

EXPLORATIONS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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Week One: “A New Passover Lamb”

OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE STUDY

Over the next eight weeks, we will read the entire Gospel according to John, focusing on Passover as a theme that connects all twenty-one chapters. Each week, we will summarize the content of a few preassigned chapters and then focus in depth on one shorter, exemplary text that allows us to appreciate all that the Evangelist is telling us about Jesus. The schedule is as follows:

Week (Dates)	Content	Key Text	Theme
Week 1 (Sept. 19-20)	Jn 1	Jn 1:19–51	A New Passover Lamb
Week 2 (Sept. 26-27)	Jn 2–4	Jn 4:1–42	The First Passover
Week 3 (Oct. 3-4)	Jn 5–6	Jn 6 (all)	The Second Passover
Week 4 (Oct. 10-11)	Jn 7–10	Jn 9:1—10:18	Interlude: Other Feasts
Week 5 (Oct. 17-18)	Jn 11–12	Jn 12:12–36a	The Third Passover: Foretold
	Oct. 24–25	BREAK: PARISH MISSION	
Week 6 (Oct. 31-Nov. 1)	Jn 13–17	Jn 17 (all)	The Third Passover: Discussed
Week 7 (Nov. 7-8)	Jn 18–19	Jn 18:28—19:16	The Third Passover: Narrated
Week 8 (Nov. 14-15)	Jn 20–21	Jn 20 (all)	The Eternal Passover

JN 1 IN THE ROMAN LITURGY

Christmas Day: Mass during the Day (ABC)	Jn 1:1–18
[2 nd Sunday of Christmas]*	Jn 1:1–18
3 rd Sunday of Advent (B)	Jn 1:6–8; 19–28
2 nd Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)	Jn 1:29–34
2 nd Sunday of Ordinary Time (B)	Jn 1:35–42

On weekdays, we hear Jn 1 read continuously during the Season of Christmas, on Dec. 31 (Jn 1:1–18), Jan. 2 (Jn 1:19–28), 3 (1:29–34), 4 (1:35–42), and 5 (1:43–51).

*This liturgical day only occurs in countries where Epiphany is celebrated on January 6 (regardless of the day of the week on which it falls) and there only when a Sunday falls between January 2–5. Since we celebrate Epiphany each year on the Sunday between January 2–8 in the United States, we never observe this day here.

STRUCTURE OF THE ENTIRE GOSPEL

<i>Part</i>	<i>Feast</i>	<i>Text</i>	<i>Content</i>
Introduction		1:1–18	The Evangelist's Prologue
The Book of Signs	Pentecost? (summer?)	1:19–51	Narrative: The Early Followers of Jesus
		2:1–12	1st Sign: Jesus Turns Water into Wine at Cana
	1 st Passover (spring)	2:13–25	Controversy: The Cleansing of the Temple
		3:1–24	Discourse: Jesus and Nicodemus
		3:25–36	Discourse: Final Testimony of John the Baptist
		4:1–42	Discourse: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman
		4:43–54	2nd Sign: Jesus Heals the Official's Son at Cana
	Sabbath/ Pentecost?	5:1–16	3rd Sign: Jesus Heals a Paralytic
		5:17–47	Controversy: Jesus, the Just Judge
	2 nd Passover (spring)	6:1–15	4th Sign: Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand
		6:16–21	5th Sign: Jesus Calms the Storm
		6:22–71	Discourse: Jesus, the Bread of Life
	Tabernacles & Sabbath (autumn)	7:1–52	Controversy: The Identity of Jesus
		7:53—8:11	[[Narrative: Jesus and the Adulterous Woman]]
		8:12–59	Controversy: Jesus as Light, Truth, and Freedom
		9:1–12	6th Sign: Jesus Gives Sight to a Man Born Blind
	Dedication (winter)	9:13—10:21	Controversy: Sight and Blindness
		10:22–39	Controversy: "The Father and I are one."
		10:40–42	Narrative: Jesus Returns to Galilee
		11:1–44	7th Sign: Jesus Raises the Dead Man to Life
11:45–57		Narrative: Some Believe, Some Plot to Kill	
Before Passover (spring)		12:1–11	Narrative: Anointing at Bethany
		12:12–19	Narrative: Jesus Enters Jerusalem
	12:20–36	Narrative: Jesus Announces His Hour	
		12:37–50	The Evangelist's Conclusion to the Book of Signs
The Book of Glory	3 rd /Last Passover (spring)	13:1–38	Narrative: Jesus, Satan, Peter, and Judas
		14:1–22	Discourse: Jesus—The Way, Truth, and Life
		14:23–31	Discourse: The Promise of the Advocate
		15:1–17	Discourse: The Vine and the Branches
		15:18—16:11	Discourse: The World's Persecution
		16:12–33	Discourse: Jesus Bids Farewell to "His Own"
		17:1–26	Discourse: Jesus Prays for "His Own"
		18:1—19:42	Narrative: The Slaughter of the Lamb
	After Passover	20:1–18	Narrative: Mary Magdalene Sees the Risen Lord
		20:19–29	Narrative: The Disciples See the Risen Lord
Conclusion	20:30–31	The Evangelist Explains Why He Wrote	
	21:1–23	Narrative: The Risen Lord Appears on the Sea	
	21:24–25	The Evangelist's Final Testimony	

