





**2018**



# **READING JOHN**

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# SEQUENCE

- Reading John 3:1-15
- Symbolic Narratives in John
- The layout of John 4
- Nicodemus?
- Synoptic links
- Commentary
- And so...
- Prayer

# SYMBOLIC NARRATIVES IN JOHN

**Stage 1**     *Foundational Image or 'Sign'*

**Stage 2**     *Misunderstanding*

**Stage 3**     *Struggle for Understanding*

**Stage 4**     Outcome

(i) Attainment of Understanding

(ii) Rejection of Symbolic Understanding

**Stage 5**     *Confession of Faith or Statement of Rejection*

# JOHN 3: LAYOUT 1

**Introduction:** Jesus' knowledge of the human heart (2:23-25)

## Scene 1: Nicodemus' quest

## Scene 2: John's witness

Setting (1-2)

Setting (22-24)

First major Amen saying: birth from above (3-10)

Dispute over baptism (25-26)

Second major Amen saying: faith in the Son of Man (11-15); choice of Jesus (27-30) of light and darkness (16-21)

**Summary:** faith in Jesus as the one "from above" (31-36)

# JOHN 3: LAYOUT 2

## Jerusalem

Story: 2:23-3:1

Dialogue: 3:2-12

Monologue: 3:13-21

## Judea

Story: 3:22-26a

Dialogue: 3:26b-30

Monologue: 3:31-26

# LAYOUT OF JOHN 3

**John 2:23** Now while Jesus was in **Jerusalem** at the feast of the Passover, many people believed in his name because they saw the miraculous signs he was doing. **24** But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people. **25** He did not need anyone to testify about man, for he knew what was in man.

**John 3:22** After this, Jesus and his disciples came into **Judean** territory, and there he spent time with them and was baptising. **23** John was also baptising at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming to him and being baptised. **24** (For John had not yet been thrown into prison.)



# LAYOUT OF JOHN 3

**John 3:1** Now a certain man, a Pharisee named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council,

**John 3:2** came to Jesus at night and said to him, "**Rabbi**, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For **no one** could perform the miraculous signs that you do **unless** God is with him." **3** Jesus **replied**, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born **from above**, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

**John 3:25** Now a dispute came about between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew concerning ceremonial washing.

**26** So they came to John and said to him, "**Rabbi**, the one who was with you on the other side of the Jordan River, about whom you testified—see, he is baptising, and everyone is flocking to him!" **27** John **replied**, "**No one** can receive anything **unless** it has been given to him **from heaven**."

# LAYOUT OF JOHN 3

**John 3:13** No one has ascended into heaven except the **one who descended from heaven**—the Son of Man. **14** Just as Moses *lifted up the serpent in the wilderness*, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** so that **everyone who believes** in him may have **eternal life**.”

**John 3:16** For this is the way **God loved** the world: He gave his one and only **Son**, so that everyone who **believes** in him will not perish but have **eternal life**. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to *condemn* the world, but that the world should be saved through him.

**John 3:31** The one who **comes from above** is superior to all. The one who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The **one who comes from heaven** is superior to all. **32** He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. **33** The one who has accepted his testimony has confirmed clearly that God is truthful. **34** For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he does not give the Spirit sparingly. **35** The Father **loves** the Son and has placed all things under his authority. **36** The one who **believes** in the **Son** has **eternal life**. The one who rejects the **Son** will not see **life**, but God’s *wrath* remains on him.

# NICODEMUS?

- John 3:1 Now a certain man, a Pharisee named **Nicodemus**, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council,
- John 3:4 **Nicodemus** said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time, can he?"
- John 3:9 **Nicodemus** replied, "How can these things be?"
- John 7:50 **Nicodemus**, who had gone to Jesus before and who was one of the rulers, said,
- John 19:39 **Nicodemus**, the man who had previously come to Jesus at night, accompanied Joseph, carrying a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about seventy-five pounds.

# SYNOPTIC LINKS?

**John 3:2** came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him."

**Mark 12:14** When they came they said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are truthful and do not court anyone's favour, because you show no partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn't we?"

# SYNOPTIC LINKS

**John 3:3** Jesus replied, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

**John 3:5** Jesus answered, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

**Mark 10:15** I tell you the truth, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it."

Some characteristic traits in John: the address of the double amen, "from above", water and spirit. But the key theme of the Kingdom of God is central to both. This shows us the *conservative innovations* of John the Evangelist.

# COMMENTARY

**John 3:1** Now a certain man, a Pharisee named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council, **2** came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him."

