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THE CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

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Abstract: *This essay seeks to sharpen the widely accepted "Book of Signs" and "Book of Glory" structural outline of the Gospel of John by showing that these features contribute to its chiastic structure. Having defined chiasmus, described its widespread use as a compositional strategy, and suggested that the major exegetical benefit of recognizing these structures is the way they enable us to establish context, I state my working assumptions, invite skeptics to provide a better explanation of the details and architecture of the text, and lay out a step-by-step process of examining texts that seeks to use rigorous, objective standards in the service of verifiable claims. I then apply the method to John's Gospel. By highlighting wide-angle inclusios formed by parallel events, repeated language, and thematic repetitions, the wide-angle sections of the Gospel are discussed in relationship to each other. The medium is the message, and this essay shows that understanding an author's intended literary structure is crucial to understanding the message he intended to communicate.*

Key words: *chiastic structure, literary structure, John's Gospel, Fourth Gospel, chiasmus, authorial intent, New Testament use of the Old Testament*

According to John, Jesus teaches that eternal life is knowing God (John 17:3). We want to know God, and he has revealed himself in the writings of human authors—writings that have been recognized as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

In my baseball playing days, my goal was to go to the plate and make good solid contact with the ball. If I hit the ball on the sweet spot of the bat, whether it was a line drive or a home run, I was happy. The best outcome was both: a line drive that left the yard. In this presentation, my goal is to make good solid contact. If I get a line drive base hit, I will have convinced you to consider the possibility that John's Gospel is chiastically structured. If that line drive carries over the wall, you will recognize the intrinsic connections between *the message* intended by the human authors of the biblical texts and the way those authors intended to *structure* their message.

If it turns out that the bases were loaded and I have hit a grand slam, you will arrive at two further points that are implied but beyond the scope of what can be argued in the space of this article: first, that understanding literary structure also furthers our understanding of an author's biblical-theological engagement with earlier Scripture. That is to say, understanding literary structure enables us to more deeply appreciate the use of the Old Testament in the Old Testament and the Old

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Testament in the New. And second, that understanding the literary structures intended by the human authors increases our ability to appreciate the theological meaning of what they intended to communicate.

For us to understand the biblical and systematic theological perspective of the biblical authors, we must attend to the literary structures they employ. We give the texts this attention because we believe that God has revealed himself in his Word, and we want to know God. In my opinion, evangelical biblical scholarship should focus attention on these three areas: the literary structure of the texts, the biblical-theological engagement with earlier Scripture, and the theological implications and significance of what the human authors intended to communicate.

I aim to demonstrate that John the son of Zebedee structured his Gospel as a chiasm built of smaller chiasms.[1] This conclusion has not been forced upon the text but arises from it. To prove this, I begin with introductory thoughts on what chiasms are and how authors use them to establish context, signaling both smaller units and broader sections within extended discourses. Next, knowing that many are skeptical of wide-angle, book-length chiastic proposals, I will lay my cards on the table, explaining my key assumptions, and offering those who wish to disprove the presence of wide-angle chiastic structures what I think is the best way for them to put a stop to all this nonsense (as some regard it). In an attempt to show my hand fully, I will also seek to describe the step-by-step process whereby I go about seeking to determine thought units within texts, considering how boundaries around discrete movements of thought are established in texts whose authors did not enumerate chapter and verse, insert first, second, and third level subheads, or even indent new paragraphs.[2] In the third and most substantial section of this endeavor, I apply my assumptions and step-by-step process to the Gospel according to John, seeking to show that it is chiastic in whole and part.

I. UNDERSTANDING CHIASTIC LITERARY STRUCTURES

Chiasms are extensions of parallelism that provide structure and boundaries as aids to memory that create synergy between thought-units while providing authors a vehicle for artistic expression of literary beauty.[3] Stock adds, "The two main

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[1] I take it as an established fact that the son of Zebedee called John authored the Fourth Gospel. The argument of this presentation, however, does not stand or fall on that claim, and those with other views can disregard my conclusions on authorship just as I do when I read claims about the authorship and date of biblical books with which I disagree.

[2] So also, independently, Augustine Stock, who writes, "Chiasmus afforded a seriously needed element of internal organization in ancient writings, which did not make use of paragraphs, punctuation, capitalization and other such synthetic devices to communicate the conclusion of one idea and the commencement of the next." Augustine Stock, "Chiastic Awareness and Education in Antiquity," *BTB* 14.1 (1984): 23.

