

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Chapters 1 to 6

A series of
10 Bible Studies

by

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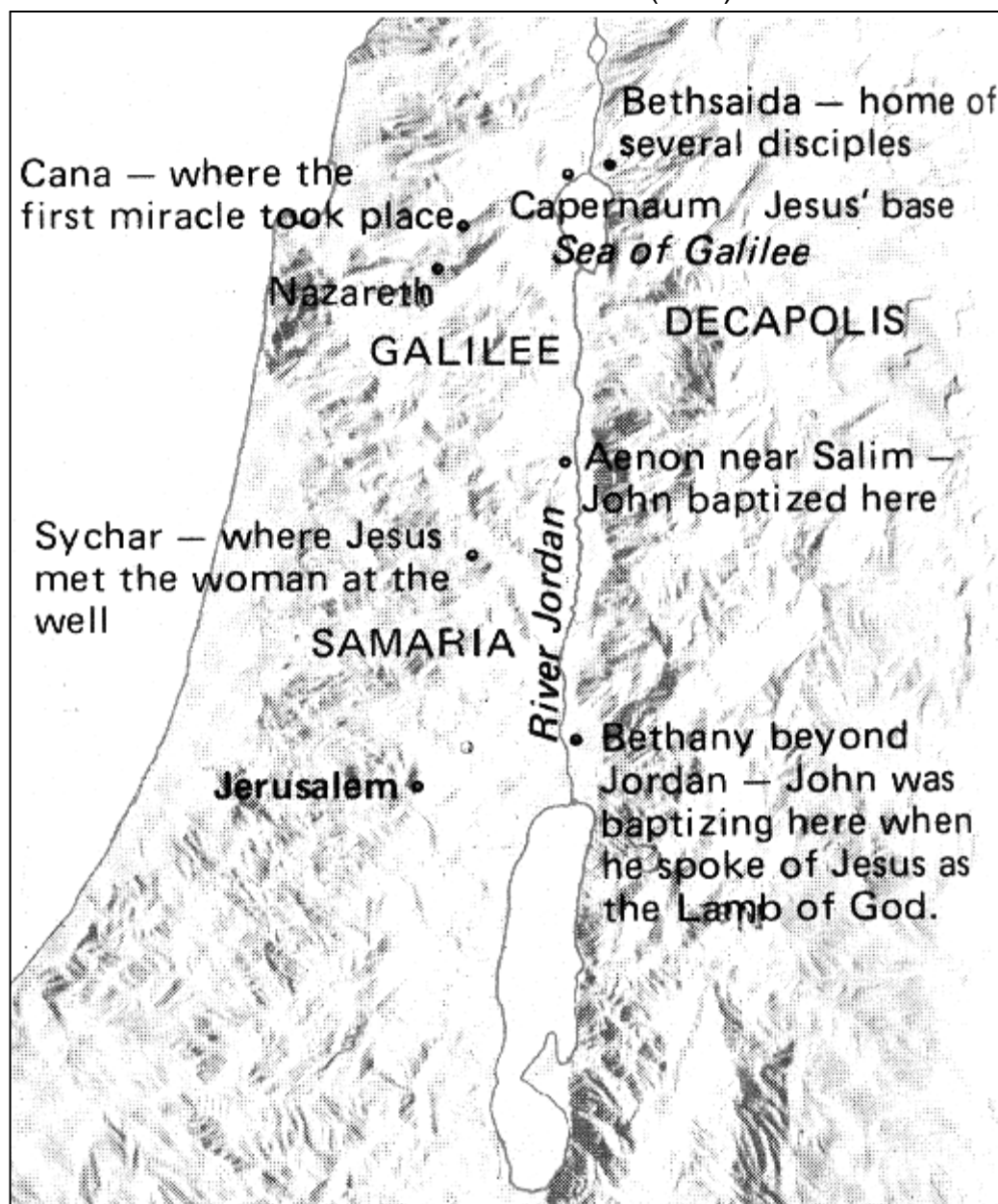
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*In him was life
and that life
was the light of men
(John 1:4)*

MAP - PLACES IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

John's story begins as John the Baptist ministers near **Bethany beyond the Jordan** (1:28ff). Jesus also begins his ministry there, talking to some of the men who would later become his 12 disciples. Jesus' ministry in **Galilee** began with a visit to a wedding in **Cana** (2:1ff). Then he went to **Capernaum**, which became his new home (2:12). He journeyed to **Jerusalem** for the special feasts (2:13) and there met with Nicodemus, a religious leader (3:1ff). When he left Judea, he travelled through **Samaria** and ministered to the Samaritans (4:1ff).