THE PROLOGUE (NABRE)

The Evangelist Solemnly Announces the Coming of the Word-Made-Flesh

1 ¹ In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

² He was in the beginning with God.

³ All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.
What came to be ⁴ through him was life,
and this life was the light of the human race;
⁵ the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ A man named John was sent from God. ⁷ He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world,
and the world came to be through him,
but the world did not know him.

¹¹ He came to what was his own,
but his own people did not accept him.

¹² But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, ¹³ who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory as of the Father's only Son,
full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'"

¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, ¹⁷ because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.

THE LAMB'S WITNESSES

After the 18-verse Prologue, which introduces Jesus, John the Baptist, and their respective missions, the Gospel's narration begins in the wilderness outside of Jerusalem as curious priests inquire John about whether he might be the Messiah.

The First Day: The Priests and Levites Question John

1¹⁹ And^a this is the testimony^b of John, when the Jews sent from Jerusalem priests and Levites^c [to him]^d so that they might ask him, “Who are you?”²⁰ And he confessed and did not deny, indeed he confessed,^e “I am not the Christ.”

²¹ And they asked him, “What are you then? Are you Elijah?”

And he said, “I am not.”

“Are you the prophet?”

And he answered, “No.”^f

²² So they said to him, “Who are you? So that we can give an answer to those who sent us, what do you have to say for yourself?”

²³ He said,

^a This conjunction “and” transitions directly from the conclusion of the Prologue (Jn 1:1–18), which contains a summary of the entire message of the Gospel.

^b Gk *martyria*. This word can be translated either “witness” or “testimony” in English. This noun implies a courtroom atmosphere where one speaks in order to establish the truth. The word family (consisting of the noun *martyria* and verb *martyrein* “to bear witness, to testify”) occurs 38x in Jn (and 10x in 1 Jn, 3x in 3 Jn, and 14x in Rv). “Instead of using the term ‘evangelize,’ John speaks of ‘witnessing,’ which in a Christian context suggests not only personal, firsthand knowledge but also risking one’s all.” (Martin/Wright, p. 43) Indeed, “to witness is an important vocation in John because through witness, the world comes to know the presence of God in Jesus.” (O’Day, p. 1908)

^c “the Jews sent from Jerusalem priests and Levites”: The identity of these people who hear the testimony foreshadows the Jesus’ testimony in Jerusalem during his trial. This confrontation between “the Jews” and John the Baptist sets the stage for greater conflict between the leaders and Jesus later in the Gospel. (See Köstenberger, p. 59; O’Day, p. 1909)

^d These square brackets indicate words that are absent in some of the earliest manuscripts of Jn. Therefore, scholars question whether they appeared in the original text of the Gospel or instead were added by an early copyist.

^e “confessed ... did not deny ... confessed”: This repetition in the translation follows that of the Gk text. Notice that all three verbs have courtroom connotations like “testimony”.

^f John denies being the Christ three times. Who else denies something related to Christ three times? Unlike the later denials, John is an ideal witness who bears testimony to the truth, like the one he announces (see Jn 18:37). See Köstenberger, p. 60.

“I am *the voice crying out in the desert, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,’*” as Isaiah the prophet said.^a

²⁴ And those people sent were from the Pharisees.^b ²⁵ And they asked him and said to him, “So why do you baptize if you are neither the Christ nor Elijah nor the prophet?” ²⁶ John answered them, “I baptize with water; among you stands one whom you do not know,^c ²⁷ the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to loosen the strap of his sandal.^d ²⁸ These things happened in Bethany across the Jordan,^e where John was baptizing.^f

The Second Day: The Baptist Announces the Coming of the Lamb of God

²⁹ The next day, he saw Jesus coming towards him and said,^g “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”^h ³⁰ This is he about whom I said, ‘After

^a The italicized text is a direct quotation from the Gk translation of Is 40:3. In their original context, the prophet’s words formed part of a message of consolation to Israel, that their time of punishment (the Exile) was over and that God was coming with power to redeem his people.

^b An important detail, these emissaries do not represent Judaism as a whole, but rather the leaders in Jerusalem.