[3] For a chiastic arrangement in the ideas in this sentence, as well as a wider discussion of what can only be sketched out in this presentation, see my book, James M. Hamilton Jr., *In the Beginning was the Word: Finding Meaning in the Literary Structure of the Gospel of John* (Baker, 2025).

elements of chiasmus, inversion and balance, produce a third, climactic centrality."[4] In this section I want first to offer considerations that make the idea that the biblical authors intended to compose their material in chiastic shape plausible before suggesting the main exegetical payoff afforded by recognition of chiastic structure.

1. *The plausibility of chiastic composition.* In his book *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, Ian H. Thomson makes two points that I think make the idea that biblical authors made pervasive use of chiastic structures much more plausible. The first has to do with habits of thought, the second with compositional technique.

Regarding habits of thought, Thomson writes,

> The ancient educational system available to the privileged among Paul's readers, both Greek and Roman, made even its youngest pupils much more aware of the movement and structure of a passage than moderns are. Thus, in both systems, a child was not deemed to have learned its alphabet until it could be recited both from *alpha* to *omega* (A to X in Latin—Y and Z were looked on as 'foreign'), and also from *omega* to *alpha*, and then both ways at once, *alpha-omega*, *beta-psi* … *mu-nu*. This could not but help contribute to chiastic awareness.[5]

With reference to compositional technique, Thomson summarizes an essay by Standaert as follows:

> Standaert has an interesting point to make that chiasmus was one of three models of compositional technique in antiquity. The first is the rhetorical model of introduction, narration, argumentation, peroration, and conclusion. The second is the dramatic model with its δέσις leading towards the denouement of the λύσις. The third is the widely found chiastic model, evidence for which can be gleaned from occasional remarks, but which was never systematized in the work of the ancients.[6]

Note that what Thomson refers to as a rhetorical model itself has a chiastic shape:

introduction,
    narration,
        argumentation,
    peroration, and
conclusion.

In keeping with this point, Augustine Stock has written, "Chiasmus was pervasive in antiquity, first as the traditional oral teaching form then as the key structuring device for writings."[7]

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[4] Stock, "Chiastic Awareness and Education in Antiquity," 23.

[5] Ian H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, JSNTSup 111 (Sheffield Academic, 1995), 20.

[6] Thomson, 35n107. Citing B. Standaert, "La rhétorique ancienne dans saint Paul," 78–92 in A. Vanhoye, *L'apotre Paul: Personnalité, style et conception du ministére* (Leuven, 1986).

[7] Stock, "Chiastic Awareness and Education in Antiquity," 23.

2. *The main exegetical benefit of recognizing chiastic structure.* I have become convinced that the main benefit of recognizing chiastic structure is that doing so enables us to establish context. The medium is part of the message, and to determine the intent of the human author, we must establish the parameters of contexts—the boundaries of units within a wider discourse—and then we must consider the relationships between those units. As is often noted, when interpreting a written text, context is king. How do we establish that an author intended the parameters of a context within which his statements are meant to be understood? Are there objective criteria that can be used with rigor to achieve a measure of objectivity?

Authors signal the boundaries of units in a variety of ways. John sometimes does this by starting a series of units with the same phrase or line, such as:

- "the next day" at 1:29,
- "the next day" at 1:35, and
- "the next day" at 1:43.

Another example of the same is:

- "After this" at 5:1,
- "After this" at 6:1, and
- "After this" at 7:1.

A second very common way John marks the boundaries of units is the use of inclusio-bookends, whereby a repeated phrase or concept, or even a parallel event, marks the beginning and end of a unit or a whole section of the Gospel. For instance, chapters 2–4 are bookended by the very similar accounts in 2:1–12 and 4:43–54. These both unfold in a similar manner, take place at Cana, on the third day, provoke belief, and are even numbered first and second, with the second making specific mention of the first. An example of this technique at the phrase level is the way that in 5:19 and 5:30 John presents Jesus saying he is not able to do anything "from himself."[8] These assertions stand as an inclusio around 5:19–30.

Having established the boundaries of units, within the bookends John positions subunits in counterpoise with one another. John and the other biblical authors accomplish all this by using repeated words and phrases and/or related themes. Close attention to these repetitions of word and concept provide objective criteria whereby we can make demonstrable claims about units of thought and their relationships to one another.

