1 centimeter a year.

The rift begins in the Amanus Mountains of southeastern Turkey and extends southward through western Syria where it is known as the Ghab. Thence, it continues southward through Lebanon (where it is known as the Beqa Valley) into Israel (where it is known as the Jordan Rift Valley). It continues down through the Gulf of Aqaba or Gulf of Eilat on the Red Sea. There it parallels the Red Sea all the way to Ethiopia, where it splits. An eastern rift extends to the Indian Ocean. A western rift penetrates Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, and Mozambique—a total of 4,000 air miles, or 1/6th of the earth’s circumference.

This single rift is responsible for creating the Sea of Galilee & Dead Sea in Israel, and lakes Rudolph, Albert, Edward, and Victoria in West Africa. It is responsible for separating the island of Madagascar from the continent of Africa. Due to the constant moving of the two continental plates along this valley, between 200–300 earthquakes occur here daily.

Although the distance from the Sea of Galilee in the north to the Dead Sea in the south is only sixty-five miles in a straight line, the Jordan River winds like a serpent through the rift for more than two hundred miles between those two points.

The Jordan River ends where its waters flow into the Dead Sea, which is about 1,292 feet below sea level and is 1,300 feet deep. About 6 million tons of water flow into the Dead Sea *every day*, but the water has nowhere to go; the Dead Sea has no outlet! Because of the intense heat of the area, the water evaporates very rapidly, leaving behind about 25 percent solids (by contrast, normal ocean water contains only 4 to 6 percent solids), making it one of the wealthiest mineral deposits in the world.

The Trans-Jordan Hills

As the name implies, these hills and mountains lie on the other side (east) of (*trans-*, “across”) the Jordan River. (Technically, the term means the side opposite from the viewer’s perspective, but it is generally used to refer to the east bank area.) This area is a high plateau that rises gradually from north (about 1,320 feet high) to south (higher than 3,940 feet).

Cities (Chart 3E)

The various accounts of Jesus’ ministry mention twenty-one cities in Israel. Most of these cities were located in the Cis-Jordan Hills. The maps in the appendix locate those cities that are significant in John’s Gospel. It is important for the students to know where these cities are located so that they can better relate to the accounts of Jesus’ ministry when they read about them.

Dead Sea: A Picture of Many Christians (Chart 3F)

The Dead Sea aptly describes many Christians. The Jordan River empties a steady stream of fresh water into the Dead Sea at an astounding rate, yet the sea is almost solid salt. Nothing can live in it, and no vegetation grows within miles of its shores. Swimmers need not fear drowning in it because the salt content causes them to float without any problem. In fact, the salt content is so high that some say it’s hard to swim in it. Tasting the water of the Dead Sea burns the tongue for several minutes. Drinking it means almost instant death.

Ask: How does the fresh water that flows into the lake become so deadly? (Discuss) The answer, of course, is that the Dead Sea has no outlet.

Christians sometimes become spiritually poisoned, dry, and dead because although they take in the Word, they never give it out. If we have no outlet for evangelism and service, we become as dead as the Dead Sea.

Ask: Is your life fresh and vibrant, yielding a harvest of fish (as does the Sea of Galilee)? Or is it lifeless and meaningless (like the Dead Sea) because of lack of service for the Lord?

