

JOHN



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Hadrian's Arch, possibly at the entrance to the Antonia Fortress where Jesus was brought before Pilate

In this lesson we study the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John. We learned in our last lesson that Matthew, Mark, and Luke—the Synoptic Gospels—have many similarities. But since the days of the early church, Christians have noticed how much the Gospel of John differs from the Synoptics. In the Synoptics, Jesus' ministry takes place primarily in Galilee; in John it is chiefly in Judea and Jerusalem. In the Synoptics, Jesus' ministry lasts for only a short time; in John it lasts for over three years since the Gospel refers to three different Passovers. In the Synoptics, Jesus'

preaching focuses primarily on the kingdom of God; in John he preaches about himself and the significance of his ministry.

In the Synoptics, Jesus teaches in short, pithy sayings, in parables, and through conversations in everyday situations. In John, Jesus teaches in long discourses and dialogues. In the Synoptics, Jesus begins his ministry after the arrest of John the Baptist; in John, Jesus carries on a ministry that competes with the Baptist, and he recruits his first followers from John's followers. In the Synoptics, Jesus' miracles are works of compassion, which benefit the needy; in

John, they are primarily signs that point to Jesus' true identity.

Many of the events reported about Jesus in the Synoptics do not appear in John, which contains many episodes not found in the Synoptics. Among those unique to John are the account of the marriage in Cana of Galilee, Jesus' meeting with the woman at the well in Samaria, and the raising of Lazarus.

In many ways the Gospel of John is more an interpretation of who Jesus was than a straightforward report of Jesus' ministry. John is much more philosophical in nature than the Synoptics. Early church tradition, from the second century on, associated the Gospel of John with the disciple, John the son of Zebedee, and its place of origin with the city of Ephesus. The differences between the Synoptic Gospels and John show how the traditions about the interpretations of Jesus developed differently in various centers of Christianity.

The central characteristic of the Gospel of John is its stress on Jesus as the heaven-sent Son of God and divine savior of all who believe in him. The writer summarizes his purpose in John 20:31: "that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

In examining the Gospel of John, we can divide it into four main parts. First, we have a prologue in the first eighteen verses of the book. The second part runs through Chapter 12. Here Jesus reveals himself to the world in sign and word. The third part, Chapters 13 through 20, contains Jesus' special revelation of himself to the disciples. This part also contains the account of Jesus' trial, death, and resurrection. The fourth and final part is the epilogue in Chapter 21.

JOHN 1:1-18

In the prologue in John 1:1-18 John presents Jesus as the incarnation of the eternal word of God. This interpretation of Jesus is

one of the most exalted views in the New Testament. Mark associates Jesus' divine sonship with his baptism. Matthew and Luke relate his sonship to his birth. In John, Jesus is the eternal son of God who existed with the Father before creation. The book opens like the Book of Genesis, with a reference to the beginning, to the time before the creation of the world. These opening verses stress two points in particular. First of all, John presents the Word as existing with God eternally and as having shared in the creation of all things. Read John 1:1-3.

The second point these opening verses stress is that the eternal word is now flesh in Jesus who is the light of the world. He reveals the glory of the Father to humanity. Read John 1:4-8.

Read the remainder of the prologue to John (1:9-18), and follow the directions below.

1. Summarize the main idea or ideas of verses 9-13.

2. Summarize the main idea or ideas of verses 14-18.

JOHN 1:19-12:50

We might call the second major section of the Gospel—John 1:19-12:50—the revelation of Jesus to the world. This section tries to demonstrate how Jesus makes himself known, is rejected by many, but is believed in by some.

This section opens with a presentation by John the Baptist and his testimony to Jesus. John makes it clear that he is only "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." When Jesus appears, John does not hesitate to declare who Jesus is. Read John 1:29-31.



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Loaves and fishes mosaic in an early church beside the Sea of Galilee

Several of John's disciples follow Jesus and become the core of Jesus' circle of disciples.

Beginning with Chapter 2 the writer of John presents a number of Jesus' miracles, which he calls "signs." Interwoven with the narratives about Jesus' signs are discourses and sermons of Jesus. In John 2:1-11 we read about Jesus' first sign. Here he changes water to wine at the marriage in Cana. The water symbolizes the old life of Judaism. Its change into wine symbolizes the new life given by Jesus.