^c This verse also echoes the words of the prophet: “Shout for joy ... for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.” (Is 12:6)

^d Unlike in the Synoptics, John does not record Jesus’ baptism in connection with this saying about the Baptist’s comparative unworthiness.

^e “Bethany across the Jordan”: The village of Bethany mentioned later in Jn 11:1, 18; 12:1 is only two miles from Jerusalem and is not across the Jordan from the Holy City. Perhaps the Evangelist means a different Bethany—one more in the wilderness and closer to the river (see Köstenberger, p. 65). Given the difficulty, it is unsurprising that many early manuscripts have a different name of the place. For more, see Metzger, p. 171.

^f John the Baptist assumes a subservient role in Jn: “His baptizing and preaching in the desert was opening up the hearts of men, leveling their pride, filling their emptiness, and thus preparing them for God’s intervention.” (Brown, p. 50)

^g Notice the pattern of seeing and saying. Again, like a courtroom witness, the believer testifies to an experience of Jesus. This pattern repeats in 1:36 and 1:47. Jesus himself does the same on the cross when he sees his mother and the beloved disciple and says, “Behold your mother” and “Behold your son” (Jn 19:26–27). See Martin/Wright, p. 45.

^h “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”: It is hard to exaggerate the importance of this verse as it contains two of the Gospel’s central themes: (1) Jesus as the Lamb whose blood surpasses that of all other Passover lambs and (2) the relationship between sin and the world. In the latter theme, John uses the term “sin” (Gk. *hamartia*) to connote a rejection of Jesus, a rebellion against God’s plan to make the world “children of God” (cf. Jn 1:12). Of the Gk noun’s 17x in Jn, 14x are singular, indicative of a disposition against God rather than an enumeration of discrete misdeeds. This verse also evokes Is 53:7, which speaks of the Prophet’s suffering servant

me is coming a man who ranks ahead of me, because he was before me.’³¹ And I myself did not know^a him, but so that he might be shown^b to Israel, I thus came baptizing with water.”³² And John testified,^c “I saw the Spirit descend like a dove from heaven and it remained on him.”³³ And I did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘On the one whom you shall see the Spirit descend and remain on him, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’³⁴ And I have seen and have testified^d that this is the Son of God.”

The Third Day: The Baptist and the Disciples

³⁵ The next day, John was again standing with two of his disciples³⁶ and, when he watched Jesus walking around, he said, “Behold the Lamb of God.”^e³⁷ And his two disciples heard what he said, and they followed Jesus.

³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw that they were following him, he said to them, “What do you seek?”

They said to him, “Rabbi^f (which translated means Teacher),^g where are you staying?”^h

who becomes like a slaughtered lamb on behalf of the people. For more, see Köstenberger, pp. 66–68.

^a But he knows the Son now. The Evangelist declines to narrate how the Baptist came to this knowledge.

^b “be shown”: This passive voice verb accents that it is God who truly reveals his Son. The Baptist is but an instrument.

^c This piece of testimony evokes Is 11:1–2, a famous messianic passage, which mentions the sevenfold gift of the Spirit. The Baptist hence says in effect: “Here’s the Messiah.”

^d “have seen and have testified”: In Gk, the perfect tense of these two verbs indicates a past experience with an ongoing effect: “I have seen and continue to see, and I have testified and continue to testify.” The Baptist’s experience and testimony are not yet finished.

^e Some manuscripts add “who takes away the sins of the world” here (as in 1:29).

^f Here, the two disciples address Jesus as “Rabbi”. Later in this chapter, the titles will progress to “Messiah” (1:41) and “Son of God” / “King of Israel” (1:49, indicative of how the disciples’ “remaining” with Jesus leads them to a deeper recognition of who he is. See the discussion in Brown, pp. 78–80.

^g The inclusion of this translation implies that the original hearers of Jn did not know Hebrew, since a reader who did would have no need of this information. It also reinforces the first disciples’ initial lack of understanding of the fullness of who Jesus is. (See Moloney, p. 60).

^h The patron saint of the double entendre strikes! What answer do the two disciples expect? What is the real answer? (Hint: See Jn 1:14).

³⁹ He said to them, “Come, and you will see.”^a So they came and saw where he was staying and remained^b with him that day; it was about the tenth hour.^c ⁴⁰ Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard John and followed him; ⁴¹ he first^d found his brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah (which translated means Christ).”^e ⁴² He led him to Jesus.^f

Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon, the son of John, you shall be called Cephas (which is translated Peter).”

The Fourth Day: Philip and Nathanael

⁴³ The next day, he decided to leave for Galilee and found Philip^g. And Jesus said to him, “Follow me.”

⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, from the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael^h and said to him, “We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the Law, and also the prophets, Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.