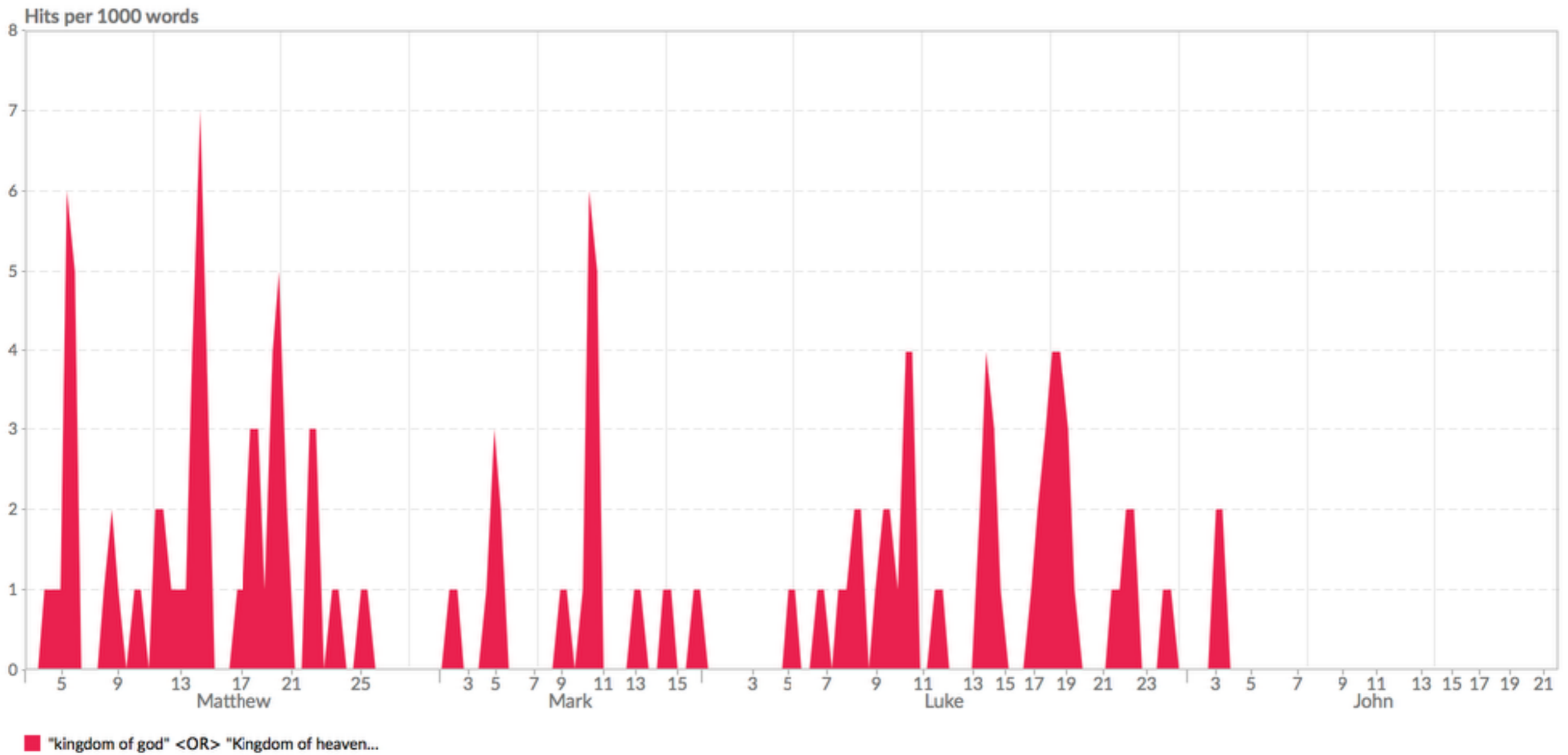
- Unusual to get a name
- Council = anticipation of chapter 7
- At night!
- Rabbi: not negative in this Gospel but confined to the first 11 chapters (John 1:38, 49; 3:2, 26; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8)
- Signs: "When a finger points to the moon, the imbecile looks at the finger" (Chinese proverb)

# COMMENTARY

**John 3:3** Jesus replied, "I tell you the solemn truth (=Amen, Amen), unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

- Amen, Amen
- From above (anōthen): see next slide
- Kingdom of God (see the visuals)

