

Jesus and John the Baptist

BIBLE PASSAGE: John 3:22-36

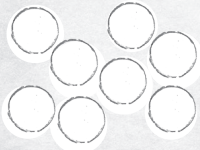
MAIN POINT: Jesus came from heaven to earth.

KEY PASSAGE: John 14:6

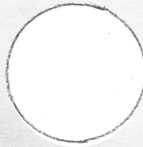
BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Who did Jesus say He is? Jesus said He is the Messiah.

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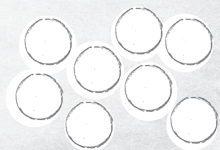
SMALL GROUP OPENING
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SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES
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Leader BIBLE STUDY

Jesus went with His disciples into the countryside of Judea. He oversaw them as they baptized people. At the same time, people came to John, and he was baptizing them. These baptisms were an outward sign of cleansing for people who had repented of their sins.

Some of John's disciples came to John. They had noticed that the disciples of the man John had reluctantly baptized were baptizing others. Perhaps they felt the need to defend John's ministry, but John explained God's purpose for his life. John had been chosen by God long before he was born to be a forerunner—one who prepares the way. (See Mal. 3:1; Isa. 40:3.)

John the Baptist understood who he was and who Jesus is. Consider these comparisons as John explained that Jesus was greater than John.

First, who were they? John was clear: “I am not the Messiah” (John 3:28). John was not the bridegroom, but the groom’s friend. Jesus is the bridegroom. (John 3:29)

Where did they come from? John was from the earth, and he belonged to the earth. Jesus comes from above and is above all. (John 3:31)

Next, what did they do? John said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” John was a witness to the Light. (John 1:7-8) He was a voice in the wilderness, and Jesus is the Word. (John 1:14,23) John baptized with water, but Jesus baptized with the Spirit. (John 1:33)

Finally, why were they here? John went before Jesus and rejoiced with Him. (John 3:28-29) Jesus came to give eternal life. (John 3:36)

In the scope of God’s plan of salvation, it was time for John to step aside for Jesus to do His work on earth. Jesus’ earthly ministry had begun, and He would obediently do God’s will to bring salvation to sinners.



Additional resources for each session are available at gospelproject.com. For free training and session-by-session help, visit www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

The BIBLE STORY

Bible Storytelling Tips

Jesus and John the Baptist

John 3:22-36

- **Shout it out:** Guide kids to shout “from earth” when you say *John* and “from heaven” when you say *Jesus*. Pause after reading each name at first until the kids get the hang of it.
- **Doodle It:** Draw key parts of the story, like a countryside, Jesus baptizing people, and John and his disciples who are questioning him. Stick figures work too!

Jesus and His disciples left Jerusalem, and they went out into the countryside. Jesus spent time with His disciples, and people came to them. Jesus taught the people, and the people were baptized.

Nearby, John the Baptist was baptizing people too. Some of the people who followed John got into an argument. They went to John to ask him a question.

“Teacher,” they said, “remember the man you talked about, the One who was with you on the other side of the Jordan River? He is baptizing people, and people are starting to follow Him.”

John answered them, “A person can only receive what God gives him. You heard me say that I am not the Messiah. I am the messenger who goes before Him to announce that He is coming.”

John tried to explain by talking about a wedding. When two people get married, the man who marries the bride is the groom. His friend stands with him at the wedding, and he is happy to be there and hear the groom’s voice. This was how John felt—like a groom’s friend—because he was happy that Jesus, the Messiah, had come.

John also knew that a wedding is the groom’s special day; the groom’s friend should not make it about himself. John said, “Jesus must become greater, and I must become less.”

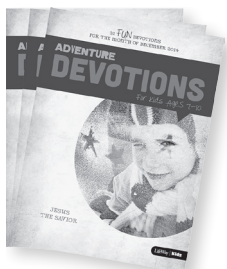
Then John explained why Jesus was more important than himself. John was from the earth, and he could only talk about things on earth. Jesus—the One who comes from heaven—talked about things in heaven because He had seen

them! Still, no one believed what Jesus said.