Jesus did miracles in **Galilee** (4:46ff) and in **Judea and Jerusalem** (5:1ff). We follow him as he fed 5,000 near **Bethsaida-Julias** beside the Sea of Galilee (6:1ff), walked on the water to his frightened disciples (6:16ff), preached through **Galilee** (7:1), returned to **Jerusalem** (7:2ff), preached beyond the Jordan in **Perea** (10:40), raised Lazarus from the dead in **Bethany** (11:1ff), and finally entered **Jerusalem** for

the last time to celebrate the Passover with his disciples and give to them key teachings about what was to come and how they should act. His last hours before his crucifixion were spent in the city (13:1ff), in the Garden of Gethsemane (18:1ff), and finally in various buildings in Jerusalem during his trial (18:12ff). He would be crucified, but he would rise again as he had promised.

INTRODUCTION

He's an old man, this one who sits on the stool and leans against the wall. Eyes closed and face soft, were it not for his hand stroking his beard. you'd think he was asleep.

Some in the room assume he is. He does this often during worship. As the people sing, his eyes will close and his chin will fall until it rests on his chest, and there he will remain motionless. Silent.

Those who know him well know better. They know he is not resting. He is travelling. Atop the music he journeys back, back, back until he is young again. There on the seashore with James and the apostles. There on the trail with the disciples and the women. There in the temple with Caiaphas and the accusers.

It's been sixty years, but John sees him still. The decades took John's strength, but they didn't take his memory. The years dulled his sight, but they didn't dull his vision. The seasons may have wrinkled his face, but they didn't soften his love.

He had been with God. God had been with him. How could he forget?

The wine that moments before had been water — John could still taste it. The boy's lunch that fed a crowd — John could still remember it.

And the voice. Oh, the voice. His voice. John could still hear it. As he spoke to the woman at the well. The conversation with Nicodemus. His words as he came to them walking on the water.

John could hear him. John could see him. Scenes branded on his heart. Words seared in his soul. John would never forget. How could he? He had been there.

He opens his eyes and blinks. The singing has stopped. The teaching has begun. John looks at the listeners and listens to the teacher. If only he could have been there, he thinks. But he wasn't. Most weren't. Most weren't even born. And most who were there are dead. Peter is. So is James. They are all gone, even Paul the apostle. Only John remains.

He looks again at the church. Small but earnest. They lean forward to hear the teacher. John listens to him. What a task. Speaking of one he never saw. Explaining words he never heard. John is there if the teacher needs him. But what will happen when John is gone? What will the teacher do then? When John's voice is silenced and his tongue is stilled? How will they know? If only they could have been there. Suddenly in his heart he knows what to do.

Later, under the light of a sunlit shaft, the old fisherman unfolds the scroll and begins to write the story ...

In the beginning was the Word ...

(adapted from Max Lucado, Life Lessons — Book of John, 1996)

Study 1

JESUS AND THE WORLD

John 1:1-18

Warm Up

1. In what ways have you benefited from being part of your home group? What things do you consider important for your group as you begin a new term of Bible study together?

Bible Study

(Read John 1:1-18)

1. Make a list of the key words used in this passage.

2. One clue to help you determine what the writer considers important is the repetition of a word, phrase, or concept. ‘The Word’ is used four times in this passage. Who is ‘the Word’ and what do we learn about him?

3. ‘... [W]ithout him nothing was made that has been made’ (v 3). Why is this teaching — that the universe is fundamentally distinct from God — such a crucial one today?

4. Compare the beginning of John's first letter with the beginning of his gospel. (Read 1 John 1:1-6.) What similarities do you see? What new insights do you gain? What is John's purpose in writing this letter and his gospel? (Also refer to John 20:31.)

5. What is the invitation in verse 12? How does a person become a child of God? How do you know you are a child of God?

Discussion

1. What is comforting and encouraging about God taking on human form? What does Jesus' life tell us about God?

2. How does this passage help us in responding to the person who says, 'Everyone has their own concept of God, but no one knows what he is really like.'?

