

JOHN THE BAPTIST IN PRISON

MATTHEW 11, 14; MARK 6; LUKE 3, 7



KEY PASSAGE: Jeremiah 29:12-13

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What is prayer? Prayer is talking with God to praise Him, ask Him for help, and confess our sins.

CHRIST CONNECTION: When faced with suffering, John was reminded that Jesus is the Messiah who had come to bring the good news of salvation. Followers of Jesus will face troubles, but they have hope: Everyone who trusts in Jesus for salvation will live in His kingdom forever.

STORY POINT: John was reminded that Jesus is the promised Messiah.



PREPARE

PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

LEADER Bible Study

John the Baptist was a faithful messenger of the gospel. Though he was persecuted by a wicked leader, he was commended by Jesus for his faith. Scripture's accounts of John's imprisonment and beheading illustrate his devotion to Jesus, even as John suffered for advocating for the truth.

John was arrested for publicly rebuking Herod's affair with a young woman who was both his niece and his brother's wife. Herod wanted to kill John but was mindful of the crowd's support of him as a prophet. Herod didn't fear God but was swayed by the opinions of people.

Though John the Baptist centered his ministry on proclaiming Jesus as Messiah, John needed to be reminded that Jesus is truly the one God promised to send. Confined to a prison cell, John relayed his questions in his time of need to Jesus' disciples and sent them to get an answer from the Lord. "Are you the one who is to come," John asked Jesus, "or should we expect someone else?"

Jesus offered words of assurance to John and his followers by quoting Isaiah 35:5-6 and pointing to His miracles and proclamation of the gospel. Jesus' purpose in coming to earth wasn't to be a political hero for the Jews against the Romans, but to restore the relationship between God and humans. Jesus asked the crowd why they followed John in the first place and declared that John was indeed a prophet.

John the Baptist's message was even greater than that of the Old Testament prophets who preceded him. While the prophets of old declared the Messiah was coming, John declared that He was there among them—Jesus, their Emmanuel! Yet even though John had such an esteemed role in heralding the long-awaited Messiah, Jesus declared that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John was. How blessed are partakers of the new covenant of Christ's blood!

Just as John needed to be reminded of Jesus' role as the Messiah, we, too, must be reminded of the good news of the gospel. John the Baptist trusted Jesus' words of life and knew the threat of death was nothing compared to His promise of eternal life. May the kids in your class who hear this story experience the power of the gospel in their own lives, trusting in Jesus as Messiah and Lord.



Scan the QR code to listen to The Gospel Project for Kids Weekly Leader Training Podcast.



PREPARE

THE WEEK PRIOR

Prepare your heart to teach; plan the session



WELCOME

10-15 MINUTES

Greet kids and open the session



LEARN

25-30 MINUTES

Teach kids the story of the gospel



LOVE

15-20 MINUTES

Lead kids to love the God of the gospel



LIVE

15-20 MINUTES

Lead kids to live out the mission of the gospel



PREPARE

PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

GATHER Supplies

Keep a regular supply of the following items available at all times: Bibles, pens or pencils, markers, crayons, colored pencils, scissors, glue or tape, paper.



WELCOME

Activity Page

- ☐ "Color to Reveal" activity page

Session Starter (Option 2)

- ☐ brown construction paper
- ☐ craft sticks



LOVE

Review & Bible Skills

- ☐ Small Group Timeline and Map Set (optional)



LIVE

Activity Choice (Option 1)

- ☐ manilla folders, 1 per kid

Activity Choice (Option 2)

- ☐ painter's tape
- ☐ game spinner
- ☐ sticky notes

Reflection and Prayer

- ☐ Bible story coloring page



LEARN

Introduce the Session

- ☐ countdown video
- ☐ Story Point Poster

Big Picture Question

- ☐ Big Picture Question Poster

Review the Timeline

- ☐ Giant Timeline

Tell the Bible Story

- ☐ "John the Baptist in Prison" video
- ☐ Bible Story Picture Poster
- ☐ props (optional)

Questions from Kids

- ☐ "Unit 24, Session 1" Questions from Kids video

Missions Moment

- ☐ "Ski City Prayer Reminder" printable

Key Passage Activity

- ☐ Key Passage Poster
- ☐ ball
- ☐ "With All Your Heart (Jeremiah 29:12-13)" song
- ☐ worship song of your choice (optional)



WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

SAY “Has anyone ever made a promise to you? Did they keep that promise? Do you always keep the promises you make?”

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the “Color to Reveal” activity page.

