

ESV Expository Commentary

VOL. IX

John–Acts

EDITORS

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EXPOSITORY
Commentary

VOL. IX

—
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John

James M. Hamilton Jr.

Acts

Brian J. Vickers

 **CROSSWAY**[®]
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

ESV Expository Commentary, Volume 9: John–Acts

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Published by Crossway
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover design: Jordan Singer

First printing 2019

Printed in Italy

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Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4335-4660-0

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

LEGO 27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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PREFACE

TO THE ESV EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY

The Bible pulsates with life, and the Spirit conveys the electrifying power of Scripture to those who lay hold of it by faith, ingest it, and live by it. God has revealed himself in the Bible, which makes the words of Scripture sweeter than honey, more precious than gold, and more valuable than all riches. These are the words of life, and the Lord has entrusted them to his church, for the sake of the world.

He has also provided the church with teachers to explain and make clear what the Word of God means and how it applies to each generation. We pray that all serious students of God's Word, both those who seek to teach others and those who pursue study for their own personal growth in godliness, will be served by the ESV Expository Commentary. Our goal has been to provide a clear, crisp, and Christ-centered explanation of the biblical text. All Scripture speaks of Christ (Luke 24:27), and we have sought to show how each biblical book helps us to see the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

To that end, each contributor has been asked to provide commentary that is:

- *exegetically sound*—self-consciously submissive to the flow of thought and lines of reasoning discernible in the biblical text;
- *robustly biblical-theological*—reading the Bible as diverse yet bearing an overarching unity, narrating a single storyline of redemption culminating in Christ;
- *globally aware*—aimed as much as possible at a global audience, in line with Crossway's mission to provide the Bible and theologically responsible resources to as many people around the world as possible;
- *broadly reformed*—standing in the historical stream of the Reformation, affirming that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, taught in Scripture alone, for God's glory alone; holding high a big God with big grace for big sinners;
- *doctrinally conversant*—fluent in theological discourse; drawing appropriate brief connections to matters of historical or current theological importance;
- *pastorally useful*—transparently and reverently "sitting under the text"; avoiding lengthy grammatical/syntactical discussions;
- *application-minded*—building brief but consistent bridges into contemporary living in both Western and non-Western contexts (being aware of the globally diverse contexts toward which these volumes are aimed);

- *efficient in expression*—economical in its use of words; not a word-by-word analysis but a crisply moving exposition.

In terms of Bible translation, the ESV is the base translation used by the authors in their notes, but the authors were expected to consult the text in the original languages when doing their exposition and were not required to agree with every decision made by the ESV translators.

As civilizations crumble, God's Word stands. And we stand on it. The great truths of Scripture speak across space and time, and we aim to herald them in a way that will be globally applicable.

May God bless the study of his Word, and may he smile on this attempt to expound it.

—The Publisher and Editors

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ABBREVIATIONS

General

AT	Author's Translation	lit.	literal, literally
c.	circa, about, approximately	LXX	Septuagint
cf.	confer, compare, see	mg.	marginal reading
ch., chs.	chapter(s)	NT	New Testament
d.	died	OT	Old Testament
ed(s).	editor(s), edited by, edition	par.	parallel passage
e.g.	for example	r.	reigned
esp.	especially	repr.	reprinted
et al.	and others	rev.	revised (by)
etc.	and so on	s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> (under the word)
ff.	and following	trans.	translator, translated by
Gk.	Greek	v., vv.	verse(s)
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place	vol(s).	volume(s)
i.e.	that is	vs.	versus

Bibliographic

BDAG	Bauer W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NAC	New American Commentary
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
SBJT	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>

<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

Books of the Bible

Gen.	Genesis	Amos	Amos
Ex.	Exodus	Obad.	Obadiah
Lev.	Leviticus	Jonah	Jonah
Num.	Numbers	Mic.	Micah
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Nah.	Nahum
Josh.	Joshua	Hab.	Habakkuk
Judg.	Judges	Zeph.	Zephaniah
Ruth	Ruth	Hag.	Haggai
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Zech.	Zechariah
2 Sam.	2 Samuel	Mal.	Malachi
1 Kings	1 Kings	Matt.	Matthew
2 Kings	2 Kings	Mark	Mark
1 Chron.	1 Chronicles	Luke	Luke
2 Chron.	2 Chronicles	John	John
Ezra	Ezra	Acts	Acts
Neh.	Nehemiah	Rom.	Romans
Est.	Esther	1 Cor.	1 Corinthians
Job	Job	2 Cor.	2 Corinthians
Ps., Pss.	Psalms	Gal.	Galatians
Prov.	Proverbs	Eph.	Ephesians
Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Phil.	Philippians
Song	Song of Solomon	Col.	Colossians
Isa.	Isaiah	1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians
Jer.	Jeremiah	2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians
Lam.	Lamentations	1 Tim.	1 Timothy
Ezek.	Ezekiel	2 Tim.	2 Timothy
Dan.	Daniel	Titus	Titus
Hos.	Hosea	Philem.	Philemon
Joel	Joel	Heb.	Hebrews

James	James	2 John	2 John
1 Pet.	1 Peter	3 John	3 John
2 Pet.	2 Peter	Jude	Jude
1 John	1 John	Rev.	Revelation

Apocrypha and Other Noncanonical Sources Cited

1 Clem.	1 Clement
1 Macc.	1 Maccabees
2 Macc.	2 Maccabees

JOHN

James M. Hamilton Jr.

