

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SEVENTH JOHANNINE SIGN: A Study in John's Christology*

Introduction

Studies on the "signs" in John's Gospel are legion.¹ It is therefore surpris-

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¹On signs in the Fourth Gospel, cf. Jürgen Becker, "Wunder und Christologie. Zum literarkritischen und christologischen Problem der Wunder im Johannesevangelium," *NTS* 16 (1969/70): 130-48; Otto Betz, "Das Problem des Wunders bei Flavius Josephus im Vergleich zum Wunderproblem bei den Rabbinen und im Johannesevangelium," *Jesus. Der Messias Israels. Aufsätze zur biblischen Theologie* (WUNT 42; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1987), 409-19; Wolfgang J. Bittner, *Jesu Zeichen im Johannesevangelium. Die Messias-Erkennntnis im Johannesevangelium vor ihrem jüdischen Hintergrund* (WUNT 2/26; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1987); Raymond E. Brown, "Appendix III: Signs and Works," *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 525-32; D. A. Carson, "The Purpose of Signs and Wonders in the New Testament," *Power Religion* (ed. Michael S. Horton; Chicago: Moody, 1992), 89-118; W. D. Davies, "The Johannine 'Signs' of Jesus," *A Companion to John: Readings in Johannine Theology* (ed. Michael J. Taylor; New York: Alba, 1977), 91-115; Robert T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel* (SNTSMS 11; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Donald Guthrie, "The Importance of Signs in the Fourth Gospel," *Vox Evangelica* V (1967): 72-83; Marinus de Jonge, "Signs and Works in the Fourth Gospel," *Miscellanea neotestamentica* 2 (ed. T. Baarda, A. F. J. Klijn and W. C. van Unnik; NovTSup 48; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 107-25; Mark Kiley, "The Exegesis of God: Jesus' Signs in John 1-11," *SBL Seminar Papers* 27 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 555-69; Eduard Lohse, "Miracles in the Fourth Gospel," *What about the New Testament? In Honor of Christopher Evans* (ed. Morna D. Hooker and Colin J. A. Hickling; London: SCM, 1975), 64-75; Leon Morris, *Jesus is the Christ. Studies in the Theology of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 20-42; Willem Nicol, *The Semeia in the Fourth Gospel. Tradition and Redaction* (NovTSup 32; Leiden: Brill, 1972); P. Riga, "Signs of Glory: The Use of Semeia in John's Gospel," *Int* 17 (1963): 402-10; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Crossroad, 1990 [1965]), 1:515-28; Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John. An*

ing that there is no treatment of the exact number and identity of the Johannine signs. Such a work, however, is needed for the following reasons.

First, as will be seen, while six Johannine signs are commonly acknowledged, there is no agreement regarding possible other signs in the Fourth Gospel. Indeed, some even question whether one should look for further signs in John at all. By a thorough exploration of the alternative proposals, perhaps greater clarity, if not consensus, could be achieved.

Second, if a seventh or even other signs could be identified with a significant degree of plausibility, a closer investigation may aid in our apprehension of the characteristics of the Johannine signs in general.

Third, such a study would be important since the signs occupy a central place in John's christology (cf. 20:30–31). Clarity regarding the number and identity of the Johannine signs would therefore result in a refined understanding of the christological presentation of the Fourth Gospel as a whole.

Fourth, since the Johannine signs function as an important structural component, a precise delineation of the signs may also help clarify the structure of the Gospel.

The Six Commonly Acknowledged Signs in the Fourth Gospel

How many signs are there in the Fourth Gospel, and what are they? The Fourth Gospel explicitly identifies, and commentators generally acknowledge, the following six signs:²

Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 74–175; Marianne Meye Thompson, "Signs and Faith in the Fourth Gospel," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 1 (1991): 89–108; id., "Signs, Seeing, and Faith," *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 53–86; and Wilhelm Wilkens, *Zeichen und Werke. Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des 4. Evangeliums in Erzählungs- und Redestoff* (ATANT 55; Zurich: Zwingli, 1969). Cf. also the bibliography in Brown, *Gospel According to John I–XII*, 531–32, with reference to some helpful older treatments on signs in the Fourth Gospel.

²There are 17 occurrences of the term *σημεῖον* in John's Gospel: 2:11, 18, 23; 3:2; 4:48, 54; 6:2, 14, 26, 30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:48; 12:18, 37; and 20:30. John 2:11 refers to Jesus' changing water into wine; 2:18 to the temple cleansing; 2:23 and 3:2 make general reference to "the signs" Jesus is doing; in 4:48, Jesus chastises people for their insistence on "signs and wonders" in order to believe; 4:54 refers to Jesus' healing of the nobleman's son; 6:2 talks about signs Jesus is doing upon the sick; 6:14 relates to Jesus' feeding of the multitudes; 6:30 records

- (1) the changing of water into wine (2:1–11);
- (2) the healing of the nobleman's son (4:46–54);
- (3) the healing of the lame man (5:1–15);
- (4) the feeding of the multitude (6:1–15);
- (5) the healing of the blind man (chap. 9); and
- (6) the raising of Lazarus (chap. 11).³

Whether any other work of Jesus is referred to as a "sign," however, is disputed.

