## 1. AUTHOR

**Q**. What do you know about *John*?

**A**. Many people's 'favourite' gospel may have been written in Ephesus<sup>1</sup>, after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. John seems to assume that the

reader has read one or more of the synoptic gospels<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

Note slightly different word order<sup>3</sup> from that of ESV, NIV etc.<sup>4</sup>

#### 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; <sup>31</sup> 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.

 PROBABLE DATES OF WRITING (AD)

 MATTHEW
 MARK
 LUKE
 JOHN

 63 - 70
 40 - 65
 62 - 64
 80 - 85



<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, Page 87, The Gospel According to John, Pillar, 1991, Apollos, IVP – following Irenæus (130 – 202 AD).

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)

<sup>3</sup> SBL Greek of John 20:31: '... πιστεύητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοΰ θεοῦ, ...'

<sup>4</sup> 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).

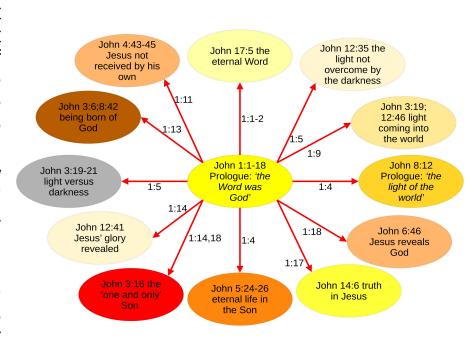
A more useful structure (below) has Lazarus' death and resurrection acting as a pivot after which the gospel moves inexorably towards Jesus' death and resurrection.

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	Passion⁵ 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 prologue<sup>6</sup>. John expands all the themes from the prologue in the remainder of his gospel.

Textually, John uses many different structuring 'devices' such as chiasms<sup>7</sup>. bridge-pericopes<sup>8</sup>, inclusios<sup>9</sup>, repetitions, closures<sup>10</sup>.

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

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

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

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.

<sup>8</sup> Greek, cut-out sections of text.

<sup>9</sup> Latin meaning 'enclosure', e.g. John 2:1 – 4:54 where Cana functions as a geographical inclusio. Carson, page104.

<sup>10 1:18; 4:42; 4:53-54; 10:42; 12;50</sup>b; 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 AM the bread of life 6:35,41,48,51	5. I AM the resurrection and the life 11:25
2. I AM the light of the world 8:12	6. I AM the way, the truth, and the life 14:6
3. I AM the door 10:7,9	7. I AM the true vine 15:1,5
4. I AM the good shepherd 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*. DWL<sup>11</sup> There are 35 '*I AM*' statements in total, in the four gospels<sup>12</sup>.

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

## 5. KEY GROUPS OF PEOPLE

- 1. Jesus Christ, the Word (John 1:1-5 ...)
- 2. The Holy Spirit (1:32-34; 14–16; 20:22)
- 3. The Father (12:28)
- 4. John the baptist (1:23)13
- 5. Jesus' *mother, brothers* and *disciples* (including named women)
- 6. Nicodemus (3, 19:39)
- 7. Samaritan woman at the well (4)

- 8. Crowds, including the 5,000 fed (6)
- 9. Lazarus, Mary and Martha (11)
- 10. The Jewish leaders/enemies
- 11. Joseph of Arimathea (19:38)
- 12. Pilate (18 19)
- 13. Thomas in particular (20:28)
- 14. 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (19:26-27; 21:20) i.e. his best friend<sup>14</sup>

## **6. Great Events**

- 1. John declaring Jesus the lamb of God
- 2. Only 8 obvious, physical, sign-miracles<sup>15</sup>
- 3. Virtually no parables (good shepherd? (10) true vine? (15))
- 4. Extended discourses and interviews
- 5. The Passover and passion<sup>5</sup> week occupy about half of John's gospel.
- 6. Peter's 'denials' of Jesus (18)
- 7. Resurrection and appearances
- 8. Peter's reinstatement (21)

## 7. THEMES<sup>16</sup>

- 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 oτ (e.g. 1:23)

- 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)

<sup>11</sup> Greek: ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς·

<sup>12</sup> 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; 18:6; 18:8.

<sup>13</sup> In common with all the other gospels.

<sup>14</sup> ὁ μαθητὴς ἐκεῖνος ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς in John 21:7. There is a concensus that this is John, Jesus' cousin, the writer of the gospel.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again [from above] he cannot see the kingdom of God." <sup>4</sup> 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?" <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> 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 4:25-26 John 4:25-26

John 18:4-6

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

## 9. HOMEWORK

John 5:16-18<sup>18</sup>

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

<sup>18</sup> Watch out for verses which do not contain actual 'I AMs'. Here the verb is 'working', not 'am', in Greek.