

BOOKS OF THE BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

by WAYNE PALMER

J O H N



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INTRODUCTION:

Unlike the other three Gospels, which give us an outline of Jesus' words and deeds, the Gospel of John gives us a collection of the deep sayings of Jesus, which systematically present and explain the eternal mysteries of the faith God had revealed through the prophets of the Old Testament.

AUTHORSHIP:

The Gospel of John was written by the apostle John, one of Jesus' hand-picked twelve disciples, brother of James, son of Zebedee. John was in the inner circle of disciples with his brother James, and Simon Peter.

PURPOSE:

John wrote this Gospel to address the false teachings of a man named Cerinthus, who argued from Moses' writings (Deuteronomy 5:7 and 6:4) that there is only one God, and therefore Jesus, the Word, cannot be the divine Son of God. John wrestled Moses' writings back from this heretic and taught that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, begotten of His Father in eternity, who took on human flesh and lived among us as the promised Christ or Messiah. John recorded a series of Jesus' miracles, but he called them "signs" instead of "miracles." They are signs because they point to Jesus' divinity. This Gospel's purpose is summed up in 20:31, "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."

OUTLINE:

For the purposes of this study, we will divide the Gospel of John into a prologue, four parts, and an epilogue.

PROLOGUE:**THE WORD BECAME FLESH (1:1–18)**

1. Jesus' Ministry (1:19–10:42)
2. A Death and Resurrection; Persistent Unbelief (chs. 11–12)
3. Passover and Holy Week (chs. 13–19)
4. Jesus' Resurrection (ch. 20)

EPILOGUE (CH. 21)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PROLOGUE: THE WORD BECAME FLESH—JOHN 1:1–18

While the other three Gospels began their accounts of Jesus' earthly life in the land of Israel, John began his account in heaven, as the Son of God rose from His throne to become man and enter into the world He created. He came to graciously deliver His human creatures from spiritual darkness and to make it possible for believers to become the children of God.

Read 1:1–18.

In the second half of the prologue, John introduced the theme of his Gospel: some will believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the promised Savior, but others will reject Him. Those who refuse to believe remain in darkness; but Christ overcomes this darkness and promises His grace to each of us, to every person on earth.

Q 1: Pause for a moment to ponder the profound words of verse 14, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” What thoughts enter your mind when you meditate on this?

A 1: Jesus' incarnation was a profound event, God the mighty Creator becoming a creature—one of us. Instead of praying to a distant God sitting on His throne in heaven, far away from us and our daily pains and miseries, we can cry out to the Son of God who shared this life with us, who experienced all the joys and griefs we suffer—yet who also conquered sin, death, the devil, and hell and has power to give us the victory and guide us through every life struggle we can face.

JESUS' MINISTRY—JOHN 1:19–10:42

In the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), we see Jesus carry out the bulk of His public ministry in Galilee to the north. The Book of John opens with some events of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, but quickly moves down to Jerusalem to show us what Jesus taught in the Holy City.

We begin with the witness of John the Baptist and Jesus calling four of His first disciples—two of whom are well-known from the other Gospels, two whose calling is recorded nowhere else.

John did not record Jesus' Baptism. His focus was the words that John the Baptist spoke about Jesus. From John, we receive the deeply meaningful phrase "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29). All of the Old Testament sacrifices pointed ahead to this final, perfect sacrifice.

Read 1:19–34.

Q 2: What new insight do these words of John the Baptist bring to Holy Communion?

A 2: First, they remind us that Jesus has taken away the sins of each and every human of all times—so we can be assured that the wrath of God our Father is gone and He welcomes us with open arms—no matter how grievous our sins. Second, the words of 1:29 remind us that we can look upon the visible elements of bread and wine through the eyes of faith and see the body and blood Jesus sacrificed and shed to pay the price for our sins and secure our freedom. Whenever we sing those words after the Words of Institution, we should look to the bread and wine on the altar where Jesus has come to feed us.

In the next passage, Jesus called four disciples by the Jordan River. Brothers Andrew and Peter, and friends Philip and Nathanael. Here we learn that Andrew was first a disciple of John the Baptist, then when Jesus called him to become His disciple, he rushed off to find Peter and introduce him to Jesus.

Read 1:35–51.

Q 3: How did Nathanael's initial response to Philip's witness about Jesus cue us in to the opposition and rejection Jesus faced throughout His ministry? What objections have you heard people raise against Jesus?

A 3: Nathanael was ready to write Jesus off because of the bad reputation of the Savior's hometown. Many people judge Jesus Christ and Christianity with incomplete information, just as Nathanael did. Some see Him as a new Lawgiver—rather than the One who set us free from God's Law and the punishment we deserve for breaking that Law. Others reject Jesus because of the hypocrisy they see in

Christ's followers—rather than looking to Jesus Himself.

In chapters 2–4, John continues with Jesus' early ministry.

We begin with Jesus' first miracle at a wedding. When John wrote about these miracles of Jesus, he was careful to call them "signs." As such, their purpose is to help us look beyond the miracle itself to the Mighty One who used His power in love and grace on behalf of His creatures in need.

Read 2:1–12.

Q 4: How did this miracle point to Jesus' divine nature?

A 4: It was not simply that Jesus changed water into fine wine, but that He also hid the miracle from most of the people in attendance so that only the servants and His disciples were aware that anything supernatural had even taken place. The groom, the master of the feast, and most guests were totally unaware that they were even running low on wine.

Going up to Jerusalem for the Passover, Jesus noticed the blatant disrespect of the Jewish leaders who had turned His Father's temple into a marketplace. Jesus demonstrated His divine authority—and faced the first challenges to that authority. In doing so, He prophesied His own coming resurrection.

Read 2:13–25.

Q 5: In what way was Jesus demonstrating His zeal for His Father and for us, rather than simply showing devotion to a worship space?