II. SHOWING MY HAND: PUTTING MY CARDS ON THE TABLE FOR THE SKEPTICAL

1. *My assumptions.* I work under the assumption that the books of the Bible are literary units that have been intentionally arranged, and I am skeptical of suggestions that the books of the Bible have been poorly edited, that material that seems

[8] John 5:19, **οὐ δύναται** ὁ υἱὸς **ποιεῖν ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ οὐδὲν.**
John 5:30, **Οὐ δύναμαι** ἐγὼ **ποιεῖν ἀπ' ἐμαυτοῦ οὐδέν**.

to modern eyes not to fit results from later interpolation, or that the material needs some modern scholar to practice "content criticism" to put it in the "right" order.[9] "Ancient people were stupid" is not an assumption on which I want to operate, and the idea that these books were cobbled together by scribes reflecting competing agendas and perspectives as the books took shape over centuries fails to recognize the unified literary masterpieces the biblical books have proven to be.

Committees do not produce books that transform lives, shape cultures, and command serious attention, discussion, and comment for centuries and millennia. The only books that do that are the ones produced by literary geniuses. The literary geniuses who wrote the biblical books happen to have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. To summarize my assumptions, I list the top three as follows:

1. the biblical authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit, who is consistent with himself;
2. the biblical authors were literary geniuses who learned from one another;
3. the biblical authors have produced unified books that betray evidence of intentional arrangement.

Perhaps because I regularly talk and write about chiastic structures in biblical texts, I seem to regularly hear or read responses that amount to, "Really?" "Please." "Seriously?" In response, I would like to speak to the skeptical about how they might convince me to abandon what they seem to regard as useless nonsense.

2. *How to stop the madness.* Let me first make a humble request of those who doubt book-length chiastic structures: please examine the Scriptures to see if these things are so. Proposals should be evaluated on the basis of how well they match the words, phrases, themes, and message of the text. If chiastic proposals are *imposed on* the literature rather than being *demonstrated from* the reuse of key terms and phrases, they should be rejected.

If, however, a proposal accounts for the reuse of unique terms and phrases and explains the presence of otherwise inexplicably placed units, then in order to supplant the proposed chiasm as the author's intended literary structure, a better explanation of the positioning of the information is required. A proposal can be adopted as a working hypothesis when it accounts for the reuse of key terms and phrases, explains repetitions of events and themes, and provides a rationale for puzzling placements of material such as the references to the Baptist's testimony in John 1:6–8 and then again at 1:15, or when, for instance, it accounts for the strategic references to the disciples remembering or understanding only after the resurrection at John 2:22, 12:16, and 20:9.

Along these lines, in Genesis, the so called "doublets" are actually serving the literary structure of the chiastic form, and in Daniel chronological dislocations likewise allow the positioning of material to achieve the literary structure. The chiasm-skeptics must provide better, more persuasive suggestions as to why books are

[9] See, for example, Bultmann's commentary on John. Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Westminster John Knox, 1971).

arranged as we find them. It is incumbent upon those who wish to stop the madness of those who see chiasms everywhere to make a better proposal. Explain the data—demonstrate some other structure, some other concern that accounts for the details of the text in whole and in part in a more satisfying way. Just as "ancient people were stupid" is not persuasive, "I do not have the patience to examine this," or "I have not thought through the material this way" will not deliver me from my delirious enchantment with this fascinating literary device.

III. DISCERNING THE ARCHITECTURE OF A DISCOURSE

What is my procedure for examining first a passage and then the whole book in which it is found? We begin the inductive process by seeking to discern the smallest context, then moving out from smaller units to wider sections. My examination of these matters in John's Gospel involved copying and pasting the Greek text into a Word document, then working carefully through the whole, marking reused words and phrases in the same color font or highlight, inductively working up from the smallest thought units to the larger, then contemplating the relationships between them all. In the next section I summarize findings from this labor-intensive, time-consuming, most-rewarding process. Here I am trying to describe the process step by step.

The examination can be broken down into four steps, but the whole can be summarized as a meditative attempt to understand the parts in relationship to the whole. I am enumerating four steps, but there are countless decisions, considerations, and factors constantly being explored.

Step One: Determine the boundaries of micro-units, working up from there toward the boundaries of macro-units. Often these units will be marked by inclusios built of repetitions of words or phrases, or sometimes an inclusio will be formed by a parallel grammatical structure.[10] Alternatively, a series of units might be headed by the same phrase, or, as in the case of Psalms 25 and 34, acrostics that match one another in peculiar ways.[11] Because the biblical authors are not robotic, we must pay attention to their literary signals and have our eyes open to their artistic variations. The material is eclectic, and our examination must be sensitive to its contours.

