

INTERPRETING JOHN

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Structure

The Fourth Gospel's account emphasizes Jesus as the one sent from God, who acts in unity with the Father. In fact, they work so closely together that Jesus is presented as God taking on flesh. From the declaration of the incarnation through a narration of seven signs and multiple interactive discourses, John highlights Jesus's uniqueness. This Gospel's explicit portrayal of Jesus gives it a literary power. A working outline of John goes as follows:

- I. Prologue (1:1-18)
- II. The book of signs: Before the hour (3:1-4:13)
 - A. John the Baptist's witness (1:19-34)
 - B. The first disciples (1:35-51)
 - C. **Sign 1: Water to wine (2:1-12)**
 - D. The cleansing of the temple (2:13-25)
 - E. What do the signs show? Jesus and Nicodemus (3:1-21)
 - F. John the Baptist: "He must increase" (3:22-36)
 - G. True worship: Jesus and the Samaritan woman (4:1-42)
 - H. **Sign 2: Healing the royal officer's son (4:43-54)**
 - I. **Sign 3: Sabbath healing controversy (5:1-18)**
 - J. Sabbath defense: The does nothing on his own (5:19-47)
 - K. **Sign 4: Feeding of the five thousand (6:1-15)**
 - L. **Sign 5: Jesus walks on water (6:16-21)**
 - M. Jesus: The bread of life come down from above (6:22-59)
 - N. Reaction to the discourse: Rejection and confession (6: 0-71)
 - O. Temple teaching: The Christ and the Spirit (7:1-52)
 - P. A woman caught in adultery (7:53-8:11)
 - Q. Controversy heightens: Jesus, the light of the world (8:12-59)
 - R. **Sign 6: A blind man healed—Jesus the light illustrated (9:1-41)**
 - S. Jesus the good shepherd (10:1-21)
 - T. Jewish rejection at Jesus's claim of unity with the Father (10:22-42)
 - U. **Sign 7: The raising of Lazarus (11:1-54)**
 - V. The anointing at Bethany (11:55-12:8)
 - W. The triumphal entry (12:9-19)
 - X. Warning: The Son of Man will be lifted up (12:20-50)
- III. The book of glory: The farewell discourse and the Johannine passion—the hour has come (13:1-20:31)
 - A. Jesus anoints the disciples' feet (13:1-20)
 - B. Prediction of betrayal (13:21-30)
 - C. The new commandment and prediction of denials (13:31-38)
 - D. The farewell discourse for disciples: The Father, the Son, the Paraclete to come, the vine, and persecution (14:1-16:33)
 - E. Jesus' for the unity and consecration of the disciples (17:1-26)
 - F. Jesus's arrest (18:1-12)
 - G. The inquiry by Annas and Peter's denials (18:13-27)
 - H. Jesus's trial before Pilate: The crowd's choice and his presentation for execution (18:28-19:16)
 - I. Jesus's crucifixion and death (19:17-30)
 - J. The piercing of Jesus and his burial (19:31-42)
 - K. Resurrection scenes at the empty tomb (20:1-18)
 - L. Subsequent appearances to the Ten and to Thomas (20:19-29)
 - M. The purpose of the Gospel (20:30-31)
- IV. Epilogue: A miraculous catch picturing mission and a discussion with Peter (21:1-25)

After a unique and fully disclosing prologue pointing to Jesus as the Word and as God (1:1-18), John's Gospel is basically divided into two parts: the gospel of the signs (1:19-12:50) and the gospel of glory that points to Jesus sending the Spirit as a result of the crucifixion and resurrection (chaps. 13-21). Although the narrative is oriented very much from heaven downward in how it unfolds, given the introduction, the actual story of Jesus' ministry also has elements by which we get to watch who Jesus is emerge for those impacted by his ministry, much as it takes place in the Synoptics.

Themes

John's themes focus on Christology. Unlike the Synoptics, John speaks little of the kingdom. Rather, eternal life is the key theme used to express what the Synoptics call the kingdom promise. The emphasis in "eternal life" is not merely the duration of the life (eternal), but also its quality (i.e., real, unending life). Thus, to know the Father and Jesus Christ, whom the Father sent, is eternal life (17:3). This life is available now (5:24-26). In the opportunity is also the prospect of judgment for those who refuse it (3:16-21, 36). The unity of the Father and Son is highlighted in this Gospel (5:19-30; 10:30; 14:9). This inseparable functioning between the Father and Son formed part of the emphasis that led the church into discussion about the Trinity, as the Father sends the Spirit at Jesus's request (14:16) and in Jesus's name (14:26), and the Son sends the



Spirit from the Father (15:26; 16:7). The salvific activity and benefits run from the Father through the Son and come by the Spirit.