A 5: Jesus pointed out that the temple was really His Father's house—chosen as a place where God's people could draw near to receive His grace, forgiveness, and help. The racket of the animals, keepers, and money changers must have been extremely distracting to those who were trying to hear God's words and receive His promises.

Very early in John's Gospel, fierce opposition arose against Jesus in Jerusalem—especially from the Jewish religious authorities. Yet one of those authorities, Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council, came to meet with Jesus. In fear of his fellow rulers, however, Nicodemus came under the cover of night.

Read chapter 3.

Q 6: Why did Nicodemus have so much trouble grasping what Jesus told him?

A 6: Being a Pharisee, Nicodemus lived his life observing the traditions and rules of the scribes, believing that the way to heaven was through good works and obedience. Still looking through that lens, he was thrown off by Jesus' talk of baptismal rebirth. Jesus was telling him there was nothing he could do to earn heaven—but he didn't have to, either. The Christ came to do it all for him—earning Nicodemus's place in heaven by His perfect, holy life, and dying on the cross to remove the punishment each of us deserves for our sins.

When Jesus left Jerusalem with His disciples, He led them close to the place where John the Baptist was baptizing and preparing the people for Him. John's disciples were jealous for him, upset that the crowds were leaving John to follow Jesus. John humbly exalted Jesus—and gently encouraged his disciples to follow Jesus too.

When word got out that more people were coming to see Jesus than John, Jesus withdrew from that region and went through Samaria on His way to Galilee. Arriving in one Samaritan town at the middle of the day, He sent His disciples off to buy food while He awaited a meeting with a woman of poor reputation.

Read 4:1–45.

Q 7: How did Jesus use His surroundings (a well of water) to witness to this lost Samaritan woman? How did her neighbors' acceptance of her witness put the reaction of the Jews to shame?

A 7: Jesus described the Gospel as living water that springs up out of the hearts of believers by the power of the Holy Spirit. His description gives us a deeper understanding of the refreshment that faith brings to our parched and thirsty spirits. This illustration of faith and the refreshment of the Gospel still have a strong appeal today.

The Jews in Judea and Jerusalem were hostile to Jesus and skeptical of His teachings. Even the Galileans up north only believed in Jesus when they saw the miracles He performed. But the Samaritans believed without having even met Jesus—just on the word of the Samaritan woman.

After staying an extra two days in the Samaritan town, Jesus returned with His disciples to Cana, the city in which He had turned the water into wine. He was met by a grieving father whose son was near to death.

Read 4:46–54.

Q 8: What is remarkable about this official's response to Jesus' promise?

A 8: Most of the Gentiles and Judeans demanded proof before they would put their trust in Jesus—but this official trusted Jesus at His word. In fact, he didn't rush home, but probably stopped to spend the night at a lodging place on the way home (consider "yesterday" in v. 52). The news he got from his home the next day reassured him that he had been right to trust Jesus.

In the next section of John's Gospel, chapters 5–10, we see a new pattern emerge. Each chapter contains the account of one miraculous sign Jesus worked and how He used that miracle to teach about how God's kingdom works. John shows us the opposition rising not only among the Jewish leaders, but also among the Judeans who heard Him.

Opposition arose against Jesus because He did this great healing on the

Sabbath. It became even more fierce when Jesus called God His Father.

Read 5:1–29.

Q 9: How did Jesus answer the charge of blasphemy leveled against Him?

A 9: Jesus did not back down from the criticism or shrink away from His identity as the Son of God; instead, He asserted His equal deity and honor with the Father. He clearly proclaimed that He makes people spiritually alive through His Word and will raise believers from the dead on the Last Day. Those who refuse to believe in Him will come under judgment, and their wicked deeds will be exposed. Today, people feel free to turn their back and walk away, but Jesus' warning remains—He is the judge who will come on the Last Day.

Knowing the crowds rejected His testimony about Himself, which He gave to bring them to saving faith, Jesus turned to two other witnesses who speak on His behalf—God the Father and the Old Testament Scriptures.

Read 5:30–47.

Q 10: How did God the Father witness to Jesus' identity as Son of God and Savior?

A 10: Jesus attributed the miraculous deeds to God the Father. God gave Him those miraculous signs to authenticate Jesus as His own Son and to give the Jewish people confidence that Jesus was indeed the promised Savior He had sent into the world.

In chapter 6, John relates one miracle mentioned in each of the four Gospels: Jesus feeding a large crowd of five thousand. Notice the crowd's reaction when they saw the miracle.

Read 6:1–21.

After being fed by Jesus, the crowds concluded He was the promised Savior, the prophet Moses had foretold in Deuteronomy 18:15.

Q 11: How did the crowds take matters into their own hands?

A 11: Instead of waiting for Jesus to choose the time when He would reign as King of the heavens and the earth (Judgment Day), the crowds decided they would pick the time and the place—trying to force Him to become king right then and there.

Q 12: What reassurance did Jesus give His disciples by walking to them on the water?

A 12: Though they were initially terrified that what they saw was a ghost or specter, it was instead Jesus, the King of Creation. The crowds had not been wrong to say He was the Prophet, but they were wrong to try to force His hand. We are wise to humbly wait for Him to answer our prayers in His time and according to His wisdom and will.

The next day, the crowds walked around the lake and met Jesus on the other side. He recognized that their chief interest in Him was not to receive eternal

life or the forgiveness of sins but to fill their bellies with free bread and fish. Jesus took the opportunity to teach them about true bread from heaven.

Read 6:22–34.

Q 13: How did the Galileans show their resistance to put their faith in Jesus?

A 13: In verse 30, they demanded that Jesus perform another, greater miraculous sign—greater than the feeding they had experienced the day before. After all, Moses had fed the entire nation of Israel for forty years in the wilderness—Jesus had only given a large crowd one meal.

Q 14: How did Jesus answer their demand?

A 14: He reminded them Moses didn't feed anyone—the manna came down from God in heaven and sustained the lives of their ancestors.

Next, Jesus pivoted from the manna to describe Himself as the bread God the Father sent down from heaven to give life to the world through faith.