Step Two: Once smaller units have been established by step one, we examine these for relationships between the statements within the units. We are both interpreting statements in their intended context and considering the possibility that those statements might be arranged in particular relationships with one another. As

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[10] Thomson writes, "Chiasmus may be said to be present in a passage if the text exhibits bilateral symmetry of four or more elements about a central axis, which may itself lie between two elements, or be a unique central element, the symmetry consisting of any combination of verbal, grammatical or syntactical elements, or, indeed, of ideas and concepts in a given pattern." Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, 26.

[11] For discussion, see ad loc. James M. Hamilton Jr., *Psalms Volume I: Psalms 1–72*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Lexham Academic, 2021).

we examine these units micro and macro, we should be aware that verbal repetitions are often employed by the biblical authors to indicate a unit's structure.

Step Three: Having achieved a working hypothesis concerning boundaries and structures of constituent units, the next step is to consider the units in relationship to one another. Is there a relationship between the way the book begins and the way it ends? Is there a second section that matches the second to last section? In steps one and two, we are looking at individual trees and paying the closest possible attention to them, in step three we are backing up to see how these trees stand in relationship to one another in the forest.

Step Four: This final step seeks to apply rigorous quality control and objective analysis to what we may have found in steps one through three. The determinative consideration is always the attempt to account for repetitions, whether of words or phrases or thematic parallels. We assume strategic intentionality and ask, Why did the author arrange the material as we find it? In step four, assuming we have arrived at an initial proposal, we are stress-testing our findings by asking if there might be other verbal, phrasal, grammatical, or thematic repetitions for which our proposal does not account, and which another proposal might better accommodate.

As a final observation on this process, I would note that the interpreter has to hold the particular words and phrases in mind in order to notice repetitions. In addition, the interpreter must understand the import of what those words and phrases communicate in order to discern thematic parallels. Analyzing the text of Scripture with this level of attention is, in my experience, the best way to study the text in the most thorough fashion. Having studied texts in this way, when I then read secondary literature, I often sense that scholars seem to spend more time reading other scholars than they do meditating on the primary source material.

IV. APPLYING THIS METHOD TO JOHN'S GOSPEL

1. *John's opening and closing sections*. Though we could break John 1:1–18 into smaller units such as 1:1–5, 1:6–8, and so on, we will be content here with the observation that many interpreters have rightly recognized a satisfying chiastic structure in John 1:1–18. We then meet the testimony of the Baptist in 1:19–28, before John marks the beginning of the next three units with the phrase "the next day" at 1:29, 1:35, and 1:43. We find the sequence broken by "And on the third day" at 2:1.

Are there rigorous, objective criteria that would enable us to determine whether the unit that begins at 2:1 should be grouped with what precedes or with what follows? The criteria that convince are those we have been considering—the use of repeated words, phrases, and themes to build inclusios. These inclusios are built sometimes at the level of individual words, sometimes phrases, sometimes whole lines or even pericopes. Consider again the similarities between John 2:1–12 and 4:43–54. The changing of water to wine (2:1–12) and the healing of the official's son (4:43–54) both take place at Cana, on the third day, and the two events unfold the same way—an initial request, which is rebuffed, which leads to a desperate plea, which leads to instructions from Jesus, then the miracle takes place out of view, and the report of it having happened is given. John enumerates these two

events "first" and "second," and both prompt belief. The enumeration of these two events as "first" and "second," with both happening in Cana and the second pointing back to the first provides particularly strong evidence that John intended his audience to think of the first when they read the second.

The similarities show that these two pericopes form an inclusio around John 2–4, so that at John 2:1 we begin a second section of John's Gospel. This likewise enables us to see John 1:1–51 as the Gospel's first section, John 2–4 as its second.

Having hypothesized that John 1 is a self-contained section, we then ask if there are correspondences between its first subunit, 1:1–18, and its final, 1:43–51. Both beginning and end refer to Moses (1:17; 1:45), and both have significant "dwelling place of God" imagery—Jesus is the word who "tabernacled among us" in 1:14, and he is the new stairway to heaven at Bethel, the house of God, in 1:51.