Read the witness of John to Jesus again, and answer these questions.

a. When he saw Jesus, what title did John give him? (1:29)

b. What did John mean when he said that

Jesus was "before me"? (Rereading John 1:1-8 will help you answer this question.)

c. By what sign was John to recognize the one who was the Son of God? (1:33)

JOHN 3-10

Following the story of the wedding at Cana, John reports Jesus' cleansing of the Temple. The Synoptics place this act in the last week of Jesus' life. John places this

episode early in Jesus' ministry to show that Jesus' way supplants the old order of Temple worship. Jesus makes this clear in John 2:19 when he says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." In verse 21 the Gospel writer notes that Jesus is referring to his resurrected body.

In Chapter 3 we read the account of Nicodemus's nighttime meeting with Jesus. Jesus emphasizes the need to be born again. Read John 3:1-6.

This story illustrates one of the literary characteristics of John's Gospel. Jesus makes a statement; the hearer misunderstands the statement; this misunderstanding allows Jesus to give a long speech on the subject to clarify the issue. This technique appears in several places in the Gospel.

In Chapter 4 Jesus leaves Jerusalem to return to Galilee. Passing through Samaria, he encounters the woman at the well. None of the other Gospels shows Jesus in contact with Samaritans. As in the case of Nicodemus he carries on a long conversation with her. In his conversation at the well Jesus talks about the newness of his way and emphasizes the spiritual dimensions of worship.

Chapter 4 concludes, in verses 46 through 54, with the second of Jesus' signs: the healing of an official's son at Capernaum. The third sign—another healing—follows in Chapter 5. This healing takes place in Jerusalem at the pool of Bethzatha. There Jesus heals a man who has been ill for thirty-eight years. Jesus heals on the sabbath. The Jewish opposition to such healing on the sabbath gives Jesus the occasion to speak of his authority and the continuing work of the Father through him. Read John 5:15-18.

We find the fourth and fifth signs in Chapter 6. The fourth sign is the feeding of the five thousand in 6:1-14. The fifth sign is Jesus' walking on the water, in 6:16-21.

Speeches by Jesus follow the fourth and fifth signs. Jesus speaks of himself as the bread of life in John 6:25-65. In Chapters 7

and 8 Jesus again speaks with Jewish leaders in Jerusalem about himself as the one sent by God—the light of the world.

The sixth sign occurs in John 9:1-17. Jesus heals a man born blind. The healed man then bears witness to Jesus. In verse 34 we read that the Jews cast him out of the synagogue. Jesus' speech about his being the door to the sheepfold, as well as the good shepherd, follows in Chapter 10.

Jesus' changing the water into wine is the first of his signs in the Gospel of John. Read the verses below, and list other signs of Jesus.

a. (4:46-54)

b. (5:1-9)

c. (6:1-14)

d. (6:16-21)

e. (9:1-17)

f. (11:1-44)

JOHN 11-19

The seventh and final sign in the revelation of Jesus to the world is the story of the raising of Lazarus in Chapter 11. This episode raises such opposition from the Jewish leaders that they set out to put Jesus



Steps to the Pool of Siloam, Jerusalem

to death. The Gospel writer thus shows how one of the points of his prologue reaches its fulfillment: “He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.” The people’s response to the raising of Lazarus gives Jesus the opportunity to talk about the Resurrection and his return to the Father.

With Chapter 13 we come to the third main section of the Gospel. We might call this section Jesus’ revelation to his disciples and his return to the Father. In Chapters 13 through 16 Jesus instructs his disciples at the Last Supper. He washes the disciples’ feet, and he asks them to have faith in him and to keep the commandments.

Jesus promises them a Counselor or

Spirit to support them after his departure. In Chapter 17 Jesus prays to the Father that the disciples might abide in him and in unity with one another.