Read 6:35–59.

Q 15: What protest did the crowd raise against Jesus?

A 15: Jesus was a Galilean like they were. They knew His mother and supposed Joseph was His true father. They knew His brothers and sisters. So they couldn't picture how Jesus could have come down from heaven.

As a result of Jesus' words, the wider circle of disciples, whom we saw at the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), were offended and turned back from following Him. Jesus turned to ask the Twelve if they wanted to leave Him too.

Read 6:60–71.

Q 16: How did Peter's answer cut through all the confusion?

A 16: Peter's answer demonstrates an awareness that Jesus' teachings extend beyond this life to eternity. He knew there was no one else to whom they could go—only Jesus had the words of eternal life.

Jesus encountered growing opposition from Jewish leaders and even unbelief from the members of His own family. Yet He entered Jerusalem during the Feast of Booths and began to teach.

Read 7:1–24.

Q 17: How did the advice of Jesus' brothers to go up to Jerusalem and perform His miracles reveal their unbelief?

A 17: They were mocking and ridiculing Jesus for doing most of His ministry (including His mighty miracles) in Galilee rather than in Jerusalem. To them, it was like an aspiring country singer singing in the cornfields of Nebraska rather than going to Nashville, or an actor doing plays in Peoria rather than moving to Broadway or Hollywood.

When Jesus' actions did not match their expectations for the Messiah, the residents of Jerusalem joined in the effort to kill Him for blasphemy.

Read 7:25–36.

Q 18: Why were the Jewish leaders and people unable to lay their hands on Jesus, even though they wanted to arrest Him?

A 18: God the Father was the only one who could decide the time when His Son would be handed over (betrayed) into their hands. That time was coming soon—at the spring Passover. But not here at the fall Feast of Booths.

Divisions and sharply different opinions about Jesus are found among the Jewish leaders and the people of Jerusalem.

Read 7:37–52.

Q 19: How did Nicodemus argue in Jesus' defense without revealing that he was secretly a follower of Jesus?

A 19: Nicodemus asked his question in a reasonable way, asking his fellow members in the Jewish high court (the Sanhedrin) to follow God's guidelines and give Jesus a hearing rather than continue with their rush to judgment and to put Jesus to death. It was a sensible suggestion—but those members who hated Jesus pointed to His childhood spent in Nazareth of Galilee—not knowing that He was actually born in Bethlehem. When our friends or acquaintances reject Jesus outright, it is wise to ask them to reconsider the assumptions they have about Him and give Him a fair hearing.

Next, we read the story of the woman caught in adultery. She was brought to Jesus so His enemies could entrap Him.

Read 7:53–8:11.

Q 20: What was the trap Jesus' enemies tried to spring on Him by this test?

A 20: They hoped Jesus would hastily make a judgment—saying something that would give them grounds for criminal prosecution—or a way to turn the crowds against Him. Instead, Jesus took His time stooping down to write in the dirt. He was slow and intentional as He turned the matter back to them to be the judges—but this time to judge themselves first and their motives.

Jesus claimed to be the Light of the world who gives life to those who come to Him—which prompted the Pharisees to question His authority.

Read 8:12–30.

Q 21: Why is the theme of light/darkness such a powerful way to help us understand Jesus and His work in our world?

A 21: Darkness is a powerful and appropriate description of sinfulness. Consider trying to walk around in the deep darkness of a moonless

night. Even if we have a flashlight or cell-phone light, the light it can produce has a tiny range before it is swallowed up in darkness. So much danger lurks around us and is impossible to see. Sin blinds us to the dangers of death and hell. But like the light of the sun, Christ lights up our entire world and His Word enables us to see the truth about God and about ourselves.

Some Jews with weak faith in Jesus balked when He promised them true freedom through His teachings. Jesus traced their refusal to believe to Satan.

Read 8:31–47.

Q 22: Why was Jesus so blunt and harsh with the Jewish crowds to tell them Satan was their father and not God?

A 22: The people in the crowd were smug and confident, completely blind to their sinful nature and the judgment awaiting them. They demonstrated this very clearly in the way they treated Jesus in the following weeks. Jesus used this harsh description to cut right to the heart of their situation. They thought they were children of God, but their murderous hatred of Jesus proved they were actually children of Satan. John the Baptist described the Pharisees coming out to him as a “brood of vipers”—children of the serpent Satan.

Next, Jesus claimed to be the preexistent Son of God, leading the Pharisees to attempt to stone Him for blasphemy.

Read 8:48–59.

Q 23: Why is it important to think about Jesus’ two natures—divine and human—when we try to understand what He said about Abraham in 8:56?

A 23: According to His human nature, Jesus was the offspring of Abraham, living more than a thousand years after Abraham’s death. But according to His divine nature, He was the preexistent Christ who lived in eternity long before the births of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In fact, while He used the past tense to speak of Abraham’s existence in time, He used the timeless “I am” about Himself, showing that according to His divine nature He stands outside of time, which He created.

Next, John moves on to a notable miraculous sign Jesus worked in Jerusalem—healing a man born blind. His enemies tried desperately, but unsuccessfully, to undermine this miracle.

Read chapter 9.

Q 24: What were the Pharisees hoping to find as they interrogated the healed man and questioned his parents?

A 24: They were hoping to prove this man was a perfectly healthy person that Jesus had planted in the crowd. But the crowds had known this man was blind for years, and his parents established that he was definitely blind from birth. The Pharisees interrogated the healed

man to learn precisely each step Jesus had taken so they might find grounds to accuse Him of violating the Sabbath—but their efforts only proved the genuineness of Jesus' miracle.

Q 25: What is remarkable about the healed man's testimony in the exchange of verses 24–34?

