

---

# INTRODUCTION

---

**T**he genius of the Apostle John resides in his ability to penetrate to the theological foundations that undergird the events of Jesus' life. He reaches to the deeper meaning of the events, to the relationships of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the work of redemption, and to the Trinitarian love for humanity which generated that work and which seeks through the gospel to bring within that sublime circle of indwelling love all who respond by faith to Jesus as the great "I AM."

John deals with the same revealed truth as Mathew, Mark, Luke and Paul. But his way of approaching that truth is different--very different. Like waters from the same source, Johannine, Pauline and the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) all flow from the same historical Jesus, but flow through different lands, picking up different textures, and emerge as observably different rivers.

The Johannine river, as a preceptive reader will quickly realize, flows through a profoundly different world of its own: a world with its own language, its own symbolism, and its own unique theological view point. The reader who enters this world senses immediately how different it is from the world of Paul and the Synoptic Gospels. And thus, a few words are needed to help to guide our way.

First, John's Gospel leaves out a great deal of material that is characteristic of the Synoptic Gospels. There are no narrative parables in John, no account of the transfiguration, no record of the institution of the Lord's Supper, no report of Jesus casting out a single demon, no mention of His temptations. There are fewer brief, pithy utterances, but more discourses; but even here some major discourses found in the Synoptics (*e.g.* the Olivet Discourse) are not found in John. Although Jesus'

baptism and the calling of the Twelve are doubtless presupposed, they are not actually described. Even themes central to the Synoptics have almost disappeared: in particular, the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, so much a part of the preaching of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels and the central theme of His narrative parables, is scarcely mentioned as such (cf. 3:3, 5; 18:36).

Second, John includes a fair amount of material of which the Synoptists make no mention. All of the material in John chapters 2 thru 4, for instance, including His miraculous transformation of water into wine, His dialogue with Nicodemus and His ministry in Samaria, find no Synoptic counterpart. Further, the resurrection of Lazarus, Jesus' frequent visits to Jerusalem, and His extended dialogues or discourses in the Temple and in various synagogues, not to mention much of His private instruction to His disciples, are all exclusive to the Fourth Gospel.

No less striking are the forcefully presented themes that dominate John but that are largely absent from the Synoptics. Only in John is Jesus *explicitly* identified with God (1:1, 18; 20:28). Here, too, Jesus makes a series of important "I am" statements which are qualified: I am the light of the world, the resurrection and the life, the good shepherd, the vine, the living water, the way, the truth and the life. These culminate in a series of absolute (unqualified) "I AM" statements that are redolent of God Himself (cf. 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58). Furthermore, the Fourth Gospel maintains a series of "opposites," dualisms if you will, that are much stronger than in the Synoptics: life and death, from above and from below, light and dark, truth and lie, sight and blindness, and more.

Third, these themes become still more problematic for some readers when, formally at least, they contradict the treatment of similar themes in the Synoptic Gospels. Here, for instance, John the Baptist denies that he is Elijah (1:21), even though according to the Synoptists Jesus insists that he is (Mk. 9:11-13). What shall we make of the bestowal of the Spirit (Jn. 20:22) and its relation to Acts 2? Above all, how do we account for the fact that in the Synoptics the disciples seem to grow from small beginnings in their understanding of who Jesus is, with various high-points along the way, such as Caesarea Philippi (Mk. 8:27-30), while in John the very first chapter finds various individuals confessing Jesus not only as Rabbi, but as Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, Lamb of God and King of Israel?

Fourth, there are several chronological difficulties that must be addressed. In addition to the obvious questions, such as the relation between the cleansing of the Temple at the beginning (Jn. 2:14-22) and at the end (Mk. 11:15-17) of Jesus' public ministry, or the length of that ministry as attested by the number of Passovers it embraces (John reports at least three, the Synoptists only one); there are one or two questions of great difficulty that are precipitated in part by a knowledge of background ritual and circumstance. In particular, the chronology of the Passion in the Fourth Gospel, as compared with that of the Synoptics, seems so idiosyncratic that it has generated complex theories about independent calendars, or about

theological motifs that John is self-consciously allowing to skew the naked chronology. Did Jesus and His disciples eat the Passover, so that He was arrested the evening of Passover and crucified the next day, or was He crucified at the same time the Passover lambs were being slaughtered? And how does one account for the fact that the Synoptics picture Jesus being crucified about the third hour (9:00 a.m.), while in John Pilate's final decision is not reached until the sixth hour (19:14)?

Fifth, students of Greek, perhaps more readily than those who read John's Gospel only in a translation, observe that the style of writing is quite different from that of the Synoptics. For instance, the vocabulary is smaller, there is frequent parataxis (the use of co-ordinate clauses instead of subordinating expressions, which elegant Greek much prefers), peculiar uses of pronouns (*e.g.* "that one"), and many instances of asyndeton (simply laying out clauses beside each other, without connecting them with particles or conjunctions, as Greek prefers). More importantly, there is little discernible difference in style between the words that are ascribed to Jesus and the Evangelist's own comments (Jn. 3:16 ff.).

With all these examples of the differences between the Synoptics and John's Gospel, the Gospel of John has been used by Christians in every age, and for the greatest array of purposes. University students distribute free copies to their friends in the hope of introducing them to the Savior. Elderly Christians on their deathbed ask that parts of this Gospel be read to them. Very often, this Gospel is the first of all Scripture to be translated in a newly evangelized part of the world. Children memorize entire chapters, and sing choruses based on its truth (*e.g.* "For God So Loved The World"). Countless Bible courses and sermons have been based on this Book or on some part of it. It stood near the center of Christological controversy in the fourth century. And perhaps the best known verse in all the Bible is John 3:16: a toddler can even recite it. In this Gospel the love of God is dramatically mediated through Jesus Christ, so much so that Karl Barth is alleged to have commented that the most profound truth he had ever heard was "Jesus loves me, this I know/For the Bible tells me so."

| AN OVERVIEW         |      |
|---------------------|------|
| Topic               | Page |
| Date                | 4    |
| Author              | 4    |
| Purpose & Audience  | 6    |
| Literary Techniques | 8    |
| Structure           | 21   |

Before entering this world, something must be said about the date and the author. In addition, something must be said about the audience and purpose of the author, and especially his literary techniques, and the structure of his Gospel. These points belong to what is known as introduction. The better they can be established and described, the easier it is to understand and appreciate the Gospel.

# Date

Internal evidence suggests that the Gospel was written after 85 A.D. External evidence points to a date no later than 110 A.D. The allusion to Peter's martyrdom in 21:18-19 demands a date after 64 A.D. Three references to excommunication from the synagogue (9:22; 12:42; 16:2) allude to the *Birkat ha-minim*, a "Test Benediction" used by the rabbis to exclude from the synagogue all heretics and perhaps especially Christians. Since the "Test Benediction" was instituted in the mid eighties, it is reasonable to conclude that the Gospel was composed sometime after 85 A.D.

How long after is impossible to determine. But external evidence in the form of papyrus fragments found in Egypt suggests some ten or fifteen years later, i.e., between 85 and 100 A.D. The Rylands papyrus, the papyrus Egerton 2, P66, and P75 all date to approximately 150 A.D. These papyrus finds prove that the Gospel existed in Egypt in the first half of the second century. If one allows forty or fifty years for the Gospel to become known and copied in Egypt, one comes on the basis of external evidence to the same conclusion suggested by the internal evidence, i.e., 85-100 A.D. for the date of the Gospel.