John said, “Whoever believes Jesus knows that God tells the truth. God sent Jesus to earth, and Jesus speaks God’s words.”

John also said, “The Father loves the Son and has given Him power over everything. Whoever believes in the Son will have eternal life, but whoever refuses to believe in the Son will not have eternal life. He will never be able to get away from God’s judgment.”

Christ Connection: John the Baptist had told people to get ready for Jesus, the promised Messiah. Now that Jesus was on earth, John’s mission was complete. John the Baptist joyfully stepped aside as Jesus began His earthly ministry.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD’S WORD?
GET
ADVENTURE!**

Invite kids to check out this week’s devotionals to discover that John told his disciples that Jesus is the Messiah. Anyone who believes in Jesus—not John the Baptist—will receive eternal life. (John 3:16) Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Small Group OPENING

SESSION TITLE: Jesus and John the Baptist

BIBLE PASSAGE: John 3:22-36

MAIN POINT: Jesus came from heaven to earth.

KEY PASSAGE: John 14:6

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Who did Jesus say He is? Jesus said He is the Messiah.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. As kids arrive, ask them if they have ever had to step aside to let someone take over a task that they were working on. How did that feel?

SAY • There are a lot of different ways we might feel when someone is better at a certain job or task. We might feel like he or she is more important than us. Today, our story is about a man who knew when it was time to step aside and let the new person take over. He was even happy to do so! Who do you think it could be?

Activity page (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the “Bigger and Better” activity page. Invite kids to circle which item in each pair is bigger or better. Answers could differ in cases where bigger may not be considered better.

SAY • In our story today, we will learn about a man who recognized when someone better had come to take over for him. He gladly stepped aside to let the more

- “Bigger and Better” activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

important man lead. That's not always easy, but John did so willingly for Jesus to take over.

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Great and small

Hold various competitions to see who can do things the best, like taking the largest step, jumping the highest, reaching the tallest, and so forth. Then see who can crouch the lowest, whisper the softest, and so forth. Talk to the kids about situations where both a big action and a small action might be necessary, such as reaching a tall ledge or fitting into a small space.

SAY • In our story today, we will hear why John the Baptist said that he must become less and Jesus must become greater. What do you think that means? Do you think it is easy or hard to admit when someone is better than you?

OPTION 2: Order up

Provide the kids with multiple sets of manipulatives and counting toys. Ask them to order them in different ways such as smallest to largest, according to the color spectrum, or by approximate weight. You may also use things like assorted buttons, beads, beans, or interlocking brick toys.

SAY • Before Jesus began His ministry, John the Baptist had many followers. When Jesus began to teach people about God and perform miracles, it was time for John to step back because Jesus was the greater of the two. Jesus is the most important person ever! Everything and everyone is less important than Jesus.



- manipulatives and counting toys
- assorted buttons, beads, beans, or interlocking brick toys (optional)

Transition to large group

Large Group LEADER

SESSION TITLE: Jesus and John the Baptist

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Countdown

• countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as large group time begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

• leader attire

• caution tape

[Large Group Leader enters wearing festive clothing and a brightly colored traffic vest. He or she is carrying caution tape. Leader begins to unroll it and use it to mark off part of the stage area.]

LEADER • Hello there, kids! I'm glad you could come back.

The street festival has been going on for about a week, and the people are loving it. We actually have had so many visitors that we are extending the parking lots to make a bigger, better festival!

That's why I'm here. I need to mark out the area that is going to be under construction. This area is great, but it's not the best. We need to bring in something better! We need room for bigger food trucks, more restrooms to cut down on lines, and extra space for booths.

You know, in a way it reminds me of a Bible story. And not just any story! This is a story that will help

us further examine who Jesus is.

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • We've been studying Scripture to learn about Jesus—straight from Jesus. We want to read His words in the Bible to learn about Him. ***Who did Jesus say He is? Jesus said He is the Messiah.***

Messiah is a word that means “anointed one” or “chosen one.” This title is used to refer to Jesus because God chose Him to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins. As we go through this story, think about the ways we can see this is true—Jesus really is the Messiah.