A 25: By the power of the Holy Spirit, the healed man gave a most eloquent testimony of faith. He didn't jump to conclusions right away but simply repeated the bare, indisputable facts: "I was blind, now I see." When the Pharisees kept asking the same questions, he dug deeper, asking their motivation, "Do you also want to become His disciples?" This brought out their unreasonable, inexcusable hatred of Jesus, "You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses." When they said they did not know where Jesus came from, the man pointed out that no one ever heard of a man born blind having his sight restored (not even by Old Testament prophets), so Jesus had to have come from God or He could have done nothing. Though the man's parents were afraid to give Jesus credit for healing their son, the man himself was willing to be cast out for Jesus' sake.

Q 26: What point did Jesus make to the Pharisees when He compared faith and unbelief to sightedness and blindness?

A 26: A person who rejects Jesus because he or she has not heard Jesus' preaching and seen His miraculous signs is like a blind person who hasn't seen. But the Pharisees bear a greater guilt because they have heard Jesus' words and seen His mighty miracles, yet have rejected Him.

Chapter 10 is a beloved chapter where Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd. But bear in mind that these words were spoken while Jesus was meeting with the healed man and speaking to the Pharisees at the end of chapter 9. In fact, in verse 1, when He says, "Truly, truly I say to you," He is speaking to these same Pharisees.

Read 10:1–21.

Q 27: What point did Jesus make when He called Himself the door of the sheep?

A 27: After contrasting the thief and robber, who avoid the door to the sheep, with the true shepherd, who enters through the door, Jesus states that He is that door. Therefore, anyone who denies Jesus is a thief or robber who is trying to steal God's sheep for his or her own selfish purposes. This is a direct shot at the Pharisees and religious authorities who taught the people they could earn their way to heaven by observing the traditions of the rabbis. It also speaks to those who think every religion leads to heaven—those are only thieves and robbers trying to steal the precious souls of men, women, and children.

At the Feast of Dedication or Hanukkah in the December before His death

in the spring, Jesus declared He was one with the Father—which was seen as blasphemous and worthy of death by the unbelievers in the crowds.

Read 10:22–42.

Q 28: Why did Jews take up stones to stone Jesus?

A 28: When Jesus said, “I and the Father are one,” the Jews in the temple clearly took that as blasphemy, as Jesus claiming to be God’s Son. The Jews were trinitarian—they believed God had a Son. But Jesus’ divinity was so perfectly hidden within or under His humanity that they saw only a man who looked and sounded the same as any other man. Besides, Jesus did not match their preconceived ideas of what the Messiah would be like.

A DEATH AND RESURRECTION; PERSISTENT UNBELIEF—JOHN 11– 12

We reach a new section of John's Gospel as Jesus' ministry reaches its climax: the resurrection of Lazarus in chapter 11 and the persistent unbelief among many of the Jews in chapter 12.

Shortly after healing the man born blind and nearly being stoned, Jesus receives a message.

Read 11:1–16.

Q 29: When Jesus told His disciples Lazarus's illness would not end in death, was He lying or mistaken?

A 29: Neither. Jesus meant that by the time He was finished, Lazarus would be very much alive and Jesus would be greatly glorified by a work that would bring greater glory to God the Father.

When He arrived in Bethany, Jesus assured Lazarus's sister Martha that those who believe in Him will live forever, even though they die physically.

Read 11:17–27.

Q 30: What significance is there in the fact that Jesus' two-day delay in leaving for Bethany meant that He arrived four days after Lazarus's death and burial?

A 30: The Gospels record two other miracles where Jesus raised dead people. One was a synagogue ruler's daughter who had just died, another was a young man being carried out for burial. In both of these cases, there was the possibility that they had not really died but had only fallen into a coma from which Jesus revived them. In this case, four days after death, it was impossible for anyone to claim that Lazarus hadn't really died.

When Jesus arrived at Mary and Martha's house and saw the great mourning, He was moved to tears as well.

Read 11:28–37.

Q 31: What do you think caused Jesus to weep?

A 31: We shouldn't be at all surprised to read about Jesus feeling or showing deep emotions. God tells us, "I the LORD your God am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:5). Jealousy is a very powerful emotion filled with fiery wrath and fury. John 11:33 says, "When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in His spirit and greatly troubled." Clearly powerful emotions were surging through Jesus' heart and soul. The Greek word for "deeply moved" indicates anger. Alongside His great love,

compassion, and sorrow, Jesus was being stirred by anger—likely in the face of this great enemy, death, which had snatched Lazarus from the sisters who loved him and depended on him. And behind death stood Satan, the first murderer and the father of lies. The mighty Son of God had come to Bethany to do battle with death and Satan, and to snatch away their victim.

Jesus raised Lazarus to glorify His Father and show He is the resurrection and the life.

Read 11:38–44.

Q 32: What do you notice about the way bodies were prepared for burial in Jesus' day?

A 32: Lazarus's body was bound with linen strips, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. A stone was rolled in front of the tomb. These practices remind us of Jesus' tomb, where the angel rolled the stone away and Jesus passed through the linen strips and folded up the face cloth and laid it by itself.

We might expect that this incredible miracle created faith among the Jewish leaders—but Jesus' enemies ended up more determined than ever to put Him to death.

Read 11:45–57.

Q 33: What is ironic about words of the high priest Caiaphas in verses 49–50?

A 33: Caiaphas was convinced Jesus was a fraud. He thought of the possible danger if Jesus proclaimed Himself king during the coming Passover Feast, and he concluded that the only way to save Judah from annihilation at the hands of the Romans was for one man, Jesus, to die. But a wider truth lay behind this. Unless the Son of Man died, Satan, hell, and death would reign supreme. But His death in our place gathered all the scattered children of God and opened heaven to all who believe.

The night before Jesus entered Jerusalem on His way to the cross, He stayed with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha in Bethany. Mary went to extravagant expense to show honor to Jesus.

Read 12:1–8.

Q 34: Why is it important that John made clear the reason Judas objected to Mary's extravagant gift to Jesus?