We then examine the second and second to last units, 1:19–28 and 1:35–42, and here we find the Baptist testifying in both: to the hostile in 1:19–28, to the receptive in 1:35–42. This leaves 1:29–34 as the central unit in John 1, and there the Spirit comes down upon the tabernacling word, the new Bethel, just as he did upon the tabernacle in Exodus 40 and the temple in 1 Kings 8. The chiasm can be summarized as follows:

1:1–18, The Word Tabernacled in Glory
    1:19–28, The Voice Crying in the Wilderness
        1:29–34, The Descent of the Spirit to Remain on Jesus
    1:35–42, The Baptist's Disciples Follow Jesus
1:43–51, The True Bethel of Whom Moses and the Prophets Wrote

The method is simple but requires extreme attention to the text, to the point of holding key phrases in mind so their reuse is noted. It requires a clear mental grasp of themes and content, so that relationships can be considered, and it demands an ability to discern the eclectic ways authors mark the beginnings and endings of units and sections, sometimes with inclusios, sometimes with a series of units headed with the same expression (e.g., "the next day" at 1:29; 1:35; and 1:43).

Having arrived at this understanding of how the Gospel begins, we consider how it ends. With the last words of the Gospel providing its endpoint, our first question is where its last section begins? A lot could be said about this, but in my analysis there is a second-to-last section of the Gospel that closely corresponds to the second, John 2–4. Like John 2–4, which begins and ends in Cana, has Jesus speaking of himself as the temple that will be destroyed and rebuilt in three days, and presents the disciples remembering and understanding after the resurrection (2:19–22), John 18:1–20:18 begins and ends in a garden. In this section Jesus is the temple crucified and raised, and John explains that when he and Peter got to the tomb, "as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead" (20:9, ESV; cf. 2:22). Not only does this section, 18:1–20:19 begin and end in a garden, in both the beginning and ending units Jesus asks the question: "Whom do you seek?" He says this to those who have come to arrest him in 18:4 and 7, and he says it to Mary in 20:15. In between this inclusio, the temple of his body was

torn down and raised on the third day. As another point of contact between John 2–4 and 18–20, the mother of Jesus appears only in these two sections of John's Gospel, and in both of these sections she is addressed by Jesus with the vocative, "woman" (2:4; 19:26). One could be forgiven for suspecting the author wanted his audience to think of the first instance when they encountered the second.

I thus hypothesize that the second section of the Gospel, John 2–4, stands across from its second to last section, John 18:1–20:18. What do we find if we then propose that the final section of the Gospel begins at John 20:19 and continues to its last verse? Would John 20:19–21:25 correspond to John 1:1–51?

Consider these similarities between these first and last units of the Gospel:

- The Spirit came upon Jesus to remain upon him in the central unit of John 1 (1:29–34), and in the first unit of the Gospel's last section, the risen Jesus imparts the Spirit to his followers, breathing upon them, as though they now partake of the new creation (20:19–23; cf. 20:22; Gen 2:7; Ezek 37:9).
- Near the end of the first section of the Gospel, Jesus convinced a skeptical Nathanael (1:45–49). At a corresponding point in the final section of the Gospel, Jesus convinces a skeptical Thomas (20:24–29).
- In John 1:35, we find John the Baptist near water, the Jordan river, "with two of his disciples" (ESV), and in that context we read of a small group of disciples: Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael, and the beloved disciple might also have been present. In John 21:2, we read of Jesus revealing himself near water, by the sea, to a small group of disciples that includes Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, "and two others of his disciples" (ESV). The same Greek expression appears in John 1:35 and 21:2, ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ δύο, and these are the only two instances of this phrase in the Gospel.
- The first section of the Gospel has these disciples recognizing who Jesus is in 1:43–51, "We have found him," and the same thing happens at the end, when from the fishing boat, "that disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'" (21:7, ESV).
- John the Baptist repeatedly testifies to Jesus in the Gospel's first section (1:6–8, 15, 19–28, 29–34, 35–36), and John the Evangelist likewise testifies to Jesus in the last (20:30–31; 21:24).
- The opening words of the Gospel correspond to its closing. John's Gospel famously ends with the assertion that if everything Jesus did were written down, the world itself would not contain the books (21:25). In view of John 1:3, "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made" (ESV), this has to be the case.

We can summarize what we have so far as follows:

John 1:1–51, The Spirit Comes Down on the Tabernacled Word
    John 2–4, From Cana to Cana: Destroy this Temple
    John 18:1–20:18, From Garden to Garden: In Three Days Raised
John 20:19–21:25, The Spirit Given to the Disciples

2. *The middle sections.* To this point in our overview, we have established boundaries for the first, second, second-to-last, and last sections of the Gospel. Let us turn our attention to its third, third-to-last, and central sections.