• Big Picture Question Poster

Giant timeline (1 minute)

LEADER • Let's see, where are we? Last week we talked about ... what was it? [*Allow responses.*] That's right, I remember now. We talked about when Jesus and Nicodemus met. **Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born again**, and we learned that this meant spiritual birth by believing in Jesus.

Well, this week we will learn about another man Jesus interacted with: John the Baptist. You may remember the story of Jesus being baptized from a few weeks back. This week we will see what happened between them when Jesus started teaching about God publicly. Our story is called “Jesus and John the Baptist.”

• Giant Timeline

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to John 3:22-36. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or

• Bibles
• “Jesus and John the Baptist” video
• Big Picture Question Poster
• Bible Story Picture Poster

show the Bible story video “Jesus and John the Baptist.”

LEADER • John the Baptist was a special messenger sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus. He warned people to repent of their sins and told them to get ready for the Messiah. Many people followed John and were baptized because of what he taught about the coming Messiah.

When Jesus began to teach and perform miracles, John’s followers were confused. They wondered who this new preacher was.

John helped them understand who Jesus is. John told them, “I am not the Messiah.” His job was just to prepare the people for when the Messiah would come. It was clear that John’s job was coming to an end now that Jesus the Messiah had begun His ministry. John understood that Jesus was more important than him, and he wanted his followers to become Jesus’ followers. John had no power to save people from sin, but he knew that Jesus did!

At one period of time, it was good for John to be the “center of attention,” since he called people to repent of their sins. However, Jesus is the Son of God. **Jesus came from heaven to earth**, and it was time for Him to be the “center of attention” because He would actually save sinners.

Note: You may use this opportunity to use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

Christ connection

LEADER • **Jesus came from heaven to earth** to be God’s promised Savior, the Messiah who would take away people’s sin and give them new life with God. John joyfully gave up his position as a leader and teacher to Jesus because that position was rightfully His.

In our lives, Jesus rightfully deserves the most important position too. We often want to lead our own lives and be in charge of ourselves. This is a sinful attitude because God made us to glorify Him. God sent Jesus to die on the cross and rise from the dead to forgive our sin. When we trust that Jesus was the perfect sacrifice and God raised Him from the dead to defeat sin and death, we have new life with God! We can be forgiven and set free because of Jesus. Then we can joyfully step aside and give Jesus the best position in our lives—the position that is rightfully His.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together John 14:6. Then sing “I Am the Way” song

- Key Passage Poster
- “I Am the Way” song

LEADER • Jesus is the most important Person ever. He is the only way to be forgiven of sin and reunited with God. Our key passage records Jesus’ words to His disciples explaining that to them. Jesus said that no one would come to the Father except through Him. Jesus is the rightful King over the universe, including our hearts!

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • Have you ever won first place in a competition? Have you ever been shocked to find you didn’t win first place? Think about those two ideas as you watch this video.

- “Unit 21, Session 2” discussion starter video

Show the “Unit 21, Session 2” discussion starter video. Discuss with your group how it would feel to be recognized as the best. Ask them why it was appropriate in the video

for the baker to win first place and receive recognition. Who really deserved the credit? Who deserves the credit for our talents and skills?

LEADER • We are sometimes tempted to take credit for the good things we accomplish. The truth is, God deserves all the credit for the good things in the world. John understood this and joyfully stepped aside for Jesus to take His rightful place as the most important Person. What are some ways we can step aside to give Jesus more glory in our lives?

Sing (4 minutes)

• “God Is Here” song

LEADER • Our God is worthy of all praise and honor! Let’s spend the next few minutes praising Him in song. Sing together “God Is Here.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

LEADER • Father, Your glory never ends. It goes on and on forever. We sometimes think we deserve glory or power when it belongs only to You and Your Son. Help us to see the wisdom in John’s choice to joyfully step aside and welcome Jesus. Help us to welcome Jesus joyfully into our lives too. Amen.

Dismiss to small groups

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. You may provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

Small Group LEADER

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Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- sticky notes

Use sticky notes to cover a word or two from the key passage. Challenge kids to read the key passage, filling in the missing words. Add more sticky notes to cover additional words each round, inviting the kids to read the passage each time until the entire verse is covered. See if anyone can say it from memory.