Why should one look further? Should one not rest content with six Johannine signs, regarding the *number* of signs in John as merely incidental and irrelevant or possibly finding in the number six evidence for John's view that Jesus' signs are of necessity imperfect and incomplete, thus accentuating the uniqueness and significance of Jesus' resurrection?⁴ Indeed, care should be taken not to press one's search for a seventh, or

the Jews' request for yet another sign; 7:31 asks, in the context of discussion over Jesus' healing of the lame man (cf. 5:1–15), whether the Christ will do more signs than Jesus; 9:16 makes reference to Jesus' opening the eyes of a blind man; 10:41 says that John the Baptist did not do any signs; 11:47 and 12:18 refer to Jesus' raising of Lazarus; 12:37 concludes that even though Jesus did all these signs, the Jews still did not believe in him; and 20:30 notes that Jesus did many other signs, but that the evangelist selected certain signs to lead his readers to faith in Jesus. Some commentators, while acknowledging the six signs listed below, may also include additional signs. These will be treated as possible signs below.

³Cf. Leon Morris, *Jesus is the Christ*, 21; Stephen S. Smalley, *John: Evangelist and Interpreter. History and Interpretation in the Fourth Gospel* (Greenwood, SC: Attic, 1978), 86–87; and C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 438; Fortna (*Gospel of Signs*, 100–101) concludes that John's source originally comprised seven signs. Fortna combines the feeding and walking on the sea miracles of chapter 6 as one sign and includes the catch of fish in chapter 21 as the seventh sign. Some have organized these **σημεία** in various ways, such as two groupings of three, each incorporating a nature and two healing miracles (cf. J. N. Sanders, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* [London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968], 5) or as three signs occurring in Galilee and three in Jerusalem and vicinity). It should be noted that until the issue of possible further signs in John is settled, such classifications remain preliminary. Since it is possible to group the Johannine signs in a number of plausible ways, the question remains which, if any, of these classifications reflects Johannine intent.

⁴Cf. Sanders, *St. John*, 5, who holds that John has six signs, not seven, and that the number six, being one less than the perfect number, points to the great sign of the resurrection.

even other, Johannine signs unduly. On the other hand, the number seven appears to have some importance for John in the case of the seven "I am" sayings of Jesus (cf. 6:35, 51; 8:12–9:5; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; and 15:1, 5). But *regardless* of whether the number seven is significant for John or not, and whether or not any symbolism is attached to the numbers six *or* seven, it is important to identify properly all the signs in John's Gospel. They are too crucial a part of John's christological presentation and, indeed, of the purpose of his entire Gospel for ambiguity regarding the number and identity of the Johannine signs to be allowed to prevail. For those still not convinced, it may be possible to adopt at least a temporary agnosticism and suspend judgment until the results of the study are known. There will still be time to evaluate whether the conclusions arrived at here show that the search for further Johannine signs was worthwhile or not and whether or not it enhanced the understanding of the Fourth Gospel.

Before seeking to identify the characteristics of a Johannine sign, it seems advisable to investigate briefly the conceptual background. John did not operate in a vacuum in formulating his theology. While there is no consensus regarding the most likely general background for John's thought (or that of his various sources), it is apparent that John is deeply rooted in Old Testament symbolism.⁵ The case cannot be fully argued here, nor is it necessary to do so for the purpose of the present work. We will merely take a brief look at the Old Testament in an effort to trace the development of the "signs" concept. It is hoped that this survey will provide a general backdrop for the study of the Johannine signs.

Signs in the Old Testament

Of the roughly 120 references to "signs" in the Old Testament and apocrypha, the vast majority are clustered around two events or types of ministries: the exodus, where frequent reference is made to the "signs *and* wonders" performed by God through Moses, and the "signs" forming

⁵Regarding the Old Testament background to John in general, see especially John W. Pryor, *John: Evangelist of the Covenant People. The Narrative and themes of the Fourth Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992). Cf. also D. A. Carson, "John and the Johannine Epistles," *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture* (ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 245–64; and C. A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Prologue* (JSNTSup 89; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 146–86.

part of the activity of the Old Testament prophets.⁶ The common element between these two clusters of references is that in both cases the signs function to authenticate the divine messengers, whether Moses during the exodus or later Old Testament prophets.⁷ While the emphasis regarding the signs performed during the exodus, however, is usually on their miraculous nature, this miraculous element later retreats into the background.⁸