^a “you will see”: This verb appears in the future indicative tense, implying that they who come experiences a true vision as a consequence of the faith that impels them to follow.

^b “remained”: The verb “to remain” (Gk *menein*) bears particular significance in Jn; it means to exist in an intimate relationship with the Father through the Son. Jesus calls all his followers “to remain” with him. Such is the point of the vine/branches in Jn 15. See Martin/Wright, p. 48.

^c “the tenth hour”: About 4:00 p.m. Unclear therefore is whether Andrew stayed with Jesus overnight and then told his brother about him the next day or, as the subheadings here assume, that Andrew brought Peter to see Jesus before the day ended.

^d “first”: Most likely, the word means that the first thing Andrew did after Jesus called him was to tell his brother. For more on the uncertain form of this word in the text, see Metzger, p. 172.

^e While Jesus is the Messiah, the term carried much meaning to first-century Jews like Simon and Andrew; their understanding of Jesus falls short of the divinity announced in the Prologue (1:1): “The words to Simon are an indication to the disciples that there is more to a proper understanding of Jesus than finding in this rabbi the fulfillment of *their* messianic expectations.” (Moloney, p. 55)

^f This short five-word sentence matches the Gk text and speaks volumes. Before all else, a disciple leads others to Jesus.

^g Galilee is about 70 miles north of Jerusalem. Therefore, this journey would have taken several days on foot. The narrative leaves unclear why Simon and Andrew would have been south in Judea during this time (Perhaps they were in Jerusalem for a feast at the Temple?). In any event, the Evangelist is not writing a travelogue, but an account of how a variety of people recognize who Jesus is. One solution to this difficulty proposes that this “Bethany across the Jordan” (1:28) in fact is on the east side of the Sea of Galilee (ancient Batanea). For more, see Köstenberger, p. 65.

^h Nathanael is known as Bartholomew in the Synoptics: “Since the name ‘Nathanael’ is not mentioned in the Synoptics, it is likely that this was the personal name of Bartholomew (Bar-

⁴⁶ And Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good be from Nazareth?”^a

Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him and said about him, “See a true Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?”

Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree.”^b

⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God, the King of Israel.”

⁵⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.”^c ⁵¹ And he said to him, “Amen, amen, I say to you^d, you will see *heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending*^e on the Son of Man.”^f

The Sixth Day: A Cliffhanger!

2 ¹ And on the third day^g, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there...

Tholomaios = son of Tholomaios), who is linked with Philip in all three Synoptic lists” (Köstenberger, pp. 79–80).

^a Note the irony: Does Jesus *really* come from Nazareth? See again Jn 1:1-18.

^b Notice that Jesus meets Nathanael’s skepticism in the same way that he meets Thomas’s after the Resurrection (Jn 20:20–31), by meeting his needs in order to move to discipleship. In Jn, Jesus makes radical demands of his disciples, but provides them with the help they need to respond to his call, most especially by providing them with an Advocate (see Jn 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

^c “You will see greater things than these.” These words bespeak the signs that will begin two days later (starting in 2:1, see especially 2:11). For more on how the three days mentioned in 1:41–2:12 parallel the three days mentioned in Ex 19, see Moloney, pp. 50–57.

^d “you”: Gk *hymin*; the pronoun is plural. Jesus speaks here to more than just Nathanael. He certainly addresses Philip also, and probably also Peter and Andrew, who are likely also present. The Evangelist thus concludes this opening story with a concluding line that draws all the readers to anticipate what he will say about Jesus later in the Gospel.

^e The italics here indicate a quotation from the OT, here Gn 28:12, the story of Jacob’s ladder. In the story in Genesis, the Patriarch has a dream in which he sees a ladder on which angels ascend and descend between heaven and earth. When he awakens, he exclaims, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it!” Nathanael has just had the same experience as Jacob. This quotation points to Jesus as the divine Word who has come to dwell with his people (again, see Jn 1:14, 17). For more, see Martin/Wright, pp. 51-52.

^f “Son of Man”: This title evokes Dn 7:13-14, in which a figure “like a son of man” receives “all dominion, splendor, and kingship.” See O’Day, p. 1910.

^g As measured from the fourth day (1:43-51); hence, it is the sixth day in the sequence begun in 1:19.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

Abbreviations:

All biblical abbreviations are those proposed as standard in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

A number followed by “x” reflects the number of times a given word occurs in a given context. Therefore, the shorthand “3x in Jn” means that the word occurs three times in the Gospel of John.

Gk = Greek.

Bibliography:

Unless otherwise indicated, all English biblical citations (except the main text, which I translate personally) are from the *New American Bible Revised Edition*, 2011. (= NABRE)

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