The third section begins in John 5, when Jesus heals the man at the pool of Bethesda. In the ensuing controversy he declares, "An 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" (John 5:25, ESV). This very thing happened when Jesus went to the tomb in John 11 and "cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out" (11:43, ESV). The announcement that the dead will hear his voice and live, and the realization of that very thing happening at the raising of Lazarus, bookends all the material between John 5:1 and 11:44.

The third-to-last section of the Gospel begins when the Greeks want to see Jesus in 12:20, in response to which Jesus announces, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23, ESV). This statement has obvious resonance with the opening words of the prayer of Jesus in John 17, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you" (17:1, ESV). The third-to-last unit of the Gospel thus begins at 12:20 and continues through 17:26.

This leaves a central section of the Gospel, which would begin at 11:45 and continue through 12:19. Here too we find a kind of inclusio, as 11:45 begins with the assertion that many Jews had believed in Jesus, and then in 11:48 his opponents express the concern, "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him" (ESV). This unit ends in 11:53 with the opponents planning to put Jesus to death.

The corresponding unit at the end of this central section (12:9–19) inverts these by beginning with the opponents planning to put Lazarus to death (12:10) and ending with those opponents saying to one another in 12:19, "Look, the world has gone after him" (ESV). Note the inverted parallelism of these beginning and ending statements:

11:48, everyone will believe in him
    11:53, plans to put Jesus to death
    12:10, plans to put Lazarus to death
12:19, the world has gone after him

We will discuss the two central units of the central section of John's Gospel, 11:54–57 and 12:1–8, below, but from what we have seen to this point we are in position to summarize the sections of the Gospel of John as follows:

John 1:1–51, The Spirit Comes Down on the Tabernacled Word
    John 2–4, From Cana to Cana: Destroy this Temple
        John 5–11, In Public, among Crowds, at Feasts
            John 11:45–12:19, Rejection, Reception, Temple Fulfillment
        John 12–17, In Private, with Disciples, at the Last Passover
    John 18:1–20:18, From Garden to Garden: In Three Days Raised
John 20:19–21:25, The Spirit Given to the Disciples

With the broad sections of John's Gospel marked out by these wide-angle inclusios, let us look at each of these sections in a bit more detail. We begin with the third section, John 5–11.

a. John 5–11, in public, with crowds, at feasts. John 5, 6, and 7 all begin with the same phrase, "After this" (Μετὰ ταῦτα in 5:1 and 6:1, Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα at 7:1). In addition, the opening statements of each chapter identify where and when the events and teachings in the chapter happen: in Jerusalem at an unnamed feast in 5:1; near the sea of Galilee at Passover in 6:1–4; and from Galilee to Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths in 7:1–2 (cf. 7:1–10). The events in John 8 seem to continue in the same time and place introduced in John 7, though the conflict becomes more direct. John 9 sets no new time and place, but the whole chapter deals with the healing of the man born blind, forming a self-contained unit. Throughout John 10 Jesus speaks as the Good Shepherd, and 10:22 sets the time as the feast of dedication, the place as Jerusalem. John 11:1–44 deals with the raising of Lazarus. The units of material in John 5–11 are straightforward and easily distinguished from one another.

When we consider them in relationship to one another, first and last naturally correspond: Jesus heals the man at the pool of Bethesda (an anticipation of resurrection) then speaks of how he will raise the dead in John 5; and he heals Lazarus by raising him from the dead in John 11. John 6 and 10 likewise naturally correspond: Jesus feeds the five thousand and teaches, with several references to Moses in John 6; and then he identifies himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10. John 7 and 9 correspond to one another in unique and intriguing ways: In both passages there is discussion of what "some said" and what "others said."

- John 7:12 (ESV), "And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, 'He is a good man,' others said, 'No, he is leading the people astray.'"
  (οἱ μὲν ἔλεγον ὅτι ἀγαθός ἐστιν, ἄλλοι [δὲ] ἔλεγον· οὔ, ἀλλὰ πλανᾷ τὸν ὄχλον.)
- John 9:9 (ESV), "Some said, 'It is he.' Others said, 'No, but he is like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.'
  (ἄλλοι ἔλεγον ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν, ἄλλοι ἔλεγον· οὐχί, ἀλλὰ ὅμοιος αὐτῷ ἐστιν. ἐκεῖνος ἔλεγεν ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι.)

