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978-1-107-41623-9 - Disarrangements in the: Fourth Gospel  
F. Warburton Lewis  
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## DISARRANGEMENTS IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

IT is generally understood among students of the New Testament that the text of the Fourth Gospel has suffered by disarrangement, but surprisingly little notice has been given to the subject. One explores wide reaches of the Johannine literature only to find no reference to the subject.

What has been written directly on the subject at all usefully will be found referred to, for the greater part, in the pages following. There is no reference to Wellhausen's suggestions in his recent *Erweiterungen* only because he has not followed fruitful lines of investigation.

This Essay is really a sequel to the relevant section of Spitta's work<sup>1</sup> referred to throughout. But even Spitta has only dealt with a part of the subject. I have gone over his ground independently, and added what must be termed newly discovered passages that have been displaced from their original position. It is only such passages that have place in the present investigation. For this reason there is no notice of Spitta's discussion of the alleged disorder in XVIII 12–28, or of any such supposed disorder in the Prologue. Our subject is that of passages now found in positions which they did not originally occupy, or which they were not meant to occupy by the writer. This alternative it is necessary to state

<sup>1</sup> *Zur Geschichte und Litteratur des Urchristenthums*, von Friedrich Spitta, pp. 156–204.

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for completeness' sake, for it is not possible to prove whether the disorder arose in the disruption of some early copy of the Gospel after it had been completed, or whether it was caused by original ill-arrangement of the writer's material. It will conduce to clearness, if we take the former as a working hypothesis.

Then an attempt is made to re-construct the original order of the Gospel, and to show the bearing of the re-arrangement on the subject of the chronology of the Life of Christ, as well as upon, in each case, the exegesis of the passages and their contexts.

The name "John" is used without prejudice to the question of authorship. Our investigation is really preliminary to all other investigations except those of a still more purely textual character.

Finally, I would take Spitta's words for my own, when, after speaking of attempts to re-arrange the Prologue as springing from "the idea that the train of thought in question did not agree with that which the commentator expected to find," he adds on his own behalf:—"My hope of a friendly reception of this hypothesis rests mainly on this, that the motive that leads to it is in no way concerned with the niceties of a commentator in reviewing S. John's train of thought, but on peculiarities in the text which strike the eye of a layman. I hope also to be able to show that a knowledge of the original connection is not worthless in considering these extracts, nor worthless for the whole Gospel."

It may be added that of the passages to be examined, Spitta only deals with XIII–XVII, VII 15–24 and the *pericope adulterae*.

## VI.

We begin with the position of VI.

It is not surprising to find that the present position of this chapter has for long been a subject of question and discussion, though it is surprising that the needed and inevitable re-arrangement has not been seriously taken into consideration in the study of the chronology of the Life of Christ.

As long ago as the fourteenth century a re-arrangement in the order of the chapters was suggested by Ludolphus de Saxonia in his *Vita Christi Evangelicis et scriptoribus orthodoxis excerpta*<sup>1</sup>. But even to the present day the obvious misplacement has not been duly recognised in its bearing on such a question, e.g., as that of the “feast” mentioned in V.

The position is as follows :—

IV brings Jesus to Galilee (43–54) and ends with words that lead us to expect a period of ministry in Galilee: “having come out of Judaea into Galilee.”  
 But

V inconsequently brings Him back to Jerusalem, and leaves Him there. Whereas

<sup>1</sup> J. P. Norris, *Journal of Philology* (1871), vol. III, pp. 107–112.

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VI opens in Galilee. And not only is Jesus in Galilee instead of being in Jerusalem where V left Him, but we find Him in the *first* verse crossing from one side of the Lake of Galilee to the other—i.e. VI 1 actually presupposes that He is in Galilee, whereas the now preceding chapter only speaks of Him as being in Jerusalem.

Again: VII opens with a statement that Jesus would not walk any longer in Judaea, and therefore resorted to Galilee, where, according to the preceding chapter, He already was. This chapter, therefore, is like Chapter VI in presupposing in its opening words precisely the situation that is not found in the narrative immediately foregoing.

All this confusion is ended by the simple transposition of V and VI. This gives the natural order of the chapters

IV  
VI  
V  
VII

Christ's return to Galilee (IV 43) is followed by what IV 54 leads us to expect, a period of work in Galilee (VI 1-2) culminating in the crisis of the Galilean ministry (4-66).

And the breach with His disciples ("many" VI 66) and with the people (VI *passim*) is followed by withdrawal, and ultimately by a period of ministry in Jerusalem (V and VII).

Moreover we can by this re-arrangement, if we desire, give the natural interpretation to IV 35 ("Yet four months, and then cometh harvest"): Jesus re-

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turned in December, and His resumed ministry in Galilee (45 ff.) culminated in the dramatic and critical crisis of VI four months later at the Passover of A.D. 28.

And we are now free to regard the “feast” of V as the subsequent Pentecost, if we find that this accords with other facts and considerations.

The full chronological import of the re-arrangement must however be left to a subsequent stage of the investigation.

The result thus reached is still more strongly confirmed by the initial facts of the next section.

## V and VII.

(i) By the transposition of V and VI thus made, V and VII are brought into conjunction.

Investigation shows that this conjunction is confirmed by internal evidence, some such interval as that between the Feasts of Pentecost and Tabernacles being the utmost that can be supposed to have elapsed in view of the facts that VII takes up the situation of V and carries it on, and that the attitude of the "Jews" to Christ revealed in VII is the sequel of that in V.

More particularly :—

VII 1 accounts for Christ's departure from Judaea by saying that "the Jews were seeking to *kill* Him."

This exactly answers to the situation of V, for in V 16 persecution breaks out, and in ver. 18 we have the first record of the design to kill Him.