By the end of the second century, the Fourth Gospel was accepted, along with the three Synoptics, as canonical in Gaul (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1-2), in Egypt (Clement of Alexandria, so Eusebius, *Church History* 6.14.5), in North Africa (Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.2), and in Rome (Muratorian fragment).

# The Author

Whoever the author of the Fourth Gospel was, one thing is certain: he wanted to remain anonymous. He wanted only to be known as the disciple whom Jesus loved. He speaks about himself in 13:23 as the one who at the Last Supper "was reclining on Jesus' breast . . . whom Jesus loved."; in 19:23-26, 35, as the disciple who stood beneath the cross, was given the care of Jesus' mother, and witnessed the death of Jesus; in 20:2-10, as the disciple who ran with Peter to the tomb on Easter morning and, upon seeing the burial cloths, believed; in 21:7, as the disciple who alone recognized the stranger on the shore as Jesus; and in 21:20-23, as the disciple about whom Jesus said to Peter: "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow Me!"

It is probable that he is the "disciple . . . known to the high priest" who spoke to the maid and had Peter admitted to the court of Annas (18:15-16). It is quite probable that he was one of the two unnamed disciples of John the Baptist who followed Jesus at the beginning of His public life (1:35-39), and equally probable that he was one of the two unnamed disciples who accompanied Peter in the boat on the Lake of Galilee after the resurrection (21:2).

What is certain is that the Gospel itself declares the Beloved Disciple to be "this is the disciple who bears witness of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his witness is true" (21:24). The meaning of this statement is hotly debated. It asserts at a minimum that the Beloved Disciple is the author of at least chapter 21; at a maximum, it asserts that he is the author of the entire Gospel. The reasons for these conclusions will be explained in the commentary on 21:24-25.

However much the Gospel says about the Beloved Disciple, it nowhere identifies him by name. Tradition, via Polycarp, Polycrates, and Irenaeus, testifies to the belief of the Church in the early second century that John, the son of Zebedee, was the Beloved Disciple. This belief perdured until the twentieth century and was defended as recently as the sixties by such renowned Johannine scholars as R. Schnackenburg and R. E. Brown. Brown, however, in his more recent *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, has abandoned it and now goes along with the modern trend of dissociating John, the son of Zebedee, and the Beloved Disciple.

**"John the disciple of the Lord,  
who leaned upon his breast,  
did himself publish a Gospel during  
his residence at Ephesus in Asia.**

**Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1**

Contemporary scholars see the Beloved Disciple as a disciple of Jesus, but not one of the Twelve, a disciple who formed and led his own Christian community sometime after the resurrection and became for that community a living link with the teaching of Jesus. They see him also as the leading figure in a school of interpreters who preserved his teaching and expanded it as the years went on, until a genius member of the school at the end of the first century authored the Gospel as we know it now. His identity, however, remains a mystery. Considering the paucity of the evidence, it will probably always remain a mystery.

# The Purpose and Audience of the Gospel

The proper place to begin when we discuss John's purpose for writing his Gospel is with his own statement: "Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (20:30-31). The words rendered "that you may believe" hide a textual variant: either *hina pisteuete* (present subjunctive) or *hina pisteusete* (aorist subjunctive). Some have argued that the latter expression supports an evangelistic purpose: that you may come to faith, come to believe. The former, then supports an edificatory purpose: that you may continue in faith, continue to believe. In fact, it can easily be shown that both expressions are used for both initial faith and continuing in faith, so that nothing can be resolved by the appeal to one textual variant or the other.

It is worth comparing these verses with the stated purpose of 1 John: "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). This verse was clearly written to encourage Christians; by the contrasting form of its expression, John 20:30-31 sounds evangelistic.

This impression is confirmed by the firm syntactical evidence that the first purpose clause in 20:31 must be rendered literally, "that you may believe that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus." Thus the fundamental question the Fourth Gospel addresses is not "Who is Jesus?" but "Who is the Messiah? Who is the Christ? Who is the Son of God?" In their context, these are questions of identity, not of kind: *i.e.* the question "Who is the Christ?" should **not** here be understood as "What kind of 'Christ' are you talking about?" but "So you claim that you know who the Christ is. Prove it, then: Who is he?"

Support for this is simply common sense. Christians would not ask that kind of question, because they already knew the answer. The most likely people to ask that sort of question would be Jews and Jewish proselytes who know what "the Christ" means, have some sort of messianic expectation, and are perhaps in personal contact with Christians and want to know more. In short, John's Gospel is not only evangelistic in its purpose (which was a dominant view until this century, when only a few have defended it), but aims in particular to evangelize Jews and Jewish proselytes. This view has not been popular, but is gradually gaining influence, and much can be said for it. It may even receive indirect support from some recent studies

that try to interpret the Fourth Gospel as a piece of mission literature.

The commentary that follows occasionally pauses to show how one passage or another fits nicely into this purpose. Some have argued, for instance, that John chapters 14--17 cannot possibly be viewed as primarily evangelistic. Such judgment is premature, for at least two reasons. First, the evangelism of the early church was not merely existential. It had to explain, as it were, "how we got from there to here," especially if the targeted audience was Jewish. Second, the best evangelistic literature not only explains *why* one should become a Christian, but *what it means* to be a Christian. John chapters 14--17 addresses those concerns rather pointedly, and numerous details within those chapters likewise suggest an evangelistic thrust (e.g. 14:6).

In addition, the Gospel seems to be polemic. But who would need such warnings, refutations, encouragement, and strengthening? We come to one reasonable conclusion from looking at the question from a historical perspective: John wrote his Gospel primarily for Jewish Christians whose faith was wavering, who were under attack by the synagogue for believing in Jesus, and who, because of Jewish persecution, were tending to either remain in or return to the synagogue and thereby apostasize from their faith in Jesus (*i.e.* in Paul's terminology, "fallen from grace," Gal. 5:4). In brief, John's primary audience among Christians was that group of Christian Jews who were straddling the fence between the Christian community and the Jewish synagogue (cf. the Book of Hebrews).

John's secondary audience was that group of Jewish Christians who belonged to Christian communities but who were wavering in their faith because of persecution and the threat of death (16:1-4). For these he records the words of Jesus: "These things I have spoken to you, that you may be kept from stumbling" (16:1).

Therefore, in conclusion, the Gospel as an edificatory piece, we may be reasonably sure that John wrote his Gospel for weak Christians both in his community and in the synagogue. His Gospel encourages Christian Jews who were straddling the fence between Jesus and the synagogue (1) because they feared excommunication from the synagogue (cf. 9:22; 12:37-43; 16:2); (2) or because they found Jesus' teaching about the Eucharist a hard saying and could not accept it (cf. 6:59ff.) (3) or because they could not accept the high Christology of John and his community (cf. 5:1-47; 7:--8:59, especially 8:31; 10:22-29; and perhaps 2:23-25; 11:46); (4) or, possibly but not certainly, because they had been disciples of John the Baptist and could not easily accept Jesus as greater than the Baptist (cf. 1:19-34; 3:22--4:3). For all of these, the Gospel as a whole, with its massive emphasis on

witness to Jesus and response of faith in Jesus, provided a powerful appeal for a definitive decision concerning the Messiah ("the Christ"). To all of these equally, the words of Jesus would certainly apply: "These things I have spoken to you, that you may be kept from stumbling" (16:1).