SAY “God kept His promise to send the Messiah who had come to bring salvation. Today we will see how **JOHN WAS REMINDED THAT JESUS IS THE PROMISED MESSIAH.**”

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: PASS THE MESSAGE



Direct kids to line up shoulder to shoulder. If you have a large group, consider forming kids into smaller groups. Go to the first kid in each group and whisper a “secret message” to them. The message can be silly like a tongue-twister rhyme or a message that has to do with today’s story like Jesus is the Messiah. Challenge kids to pass the message down the entire line by whispering one at a time. Then, encourage the last kid in each group to shout out the message they heard. Allow kids to change positions in the line and repeat with different messages as time allows.

SAY “Great job passing the message down the line! That reminds me of something we’ll learn about today: John sent a message to Jesus asking if He was the promised Messiah. Jesus responded and **JOHN WAS REMINDED THAT JESUS IS THE PROMISED MESSIAH.**”

☐ OPTION 2: IS HE THE MESSIAH?

Invite kids to sit around tables. Distribute a sheet of brown paper and two craft sticks to each kid. Direct kids to glue their craft sticks along the left and right edges of their papers. Explain that today we will see how **JOHN WAS REMINDED THAT JESUS IS THE PROMISED MESSIAH.** Challenge kids to listen carefully as you remind them of things Jesus did during His ministry and encourage them to draw on their papers pictures of Jesus doing these things. Remind kids that Jesus gave the blind their sight, healed people who could not walk and helped them walk again, healed the deaf by restoring their hearing, raised the dead to life, and preached the good news. Once the glue has dried, assist kids in rolling up their scrolls.

SAY “Jesus sent messengers to John to tell him all that they had seen and heard while being with Jesus. They saw Jesus heal people, raise people to life, and preach the good news. All these things reminded John that Jesus is the promised Messiah.”

Transition from **WELCOME** to **LEARN**





INTRODUCE the Bible Story

1 INTRODUCE THE SESSION (3 minutes)

Show the countdown video as you transition to introduce the Bible story. Set it to end as the session begins.

SAY “ Welcome, kids! My name is [your name], and I am so glad you are here! Today we will be learning about John the Baptist’s time in prison and how **JOHN WAS REMINDED THAT JESUS IS THE PROMISED MESSIAH**. If you have a Bible, will you take it out and place it in your lap? [Distribute Bibles to kids who do not have one.]

God wants to speak to us through His Word. Let’s ask God to prepare our hearts to hear what He wants to teach us today. ‘Lord, thank You for Your Word. Help us listen and understand what You want us to learn through our story today. In Jesus’ name, amen.’ ”

2 BIG PICTURE QUESTION (1 minute)

Display the Big Picture Question Poster.

SAY “ As we study God’s Word together, we like to discuss a big picture question and answer that helps us focus on an important truth. Our big picture question for the next few weeks is: **What is prayer? Prayer is talking with God to praise Him, ask Him for help, and confess our sins.** When we pray, God often reminds us of who He is. Today we will see how **JOHN WAS REMINDED THAT JESUS IS THE PROMISED MESSIAH**, and this brought him great comfort and hope as he was in prison. ”

3 REVIEW THE TIMELINE (1 minute)

Show the Giant Timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

SAY “ The long-awaited Messiah who the prophets foretold had finally arrived. Throughout His ministry, Jesus healed people, raised the dead, and preached the good news, proving that He is the promised Messiah who came to bring salvation. Today we will learn that John the Baptist had been put in jail for sharing about God. During his time in prison, **JOHN WAS REMINDED THAT JESUS IS THE PROMISED MESSIAH**. ”



LEARN the Bible Story

1 TELL THE BIBLE STORY: VIDEO OR STORYTELLER (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Matthew 11, 14; Mark 6; Luke 3, 7. Use the Bible storytelling tips to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “John the Baptist in Prison.” Use the bold text to retell or review the story.

JOHN THE BAPTIST IN PRISON

“John the Baptist had been telling King Herod the truth about God’s commands and how Herod had disobeyed them. Herod didn’t like John’s message, so Herod had John arrested and put in prison. Herodias, Herod’s wife, also didn’t like John’s message. She held a grudge against John and wanted to put him to death.

While John was in prison, he sent a message to Jesus. He said, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else to be the Messiah?”

Jesus replied to the messengers, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are healed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the poor are told the good news. Blessed is the one who isn’t offended by Me.”

Then Jesus turned to the crowds and said, “When you went out to see John in the wilderness, what did you go to see? A man dressed in soft clothes like kings wear? No! You went to see a prophet. Yes, and John is more than a prophet. He is the one the prophet Malachi spoke of when he said:

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;
he will prepare your way before you.’