There is little that is “miraculous,” for example, in Isaiah’s walking stripped and barefoot for three years as a sign of judgment against Egypt and Cush (cf. Isa 20:3; cf. also Ezek 4:1–3). The emphasis rather lies on the authentication of Isaiah’s prophecy, and ultimately of God’s sovereign power. While such prophecies were usually given on a merely verbal level, occasionally God chose to communicate by way of a visual aid, i.e., a “sign.” In the case of prophetic signs, there are thus two important elements: the prophetic component and the inherent symbolism. Both aspects combine to provide a way of revelation that, once the sign has been realized, proves the prophet to be authentic and brings glory to God.

A look at the explicitly identified Johannine signs reveals that John’s “signs” concept fits well within the general development from an emphasis on the miraculous to a focus on the prophetic-symbolic dimension of a

⁶In the vast majority of instances, *σημείον* translates the Hebrew *אֵימֹת*. For references to signs (and wonders) during the exodus, cf. Exod 4:8, 9, 17, 28, 30, 7:3, 8–9, 8:23, 10:1–2, 11:9, 10, 12:13, 13:9, 16; Num 14:22, 21:8 (bronze serpent; *נָחַשׁ*); Deut 4:34, 6:22, 7:19, 11:3, 13:1–2, 26:8, 29:2, 3, 34:10–12; Josh 24:5; Neh 9:10; Ps 78:43, 105:27, 135:9; Jer 32:20, 21; Bar 2:11). For signs in the ministry of the Old Testament prophets, cf. 1 Sam 2:34; 2 Kgs 19:29, 20:8, 9, 2 Chr 32:24; Ps 74:9; Isa 7:11, 14, 20:3, 38:7, 22, 44:24–25, 66:18–19; Ezek 4:3, 9:4, 6, 20:12, 20; Sir 36:6. Almost all of the remaining references can be grouped under either general category. For example, Esth 10:3 (LXX) refers to God’s working of “signs and wonders” in the events commemorated in the feast of Purim. Occasionally, the term “sign” is applied to the sun, moon, and stars in the heavens (e.g., Gen 1:14).

⁷Cf. Davies, “Johannine ‘Signs,’ ” 92, who refers to the turning of a rod into a serpent in Exod 4:1–9: “but it is not only called a wonder, but a sign (*ôth*), because it points beyond itself to the power of Moses’ God.”

⁸Cf. Bittner, *Jesu Zeichen*, 24–27, who also points to the scholarly neglect of the question why the term “sign” gains central importance for John’s christology while it is avoided by the synoptics. Cf. also F. Stolz, “Zeichen und Wunder. Die prophetische Legitimation und ihre Geschichte,” *ZTK* 69 (1972): 125–44.

“sign.”⁹ The “miraculous” element is certainly not missing in the signs of John’s Gospel. It appears, however, that this is not where John’s emphasis lies. This seems to be suggested by the fact that the phrase “signs and wonders” which is characteristic for the types of signs performed during the exodus occurs only once in the Fourth Gospel, and there on the lips of Jesus with a strongly negative connotation (cf. 4:48). In all the other cases, the thrust of a **σημείον** reference appears to be prophetic-symbolic: the sign’s symbolism is developed and the prophetic component is emphasized, in the case of John’s Gospel the authentication of Jesus’ Messianic claims.¹⁰

Whether one agrees with every detail of this reconstruction or not, the most significant insight for the purposes of the present study is that not all of the events called “signs” in the Old Testament were miraculous. If John can be shown to fall within this general conceptual framework, one should not therefore require an event to be miraculous for it to qualify as a Johannine sign. On the other hand, one may expect a possible sign to display a combination of prophetic and symbolic elements. The event thus points to the future where the symbol will become a reality, at which time God’s messenger will be proved authentic and God will receive glory.

⁹This is inadequately recognized by Karl-Heinz Rengstorf, who claims that the Johannine signs are “theologically and fundamentally the same kind as the classical **σημεία** of the OT, the signs in Egypt in the time of Moses” (“**σημείον**, et al.,” *TDNT* 7:256). Cf. also Brown, *Gospel According to John I–XII*, 528–29, who considers the exodus narrative to be the primary background for both signs and works terminology in the Fourth Gospel; and Robert Houston Smith, “Exodus Typology in the Fourth Gospel,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 329–42.