## Literary Techniques

Few things are more helpful for readers of John's Gospel than an appreciation of his literary techniques. These are for the most part the techniques of a dramatist. They include the technique of using stories to set up scenes; the use of discourses, dialogues, and monologues to expound Jesus' teaching; the use of misunderstanding and double-meaning words to emphasize important elements of Jesus' teaching; and the use of such other techniques as the rule of two, explanatory comments, irony, foreshadowing, inclusion, and the chiasmic arrangement of parts, sequences, and sections of the Gospel. All of these call for a brief explanation.

### 1. Stories

John uses stories to set up scenes, discourses, and dialogues. The following are good examples. In John 1:19-51, the story of Jesus' coming to John the Baptist at the Jordan sets the scene for the parade of witnesses who testify successively to Jesus as the Lamb of God, Messiah, King of Israel, Son of God, and Son of Man.

In 2:13-25, the story of the cleansing of the temple sets the scene for Jesus' dialogue with the Jews concerning His words "Destroy this temple [He means His body], and in three days I will raise it up." In 3:1-21, the story of Nicodemus' coming to Jesus at night sets the scene for Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus about being "born again" (3:5), just as in 4:4ff., Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman sets the scene for His dialogue with her about the water that will become "a well of water springing up to eternal life" (4:14).

John uses the same technique in chapter 5, where the cure of the paralytic (5:1-18) sets the scene for the long monologue of 5:19-47; in chapter 6, where Jesus' discussion with the Jews about signs (6:22-31) sets the theme for Jesus' homily on "the true bread from heaven" (6:32-58); in chapters 7--8, where Jesus' secret trip to Jerusalem sets the scene for a series of debates with the Jews; in chapter 9, where the cure of the man born blind sets the scene for the discourse on the good and the

bad shepherds (10:1-21); in 10:22-39, where Jesus' appearance at the feast of the Dedication leads to His final dispute with the Jews; and lastly in chapters 13--17, where the washing of the feet (13:1-32) sets the scene for Jesus' Last Supper discourse. In all these examples, the stories are secondary to the dialogues, monologues, and discourses for which they prepare the way. They are clearly the work of a superb dramatist.

## 2. Discourses, Dialogues, and Monologues

As C. H. Dodd has pointed out, the typical Johannine discourse (*e.g.*, in 3:1-21; 4:4-38; 5:1-47; 6:22-58; 9:39--10:21; 10:22-39; 13:33--16:33) follows a distinctive pattern: (a) it begins with a solemn declaration by Jesus, often in lapidary terms (*e.g.*, 3:3; 4:10; 5:17; 6:32; 7:16; 9:39; 10:25; 13:13); (b) it is frequently followed by an objection or question based upon a misunderstanding of Jesus' words (*e.g.*, 3:4; 4:11; 5:18; 6:41-42; 7:20; 9:40; 10:6; 10:31; 13:36); (c) there then follows Jesus' discourse clarifying the misunderstanding or the objection. The discourse is sometimes interrupted by further questions and objections (*e.g.*, 4:4-38; 6:33-58; 15:33--16:33) and at other times consists entirely of a long monologue (*e.g.*, 3:11-21; 5:19-47; 10:7-18).

## 3. Misunderstanding and Double-Meaning Words

Misunderstanding is a dramatist's technique whereby the author represents a person as misunderstanding either the actual words of the speaker or the meaning of his/her words in order to give the speaker (in this case Jesus) the opportunity to explain himself/herself more fully. This frequently comes about because the author uses double-meaning words, *i.e.*, words that have one meaning for Jesus and quite another for the person or persons to whom He is speaking.

There are many examples of double-meaning words in this Gospel. When Jesus says, "Destroy this **temple**, and in three days I will rise it up" (2:19), the Jews think He means the Temple of Jerusalem, but Jesus means His own body put to death and later raised from the dead. When Jesus says to Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (3:3). Nicodemus understands the double-meaning Greek word *anōthen* to mean "again" (one meaning of *anōthen*), whereas Jesus meant it to mean "from above" (a second meaning of *anōthen*). In 4:10, by "living water" the Samaritan woman understands Jesus to mean material water, whereas Jesus means the gift of spiritual life that only comes from God. These three examples are obvious. Others are not so obvious (cf. 7:15, 27, 35; 8:22, 31-33, 51-53, 57-58; 11:11-14, 23-26; 13:6-9, 36-37; 14:3-7, 7-9, 21-

23).

## 4. The Rule of Two

Narratives and dramatists try to limit dialogue to two persons at any one time. Others on stage are either provided with exit cues or reduced to simple bystanders. This is what is meant by the rule of two, and John uses it regularly. Three examples are noteworthy: the staging of the scene with the Samaritan woman in 4:4-38; the staging of the scene at Bethany when Jesus come to raise Lazarus; and the staging of Jesus' trial before Pilate.

In the first example, the disciples go into town for food (4:8), leaving the stage to Jesus and the Samaritan woman. When they return (4:27), the woman exits (4:28), leaving the stage to Jesus and His disciples. In the second, when Jesus arrives at Bethany, Martha comes to Jesus first and dialogues with Him (11:20-27). She then departs off stage to call Mary (11:18), and Mary comes on stage to speak with Jesus (11:32). In the third, the trial before Pilate, it is notable that Pilate speaks outside to the Jews, inside to Jesus alone. In all three of these exquisitely staged stories, John scrupulously observes the dramatist's rule of two.

## 5. Explanatory Comments

These are used to explain or clarify a statement and sometimes to correct wrong impressions a reader might derive from a statement. Today most of them could be put in footnotes. Some examples: comments explaining symbols (2:21; 12:33; 18:9; 21:9); comments reminding the reader of something that happened previously (3:24; 11:2); comments correcting misapprehensions (4:2; 6:6); and explanations or translation of words (1:41, 42).

## 6. Irony

John records certain persons, most frequently opponents of Jesus that make statements about Jesus that they think are correct and that John's readers know are correct, but in a different and sometimes far deeper sense. The following are good examples. In 4:12, the Samaritan woman asks Jesus, "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are you, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" She thinks not; the reader knows that Jesus is inestimably greater than

Jacob--for He is the one that gave it to Jacob (cf. 8:58).

The Jews ask, "Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" (7:42). Their question implies that they deny Jesus' Davidic descent and birth in Bethlehem. The reader knows the opposite is true.

Caiaphas declares, "nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish" (11:50). Caiaphas means that the execution of Jesus as a revolutionary will save the Jews from the wrath of Rome. The reader knows that Caiaphas (the high priest), without being conscious of it, has prophesied the death of Jesus for the spiritual redemption not only of the Jews but of the whole world!

When Pilate asks, "What is truth?" (18:38), his question implies that one cannot find the truth. John's readers know that the truth Pilate despairs of finding stands before him in the person of Jesus, "the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6).

