

## 1. Introduction and Overview

Robbins, *Johannine Writings*

D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary

Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John (Revised)*, New Int'l Commentary of the New Testament

Gary Burge, *John*, NIV Application Commentary

Tom Wright, *John for Everyone*

### 1. The Wonder of the Gospel of John

- **The spiritual Gospel.** 'Last of all John, perceiving that the external facts had been set forth in the Gospels, at the insistence of his disciples and with the inspiration of the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel.' Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 200), *Hypotyposes*, cited in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.14.7.
- **Soars like an eagle.** '[I]n the four Gospels, or rather the four books of the one Gospel, St John the Apostle, not unworthily in respect of spiritual intelligence compared to the eagle, hath taken a higher flight, and soared in his preaching much more sublimely than the other three, and in the lifting up thereof would have our hearts lifted up likewise.' Augustine of Hippo (AD 416), *On St John*, Hom. xxxvi.
- **'Chiefest of the Gospels, unique, tender, and true.'** Martin Luther (c. AD 1520). 'Das einzige zarte rechte Haupt-Evangelium', in *Werke*, Erlangen, 1854, lxiii, p. 115.
- **Exhibits the soul of Jesus; key to the other Gospels.** 'And as all of them had the same object in view, to point out Christ, the three former [Gospels] exhibit his body, if we may be permitted to use the expression, but John exhibits his soul. On this account, I am accustomed to say that this Gospel is a key to open the door for understanding the rest; for whoever shall understand the power of Christ, as it is here strikingly portrayed, will afterwards read with advantage what the others relate about the Redeemer who was manifested.' John Calvin (AD 1553), *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. 1.
- **'A pool in which a child may wade and an elephant may swim.'** Leon Morris (AD 1971), *The Gospel According to John (Revised)*, NICNT, p. 3.
- **The Mona Lisa of the Bible.** The Gospel of John is probably the most remarkable book ever written. Like the Mona Lisa, the simple beauty of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospel is instantly appealing. The longer you look at the work, the more subtlety, genius and power you perceive. Unlike the Mona Lisa, however, the unrivalled effect of this work is that, when looked at the right way, the Gospel reveals not just the image but the living, breathing Jesus himself looking back at you from its pages. In a breathtaking moment you start to see *Him*—the Word Made Flesh, the Light of the World, the Son of God—not a dead artefact of history but a living King whose face commands your attention. For those who see Him, everything else in the book becomes literally possible: grace, truth, light, new birth, freedom and power in this present life, and eternal life to come. AN Dixon (AD 2005).

3. **Book about Who Jesus Is: the 'Word Made Flesh', the Son of God**

'The theme of the Fourth Gospel is Christ.... There is an astonishing variety of ways in which Jesus is confessed and described in the Gospel.' Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, p. lxxxi.

- The Word
- The Only-Begotten
- The Son of God
- The Son of Man
- A Teacher come from God
- The Prophet
- The Messiah
- The King of Israel
- The King of the Jews
- The Holy One of God
- The Lamb of God
- The Man
- The Lord

4. **Who, what, why, when, where, how?**

Oldest remaining copy of New Testament (AD 130): Papyrus fragment p52 of the Gospel of John 18:31-33, 37-38, in John Rylands Library, University of Manchester.



Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die. So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

- **Why:** John 20:31: [T]hese are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.
- **What:** The post-resurrection (lifelong) reflection on Jesus of a claimed eyewitness (e.g. 1.14, 19.35)
- **Who:** Traditionally, the Apostle John
  - Not named in the Gospel, only in the title
  - 'Disciple Whom Jesus Loved' (13.23, 19.26, 20.2, 21.7, 21.20)
  - 'This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.' (21.24)
  - Eyewitness details (place names, time of day, names, relatives)
  - Deep Hebrew knowledge; similar approach in Dead Sea Scrolls
  - Irenaeus (AD 180) – 'John, son of Zebedee, the apostle'
  - Eusebius (AD 325), quoting Papias (c. AD 150) - 'John the Elder'?
- **When:** AD 65-110
  - No reference to destruction of the Temple
  - No direct references to other Gospels
  - Oldest remaining copy - Papyrus<sup>52</sup> (AD 130)
- **Where:** No direct evidence
  - Ephesus – early report by Irenaeus (AD 180), used by Montanists
  - Antioch – similar to Ignatius's thought; first commentary here
  - Alexandria – earliest manuscript found here; used by Gnostics
- **How:** Hotly debated
  - Sources – signs source, apostle's tradition, Johannine 'school'?
  - A unified whole – virtually impossible to 'unpick'

5.

