

# GOSPEL OF JOHN SUMMARY

## STRUCTURE, SYMBOLISM, AND DEFINITION



## STRUCTURAL DIVISIONS

The Gospel of Saint John can be divided into four parts.

- 1) **Prologue: 1:1-18** (Logos Hymn: The Word with God; Believers become Children of God; The Word becomes Flesh; The Son Reveals the Father)
  
- 2) **The Book of Signs: 1:19—12:50** (Wedding at Cana; Temple Incident; Dialogue with Nicodemus; Royal Official's Son; Samaritan Woman at the Well; Healing at the Bethesda Pool; Feeding 5000 & Bread of Life Discourse; Conflicts in Jerusalem; Man Born Blind & Good Shepherd Discourse; Raising of Lazarus; Anointing at Bethany; Plots to Kill Jesus) John provides a record of Jesus' miracles with detailed 'commentary' about their significance in signifying Him as Messiah (Christ) and Lord, the Living Word of God, revealing Himself to the disciples and the world.
  
- 3) **The Book of Glory: 13:1—20:31** (Last Supper: Washing the Disciples' Feet, Foretelling Judas' Betrayal & Peter's Denial, Farewell Discourses; Jesus' Great Prayer; Passion Narrative: Arrest, Hearings & Trials, Crucifixion, Death & Burial; Resurrection Appearances, esp. to Mary Magdalene and Thomas) To those who accept Christ as the Living Word and God, this section of the Gospel, through several long discourses by Christ Himself, the doctrines of His Personhood and work are most deeply explained. Here Christ relates Himself to God the Father, to the Holy Spirit and to His community of believers in clear and certain terms. He is one with God, whose words He speaks, whose works He accomplishes and Whose will He performs. And through the Holy Spirit, bears witness to Him in the world. Christ remains abiding forever in those who are His through their faith and co-service of God.
  
- 4) **Epilogue 21:1-25** (Another Resurrection Appearance at the Sea of Tiberias/Galilee). The final chapter of the book is traditionally considered to be an addition following the first ending of the gospel, to affirm the reinstatement of the apostle Peter to the leadership of the apostolic community after his three denials of the Lord at the time of His passion. It may have been a necessary inclusion to offset a certain lack of confidence in Saint Peter by some members of the Church. This section also includes the post-resurrection appearance of Christ to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias.

## SYMBOLISM

A unique feature in John's Gospel is his use of symbolism in his narratives. Symbols are widely used in Orthodox theology and practice. Before speaking of John's use of symbols we should discuss the characteristics of a symbol.

1. Symbols point beyond themselves to something else and are integral to that which they point and invite us to participate. The example here is a flag.
2. Symbols open up levels of reality which otherwise we could not imagine or anticipate. The example here is art.
3. Symbols unlock dimensions and elements of our soul which correspond to a reality or realities of which we are unaware. The example here is a play.

In her work *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel. The Interplay of Form and Meaning*, Dorothy A Lee, professor of New Testament Theology at Trinity College in Melbourne Australia identifies six (6) of these "symbols" present in John's Gospel.

Birth

Water

Signs

Bread

Light

Resurrection

She identifies the way John develops a relationship or interplay between symbol and narrative expressing a complex interplay or form and meaning. In each encounter with Jesus the characters gradually develop and move beyond a worldly and literal response ultimately achieving an understanding of these as Symbols of the Personhood of Christ demonstrated through His encounter with the character. She points out that this "interplay" between symbol and narrative is established using a literary structure consisting of five (5) stages.

- 1) a sign, image or feast is established at the beginning of the narrative,
- 2) an individual or group misunderstands the image/sign through literal interpretation,
- 3) struggle of the main character(s) to acquire a proper understanding as they move towards symbolic interpretation
- 4) a definitive response which invokes acceptance or rejection
- 5) conclusion with a statement of faith or rejection.

## DEFINITION

Throughout John's Gospel Christ is identified with the Symbology mentioned above. The Table below highlights several of how Christ was typified in the Gospel.

Intent	Key Chapter Verses identifying Christ as Symbols	
<b>Christ the Word</b>	1:1	In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
	1:14	And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,
	8:31	Then Jesus said, 'If you abide in my Word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.
<b>Christ the Son of God</b>	1:18	No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, who has made Him known.
	1:34	And I myself [John the Baptist] have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.
	1:49	Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God!
	1:51	And [Jesus] said to [Nathanael], 'Very truly, I tell you that you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'
	3:16-18	For God so loved the world that he gave his only <b>Son</b> , so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the <b>Son</b> into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Those who believe in Him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only begotten <b>Son</b> of God.
	3:36	The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. Who so ever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath.
	5:23	Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.
	5:25	Truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.
<b>Christ the Son of Man</b>	1:51	And [Jesus] said to [Nathanael], 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.
	3:13,14	No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.
	5:27	and [the Father] has given [Jesus] authority to execute judgement, because he is the Son of Man.
	6:27	Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.
	6:53,54	So Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat My flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day
	8:28	So Jesus said, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am He.
	9:35	Jesus heard that they had driven him [the blind man] out, and when He found him, He said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'

Intent	Key Chapter Verses	
<b>Christ the Creator</b>	1:8	Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim... When the steward tasted the water that had become wine...
	6:11	Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.
	6:19	The [disciples] saw Jesus walking <u>on</u> the lake and coming near the boat
	9:6	Then [Jesus] spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes...Then he went and washed and came back able to see.
<b>Christ the Water of Life</b>	4:10,13	Jesus answered [the Samaritan woman], 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water... The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.
	7:37,38	Jesus cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, 38 and let the one who believes in me drink. As[k] the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'
<b>Christ the Bread of Life</b>	6:35	Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry...
	6:48-50	I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'
<b>Christ the Light</b>	1:4	[Jesus] was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.
	3:19	And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world...
	8:12	Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.
<b>Christ the new Temple</b>		Jesus answered [the Pharisees] 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up...But he was speaking of the temple of His Body.
<b>Christ the Judge</b>	3:19	And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.
	5:22	The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son
	5:30	I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just...
	8:16	Yet even if I do judge, my judgement is just; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me.
	9:39	Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.'

Intent	Key Chapter Verses	
<b>Christ the Teacher</b>	3:2	Nicodemus came to Jesus and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God.
		So when the Samaritans came to [Jesus] and asked him to stay with them; and He stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word.
	6:2,3	A large crowd kept following [Jesus], because they saw the signs that He was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. (see also Luke 9:11)
	7:14	About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach.
	8:2	Early in the morning [Jesus] came again to the temple. All the people came to him and He sat down and began to teach them.
<b>Christ is Human</b>	1:14	And the Word became flesh and lived among us.
	2:16	And Jesus said, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a market-place!”
	4:6	Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by His journey, was sitting by the well.
	4:7	A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink’.
<b>Christ is Divine (God)</b>	1:1	In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
	4:25	The [Samaritan] woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘I am He, the one who is speaking to you. (see also Deut. 18:15)
	5:18	For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making Himself equal to God.
	8:58	Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I Am.