# COMMENTARY



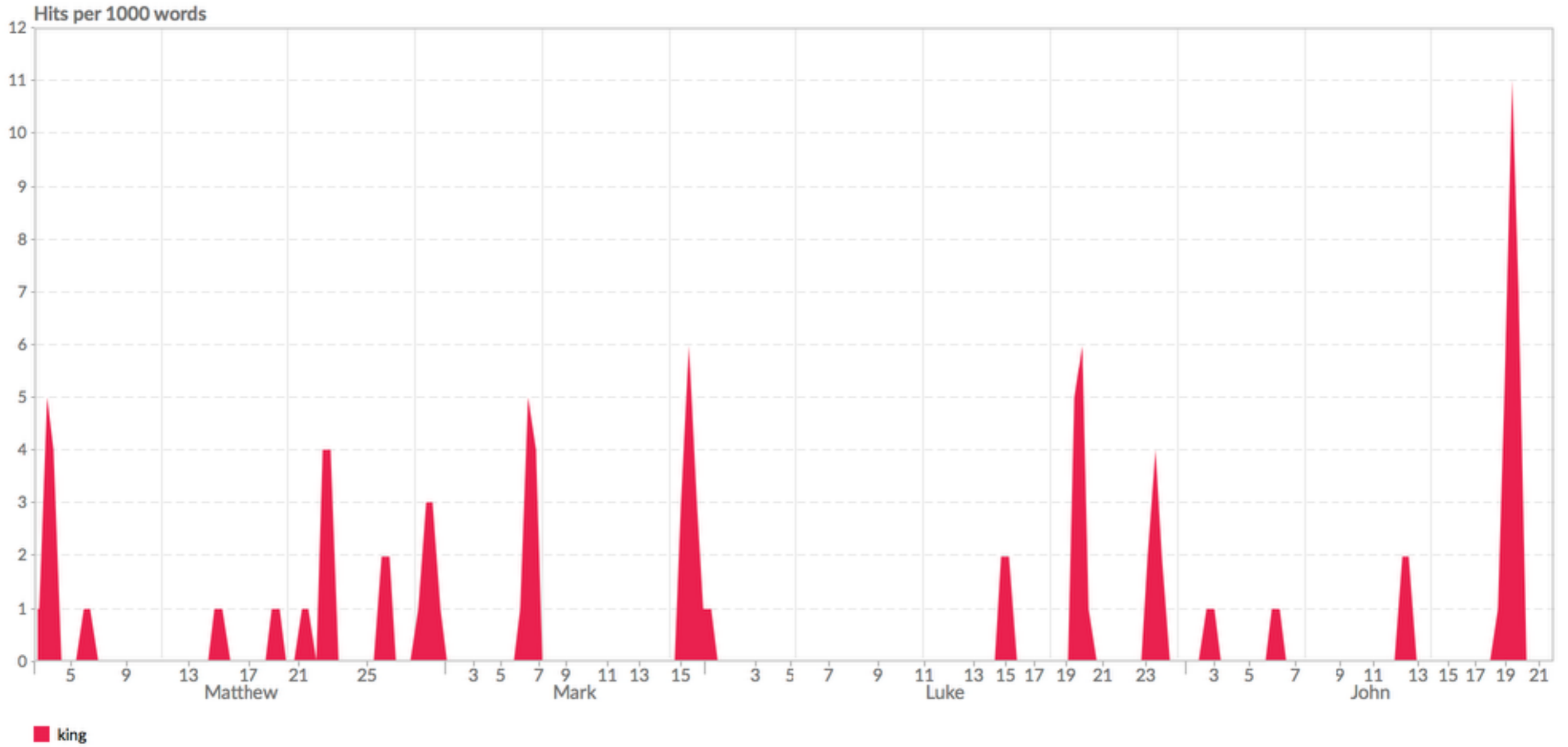


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# "FROM ABOVE" OR "AGAIN" / ANÓTHEN

- John 3:3 Jesus replied, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born from above (**anōthen**), he cannot see the kingdom of God."
- John 3:7 Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must all be born from above.' (**anōthen**)
- John 3:31 The one who comes from above (**anōthen**) is superior to all. The one who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is superior to all.
- John 19:11 Jesus replied, "You would have no authority over me at all, unless it was given to you from above (**anōthen**). Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of greater sin."
- John 19:23 Now when the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and made four shares, one for each soldier, and the tunic remained. (Now the tunic was seamless, woven from top **[anōthen]** to bottom as a single piece.)

# COMMENTARY

**John 3:4** Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time, can he?"

- Johannine use of misunderstanding (cf. John 4 and 6)
- "A second time" makes it really clear
- If that is *not* the meaning, then what is the meaning?

# COMMENTARY

**John 3:5** Jesus answered, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

**Ezek 36:25** And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be cleansed from all your unclean acts and from all your idols, and I will cleanse you. **26** And I will give you a new heart, and a new **spirit** I will give in you, and I will remove the stone heart from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **27** And I will give my **spirit** in you and will act so that you walk in my statutes and keep my judgments and perform them.