Finally, when the soldiers mock Jesus as king (19:2-3), John's readers grasp the double irony: He whom the soldiers ironically declare to be king is, ironically, truly a king!

## **7. Foreshadowing**

This is a narrator's technique whereby knowledge of the future is given in advance in order to arouse anticipation and suspense, and at the same time prepare the audience to look for an interconnection of the parts of the story with the whole. There are several excellent examples of foreshadowing in John's Gospel. In the Prologue, John says, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him" (1:11). Hearing these words, the reader is led to anticipate both the rejection of Jesus by the Jews and His eventual death on the cross.

When Jesus looks at Peter and says to him, "'You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas' (which translated means Peter)" (1:42), the reader, who already knows the significance of Simon's nickname, Peter (cf. Matt. 16:17-19), is led to anticipate what actually only happens at the end of the Gospel, namely, Jesus' designation of Peter to be vicar-shepherd in charge of His flock (21:15-19).

A classic example of foreshadowing occurs in 11:4. Jesus responds to Martha and Mary's message about Lazarus' illness by declaring, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it." Lazarus' illness is not unto death because Jesus will raise him. And because Jesus raises him, the Jewish leaders will plot and bring about Jesus' own death. Thus, Lazarus' illness is "for the glory of God," because it leads to Jesus' death-glorification on the cross. Simpler foreshadowings are found in 11:50; 12:33; 13:36; 16:32; 21:18.

## 8. Inclusion

Known among classical scholars as "ring composition," inclusion is a narrator's technique in which what is said at the beginning of a piece is repeated at the end. The repetition forces the reader's attention back to the beginning and thus serves as a frame for the piece as a whole. John frames his whole Gospel by repeating in chapter 21 words and names used in 1:19-51 (note the return in chapter 21 of the names Simon son of John, Nathanael, the two unnamed disciples, the words "follow me," and the commissioning of Peter as vicar-shepherd of the sheep, a commissioning already implicit in the change of Simon's name to Peter in 1:42).

In addition to framing the Gospel as a whole, John frames each individual sequence of his Gospel. Two examples will suffice: 2:1-12 (note how verses 11-12 repeat names and places in verses 1-2); 20:1-18 (note how the sequence begins and ends with the full name of Mary Magdalene). Recognition of inclusions is important for the interpreter. More than anything else, inclusions clearly indicate beginnings and endings and thus help the exegete to divide the Gospel into distinct parts, sequences, and sections. In modern terms, inclusions divide the written Gospel into parts, chapters, and paragraphs. The importance of this becomes obvious when the reader realizes that ancient manuscripts like John's Gospel were regularly written almost entirely without indications of, or divisions into parts, chapters, and sections.

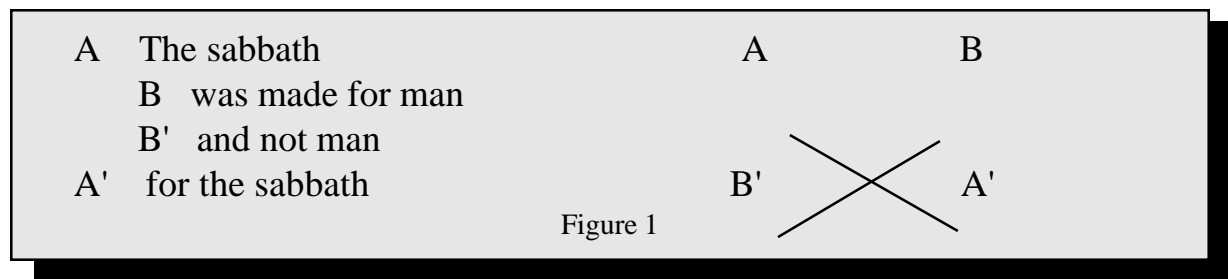
Recognition of John's inclusions becomes all the more important when one realizes that the present division of the Gospel into twenty-one chapters, as found in all modern Bible translations, goes back to the twelfth century and was done with complete **disregard** for John's use of inclusions to divide his Gospel into individual parts, sequences, and sections. As we shall see in this study, when we deal with the structure of the Gospel, John uses inclusions regularly, skillfully, and abundantly in the composition of his Gospel.

## 9. Chiasmus

An important literary form which has come to light in the past century, and especially which impacts our understanding of the Fourth Gospel, is called chiasmus (ki az mes), also called chiasm. In reality, chiasmus is a development of inclusion. Instead of simply ending and beginning in the same way, chiasmus extends the balancing of the first and the last to balancing all the subsequent parts of the structure. Because of the importance of this literary technique employed by John, we will first discuss some general principles about chiasmus before returning to the Gospel of John and see how it is used there.

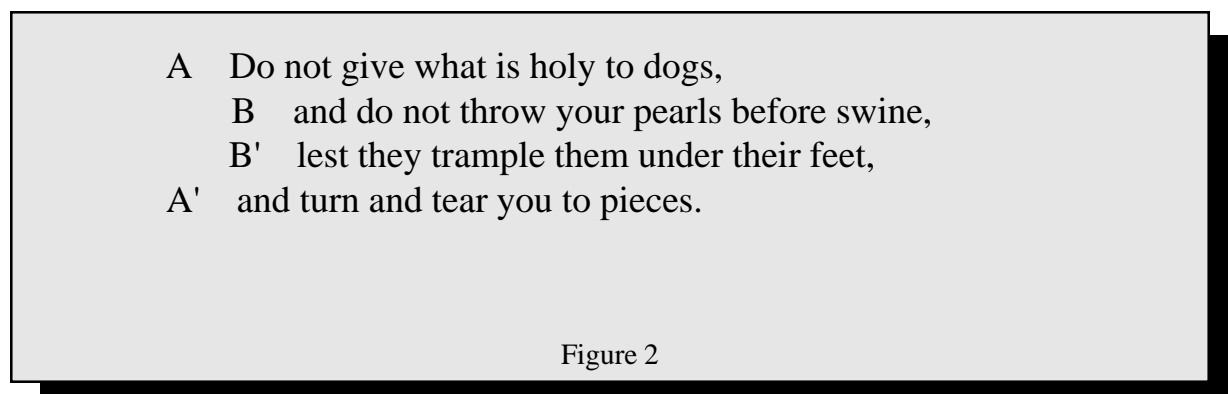
### DEFINITION

The term "chiasmus" is derived from the Greek verb *chiazo*, meaning to mark with two lines crossing like the Greek letter *chi* (x), and literarily refers to an inverted parallelism or sequence of words or ideas in a phrase or clause, sentence, paragraph, chapter, or as in the case of the Fourth Gospel, an entire literary work. For example, Mark 2:27 contains a chiasmus which may be represented as follows:



The term "chiasmus" is used today to refer to a variety of different patterns whose common denominator is symmetrical structure involving some form of inversion: the reversing of word order in parallel phrases. An example would be the pattern A B B' A', accepted broadly in academic circles as chiastic. In this instance, the propositions A and B are reflected as in a reversed mirror image by the propositions A' and B'. Three further clear examples will suffice:

### Matthew 7:6



By recognizing this chiastic structure one can make much better sense of this verse than might otherwise be done; for it seems most logical that the dogs (A) tear to pieces (A'), and the swine (B) do the trampling (B').