“Truly, there is no human greater than John the Baptist. But the person who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater even than he is.”

Later, King Herod had a birthday party. When Herod’s niece danced for the king and his guests, Herod was pleased and promised to give her anything she wanted. The girl went to her mother, Herodias, for advice, and her mother told her to ask for Herod to kill John. So, Herod ordered for John to be killed.

When John’s disciples heard this, they took John’s body and placed it in a tomb.

Christ Connection: When faced with suffering, John was reminded that Jesus is the Messiah who had come to bring the good news of salvation. Followers of Jesus will face troubles, but they have hope: Everyone who trusts in Jesus for salvation will live in His kingdom forever. ”

STORYTELLING TIPS

Prophecy: When you read what Malachi spoke of, lead kids to open their Bibles to Malachi 3:1 and read the verse. Explain that this verse was written 400 years before Jesus was born.

Evidence: Challenge kids to listen closely for any time the story gives evidence that Jesus is the promised Messiah and raise their hands each time they hear an example.

2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

| SAY “ John had been put in prison for telling people about God. During his time



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

in prison, he heard about Jesus' ministry and all that He was doing, so John sent a message to Jesus. What did John ask Jesus? **[Allow responses.]** John sent a message to Jesus asking if He was the promised Messiah or if someone else was coming. John had certainly heard Isaiah's prophecies about the coming Messiah and had been waiting for His arrival. He had heard all that Jesus was doing, but he wanted to be sure that Jesus was the one they had all been waiting for.

How was John reminded that Jesus is the Messiah? **[Allow responses.]** Jesus sent messengers to John. He told the messengers to tell John what they had seen and heard while they were with Jesus. Jesus said to tell how He was healing those who were blind, lame, sick, deaf, and that He was raising dead people to life and preaching good news to the poor. Jesus had done all these things and proved that He is the Messiah.

There may be times in our lives when we question who Jesus is and if He really is the Messiah. In these times, we can remember all that Jesus did and know with confidence that He is the Messiah, the one who brings salvation, forgiveness, and eternal hope.

When faced with suffering, John was reminded that Jesus is the Messiah who had come to bring the good news of salvation. Followers of Jesus will face troubles, but they have hope: everyone who trusts in Jesus for salvation will live in His kingdom forever. ”

3 GOSPEL DISCUSSION

SAY “ Jesus is the Messiah who offers salvation and hope to those who trust in Him. If you haven't trusted Jesus as your Savior, I would like to share more about this with you. ”

(Tip: Use Scripture and the Gospel Plan Poster to explain how to become a Christian. Create an environment where kids are welcome to ask questions about what it means to follow Jesus.)

4 QUESTIONS FROM KIDS (3 minutes)

Show the “Unit 24, Session 1” Questions from Kids video. Prompt kids to discuss:

1. Why does God let us have bad days?
2. How can we have hope, even on difficult days?



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

5 MISSIONS MOMENT (3 minutes)

Print a copy of the “Ski City Prayer Reminder” printable for each kid. Lead kids to cut the figure they choose and the stand along the dotted lines. Demonstrate how to fold the stand along the solid lines and glue it together. Then lead kids to glue the figures so it appears the figure is going down the ski slope.

SAY “Salt Lake City, Utah, promotes itself as ‘different by nature,’ which refers to the natural beauty of their world-class ski slopes and national parks. It also reminds people of the city’s history and present-day life. Recently, the city has become a major metropolitan area with a growing population of people with a diverse range of beliefs.”

Explain that Salt Lake City is known for desert spires and for lush alpine forests. The presence of 11 world-class ski resorts gave the city a nickname of Ski City. However, as beautiful as the city is, many people in this city need to hear about the good news of Jesus. The number of evangelical Christians in the metro area is only a small percentage of the population. Explain that in the next few weeks, kids will learn how believers are working to tell people in Salt Lake City about Jesus.

Pray, thanking God for missionaries who serve in places where it may be difficult to teach people about Jesus. Encourage kids to take home their prayer reminders to remember to pray for missionaries in Salt Lake City.

6 KEY PASSAGE ACTIVITY (5 minutes)

Show the Key Passage Poster. Lead kids in reading aloud Jeremiah 29:12-13 together.

SAY “Our key passage reminds us that when we seek God, He will show us more of Himself. Let’s work on memorizing this important verse.”

Lead the groups to form a circle. Hold a ball and say the first word of the key passage; then pass the ball to the kid next to you and challenge her to say the next word. Encourage kids to continue passing the ball around the circle, saying one word of the key passage and passing it to the next kid.