INTRODUCTION TO

JOHN

Overview

Mark's Gospel begins with John the Baptist. Luke backs his starting point up to the parents of the Baptist. Matthew's opening genealogy starts with Abraham and works down to the birth of Jesus. The first phrase of John's Gospel reaches farther back—all the way back—to the beginning, evoking the opening words of Genesis and its account of the world's creation with the phrase "In the beginning" (1:1).

After his majestic opening (1:1–18), John narrates four momentous days at the outset of Jesus' ministry (1:19–51) then presents what Jesus said and did in a cycle of events beginning and ending in Cana, framing a trip to Jerusalem and back (2:1–4:54). In chapters 5–12 the narrative shows Jesus in relation to Israel's feasts. The feast in chapter 5 is unnamed, and then Jesus is presented in relation to the Passover in chapter 6 and the Feast of Tabernacles (ESV "Booths") in chapters 7–9. Jesus is at the Feast of Dedication in chapter 10, then goes to Jerusalem for the Passover, where he will be betrayed (chs. 11–12).

There are three Passovers in chapters 1–12 (2:13; 6:4; 11:55), necessitating at least three different years for these events to unfold. Chapters 13–20, by contrast, relate the events of an eight- to ten-day period (20:26). Jesus was betrayed on Thursday night after the events of chapters 13–17, put on trial through the night into early morning, then crucified on Friday (chs. 18–19). He rose from the dead on the third day—that Sunday morning (ch. 20). Eight days later, presumably the Monday one week after the resurrection, he appeared to Thomas at the end of chapter 20. The breakfast on the beach in chapter 21 takes place on an unspecified later morning ("after this"; 21:1) prior to Jesus' ascension, which took place forty days after his resurrection (Acts 1:3).

Title

Reliable early manuscripts of John's Gospel (among which are P⁶⁶ and P⁷⁵) present its title as "The Gospel according to John." Other high-quality early manuscripts (such as Sinaiticus and Vaticanus) present a shortened form, "According to John." There are no manuscripts of any NT Gospel bearing variations on this formula; all the witnesses to the titles of the Gospels have either the full title or a shortened

version. Martin Hengel¹ has persuasively argued that the uniform manuscript titles of the four canonical Gospels most likely stem from the opening phrase of Mark's Gospel, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1), and that these books would have needed titles from the time of their production and distribution. The fact that the manuscripts do not reflect a wide variety of titles but are consistent in their presentation of the one phrase or its shortened form indicates that these books *always* bore these titles.

Author

Western culture has suffered from a widespread fad in scholarship involving profound skepticism about authors and authorship.² Scholars have posited that Homer did not write the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Shakespeare did not write the plays for which he is famous, and Moses did not write the Pentateuch, Isaiah did not write his book, and John son of Zebedee did not write the Gospel attributed to him.

The evidence, however—from the titles on the manuscripts to the statements found within the Fourth Gospel itself, as well as those made about it by people nearest its time of composition—points to the conclusion that John son of Zebedee wrote the Fourth Gospel. Those positing a different author often set aside primary source data and reliable early testimony in favor of elaborate theories reflecting deep suspicion of the evidence in our possession.

No manuscript attributes the Fourth Gospel to anyone other than John. In the body of the Fourth Gospel, we find it claiming to have been written by the beloved disciple (John 21:20–25). When we investigate which disciple this could be, the evidence points to John son of Zebedee. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus took only Peter, James, and John with him to heal Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:37), to his transfiguration (Luke 9:28), and to pray on the night when he was betrayed (Matt. 26:37). Such evidence indicates that Peter and the two sons of Zebedee enjoyed unique intimacy with Jesus and one another.

In John's Gospel, Peter is named along with the sons of Zebedee in 21:2. John's Gospel also shows Peter and the beloved disciple communicating with each other at the Last Supper through signals (cf. "motioned"; 13:24), and the beloved disciple asks Jesus about the delicate issue of who would betray him (13:25). Later Peter and the beloved disciple run to the empty tomb together (20:4). Since this Gospel was never attributed to James, whom Herod killed at a relatively early point (Acts 12:2), it does not seem likely that James son of Zebedee was the beloved disciple. When joined with the universal early attribution of the Fourth Gospel to John son of Zebedee, the most natural conclusion is that John has chosen to refer to himself as the beloved disciple.

This conclusion from within John's Gospel is supported by universal testimony from the early church that John son of Zebedee wrote this book.³ Some have

1 Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000).

2 See, e.g., the Introduction in Homer, *The Iliad: Books 1–12*, ed. William F. Wyatt, trans. A. T. Murray, 2nd ed., vol. 170, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1–6.

3 See especially Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

suggested that the first-person plural statement in John 21:24 suggests something like an editorial committee or later community, but John makes a similar first-person plural statement in 3 John 12.⁴

Date and Occasion

John could have written his Gospel at any point between the resurrection of Jesus and his own death, which likely came near the end of the first century. Early church tradition held that John wrote Revelation near the end of the first century, but we have no explicit statement as to when John wrote his Gospel. John's Gospel seems to assume knowledge of the deeds and teachings of Jesus recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke (cf. John 3:24 and Mark 1:14),⁵ but that does not necessarily mean John wrote after they did. After all, John was with Jesus when Jesus did and taught what the other Gospels record, and John knew and worked with Peter and other early Christians, so he would have known how they told the story of Jesus.

John states the reason he wrote in 20:31: "That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John no doubt wanted unbelievers to *start* believing and believers to *continue* believing.