**1 John 4:7**

**A . . . for love is of God,  
B and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.  
B' The one who does not love does not know God,  
A' for God is love.**

Figure 3

The Epistle of 1 John presents numerous examples of authentic chiasmus. The following is another example of a verse which is chiastically structured and exhibits inverted parallelism.

**1 John 1:6-7**

**A If we say we have fellowship with Him  
B and (yet) walk in the darkness,  
C we lie and do not do the truth.  
B' If we walk in the light as He is in the light,  
A' we have fellowship with one another . . . .**

Figure 4

The chiastic pattern concludes with a central doctrinal affirmation: "and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1:7c). The effect of the chiastic arrangement is to focus attention on the hypocrisy of those who claim to be in fellowship with God while nevertheless committing sin. Incidentally, the chiastic pattern A - A' establishes that the fellowship which the believer sustains in verse 7 is not common ground with other believers (which most commentators understand by "one another"), but with "Him" in verse 6a.

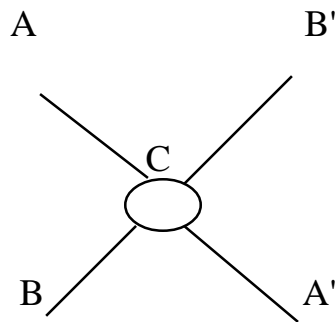
Chiasmus involves fundamentally two elements: **inversion and balance** (as shown above). These two main elements of chiasmus, inversion and balance,

produce a third, **climactic centrality**. Figures 1-3, strictly speaking, represent inverted parallelism rather than chiasmus. Thus, the uniqueness of the chiasmic structure lies in its focus upon a **pivotal theme**, about which the other propositions of the literary unity are developed, whereby the author may compare, contrast, or complete each of the flanking elements in the chiasmic structure.

*DEFINITION: CHIASMUS*

Henceforth, "chiasmus" or "chiasm" will refer to an author's literary structure whereby he produces **balanced statements**, in direct, inverted, or antithetical parallelism, constructed **symmetrically** and encompassing a **central idea**.

The abrupt repetition by which the last elements of the first half of the system become the first elements of the second half, draws attention to the central terms (A B C B' A'). It therefore presupposes a center, a "crossing point," illustrated perfectly by the Greek letter *chi* (X), which then abstractly gives us the following figure:



### The Graphic Presentation of a Chiasmic Structure

A fundamental principle when dealing with chiasmus is not to think linear, but concentric. We have been trained to think and outline in our western culture in a fashion incongruent with the literary patterns of both the ancient Near Eastern civilizations and the Graco-Roman. When we outline, we designate with an ever increasing alphanumeric point of harmonize with the progressive thoughts of a speech or book (*i.e.*, I, II, III, IV; A, B, C, etc.) But do we stop and ask ourselves whether or not this form of Western outlining actually does justice to a passage, chapter or book which was written in a very different language(s), spanning 2000 to 3500 years ago?

A much improved approach to outlining chiasmic structure is to employ repeating numbers or alphabetical characters (which is traditional: A, B, C, B', A'), and thus

conforming to the very thought structure of the literary device. Admittedly, such a structure is alien to modern experience (especially Western literary thought) and difficult to appreciate. But for those who are willing to study the principles of chiasmic structure and apply them to Scripture, the aesthetic, literary, and theological rewards are considerable.

Under no circumstances should it be assumed from this system of repeating alphabetical characters that the ancient manuscripts were written with indentations in order to exhibit chiasmic structure. The graphic method of presentation employed in these notes is merely a device adopted in order to eliminate unnecessary explanations and to render a complicated subject easy to grasp with a minimum of time and effort. We do not know the original appearance of any manuscripts. We are therefore now in no position either to affirm or deny the presence in the original manuscripts of any guides to their chiasmic structure.

I have reached the firm conclusion that many of these symmetries were altogether subconscious, and that it was felt rather than seen. This is merely another way of saying that the writers had learned their forms so thoroughly that they had forgotten them as forms. For the more extensive chiasmic structures, however, I posit that some degree of conscious effort on the part of the writer. Whether or not these longer divisions were in some graphic manner indicated in the original manuscript is impossible to say, though I should not consider it altogether unlikely.

### **Significance of Chiasmus**

All too often chiasmic structures are passed off in the scholarly literature as mere literary niceties, a structural *tour de force* which serves only aesthetic ends. Too little consideration has been given to the possible exegetical significance of such structures in the interpretation of biblical passages. In fact, theological studies which have used chiasmus for purposes of exegesis are rare.

Actually the study of chiasmus in exegesis dates back to John A. Bengel in the 18th century, as Lund notes: "To Bengel . . . belongs the credit of having first grasped the significance of chiasmic forms in the writings of the New Testament and of having applied the principle to exegesis" (*Chiasmus in the New Testament*, pp. 35-36). In his fifth volume of *Gnomon of the New Testament* (p. 399), Bengel wrote: "Often there is the greatest use in the employment of this figure, and it is never without some use, viz, in perceiving the ornament, in observing the force of the language; in understanding the true and full sense; in making clear the sound exegesis; and in demonstrating the true and neat analysis of the sacred text."

Bengel studies chiasmus in this way, but unfortunately, few have done so since then. In recent years, though, Gaechter in his commentary on Matthew, Bailey in his work on the Lucan parables, and Miesner in his study on the missionary journeys narratives in Acts have all pioneered in giving attention to chiasm in the interpretation of their respective texts. Hopefully the examples in this study will give ample proof that the recognition of chiasmic structures in the biblical text may greatly enrich one's study and understanding of the Scriptures.

### A Warning

Chiasmic structures should not dominate exegesis. Although chiasmi are usually significant, they are at other times subtle demonstrations of the narrator's skill, which is interwoven well beneath the surface of the text. They do not always determine the narrative (or poetic) structure of a passage, nor do they always indicate where the climax of a text lies. The actual narrative structure, although it may correspond exactly to an underlying chiasm, may be independent of it. A chiasmus, parallelism, acrostic, or other device may provide "background music" for the text but may not be the only determining factor in the shaping of the text.

### Examples of Chiasmus in the Old Testament

In order to become better acquainted with different types of chiasmus patterns, a few will be given below. Some of these examples will encompass only a few verses, others will embrace entire chapters. Because of the limitation of space, an explanation will not follow most of the examples.

