

# *The Gospel according to John*



*Lindisfarne Gospels* (Cotton MS Nero D. IV), c. A.D. 700.  
London: British Library.

*with*  
*Dr. Bill Creasy*

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# Palestine in New Testament Times



# The Gospel According to John

Traditional Author: St. John the Apostle

Traditional Date Written: A.D. 90-100

Period Covered: A.D. 30-33

*Simon Rattle, the seasoned conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, once advised the rising, young maestro, Robin Ticciati, on conducting Mozart's Il Sogno di Scipione: "It is not enough to just play the notes . . . For this music to work, you have to understand the grammar, the rhetoric, the phrasing, the articulation. Otherwise this piece is non-existent."*

*And Robin Ticciati observed, in turn: "I might read a symphony score for the first time and read it like a novel, and get awash with feelings. And then I might look at it going, 'humm, so there it goes to the supertonic, he's used that inversion to get to there, there's a three-bar phrase, there's a seven-bar phrase . . .'" I might have a month of reading . . . and then gradually I'll put it together."*

--Robin Ticciati  
(Clemency Burton-Hill, "Maestrochef,"  
*Intelligent Life*, April/May 2015.)

So it is with *The Gospel according to John*. As a literary work, *John* stands shoulder to shoulder with the greatest works of ancient literature. In its final form, it is a remarkably unified work with a simple narrative strategy and a deceptively simple prose style. Yet, of all the writings in the New Testament, *The Gospel According to John* is the most subtle and multi-layered, moving us into profoundly intimate moments with Jesus and his disciples. In it we see Jesus through the eyes of an old man remembering precious moments from long ago, moments shaped through decades of reflection and recalled with a Proustian longing. In *The Gospel According to John*, we probe the very depths of who Jesus *is*. In biblical iconography, Matthew appears as a lion, Mark as an ox and Luke as a man. John rightly appears as an eagle, for in so many ways, he soars above the rest.

As we have seen in our previous studies, Matthew, Mark and Luke all draw from a common body of source material: the events of Jesus' life, the teaching and preaching of the early church and the stories that developed and took shape between A.D. 30 through the mid 70s, the first generation of the church; hence, we refer to Matthew, Mark and Luke as the *synoptic* gospels (Greek, *syn*, "same" and *optic*, "eye"). Although drawing on a common body of source material, we have also seen that Matthew, Mark and Luke each has its own narrative strategy, each shaping its material to suit its purpose and audience.

*The Gospel According to John* operates outside this “synoptic tradition.” Most scholars place the gospel’s composition somewhere between A.D. 90-100, with the outermost limits, A.D. 75-110, and although modern scholarship struggles with the process of the gospel’s composition, the early church consistently identified John, son of Zebedee, “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” who was “reclining next to him” at the last supper (John 13: 23), as its author. As early as A.D. 180-200, Irenaeus tells us that John lived on at Ephesus into the reign of Trajan (A.D. 98-117) and that he wrote his gospel during that time.<sup>1</sup>

John begins his gospel with a prologue and he ends it with an epilogue; in between we follow Jesus and his disciples through three increasingly detailed cycles of Jewish festivals. We might visualize the gospel’s architecture like this:

Prologue (1:1-18)

A Cycle (1:19-2:12)

B Cycle (2:13-5:47)

C Cycle (6:1-20:31)

Epilogue (21:1-25)

In the Prologue, John focuses upon the *person* of Jesus, and he defines precisely who he is. Here is my literal translation, emphasizing the Prologue’s structure and John’s very precise use of diction and grammar. I highlight words and phrases for later analysis.

1a	In the beginning was the Word,
1b	and the Word was with God,
1c	and the Word was God.

- a. 2 He was in the beginning with God.
- 3 All things through him came to be,  
and without him nothing came to be that came into being.
- 4 In him was life,  
and the life was the light of men,
- 5 and the light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness did not comprehend it.
  
- b. 6 There came a man, having been sent from God  
whose name was John.

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, the ancient church historian, mentions that John returned to Ephesus from his exile on Patmos after the death of Domitian, and he gives Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria as his sources (see *Ecclesiastical History*, III, xxiii, 1-2), while Irenaeus himself tells us that the Apostle John authored the gospel during that time (*Adv. Haer.*, III, 1:1).

- 7 He came as a witness  
that he might witness about the light  
that all might believe through him.
- 8 He was not the light,  
but he came that he might witness about the light.
- 9 He was the true light which,  
coming into the world  
enlightens every man.
- 10 He was in the world,  
and the world came to be through him,  
and the world did not recognize him.
- 11 He came to his own,  
and his own did not receive him.
- 12 But as many as did receive him  
he gave to them the right to become children of God  
to those believing in his name—
- 13 the ones born not of blood,  
nor of the will of flesh,  
nor of the will of man,  
but of God.

14a	And the Word became flesh
14b	and dwelt among us,
a.	and we gazed upon his glory, glory as of an Only Begotten who came from the Father,
14c.	full of grace and truth.

- b. 15 John bears witness about him, and he cries out saying,  
“This was he of whom I said,  
‘He who comes after me surpasses me  
because he was before me.’”
- 16 For from his fullness  
we have received  
even grace on top of grace.
- 17 For the law was given through Moses:  
grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

18a	No one has ever seen God,
18b	but God, the Only Begotten, who is in the bosom of the Father has made him known.

Notice how the first two of the three main units I have highlighted read as one statement:  
“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . .  
and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth.”

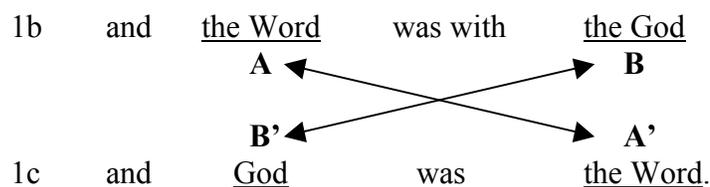
The diction and grammar of this statement are crucial in understanding its full implication. In 1a-c we read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” The verb *was* drives verse 1. In English, “was” is a simple past tense, but the Greek is in the *imperfect tense*. This presents a very important grammatical distinction. While the past tense in English describes a simple action that took place in the past (“Dr. Creasy *spoke* last week.”), the Greek imperfect tense portrays an action *in progress*. When John says, “In the beginning *was* the Word . . .” the Word existed in the past from some indeterminate point in time; it exists in the present; and it continues to exist into the future. The English past tense presents a snapshot of a past event; the Greek imperfect tense presents a moving picture.