3. Jesus has brought grace and truth to us. How does this benefit your life?

Study 2 JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

John 1:19-36 and 3:22-36

Warm Up

1. If an interviewer approached you and asked you what your purpose in life was, what would you say?

Bible Study (Read John 1:19-36 and 3:22-36)

1. What was John's answer to the question, 'Who are you?' What was his mission?

2. What does John the Baptist tell us about Jesus in this passage?

3. John's baptism is with water, but he says Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit (John 1:33). What does this mean?

4. *We are told in Luke 3:3 that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Why then was Jesus baptised by him? (Refer to John 1:32-34 and Matthew 3:13-17.)*

5. *What is significant about the title, 'Lamb of God'? (Refer to Exodus 12:1-13, Isaiah 53:7, 1 Peter 1:18-19.)*

Discussion

1. *What is the general impression you get of John the Baptist? (You may want to look him up in a Bible dictionary or read Luke 3:1-20 to add to the discussion.) What can we learn from the witness of John the Baptist and his attitude to Jesus?*

2. *Whom did God use to prepare the way in your life? How did this help you when you met Jesus?*

3. *Who is one person whom God is calling you to point towards Jesus?*

Study 3

JESUS AND THE DISCIPLES

John 1:35-51

Warm Up

1. *Are you more of a leader or a follower?*
or
2. *Perhaps one or two people in the group might share briefly how God called them to himself.*

Bible Study

(Read John 1:35-51)

1. *List the names of the five disciples who came into contact with Jesus, and briefly note how each one met Jesus. (Note: the apostle John is probably the unnamed disciple in verse 37.)*

2. *Andrew is referred to in verse 40 as ‘Simon Peter’s brother’. He probably lived in the shadow of his more illustrious brother, who was to become the leader of the early church. In John’s Gospel we discover one consistent trait of Andrew. What was it? (Read John 6:1-9 and 12:20-22.)*

From these same passages, plus John 14:5-10, what insight do we get into the character of Philip?

3. *Andrew told his brother, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (i.e. the Christ) (v 41); Nathanael declared of Jesus, ‘[Y]ou are the King of Israel’ (v 49). In what ways would Jesus meet their expectations of the long-awaited Messiah? In what ways did he need to reshape their expectations?*

4. *In verse 34 and again in verse 49 Jesus is declared to be ‘the Son of God’. What does this title mean?*

5. *Jesus said, ‘I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man’ (v 51). What truth is Jesus conveying about himself in this verse? (Refer to Genesis 28:10-12, John 3:13, Daniel 7:13-14.)*

Discussion

1. *Jesus changed Simon’s name to ‘Peter’ (i.e. ‘Rock’). It took a great deal of work for Jesus to change weak Simon, but he did it! ‘You are ... You will be.’ Jesus gives us the power to become! What is one area of your life that God has changed, or that needs God’s transforming power?*

2. *Nathanael was astounded that Jesus knew him before their conversation. John Calvin wrote:*

We should gather from this passage a useful lesson, that when we are not even thinking of Christ we are observed by Him.

Discuss the implications of this for you.

Study 4 JESUS, THE WEDDING AND THE TEMPLE

John 2:1-25

Warm Up

1. *Think of the most memorable wedding you have attended. What made it so memorable?*

Bible Study (Read John 2:1-11)

1. *Why do you think Jesus chose to attend the wedding?*

2. *Do you think Jesus was upset with his mother in v 4? Why or why not? What does he mean when he says, ‘My time has not yet come’?*

3. *What is the significance of the water jars that Jesus used in v 6? (Refer to Mark 7:1-8 and Mark 2:21-22.)*

4. *For whose benefit did Jesus do this miraculous sign?*

(Read John 2:12-25)

- 5.** *Do Jesus' actions in this passage surprise you? Discuss.*

- 6.** *Why do you think Jesus refers to his body as a temple in v 19-22? (Hint: look back at John 1:14.)*

- 7.** *What connection does this incident have with the changing of the water into wine?*

Discussion

- 1.** *List some ways God has met your needs. How does remembering God's provision in the past encourage you to trust him with your present needs?*