In both John 7 and 9, Jesus is somewhat evasive. In John 7 he first says that he is not going up to the feast in 7:8 (probably meaning he will not do something like a triumphal entry), and then goes to it in private in 7:10. People are sent to arrest him in 7:32, but they do not do it (7:45). In the midst of this is a discussion about where Jesus goes and from where he came (7:33–36, 52). In John 9 we find similar features. Jesus heals the man born blind (9:1–8), then slips off the scene (9:9–34), and only returns at the end of the chapter (9:35–41). Again there is discussion of where Jesus comes from (9:29). Note similarities between 7:27 and 9:29.

- John 7:27 (ESV), "But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from."
  (ἀλλὰ τοῦτον οἴδαμεν πόθεν ἐστίν· ὁ δὲ χριστὸς ὅταν ἔρχηται οὐδεὶς γινώσκει πόθεν ἐστίν.)
- John 9:29 (ESV), "We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."
  (ἡμεῖς οἴδαμεν ὅτι Μωϋσεῖ λελάληκεν ὁ θεός, τοῦτον δὲ οὐκ οἴδαμεν πόθεν ἐστίν.)

John 8 stands apart in reporting the most direct confrontation between Jesus and his opponents. They imply that he was born of sexual immorality in 8:41 and say that he is a Samaritan with a demon in 8:48 (so also 52), before taking up stones to stone him in 8:59. For his part, Jesus tells them they are of their father the devil, the murderer from the beginning and father of lies (8:44). Nowhere else in the Gospel are the mutual indictments and accusations so heated.

Given how John 8 stands across from John 15, we should note that in 8:31 Jesus says, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples" (cf. 15:7).

The chiastic structure of John 5–11 can be summarized as follows:

John 5, Healing of the man at the pool, the dead will hear and live
  John 6, Jesus the new and better Moses who feeds the five thousand
    John 7, Some said …Others said … Where he comes from
      John 8, Disciples abide in Jesus's Word; opponents are of their father the devil
    John 9, Some said … Others said … Where he comes from
  John 10, Jesus the Good Shepherd
John 11, Raising of Lazarus, the dead hear and live

b. *John 12–17, in private, with disciples, at final Passover.* We turn our attention to the third-to-last section, John 12–17. We have noted how 12:20–17:26 is framed on the front end by the declaration that the hour has come in 12:23, on the back end by the same at the beginning of Jesus's prayer in 17:1. This section of the Gospel thus has an "hour has come/glorify" inclusio around it. Within that outer frame, we find corresponding sections that center on Jesus's instructions that his disciples are to abide in him by abiding in his word in 15:1–15. As just noted, this aligns the center of John 5–11 with the center of John 12–17. Consider these two statements:

- John 8:31–32 (ESV), "So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"
- John 15:7–8 (ESV), "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

The sections that frame John 15:1–15 are both concerned with equipping the disciples to deal with the opposition they will face from the world after the departure of Jesus. The teaching in John 14 is framed by the opening "Let not your hearts be troubled" in 14:1 and the repetition of that idea near the end of the discourse at 14:27. On the end of the central teaching on abiding in Christ (15:1–15), Jesus explains to his disciples in 15:16–27 that the world will treat them the way it treated him. Rather than letting their hearts be troubled (14:1), they should abide in Christ (15:1–15); this will bring them through the world's opposition (15:16–27).

Jesus symbolically prepares his disciples for his departure in John 13 by washing their feet, and he intellectually prepares them for his departure in John 16 through what he teaches. Several similar expressions suggest that these sections are to be understood as standing across from one another. For instance, near the end of John 13, Peter asks where Jesus is going (13:36). Inverting the order, near the beginning of John 16, Jesus asserts that no one asks where he is going (16:5). This is not an "aporia" or a historical difficulty but a marker of literary structure. John knows that when his audience reads 16:5 their minds will automatically go to 13:36, and that is precisely what he wants them to do because, having worked their way from the front end "hour has come/glorify" inclusio in John 12 to the central statement in 15:1–15, they are now working their way out to the back end "hour has come/glorify" inclusio in John 17. John is giving his audience literary signposts whereby they can find their way in the majestic architecture of his cathedral of a Gospel. Another similarity between John 13 and 16 can be seen in the mini conversations that take place in both sections in response to what Jesus says. Jesus sparks a conversation in 13:21 by announcing that one of them will betray him. He sparks a similar conversation in 16:16 by saying that in a little while they will see him no longer, then again after a little while they will see him. A close reading of John 13:21–26 and 16:16–22 in the context of John 12–17 will bring out how distinct these two units are from the rest of the section and how similar they are to one another. To add to their similarity, immediately after the departure of Judas, Jesus gives the new commandment in 13:31–35. Immediately after the similar conversation in John 16, Jesus describes the new access his followers will have to the Father in prayer in 16:23–24.