The imperfect tense in verse 1 has significant exegetical implications. It tells us that we can look back into the past as far as we want and the Word walks out of eternity to greet us; or we can look into the future as far as we can, and the Word is there waiting to meet us.

Furthermore, John tells us that “the Word was with God” and the “Word was God,” thus equating the two: Word = God. Keeping the verbs parallel and in the imperfect tense throughout the verse tells us that this equation did not happen at some particular point in time; it was always this way.

Consequently, when John says in verse 14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” he makes an astounding claim: if Word = God, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, *then God became one of us and lived among us*. (If **A**, Word = **B**, God; and if **A**, Word = **C**, flesh; then **B**, God must = **C**, flesh.) In addition, the imperfect tense throughout verse 1 tells us that when the Word became flesh, that “flesh” wasn’t a new creation, but a different manifestation of the eternally existing God. Thus, in his Prologue John makes the staggering claim that Jesus *is* God, manifested in flesh; in these verses John explicitly sets forth the divinity of Christ.

John’s grammar reinforces the point. A very literal translation of 1b, c reads:



The chiasm structure (**A/B, B'/A'**) is a common technique in Hebrew poetry, and we have encountered it already in our study of the Hebrew Scriptures. Structuring the verse in this way balances it and reinforces the absolute equality of Word/God. It creates a grammatical problem, though. Note that **B** carries the definite article, “*the* God,” leaving no doubt about who is intended: the *one* God, YHWH. To be consistent, **B'** should read “*the* God” as well. If it did, though, the subject would be ambiguous: Would the subject be “God” or “Word”? If “God,” then 1c would read “and God was the Word”; if “Word,” then 1c would read “and the Word was God.” Dropping the definite article from

**B'** solves the problem. Technically, this is called an *anarthrous construction*, and it allows “the Word” to be the unambiguous subject. Consequently, 1c correctly reads, “and the Word was God.” All three phrases of verse 1 are thus parallel, while the tight chiasmic structure of 1b and 1c displays the inherent equality of Word/God.

Even John’s choice of prepositions displays his careful craftsmanship. In 1b he writes, “and the Word was *with* God.” The Greek word for “with” is *pros*. He could have chosen *meta*, which means “in the midst of” (as he does in 1:26 when he has John the Baptist say, “but *in your midst* [*mesos*] stands one you do not know,” literally placing Jesus within the crowd to whom John is speaking), or *soon*, which means “in close association with,” or *para*, which means “along side of.” Instead, he chooses *pros*, which suggests equality as well as distinction of identity. When John says “The Word was *with* [*pros*] God,” he means more than that the Word is a subset of God [*meta*, “in the midst of”] or a partner of God [*soon*, “in close association with”] or parallel to God [*para*, “along side of”]. By choosing *pros*, John tells us that the Word is a separate, distinct entity, equal to God and fully united with him in his creative action.

This is very thoughtful, very deliberate writing, and it is characteristic of the care and subtlety with which John crafts every facet of his gospel.

As we move from the Prologue to the “A Cycle” of the story, we encounter John’s use of time markers, another feature of his narrative technique. The “A Cycle” spans 1:19 - 2:12, and it begins with our narrator saying “Now this is John’s testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was” (1:19). In this scene, John firmly tells the delegation that he is neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet that Moses spoke about in Deuteronomy 18:15; rather, he is the one spoken of in Isaiah 40:3, the “voice of one calling in the desert.” When they protest, John says, I baptize with water . . . but among you [*meta*, “in your midst,” as noted above] “stands one you do not know” (1:26). “This all happened,” we’re told, “at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing” (1:28).

Our story continues, “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’” (1:29), telling us that we are in Day 2 of our narrative sequence. On this day John tells his followers that he himself would not have known who Jesus was, except that when he baptized him he “saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him” (1:32). We know from the geographic references that John is baptizing on the east side of the Jordan River, at the main fording point, across from Jericho (the location is near today’s Allenby Bridge). It is clearly at the time of a pilgrimage festival—Passover, Pentecost or Tabernacles—and large crowds are moving from the north on the main pilgrimage route toward Jerusalem. And we know from the synoptic gospels that immediately after Jesus’ baptism by John, the Holy Spirit “drives him into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days being tempted by Satan” (Mark 1:12-13). Again, from our geographical references, we know that the desert in which Jesus is tempted is the area around Jericho. If Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River near Jericho at Passover, then spent forty days being tempted in the desert, Day 1 of our narrative sequence must be at the

start of the feast of Pentecost, for Pentecost occurs fifty days after Passover, and the crowds are just beginning to arrive, traveling from the north, fording the Jordan at Jericho, and moving up the 17-mile Roman road toward Jerusalem.

At verse 35 we read, “The next day John was there again with two of his disciples . . .,” leading us into Day 3 of our sequence. On this day two of John’s disciples, Andrew and our narrator, John, meet Jesus and spend the day with him, beginning at “about the tenth hour”<sup>2</sup> and they introduce him to Peter.

“The next day”—Day 4 (1:43) Jesus decides to leave for Galilee, taking with him Peter, Andrew, John, Philip and Nathaniel. To return to Galilee the group would travel north up the eastern side of the Jordan to the area around Scythopolis (or in Hebrew, “Beit She’an”) and cross back over the Jordan at that point. Jesus would have then walked across the Jezreel Valley to Nazareth and the rest of the group would have headed north to the Sea of Galilee. The journey for Jesus totals around 65 miles. Adult males traveling together would cover about twenty miles per day; hence, we read in 2:1, “On the third day [of the journey home] a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee,” and the group attended. Presumably, Jesus invited his traveling companions. Oddly, they ran out of wine (perhaps because of Jesus’ five uninvited guests?), and Jesus performs his first miracle, changing water into wine.<sup>3</sup>

The wedding party takes place on Day 7 of our narrative sequence, and the following day, Day 8, “he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days” (2:12), bringing us to Day 12 and the end of the sequence. Between 2:12 and 2:13, the rest of the year passes, for we read “When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem” (2:13).

