

The Structure of the Gospel of John

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The Gospel of John: The Book of Signs

The following two paragraphs are from D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 103.

On the face of it, the Fourth Gospel offers a prologue (1:1-18) and an epilogue or appendix (21:1-25), between which are the two central sections, 1:19 - 12:50 and 13:1 - 20:31. Under the influence of two or three influential scholars, these are now frequently designated, respectively, 'Book of Signs' and 'Book of Glory' (Brown, 1. cxxxviii-cxxxix), or 'Book of Signs' and 'Book of the Passion' (Dodd, *IFG*, p. 289). The advantages are obvious.

Nevertheless, 'Book of Signs' makes it sound as if the signs are restricted to 1:19 - 12:50, whereas 20:30-31 makes it clear that from the Evangelist's perspective the *entire* Gospel is a book of signs. Moreover, although it is true that Jesus' passion is related in cbs. 13 - 20, the passion narrative itself does not begin until ch.18. If cbs.13-17 can be included on the ground that they are thematically tied to the passion, so also are many passages in cbs. 1-12 (e.g. 1:29,36; 6:35ff.; 11:49-52).

My own view of the structure of the Gospel of John

1. John opens with a prologue (chapter 1) and closes with an epilogue (chapter 21).

2. There are two large sections in between.

a. Chapters 1-11 feature seven signs.

(1) Turning Water into Wine (2:1-11). See verse 11.

(2) Healing the Nobleman's Son (4:46-54). See verse 54.

(3) Healing the Paralytic (5:2-9).

(4) Multiplying the Loaves and Fish (6:1-14). See verse 14.

(5) Walking on Water (6:16-21).

(6) Healing the Man Born Blind (9:1-7).

(7) Raising Lazarus from the Dead (11:38-44). See verse 47.

b. Note the following about this list of signs:

(1) Signs one and four involve food and drink.

(2) Signs three and six are done in connection with one of the pools in Jerusalem, Bethesda and Siloam respectively. Each sign is also performed on the Sabbath. See verses 5:9b, 9:14.

(3) The capstone of this series, sign seven, is the raising of Lazarus.

c. Chapters 12-20 lead to the sequel to the raising of Lazarus, the resurrection of Christ.

(1) Chapter 12 brings to the Triumphal Entry and chapter 13 brings us to the upper room. Chapters 14-16 are Christ's farewell discourse in the upper room or on the way to Gethsemane. See verses 14:31 and 18:1. Chapter 17 is our Lord's high priestly prayer.

(2) Chapters 18-19 present the arrest and trials of Christ and chapter 20 presents Christ's Resurrection.

d. Note the following about this section of John's Gospel:

(1) Christ's resurrection is the great sign. See 2:18-21. Compare Matthew 12:39-40. See John's purpose, 20:30-31.

(2) The raising of Lazarus closes section one of the gospel. The sequel, Christ's resurrection, closes section two.

3. This overall structure shows us that this gospel is the 'Book of Signs.'