¹⁰As C. K. Barrett maintains, “The **ἄρα-σημείον** [is] a special part of the prophetic activity; no mere illustration, but a symbolic anticipation or showing forth of a greater reality of which the **σημείον** is nevertheless itself a part” (*The Gospel According to St. John* [2d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978], 76). He contends that, seen against their most probable background, the Johannine signs are therefore “**σημεία** in the Old Testament sense, special demonstrations of the character and power of God, and partial but effective realizations of his salvation.” Cf. also Schnackenburg, who refers to the symbolic actions of the prophets where the symbol was “a creative prefiguration of the future” and a “revelatory sign” (*Gospel According to St. John*, 1:527). Schnackenburg believes that John developed his notion of signs “in the course of his meditation on the Gospel tradition” while Barrett thinks that John the evangelist himself chose the term **σημείον**. Others, such as Bultmann or Fortna, conjecture that John’s signs terminology stems from his use of a **σημεία**-source. However, the answer to this question does not materially affect the thesis of this paper.

Signs in John's Gospel

As one surveys the six explicitly identified and commonly acknowledged Johannine signs in an effort to identify their common characteristics, the following observations can be made.

(1) *Signs are public works of Jesus.* In each case, the term **σημεῖον** in the Fourth Gospel is linked with the term **ποιεῖν** ("do"; cf. 2:11, 23; 3:2; 4:54; 6:2, 14, 30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18; 12:37; 20:30), **ιδεῖν** ("see"; 4:48; 6:26), or **δείκνυμι** ("show"; 2:18); the verb **ἀκουεῖν** is never used. This pattern of usage indicates that a "sign" is something Jesus *does* (or, in the case of 10:41, John the Baptizer has not done), not merely something he says, and something people can *see*, not merely hear. "Signs" in John are therefore *works* of Jesus, not mere words. They are events, not mere utterances.¹¹

Moreover, all six commonly recognized Johannine signs are works done by Jesus not merely before his disciples but before an unbelieving world.¹² The changing of water into wine, the feeding of the multitude, and the various healings including the raising of Lazarus from the dead all share in common that they have as their audience people other than merely Jesus' followers. All these signs are collectively referred to by

¹¹It is improper to equate completely Jesus' works and words in the Fourth Gospel, as Bultmann does when he asserts, "The works of Jesus are his words," cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. Kendrick Grobel; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 260, and the critique by de Jonge, "Signs and Works in the Fourth Gospel," 125. Note also that Jesus habitually refers to things he does in the Fourth Gospel as mere "works" (the only—disparaging—references made to "signs" by Jesus are found in 4:48 and 6:26) while it is John or other characters in the Gospel that use the terms "sign" or "signs" (John: 2:11, 23; 4:54; 6:14; 12:18, 37; 20:30; Nicodemus, the Jews, or people in the crowds: 2:18; 3:2; 6:30; 7:31; 9:16; 11:47). Cf. Guthrie, "what Jesus meant by works was identical with what John meant by signs" ("Importance of Signs in the Fourth Gospel," 79). Thus it appears that the term "sign" in the Fourth Gospel reflects the perspective of the audience of Jesus' works, pointing to the perceived attesting function or symbolic content of the deeds done by Jesus.

¹²Cf. 12:37: "even though Jesus had done all these signs *before them*" (**ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν**), i.e., "the Jews." In 20:30, reference is made to "many other signs Jesus did *before his disciples*" (**ἐνώπιον τῶν μαθητῶν**). The latter passage probably points to the disciples as the primary witnesses of Jesus' signs in relation to the Fourth Gospel's readers and should not be taken to negate the fact that Jesus' signs had a wider audience than merely the disciples. Cf. Barrett, "The stress on signs done by Jesus and beheld by his disciples is important and illuminates the structure and method of the gospel as a whole; there is no disparagement of the role of eye-witnesses" (*Gospel According to St. John*, 575).

John's summary statement at the end of part one of his Gospel: "Even though Jesus had done all these signs *before them*, they [i.e., "the Jews"] did not believe in him." The Fourth Gospel's signs are therefore confined to the period of Jesus' public ministry (i.e., chaps. 1–12).

(2) *Signs are explicitly identified as such in the Fourth Gospel.* All six commonly acknowledged Johannine signs are called "signs": the changing of water into wine (cf. 2:1–11) in 2:11; the healing of the nobleman's son (cf. 4:41–54) in 4:54; the healing of the lame man (cf. 5:1–15) is included in the reference to **πλεῖονα σημεῖα** ("more signs") in 7:31 (cf. 7:21); the feeding of the multitude (cf. 6:1–15) is called a "sign" in 6:14, 26, 30; the healing of the blind man (cf. chap. 9) in 9:16; and the raising of Lazarus (cf. chap. 11) in 11:47 (cf. 12:18). Ultimately, the only way a "sign" can be identified as such in the Fourth Gospel is by explicit reference to an event in Jesus' public ministry as a "sign."¹³

(3) *Signs, with their concomitant symbolism, point to God's glory displayed in Jesus, thus revealing Jesus as God's authentic representative.* The prominence of the signs in the two major summary sections of the Fourth Gospel underscores their centrality in John's christology. Within the framework of this sending christology, the signs are shown to authenticate Jesus as the true representative of God, revealing God's glory in Jesus. Thus people's acceptance of the genuineness of Jesus' signs should lead to their acceptance of Jesus' messianic mission. This is true both for Jesus' original audience and for the readers of the Fourth Gospel to whom testimony regarding Jesus' signs is supplied.