Thus, the “A Cycle” spans Passover to Passover, 1:19 - 2:12. The “B Cycle” covers 2:13 - 5:47, for we read at the start of chapter six, “Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Feast was near” (6:1-4). And the “C Cycle” covers 6:1 - 20:31, from the Passover mentioned in 6:4 to the Passover on which Jesus is crucified. The three cycles together cover the three years of Jesus’ public ministry. Taking into account Luke’s

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<sup>2</sup> That is, about 10:00 AM. John, writing from Ephesus in the late first century, habitually uses Roman time references, which begin at midnight, not Jewish references, which begin at sunrise. Hence, Mark, using Jewish time references, tells us that Jesus was crucified at “the third hour [9:00 AM],” (Mark 15:25), “at the sixth hour [noon] darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour [3:00 PM]” (15:33) and “at the ninth hour [3:00 PM] Jesus cried out . . . ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” and died (15:34), while John tells us that Jesus appeared before Pilate “about the sixth hour [6:00 AM]” (John 19:14) and would then have been crucified about the ninth hour [9:00 AM], reconciling the two accounts. B.F. Westcott first suggested this solution to an apparent contradiction in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and N. Walker revived it in “The Reckoning of Hours in the Fourth Gospel,” *Novem Testamentum* 4 (1960), pp. 69-73.

<sup>3</sup> I say it in jest, but if the five uninvited guests caused the wine shortage, then the story has a considerable element of humor. When Mary looks toward Jesus, we may picture her raising an eyebrow as she says, “They have no more wine” (2:3). If so, the humor intensifies when Jesus creates 180 gallons more!

mention that “Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry” (Luke 3:23), we conclude that Jesus was crucified at about 33 years old.

As we move through John’s story, the time markers provide milestones along our narrative journey. With each step we encounter a narrative texture of greater or lesser depth, forcing us to observe the scenery around us and to navigate the trail carefully as attentive readers. Take the story of Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus, as an example.

The unit begins with 2:23 and extends through 3:21. We read:

*Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.*

*Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”*

(John 2:23-3:2)

As the story opens at Passover in Jerusalem, we learn that many people believed in Jesus because of the miraculous signs he was doing, but Jesus did not trust such superficial faith. In contrast to them, we meet Nicodemus. An adversative *de* in the Greek—better translated “but”—introduces him: “[But] there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council . . .” (3:1). In contrast to the “many people,” Nicodemus is clearly a man of substantial intellect and elevated position. He comes to Jesus at night with a question: “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him” (3:2).

Nicodemus, like the people, has seen the miracles, but unlike the people he has not blindly placed his faith in Jesus. Instead, he comes at night, not because he fears the people (like them, he is fascinated with Jesus) or the religious leaders (after all, he is one of them); rather, he comes for a private conversation, for more information about an important question. Notice how he begins: “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God . . .” But this is not a question; it is a statement—and an odd one at that. What does Nicodemus really want here? Perhaps if we read between the lines: “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher come from God (but are you *the* Teacher come from God?) . . . Before Nicodemus can finish, however, Jesus replies, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (3:3). On the face of it, Jesus’ reply makes no sense whatsoever; it seems a complete *non sequitur*. Yet Nicodemus follows it up: “How can a man be born when he is old? . . . Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” (3:4).

Don't conclude that Nicodemus is naïve or foolish; he is neither. Later in verse 11 Jesus makes that clear when he says of himself and Nicodemus, "we speak of what we know." No, Nicodemus's question has to do with how one enters the kingdom of God, and Jesus sees straight through the indirection to the heart of the matter. When he tells Nicodemus that he must be "born again," Nicodemus rightly understands that to mean he must start anew. But how can an old man steeped in the Law, shaped by history and rooted in tradition toss all of his beliefs overboard and adopt a completely new paradigm? That would be as impossible as reentering his mother's womb and beginning life again!

And Jesus agrees when he says, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (3: 5-6). Notice that in Jesus' first response he says, "I tell you the truth, no one can *see* the kingdom of God . . .," and here he says, "I tell you the truth, no one can *enter* the kingdom of God . . ." Moving from "see" to "enter" gets us closer to Nicodemus' real question: "How can *I* [Nicodemus] enter the kingdom of God." If our reading is correct, this is a remarkable statement coming from a member of the Jewish ruling council, a man steeped in a lifetime of learning, tradition and religion.

At the next moment we might imagine a random breeze rustling the trees and both Nicodemus and Jesus looking upward as Jesus says, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (3:8). *This* is how one is born again. It is not something you can affect; it is the work of the Spirit, and you can no more control it than you can control the wind.

Nicodemus then replies, "How can this be?" (3:9), not expressing doubt, but (like Mary in Luke's Annunciation scene of Luke 1:34) inquiring about the *process*: "If I cannot affect the work of the Spirit in being born again, how exactly does it occur?" And Jesus replies with a wink, "You are Israel's teacher . . . and you do not understand these things?" (3:10). This is not sarcasm or criticism, but a humorous jab: "You have a Ph.D. in theology and you don't know this?" And then Jesus goes on to say, more seriously, "We [you and I] speak of what we know, and we [you and I] testify to what we have seen . . .," indicating that Jesus and Nicodemus both clearly understand the discussion at hand. He then goes on to say, "but still *you* people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to *you* of earthly things and *you* do not believe; how then will *you* believe if I speak of heavenly things?" (3:11-12). The grammar is critical to understanding Jesus' statement. The three references to *you* in verse 12 are grammatically *second person plurals*. Jesus is not referring to Nicodemus here, but to the people who place their faith in him because of the miracles they have seen. Jesus is saying, "Look, Nicodemus, you and I understand what we are speaking about: if you want to enter the kingdom of God, it must be through the work of the Spirit, not through some action that you take yourself; but the people do not have a clue about any of this: they simply do not understand. And if they do not understand such a basic truth, how in the world will they understand the deeper things of heaven?"

And then Jesus answers Nicodemus' question directly: "You want to know, Nicodemus, how to enter the kingdom of heaven and have eternal life? I'll tell you how: 'No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man [me]. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life'" (3:13-15). Here, Jesus presents plainly the process by which one attains eternal life: "As Moses lifted up the snake in the desert and those who looked to it in faith were saved (Numbers 21: 4-9), so too when I am lifted up on the cross will those who look to me in faith be saved. *That's* the process by which one attains eternal life and enters the kingdom of heaven."