#### The "Tower of Babel" Genesis 11:1-9

- A All the earth had one language (1)
- B there (2)
- C one to another (3)
- D Come, let us make bricks (3)
- E Let us make for ourselves (4)
- F a city and a tower (4)
- G And the LORD came down to see (5)**
- F' the city and the tower (5)
- E' that the humans built (5)
- D' Come, let us confuse (7)
- C' everyone the language of his neighbor (7)
- B' from there (8)
- A' (confused) the language of the whole earth (9)

Figure 5



## The LORD's Covenant with Abraham Genesis 17:1-25

- A Abram's age (17:1a)
- B The LORD appears to Abram (1b)
- C God's first speech (1b-2)
- D Abram falls on his face (3)
- E God's second speech (names, kings (4-8)
- F GOD'S THIRD SPEECH** (the covenant) (9-14)
- E' God's fourth speech (names, kings) (15-16)
- D' Abraham falls on his face (17-18)
- C' God's fifth speech (19-21)
- B' God "goes up" from Abraham (22)
- A' Abraham's age (24-24)

Epilogue: Abraham obeys the LORD (25-27)

Figure 7

## The Golden-Calf Episode Exodus 32:1--33:6

- A People act, and Aaron (YHWH's High Priest) reacts (32:1-6)
- B YHWH's two utterances (32:7-10)
- C Moses intercedes (32:11-14)
- D Moses goes down the mountain (32:15-20)
- E Judgment: investigative phase (32:21-25)
- F OPPORTUNITY FOR REPENTANCE** (32:26a)
- E' Judgment: executive phase (32:26b-29)
- D' Moses goes up the mountain (32:30)
- C' Moses intercedes (32:31-32)
- B' YHWH's two utterances (32:33--33:3)
- A' YHWH acts, and people react (33:4-6)

Figure 8

## Chiasmus in the New Testament

We have already seen several examples of chiasmus in the New Testament (see Figures 1-4). A few more will suffice.

### The Annunciation Luke 1:6-25

- A Godliness of Zacharias and Elizabeth (6)
- B Elizabeth barren (7)
- C Zacharias' priestly service (8)
- D Zacharias enters the temple (9)
- E The people outside (10)
- F Angel standing (11)
- G Zacharias' fear (12)
- H THE ANNUNCIATION (13-17)**
- G' Zacharias' doubt (18)
- F' Angel who stands (19-20)
- E' The people outside (21)
- D' Zacharias exits from the temple (22)
- C' Zacharias' priestly service (23)
- B' Elizabeth pregnant (24)
- A' God's favor on Elizabeth (and Zacharias) (25)

Figure 9

### Jesus, the Perfecter of the Faith Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore,

- A since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us,
- B let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us,
- C and let us run with endurance
- D the race that is set before us,
- E FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND PERFECTER OF FAITH**
- D' who for the joy set before Him
- C' endured the cross,
- B' despising the shame
- A' and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Figure 10

# Structure of John's Gospel

The search for the structure of John's Gospel has been long and dishearteningly unsuccessful. Forty years ago, Bultmann proposed that the Gospel as it stands is not the Gospel as it came from the hand of the author, but the poor attempt of editors to put back in order an originally well-arranged manuscript that was either damaged or disarranged as early as the autograph stage.

In 1963, D. M. Smith, Jr., made a study of Bultmann's thesis regarding the order of John and came to the conclusion that in almost every instance Bultmann's reconstruction raised as many problems as it provided solutions. Smith himself came to the conclusion that it was "quite possible, indeed probable, that the Fourth Gospel has been left to us in an unfinished stage."

Brown begins his section on the unity and composition of the Gospel with the question: "Is the fourth gospel as it now stands the work of one man?" His answer, like that of all modern commentators with the exception of Lagrange and Hoskyns, is an emphatic denial. Despite the fact that there is absolutely no textual witness to any other order than the one we find now in the Gospel, almost all commentators take for granted that there were at least two hands (or "schools") at work in the composition of the Gospel and that the Gospel as it stands now is in a state of great disorder.

The great commentators since Bultmann (Dodd, Barrett, Brown, Schnackenburg, Lindars, and Marsh) all call attention to the difficulties with Bultmann's reconstruction but do little more toward reconstructing the so-called original Gospel beyond suggesting a series of inept redactors or editors who have distorted the original order of the Gospel by introducing new material at several points and by adding to what is considered the original ending of the Gospel (20:30-31) a new concluding chapter (21).

To explain the alleged disorder, they propose variant versions of the following hypotheses: (a) hypotheses of accidental displacements; (b) hypotheses of multiple sources ineptly melded together; (c) hypotheses of successive editions of an earlier Gospel supplemented and re-edited later by incompetent editors. Despite these and other hypotheses, what H. M. Teeple said in 1962 remains true: "No one yet has demonstrated convincingly that the gospel has been disarranged."

What follows is a proposed hypothesis that the Gospel of John has suffered neither **displacements** nor **disarrangements** but stands now as it came from the hand of the author. This proposition is based on the contention amply demonstrated that the Gospel was composed according to the laws of chiasmic parallelism rather than according to 20th century Western literary devices.

The Gospel appears to be in a state of disarrangement only if one presupposes that the author composed it according to the ordinary principles of narrative composition. If one presupposes, on the contrary, that the Gospel was composed according to the principles of chiasmic parallelism, every part, sequence, section, and element is **precisely** where it belongs.

It is my belief that the Gospel as it now stands is the work of one individual; that it has suffered no displacements; that it has a clear and easily demonstrable chiasmic structure from beginning to end; and that it exists now in our New Testament (with the exception of the adulteress account) exactly as it came from the author. I agree wholeheartedly with Strauss who concluded many years ago when he declared that the Gospel "was like the seamless robe of which it spoke (John 19:23-24), which one may cast lots for, but cannot divide."

The heart of my argument resides in this fundamental presupposition--a presupposition diametrically opposed to the fundamental presupposition of all previous authors: John wrote his Gospel according to the laws of chiasmic parallelism and not according to the laws of narrative. If the Gospel had been written according to the principles of narrative, one would rightly expect a logical and chronological succession of events without violent changes of geography, situation, time, and content. If this narrative presupposition is true, scholars would be correct in deducing that John's Gospel has suffered displacements, rearrangements, supplementary interpolations, and even several redactions.

The following would be the most obvious of these displacements and rearrangements: (1) the cleansing of the Temple (2:13-25), which is out of place and should be transposed to some point closer to the Passion account; (2) 3:27-36, which is misplaced and should be rearranged to follow either 1:19-34 or perhaps 3:19; (3) chapters 5--7, which are not in correct order and should be rearranged so that chapter 5 and chapter 7 go together, with chapter 6 preceding them; (4) parts of 10:22-39 (the shepherd and sheep parts), which are misplaced and should go somewhere in 10:1-21; (5) 12:44-50, which floats and can find no good resting place anywhere in the

Gospel; (6) chapters 15--17, which should be treated as supplementary material added to the Last Supper discourse by one or more editors; and (7) chapter 21, which gives the appearance of being a supplement added to the Gospel as an epilogue by the final editor.

The above-mentioned displacements and rearrangements have been hypothesized on the premise, rarely if ever questioned, that the Gospel was written according to the laws of narrative. If this premise were true, logic would demand that some hypothesis of displacements, rearrangements, and editions must be found, even though it reduces the Gospel as it stands to a hodgepodge of material put together by remarkably incompetent authors and editors. Reflecting on this situation, C. H. Dodd thirty years ago remarked, "Unfortunately, when once the gospel has been taken to pieces, its reassemblage is liable to be affected by individual preferences, preconceptions, and even prejudices" (*The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 290).

If, on the other hand, the premise is false, then the situation is entirely different. There remains the possibility that the Gospel was indeed written according to the principles of parallelism rather than according to the principles of narrative. That this is more than a mere possibility may be deduced from the fact that chiasmic parallelism as a structural principle in ancient Middle Eastern books has been amply documented in the last fifty years for both classical and biblical authors. C. H. Talbert is undoubtedly correct in his contention that books in the ancient Middle East were frequently written according to the laws of chiasmic parallelism, and in his subsequent judgment that "... the very law of duality (*i.e.*, parallelism) by which one part is made to correspond to another by being either analogous or contrasting seems deeply rooted in Near Eastern mentality" (*Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts*, p. 74).