That the signs are works of Jesus that reflect God's glory can already be seen in John's account of the first sign: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him" (2:11). The reader of the Fourth Gospel is almost certainly expected to draw the connection between this statement and the earlier assertion found in the prologue, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14). John thus presents Jesus' signs as the vehicles through which God's glory is revealed in Jesus. While the word "glory" is not always used in conjunction with Jesus' working of signs, all of Jesus' signs are presented as evidence that Jesus is God's authentic representative (cf. 5:17–47; 7:14–24; 6:25–59; 9:3–5, 35–41; 11:25–27, 40). The Fourth Gospel also reflects

¹³Of course, this does not mean that there may not be some ambiguity regarding the referent of a given **σημεῖον** passage in the Fourth Gospel. See the discussion below.

Jewish expectations that both the coming prophet and the Messiah would perform signs to prove their divine commission (cf. 6:14; 7:31).¹⁴

But what kind of works are Jesus' signs according to John? Great care must be taken not to import an understanding of the term "miracle" into the Fourth Gospel that is foreign to it.¹⁵ As has been argued above, the most likely background for the Johannine signs are the signs of the Old Testament prophets where the symbolic-prophetic element generally predominated over the miraculous. We agree therefore with Dodd when he maintains, "to the evangelist a **σημεῖον** is not, in essence, a miraculous act, but a significant act, one which, for the seeing eye and the understanding mind, symbolizes eternal realities."¹⁶ Indeed, the signs in John "are not mere displays of power but are symbol-laden events rich in meaning for those with eyes to see."¹⁷

In the light of these observations, a tentative definition of a "sign" in John's Gospel can be constructed as follows: "A sign is a symbol-laden, but not necessarily 'miraculous,' public work of Jesus selected and explicitly identified as such by John for the reason that it displays God's glory in Jesus who is thus shown to be God's true representative (cf. 20:30-31)."¹⁸

¹⁴See the discussion of the Old Testament background of the Johannine signs above.

¹⁵Contra translations such as the NIV that render **σημεῖον** in the Fourth Gospel regularly as "miraculous sign."

¹⁶Cf. Dodd, *Interpretation of Fourth Gospel*, 90. Contra Schnackenburg, who understands the Fourth Gospel's "signs" as Jesus' major miracles: "The signs are important works of Jesus, performed in the sight of his disciples, miracles, in fact, which of their nature should lead to faith in 'Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God'" (*Gospel According to St. John*, 1:515); and Morris, who defines a sign simply as "a miraculous happening that points to some spiritual truth" (*Jesus is the Christ*, 22).

¹⁷Cf. Carson, "Purpose of Signs and Wonders," 93.

¹⁸This definition is not unlike that by Thompson, who describes a Johannine sign as "a manifestation, through the person of Jesus, of God's work in the world" ("Signs and Faith in the Fourth Gospel," 93-94). Cf. also George R. Beasley-Murray, "The 'signs' of the first twelve chapters are specifically actions of Jesus, generally miraculous, which find their exposition in discourses" (*John*, WBC 36 [Waco, TX: Word, 1987], 387). Note also the possible connection between the term **σημεῖον** and the expression **λόγος** in John's Gospel, an intriguing interrelation that cannot be further explored here. Likewise, it might be worthwhile to investigate further the relationship between the Johannine signs and the "I am" sayings which are sometimes, but not always, linked.

In screening the options suggested for additional signs in the Fourth Gospel, the following criteria may therefore be used:

- (1) Is a given work performed by Jesus as part of his public ministry?
- (2) Is an event explicitly identified as a "sign" in the Fourth Gospel?
- (3) Does the event, with its concomitant symbolism, point to God's glory displayed in Jesus, thus revealing Jesus as God's true representative?

If it can be shown that one or more events in John's Gospel fit these criteria, these should take their proper place alongside the commonly recognized six signs. If, on the other hand, no such event(s) can be identified, it can confidently be held that there are merely six signs in John.