In verses 16-21 that follow, our narrator offers an extended reflection on the action that has just taken place: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (3:16). Notice that this statement directly addresses Nicodemus' question, "How can I attain eternal life?" Our narrator goes on to say, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light . . ." (3: 18). At this point our narrator reaches back to the light/dark motif he introduced in the Prologue to conclude his reflection. We should recognize that 3:16-21 are the narrator's thoughts on the story we have just read; they are *not* Jesus' words, as so many editors interpret them, printing them in red.

The story of Nicodemus and Jesus is brilliantly crafted, with multiple subtexts. Nicodemus has heard Jesus teach and he has seen the miracles Jesus has performed, just like the people who have placed their faith in Jesus because of the miracles. Nicodemus, however, is not willing to embrace such superficial faith. Instead, he approaches Jesus for a private conversation. Rather than simply ask Jesus—"How can I attain eternal life and enter the kingdom of heaven?"—Nicodemus approaches Jesus indirectly, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God . . ." But Jesus sees through the indirection and instantly cuts to the heart of the matter. This is truly world-class narrative: it operates on multiple levels, it draws on a shared cultural and religious knowledge, it is subtle, and it probes the depths of the issue it addresses. The story of Nicodemus and Jesus is a superb example of John's narrative style, and it presents a model for an attentive reading of the rest of John's gospel.

This truly is world-class literature of the highest order.

# Outline

## Prologue (1:1-18)

### I. “A Cycle,” First Passover (1:19-2:12)

- A. Day 1 (1:19-28)  
(John the Baptist is questioned about who he is)
- B. Day 2 (1:29-34)  
(John the Baptist identifies Jesus)
- C. Day 3 (1:35-42)  
(Andrew, John and Peter meet Jesus)
- D. Days 4-7 (1:43-51)  
(The journey home)
- E. Day 8 (2:1-11)  
(The wedding at Cana)
- F. Days 9-12 (2:12)  
(A visit to Capernaum)

### II. “B Cycle,” Second Passover (2:13-5:47)

- A. Jesus visits the temple with a whip (2:13-22)
- B. Nicodemus meets Jesus (2:23-3:21)
- C. John the Baptist testifies concerning Jesus (3:22-36)
- D. Jesus travels through Samaria and meets a Samaritan Woman (4:1-42)
- E. Jesus heals a royal official’s son in Cana (4:43-54)
- F. Jesus heals an invalid at the Pool of Bethesda (5:1-15)
- G. Resulting controversy with the Jewish leaders (5:16-47)

### III. “C Cycle,” Third Passover (6:1-20:31)

- A. ***“I am the Bread of Life”*** (6:1-71)
  - 1. Jesus feeds the five thousand (6:1-15)

- a. Jesus returns to Capernaum, walking on the water (6:16-24)
- 2. Jesus presents himself as genuine food and genuine drink (6:25-71)
- B. Autumn Brings Increasing Conflict with the Religious Leaders (7:1-10:42)
  - 1. Feast of Tabernacles (7:1-10:21)
    - a. Jesus is reluctant to attend the feast because of intense opposition (7:1-13)
    - b. Halfway through the feast, Jesus appears (7:14-52)
      - (1) The plot to kill Jesus emerges as conflict intensifies (7:14-31)
      - (2) On the final day of Tabernacles, temple guards are sent to arrest Jesus (7:32-52)
  - 2. After Tabernacles through the Feast of Dedication (8:1-10:42)
    - a. Jesus deals with the woman caught in the act of adultery (8:1-11)
    - b. ***“I am the light of the world”*** (8:12-9:41)
      - (1) Introduction (8:12-30)
      - (2) A question of identity (8:31-59)
        - (a) Jewish leaders claim to be “children of Abraham”; Jesus calls them “children of the devil” (8:31-47)
        - (b) Jesus claims equality with God (8:48-59)
      - (3) Jesus heals a man born blind (9:1-41)
    - c. ***“I am the gate for the sheep”*** (10:1-10)
    - d. ***“I am the good shepherd”*** (10:11-21)
    - e. The Feast of Dedication (10:22-42)
  - 3. After the Feast of Dedication to Passover (11:1-12:50)
    - a. ***“I am the resurrection and the life”*** (11:1-57)
      - (1) Jesus raises Lazarus (11:1-44)
      - (2) Religious leaders’ response (11:45-57)
    - b. Jesus arrives at Jerusalem (12:1-50)
      - (1) The dinner party with Mary, Martha and Lazarus (12:1-11)
      - (2) Triumphal entry and the end of Jesus’ public ministry (12:12-36)
    - c. Narrative reflection of Jesus public ministry (12:37-50)

4. Final Passover (13:1-20:31)
  - a. Passover meal (13:1-14:31)
    - (1) Jesus washes his disciples' feet (13:1-17)
    - (2) Jesus predicts his betrayal and Peter's denial (13:18-38)
    - (3) Jesus comforts his disciples (14:1-14)
      - (a) ***"I am the way and the truth and the life"*** (14:6)
    - (4) Jesus promises the Holy Spirit (14:15-31)
  - b. The Walk to Gethsemane (15:1-17:26)
    - (1) ***"I am the true vine"*** (15:1-16:33)
      - (a) Remain in me (15:1-8)
      - (b) Love one another as I have loved you (15:9-17)
      - (c) The world will hate you because of me (15:18-16:4)
      - (d) The Holy Spirit will help you (16:5-16)
      - (e) You will overcome the world (16:17-33)
      - (f) Jesus' prayer (17:1-26)
  - c. Jesus' arrest and trial (18:1-19:16)
    - (1) Arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (18:1-11)
    - (2) Trial before Annas (18:12-24)
    - (3) Trial before Caiaphas (18:25-27)
    - (4) Trial before Pilate (18:28-19:16)
  - d. Jesus' crucifixion and death (19:17-42)
    - (1) Jesus carries his own cross (19:17)
    - (2) Jesus crucified (19:23)
      - (a) Soldiers cast lots for Jesus' clothing (19:23-24)
    - (3) Jesus dies (19:28-37)
    - (4) Jesus buried (19:38-42)
  - e. Jesus' resurrection (20:1-31)
    - (1) Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb (20:1-2)
    - (2) Peter and John at the empty tomb (20:3-9)
    - (3) Jesus speaks with Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb (20:10-18)
    - (4) Jesus' first appearance to his disciples—without Thomas—in the upper room (20:19-23)
    - (5) Jesus' second appearance to his disciples—with Thomas—in the upper room (20:24-31)