Book of 'Signs'

- **Miraculous 'signs' (semeion) guide the Gospel account. At least seven in number, they not only show Jesus' glory but also give spiritual meaning on several levels to the miraculous events.** 'Signs' are mentioned 17 times in the Gospel of John, whereas the other gospels tend to focus on 'works of power' and 'wonders'.

▪ 'This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.' (2.11)

- #1 - **Turning water into wine** (2.1-2.11)
- #2 - **Healing the nobleman's son** (4.46-54)
- #3 - **Healing the lame man** (5.1-18)
- #4 - **Feeding the 5,000** (6.1-15)
- #5 - **Walking on the water** (6.16-21)
- #6 - **Healing the man born blind** (9.1-41)
- #7 - **Raising Lazarus from the dead** (11.1-57)
- **Resurrection (rebuilding temple)** (20; 2.18-2.19)
- **The miraculous catch of fish** (21.1-14)
- **Many other signs** (20.30)

- 'Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe.' (4.48)
- 'Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these have been written so 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 NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon

<b>Strong's Number:</b> 4592	<a href="#">Browse Lexicon</a>	<b>NAS Verse Count</b>
<b>Original Word</b>	<b>Word Origin</b>	<a href="#">Matthew</a> 9
σημεῖον	from a presumed derivative of the base of (4591)	<a href="#">Mark</a> 6
<b>Transliterated Word</b>	<b>TDNT Entry</b>	<a href="#">Luke</a> 9
Semeion	7.200,1015	<a href="#">John</a> 17
<b>Phonetic Spelling</b>	<b>Parts of Speech</b>	<a href="#">Acts</a> 13
say-mi'-on	Noun Neuter	<a href="#">Romans</a> 2
<b>Definition</b>		<a href="#">1 Corinthians</a> 2
1. a sign, mark, token		<a href="#">2 Corinthians</a> 1
a. that by which a person or a thing is distinguished from others and is known		<a href="#">2 Thessalonians</a> 2
b. a sign, prodigy, portent, i.e. an unusual occurrence, transcending the common course of nature		<a href="#">Hebrews</a> 1
1. of signs portending remarkable events soon to happen		<a href="#">Revelation</a> 7
2. of miracles and wonders by which God authenticates the men sent by him, or by which men prove that the cause they are pleading is God's		<b>Total</b> 69

NAS Word Usage - Total: 77

distinguishing mark 1, miracle 2, sign 35, signs 39

<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Greek/grk.cgi?number=4592&version=nas>

6.

Book of 'I AM' Declarations

- **Jesus refers to himself more than 7 times using the 'I AM' (ego eimi) name that God calls Himself in the Old Testament. These claims also guide the Gospel narrative, and often are graphically demonstrated by relevant miracles (e.g. feeding 5,000—I am the bread of life). These claims of Jesus to be God were the most outrageous offence to the Jewish leaders.**

- God said to Moses, 'I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: "I AM has sent me to you."' (Exodus 3.14)

- #1 - **I am the bread of life** (6.35, 41, 48, 51)
- #2 - **I am the light of the world** (8.12, 9.5)
- #3 - **I am the door** (10.7, 9)
- #4 - **I am the good shepherd** (10.11, 14)
- #5 - **I am the resurrection and the life** (11.25)
- #6 - **I am the way, the truth and the life** (14.6)
- #7 - **I am the true vine** (15.1, 5)

- **His Jewish hearers recognised and indeed experienced the power of 'The Name' as Jesus used it.**

- 'You are not yet fifty years old,' the Jews said to him, 'and you have seen Abraham!' 'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am!' At this, they picked up stones to stone him.... (8.57-59)
- Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. (18.4-6)

7.

**Book of Hebrew Institutions, Festivals, Scriptures**

- **Explicit references to Jewish institutions and festivals also serve as guides to the meaning of what is happening.**

Verses	Institutions	Narrative
2.1-2.12	Purification vessels	Wedding at Cana Water into wine
2.13-25	Temple in Jerusalem	Cleansing of the temple Rebuilding the temple in 3 days
3.1-21	Rabbi in Jerusalem	Interview with Nicodemus New birth
4.1-42	Jacob's sacred well	Woman at the well Living water
Verses	Festivals, Holy Days	Narrative
5.1-47	Sabbath	Healing lame man Father and Son still working, giving life
6.1-71	Passover (Exodus)	Feeding 5,000 Bread from heaven; Jesus' flesh and blood gives eternal life
7.1-9.41	Feast of Tabernacles (Water and Light)	Walking on water, healing blind man Living water, light of the world
10.1-39	Festival of Rededication (Hanukah)	True versus false shepherds The Father has 'sanctified' Jesus - 10.36 [Triumphal entry into Jerusalem (12.12-19)]
13-20	Passover	Preparatory meal, death and resurrection of Jesus 'One man dying for the people'

- **The indirect references or allusions to the Old Testament are extraordinarily frequent and subtle.**
  - 'One of the features of these allusions is the manner in which Jesus is assumed to *replace* Old Testament figures and institutions. He is the new temple, the one of whom Moses wrote, the true bread from heaven, the true Son, the genuine vine, the tabernacle, the serpent in the wilderness, the Passover. [There is] an underlying . . . way of reading the Old Testament that goes back to Jesus himself.' Carson, p. 98.
- **There are numerous direct references to Old Testament scriptures and events.**
  - See attached appendix.