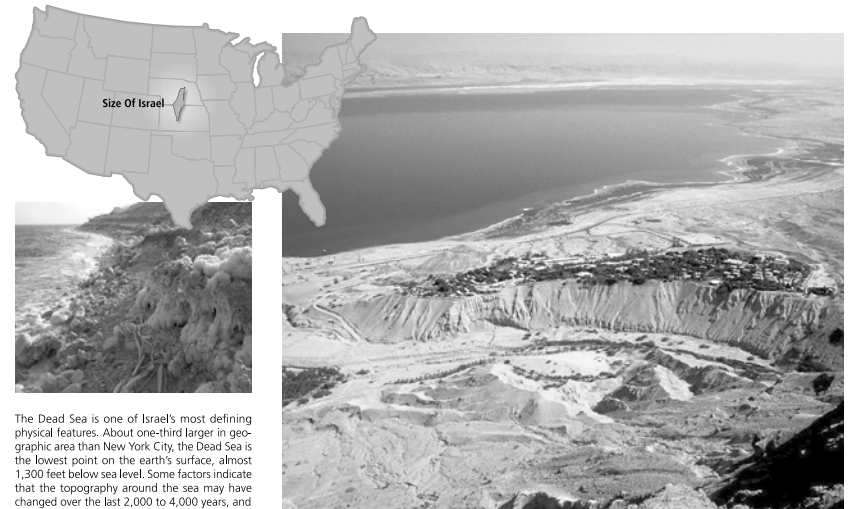
3

The Geographic and Political Situation at the Time of Christ's Ministry

Whenever some students see the word *geography*, they cringe, thinking that the subject is boring and impractical. In reality, geography is important for one to understand events of history, especially events in the time of Christ during His earthly ministry. But gaining an understanding of geography can actually be *fun* too!

Consider, for example, the following interesting facts about one geographic feature of Palestine, the Dead Sea.

- “If a canal were cut to the Mediterranean Sea [from the Dead Sea], the ocean would run in, instead of the Dead Sea running out” (Jesse L. Hurlbut, *A Bible Atlas: A Manual of Biblical Geography and History* [New York: Rand McNally, 1944]).
- It receives more than six million tons of water daily from the Jordan River and other smaller rivers.
- After a very rainy season, it will be fifteen feet deeper and a mile longer than usual.



The Dead Sea is one of Israel's most defining physical features. About one-third larger in geographic area than New York City, the Dead Sea is the lowest point on the earth's surface, almost 1,300 feet below sea level. Some factors indicate that the topography around the sea may have changed over the last 2,000 to 4,000 years, and the water level may have been even lower in Abraham's day. It is the saltiest natural body of water on the planet, almost twice as saline as the Great Salt Lake and eight to ten times as saline as the world's oceans.

A rift in the earth's crust makes this region quite unstable. Earthquakes are commonplace. Many Bible scholars believe that God used volcanic activity in this area to judge Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness. It is possible that these cities are buried at the bottom of the sea.

The stench of the water is overwhelming due to high concentrations of minerals including magnesium, sulfur, potassium, calcium, and bromide salts that arise from hot springs under the sea. Since the sea has no outlet, the water evaporates, leaving the chemicals behind. Although these minerals have tremendous potential value, it is so expensive to extract them that the resources remain virtually untapped. Drinking the water in any significant quantity can prove fatal, but the taste is so repulsive that the danger is minimal.

- Evaporation is so great that at times it creates dense clouds.
- “The water is nauseous to the taste and oily to the touch, leaving upon the skin, when it dries, a thick crust of salt” (Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1967]).
- “It's buoyance is so great that it is difficult to sink the limbs deep enough for swimming” (*ibid.*).

The Gospels are filled with references to other similarly interesting places, all of them connected in some way with the ministry of Christ.

A thorough understanding of the land of Palestine will help one to understand the life and ministry of Christ on earth. Its distinct geographic features and political realities provide the background of His life. Visualizing and tracing His ministry throughout the land enhances our appreciation for what Christ did for us. Refer to each of the maps in the appendix as you progress through this study of the book of John.

Physical Features

The physical characteristics (terrain and bodies of water) of Israel may be divided into five features running eastward from the Mediterranean Sea. Using the cross-section below, list the five features in the following blanks:

1. **Coastal Plain** _____
2. **Shephelah** _____
3. **Cis-Jordan Hills** _____
4. **Jordan Valley** _____
5. **Trans-Jordan Hills** _____

What river runs north to south through Israel? **Jordan River**

What two lakes (called “seas”) are found there? **Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee**

The Shephelah is the region of gradually rising hills between the coastal region and the Cis-Jordan Hills. Israel has two ranges of hills, the Cis-Jordan Hills and the **Trans-Jordan** Hills.

What land region contains most of the cities that Christ visited during His earthly ministry? **Cis-Jordan Hills**

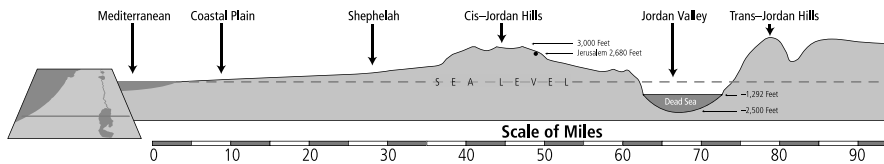
The highest point in Israel is Mount Hermon, which is 9,232 feet in elevation. Jerusalem is **2,680** feet above sea level. Just **10** miles from Jerusalem is the lowest point on earth, the Dead Sea, which is **1,300** feet below sea level.