- Amen, amen
- Spirit: = pneuma = wind, breath, spirit
- Jesus is "forced" to clarify, but he does so with a play on words
- Cf. Ezekiel 36:25-27
- NB this comes in a context dealing with baptism and, even more significantly, before the encounter with the woman at the well

# COMMENTARY

**John 3:7** Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must all be born from above.' **(anōthen)** **8** The wind **(pneuma)** blows wherever it will, and you hear the sound it makes, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit **(pneuma).**"

**Ecccl 11:5** Just as you do not know the path of the **wind**, or how the bones form in the **womb** of a **pregnant woman**, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

- This time, "anōthen" is explained
- Example from nature: the mystery of the wind/spirit/breath
- Cf. Ecclesiastes where both wind and maternity come up
- Cf. Jubilees 1:22-25 (next slide)

# COMMENTARY

**Jubilees 1:22** And the LORD said to Moses, "I know their contrariness and their thoughts and their stubbornness. And they will not obey until they acknowledge their sin and the sins of their fathers. **23** But after this they will return to me in all uprightness and with all of (their) heart and **soul**. And I shall cut off the foreskin of their heart and the foreskin of the heart of their descendants. And I shall create for them a **holy spirit**, and I shall purify them so that they will not turn away from following me from that day and forever. **24** And their **souls** will cleave to me and to all my commandments. And they will do my commandments. And I shall be a **father** to them, and they will be **sons** to me. **25** And they will all be called '**sons of the living God**.' And every angel and **spirit** will know and acknowledge that **they are my sons and I am their father** in uprightness and righteousness. And I shall love them.



# COMMENTARY

**John 3:9** Nicodemus replied, "How can these things be?" **10** Jesus answered, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you don't understand these things?"

**Sir 16:20** But no human mind can grasp this, and who can comprehend his ways? **21** Like a tempest that no one can see, so most of his works are concealed. **22** Who is to announce his acts of justice? Or who can await them? For his decree is far off."

- Nicodemus is perplexed and simply does not get it
- Teacher of Israel: the full title
- The reproach is not simply to an individual but to all who misread the Scriptures
- Cf. Sirach 16:20-22

# COMMENTARY

**John 3:11** I tell you the solemn truth, we speak about what we know and testify about what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony. **12** If I have told you people about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?

- NB switch to the plural
- Know, testify, see – the typical “catechetical” language of the Johannine community
- V. 1: back to singular (“I”), but “you” is in the plural
- Argument from the lesser to the greater
- Rhetorical question

# COMMENTARY

**John 3:13** No one has **ascended** into heaven except the one who **descended** from heaven—the **Son of Man**.

**Son of Man:** Reference to identity, authority, crucifixion and resurrection (John 1:51; 3:13-14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:23, 34; 13:31)

NB: **Jacob** is again in view.

- Ascent and descent in reverse order
- **Ascend and descending:** John 1:51; 3:13; 6:62; 20:17
- **John 1:51** He continued, "I tell all of you the solemn truth—you will see heaven opened and the angels of God **ascending** and descending on the Son of Man."
- **John 6:62** Then what if you see the Son of Man **ascending** where he was before?
- **John 20:17** Jesus replied, "Do not touch me, for I have not yet **ascended** to my Father. Go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am **ascending** to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

# COMMENTARY

**John 3:14** Just as Moses *lifted up the serpent in the wilderness*, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

**John 12:32** "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

- NB "just as"
- Moses: Numbers 21:5-9
- Lifted up: cross *and* resurrection; cf. John 12:32
- A synonym for "glorified"
- Believe
- Eternal life: John 3:15-16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:25, 50; 17:2-3
- Eternal life is now, i.e. not postponed to the future "last things"

# AND SO

- All of chapter 3 has a distinct structure and function
- Being born from above is linked to water (baptism) and the Spirit
- The whole scene prepares us for John 4 (water, Spirit, Jacob, eternal life, the spiritual quest)
- The particular story of Nicodemus is an incomplete, fractured quest to be profiled later in chapter 7 and completed implicitly in chapter 19

# AND SO

- The teaching about birth from above (rather than “again”) speaks to the deep desire “more”
- Rebirth is a mystery: links to the Prologue
- Word play (anōthen, pneuma) triggers deeper meaning
- Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Jubilees
- Jacob, Moses and Abraham (v. 16)

# PRAYER

O God, rich in mercy, you so loved the world that when we were dead in our sins, you sent your only Son for our deliverance.

Lifted up from the earth, he is light and life; exalted upon the cross he is truth and salvation.

Raise us up with Christ and make us rich in good works, that we may walk as children of light toward the paschal feast of heaven.