Genre and Literary Structure

John's interpretive perspective, which includes his understanding of the world, its problems, and how Jesus solves them, as well how to interpret earlier Scripture and write a narrative that continues its story—in short, every aspect of John's worldview—has been quarried, hewn, sculpted, and textured by Scripture. That is to say, John was a biblical theologian. John's heart, mind, and soul were enlivened by the way Jesus taught him to understand the OT's accounts of how God created and redeemed, covenanted and promised. Jesus not only taught John, he also sent the Holy Spirit (20:22), with the result that the OT's commands, counsel, and covenants, as well as its patterns, promises, and paradigms, determined how John approached the incomparably difficult task of describing what Jesus said and did, and why it matters (cf. 21:25).

All this leads to the assertion that the best phrase for describing the kind of literature found in the Gospel of John is *biblical narrative*. This category recognizes the material similarity between the narratives in the Bible that take for granted everything Moses presented in the Torah, the narratives of the Latter Prophets, and the interpretations of the same in the Former Prophets and Writings. This material similarity stems from a shared understanding of creation, man, sin, redemption, and the promise of a new creation that become the wellspring of hope and the substance of faith.

⁴ For further discussion of Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel, see Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002); and D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).

⁵ See Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

John operates from the same worldview and employs the same literary techniques used by authors of biblical narrative from Moses to the unnamed writers of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, and his perspective is deepened by the words of OT prophets such as Isaiah, psalmists such as David, and sages such as Solomon. Thus the NT Gospels are a lot more like the OT narratives whose story they purport to continue than like Greek biographies of significant figures.

The choice to write in Greek rather than Hebrew appears to have been an outworking of the command Jesus gave his disciples to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18–20). The apostles wrote in Greek not to distinguish their books from OT biblical narratives but to put the story in the lingua franca of the day, to make known God’s mighty works among the nations. The commentary that follows seeks to understand how John intended the words he used to activate a dynamic between his narrative and the OT, a dynamic that presents Jesus as the culmination, fulfillment, resolution, and realization of everything anticipated in the Law and the Prophets.

As to literary structure, a pervasive feature of biblical narrative and poetry is the arrangement of material into chiasmic shape. I am fairly confident of the chiasmic structure that will be presented below for John 1:1–18 and John 2–4. I suspect a wide-angle chiasmic structure of John 5–12, 13–17, and 18–21. More work needs to be done on these matters, and I do not consider the suggestions made in the commentary to be the last word. I would not be surprised to find that John has arranged the whole of his Gospel into chiasmic shape, but the key to that locked secret remains elusive.⁶

Theology of John; Its Relationship to the Rest of the Bible

John had the daunting task of attempting to use words to describe how the most important person who ever lived did the most important things ever accomplished, leading up to the single most important execution that has ever taken place, followed by the unprecedented resurrection of the executed innocent, in fulfillment of the most important body of literature ever written to that point in human history. John discharged his task by employing strategies utilized by previous biblical authors. The genre constraints and expectations of “biblical narrative” provide the medium for his message. These strategies, constraints, and expectations include the reuse of broad biblical categories of thought, repetition of key phrases, engagement with potent themes, and careful deployment of significant terms. Often the categories, themes, and terms evoke prior biblical writings, making the understanding of the OT that John learned from Jesus a necessary prerequisite for understanding John’s presentation of Jesus. This means John’s Gospel and the OT must be read in light of each other, each expositing and informing the other.

⁶ The arrangement proposed by David Deeks and cited by Peter Leithart fails to persuade because the points of contact highlighted in the commentary that follows prove more convincing (cf. Peter Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009], 169). See also the extensive discussion of chiasmus in John’s Gospel by John Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 165–201; and John W. Welch and Daniel B. McKinlay, eds., *Chiasmus Bibliography* (Provo, UT: Research Press, 1999).

In keeping with my attempt to answer the question *What Is Biblical Theology?*,⁷ this discussion of John's theology will be organized around John's contributions to the big story of the world, symbols summarizing and interpreting that story, and truths arising out of the story and its symbols, giving rise to worship, culture, and a certain way of life.

STORY

John plugs his narrative into the wider story the Bible tells by manifestly adding to what Genesis says about how everything got started. No other Gospel begins the way John does, with overt assertions that Jesus, identified as the Word (1:1–4, 14), both was with God and was God from the beginning (1:1), a statement so bold he rephrases and repeats it (1:2); and that, through Jesus, God created all things (1:3). John's prologue explores some of the implications of this new revelation about the nature of God: namely, that Jesus the Messiah is God incarnate. This revelation marches inexorably toward the Christian understanding of the tri-unity of God. John makes suggestive comments about how Jesus is the source of life and light for all people (1:4, 9); how the world did not recognize its Creator and the Jews refused to receive him (1:10–11); how the new birth leads to welcoming Jesus and receiving a new status as children of God (1:12–13); how at the incarnation Jesus tabernacled among his people (1:14); how the grace and truth in Jesus fulfill the revelation of the same in the law of Moses (1:17); and how Jesus came from the Father's bosom to make him known. Still, much of what John says is tantalizingly brief, and many things are left unexplored.

John seems content to assert the reality that Jesus has always been God and has always been with God, establishing a unity and diversity within the Godhead. From there, John tells the story of Jesus such that his Gospel is *both* a straightforward historical narrative *and* a pervasively allusive biblical-theological account whose resonance with the OT is so full and sophisticated that it takes its place as one of the great achievements of human art. The Gospel according to John is, of course, more than art, being a revelation of God himself inspired by the Holy Spirit, but it is not less. Like a symphony studied centuries after its creation, its melodies and harmonies charm those who hear only the surface, while astounding those who explore its depths.