**Epilogue (21:1-25)**

# The Gospel according to John

## Syllabus

Week 1 (January 11, 12)

### Lesson #1: Introduction to the Johannine Canon

The Johannine canon consists of the *Gospel according to John*; *1, 2* and *3 John*; and the *Book of Revelation*. As we have noted many times, all art—literary, musical and visual—mirrors the time and culture from which it emerges, and Scripture is no exception. As the early Church spread throughout the Roman Empire in the second half of the first century, the teaching and preaching of the Apostles and others brought the gospel message to an enormously diverse audience of both Jew and Gentile, spread geographically from Jerusalem, Damascus and Antioch in the east; Alexandria, Cyrene and Carthage in the south; Mauretania, Spain and Gaul in the west; and St. Paul’s mission field of Asia Minor, Macedonia, Achaia and Rome in the north.



Hundreds of “church” communities took root throughout the Roman Empire in the fertile soil of the gospel message, but each of those communities experienced and lived that message within its own historical, political and cultural context. Although the core gospel message was the same, each community *experienced* and *understood* that message differently: a highly urban community in Carthage or Alexandria, for example, might view the gospel very differently from one in a remote agricultural area of eastern Cappadocia.

When we studied the synoptic gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—we learned that a “gospel” is *not* a biography of a person, although it does contain biographical information; it is *not* an historical account of a person, although it is rooted in historical time; it is *not* a fictional account of a person, although it does include miracles, wonders and the large dose of the supernatural; rather, a “gospel” is an account of the “good news” of the coming Kingdom of God and of the redemption of humanity through the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, *as seen through the eyes of a living faith tradition, guided by the Holy Spirit, 30-60 years after the events it portrays.*

Consequently, each Christian community experienced and lived the gospel through its own interpretative lens. It wouldn't be until the 4<sup>th</sup> century that a series of 7 Ecumenical Councils (A.D. 325-787) defined precisely who Christ is and what he did, in a manner that most church communities could agree upon.

We don't know precisely where the Johannine canon originated or who exactly wrote it (although tradition holds that it was the St. John the Apostle), but the five works within the canon differ radically from the synoptic gospels, St. Paul's epistles and letters, and the other general epistles and letters of the New Testament.

In Lesson #1 we explore those differences, and we focus especially on the *Gospel according to John*, the jewel in the crown of the Johannine canon.

## ***Lesson #2: The Prologue (1: 1-18)***

Unlike Matthew and Luke in the synoptic tradition, who introduce Jesus through a linear genealogy (in *Matthew*, Abraham to Jesus; in *Luke*, Jesus to Adam), John's gospel takes flight on eagle's wings, with soaring poetry:

*“In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God . . .  
and the Word became flesh  
and made his dwelling among us.”*

(John 1: 1, 14)

John introduces Jesus not as a descendant of Abraham or a descendant of Adam, but as the incarnate Word; as God, enfleshed. This is an astounding claim, one that introduces John's “high” Christology, and one that forms the very core of John's gospel. Unlike Matthew, Mark and Luke, John's gospel is not linear, but cyclical, with the incarnate Word at its center and all other action radiating outward from it like pulsating rays of light.

The Prologue, too, introduces fundamental thematic dichotomies of light/dark, descent/ascent, acceptance/rejection and insiders/outsideers. Every character, every action in John's gospel fits one category or the other, opposites in constant juxtaposition, constant tension.

John's Prologue demonstrates superb poetic craftsmanship, each thematic element, each word choice, each grammatical nuance intricately intertwined, gossamer threads weaving light and shadow, a portrait of Christ emerging.

This is really, really good stuff!

### **Enrichment Material**

Luke Timothy Johnson, "Johannine Traditions," *The Writings of the New Testament*, pp. 461-463.

Donald Senior and PHEME Perkins, "John," *The Catholic Study Bible*, pp. 412-423.

"The Gospel according to John, Introduction," *The Catholic Study Bible*, pp. 1486-1487.

## **Week 2 (January 18, 19)**

### **Lesson #3: First Encounter (1: 19 – 2: 12)**

We begin John's "A Cycle" (1: 19 – 2: 12) in Jericho on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, A.D. 29. With thousands of people fording the Jordan River to make their way up the old Roman Road to Jerusalem for the festival, John the Baptist is busy at the river, baptizing. As he works, a delegation arrives from Jerusalem, sent by the priests and Levites at the Temple, to ask John who he is and what he is doing. The confrontation is brief but bold, and in it we first meet Jesus, standing on the edge of the crowd, silent and watching.

The next day, as John and his disciples are heading back to the Jordan River, they pass Jesus heading in the opposite direction, and John says something very strange: "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*" (1: 29). It happens again the next day, and this time two of John's disciples (Andrew, Peter's brother; and John, our author) follow Jesus and spend the day with him.

Through the ingenious use of "time markers" we follow Jesus as he gathers disciples, leaves Jericho and attends—with his newly found friends—a wedding at Cana.

This is exceedingly rich material, and we want to observe two things as we engage it: 1) John's use of time markers; and 2) the "gaps" in the narrative that

we must fill in, if we're to understand the story. As we read closely, this seemingly-simple narrative takes on layer upon layer of structural and stylistic complexity as the enigmatic figure of Jesus slowly emerges, like watching an old Polaroid SX-70 photo develop before your very eyes!

#### **Lesson #4: Nicodemus (2: 13 – 3: 36)**

Lesson #4 begins the “B Cycle” (2: 13 – 5: 47), the 2<sup>nd</sup> Passover, with the story of Nicodemus, a prominent Jewish leader and a member of the Sanhedrin. On this 2<sup>nd</sup> Passover Jesus enters Jerusalem with a whip and he clears the Temple, tossing tables and driving out the moneychangers. In the synoptic gospels this scene occurs on Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, toward the *end* of the story; John positions it here, at the *beginning* of the story. In *John* the “cleansing of the Temple” establishes Jesus’ knowledge and authority, in sharp contrast to the knowledge and authority of Nicodemus, “a ruler of the Jews” (3: 1).