8. **Book of Key Words and Themes**

- **Certain key words and themes, used repeatedly, emphasise particular aspects of Jesus and his work.**
  - **sign** - 17 times
  - **word** - 37 times
  - **light** - 16 times
  - **life** - 44 times
  - **water** - 26 times
  - **spirit** - 22 times
  - **world** - 57 times
  - **know** - 80 times
  - **truth** - 49 times
  - **witness/testimony/testify** – 45 times
  - **believe/faith** - 83 times
  - **glory** - 16 times
  
- **The book answers key questions that serve as major themes of the Gospel.**
  - **Who is the Messiah ('Christ')?** (Christology)
  - **How does the Kingdom of God work?** (future and realised 'eschatology')
  - **How does salvation / redemption work?** (Soteriology)

9. **Book of Contrasts ('Dualism')**

- **The Gospel and Jesus himself in the Gospel use the simple but powerful tool of contrasts ('dualism') to explain events, his actions and his message.** For example:
  - **Light vs. darkness**
  - **Heaven vs. earth**
  - **Life vs. death**
  - **Of God vs. of the devil**
  - **Flesh vs. spirit**
  - **From above vs. from below**
  - **Truth vs. lies**
  - **Sight vs. blindness**
  - **Slave vs. son**

10. **Book of Conflicts ('Polemic'): Judeans, Baptists, Gnostics/Docetists**

- **It seems clear from the Gospel that at least part of the context in which it was written was rejection of Jesus and Christians by Jewish authorities, early debates about Jesus's earthly nature (pre-Gnosticism), and the role of John the Baptist.**

- **John uses stronger language than the other Gospels in denouncing 'the Jews'.**
  - John may be 'profoundly interested in preventing the diaspora Jews from committing the same errors and sins that so many Jews of Palestine committed... The Fourth Gospel is not as anti-Jewish as some people think anyway: salvation is still said to be 'from the Jews' (4.22), and often the referent of 'the Jews' is 'the Jews in Judea' or 'the Jewish leaders' or the like. 'Anti-semitic' is simply the wrong category to apply to the Fourth Gospel: whatever hostilities are present turn on *theological* issues related to the acceptance or rejection of revelation, and not on race. How could it be, when all of the first Christians were Jews, and when, on this reading, both the fourth Evangelist and his readers were Jews?' Carson, p.92.
  - For example: 'His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.' (9.22)
  
- **Docetism / gnosticism. The author seems to address in passing one of the first Christian heresies – the pre-Gnostic heresy 'docetism' which maintained that Jesus never actually became a human but only 'seemed' (doxein) to do so.**
  - **Docetism** was a late 1<sup>st</sup> century Greek reaction against the idea that an eternal God could inhabit human flesh and blood.
  - For example, 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.' (1.14)
  - 'Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'" (20.27)
  - 1 John and 2 John address this more directly.
  - **Gnosticism** was a 2<sup>nd</sup> century heresy. The foundation of this belief was a radical cosmological dualism – an evil, created world of matter with which God had no dealing, totally separate from and in opposition to the 'spiritual' world. Only those with a 'divine spark', enlightened by special 'knowledge' could escape from the material world to the spiritual world at death. In the Gnostics world, Jesus was not 'the Word made Flesh', and we are not delivered from sin but 'self-realise'. See New Bible Dictionary, *Gnosticism*.
  - The Gospel of John was used both by proponents and opponents of Gnosticism to support their views.

- **John the Baptist 'cult'. There also seem to be passages in the Gospel specifically addressed to the continuing followers of John the Baptist.**
  - The movement among John the Baptist's followers continued for a considerable time after his death. Acts 19.1-7 (Ephesian disciples had only experienced the baptism of John)
  - E.g.: 'There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. (1.6-8)
  - 'Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ."' (1.19-20)

11.