Also like a master composer of music, John does not explicitly state what everything means, as I will try to do in this commentary. Instead, he lets the rhythms and reminiscences, signals and hints provoke his audience to worship Jesus, surpassing the wonder one might feel in response to the music of a Bach or a Beethoven. John intends his audience to stand amazed at the Nazarene.

The OT's story begins in the pristine and pure garden of Eden. There everything God made was good, but man sinned, bringing God's words of judgment, including a curse on the ground. As the narrative unfolds and the prophets and poets interpret that narrative, it becomes clear that the words of hope God spoke

⁷ James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

in Genesis 3:15 about the seed of the woman bruising the serpent's head produce an expectation that God will raise up a redeemer, seed of the woman, seed of Abraham, seed of David, through whom the adversary will be silenced and the curse rolled back, resulting in a renewal of creation, a swallowing up of death itself. God's people will enjoy God's presence in a new heaven and new earth.

That wide-angle story of exile from Eden with the hope of a return is enacted on a small scale as God makes covenants with Abraham and Israel. God promised land to Abraham in Genesis 12:7. Abraham left that land because of a famine, an outworking of the Genesis 3:17 curse on the land. But God brought Abraham back to that land and revealed himself to him (Genesis 15). Similarly, another famine forced Abraham's descendants out of the land, and Jacob and his sons went to Egypt. Once again, God brought Israel out of Egypt and restored them to the land, revealing himself to them at Sinai with words reminiscent of his Genesis 15 revelation of himself to Abraham (cf. Ex. 20:2; Gen. 15:7).

The genealogy in Genesis 5 hints at Adam's role as the son of God (Gen. 5:1–4; cf. Luke 3:38); at the exodus God identifies Israel as his firstborn son (Ex. 4:22–23), later promising that the king from David's line would be a son to him (2 Sam. 7:14). As Adam was driven from Eden for his sin, so Israel was driven from the Land of Promise for breaking the covenant. The one hailed as the "Son of God . . . the King of Israel" (John 1:49) came to succeed where Adam and Israel failed—to bruise the serpent's head, conquer death, and set in motion a new and greater exodus leading to the enjoyment of a new and better Land of Promise, a new heavens and earth.

John shows that Jesus has come as the expected son of David, the Son of God who will bring Israel's history to its anticipated climax, by presenting Jesus in relation to Israel's feasts. The relationship between Jesus and Israel's feasts invites us to consider John's development of biblical symbolism.

SYMBOL

Israel's feasts were symbolic reenactments of what God had done for them. Passover commemorated the exodus from Egypt, Tabernacles celebrated God's provision and protection in the wilderness, and Weeks seems to build on the creation week to point to the cycles of life under God's law in God's land (cf. Deut. 16:16). John mainly highlights Jesus in relation to Passover (John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55; 12:1; 13:1; 18:39) and Tabernacles (7:2; cf. 7:1–10:21). John also includes an unnamed feast (5:1) and mentions the Feast of Dedication (10:22), which celebrated the rededication of the temple after the Maccabean revolt in 167–164 BC.

These feasts summarized liturgically God's mighty acts in the past, embedded them in present experience, and shaped expectations of the way God would fulfill his promises in the future. The yearly celebrations impressed the contours of God's character and way of acting on the consciousness of the worshiper. The symbols were used in worship to communicate a whole worldview meant to condition the hearts of those who hoped for more like this in the future.

Throughout the writings of Israel's prophets we find indications that God would do for Israel in the future what he did for them in the past; he saved Israel with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm at the exodus, and he would extend his arm a second time; he brought Israel through the Red Sea and Jordan River, and he would be with them when they passed through the waters; he gave manna from heaven, and he would prepare a table in the wilderness; he provided water from the rock, and he would make streams in the desert; he gave Israel the land, and he would make it like Eden. In all this, Israel's prophets, guided by the institution of the feasts, used the historical acts of God celebrated in the symbols to depict the way God would save his people in the future.

The repetition of patterns and events in Scripture attuned people like John to pick up on occasions recalling those repetitions. John saw Jesus do things corresponding to significant events, patterns, and symbols in Israel's Scriptures, and he interpreted Jesus as the fulfillment to which the Scriptures pointed. This is why he records the Baptist's heralding Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36), saw significance in a wedding on the third day (2:1), and recounted how Jesus discussed the manna from heaven after feeding the five thousand (6:1–71); and it is why the narrative set at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles (which celebrated the pillar of fire in the wilderness and the water the people drank from the rock) has Jesus calling people to come to him if they are thirsty (7:37–39) and to follow him and not walk in darkness (8:12). John understood Jesus as the "good shepherd" who would take his people to the kingdom God has prepared for them (10:1–21).

More could be said about how symbols function in John's Gospel, but I will reserve further thoughts for the exposition in the body of the commentary. At this point we turn to consider the way that the stories and the symbols give rise to certain bedrock truth convictions.

TRUTH

Stories explaining the world give rise to foundational truths and assumptions. That is to say, the Bible does not present Moses or other biblical authors as starting with philosophical truth claims, illustrated by invented stories. Rather, Moses and the other biblical authors encountered God, heard the story of what he had done, and derived truth from the stories. We believe God to be the Creator because Genesis 1 shows him creating the world, not because we reasoned our way to a philosophical claim and then made up a story to fit.