Possible Additional Signs in John's Gospel

The suggestions for additional signs in John's Gospel include the following:¹⁹

- (1) Jesus' cleansing of the temple (cf. 2:14-17);²⁰
- (2) Jesus' word regarding the serpent in the wilderness (cf. 3:14-15);²¹
- (3) Jesus' walking on the water (cf. 6:16-21);²²

¹⁹While not exhaustive, the following alternatives represent the most frequently made suggestions. It should be noted that some writers define the concept of a Johannine "sign" so broadly as to include virtually everything Jesus did or said in the Fourth Gospel. Davies, for example, also includes the signs of "new birth" (John 3), "new worship" (John 4), the "light of the world" (John 7-8), and "signs that Jesus brings life through death" (11:55-12:36), including the anointing, the triumphal entry, and the grain of wheat saying ("Johannine Signs," 95-112). However, this terminology demonstrably departs from the Johannine usage. Dodd's concept of "signs" in John, too, appears to be unduly broad when he writes, "The works of Christ are all 'signs' of his finished work" (*Interpretation of Fourth Gospel*, 383). On one level that may be true, but clearly John selects certain events in Jesus' ministry by designating them as "signs" and by exposing their symbolic significance. All signs contain symbolic elements, but not every symbolic element in the Fourth Gospel is therefore a sign. To subsume various allusions to the Old Testament as well as instances of Johannine irony and double meaning under the category of "Johannine sign" fails to observe this distinction between symbolism and "signs."

²⁰Cf. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 42; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 181; Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 300-303, 370.

²¹Cf. Brown, *Gospel According to John I-XII*, 528.

²²Cf. Morris, *Jesus is the Christ*, 21. Cf. also Davies, "Johannine 'Signs,'" 93, calling this the traditional view.

- (4) the anointing of Jesus (12:1–8);²³
- (5) the triumphal entry (12:12–16);²⁴
- (6) Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection (chaps. 18–19);²⁵
- (7) his resurrection appearances (chaps. 20–21);²⁶ and
- (8) the miraculous catch of fish (21:1–14).²⁷

Which of the above alternatives, if any, fits the general characteristics outlined in the above definition?

(1) *Is a given work performed by Jesus as part of his public ministry?*

All six commonly recognized Johannine signs occur during the course of Jesus' public ministry (chaps. 1–12). Of the suggested additional signs, only three fall into this category: the temple cleansing, the anointing of Jesus, and the triumphal entry. Jesus' word regarding the serpent in the wilderness is not an event at all but merely a word of Jesus and should therefore be ruled out from consideration.²⁸ The walking on the water, while being something Jesus *does*, is not a part of Jesus' public ministry but occurs privately before Jesus' disciples so that it, too, should be

²³Cf. Dodd, *Interpretation of Fourth Gospel*, 438.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Cf. Betz, *Jesus*, 412–13; Carson, "the greatest sign of them all is the death, resurrection and exaltation of the incarnate Word" (*Gospel According to John*, 661); Dodd, "The death of Christ by crucifixion . . . is a σημεῖον of the reality which is the exaltation and the glory of Christ" (*Interpretation of Fourth Gospel*, 379; cf. also 438–40); J. Terence Forestell, who refers to "the supreme sign of the entire gospel, the exaltation and glorification of the Son of Man" (*The Word of the Cross. Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel* [AnBib 57; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1974], 71); B. H. Grigsby, "it does not seem to be speculative to discuss the Johannine cross as a 'sign'" ("The Cross as a Expiatory Sacrifice in the Fourth Gospel," *JNT* 15 [1982]: 64, n. 6); Lucius Nereparampil, *Destroy this Temple. An Exegetico-Theological Study on the Meaning of Jesus' Temple-Logion in Jn 2:19* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1978), 92–97; Nicol, "John never directly says the resurrection is also a *semeion*, but it is significant that when the Jews ask Jesus for a *semeion* in 2:18, he answers by referring to his resurrection" (*Semeia in the Fourth Gospel*, 115); and Wilhelm Thüsing, who repeatedly refers to Jesus' exaltation at the cross as a "Glaubens-zeichen" (*Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu im Johannesevangelium* [NTAbh 21; Münster: W. Aschendorff, 1979] 289, *passim*).

²⁶Cf. Bultmann, *Theology of NT*, 2:56; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 387.

²⁷Cf. Smalley, *John: Evangelist & Interpreter*, 87; id., "The Sign in John XXI," *NTS* 20 (1974): 275–88; Fortna, *Gospel of Signs*, 87–98.

²⁸Cf. Dodd, "for John a 'sign' is something that actually happens" (*Interpretation of Fourth Gospel*, 300).

excluded. The remaining alternatives, i.e., Jesus' crucifixion and the resurrection, his resurrection appearances, and the miraculous catch of fish, are not a part of Jesus' ministry narrated in chaps. 1–12 and can therefore not be considered "signs" in the Johannine sense of the word. These considerations are further clarified by dealing with the second characteristic of a Johannine "sign."

