

1. AUTHOR

Q. What do you know about *John*?

A. Many people’s ‘favourite’ gospel may have been written in Ephesus¹, after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. John seems to assume that the reader has read one or more of the synoptic gospels² so, for example, he includes no accounts of Jesus birth, transfiguration, the institutions of the Lord’s supper or Christian baptism. It is his own, mainly eye-witness, account.

PROBABLE DATES OF WRITING (AD)			
MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
63 – 70	40 – 65	62 – 64	80 – 85

2. ONE KEY THEME – ‘BELIEVE THAT THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD IS JESUS’

Note slightly different word order³ from that of ESV, NIV etc.⁴

3. KEY VERSE

John 20:30-31 Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;³¹ but 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. ESV
See also John 1:1-5.



1 D.A. Carson, Page 87, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar, 1991, Apollos, IVP – following Irenæus (130 – 202 AD).
 2 Eusebius (c.260–c.340 AD) on Clement of Alexandria (c.150–c.215 AD): ‘But John, last of all, seeing that what had reference to the body in the gospel of our saviour was sufficiently detailed, and being urged by his friends ... composed a spiritual gospel’ (Ecclesiastical History 6.14.7)
 3 SBL Greek of John 20:31: ‘... πιστεύητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ...’
 4 As per Carson, Page 102.

4. TEXTUAL STRUCTURE & SHAPE OF JOHN?

The traditional breakdown of John has the prologue (1:1-1:19) and final epilogue (21) surrounding the 'book of signs' (1:19-12:50) and 'book of glory' (13:1-20:31).

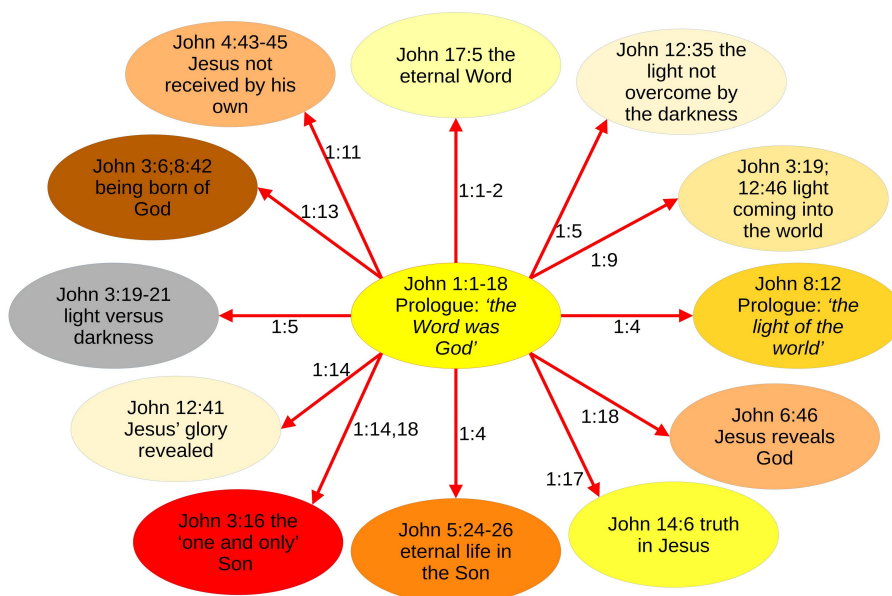
A more useful structure (below) has Lazarus' death and **resurrection** acting as a pivot after which the gospel moves inexorably towards Jesus' death and **resurrection**.

TEXTUAL STRUCTURE OF JOHN		
CHAPTER: VERSE	CONTENT	DETAIL
1:1-18	Prologue: Jesus' identity	The Word, God, life, light ...
1:19-11:54	Jesus' public ministry	Sign-miracles, parables?, other teaching
		Jesus raises Lazarus
11:55-20:29	Passion ⁵ week	Passover, suffering & death of Jesus
		Jesus' resurrection
20:30-21:25	Conclusion	Purpose of John's gospel (20:31)
		Appendix: Jesus forgives Peter

The 'shape' of John's thought progression is perhaps best represented as a kind of explosion emanating from the prologue⁶. John expands all the themes from the prologue in the remainder of his gospel.

Textually, John uses many different structuring 'devices' such as chiasms⁷, bridge-pericopes⁸, inclusios⁹, repetitions, closures¹⁰.

The most useful device to notice is the following of sign-miracles by some teaching from either Jesus or John, e.g. the feeding of the 5,000 in John 6:1-15 followed by the bread of life teaching in 6:25-59. But even this simple device is complicated by the mingling in of Jesus



5 Traditional name, from the Latin 'passio', 'suffer'.

6 Adapted from Carson, page 111, who, in turn, cites Robinson, *More*, page 68.

7 Greek, symmetrical arrangements of text, e.g. John 1:1-2; 1:3-5; 1:6-8; 1:9-11 (centre); 1:12-13; 1:14; 1:15-18. See any technical commentary.

8 Greek, cut-out sections of text.

9 Latin meaning 'enclosure', e.g. John 2:1 – 4:54 where Cana functions as a geographical inclusio. Carson, page 104.

10 1:18; 4:42; 4:53-54; 10:42; 12:50b; 20:31; 21:25, largely as per Carson, page 104.

walking on water (6:16-24) and teaching about eternal life (John 6:35;60-69).