We could go on and on listing propositions like the ones that follow, propositions we learn from the story John tells: Jesus is God. God keeps his word, enforcing commands and fulfilling promises. God made the world good and will overcome evil. Man is lost in sin and unable to save himself. The Spirit gives life to those who embrace Jesus and his teaching by faith. The OT narratives inform the Christian sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The world will respond to followers of Jesus the same way they responded to Jesus himself. Jesus has been raised from

the dead and will return to take his followers to the place he has gone to prepare for them.

To encounter Jesus in John is to encounter one who inspires us to thank and praise God. That is to say, the Gospel of John provokes the worship of Jesus.

WORSHIP

Jesus declares in John 4:23 that the Father is seeking people who will worship him in Spirit and truth. The story gives rise to symbols that summarize, interpret, and reinforce its significance, and from the story we derive truths teaching us about God and his world. What we learn from the truths and see in the beauty of the symbols about the grandeur of the story provokes our hearts to offer to God the thanks and praise due him for his incomparable love and power and goodness and, in a word, glory. We were made for this. We long to celebrate something beyond ourselves with undiluted joy over its undiminished greatness. The God who loved the world by sending his only begotten Son, whose deeds the world's books cannot contain (21:25), will never disappoint us. Our praise will never exceed his worth. John's Gospel gives ample reason for God's people to present their bodies as living sacrifices in reasonable acts of worship (Rom. 12:1–2).

CULTURE

Stories create culture, and the story of Jesus in the Gospel of John anticipates a people who will seek to imitate the character and virtue of Jesus. These people are taught by John's Gospel that Jesus will send them the Holy Spirit as another comforter; the world will treat them as it treated him; and they will be in the world but not of it as the Father protects them, just as Jesus prayed he would. The norms and values commended by the Gospel of John fit with the stories and symbols, the truths and responses prompted by the narrative, and where these expectations and principles are understood as "normal," one finds a culture generated by John's Gospel and the rest of Scripture.

WAY OF LIFE

John's Gospel presents Jesus and his followers pursuing a way of life consisting of, among other things: devotion to the living God of the OT; recognition of Jesus as God's Son, who reveals him to the world and carries forward his program; teaching others the truth so they might believe in Jesus and be delivered from God's wrath; solidarity with others who believe, a unity that transcends place of origin, ethnic identity, or anything else typically distinguishing people from each other; expectation that God will answer prayer as Jesus said he would; a habit of abiding in Christ by abiding in his words; and hope that Jesus will return to consummate what he began.

This way of life and culture grows from a worshipful response to the truths learned from the symbols that interpret and communicate the story John tells. In that way of life, we are on the path to understanding John's theology. As we proceed through the Gospel, more detail will be added to the outline sketched here.

Preaching from John

This Gospel was meant to be proclaimed. It was my own privilege to preach through the Gospel of John between August 2013 and February 2015. I heartily commend the exercise. You will never regret preaching from John.

Interpretive Challenges

There are, of course, interpretive disputes on which positions must be taken. In the commentary that follows, I depart from some reigning points of consensus. For instance, I offer an alternative understanding to the one preferred by many at present concerning Jesus' identity as the "only begotten" Son of God. These choices will be discussed further below. In addition, I am not impressed by the claim that John is interested in there being exactly *seven* "I Am" statements in his Gospel, or seven signs. There are more than seven "I Am" statements, and John does not seem to me to have been interested in enumerating exactly seven signs. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, so the exposition to follow will have to speak for itself.

Outline of John

The final arbiter of all interpretation is the question of what the author intended. While John almost certainly held a mental conception of the structure of his Gospel in whole and in part, he almost certainly did not think of it along the lines of the analytical outlines (Roman numeral I, Point A, etc.) so commonly employed in our culture.

Given the pervasive use of chiasm and *inclusio* and related literary devices in biblical literature, it seems likely that John's mental conception of the structure of his Gospel, in whole and in part, was probably more chiastic than anything else. For this reason, while I am presenting an analytical outline in deference to the expectations of my own culture, I am also providing what appear to me to be the chiastic structures intended by John. Corresponding parts of a chiasm often interpret and develop each other, with the center of the chiasm occupying pride of place in the author's arrangement, revealing the big idea of his presentation. The center points of chiasms sometimes function as narrative turning points, and arranging the material chiastically would serve as an aid to memory.

I will present first an overview of the analytical outline, followed by a series of chiastic structures John seems to have built into his Gospel, and conclude with a more detailed analytical outline, with subpoints.

An overview of the analytical outline:

- I. Grace upon Grace (1:1–18)
- II. Four Momentous Days (1:19–51)
- III. From Cana to Cana (2:1–4:54)
- IV. Jesus and the Feasts (5:1–11:57)

- V. The Raising of Lazarus (11:1–44)
- VI. The Hour Has Come for the Son of Man to Be Glorified
(11:45–17:26)
- VII. Denial, Death, Resurrection (18:1–20:31)
- VIII. Breakfast on the Beach (21:1–25)

John seems to have built several chiasmic structures into his Gospel:

John 1:1–18

- 1:1–5: The Word as God, Agent of Creation, Life, and Light
- 1:6–8: John the Baptist Testifies
- 1:9: The True Light
- 1:10–11: Rejected by the World and by His Own
- 1:12–13: Received by Those Born of God
- 1:14: The Glory of the Only Begotten from the Father
- 1:15: John the Baptist Testifies
- 1:16–18: The Revelation of the Father in the Son

