



# 1

## An Introduction to the Gospel of John

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

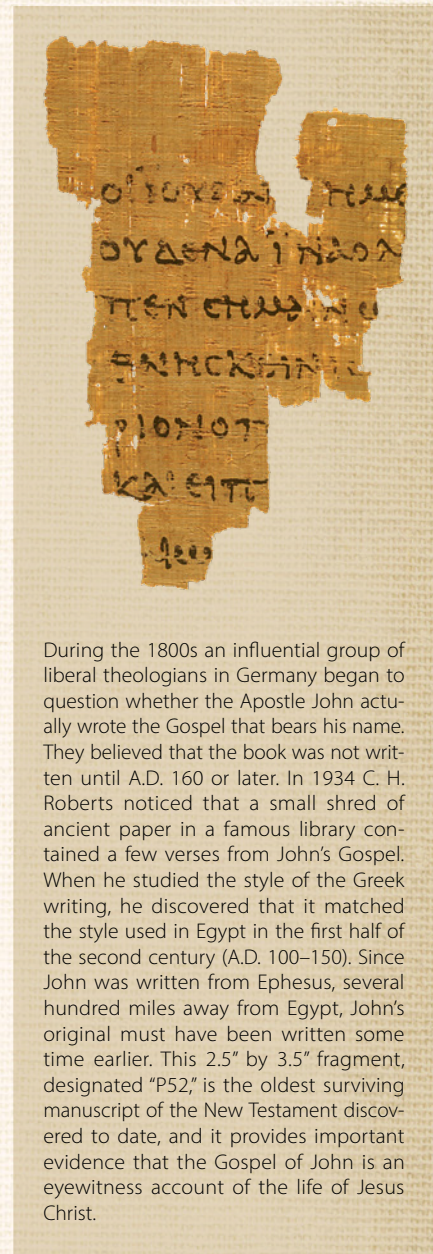


- The word *believe* is used almost one hundred times in John, whereas it appears only about forty times in the other three Gospels.
- The word *faith* does not occur even once in John.
- *Eternal life* appears thirty-five times in John but only twelve times in the other Gospels.

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

## The Date of Its Writing

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



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

## The Author



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



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

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

## How We Got Our Bible

No one has discovered the original copies of Scripture written by John, Paul, and others, but at this time we possess about 5,300 handwritten copies of different portions of Scripture. Some of these manuscripts are as old as the second century A.D. The oldest manuscripts have been found in the warm, dry climates of Northern Africa and Palestine, but the vast majority of what we have today were created in Eastern Europe and Turkey in the ninth century or later.

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

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

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



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

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



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



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

The other two are simply called “two other of His disciples.”



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

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



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

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

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

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

## Predominant Thinking Patterns

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

### **Gnosticism**

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

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

## The Mosaic System

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

## John's Attack

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



Read John 1:1–3. How did John attack the Gnostic idea of a creator being who was less than God but more than man? \_\_\_\_\_

**He wrote that the Creator was in the beginning with God and was God.**



How did John answer the Docetic beliefs in John 1:1–14? \_\_\_\_\_

**He wrote that the Word was made flesh.**



How did John prove that the Mosaic system was replaced by Christ in John 1:1–18? **He wrote that although Moses gave the**

**law, Christ brought grace and truth.**



What did John write about the Jewish belief that Christ was to come for only the Jews? **He came to them, but they did not**

**receive Him; however, whoever did receive Him became the sons of God.**



## Notes from the Teacher's Lesson

### An Introduction to the Gospel of John

#### The Place of John in the New Testament

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

## The Contents of John

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

## The Unique Characteristics of John

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

## The Application of the Gospel of John

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

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





## Digging Deeper

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





# 2

## The Purpose of John's Gospel

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

### The Gospel of John Proves the Deity of Christ

#### *Purpose*



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

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#### *Selective evidence*



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

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



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

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



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

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



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

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

## John Wrote to Cause Men to Believe and Live



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



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



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

## John Also Wrote to Supplement the Other Three Gospels

### *The Synoptic Gospels*

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

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

### ***John was written after the Synoptic Gospels***

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

### ***John centers on major Jewish feasts***

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

### ***John completes the Gospels’ scope of Christ’s ministry***

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

### ***John shows us the time of Christ’s ministry***

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

## **The Timeline of the Book of John**

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

## The timelines

Found on pages 276–277.