- 2.** *Some have used the wedding at Cana as a justification for drinking alcohol. Is this valid? What do you think a Christian's attitude should be to drinking alcohol? (You may want to consider the following verses to aid your discussion: 1 Corinthians 8:9 and 10:24 & 31, Ephesians 5:18, Proverbs 20:1 and 23:29-35.)*

- 3.** *From Jesus' actions in the temple, what can we learn about our attitude and response to injustice and wrongdoing?*

Study 5

JESUS AND NICODEMUS

John 3:1-21

Warm Up

1. *Have you ever been scared of the dark?*
or
2. *Are you more of a morning or an evening person?*

Bible Study

(Read John 3:1-21)

1. *Who was Nicodemus and why do you think he wanted to see Jesus? Why do you think John records that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night?*

2. *How did Jesus explain what it means to be born again? What is the water of which Jesus spoke? How does the wind help explain new birth?*

3. *Perhaps because Jesus was speaking to a teacher of the Old Testament, he referred to an episode in Israel's history (v 14). Read the account of this event in Numbers 21:1-9. How is Jesus like the bronze snake?*

4. *Martin Luther described v16 as ‘the Gospel within the Gospels’. What do you learn about God, his personality and his plan, in verses 16-21? What do you learn about humanity?*

5. *What does ‘believe’ mean in verses 16-18? Does this belief entail action? Why or why not?*

Discussion

1. *The contrast of light and darkness is a common theme in John’s gospel, e.g. John 1:1-9, 3:19-21, 8:12. ‘Light’ and ‘life’ belong to Jesus and his kingdom. ‘Darkness’ and ‘death’ belong to Satan and his kingdom. How are we to live in the light? (Refer to 1 John 1:5-10.) What implications does this have for your life at the moment?*

2. *What gives you personal assurance that Jesus is your Saviour?*

3. *‘To experience God’s salvation is not simply a matter of illumination: it is a matter of regeneration.’ What does the story of Nicodemus have to say:*
i) *to the religious person?*

ii) *to the ‘New Age’ person?*

Study 6 JESUS AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

John 4:1-42

Warm Up

1. In what way have you been shaped as a person by the place where you grew up?

Bible Study (Read John 4:1-42)

1. What contrasts can you find between Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria? What does this tell us about Jesus?

2. Why was it so surprising that Jesus should talk to this woman?

3. It was customary and practical to go to fetch water in the cool of the evening. Why do you think this woman might have been collecting her water at midday ('the sixth hour')?

4. *What is the 'living water' that Jesus offers this woman?*

5. *As the story progresses, what changes do you begin to see in the Samaritan woman? What evidence is there that light is penetrating her darkness?*

6. *The Samaritans considered Mt Gerizim to be the sacred place. According to their tradition, it was there that Abraham prepared to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. The Jews considered Jerusalem and the temple to be the proper place for worship. According to verses 20-25, what does Jesus consider important for worship?*

Discussion

1. *From Jesus' example here, what can you learn about sharing your faith?*

2. *Who do you think God may have specifically placed in your path this last week? Who are the 'Samaritans' in your life?*

3. *'I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.' (v 35) What might your Home Group do to be involved in 'sowing and reaping' God's harvest?*

Study 7 JESUS HEALS THE OFFICIAL'S SON AND THE MAN AT THE POOL

John 4:43-5:15

Warm Up

1. What is the most serious illness or injury you have ever had?

Bible Study (Read John 4:43-54)

1. Why does this royal official come to Jesus?

2. In what two ways can we see Jesus as the giver of life in this passage?

3. The royal official called on Jesus to intervene. What can we learn from this incident about prayer?

4. What sort of faith is Jesus looking for?

(Read John 5:1-15)

- 5.** *This story focuses on one invalid man at Bethesda. What words would you use to describe this man's life?*

- 6.** *Can Jesus' power operate when there is no faith? Is the paralysed man a good example of this? Why or why not?*

- 7.** *What do you think Jesus meant by his statement in verse 14? How closely are sin and suffering connected?*

Discussion

- 1.** *When do you find it hard to take Jesus at his word (John 4:50)? Be specific.*

- 2.** *'I have no one to help me ...' says the paralysed man. At a time of celebration in Jerusalem, Jesus was at the Bethesda pool amongst the disabled. What can we learn from Jesus? How can you apply this to your life?*