A 34: None of the other Gospels expressly tell us why Judas said what he said. At face value, it looked as though Judas's motives were pure and right. But John reveals the greed and covetousness that filled Judas's heart and became his god. This event also takes away any noble purpose we might assume behind Judas's betrayal—like thinking Jesus would free Himself, or wanting to push Jesus to take the throne He seemed hesitant to take. John makes it clear that Judas loved

money more than he loved Jesus.

Jesus' popularity continued to grow as Jewish pilgrims to the Passover saw Lazarus. Jesus entered Jerusalem as a conquering king, riding on a donkey.

Read 12:9–19.

Q 35: What part did the raising of Lazarus play in Jesus' triumphant entry?

A 35: The pilgrims who traveled with Jesus to celebrate the Passover Feast in Jerusalem were pumped up because of Jesus' raising of Lazarus. The crowds already in Jerusalem had heard of Lazarus's raising and were eager to see Jesus. Clearly, the miracle of raising Lazarus was at the center of the crowds' excitement. The miracle also served to convince the Jewish leaders that their cause was lost.

After learning that some Greeks wanted to see Him, Jesus revealed the scope of His saving death.

Read 12:20–36a.

Q 36: Why did Jesus ask the Father to glorify His own name as He thought of His coming suffering and death?

A 36: For many Jews, the cross became a great stumbling block. They refused to believe and accept that God could permit an innocent man to be crucified—so they concluded that Jesus must have been a blasphemer and a fraud. To all the world, Good Friday looked like Jesus' defeat rather than His great victory. Jesus prayed that God the Father would open the eyes of believers to see and believe the great victory He won on the cross for us. God the Father used miraculous signs to glorify Jesus and vindicate Him—including the deep darkness from noon to three, the earthquake, the torn temple curtain, and Jesus' own resurrection on the third day. Think of the centurion who pronounced, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54).

Some Jews rejected Jesus; others believed but feared the Jewish authorities.

Read 12:36b–50.

Q 37: Why is it important for us to remember that "many even of the authorities believed in Him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it"?

A 37: It is easy to reach the conclusion that the whole nation of Jews abandoned and rejected Jesus, but that simply was not true. There were two good examples of people who showed great courage and faith on Good Friday: Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Also, the large number of believers on Pentecost and the following days (Acts 2:41, 47) were Jews.

PASSOVER AND HOLY WEEK—

JOHN 13–19

In this section of John, Jesus gathered His disciples for the evening meal and bid His disciples farewell with some warm and memorable words. Following the meal, He offered His High Priestly Prayer and led them to the Garden of Gethsemane. The section ends with His trials, suffering, death, and burial.

We begin with Jesus washing His disciples' feet, thus showing them His willingness to serve them.

Read 13:1–20.

Q 38: Why did Jesus wash His disciples' feet?

A 38: He wanted to give them an example of loving service—to help them understand what He was about to do the next day by laying down His life on the cross to wash away their sins and make them pure. Since they were unable to follow Him to the cross, they could show their love for Him by serving one another.

At the table, Jesus predicted one of His disciples would betray Him. He gave Judas a morsel of food as a gesture of friendship, but Judas left to carry out his plot.

Read 13:21–30.

Q 39: What great love and care do you see in how Jesus predicted Judas's betrayal?

A 39: Jesus made Judas completely aware that Jesus knew the sin he was plotting, yet instead of betraying him to the other disciples, Jesus protected him, showed him the depth of his sin, and befriended him to show Jesus would be willing to forgive and restore him.

The disciples were not able to follow Jesus to the cross, but He asked them to imitate His love for them by loving one another.

Read 13:31–38.

Q 40: Jesus called this a new commandment. In what way is it a Gospel command?

A 40: The strength and desire to serve one another in love will not be something we have to stir up from within us but will flow out of the love Jesus showed us by taking our place and dying on the cross to win our salvation.

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus promised to go and prepare a place for us in heaven, where we will live with God forever.

Read 14:1–14.

Q 41: What comfort do you find in Jesus’ promise, “In My Father’s house are many rooms. . . . If I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself”?

A 41: This great promise reminds us that Jesus has made everything ready for us to be spotless, holy, and pure to live with Him and His Father in heaven. Throughout our earthly lives, we can keep our mind on that home in heaven. He reminds us that even in good times, when we might be tempted to want to stay and enjoy this life, a better, perfect home awaits us with Him. And He reminds us that also in days of severe trials, we can remember that He will bring us to a home where we will never have problems again—only His joy and perfect peace!

Jesus promised that He and His Father will dwell in those who believe His Word, and He will send the Holy Spirit as their Helper.

Read 14:15–31.

Q 42 What is the connection between Jesus sending us His Holy Spirit and giving us His peace?

A 42: The Holy Spirit comes to us through Word and Sacrament, creating faith in us so we can receive the peace, forgiveness, and joy Jesus won for us on the cross. No matter what guilt, temptations, struggles, or burdens we face, the Holy Spirit helps us see God’s loving face and know that God is always with us and, in the end, will bring us to Himself in heaven.

Jesus used the example of vine dressing to teach how we can produce God-pleasing works.

Read 15:1–17.

Q 43: Why are a vine and its branches so perfect to describe the good works we do as Christians?

A 43: A branch that separates from the vine withers and is fruitless. It must be connected to the vine so it can receive sap, water, and nutrients from the vine to produce leaves and fruit. Like those branches, we are connected to Jesus by faith through Word and Sacraments, and the Holy Spirit works through those Means of Grace to empower us to spontaneously bear the fruit of good works.

Next, Jesus revealed the deep hatred of the sinful world toward Him and those who follow Him.

Read 15:18–16:4a.

Q 44: Why was it important for Jesus to teach His disciples about this ungodly hatred at this hour?

A 44: Up to now, Jesus’ enemies had opposed, persecuted, and harassed Him, but they had not been able to overpower Him—and large

crowds of supporters had followed Him. Now, He would voluntarily surrender Himself to His enemies and suffer and die at their hands. The cruel hatred they felt toward Jesus would also extend to those who followed Jesus. Our Lord wanted to prepare us for the depths of hatred Satan and his followers feel toward God and us, so that we might find our strength and comfort in God, who has overcome the evil one and promises to give us the new heavens and the new earth won by Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection.