John 2–4

- 2:1–12: Water to Wine
- 2:13–25: Passover/Temple
- 3:1–21: Nicodemus
- 3:22–36: The Baptist
- 4:1–45: The Savior of the World
- 4:46–54: Healing of a Son

John 5–11

- John 5: The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and live
- John 6: Jesus provides bread, crosses water, shepherds with his word
- John 7: Disputes over whether Jesus is good or a deceiver
- John 8: Jesus the Light of the World
- John 9: Disputes over whether Jesus is good or a sinner
- John 10: Jesus the Good Shepherd, whose sheep hear his voice
- John 11: Jesus calls Lazarus to come out from the tomb

John 12–17

- John 12: The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified
- John 13: Footwashing; One of you will betray me
- John 14: Jesus the way, truth, life
- John 15: Jesus the true vine
- John 16: Promise of the Spirit; You will be scattered and leave me alone
- John 17: The hour has come, glorify your Son

John 18–21

John 18: Peter denies Jesus three times at a charcoal fire

John 19: Jesus, King of the Jews, crucified

John 20: Jesus, raised from the dead, gives the Spirit and sends his disciples

John 21: Peter confesses love for Christ three times at a charcoal fire

A detailed analytical outline of John's Gospel:

- I. Grace upon Grace (1:1–18)
 - A. The Life-Giving Word (1:1–5)
 - B. The Baptist, the Life, the Birth (1:6–15)
 - 1. The Baptist Testifies (1:6–8)
 - 2. The True Light (1:9)
 - 3. Rejected by the World and His Own (1:10–11)
 - 4. Received by Those Born of God (1:12–13)
 - 5. The Glory of the Only Begotten from the Father (1:14)
 - 6. The Baptist Testifies (1:15)
 - C. The Only Begotten Reveals the Father (1:16–18)
- II. Four Momentous Days (1:19–51)
 - A. The Identity and Ministry of John the Baptist (1:19–28)
 - B. The Spirit Descends and Remains (1:29–34)
 - C. Come, See, and Stay (1:35–42)
 - D. You Will See Greater Things (1:43–51)
- III. From Cana to Cana (2:1–4:54)
 - A. The First Sign in Cana: New Wine at a Wedding on the Third Day (2:1–12)
 - 1. The Lack of Wine at a Wedding on the Third Day (2:1–5)
 - 2. The First Sign: Water to Wine (2:6–12)
 - B. Passover and a New Temple (2:13–25)
 - 1. Zeal for Your House (2:13–17)
 - 2. I Will Raise It Up (2:18–22)
 - 3. He Knew What Was in Man (2:23–25)
 - C. Nicodemus (3:1–21)
 - 1. You Must Be Born Again (3:1–15)
 - a. A Man of the Pharisees (3:1–2)
 - b. You Must Be Born Again (3:3–8)
 - c. The Earthly and the Heavenly (3:9–15)
 - 2. This Is How God Loved the World (3:16–21)
 - a. This Is How God Loved the World (3:16–17)
 - b. The Judgment (3:18–19)
 - c. Fleeing or Finding the Light (3:20–21)
 - D. The Baptist (3:22–36)
 - 1. The Setting (3:22–24)

2. The Dispute (3:25–26)
3. The Testimony (3:27–33)
4. The Explanation (3:34–36)
- E. The Samaritan Woman (4:1–42)
 1. Living Water (4:1–15)
 - a. The Weary Christ (4:1–6)
 - b. The Living Water (4:7–15)
 2. To Do the Will of Him Who Sent Me (4:16–42)
 - a. Go Call Your Husband (4:16–18)
 - b. Worship in Spirit and Truth (4:19–26)
 - c. Transition: No One Said (4:27–30)
 - d. Food, Harvest, Labor (4:31–38)
 - e. Many Believed (4:39–42)
- F. The Second Sign in Cana: New Life on the Third Day (4:43–54)
 1. On the Third Day in Cana, Again (4:43–46)
 2. Healing of a Son (4:47–54)
- IV. Jesus and the Feasts (5:1–11:57)
 - A. The Healing and Teaching at the Unnamed Feast (5:1–47)
 1. The Healing at Bethesda (5:1–18)
 - a. The Setting (5:1–5)
 - b. The Healing (5:6–9a)
 - c. The Sabbath (5:9b–13)
 - d. The Maker (5:14–18)
 2. Like Father, Like Son (5:19–30)
 - a. The Son Does What the Father Does (5:19–23)
 - b. The One Who Hears and Believes Has Life (5:24)
 - c. The Son Will Raise the Dead (5:25–29)
 - d. The Son Does the Father's Will (5:30)
 3. Know God: Believe the Testimony (5:31–47)
 - a. Testimony and Accusation (5:31–32, 45–47)
 - b. The Baptist's Lamp and True Glory (5:33–35, 41–44)
 - c. The Father, the Miracles, and the Scriptures Testify (5:36–37a, 39–40)
 - d. Knowing God (5:37b–38)
 - B. Feeding the Multitude, Crossing Water, and Providing Manna at Passover (6:1–71)
 1. Feeding the Multitude, Crossing the Waters (6:1–21)
 - a. Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand (6:1–15)
 - (1) Time, Place, People Involved (6:1–4)
 - (2) Lots of People, No Food, No Money (6:5–7)
 - (3) Five Barley Loaves and Two Fish (6:8–9)
 - (4) Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand (6:10–11)
 - (5) Twelve Baskets of Leftovers (6:12–13)

