

The Narrative Structure of John's Gospel

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Outline¹

- I. Introduction (Prologue): The Word Made Flesh in Jesus Christ (1:1–18)
- II. The Gospel Proper: From John's to the Evangelist's Witness (1:19–20:31)
 - A. Act I (Sign Drama): The Messiah's Signs and Rejection by His Own (1:19–12:50)
 1. From John to Jesus: The Beginnings of Jesus' Ministry (1:19–50)
 - SIGN 1: The changing of water into wine (2:1–11)
 - SIGN 2: The clearing of the temple (2:13–25)
 - SIGN 3: The healing of the nobleman's son (4:46–54)
 2. From Cana to Cana: The Cana Cycle (2:1–4:54; Signs 1–3)
 - SIGN 4: The healing of the lame man (5:1–15)
 - SIGN 5: The feeding of the multitude (6:1–15)
 - SIGN 6: The healing of the blind man (9:1–41)
 3. From Jerusalem to Bethany: The Festival Cycle (5:1–10:42; Signs 4–6)
 - SIGN 7: The raising of Lazarus (11:1–57)
 4. From Bethany to Jerusalem: The Climactic Sign (11:1–12:36; Sign 7)
 - SIGN 7: The raising of Lazarus (11:1–57)
 5. Conclusion: Jewish Rejection of the Messiah despite His Many Signs (12:37–50).
 - B. Act II (Crucifixion Drama): The Messiah's Passion and Preparation of His Own (13:1–20:31).
 1. Jesus Anticipates His Exaltation: The Foot washing, the Farewell Discourse, and Jesus' Final Prayer (13:1–17:26).
 2. Jesus Completes His Earthly Mission: The Passion Narrative (18:1–20:29)
 3. Conclusion: Believe in Jesus the Messiah on Account of His Signs (20:30–31)
- III. Conclusion (Epilogue): Jesus' Third and Final Resurrection Appearance and His Commissioning of Peter and "the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved" (21:1–25)

¹ Based on Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 170.

The Prologue (John 1:1–18)

There are several themes in the prologue, or introduction to John which reappear later in the Gospel. These themes alert us to what is important and prepare us to receive John's message about Jesus. These themes *include: creation, the Word, light and darkness, glory, temple, Son, Father, God, Christ (Messiah), mission, witness, judgment, revelation, the new covenant community, and regeneration* (see Köstenberger, 184).

Jesus as the New Temple

It seems that the destruction of the Second Temple is the backdrop for John's gospel (see Köstenberger, 59–72). The Jewish temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. and John was composed some time after this. The Jews were devastated at the loss of their temple, the place that represented their fellowship with God and their source of spiritual blessing. We can read John as if he is saying to those who mourn the loss of the temple: *Embrace Jesus Christ, your Messiah, who is the embodiment of the temple and the only one who can bring you into true fellowship with God and his eternal blessings!* In this Gospel, John demonstrates that in Jesus himself are fulfilled all of the Jewish festivals and institutions.

The Signs

Through the use of seven *sēmeia* or “signs,” John shows Jesus to be the Messiah. These signs begin with the miracle of water to wine at Cana and climax with the raising of Lazarus at Bethany. There are three aspects which mark an event as a “sign.” (1) A sign is always a *public* work of Jesus declaring his identity to the multitudes. (2) A work of Jesus is specifically called a “sign” in the Gospel. (3) Each sign points to God's glory as displayed in Jesus, and so revealing Jesus to be God's authentic representative (See Köstenberger, 326–27).

The “I Am” Sayings

In addition to seven signs, John also includes seven “I am” sayings which are reminiscent of God's words to Moses in Exodus 3:14—*I am who I am*—and his proclamation of his divine character in the writings of Isaiah (e.g., Isa 43:10–13, 25; 45:18; 48:12; 51:12; 52:6). These seven sayings align nicely with the seven signs and further identify Jesus as the Messiah.

1. I am the bread of life, come down from heaven (6:35, 41; 48–51).
2. I am the light of the world (8:12; 9:5).
3. I am the door for the sheep (John 10:7, 9).
4. I am the good shepherd (John 10:11, 14).
5. I am the resurrection and the life (11:25).
6. I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6).
7. I am the true vine (15:1, 5).

The Purpose of John's Gospel

³⁰ And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30–31).