**Book of the Holy Spirit and Kingdom**

- **The Gospel of John not only makes the most detailed explanations and illustrations of the Holy Spirit and the present and future Kingdom, it effectively invites the hearer or reader himself to experience the Holy Spirit.**
  - **The only way to 'see' and 'enter' the Kingdom of God is through new birth by the Spirit.** 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again... I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.' (3.3, 3.5)
  - **The experience of the Kingdom is a present reality.** 'I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.' (5.24)
  - **The experience of the Kingdom is also a future reality as yet unseen and unfulfilled.** 'In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.' (14.2-14.3)
  - **The Gospel describes the Spirit's work as 'Comforter/Advocate/Counselor' (paraclete) over three entire chapters.** (John 14-16)

- **The Gospel provides among the most powerful images of how the Holy Spirit and God's Kingdom work.**
  - i. **Submersion in water** (1.33)
  - ii. **Unseen wind** (3.8)
  - iii. **Living water** (4.10)
  - iv. **Making his home in us** (14.17)
  - v. **Vine and branches** (15.5)
  
- **Jesus' signs and explanations in this Gospel provide a powerful *model* of Kingdom ministry.**
  - i. **'I speak just what the Father has taught me'** (8.28)
  - ii. **'It is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work'** (14.10)
  - iii. **'I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.'** (5.19-20)

12.

### **Studying and Experiencing Jesus Through the Book**

- **The most powerful understanding, use and teaching of the Gospel can be gained by reading and hearing it over and over again, praying for understanding, and communing with God through the Spirit to encounter the Jesus it presents.**

▪ Study guides can help illuminate large issues and particular details.

– Devotional / laymans' guides

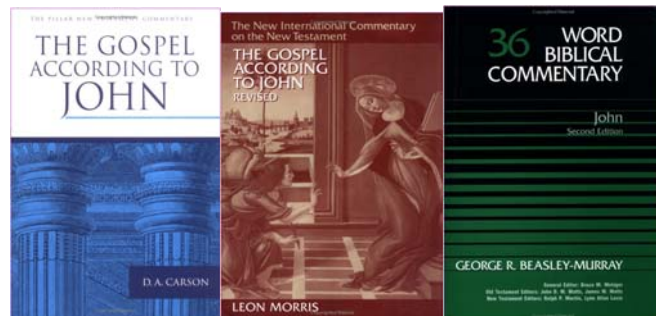
★ NT Wright, John for Everyone – Excellent all round

- Wm Barclay – Daily Study Bible
- RVG Tasker, John, Tyndale NT Commentary
- AW Pink, Exposition of Gospel of John



– Detailed, scholarly commentaries

- ★ DA Carson, Gospel Acc. to John, Pillar NT C'tary
- ★ Leon Morris, Gospel Acc. To John (Revised), NICNT
- GR Beasley Murray, John, Word Bibl. Commentary



– Honourable mentions

- G Burge, John, NIV Application Commentary
- JR Michaels, John, New Int'l Bibl. Commentary (NIBC)
- Navpress LifeChange Series, John (study guide)
- Life Application Bible Studies, John (study guide)



### Appendix: Old Testament References in the Gospel of John

- John 1.17: For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
- John 1.21-23: They asked him, 'Then who are you? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No.' John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.' ' (Isaiah 40.3)
- John 1.45: Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.'
- John 2.17: His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'
- John 2.22: After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.
- John 5.10: and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, 'It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.'
- John 5.39-40: You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, you refuse to come to me to have life.
- John 6.14: After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.'
- John 6.45: It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' (Isaiah 54.13) Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me.
- John 6.31: Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'
- John 7.19: Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?'
- John 7.23: Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath?
- John 7.38: Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.
- John 7.42: Still others asked, 'How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?'
- John 7.51-52: 'Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?' They replied, 'Are you from Galilee, too? Look

into it, and you will find that the Prophet [a prophet] does not come out of Galilee.'

- John 8.5: In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?'
- John 8.17: In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid.
- John 8.52: At this the Jews exclaimed, 'Now we know that you are demon possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death.
- John 10.34-35: Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? (Psalm 82.6) If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken—what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world?'
- John 12.14-16: Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, 'Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.' At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.
- John 12.34: The crowd spoke up, 'We have heard from the Law that the Christ [Messiah] will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?''
- John 12.38: This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: 'Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?' (Isaiah 53.1)
- John 12.39-41: For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: 'He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them.' (Isaiah 6.10) Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.
- John 13.18: 'But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.' (Psalm 41.9)
- John 15.25: But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.' (Psalms 35.19; 69.4)
- John 17.12: 'While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.'
- John 19.7: The Jews insisted, 'We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.'
- John 19.24: This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, 'They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.' (Psalm 22.18)
- John 19.28: Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.'

- John 19.36: These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken,' (Exodus 12.46; Num. 9.12; Psalm 34.20)
- John 19.37: ... and, as another scripture says, 'They will look on the one they have pierced.' (Zech. 12.10)
- John 20.9: (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)