Qualitatively (not textually), John is held together by seven great 'I AM' statements calling attention to Jesus' divinity by their allusion to the LORD's old covenant revelation of himself.

1. <i>I AM the bread of life</i> 6:35,41,48,51	5. <i>I AM the resurrection and the life</i> 11:25
2. <i>I AM the light of the world</i> 8:12	6. <i>I AM the way, the truth, and the life</i> 14:6
3. <i>I AM the door</i> 10:7,9	7. <i>I AM the true vine</i> 15:1,5
4. <i>I AM the good shepherd</i> 10:11,14	Cf. Exodus 3:14: The LORD: "I AM who I AM".

Each one presupposes a question to which Jesus is the answer, e.g.:

Q. How can I get eternal life? **A.** *John 6:35 Jesus: The bread of life I am.* DWL¹¹

There are 35 'I AM' statements in total, in the four gospels¹².

All in all, the structure of John's gospel is rather involved, and beside the main point.

5. KEY GROUPS OF PEOPLE

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jesus Christ, <i>the Word</i> (John 1:1-5 ...) 2. <i>The Holy Spirit</i> (1:32-34; 14-16; 20:22) 3. <i>The Father</i> (12:28) 4. <i>John the baptist</i> (1:23)¹³ 5. <i>Jesus' mother, brothers and disciples</i> (including named women) 6. <i>Nicodemus</i> (3, 19:39) 7. <i>Samaritan woman at the well</i> (4) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Crowds, including the 5,000 fed (6) 9. <i>Lazarus, Mary and Martha</i> (11) 10. The Jewish leaders/enemies 11. <i>Joseph of Arimathea</i> (19:38) 12. <i>Pilate</i> (18 – 19) 13. <i>Thomas</i> in particular (20:28) 14. '<i>the disciple whom Jesus loved</i>' (19:26-27; 21:20) i.e. his best friend¹⁴ |
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6. GREAT EVENTS

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. John declaring Jesus <i>the lamb of God</i> 2. Only 8 obvious, physical, sign-miracles¹⁵ 3. Virtually no parables (<i>good shepherd?</i> (10) <i>true vine?</i> (15)) 4. Extended discourses and interviews | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. The Passover and passion⁵ week occupy about half of John's gospel. 6. Peter's 'denials' of Jesus (18) 7. Resurrection and appearances 8. Peter's reinstatement (21) |
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7. THEMES¹⁶

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jesus' identity (1:34) 2. Salvation, especially from sin (e.g. 1:29) 3. The Holy Spirit (1:32-33; 14-16; 20:22) 4. Fulfilment of the OT (e.g. 1:23) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Misunderstandings (e.g. 3:4; 6:52) 6. God's people (e.g. 1:10-13; 10:27-28) 7. Background to the sacraments (e.g. 1:24-34 (baptism); 6:35,48,51 (bread)) 8. Faith and belief in general (e.g. 3:16-18) |
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¹¹ Greek: ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς.

¹² Verses featuring the exact Greek words 'ἐγώ εἰμι': Matthew 14:27; 22:32; 24:5; 26:22; 26:25; Mark 6:50; 13:6; 14:62; Luke 1:19; 21:8; 22:70; 24:39; John 4:26; 6:20; 6:35; 6:41; 6:48; 6:51; 8:12; 8:18; 8:24; 8:28; 9:9; 10:7; 10:9; 10:11; 10:14; 11:25; 13:19; 14:6; 15:1; 15:5; 18:5; 18:6; 18:8.

¹³ In common with all the other gospels.

¹⁴ ὁ μαθητῆς ἐκεῖνος ὃν ῆγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς in John 21:7. There is a consensus that this is John, Jesus' cousin, the writer of the gospel.

¹⁵ Cf. Luke, which contains 21 or more, Mark, 20 or so, Matthew, 21 or so. But notice that John 2:24 and 4:18,39 are certainly miraculous.

¹⁶ Carson, page 97, adds 'Eschatology' and other theological details.

8. JOHN IN PRACTICE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

John 2:23-35 Now when [Jesus] was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴ But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵ and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

*3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." ³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again [from above] he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. *ESV**

Q1. How do the themes in section '7. Themes' feature in the passage above?

John 2:23

John 3:3

John 2:24-25

John 3:4

John 3:2

John 3:5-6

Q2. What might we miss if we only start reading at the chapter division (3:1) ¹⁷?

Q3. What is the significance of these (selected) 'I AM' statements:

John 1:19-23

John 8:58-59

John 4:25-26

John 18:4-6

John 5:16-18¹⁸

Q4. Which is your favourite 'I AM' statement?

9. HOMEWORK

Read all of John's gospel, but especially John 19, noticing all the internal evidence of it being mainly an eye-witness account.

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¹⁷ The calamitous, traditional, and now standard, biblical chapter divisions were introduced in around 1205 by Archbishop Stephen Langton (c.1150 – 1228).

¹⁸ Watch out for verses which do not contain actual 'I AM's'. Here the verb is 'working', not 'am', in Greek.