## The outline

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

## Notes from the Teacher's Lesson



### The Purpose of John's Gospel

#### John's Two-fold Purpose

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



### ***The Four Passovers***

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

### ***The Timeline of John's Gospel***

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

### ***Lessons for Our Lives***

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

## Digging Deeper



1. Research and report on the Passover. What did it symbolize? When was it instituted? What did it foreshadow in the ministry of Christ? In what ways is the Passover like the Lord's Supper? (Consult Victor Buksbazen, "Passover and the Lord's Supper," in *The Gospel in the Feasts of Israel* for details on this topic.)
2. Select one of the miracles of Christ for closer study. Describe it and compare/contrast it with other miracles that He performed.
3. Compare and contrast the "I AM's" of Christ.
4. Using the timeline as a basis, prepare a summary of other "secular" events that were occurring throughout the known world at the time of the life of Christ. As part of your summary, explain how the Scriptures (specifically Gal. 4:4) can truthfully say that Christ's first coming to Earth was "in the fullness of time." What was going on in the world that made this the ideal time for the appearance of the Messiah?



### 3

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

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

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

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



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

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

In some areas around the sea, people find the stench overwhelming, thanks to high concentrations of minerals like magnesium, sulfur, potassium, calcium, and bromide salts, which arise from hot springs under the water. Since the sea has no outlet, the water evaporates, leaving thick deposits. Although these minerals have tremendous potential value, it is so expensive to extract them that the resources remain virtually untapped. Drinking the water in any significant quantity can prove fatal, but the taste is so repulsive that few people would try.

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

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

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

## Physical Features

Use the cross-section below to answer the following questions.



The physical characteristics (terrain and bodies of water) of Israel may be divided into five features running eastward from the Mediterranean Sea. List the five features in the following blanks:

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



What river runs north to south through Israel? Jordan River



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



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



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



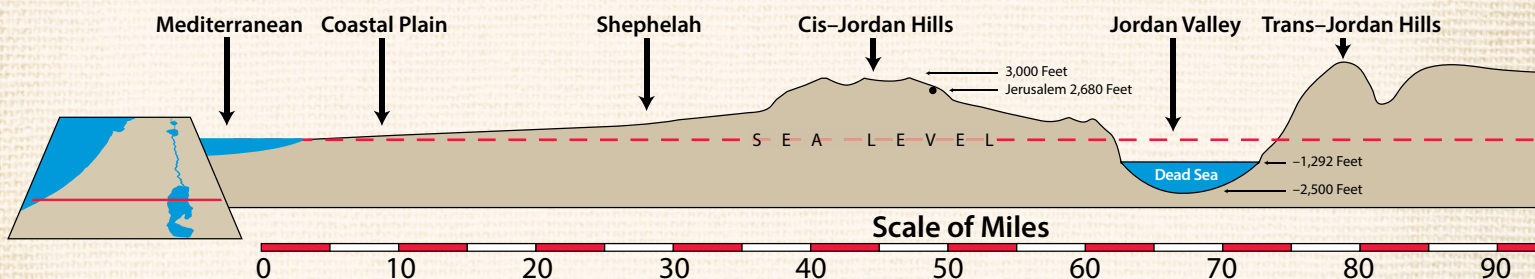
The highest point in Israel is Mount Hermon, which is 9,232 feet in elevation. Jerusalem is 2,680 feet above sea level. Just 10 miles from Jerusalem is the lowest piece of land on Earth, the shore of the Dead Sea, which is 1,300 feet below sea level.



Jordan River North of Sea of Galilee



Mount Hermon





## Climate

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

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

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

## Land Divisions

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

### *Widespread ministry*

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

### *Christ's itinerary*



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

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

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

## Political Rulers

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

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





## Notes from the Teacher's Lesson

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

#### *Size and Location of Israel*

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

#### *Physical Features: The Perfect Country*

- Varied climate
- Varied geography
- Varied crops

#### *Political Division of the Land*

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

#### *Geographical Divisions*

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

#### *Cities*

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

## Dead Sea: A Picture of Many Christians

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

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

## Digging Deeper

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