If we may anticipate a result which we shall reach in a later part of this section, V really has its conclusion in a paragraph now misplaced, viz. VII 15–24, and though the present argument does not depend upon this replacement, it is better to take it into consideration in tracing the development of the situation.

We thus have clearly before us the course of events recorded in V and VII: the outbreak of persecution (V 16) develops into the settled policy

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of violence (18), and this intention to kill becomes known to Jesus, and publicly spoken of (VII 19, 20). With this knowledge of His life being in danger, Jesus leaves Judaea and returns to Galilee (VII 1). Acting in accordance therewith, He in due time, on the advent of the Feast of Tabernacles, exercises great circumspection in going up to Jerusalem, avoiding the accustomed way and time, and appearing in the city only after His enemies have ceased to keep watch for Him (VII 2–14). Once in the midst of the people, He is comparatively safe. But the development of the situation that we are tracing is immediately confirmed and carried forward in the next verse (omitting 15–24)—i.e. in VII 25: His advent in the Temple (14) is at once greeted by the amazed question: “Is not this He whom they are seeking to kill?”

This clear development of events, proceeding, as it does, through the remaining part of VII, and carried on, as we shall see, into the connected chapter VIII, is precisely the confirmation we need of this re-arrangement of the chapters.

On the other hand it is completely broken up by the present insertion of VI between V and VII, an insertion entailing an interval of many months, even of eighteen months, if the “feast” of V is taken to be a Passover.

(ii) The paragraph VII 15–24, referred to above in anticipation, is out of place where it is now found, and entirely in place at the end of V.

This is taken from F. Spitta’s *Zur Geschichte und Litteratur des Urchristenthums*, 199 ff., and is accepted

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by E. D. Burton<sup>1</sup>, by J. Moffat<sup>2</sup>, and by others, among them being Wendt<sup>3</sup>.

Investigation again leads us to see the naturalness of the new order.

In the first place, the consecutiveness of VII in itself is greatly enhanced by the removal of a wedge of foreign matter: when verses 15–24 are deleted, verse 25 exactly follows upon verses 1–14. There is no need to labour this point.

In the second place, VII 15–24 is obviously part of V. Reading the narrative thus: V + VII 15–24, we see that:—

(1) VII 15 (“How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?”) exactly follows and answers to V 47, with its reference to the “writings of Moses,” and to the knowledge of them displayed (39, 45–47).

(2) VII 16–19<sup>a</sup> takes up and completes the argument of V 30–47: “My teaching is not Mine, but His that sent Me” (16) takes up V 30 f. as that in its turn had taken up V 19; VII 17 as surely gathers up the contention of V 37–40, just as the verses following in each chapter, V 18 and VII 41–44, answer to each other in their treatment of the subject of true and false glory; and the immediate parallel is closed by the references to Moses and his law in VII 19<sup>a</sup> and V 45–47. Thus the whole of V 30–47 is taken up and brought to an argumentative climax in VII 16–19<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Biblical World*, vol. XIII, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Historical New Testament*, ad loc. The re-arrangement is taken into his translation.

<sup>3</sup> *The Gospel according to St John* (pp. 85 ff., Eng. trans.).



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(3) Ver. 19<sup>b</sup> (“Why are ye seeking to kill Me?”) standing where it now does, is in the air, there being nothing in the preceding narrative since the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem (14) to which it can refer. The question is in the present tense, and does not refer to an action of months ago. Moreover it is “impossible” just before VII 25: “Is not this He whom they are seeking to kill?”—a question entirely out of place immediately after Christ’s open question in ver. 19<sup>b</sup> quoted above, and equally so after ver. 13. But with our paragraph replaced at the end of V, the question, which is in the present tense, naturally refers to ver. 18 of that chapter, “the Jews sought the more to kill Him.” We see that V 18 and VII 19<sup>b</sup> are contemporaneous.

(4) Even more obvious are the references in VII 21 (“I did one work”) and ver. 23 (“I made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath”) to the healing of the blind man on the Sabbath in V 2–9, and to the scandal which arose subsequently.

(5) And VII 24 (“Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment”) forms the conclusion of the entire paragraph (V 30–47 + VII 15–24), and echoes the words of the opening sentence: “as I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous” (V 30).

It is therefore clear that we have not here, in V 19–47 and VII 15–24, two passages separated by five months, at least, one of them spoken at the Feast of Pentecost<sup>1</sup>, the other at the Feast of Tabernacles,

<sup>1</sup> Under the arrangement of chapters as they now stand in the New Testament, with VI between V and VII, the gap was of course wider,

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and to diverse audiences. The references we have examined and the completion of the argument of V in the other passages demand that we regard VII 15-24 as the conclusion of the fifth chapter.

I regard as unfounded the suggestion that in VII verses 45-52 should precede 37-44 on the ground that 45 should fall on the same day as 32. It is not necessary to regard 32 as pointing to the intention of immediate arrest, but only to an arrest on some opportune occasion during the feast. So the report of the officers that no such opportunity seemed to present itself is not in place until after the end of the feast, where indeed we now find it, rightly following "the last day" (37 f.).

So far then our re-arrangement of chapters is:—

IV

VI

V + VII 15-24

VII 1-14, 25-52

These chapters are not yet complete, but, without anticipating, we may now garner our first result in the field of the chronology of the Gospels.

We have these dates clearly before us:—

VI . . . . .	Passover A.D. 28.
	Mk. VI 30 f., Lk. IX 10 f.
V + VII 15-24 .	Pentecost
VII 1-14, 25-52	Tabernacles
XII-XIX . . . .	Passover A.D. 29.

at its narrowest seven months in extent, the latest possible date for V being the Feast of Purim; at its widest, eighteen months.