SAY • Great job with that verse! Jesus said many things about Himself to help people understand who He is. Our key passage reminds us that Jesus is the only way to have life with God the Father. There is no other way to have life with God.

John the Baptist knew this, and so he joyfully stepped aside when **Jesus came from heaven to earth**. John's mission was to tell people to prepare for Jesus, and Jesus was there!

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster

Instruct your group to line up single file. One at a time, ask the following questions of the first kid in line. If she knows the answer, she should say it and move to the end of the line. If she does not know, ask her to joyfully step aside to

let the kid behind her answer it. If he also cannot answer, instruct the kids to find the reference to read the answer from their Bibles.

Questions:

1. What did Jesus do in the countryside? (*He spent time with His disciples, and people were baptized; John 3:22*)
2. What did John's followers tell John? (*Jesus was baptizing people, and people were following Him; John 3:26*)
3. John said he was not whom? (*the Messiah, John 3:28*)
4. To which people at a wedding did John compare Jesus and himself? (*Jesus is like the groom, John was like the groom's friend, John 3:29*)
5. Who did John say must become greater? (*Jesus, John 3:30*)
6. Where did Jesus come from? (**Jesus came from heaven to earth**, *John 3:31*)
7. Whose words does Jesus speak? (*God's words, John 3:34*)
8. What will those who believe in the Son have? (*eternal life, John 3:36*)
9. Who will not have eternal life? (*those who refuse to believe in the Son, John 3:36*)
10. **Who did Jesus say He is? Jesus said He is the Messiah.**

SAY • John had been preaching about the kingdom of God and baptizing people to prepare them for Jesus. **Jesus came from heaven to earth** and started doing many of the same things—teaching about the kingdom of heaven and telling people to repent of their sins. It might have seemed to some of John's followers as though Jesus were copying John, but John knew that

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

Jesus is God's Son. John stepped aside to let Jesus take His rightful place as most important. John knew that only Jesus has the power to save people from sin.



• broomstick or other
long straight stick

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Less and less limbo

Invite two volunteers to hold a broomstick horizontally over their heads. Challenge the rest of the group to walk under the limbo stick without touching the stick or letting their hands touch the floor. After the whole class has passed underneath the stick, switch stick holders, lower the bar, and start again. Whoever is the last kid to successfully pass under the lowest limbo setting wins.

SAY • In our game, you needed to get lower and lower to keep passing under the stick and moving on to the next round. In a way, that is a little like what John wanted to do with Jesus. John completed his mission of preparing people for Jesus' arrival, so it was time for him to become less important so Jesus' mission could take place. What do you think it means to "make yourself decrease"? What does it mean to "make Jesus increase"?

OPTION 2: Triplet match

Before class, write on individual index cards three sets of phrases to describe things that increase in value (good, better, best). Include some phrases that refer to Jesus' greatness. Make at least four groups of three phrases per set, so that you have at least 12 cards per group. Kids will try to match the trio of cards.

Examples:

- explaining what sin is (good), warning against sin

• index cards
• pen

(better), dying to save you from sin (best)

- owning a Bible (good), reading your Bible (better), obeying the Bible (best)
- smelling something delicious (good), tasting something delicious (better), sharing a delicious treat with a friend (best)
- hearing Jesus is the Messiah (good), believing Jesus is the Messiah (better), believing Jesus is the Messiah and telling others about Him (best)

SAY • We matched things in groups based on things getting better. In some cases, the cards described Jesus, the best of all! **Jesus came from heaven to earth.** John knew that Jesus was the promised Savior who would save people from sin. John wanted to decrease to help Jesus increase in honor and glory.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child's journal. Ask the kids to write about or draw a way they can "increase" Jesus' honor and glory in their lives.

SAY • When we experience Jesus' love and forgiveness, He transforms us to glorify Him. We can increase Jesus' glory by telling others about Him and obeying His commands.

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray for your group to glorify Jesus with their lives.

- pencils and crayons
- Journal Page
- Bible Story Coloring Page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.