We are told “*while he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all*” (2: 23-24). We then move directly to, “[but] *there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews . . .*” (3: 1). Nicodemus stands in sharp contrast to the crowds who believed in Jesus because of the “signs” he performed. Nicodemus needs more than “signs”; he needs understanding, and hence he comes to Jesus at night for a private conversation.

Make no mistake: Nicodemus is no ignorant buffoon, afraid of the crowds; he is a highly educated, insightful man, and his conversation with Jesus sparkles with insight and verbal play. It also takes us to the very heart of Jesus’ identity and of how we come to know him.

#### **Assignment**

Read: John 1: 19 – 3: 21.

### **Week 3 (January 25, 26)**

#### **Lesson #5: The Samaritan Woman (4: 1-54)**

We leave the story of Nicodemus, a respected leader of the Jews, and we move directly to the story of the Samaritan woman, an outcast (as both a Samaritan and a marginalized woman) who has been married five times, and the man she is living with now is not her husband. She is the town whore, the polar opposite of Nicodemus: whereas, Nicodemus was knowledgeable but modest, the Samaritan woman is ignorant but brash; whereas, Nicodemus resides in Jerusalem, the center of

piety and power, the Samaritan woman lives in Sychar, an anonymous village in “unclean” territory.

Unlike Jesus’ subtle and insightful exchange with Nicodemus, Jesus’ jousting with the Samaritan woman is startling, as they trade insults. Both the encounter with Nicodemus and the encounter with the Samaritan woman lead to truth, but they arrive by totally different paths.

### ***Lesson #6: The Pool of Bethesda (5: 1-47)***

In Lesson #6 Jesus heads back to Jerusalem where he meets a man at the pool of Bethesda who has been profoundly disabled for 38 years. The man believes, as do others, that when the water stirs, the first person in the water will be healed. But someone always gets there first!

The crippled man has enormous faith: he has watched the water intently for 38 years, looking for the first ripple, *believing* that the water will heal him. But he has faith in the wrong thing. Notice how Jesus redirects the man’s vision from looking at the water to looking at *him*. And when he does, the man is healed.

The healing takes place on the Sabbath, and of course this stirs up immediate opposition from the religious authorities. Jesus counters not with a story, a witty retort or a brilliant one-liner—as he so often does in the synoptic gospels—but with a lengthy theological discourse, reinforcing Jesus’ identity and his relationship with God the Father.

### **Assignment**

Read: John 4: 1 – 5: 47.

## **Week 4 (February 1, 2)**

### ***Lesson #7: The Body and Blood of Christ (6: 1-71)***

Lesson #7 begins John’s “C Cycle” (6:1 - 20:31), the 3<sup>rd</sup> Passover, with a dazzling discourse on the Eucharist, a reflection on the body and blood of Christ. To set up the discourse, John begins with Jesus and his disciples crossing to the east side of the Sea of Galilee (the “other side”) where Jesus teaches the crowds and multiplies the fish and the loaves. He then retreats to the mountains. Later that night, Jesus wants to return to Capernaum, but blocked by the lingering crowd, he walks across the water, meeting his disciples midway on the lake, where they take him into their boat.

The next day the crowd makes its way around the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, finding Jesus already at Capernaum. When they ask him how he got there, he

counters by saying, “*Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled*” (or, “You don’t care about me; you just want breakfast!”), 6: 26. He continues, “*Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you*” (6: 27).

This leads Jesus to compare the manna in the desert, which God gave to sustain the Israelites during their 40 years in the wilderness, to the *genuine* bread—his body and blood, which God gives to sustain us during our wilderness journey through life. And Jesus does not compromise, invoking symbol or metaphor: “*Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true [i.e. “genuine”] food, and my blood is true [i.e. “genuine”] drink*” (6: 53-55).

In light of Leviticus 17, this is scandalous, and his disciples say so: “*This saying is hard* [i.e., σκληρός, “hard,” “rough,” or “unyielding”]; *who can accept it*” (6: 60). Jesus does not back down, however, insisting on a literal understanding of his words, refusing to dilute his statement to make it more palatable.

Jesus’ discourse on the Eucharist introduces the first of seven “I am” statements, metaphors that lead us deeply into Jesus’ identity:

1. **“I am the bread of life” (6: 35)**
2. “I am the light of the world” (8: 12)
3. “I am the gate for the sheep” (10: 7)
4. “I am the good shepherd” (10: 11)
5. “I am the resurrection and the life (11: 25)
6. “I am the way and the truth and the life” (14:6)
7. “I am the true vine” (15:1)

### **Lesson #8: Tabernacles and Tension (7: 1-52)**

Autumn brings increasing conflict and tension within Jesus’ family, with the crowds and with the religious authorities in Jerusalem. As the feast of Tabernacles nears Jesus’ “brothers” (ἀδελφοί, those of his immediate family named in Mark 6: 3—James, Joses, Judas and Simon) urge him to go to Jerusalem, but in a tone of mocking sarcasm:

“*Leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. No one works in secret if he wants to be known publically. If you do these things, manifest yourself to the world.*’ For his brothers did not believe in him.”

(7: 3)

At first Jesus refuses to go “because the Jews were trying to kill him” (7: 1), but he soon relents, making his way secretly to Jerusalem, arriving halfway through the feast. And, indeed, he walks into a hornet’s nest. During a series of heated exchanges with the crowds, the religious leaders dispatch temple guards to arrest him, but afraid of triggering a riot they fail to do so.

Throughout John 7 opposites clash: Jesus (being drawn to Jerusalem) and Jesus (afraid to go); Jesus and his brothers; Jesus and the crowds at the festival; Jesus’ supporters and those in the crowds who oppose him; Jesus and the religious leaders; the religious leaders and Nicodemus. The chapter bristles with opposition, with tension and conflict.

### **Assignment**

Read: John 6: 1 – 7: 52.