- 3.** *Do you believe that God still heals people today?*

Study 8

JESUS AND ETERNAL LIFE

John 5:16-47

Warm Up

1. How are you like your father/mother? What characteristics of his/hers have you adopted as your own?

Bible Study

(Read John 5:16-30)

1. How does this passage connect with the previous passage? For what two reasons did the Jews want to kill Jesus?

2. In this section what amazing claims does Jesus make that reveal his divinity?

3. What do we learn about Jesus' relationship with God the Father?

4. How do we reconcile the judgment in verse 29 with the assurance of verse 24? (Refer to Ephesians 2:8-10, Titus 2:11-14 and 3:4.)

(Read John 5:31-47)

5. *Jewish law only required two testimonies in a court of law. Jesus, however, calls three witnesses to his truth (apart from his own personal testimony). Identify and describe each witness.*

v 33-35

v 36

v 37-40,46

Discussion

1. *The Jewish scribes sought to know the Word of God, but they did not know the God of the Word (v 39-40). Is there a warning here for us?*

2. *The Pharisees were more concerned with praise from men than praise from God (v 44). Is this ever a struggle for you? Is it wrong to desire the praise of others?*

3. *A day of judgment is coming. 'I tell you the truth,' says Jesus, 'whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life' (v 24). What can you do to spread the word of God locally and overseas so that others might 'cross from death to life'?*

Study 9

JESUS FEEDS THE 5,000 AND WALKS ON THE WATER

John 6:1-29

Warm Up

1. What is your worst/best experience of being on a boat?

Bible Study

(Read John 6:1-29)

1. Look at what this passage has to say about the crowd (v 1-15 & 22-29). How would you describe them?

2. This miracle is the only miracle (apart from Jesus' death and resurrection) recorded in all four gospels. Read Luke 9:12-17. What extra detail do we gain from Luke's account? What do you think Jesus wanted his disciples to learn from this event?

3. Read Matthew's account of Jesus walking on the water (Matt 14:22-32). What extra detail do we gain? What effect do you think this experience had on Jesus' disciples? Why?

4. *Read Psalm 23. The image is different, but what qualities of the Shepherd do you see from John 6:1-29?*

5. *What does the question in verse 28 reveal about the Galilean crowd? How does Jesus counter this in verse 29?*

Discussion

1. *The Galileans could well be described as materialists, for they were so obsessed with the physical that they missed the spiritual (v 26-27). Could the same be said of us? In what ways do you struggle with materialism?*

2. *What comfort can we find in the storms of life, from this story of the disciples on the lake?*

3. *With the pressure and demands of the crowd, we are told in verse 15 that 'Jesus withdrew to a mountain by himself'. Are you, in the midst of the pressures and demands of your life, finding time to withdraw and be alone with God? Perhaps a couple of people might share what God has been showing them as they have spent time with him.*

Study 10

JESUS, THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:30-71

Warm Up

1. *Share one thing you have learnt, or been challenged by, as we have studied John chapters 1-6 together.*

Bible Study

(Read John 6:30-71)

1. *In verses 35 and 48 Jesus says, 'I am the bread of life'. This is the first of seven condensed parables describing Jesus. Look them up and write them down.*

8:12

10:7

10:11

11:25

14:6

15:1

2. *Jesus' use of the words 'I am' as a title had great significance for the Jew. Why? (Refer to Exodus 3:13-15.)*

3. *What is Jesus saying about himself when he calls himself 'the bread of life'?*

4. *What promises are contained in verses 35-40 for the believer?*

5. *Read Exodus 16:1-8. What similarities are there between the manna and Jesus, the bread of life? What differences? How was the response of the people similar on both occasions?*

6. *When Jesus speaks of 'eating his flesh and drinking his blood' (v 51-59), he is not talking primarily about Holy Communion. How do we know this? (Refer especially to v 51, 53 & 56.) What is he referring to?*

Discussion

1. *In what ways as Christians are we to feed on Christ (v 57)?*

2. *If you judge success by numbers, this was probably one of the worst sermons Jesus ever preached (v 66)! In what situations do you find it hard to stand firm and not to go with the crowd?*

PRAYER POINTS