Much more could be said, but we can summarize John 12–17 as follows:

John 12:20–50, The hour has come for the son of man to be glorified
    John 13, Jesus washes his disciples' feet to prepare them for his departure
        John 14, Let not your heart be troubled
            John 15:1–15, Abide in Christ by abiding in his word
        John 15:16–27, When the world hates you
    John 16, Jesus teaches his disciples to prepare them for his departure
John 17:1–26, The hour has come for the son of man to be glorified

We can also summarize John 5–11 and 12–17 by contrasting their settings and participants. Whereas in John 5–11 Jesus is in public, among crowds, at a series

of feasts, in John 12–17 he is in private, with only his disciples, at the last Passover. As we turn to a brief discussion of the literary center of John's Gospel, consider the pedimental steps up to and out from it:

John 1:1–51, The Spirit Comes Down on the Tabernacled Word
John 2–4, From Cana to Cana: Destroy This Temple
John 5–11, In Public, among Crowds, at Feasts
John 12–17, In Private, with Disciples, at Passover
John 18:1–20:18, From Garden to Garden: In Three Days Raised
John 20:19–21:25, The Spirit Given to the Disciples

3. *John's literary center: 11:54–12:8.* To this point we have discussed all but the central section of the Gospel, which begins at 11:45 and runs through 12:19. The center points of chiastic structures often reprise their beginning and forecast their end. At the beginning of John's Gospel, the Baptist testified that all might believe (1:7). At its end, John the Evangelist wrote that his audience might believe (20:31). The opening chiastic structure in John 1:1–18, centers on the rejection and reception of Jesus, and the central section of the chiastic structure of the whole Gospel does likewise. The decisive issue is how people will respond to Jesus. Will they reject him like his opponents, or will they receive and believe in him like his disciples?

As noted above, the inclusio around this central section pertains to the concern of the opponents in 11:48 that "everyone will believe in him" (ESV), and their chagrin in 12:19 that "the world has gone after him" (ESV). This central section of the Gospel is itself composed of four units. The first and last have significant prophecies that are fulfilled, and the central two depict some rejecting and others receiving Jesus.

In the first of these four central units, John 11:45–53, Caiaphas prophesies unwittingly that it is better that one die than that the whole nation perish. Standing across from this in the last of the four in 12:9–19 John presents the prophecies fulfilled at the triumphal entry from Psalm 118:25–26 and Zechariah 9:9.

Within these framing prophecies, the twofold center of the central unit of the chiastic structure of John's Gospel has a public and a private component. In the public scene in 11:54–57, some have gone to the feast "to purify themselves" (11:55, ESV) and are looking for Jesus, while his enemies want to arrest him (11:57). In the private scene, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus have given a dinner for Jesus in 12:1–8, and at that dinner Judas objects to Mary anointing Jesus's feet and wiping them with her hair.

Jesus has manifestly come as the fulfillment of the temple (1:14, 51; 2:16–21). In what looks like a callback to the incense filling the holy of holies on the day of atonement (Lev 16:12–13), when Mary anoints the feet of Jesus, "The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume" (John 12:3b, ESV). That fragrance is the aroma of life to those who receive Jesus, who give a dinner for him (12:2), and the aroma of death to those like Judas, the thief who took from the money bag, who reject him (12:6).

John 1:1–51, The Spirit Comes Down on the Tabernacled Word
John 2–4, From Cana to Cana: Destroy this Temple
John 5–11, In Public, among Crowds, at Feasts
John 11:45–12:19, The Rejection and Reception of the Son of God
John 12–17, In Private, with Disciples, at Passover
John 18:1–20:18, From Garden to Garden: In Three Days Raised
John 20:19–21:25, The Spirit Given to the Disciples

V. CONCLUSION

God reveals himself to us in his Word. He inspired human beings to write the books that have been recognized as being inspired by the Holy Spirit. For us to understand what they wrote, we must attend to the literary structures they employed to communicate their message. These literary structures deepen our understanding and appreciation of both the biblical-theological interpretation of earlier Scripture and the theological meaning of the texts. In my opinion, evangelical biblical scholars should focus attention on these three interlocking avenues of further study: (1) literary structure in the service of (2) a biblical theological understanding of the use of the Old Testament in the Old Testament and the Old Testament in the New that we might fully appreciate (3) the theological significance of the teaching intended by the human authors of Scripture. All that we might know God.