## **Week 5 (February 8, 9)**

### **Lesson #9: A Light in the Darkness (8: 1 – 9: 41)**

Lesson #9 opens with the story of the woman caught in the very act of adultery and Jesus’ stunning response to it. The story then turns to the second of seven “I am” statements:

1. “I am the bread of life” (6: 35)
2. **“I am the light of the world” (8: 12)**
3. “I am the gate for the sheep” (10: 7)
4. “I am the good shepherd” (10: 11)
5. “I am the resurrection and the life (11: 25)
6. “I am the way and the truth and the life” (14:6)
7. “I am the true vine” (15:1)

The statement stands in sharp contrast to the darkness of the world and to the utter blindness of the religious leaders who refuse to accept Jesus, who find his statements preposterous, and who think him to be stark-raving mad. Indeed, in commenting on John’s gospel the great Oxford literary scholar and Christian apologist, C.S. Lewis, remarked:

*“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse.”*

*(Mere Christianity, London: William Collins Sons, 1952, p. 54.)*

Only those who stand in the light can see; the religious leaders cannot. This is illustrated perfectly in the story of the man born blind that immediately follows Jesus' white-hot exchange with the religious leaders.

### ***Lesson #10: The Good Shepherd (10: 1 – 11: 54)***

Lesson #10 opens with two more “I am” statements, presenting Jesus as the good shepherd; it closes with Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead and his stunning statement, “*I am the resurrection and the life*”:

1. “I am the bread of life” (6: 35)
2. “I am the light of the world” (8: 12)
3. **“I am the gate for the sheep” (10: 7)**
4. **“I am the good shepherd” (10: 11)**
5. **“I am the resurrection and the life (11: 25)**
6. “I am the way and the truth and the life” (14:6)
7. “I am the true vine” (15:1)

We know from the synoptic gospels that Jesus raised two people from the dead in Galilee: Jairus' 12-year old daughter (Matthew 9: 18-26; Mark 5: 21-43; Luke 8: 4-56); and the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7: 11-17). Neither of these appears in John's gospel; conversely, raising Lazarus does not appear in the synoptic gospels.

Raising Lazarus is the centerpiece of John's gospel. It provides the supreme example of Jesus as the good shepherd, and it also offers conclusive evidence that Jesus and the Father are one (10: 30). In addition, it sets the stage for Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion, for when word spreads that Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead, the Sanhedrin holds an emergency session, and “*from that day on they planned to kill him*” (11: 53). As Peter's confession of faith and the Transfiguration mark the turning point in the synoptic gospels, so does Jesus raising Lazarus mark the turning point in John's gospel.

### **Assignment**

Read: John 8: 1 – 11: 54.

## **Week 6 (February 15, 16)**

### ***Lesson #11: Final Passover (11: 55 – 12: 50)***

In Lesson #11 Jesus enters Jerusalem for his final Passover. We have studied this story three times now: in Matthew, Mark and Luke. John's gospel, however, approaches the story very differently. Rather than tell us what happened, as the synoptic gospels do, John invites us to join the inner circle and sit at the table. We

attend a dinner party at Bethany and we smell the perfume that Mary pours on Jesus' feet; we walk with Jesus on the "triumphal entry"; we share Jesus' fear as he contemplates what lies ahead; and we hear intimate conversations between Jesus and his disciples.

Lesson #11 draws Jesus' public ministry to a close. What follows is the most sustained, intimate sequence in all of Scripture. As Jesus steps into the shadow of the cross and the dreadful darkness of suffering and death, we walk with him. Night envelops us. Blackness grips our souls. We stand at the foot of the cross . . . and we wait.

### ***Lesson #12: The Last Supper (13: 1 – 14: 31)***

After the dinner party at Bethany and Jesus' "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem, we skip the extended drama of Holy Week portrayed in the synoptic gospels—the scourging of the Temple (which John places at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, not at the end); the daily, escalating encounters with the religious leaders; and the verbal sparring with Jesus' opponents—and we move directly to the Last Supper, which begins with Jesus washing his disciples' feet, an event unique to John's gospel. During dinner, Jesus speaks of Judas' betrayal and of Peter's denial, and he offers encouragement to his disciples, emphasizing the sixth of his seven "I am" statements:

1. "I am the bread of life" (6: 35)
2. "I am the light of the world" (8: 12)
3. "I am the gate for the sheep" (10: 7)
4. "I am the good shepherd" (10: 11)
5. "I am the resurrection and the life" (11: 25)
- 6. "I am the way and the truth and the life" (14:6)**
7. "I am the true vine" (15:1)

During the conversation Jesus stresses his oneness with the Father, prompting Philip to ask, "*Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us*" (14: 8), to which Jesus replies: "*Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*" (14: 9).

### **Assignment**

Read: John 11: 55 – 14: 31.

## Week 7 (February 22, 23)

### Lesson #13: *The Genuine Vine* (15: 1 – 16:33)

Leaving the Last Supper, Jesus and his disciples walk past the Temple's southern steps, turn left at the southeastern corner of the Temple platform, cross the narrow Kidron Valley and head up the Mount of Olives to the Garden of Gethsemane. As they begin their ascent, they turn and look toward the Temple, whose golden doors glow in the light of a Passover full moon rising from east, above the Mount of Olives. Josephus writes:

*"The temple had doors also at the entrance, and lintels over them, of the same height with the temple itself. They were adorned with embroidered vails [sic], with their flowers of purple, and pillars interwoven; and over these, but under the crown work, was spread out a golden vine, with its branches hanging down from a great height, the largeness and fine workmanship of which was a surprising sight to the spectators, to see what vast materials there were, and with what great skill the workmanship was done."*

*(Jewish Antiquities, XV, 11)*

When Jesus and his disciples see the beautiful golden vine, illuminated by the Passover moonlight, adorning the Temple doors, it prompts Jesus seventh "I am" statement:

1. "I am the bread of life" (6: 35)
2. "I am the light of the world" (8: 12)
3. "I am the gate for the sheep" (10: 7)
4. "I am the good shepherd" (10: 11)
5. "I am the resurrection and the life" (11: 25)
6. "I am the way and the truth and the life" (14:6)
7. **"I am the true vine" (15:1)**

### Lesson #14: *The Lord's Prayer* (17: 1-26)

We all know the "Lord's Prayer," as Matthew reports it in Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" (6: 9-13). But Jesus never prayed this prayer ("This is how you are to pray," he said): rather, Jesus used this prayer as a model to teach us how to pray.