Jesus' disciples feel grief when He tells them He will leave them. But He comforts them by promising to send the Helper (Holy Spirit) to guide them in understanding His words.

Read 16:4b–24.

Q 45: How does the Holy Spirit guide us into the truth of Jesus and His words?

A 45: The things of God—especially His love in Jesus Christ—are folly to our sin-stained reason. The Holy Spirit works through God's Word to enlighten us, to open our mind to understand and believe the love of God and the salvation of Jesus Christ. Then, as we read the Old Testament, we see that each book testifies about Jesus. When we read the New Testament, we better understand how Jesus is our Lord and Savior.

As Jesus completed His sayings in the upper room, the disciples were confident they understood. But Jesus predicted they would all abandon Him.

Read 16:25–33.

Q 46: Describe a time you felt more sure of yourself than you really were—either emotionally or spiritually—and then trouble came and brought you down to earth.

A 46: Like Peter and the other disciples, many times we feel strong and confident in our faith. Then a problem or crisis arises and we are crying out in fear and terrible anxiety, like the disciples did when they feared their ship was sinking into the Sea of Galilee. Those moments show us just how much we need Christ's continuing presence and the strength the Spirit provides through Word and Sacrament.

On the way to the cross, Jesus offered His High Priestly Prayer—first for Himself, then for His apostles, and then for all of us.

Read 17:1–5.

Q 47: How did God the Father glorify Jesus on the cross?

A 47: The Father glorified Jesus by accepting Jesus' sacrifice for the forgiveness of the sins of the world. The Father also glorified Jesus by the miraculous signs that accompanied our Savior's crucifixion and death—especially the resurrection on the third day. Through these, God the Father made clear that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Son of God who won salvation for all people by His death.

Read 17:6–19.

Q 48: What does the phrase “keep them in Your name” mean in Jesus’ prayer?

A 48: The Greek word for “keep” means to stand watch or stand guard to protect someone or something. God’s name is the revelation God has given about Himself—the loving grace God has for us, His plan of salvation through His Son’s suffering, death, and resurrection. Jesus is praying for the Father to unite His apostles in the true faith in the midst of the world’s hatred and opposition.

Read 17:20–26.

Q 49: What did Jesus mean when He prayed, “I made known to them Your name, and I will continue to make it known?”

A 49: During His public ministry, Jesus taught and made God’s revelation and plan of salvation known to the crowds beyond the apostles. Even though He was leaving the world through His death, resurrection, and ascension, He would continue teaching through His apostles and through the New Testament they would write under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration.

The next two chapters turn to Jesus’ Passion. They begin with the betrayal and arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. Notice how Jesus didn’t cower in the back corner of the Garden but stepped forward, took complete charge of the situation, and confronted those who came to arrest Him.

Read 18:1–11.

Q 50: Why is it significant that Judas and those who had come out to arrest Jesus fell down at the power of Jesus’ name?

A 50: When Judas later learned that Jesus was condemned and was gripped by guilt and remorse, he should have remembered this powerful moment. There should have been no doubt in his mind that Jesus was completely in control of the situation and had voluntarily laid down His life—no one had the power to take it from Him. Judas should also have remembered Jesus’ kind words of calling him “friend” while he was stepping forward to kiss Him—Jesus wanted Judas to know forgiveness was available to him also.

Jewish officials arrested Jesus with the help of the temple guard and Roman soldiers, then took Him to Annas, the former high priest and father-in-law to Caiaphas, the acting high priest. Peter followed along in the shadows with another disciple, then gained access to the courtyard of the high priest with the help of that other disciple (probably John).

Read 18:12–18.

Q 51: Describe a time your courage was put to the test like Peter's.

A 51: Peter had “bravely” promised to lay down his life for Jesus—but when he recklessly placed himself in a dangerous situation, self-preservation was the only thing on his mind. When we rely on our own strength and courage, as Peter did, we often find ourselves falling short. But when the danger drives us to our Savior in prayer, He gives us strength sufficient for the moment.

Annas conducted the preliminary interrogation of Jesus.

Read 18:19–24.

Q 52: What example does Jesus give us in His reaction to being slapped across the face for a perceived insolence to the high priest?

A 52: Jesus showed no disrespect or contempt to the high priest in His answer—He just stated that His message had always been consistent, whether He uttered it publicly before the crowds or in private to His disciples. When struck, He respectfully asked the officer to tell Him what He had done wrong or why he had struck Him if He had done nothing wrong. It was a brilliant way to get the official to examine himself and realize he had been the unreasonable, sinful one.

While Jesus stood before the high priest confessing “I am,” Peter stood outside lying, “I am not.”

Read 18:25–27.

Q 53: Why were Peter's efforts to save himself really futile?

A 53: Despite his lies, false oaths, and swearing, Peter wasn't convincing anyone that he was not one of Jesus' Twelve. The only reason he came out of that courtyard alive was because Jesus saved Him. Luke 22:60–61 says, “But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about.’ And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.”

John completely forgoes Jesus' trial before Caiaphas. Perhaps the other Gospels tell us everything John wanted us to know. Next, John tells about when Jesus was brought before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

Read 18:28–32.

Q 54: What was so hypocritical about the high priests and Jewish officials refusing to set foot in Pilate's headquarters?

A 54: The Jews did not want to be contaminated by setting foot in a Gentile house where there might be leaven, but they had no qualms about unjustly seeking to use threats to manipulate someone else to accomplish their sinful desire—the death of an innocent man, the Son of God Himself.

Read 18:33–40.

Q 55: What “good confession” (see 1 Timothy 6:13) did Jesus make before Pontius Pilate?

A 55: Jesus revealed His divinity to Pilate when He confessed that He was a king from another place. He knew that Pilate was aware of the truth of Jesus’ innocence, and Pilate’s struggles to convince the Jewish leaders to permit him to release Jesus showed that truth mattered to the governor. Jesus’ words “Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice” was Jesus’ invitation for Pilate to believe.

