

The Gospel of John: A Division of the Text

1:1-18 Prologue

A. The Seven Days and the First Sign: Wedding at Cana

B. First Passover and the Second Sign: Jesus responds to a request when someone is dying.

C. Unnamed "feast" and the Third Sign: Jesus breaks the Sabbath

D. Second Passover and the Fourth Sign

C'. Feast of Booths and the Fifth Sign: Jesus breaks the Sabbath

B'. Feast of Dedication and the Sixth Sign: Jesus responds to a request when someone is dying

A'. Third Passover and the Seventh Sign: The Hour of Glory

1:19-28 **Day 1**

1:29-34 **Day 2** (The next day)

1:35-42 **Day 3** (The next day)

1:43-51 **Day 4** (The next day)

A 2:1-11 **Day 7** (The third day) / 1st Sign / Wedding at Cana

B 2:12-3:21 Purging of the Temple at Passover / Nicodemus (Jesus went up to Jerusalem)

C 3:22-36 The witness of John the Baptism (After this Jesus and his disciples came into the region of Judea)

B' 4:1-42 Woman at the well (Jesus left Judea and headed toward Galilee through Samaria)

A' 4:43-54 Official's son / 2nd Sign at Cana (Jesus left Samaria and came to Galilee)

5:1-47 Healing of the lame man on the Sabbath (Jesus went to Jerusalem)

6:1-71 Multiplication of the loaves and fish (Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee)

7:1-8:59 Argument with "the Jews" at the feast (Jesus went to Jerusalem)

9:1-10:21 Healing of the man born blind

10:22-11:53 Raising of Lazarus (Now it was the feast of the Dedication)

12:1-20:31 Hour of Glory (Jesus departed to a deserted region)

21:1-26 Epilogue: Peter and John

Some notes on this division:

There are seven "signs" in the Gospel of John, with the last and greatest being the paschal mystery. The Jewish liturgical calendar plays a large role in the Gospel, with six feasts mentioned by name. While time certainly makes sense as a divider of the text, place is another reasonable divider: the journeys of Jesus from region to region break it up into chunks. The above division results from cutting the gospel according to Jesus' journeys, with two exceptions: 2:1-4:54 seem to record more than one journey, but in fact coalesce into one journey from Galilee down to Jerusalem and back again; 10:22 begins a new section by a break in time, a jump from the feast of Booths to the feast of Dedication, but it is not clear that the location changes. The fact that a division according to place lines up with a division according to time (one feast per journey) and a division according to signs (one sign per section) gives it an initial plausibility. The fact that it results in seven parts is also evidence, because John seems fond of the number seven; note that section B is itself a chiasm consisting of seven parts.

A-A'. John names the seven days in A by referring to "the next day" and "the next day" and "the following day," which puts one at the fourth day, and then "the third day." If we count the three days as not including the fourth day, then the Wedding at Cana happens on the seventh day (otherwise it would be the sixth). Similarly, chapter 12 begins by saying that "Jesus, six days before the Passover, went to Bethany": here again, if the six days are exclusive of the Passover itself, then the death of Jesus occurs on the seventh day. There are parallels between the Wedding at Cana and the crucifixion scene, for example the presence of Mary in each, the denial of the hour ("my hour has not yet come") and the arrival of the hour, the wedding and the water and blood which pour from the side of Jesus (long connected by the Fathers with the Eve proceeding from Adam's side).

B-B'. In both of these signs Jesus is asked to come because someone is dying. In the first, he heals right away without coming; in the second, he delays so that the person will be dead and then he comes to heal. Section B is itself a chiasm within which A and A' are numbered by the author as "the first sign" and "the second sign" at Cana; the unbelieving Jewish leader Nicodemus contrasts with the believing Samaritan woman; and John's witness points to the general trend of section B, that Jesus is "increasing."

C-C'. In these two signs, Jesus heals that traditional pair, the blind and the lame. Both times, he violates the Jewish understanding of the Sabbath and angers the Jews. After Jesus' "increase" in section B, now he begins to encounter opposition.

D. Of all the signs, this is the one that most clearly points to the final sign, explicitly developing Passover themes and the idea of Jesus' death. This is the point where Judas is first mentioned as a future traitor, seemingly because Judas first begins to turn away from Jesus after the "hard teaching" about eating flesh and drinking blood.