

The Gospel of John
John 20:30-31; 1:1-34

Memory Verse: *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God* (John 1:12 ESV).

Background Helps:

Near the end of the fourth Gospel, John the apostle indicates his purpose in writing this book: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30-31 ESV). In other words, this book is an *evangelistic* document—a fact which ought to have significant bearing on your Sunday school lessons throughout these next four and a half months.

That John is the author of this gospel is clear from both external (outside sources) and internal evidence. He is the “beloved disciple” who, in humility, keeps his name in the background (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20) but who is identified as the author in John 21:24. John was an eyewitness of the events he describes.

Reliable church tradition places John in Ephesus (a city in modern-day Turkey) at the end of his life, where he probably wrote this Gospel as well as his other writings in the late 1st century A.D. John’s Gospel selectively supplements the material in the three Synoptic Gospels (Matt., Mark, Luke)—about 90% of John’s material is unique. The focus of Jesus’ ministry in John is the city of Jerusalem, in contrast to the Synoptics which concentrate on Galilee. Seven of the twenty-one chapters (chaps. 13–19) record events in a twenty-four period, focused on the passion of Christ.

John’s vocabulary is simple, but he conveys profound truths about Jesus Christ. The deity of Christ and his unique relationship to his Father is emphasized throughout, from John 1:1 in the prologue (“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” ESV) to the climactic confession of Thomas in John 20:28 (“My Lord and my God!”).

John’s Gospel alternates between signs (miracles) of Jesus and his discourses, often inter-relating the two. Seven signs occur before Christ’s death and resurrection and an eighth sign afterwards (John 21). Six of these eight signs are unique to this Gospel. The signs point to deeper truths about Jesus. The discourses include seven “I am” sayings of Christ (“I am the bread of life,” “I am the light of the world,” “I am the resurrection and the life,” etc.), significant symbolic claims that Jesus makes about himself. The response which readers are called to make to these signs and teachings is *faith*. “Believing” in Jesus Christ is such a central concept in this book that Merrill Tenney calls John *The Gospel of Belief*.¹

Here’s a simple outline of the book:

¹ Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976).

Prologue (1:1-18)
Jesus' Ministry to the World (1:19–12:50)
Jesus' Farewell Ministry to His Disciples (13–17)
Jesus' Passion and Resurrection (18–20)
Epilogue (21)

Lesson Helps:

A possible lesson aim: My students will learn who Jesus is according to John the apostle and John the Baptist, so that they will believe in Christ.

You could divide your lesson into two parts (especially in teen and adult classes):

1. John the apostle's view of Jesus (John 1:1-18). Here you could teach from John's prologue where he presents Jesus Christ as the Word and as the Light. "Hook" your students at the beginning of class with a suitable illustration of how Jesus is like a "word" (the expression or communication of God) or like a "light." Include the memory verse, John 1:12, inviting your students to believe in Christ, that is, personally receive him into their lives.
2. John the Baptist's view of Jesus (John 1:19-34). Here you could teach from the introductory ministry of John the Baptist where he presents Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God and as the Son of God.

In your overall introduction you could include some of the background material on the Gospel of John that is given in the Helps above. Be sure to notice the purpose of John's Gospel in John 20:30-31.

Adjust your lesson according to your age group. In children's classes you may want to focus on the second part of the lesson plan above, the ministry of John the Baptist. Explain why Jesus is called the Son of God and the Lamb of God (who takes away our sin). Emphasize the memory verse.

If you are reasonably sure that all your students are already Christians, you could simply adjust your aim in this way: My students will learn about the witness of John the apostle and of John the Baptist to Jesus Christ, so that they will bear witness of him to their friends. Cover the same material but look at it from the viewpoint of a witness to Christ.

Home Assignment:

 Read: John 1:35–2:25

 Memorize: John 1:29