Q 56: How did Pilate show cowardice in the way he conducted this case?

A 56: Pilate was convinced that Jesus was not guilty of any death-deserving crime, but he tried to avoid the hostility threatened by the Jewish authorities if he rightly exercised his God-given (and emperor-given) authority and responsibility. Instead, he tried to manipulate a Jewish custom that called for the release of one prisoner at Passover. Instead of offering two harmless prisoners as was normally the case, he offered the worst criminal he had—Barabbas—underestimating the fear and hatred the Jewish authorities felt toward Jesus.

Pilate caved in under the pressure of the Jewish leaders and delivered Jesus over to death by crucifixion.

Read 19:1–16a.

Q 57: Why were the Jewish leaders successful?

A 57: In the end, Pilate concluded he could save only one: Jesus or his own political career. In selfishness, he sacrificed Jesus in an attempt to save his dreams and ambitions.

As Jesus was crucified on the Place of the Skull outside Jerusalem, He provided for His mother’s care.

Read 19:16b–27.

Q 58: What comfort and encouragement can Jesus’ care for His mother give us when we wonder what will happen to our loved ones after we die?

A 58: If in the midst of His great agony and suffering, Jesus was still concerned enough about His mother to provide for her continuing care after He died. We can be confident that He will faithfully provide and care for our loved ones after we die.

After announcing the completion of His saving mission, Jesus gave up His spirit and died.

Read 19:28–30.

Q 59: What reassurance does Jesus give us in His proclamation, “It is finished”?

A 59: All of our sins have been paid in full, all of God’s wrath at our sins is exhausted. God’s full, free, and complete forgiveness is available for every man, woman, and child. There is nothing we have to do; Jesus Christ has done it all for us.

John gives us a post-sacrifice look at the Lamb of God who has taken away our sins and suffered God’s punishment in our place.

Read 19:31–37.

Q 60: How does this view John presents inform our reception of Jesus’ body and blood in Holy Communion?

A 60: During the Jewish Passover celebration, the people of God ate the meat of a lamb, in the same way as their ancestors, to remember that it was a lamb’s blood and death that saved them from the angel of death who passed over their homes in Egypt. Now we look upon or behold the body of Jesus nailed to the cross, given for our salvation, and His blood poured out to give us life, and we eat and drink that body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins and the assurance of eternal life.

Two unlikely Jewish leaders came forward to give Jesus’ body a proper burial.

Read 19:38–42.

Q 61: What is so remarkable and commendable about the actions of Joseph and Nicodemus?

A 61: Both of these members of the Jewish high court (the Sanhedrin) had been secret followers of Jesus. But they had kept their faith hidden for fear of their fellow judges. When Jesus died, however, they were emboldened by the Holy Spirit to step forward publicly and bury Jesus’ body. Joseph even offered his own expensive tomb—one which had not been touched by the corruption of death and decay. The use of this specific tomb is important to the account of Jesus’ resurrection. If Jesus had been hastily buried in another less-auspicious tomb, opponents could have convincingly argued that the women went to the wrong tomb on Sunday morning and Jesus was still buried in an unidentified grave.

JESUS' RESURRECTION—JOHN 20

In this chapter, John presents us with three resurrection appearances of Jesus. We begin with the empty tomb and evidence of Jesus' miraculous resurrection.

Read 20:1–10.

Q 62: What important evidence do the linen cloths in the empty tomb give?

A 62: According to Matthew 28:11–15, the Jewish rulers started a rumor among the Jews that Jesus' disciples had stolen His body—sadly, many of the Jews believed this. But the linen cloths were strong evidence against this story. If the disciples had stolen the body, would they really have taken the time and trouble to unwrap it—especially if they suspected that decay had already begun to set in? Besides that, why would they have taken the time to unwrap Him with armed Roman soldiers standing guard outside the tomb? No, the disciples were locked away in fearful hiding.

After His resurrection, Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene.

Read 20:11–18.

Q 63: What is remarkable about Jesus first appearing to a woman rather than to one of the Eleven?

A 63: In that day, women were not considered reliable witnesses in court. This strongly argues for the authenticity of the Gospel accounts. If these were made-up stories, none of the evangelists would have said women were the first witnesses—but all four agree they were. Another thing this did was to prepare the apostles for something they would experience often in their future ministry. Like those who would hear their testimony, the apostles first heard of the resurrection through other eyewitnesses. Since the apostles refused to believe these other witnesses at first, they could be more patient and understanding when they shared the good news after Pentecost and some of the hearers were slow to believe too.

That evening, Jesus appeared to His disciples, commissioned them for their work, and equipped them with the Holy Spirit for that work.

Read 20:19–23.

Q 64: Why is it significant that Jesus made this commissioning on the evening of His resurrection?

A 64: It underscored for the apostles that they had been chosen as witnesses by Jesus for the express purpose of sharing what they had heard and seen. Likewise, we are brought to faith and learn the story of Jesus' great love by these witnesses so we will go and tell what we have seen and heard.

One of the Eleven missed Jesus' appearance and refused to believe his companions and fellow disciples.

Read 20:24–29.

Q 65: How can Thomas's skepticism help us when we share our faith with others in our skeptical age?

A 65: Thomas was much like the people of our day—he thought he understood how the world worked, and he refused to believe anything that didn't fit into his nice little mental picture. This again argues for the authenticity of the Gospels. Which apostle would willingly admit that he was skeptical of Jesus' resurrection? Yet, over and over, we see that unbelief clearly portrayed—not just by Thomas but by all the apostles, and even the women too. After all, none of them came to the tomb expecting to see the risen Lord. The point is, it is not our job to convince skeptical people. It is our job just share what we know and pray for the Holy Spirit to create saving faith in them through His Word.

John clearly states the purpose for this book and summarizes its central message.