Lead kids to sing “With All Your Heart (Jeremiah 29:12-13).” You may also choose to sing a worship song of your choice.

7 PRAY (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before transitioning to Love.

SAY “Thank You, Lord, for sending Jesus to bring the good news of salvation to the world. Help us remember that when we trust in You, we have hope no matter what troubles we face. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Transition from **LEARN** to **LOVE**





THE GOD OF THE GOSPEL

LOVE God by Applying the Story

1 REVIEW & BIBLE SKILLS (5 minutes)

Distribute Bibles and display the New Testament Israel Map. Guide kids to open their Bibles to Mark 6. Explain that the Bible first introduces John the Baptist before he was born, while he was still inside his mother's womb. Later the Bible teaches us that John was not the Messiah but did fulfill prophecy by being the one sent by God to prepare the way for the Messiah, Jesus.

Consider pointing out the location of Galilee [C5] on the New Testament Israel Map. Choose a volunteer to read aloud Mark 6:19-20 or ask the kids to follow along as you read the verses aloud.

SAY “ John preached the truth of God’s laws to many people, including important leaders. John told King Herod and Herodias that they were living in a sinful way, and Herodias did not like this. She was angry with John and wanted him killed, but King Herod respected John as a holy man and was afraid to do anything to him. Eventually, Herod gave in to Herodias’ wishes and ordered that John would be killed.

There will be times when we need to share the truth of God’s Word with others, even if it comes at a cost. But sharing the good news of the gospel is worth the cost. Everyone who trusts in Jesus for salvation will live in His kingdom forever. ”

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

SAY “ What can we learn from John about trusting God when it is hard? ”

During hard times, we may be tempted to doubt who God is or what He is doing. Even though John had spent his ministry preparing the way for the Messiah, he needed to be reminded that Jesus is the promised Messiah so that he could face his imprisonment with hope. All followers of Jesus can have hope in hard times, knowing they will be with God in His kingdom forever. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Romans 12:12.)

SAY “ How does God handle our doubts and questions? ”

God reminds us of the truth, just as Jesus did for John. John needed to be reminded of the truth that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Through Jesus we have hope, no matter what hardships we face. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Romans 15:4.)

SAY “ How can knowing that Jesus is the Messiah give us hope during hardship? ”

If we have trusted Jesus as Savior, we know that this world is not our final home. During times of hardship, we have hope knowing that the hard things will not last forever. One day we will go to heaven and be with God and all the sad and hard things from this world will pass away. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Romans 8:25.)

Transition from **LOVE** to **LIVE**





THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: MESSIAH DETECTIVE

Before this activity, gather enough manilla folders so that each child can have one. Write the words *Case File* on the front of each folder with a black marker. Invite kids to sit around tables and distribute a folder to each kid. Place colored pencils and markers in the center of each table. Challenge kids to listen as you read a prophecy verse from the Old Testament and a corresponding New Testament verse in which Jesus fulfills that prophecy. Then, encourage kids to draw a picture of what Jesus did to fulfill the prophecy about the Messiah on the inside of their case folders. Repeat with several other verses. Then, allow kids to share their drawings with the group. Here are some verse pairing suggestions: Isaiah 35:6 and Mark 7:31-37; Zechariah 9:9 and Mark 11:1-10; Micah 5:2 and Luke 2:4-7.

SAY “JOHN WAS REMINDED THAT JESUS IS THE PROMISED MESSIAH. Jesus fulfills all the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, proving that He is the one who was promised to save people from sin.”

☐ OPTION 2: SET THE PRISONERS FREE

Before this activity, place sticky notes reading *Go to Jail* and *Set the Prisoners Free* on different sections of a board game spinner; set up a *jail* by taping a square on the floor in one area of the room. Gather kids together as a group. Ask for one kid to volunteer to spin first. If he spins *Go to Jail*, direct him to go to the jail area set up in the room. If he spins *Set the Prisoners Free*, challenge him to answer a review question from today's story. If he answers correctly, all the prisoners in jail are free to leave the jail. If he answers incorrectly, he must go to jail. Allow all kids to take a turn spinning. Continue playing for as long as time allows.

SAY “John was imprisoned for sharing the truth of God's Word. During this hard time, John had questions for Jesus. Jesus encouraged John by reminding him that Jesus had come as the Messiah. Anyone who trusts in Jesus will live in His kingdom forever.”

2 REFLECTION AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute a sheet of paper and pencil to each kid. Ask kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Who can I tell about this story?

Be sure to send the sheets home with the kids along with the activity pages so parents can continue to discuss the Bible story with their kids. If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page. Pray for your group.