Before the “one sit” reading of John – which I achieved in two sittings (due to time and attention constraints) – I had never read all the Gospel of John. I may have heard just about every part of John, but never in one, contiguous reading. Prior to getting started, I pondered the notion of how John was to be read. The epistles in the New Testament were obviously written to a specific individual (or audience) with the intent of instruction and thus intended to be read at once. Of course, not all books in the Bible are organized like this. Arguably, the Law was not meant to be read over each time you needed to remind yourself of one small piece of the puzzle. True, God’s people were to reread and recite and memorize the Law, but it was too much for one reading. Some narratives also could be considered “too long” to be one-sit readings. Was the Gospel of John meant to be read all at once or was it small, vignettes of the life and teachings of Christ on earth?

To make my reading easier, I decided to remove all subheadings and chapter and verse numbers that were added in the 16th century for Biblical reference, beginning with the Geneva Bible for English readers. The task was accomplished easily with the aid of pattern-matching on a computer (original and edited versions available here: http://n5dux.com/files/BIBL/BIBL4963/ ). Originally, I removed line spacing in order to run the text together similar to the original Koine Greek, but this proved to be more of a hindrance than the chapter and verse numbers.

Once I began reading, I could quickly spot the somewhat cryptic and confusing wording of John. Right away, John dives headlong into a very deep and symbolic bit of theology that may seem overwhelming and confusing to a new believer. Surely there is more meaning in the original language that resonates with the original intended audience.

Continuing on, we learn of “John the Baptist”, though he is never referred to as such in the Gospel of John. At first, I was a bit thrown off. “What John is he talking about? The *author* John or someone else?” John the Baptist was Christ’s forerunner. “Prepare ye the way of the Lord” is the famous quotation from Mark. John does just this, he prepares the way. By exploring John the Baptist’s position and his relationship to the Messiah, I think sets a tone for the rest of the book.

John really hits the ground running. He does not cover the back story of Jesus very much. (There isn’t much of a Christmas story to be gleaned from the book of John.) John delves right into the “signs”, or miracles, that Jesus performs during his ministry. He starts with the water-to-wine miracle at the wedding in Cana and hits some of Jesus’ most famous miracles such as the feeding of the 5000 and raising Lazerus.

It seems that John does not focus on Jesus’ actions so much as his relationships and dialog with people. It was pointed out that John does outline Jesus’ travels through the land from Jerusalem to Galilea and back, whereas the synoptic gospels seem to just show Jesus at one location then another with little said about how he traveled or what happened along the way, such as John’s account of Jesus speaking to the woman at the well in Samaria.

In John’s overview of the dialog among the people, he manages to capture the essence of Christ’s teachings and his various explanations of things to come. They seemed cryptic and confusing when he first spoke to the disciples about who he was, what his purpose on earth was and how he was to die as a sacrifice but return. They did not fully understand until he did return.

John also doesn’t fully explain the occurrences during the so called Passion of Christ. He records the dialog of the proceedings, but does not explain how and why events happened or the timing of the events very well. He seems to blow through the details of the trial and crucifixion of Christ. He mentions the hasty burial by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. One fact I picked up in John’s account that is overlooked by most contemporary portrayals is that the disciples and women had to stoop down to peer inside the tomb. John also says that Mary saw the two angels sitting *inside* the tomb where Jesus had laid. Typically the scene is depicting a large stone with a large entry into the tomb and the angels sit atop the stone. I found John’s account interesting and oft overlooked.

John also, surprisingly, does not cover much of what Christ did *after* the resurrection. Sure that’s all he had to say, but John does not discuss Pentecost or the Transfiguration. Perhaps John was written *after* the other Gospels and he knew full well what was covered in the others, and he was setting out to fill in some of the gaps of what he thought was missing from the other accounts. The Gospel of John truly is the story of Christ’s ministry on earth from start to finish with little coming before or after his three years of ministry.