Read 20:30–31.

Q 66: Why is this verse helpful when we are sharing our faith with unbelievers?

A 66: It reminds us of the purpose for which God gave us His Word. Many people have the impression that God gave the Scriptures as a rule book for how to live our lives, but that is wrong. The Bible was given to us so that we might know that Jesus is the promised Savior, the Son of God. With that faith given us by the Holy Spirit, we have the assurance of eternal life with God.

EPILOGUE—JOHN 21

In the final chapter of his book, John presents one more resurrection appearance of our Savior by the Sea of Galilee. It begins with a miraculous catch of fish and a breakfast Jesus graciously prepared for His disciples.

Read 21:1–14.

Q 67: What special impact did this miracle have on Jesus' disciples?

A 67: Near the beginning of His ministry, before His crucifixion and death, Jesus had given a miraculous catch of fish to the disciples (see Luke 5:1–11). This miracle reasserted that first one and reminded His disciples that their life's work would now be sharing the story of God's love in Christ. Just as their labors had resulted in empty nets—which were only filled with fish at Jesus' command—so their ministry would only succeed by the power of God.

Jesus used a series of three questions to restore Peter for service to Him and His flock.

Read 21:15–24.

Q 68: Why did Jesus ask His questions to Peter three times?

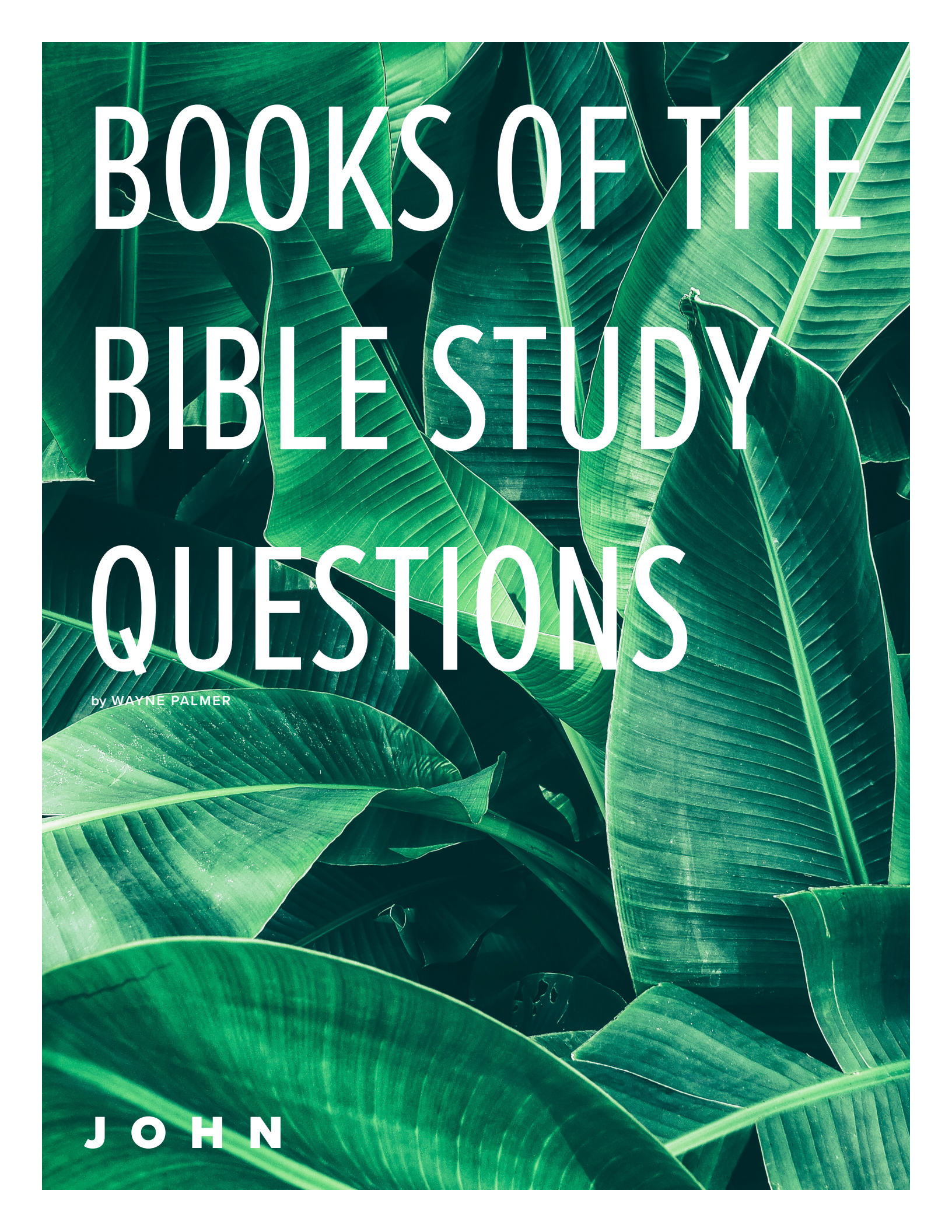
A 68: Clearly, Jesus was bringing Peter back to his denials on the night when Jesus was betrayed. He gave Peter the opportunity to confess his faith now, where before he had denied Jesus out of fear and failure. Jesus ended with the reassuring prophecy that, in time, Peter would indeed make the great confession when he would be crucified for the faith.

John closes his Gospel with an astounding statement.

Read 21:25.

Q 69: What is the importance of John's observation about the overwhelming number of miracles Jesus worked?

A 69: We can easily reach the conclusion that Jesus healed a relatively small number of people—perhaps hundreds. But this verse indicates that the healings were actually a far great number. When you compare the miracles in Jesus' ministry to those of the greatest miracle-working prophets of the Old Testament (Elijah, Elisha, and Moses), you see that the number of Jesus' miracles absolutely overwhelms those of the prophets—pointing out clearly that Jesus is the Savior and Lord.



BOOKS OF THE BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

by WAYNE PALMER

J O H N