Jordan River North of Sea of Galilee



Mount Hermon



Climate

Israel's climate is best described as variable. Extreme differences in altitude in such a small country guarantee widely varying temperatures. When snow is falling in Jerusalem, tourists might be basking under the sun in 90-degree temperatures at the Dead Sea.

Generally speaking, the country has two seasons—warm, dry summers and mild, wet winters. The rainy season lasts from November through March.

The average temperature in Jerusalem ranges from 50 degrees in January to 85 degrees in August. Galilee is pleasant in the summer, whereas the Dead Sea is a scorching 100–110 degrees during that season.

Land Divisions

Palestine comprises three major areas: Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. Other surrounding areas that Jesus visited during his earthly ministry include Perea, Decapolis, and Bashan (see map on page 271).

Widespread ministry

The Gospels mention about twenty-one cities that Christ visited or mentioned by name. Study the map to learn the locations of those cities.

Christ's itinerary

Following is a list of verses that record parts of Christ's itinerary (schedule of activities). Read each verse and then try to visualize

Christ making the trip by donkey or on foot. Record details about the geography of each place and the mileage involved.

- John 4:1–5— from Jerusalem to Galilee through Samaria: about 50 miles through hills
- John 4:43–46— from Samaria to Galilee (Cana): about 40 miles through hills and coastal plains
- John 4:54–5:1— from Galilee to Jerusalem: about 90 miles through coastal plains and hills
- Why did the Bible say that Christ went up to Jerusalem when He actually traveled south? because Jerusalem is higher in elevation than Judea
- John 10:40— from Jerusalem to beyond Jordan: about 20 miles through hills and the Jordan Valley
- John 10:40–11:1–17— from beyond Jordan to Judea, Bethany: about 18 miles through hills and the Jordan Valley
- John 11:54— from Bethany to Ephraim: about 25 miles through hills

Political Rulers

During Christ's life on earth, several different Roman rulers governed various political regions of Palestine. The following table lists those rulers, the territories they governed, and the dates of their rule.

Geo-political Region	Ruler(s)/Dates
Judea and Samaria	Herod the Great (43–4 B.C.) Archelaus (4 B.C.–A.D. 6) Procurators Coponius Pontius Pilate Ambivius (A.D. 26–36) Rufus Gratus
Galilee and Perea	Herod Antipas (4 B.C.–A.D. 39) <i>(Killed John the Baptist)</i>
Iturea and Trachonitis (northeast of the Sea of Galilee)	Philip (4 B.C.–A.D. 34)



Notes from the Teacher's Lesson

The Geographical and Political Situation at the Time of Christ's Ministry

Size and Location of Israel

- North to South 390 miles long; East to West 30 to 80 miles wide
- It has been called the center of the world

Physical Features: The Perfect Country

- Varied climate
- Varied geography
- Varied crops

Political Division of the Land

- Three major areas: Judea, Samaria, and Galilee
- Roman provinces
 - Judea and Samaria
 - Galilee and Perea
 - Iturea and Trachonitis
 - Decapolis

Geographical Divisions

- The Coastal Plain
- The Shephelah
- The Cis-Jordan Hills
- The Jordan Valley
- The Trans-Jordan Hills

Cities

- Christ visited 21 cities.
- Most were located in the Cis-Jordan Hills.

Dead Sea: A Picture of Many Christians

When fresh water flows in, but nothing flows out . . .

- We lose our joy and enthusiasm.
- We become bitter and harsh.
- We produce no life, and our soul shrivels.

Digging Deeper



1. Report on one of the following geographic features of Israel:
 - Dead Sea
 - Jordan River
 - Sea of Galilee
 - Shephelah
2. Using modeling clay or plaster of Paris, build a scale 3-D model of Israel, showing each of the major geographic features discussed in the lesson.
3. Make a chart comparing and contrasting Israel to *your* state in such information categories as area, population, resources, crops, products, climate, etc.
4. Explain how the geographic and political situations in modern Israel still cause that nation to be the focus of world attention. What is at the heart of the Arab (Palestinian)/Israeli conflict? Using Scripture as your source of information, trace that conflict to its historical roots.
5. Draw a color map of Israel, identifying each of the various political divisions of Palestine during the time of Christ and locating each major city of the time.