Many times in the gospels we observe Jesus praying, but only on rare occasion do we hear what he says. In Lesson #14 John allows us sit with the disciples and to listen as Jesus prays for himself, for his disciples . . . and for us.

#### **Assignment**

Read: John 15: 1 – 17: 26.

## Week 8 (February 29, March 1)

### ***Lesson #15: Jesus Arrested (18: 1-40)***

In Lesson #15 Jesus is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and taken to the home of Annas, who was high priest from A.D. 6-15. The Roman Prefect, Valerius Gratus (Pontius Pilate's predecessor), removed Annas from office, but Annas still exerted considerable influence among the religious leaders. John skillfully alternates the inquiry before Annas, with Peter's denial in the courtyard: Annas/Peter/Annas/Peter.

Annas then sends Jesus to his son-in-law, Caiaphas, appointed high priest by Gratus in A.D. 18, who delivers Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the current Roman Prefect, A.D. 26-36. John weaves a masterful account of Jesus' trial before Pilate, a story with significant "gaps" that we need to fill, a story that is illuminated by Jesus' and Pilate's movement into and out of the Antonia Fortress (much as Jesus' bodily movements illuminate the story of the woman caught in adultery). Although Pilate makes every effort to save Jesus, it is to no avail: Jesus refuses to cooperate.

In Lesson #15 we examine Pilate's character and possible motives as we make our way through the trial.

### ***Lesson #16: Excursus: Judas, the Betrayer***



Carl Heinrich Bloch. *The Last Supper* (oil on copper), 1876.  
Museum of National History, Frederiksborg Castle, Hillerød, Denmark.

Judas is a much more complex character than we often experience in a liturgical context. A disciple from the start, Judas was with Jesus for his entire 3-year public

ministry; Judas witnessed Jesus' teaching, preaching and healing; Judas was present at Peter's confession of faith, and Judas believed that Jesus was the Messiah.

So why does Judas betray Jesus?

In Lesson #16 we explore Judas' character and possible motives, in depth.

### **Assignment**

Read: John 18: 1-40.

**NO CLASSES MARCH 7-22 DURING DR. CREASY'S "CLASSIC ITALY" TOUR  
AND "WALKING THE ALMAFI COAST" HIKE.**

## **Week 9 (March 28, 29)**

### ***Lesson #17: The Crucifixion (19: 1-42)***

The Persians introduced crucifixion as a capital punishment as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and the Carthaginians, Macedonians and Romans employed it until the Emperor Constantine outlawed crucifixion in A.D. 337, out of deference to Christ.

The Greeks had an aversion to crucifixion, although the historian Herodotus tells of the crucifixion of the Persian General Artayctes, who commanded forces in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Persian invasion of Greece under Xerxes (a central character in the Book of Esther), 480-479 B.C.

The Romans used crucifixion frequently, however; indeed, Crassus, the Roman General who defeated Spartacus in the slave revolt of 73-71 B.C. crucified 6,000 captive slaves, lining the Via Appia with them, and the historian Tacitus tells us that during the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 no fewer than 600,000 Jews fought the Romans and those captured were crucified, up to 500 per day.

Crucifixion involved a prolonged, excruciatingly painful death by being nailed to a cross with tapered iron spikes, 7-9" long, generally taking three or more days to die.

In Lesson #17 we examine this brutal method of execution, as John presents it.

### **Lesson #18: *The Resurrection* (20: 1–31)**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single most important event in Scripture. Indeed, in addressing the church in Corinth Paul writes: “*But if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then empty is our preaching; empty, too, your faith*” (1 Corinthians 15: 12-14). Without the resurrection of Christ, our faith—no matter how authentic, how deeply felt, or how worthily expressed—is worthless.

The *Gospel according to John* offers a dramatic account of Jesus’ resurrection, including Peter and John’s footrace to the empty tomb, Jesus’ appearance to Mary Magdalene and his disciples, as well as the story of “doubting Thomas.”

#### **Assignment**

Read: John 20: 1-31.

### **Week 10 (April 4, 5)**

#### **Lesson #19: *Epilogue* (21: 1-25)**

John’s gospel ends with chapter 20, but one issue is still unresolved: Peter’s denial. The synoptic gospels do not address it, but John’s does. Peter was leader among the twelve, and with Jesus’ resurrection and ascension he will play a key role in the birth and growth of the Church, preaching his first sermon with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, A.D. 32 (Acts 2: 14-41), at which 3,000 people are “saved.”

When we left Peter, however, he was utterly devastated by his denial of Christ. Judas betrayed Jesus, and he hanged himself as a result, but what of Peter? How do we get him back? John offers a brilliant narrative on Peter’s “reinstatement,” a narrative that is so subtle and psychologically insightful that it is dazzling to read.

In this lesson we do so.

#### **Lesson #20: *Final Thoughts***

Finishing our study of Matthew, Mark, Luke/Acts and John brings us to a major milestone in our verse-by-verse study through the entire Bible, Genesis through Revelation. In our final lesson we review what we’ve covered, emphasizing that is not an historical account of a person, although it is rooted in historical time; it is not a fictional account of a person, although it does include miracles, wonders and the

large dose of the supernatural; rather, a “gospel” is an account of the “good news” of the coming Kingdom of God and of the redemption of humanity through the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, *as seen through the eyes of a living faith tradition, guided by the Holy Spirit, 30-60 years after the events it portrays.*

In this concluding lesson, we revisit the authorship, audience and purpose of each gospel account, recalling how each gospel is structured, how each differs stylistically, and how each gospel develops its own point of view and perspective on the gospel message.

Having studied all four gospels (and Acts), we have a detailed, 3-dimensional portrait of Christ, but it’s not a complete one. As the four gospels portray the person and work of Christ—as understood by four different faith communities in the second half of the first century—so does the Holy Spirit continue to guide us and deepen our understanding of Christ through the teaching of his Church, until this very day.

### **Assignment**

Read: John 21: 1-25.

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- [This is a major revision of Brown's magisterial 2-vol. Anchor Bible commentary. Sadly, Brown died in 1998 before completing his final work, but Francis J. Moloney has brought the book skillfully to publication. In his rethinking of the gospel, Brown moves well beyond the historical-critical position he articulated so well over three decades ago, and he opens his new work to a literary reading of the text. This is a very important commentary by one of the greatest New Testament biblical scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.]
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