In addition, I believe that John's Gospel is not simply constructed according to the principles of chiasmic parallelism, but also that each of its parts, numbering five, and each of the twenty-one individual sequences of the Gospel is constructed according to the principles of chiasmic parallelism.

The following study will demonstrate that John creates his parallelism most often by repeating either the same words or the same content. Occasionally he creates parallelisms by means of antithetic parallelism, *i.e.*, by contrasting a negative with a positive or a positive with a negative situation or concept. On rare occasions he not only parallels words and content, but even the literary form of a sequence.

## Chiastic Structure of the Gospel

In the following outline of the Gospel, the reader will notice that the Gospel is divided into twenty-one sequences, with the first mirrored back by the twenty-first, the second mirrored back by the twentieth, the third by the nineteenth, and so through the entire Gospel, with the eleventh sequence (6:16-21) standing starkly alone in the center. This has been done because each sequence constitutes a well-defined unit either because of unity of place or time or theme or situation. Ideally these sequences should take the place of the old chapter arrangement of the Gospel that comes from Stephen Langton, who in 1226 divided the Gospel into its present very poor arrangement of chapters and verses.

The original Gospel, like almost all ancient books, contained neither chapters nor verses nor even paragraphs. Scholars are agreed that Langton's division is almost entirely arbitrary, and they have attempted to rectify the situation by retaining Langton's chapters and verses but adding titles or headings to indicate where they believe John would have begun new chapters and paragraphs if he were writing his Gospel today.

In the following outline, because of limitation of space, only the most obvious parallels of persons, places, and situation can be indicated in bold type. Following the commentary on each sequence, beginning with the fourth, the reader will find a listing of the full range of parallels John has created in order to compose his Gospel according to the laws of parallelism.

Commentators down through the centuries have been all too content to laud John's Gospel for its theological depth and for its occasional brilliant literary sorties. But on the whole, they apologized for the seemingly pedestrian literary gifts of the author. When John is seen through the focus of chiasmic parallelism, this judgment has to be revised. Any author who could compose so elaborate a structure with such artistic attention to detail and over so long a work deserves to be ranked with the best of antiquity's literary artists.

As you study John's chiasmic structure on the next page, note particularly how he has paralleled part with part, sequence with sequence, and section with section. The total effect of such a structure when presented to the eye is similar to the effect of an elaborate mosaic or a large Persian rug.

PART 1: 1:19--4:3  
WITNESS AND DISCIPLESHIP

Seq. 1 (1:19-51): At the Jordan. Jesus' **first coming**. Baptist and disciples **witness**. **Simon** is called **Peter** (Rock). **Two unnamed disciples** and **Nathanael** are present.

Seq. 2 (2:1-12): **Mary** at Cana. "**Woman**, what have you to do with me?" **Nuptial** situation. **Water** to wine.

Seq. 3 (2:13-25): "**Destroy** this temple (Jesus' **body**) . . . "

Seq. 4 (3:1-21): Discourse at **night** to Nicodemus on **eternal life, discipleship, water, and the Spirit**.

Seq. 5 (3:22--4:3): The Baptist repeats his **witness** to Jesus.

PART 2: 4:4--6:15  
RESPONSE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE

Seq. 6 (4:4-38): Samaritan **woman**. Jesus is the **Messiah**.

Seq. 7 (4:39-45): Samaritan men **hear**, believe, and profess: "You are the **Savior** of the world."

Seq. 8 (4:46-52): **Pagan official** does not **see** but **believes**.

Seq. 9 (5:1-47): At **feast**, Jesus cures a **paralytic** and makes Himself **equal to the Father**.

Seq. 10 (6:1-15): Multiplication of the **loaves** near **Passover**.

PART 5: 12:12--21:25  
WITNESS AND DISCIPLESHIP

Seq. 21 (20:19--21:25): At the Lake. Jesus' **second coming** is discussed. Thomas **witnesses**. **Simon Peter** is told: "Feed my sheep." **Two unnamed disciples** and **Nathanael** are present.

Seq. 20 (20:1-18): **Mary** at the tomb. "**Woman**, why are you weeping?" **Nuptial** language from Song of Songs.

Seq. 19 (chapters 18-19): Jesus' **body** is **destroyed** in the Passion.

Seq. 18 (chapters 13-17): Supper discourse at **night** on **washing** of feet, **discipleship, eternal life, and the Spirit**.

Seq. 17 (12:12-50): Palm Sunday, crowd **witnesses** to Jesus.

PART 4: 6:22--12:11  
RESPONSE: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE

Seq. 16 (10:40--12:11): Bethany **women** (Martha and Mary). Jesus is the **Messiah**.

Seq. 15 (10:22-39): Jesus declares: "My sheep **hear** My voice . . . they shall never **perish**."

Seq. 14 (9:1--10:21): The **Pharisees** refuse to **see** and **believe**.

Seq. 13 (7:1--8:58): At **feast**, Jesus refers to cure of **paralytic** and makes Himself **equal to the Father**.

Seq. 12 (6:22-72): The **loaves** are explained as the Eucharist near **Passover**.

PART 3: 6:16-21  
THE NEW EXODUS

Jesus walks on the sea, declares "I AM" (= YHWH) and brings the covenanters to the other shore of the sea; thus poignantly reiterating the focus of the Prologue (cf. 1:12-13) and the purpose of the Gospel (cf. 20:31)

## Chiastic Parallelism of Each of the Five Major Parts of the Gospel

The five major parts of the Gospel arranged chiastically are:

- A PART 1: 1:19--4:3 **WITNESS AND DISCIPLESHIP**
- B PART 2: 4:4--6:15 **RESPONSE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE**
- C PART 3: 6:16-21 (the center) **THE NEW EXODUS**
- B' PART 4: 6:22--12:11 **RESPONSE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE**
- A' PART 5: 12:12--21:25 **WITNESS AND DISCIPLESHIP**

What is further profound is that each of these **five major parts** has **five sequences**, with the fifth mirroring the first and the fourth mirroring the second. What is true of PART 1, arranged below according to the principles of parallelism, will be found true of the four other major parts of the Gospel!

### PART 1 (1:19--4:3): WITNESS TO JESUS

Seq. 1 (1:19-51): The **Baptist** and the disciples **witness** to Jesus.

Seq. 2 (2:1-12): **Water** of the old covenant is changed into wine of the new covenant.

Seq. 3 (2:13-25): "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

Seq. 4 (3:1-21): **Water** of the new covenant and rebirth to eternal life.

Seq. 5 (3:22--4:3): The **Baptist** reiterates his **witness** to Jesus.

The significance of noting the inclusion-conclusion with which each major part of the Gospel ends consists in the clear indication it gives the reader that John has indeed divided his Gospel into five major parts, each consisting of five sequences. How much this assists the reader in understanding the Gospel as a whole will become evident in the course of our study of John's Gospel.