It is the Word/Logos sent from God in the form of human flesh that brings this promise. The various ways in which Jesus represents the way of God are developed in the "I am" sayings. He is the light of the world, the resurrection and the life, the good shepherd, the bread of life, the true vine, and more. Each image specifies a central role that belongs to Jesus. As Son, Jesus does only what the Father shows him. As just noted, it is Jesus's unity with the Father in mission that John highlights. Jesus is the hoped-for Messiah. This is expressed in the hope of others. And Jesus is the Son of Man, who ascends and descends between earth and heaven. In this role, he will judge (5:27), be lifted up (3:14), and serve in mediating salvation (3:13; 6:27; 14:6). Even when Jesus is seen as a prophet, it is his role as a leader-prophet like Moses that this identification highlights (6:14; 7:40).

Obviously, the role of signs for John is crucial to his work. Seven signs dominate the first two-thirds of the Gospel. The response to them covers the range from rejection (12:37-40) to openness (9:25). Interestingly, unlike the Synoptics, there are no exorcisms in John. He focuses on acts of healing, restoration, and provision. What these signs highlight above all is Jesus's superiority to Jewish institutions or their leadership (1:17; 2:19-21; 7:37-39; 9:28-41; 10:1-18). Most of the miracles take place in settings of Jewish celebrations and underscore how Jesus provides what the feasts celebrate. At the end of the Gospel, blessing comes to those who have faith without the need for signs (20:29).

Jesus is shown as the revelator of God. It is he who makes the Father and his way known (1:14-18). This is part of Jesus's function as light. Jesus's death shows the love of the Father for his own people and is an example to disciples of how they should love (13:1, 12-17, 34-35). Jesus's death also serves to gather God's people together (10:1-18) and is a means by which the Son and Father are glorified as life is made available through Jesus (3:14-16). His ministry takes place in Perea, Judea, and Galilee. That geographic scope is unique to John's Gospel.

Also of great importance to John is the Spirit, also called the Paraclete. This encourager-enabler will come after Jesus's death as one sent from Father and the Son to lead the disciple into the truth, empower them for ministry and mission, and convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (14:25-31; 16:8-11). Here is the one who sustains life (4:8-10; 7:37-39).

The new community that Jesus forms is to be characterized by love and unity. The love and unity have their model in Jesus's offering of himself and in the Son's relationship to the Father (13:31-35; 17:1-26). To function effectively, the community must stay rooted in its relationship to Jesus, who is the vine (15:1-6).

John declares that his purpose is to write a Gospel that the reader might believe and, in doing so, have life in Jesus's name (20:30-31). John supports the point by continuously showing how central relationship to Jesus is both for establishing eternal life and for maintaining its quality in a hostile world. In this fundamental goal, John is like the other three gospels.

Conclusion

This survey of the roots of the four Gospels shows two with apostolic origins (Matthew and John) and two with apostolic connections (Mark-Peter; Luke-Paul). These apostolic roots mean that our Gospels walk very close to Jesus and the experience of him. Claims that the Gospels operate at some distance from Jesus are exaggerations, as are attempts to sever their apostolic roots.

They are four different works, but as we will see, they tell one core story. While Matthew is concerned with Jewish response, Mark treats the issue of suffering and persecution. Luke provides reassurance by making clear how the message went from Jew to gentile through divine direction and a divine plan showing that the new movement actually had old and venerable roots—although the completion of this theme required a second volume, Acts. John goes his own way, highlighting the unique sending of the unique Son. All four present Jesus as a messianic claimant reframed from normal Jewish expectation but who challenged the Jewish leadership while offering deliverance to any who would embrace him. His message came with claims and actions of divine prerogatives as the unique, anointed one sent from God. This is why Jesus is called "Christ," a title that attached to his name very early on in the church because of the impetus provided by his ministry activity. Each portrait both coheres and offers an array of distinctive in presenting the overall picture of Jesus according to Scripture. There is both unity and diversity in how Jesus is seen according to Scripture. Appreciating both elements and how they work is part of gaining a biblical understanding of who Jesus is.