With Chapter 18 we begin the narrative of Jesus’ arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. This narrative continues through Chapter 19. In many ways, the narrative in John agrees in detail with that found in the Synoptics. John differs from the other Gospels on one point. The day of Jesus’ crucifixion is one day earlier than it is in the Synoptics. Jesus’ crucifixion is on Thursday—the same time that the lambs are slaughtered for Passover. Again John stresses a theme raised early in the book: Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

In John 17, we find Jesus’ high priestly prayer. Skim over this chapter, and answer the four questions below.

a. In verses 1-5, for whom does Jesus pray?

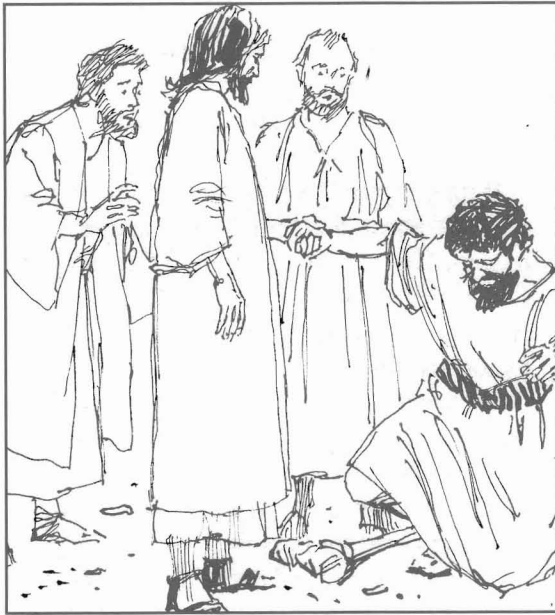
b. What is the main prayer concern that Jesus has for his disciples in verses 16-17?

c. For whom does Jesus pray in verses 20-26?

d. What is the main prayer concern that Jesus has for all believers in verses 20-26?

JOHN 20-21

After John reports appearances of the risen Jesus in Chapter 20, the writer seems to conclude the book in 20:30-31. Read these verses:



Jesus healing

However, John follows this conclusion with an epilogue in Chapter 21. We are not sure whether this ending was written by the writer of the first twenty chapters or was added by a later writer. This epilogue tells of Jesus' appearance to his disciples in Galilee and reports the story of the miraculous catch of fish. It also shows a special interest in Simon Peter and "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Jesus commissions Peter to fulfill his task of feeding the sheep. A second conclusion to the book comes in the last two verses.

SUMMARY

In summary we may say that the Gospel of John presents Jesus as the Son of God sent by the Father to show people, through his death and resurrection, the way to eternal life.

Five familiar parts of this book are listed here.

- (1) The prologue to the Gospel (John 1)
- (2) The wedding at Cana (John 2)
- (3) The woman at the well (John 4)
- (4) The raising of Lazarus (John 11)
- (5) The narrative of Jesus' death and resurrection (John 18-19)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. John the Baptist's disciples heard these words of John 1:29: "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" They knew and believed in the Scriptures (Old Testament). The idea of the Lamb of God is connected with the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. (See Leviticus 4:32-35; Isaiah 53:4-12.) God accepted the death of an animal as a substitute for the death of a person who had sinned. Sin puts every individual under the sentence of death. So when a person sinned again, another sacrifice was required for that person. What might these words have meant to John the Baptist's audience? What do they mean to us today?

2. The message of the Fourth Gospel is summarized in John 3:16. Can you recite this verse from memory? Try to put this verse into your own words. What do you think John means by the words *eternal life*? What does this concept mean to you? Read John 5:19-47. What does this passage say about the meaning of eternal life?

3. The series of "signs" (miracles) are a feature of John's Gospel. Discuss the functions of ordinary signs, such as road signs. How do the signs in John function?

4. The Gospel of John is rich with significant sayings. One of these is connected with the appearance of Jesus to Thomas. Read John 20:24-29. In your opinion, what is the most important verse in this passage? Discuss with the group why these words are important to Christians today.

DAILY READINGS FOR ACTS

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| Day 1: | Acts 1:1-11 |
| Day 2: | Acts 2:1-13 |
| Day 3: | Acts 2:37-47 |
| Day 4: | Acts 9:1-22 |
| Day 5: | Acts 23:1-11 |
| Day 6: | Acts 26:1-23 |
| Day 7: | Acts 28:17-31 |