In brief, and prescinding from other minor themes, the reader will see that PART 1 (1:19--4:3) and PART 5 (12:--21:25) not only parallel each other but concentrate on the same themes, namely, witness to Jesus and discipleship. In like manner, PART 2 (4:4--6:15) and PART 4 (6:22--12:11) not only parallel each other but concentrate in a similar manner on the same major themes, namely, response to Jesus both positive and negative and a theological defense of Jesus' divinity. These themes--witness to Jesus, response to Jesus, and discipleship--constitute the major themes of the Fourth Gospel.

Even if John had stopped here with his chiasmic structure, we would stand in awe. But hold on! Each sequence is subdivided into a five-fold chiasmic structure!! As it is true with 1:19-51, it is true throughout the Gospel.

PART 1: 1:19--4:3

SEQUENCE 1: 1:19-51

SECTION

- A The Baptist **witnesses** to Jesus (1:19-39)
- B Andrew **finds** Simon (1:40-41)
- C Jesus changes Simon's name to Peter (1:42)
- B' Philip **finds** Nathanael (1:43-45)
- A' Nathanael **witnesses** to Jesus (1:46-51)

### **The Rewards of Parallelism**

Studying the chiasmic outline of John's Gospel on page 25, the reader will notice that the author has paralleled in a chiasmic structure PART for PART, SEQUENCE with SEQUENCE, and SECTION with SECTION. With the relative ease which the literary style of John can now be detected, this study will make it a key that virtually anyone can use to gain access to the all too often "hidden" treasures of the Scriptures.

Richard Greene Moulton emphasizes the importance of printing the text in such a way that the chiasmic structure can be seen visually and thus adverted to: "The essential thing is that the verse structure should be represented to the eye by proper printing of the text. Where this is done further explanation is superfluous; where structural arrangement is wanting, no amount of explanation is likely to be of much avail."

Admittedly, such a structure is alien to modern experience and difficult to appreciate. But for the reader who is willing to study the principles of parallel structure and apply them to the Gospel of John as a whole, the aesthetic, literary, and theological rewards are considerable.

Leaving aside the aesthetic rewards, which are too subjective to be adequately described, and leaving until later the theological rewards, the literary rewards can be described briefly.

First, sequences of the Gospel and sections of sequences which seem to Bultmann and others to be out of their original place in the Gospel and which they accordingly move either backward or forward in the Book to achieve a more flowing and continuous narrative are seen to be precisely where the principles of chiasmic parallelism require them to be (*e.g.*, 2:13-25; 3:22-36; chapters 5, 6, 7).

Second, sections of the Gospel which are considered by many to be doublets of earlier sections, and which are therefore deduced to be the work of inept editors, are seen to be artistic and necessary parallels of their chiasmic counterparts when judged according to the principles of chiasmic parallelism (*e.g.*, 3:22-36 parallels 1:19-31 and chapters 16--17 parallel 13:1--14:31).

Third, individual sequences and sections of sequences whose beginnings and ends are difficult to determine when one expects them to follow the principles of narrative are seen to have clear and definite beginnings and endings when one reads them according to the principles of chiasmic parallelism.

Fourth, such pericopes as 2:13-25 (the cleansing of the Temple), 11:1-54 (the Lazarus story and the priests' plot), to name but two, have always posed problems for those who read John according to the principles of narrative. According to the principles of parallelism, both pericopes are exactly where they belong, the Temple pericope balancing the Passion narrative (the destroying of the body of Jesus) and the Lazarus pericope balancing the "bread of life" promise in 6:32-58.

Lastly, many have adverted to what has been called the "spiral" movement of John's thought. They have seen this spiral movement, however, as peculiar, confusing, and repetitive. When the spiral movement is seen as part and parcel of John's chiasmic parallelism, it ceases to be peculiar and becomes artistic; it ceases to be confusing and serves to clarify; it ceases to be repetitious and becomes balanced and supportive.

There may be no more effective way to promote an ongoing renewal in biblical studies today than to teach and encourage Christians to read the Scriptures according to the same principles by which they were composed.

Finally, one may ask, why John intentionally arrange his composition according to the principles of parallelism? Some possible answers are: (1) in order that the work might be the more easily memorized; (2) in order that corresponding parts might help to interpret one another; (3) in order to give to his grand theme a suitable artistic form

in the same way that Vergil chose dactylic hexameters for his theme; (4) in order to present his work to the world in the same parallel literary pattern used so extensively in the Old Testament and other epic works of the Middle Eastern authors.

## HOW TO FIND A CHIASM

For the reader who wishes to study the Fourth Gospel with appreciation for the author's artistry and with a view to sharpening the focus with which to look at the Gospel as a whole and in its parts, the following exercises are suggested in discovering parts, sequences, sections, and elements and in setting criteria for distinguishing and determining distinct sequences according to the principles of chiasmic parallelism.

**1. Make a preview of what appears to be a unit. Use several good English translations if possible (NASB, KJV, NEB, NIV) and compare them in order to determine what they believe constitutes a paragraph, section, or sequence of thought.**

Use a pencil or pen while observing to write down any observations. Writing down one's observations is beneficial for several reasons, not the least of which it impresses them upon one's mind. Writing is a great aid to memory.

There are two primary approaches in the observation of a passage of Scripture. One type of observation begins with a detailed noting of particulars and proceeds to the observation of the whole. The second kind of observation begins with a survey of the whole, progresses to the noting of particulars, and moves finally to a synthesis of the particulars. Both of these types are valid and useful.

The first reflects the usual process followed in the reading of a passage, for it involves beginning from the beginning and moving term by term, phrase by phrase, and clause by clause to the conclusion. The second kind of observation is most salutary when one is dealing with a longer body of material, where perspective is essential to effective observation. However, the reader is urged to experiment with both types and to determine the best for them.

## **2. Make a study of its components or what looks to be its components.**

In recording detailed components, list them so as to make them distinct from each other. Use some means, such as underlining or encircling, to indicate major observations of movements, parts, and sections. Find ways of organizing your observations so that they will be accessible with the least possible effort. Give specific chapter and verse references for each observation so that there will be no question as to the particulars of the text upon which the observations are based.

## **3. Review the unit with all parallels in mind and then apply the following criteria for distinguishing and determining distinct parts, sequences, sections, and other elements.**

- a. Is there a change of time, place, subject matter, or speaker(s)?
- b. Is there a balance of parts, *e.g.*, part one with part five, part two with part four?
- c. Are there any inclusion-conclusions by way of names, places, ideas, or key words?

## CONCLUSION

We conclude, therefore, that neither interpreters of the Fourth Gospel nor translators should ignore the help given to them by an author when he chooses parallelism as his method of composition.

After a close study of John's Gospel, the reader will be awe struck by his literary genius. Rarely in Western literature has form been woven into content, pattern sewn into meaning, structure forged into theme with greater subtlety or success. The result is a Gospel of profound paradox that first reveals then resolves itself in absolute symmetry. To look closely at the major patterns of paradox is to discover how the literal level of the Gospel fully engenders the meaning and how pattern finally unravels predication.

The Gospel of John is the most intricately composed, complex and relatively long opus in the New Testament. The author did not mind, however, breaking his Gospel up into manageable pieces. Even in the central part of his composition, which is strictly coherent, he has paid the greatest attention to the individual sequences and sections. The grand effect of the Fourth Gospel is due to its parts melting into one continuous whole.