- (6) Prophet and King (6:14–15)
- b. Jesus Walks on Water (6:16–21)
 - (1) Time, Place, People Involved (6:16–18)
 - (2) Jesus Walks on the Water (6:19–21)
- 2. The Bread of Life (6:22–40)
 - a. Time, Place, People Involved (6:22–24)
 - b. You Ate Bread but Saw No Signs (6:25–29)
 - c. The Bread of Life (6:30–35)
 - d. The Will of the Father (6:36–40)
- 3. Eat This Bread and Live Forever (6:41–71)
 - a. Grumbling and Fathers (6:41–51)
 - b. Eat My Flesh, Drink My Blood (6:52–59)
 - c. Words of Spirit and Life (6:60–71)
- C. Water from the Rock, Light for the World, Sight, and the Good Shepherd at Tabernacles (7:1–10:21)
 - 1. The Secret, Subversive Work of Jesus (7:1–24)
 - a. Sneaking into His Own Party (7:1–13)
 - (1) Time and Place (7:1–2)
 - (2) Unbelieving Brothers (7:3–5)
 - (3) The Time Has Not Yet Come (7:6–9)
 - (4) Secrecy and Muttering (7:10–13)
 - b. Subverting Lies with Truth (7:14–24)
 - (1) The Teaching of Jesus (7:14–18)
 - (2) Moses, Sabbath, and Circumcision (7:19–24)
 - 2. Rivers of Living Water (7:25–52)
 - a. Where He Comes From (7:25–30)
 - b. Where He Is Going (7:31–36)
 - c. Rivers of Living Water (7:37–39)
 - d. Is the Christ from Galilee? (7:40–52)
 - 3. The Light of the World (7:53–8:29)
 - a. [The Woman Caught in Adultery (7:53–8:11)]
 - b. The Light of the World (8:12–20)
 - c. How Not to Die in Sin (8:21–29)
 - 4. Fulfillment of the Sabbatical Years and Jubilee; Seed of the Woman and Seed of the Serpent (8:30–59)
 - a. If the Son Sets You Free (8:30–36)
 - b. Satan Kills and Lies (8:37–47)
 - c. Offspring of the Evil One (8:48–59)
 - 5. The Man Born Blind (9:1–41)
 - a. The Miracle (9:1–7)
 - b. The Rejection (9:8–34)
 - (1) The Seeing Man and His Neighbors (9:8–12)
 - (2) The Seeing Man and the Pharisees (9:13–17)

- (3) The Parents and the Pharisees (9:18–23)
 - (4) The Seeing Man and the Pharisees (9:24–34)
 - c. The Reception (9:35–41)
- 6. The Good Shepherd (10:1–21)
 - a. Jesus Is the Shepherd and the Door (10:1–10)
 - b. Jesus Lays Down His Life for the Sheep (10:11–18)
 - c. The Sheep Know His Voice (10:19–21)
- D. The One-with-the-Father Christ Protects His People at Hanukkah (10:22–42)
 - 1. Jesus Is the Christ (10:22–30)
 - 2. Jesus Is God (10:31–42)
- V. The Raising of Lazarus (11:1–44)
 - A. Death for the Glory of Christ (11:1–10)
 - B. That We May Die with Him (11:11–16)
 - C. The Resurrection and the Life (11:17–27)
 - D. The Weeping Christ (11:28–37)
 - E. Lazarus, Come Forth (11:38–44)
- VI. The Hour Has Come for the Son of Man to Be Glorified (11:45–17:26)
 - A. Approaching the Final Passover (11:45–12:50)
 - 1. When Jesus Wasn't Wanted (11:45–12:11)
 - a. Political Power or Jesus? (11:45–53)
 - b. Purity and Passover (11:54–57)
 - c. Money and Power or Jesus? (12:1–11)
 - 2. The King Comes for Judgment (12:12–33)
 - a. Thy King Cometh Gentle (12:12–19)
 - b. The Judgment of This World (12:20–33)
 - 3. That the Word Might Be Fulfilled (12:34–50)
 - a. While You Have the Light (12:34–36)
 - b. Isaiah Saw His Glory (12:37–43)
 - c. To Deliver from Darkness (12:44–50)
 - B. The Footwasher, the Way, the Vine, and the Giver of the Spirit (13:1–16:33)
 - 1. The Footwasher (13:1–20)
 - a. Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet (13:1–11)
 - b. Jesus Sets the Example (13:12–17)
 - c. Scripture Will Be Fulfilled (13:18–20)
 - 2. Treachery, Love, and Denial (13:21–38)
 - a. The Traitor (13:21–30)
 - b. The Commandment (13:31–35)
 - c. The Denials (13:36–38)
 - 3. The Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:1–14)
 - a. The Way to the Father (14:1–6)