(2) *Is an event explicitly identified as a "sign" in the Fourth Gospel?*

Of the three events identified above that fit the first criterion, i.e., being works performed by Jesus as part of his public ministry, only the temple cleansing also appears to meet the second qualification, since neither the anointing of Jesus nor the triumphal entry is called a "sign" in the Fourth Gospel. Even in the case of the temple cleansing, the designation is somewhat indirect. When Jesus, immediately after cleansing the temple, is asked to perform a sign, he explains the significance of what he had just done, thus apparently implying that the temple cleansing itself already constituted the sign people were asking for.²⁹ As one commentator has it, "Indeed, if the authorities had eyes to see, the cleansing of the temple was already a 'sign' they should have thought through and deciphered in terms of Old Testament scripture."³⁰ That this is a legitimate inference is suggested by the parallel in 6:30 where after Jesus' feeding of the multitude, the Jews similarly demand a sign, yet where in response Jesus offers an interpretation of what had already happened, inviting his questioners to see in the actual occurrence of the feeding of the multitude the *σημείον* they desired.³¹

Apart from the fact that the other suggested possibilities already failed to meet the first criterion, they also appear to fall short of standing the second test. None of these alternatives is called a "sign" in the Fourth

²⁹Nereparampil objects to an inclusion of the temple cleansing under the Johannine signs by arguing that the temple cleansing cannot be a sign since it is not "miraculous." He sees the resurrection as the sign and the temple logion as the promise of a sign, maintaining that the resurrection represents "the supreme 'sign' in the full sense of the Johannine concept of *semeion*" (*Destroy this Temple*, 92–97). But Nereparampil's objection loses its force in the light of the fact that a "miraculous" element is not a necessary component of the Johannine conception of a "sign." Moreover, as has been argued, Jesus' resurrection is not a part of Jesus' public work and corresponds to the Johannine signs as reality does to symbol rather than functioning as the ultimate symbol.

³⁰Cf. Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 181.

³¹Cf. Dodd, *Interpretation of Fourth Gospel*, 301. Dodd also notes the implication of the quote of Ps. 69:10 in John 2:17, i.e., "that, just as the Righteous Sufferer of the Psalm paid the price of his loyalty to the temple, so the action of Jesus in cleansing the temple will bring him to grief."

Gospel. It may be objected that Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, and perhaps even the resurrection appearances, should be included in the purview of the Johannine "signs" by virtue of being covered by the statement in 20:30.³² This suggestion, however, while possible, should probably be ruled out for the following reasons.

First, Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection are the reality to which the signs point. Rather than symbolizing anything, they are significant in and of themselves. As Schnackenburg asserts, "An extension of the concept of 'sign' to take in the cross of Jesus cannot be justified."³³ The reason for this is, according to Barrett, that "in the death and resurrection of Jesus, sign and its meaning coincide."³⁴ Davies agrees, "The sign is not essential to the truth to which it points, but only illustrative. But the death of Jesus is not simply an illustration or a sign; it is an actual death . . . The cross—not as a symbol or an idea—but as an actual act of self-giving is, for John, the point where God's glory is actually seen. Not the sign, not the intent, but the deed is the manifestation of the glory."³⁵

Second, the Fourth Gospel's "signs" are preliminary in nature. This temporary function is intrinsic to John's conception of a "sign." Once the reality to which Jesus' "signs" point has come, no further signs are needed, nor can the crucifixion and resurrection that accomplish that reality *themselves* be called "signs." As de Jonge notes, Jesus' "death and resurrection . . . are *not* explicitly called signs . . . This may be because from the Evangelist's post-resurrectional viewpoint, the signs bear a preliminary character, whereas death and resurrection mark the beginning of a new period."³⁶ Brown writes, "Thus, the miracle is a sign, not only qualitatively (a material action pointing toward a spiritual reality), but also temporally (what happens before *the hour* prophesying what will happen after the hour has come). That is why, as we have explained, the signs of Jesus are found only in the first half of the Gospel (chs. i–xii)."³⁷

³²Cf. e.g., Carson, who comments, somewhat tentatively, "It is possible that *miraculous signs* refers only to the miracles reported in chs. 2–12 . . . But to place this conclusion here suggests that the greatest sign of them all is the death, resurrection and exaltation of the incarnate Word . . . But however far *miraculous signs* extends . . ." (*Gospel According to John*, 661).

³³Cf. Schnackenburg, *Gospel According to St. John*, 1:520, n. 7.

³⁴Cf. Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John*, 78.

³⁵Cf. Davies, "Johannine 'Signs,'" 113–14.

³⁶Cf. de Jonge, "Signs and Works in the Fourth Gospel," 111 and 117, n. 24.

³⁷Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *Gospel According to John I–XII*, 530.