- b. Jesus Represents the Father (14:7–11)
 - c. The Disciples Represent Jesus (14:12–14)
 - 4. The Indwelling Spirit (14:15–31)
 - a. He Will Be in You (14:15–17)
 - b. I Will Come to You (14:18–21)
 - c. My Father Will Make a Home with You (14:22–24)
 - d. The Spirit Will Teach You (14:25–31)
 - 5. Abide in Christ (15:1–17)
 - a. Abiding in Christ (15:1–8)
 - b. That Your Joy May Be Full (15:9–11)
 - c. Love One Another (15:12–17)
 - 6. The Haters and the Helper (15:18–16:4a)
 - a. The Haters (15:18–25)
 - b. The Helper (15:26–16:4a)
 - 7. Jesus Will Send the Spirit (16:4b–15)
 - a. Jesus Leaves to Send the Spirit (16:4b–7)
 - b. The Spirit Will Convict the World (16:8–11)
 - c. The Spirit Will Glorify Jesus (16:12–15)
 - 8. Your Sorrow Will Turn to Joy (16:16–33)
 - a. The Death and Resurrection of Jesus (16:16–22)
 - b. A New Access to the Father in Prayer (16:23–28)
 - c. Jesus Has Overcome the World (16:29–33)
- C. The Lord’s Prayer (17:1–26)
 - 1. Knowing God (17:1–8)
 - a. Jesus Wants His People to Know God (17:1–5)
 - b. Jesus Makes God Known (17:6–8)
 - 2. Jesus Prays for Unity and Glory (17:9–26)
 - a. Jesus Prays for His Followers (17:9–19)
 - b. Jesus Prays for Those Who Will Believe through His Followers (17:20–23)
 - c. Jesus Prays for His People to See His Glory (17:24–26)
- VII. Denial, Death, Resurrection (18:1–20:31)
 - A. Jesus Gives Himself Up (18:1–11)
 - 1. The Time and Place (18:1–2)
 - 2. Jesus in Command (18:3–6)
 - 3. Let These Men Go (18:7–9)
 - 4. Shall I Not Drink the Cup? (18:10–11)
 - B. Jesus Arrested and Betrayed (18:12–40)
 - 1. Jesus Arrested (18:12–14)
 - 2. Peter’s First Denial (18:15–18)
 - 3. Jesus and Annas (18:19–24)
 - 4. Denials Two and Three (18:25–27)
 - 5. Jesus and Pilate (18:28–40)

- C. Look at How They Treated Him (19:1–16a)
 - 1. Mock Homage (19:1–3)
 - 2. The Condemnation of the Guiltless (19:4–8)
 - 3. Authority and Sin (19:9–11)
 - 4. Caesar or Jesus? (19:12–16a)
- D. They Crucified Him (19:16b–30)
 - 1. The King of the Jews (19:16b–22)
 - 2. The Soldiers (19:23–24)
 - 3. The Family (19:25–27)
 - 4. The Finish (19:28–30)
- E. The Rock, the Lamb, the Tomb (19:31–42)
 - 1. The Rock (19:31–35)
 - 2. The Lamb (19:36–37)
 - 3. The Tomb (19:38–42)
- F. The Empty Tomb (20:1–18)
 - 1. John and Peter at the Tomb (20:1–10)
 - 2. Mary at the Tomb (20:11–18)
- G. Peace Be with You (20:19–31)
 - 1. The Risen Christ Gives the Spirit (20:19–23)
 - 2. The Risen Christ Convinces Thomas (20:24–29)
 - 3. Written That You Might Believe (20:30–31)
- VIII. Breakfast on the Beach (21:1–25)
 - A. The 153 Fish (21:1–14)
 - B. The Restoration of Peter (21:15–19)
 - C. The Beloved Disciple (21:20–25)

JOHN 1:1–18

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life,¹ and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own,² and his own people³ did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his

name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son⁴ from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) ¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.⁵

¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God,⁶ who is at the Father’s side,⁷ he has made him known.

¹ Or *was not any thing made. That which has been made was life in him* ² Greek *to his own things*; that is, to his own domain, or to his own people ³ *People* is implied in Greek ⁴ Or *only One, or unique One* ⁵ Or *grace in place of grace* ⁶ Or *the only One, who is God*; some manuscripts *the only Son* ⁷ Greek *in the bosom of the Father*

Section Overview: Grace upon Grace

Could there be a more profound opening to a book than the one to John’s Gospel? One could search the great ideas of mankind and probe the ponderings of the philosophers and the poetry of the artists and find no idea higher than God, nor a more concise—yet expressive—statement about him, than the one John makes at the beginning of his Gospel. John profoundly links his Gospel to the creation account in Genesis 1 with the words “In the beginning” (John 1:1a) before launching into the world’s most economical articulation of the everlasting relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

The first statement of John’s Gospel is a bomb of meaning that goes off without warning, erupting suddenly, and the sublime and inexpressible, the infinite and unsearchable, the personal and ineffable reality of God comes exploding onto the consciousness of John’s audience in the words of John 1:1–5.

John 1:1–5 proclaims the Word as God, through whom the world was made, in whom is life, and who is unquenchable light. John will return to statements about the unparalleled Christ in 1:16–18, and within the outer frame of 1:1–5 and 1:16–18 are matching statements about John the Baptist testifying to Jesus in 1:6–8 and 1:15. Within the words about the Baptist are descriptions of the light and glory of Jesus (1:9, 14), and at the center of this chiastic structure are statements of how Jesus was rejected by the world and by his own people (1:10–11) but was received by those born of God (1:12–13). John 1:1–18 can thus be depicted chiastically as follows:

1:1–5: The Word as God, Agent of Creation, Life, and Light

1:6–8: John the Baptist Testifies

1:9: The True Light

1:10–11: Rejected by the World and by His Own

1:12–13: Received by Those Born of God

1:14: The Glory of the Only Begotten from the Father

1:15: John the Baptist Testifies

1:16–18: The Revelation of the Father in the Son