Third, while the “signs” reference in 20:30 allows for the possible inference that Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection should be numbered among the Johannine “signs,” this inference falls short of making the connection explicit. Other explanations are possible. As passages such as 2:22 (cf. also 12:16) indicate, even the disciples’ understanding of events in Jesus’ ministry was predicated upon the actual occurrences of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. Their reception of the Holy Spirit and their commissioning by Jesus were not possible until *after* these events. Thus the Fourth Evangelist may choose to mention Jesus’ “signs” once more, not because he wants to include Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection in their purview, but because the disciples are now fit to witness to the true significance of the “signs” Jesus had performed during his public ministry. It had been necessary for Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, the reality to which those “signs” pointed, to occur in order for the disciples to be able to function as witnesses in the power of the Spirit (cf. 15:26–27). Indeed, what the Farewell Discourse expounds is not so much the significance of Jesus’ death (which had already been foreshadowed by word and deed in chaps. 1–12) as the *implications* of Jesus’ death for the mission of his followers.³⁸

Fourth, it probably would have appeared rather inappropriate (if not blasphemous) to Jesus’ own disciples, and to the author of the Fourth Gospel, to place Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection into the same category as the commonly acknowledged six Johannine signs. The inclusion of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection among the “signs” appears to run counter to John’s consistent emphasis on Jesus’ salvation-historical and personal uniqueness (cf. e.g., 1:14, 18; 3:16). The book of Acts finds the early church preaching, not Jesus’ signs, but his resurrection.

For these reasons Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, and appearances should not be considered Johannine “signs.” They do not fit the criteria laid out above in that they are neither a “public work” of Jesus nor called “signs” in John. In line with the Old Testament background sketched earlier in this essay, the Johannine “signs” point symbolically to God’s future intervention. Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, however, represent the very reality to which the earlier signs had referred. If the raising of Lazarus is a “sign,” it may be asked, and if its symbolic significance is that

³⁸Contra Carson, “But to place this conclusion here suggests that the greatest sign of them all is the death, resurrection and exaltation of the incarnate Word, the significance of which has been carefully set forth in the farewell discourse” (*Gospel According to John*, 661).

Jesus is “the resurrection and the life,” how can Jesus’ resurrection *itself* also be a sign? This seems to be logically inconsistent.

Finally, the miraculous catch of fish in John 21, too, should be ruled out from consideration, since it is neither a part of Jesus’ public ministry nor explicitly identified as a “sign” in John.

(3) *Does the event, with its concomitant symbolism, point to God’s glory displayed in Jesus, thus revealing Jesus as God’s true representative?* To some extent, this criterion is met not merely by the six commonly acknowledged Johannine “signs” but also by the various suggestions for additional “signs.” In a sense, everything Jesus does and says points to God’s glory and reveals Jesus as God’s true representative. Not everything Jesus does or says, however, is selected by the Fourth Evangelist as a “sign.” It has already been suggested that the temple cleansing alone meets the first two criteria; all that remains to be done is to discuss whether this event is presented in the Fourth Gospel as an incident that reveals God’s glory in Jesus and that reveals him as God’s authentic representative.

It has already been argued that Jesus’ response to the Jews’ demand for a “sign” consisted in his explication of the significance of the temple cleansing he had just performed so that the temple cleansing itself is presented as a Johannine “sign” (cf. 2:18–21).³⁹ It is not necessary here to discuss in detail all the implications of Jesus’ temple logion in 2:19. Suffice it to say that Jesus’ words were uttered in explicit response to the Jews’ challenge of his authority (cf. 2:18). In Jesus’ eyes, the temple cleansing was symbolic of the crucifixion and resurrection of his body which, in turn, would replace the temple’s significance in the life and worship of the Jewish nation (cf. 4:21–24; cf. also already ἐσκήνωσεν in 1:14). Indeed,

³⁹Note also the connection between the changing of water into wine and the temple cleansing. What the first sign indicates, i.e., that Jesus replaces Judaism in its various features, is applied in the case of the temple cleansing to the Jewish temple. Cf. Dodd, “it seems clear that both the Miracle of Cana and the Cleansing of the Temple are σημεῖα which signify the same foundational truth: that Christ has come to inaugurate a new order in religion” (*Interpretation of Fourth Gospel*, 303). Cf. also Nereparampil, *Destroy this Temple*, 89; and Pryor, who likewise emphasizes the close connection between Jesus’ first sign at the wedding in Cana and the temple cleansing: “the two pericopae form an impressive and united introduction to the ministry of Jesus. Both point to the passing away of the old religion (signified by water and temple), and its replacement by the newness and superiority of Christ. He is the wine of the new age, he is its temple, the focus of worship and devotion” (*John: Evangelist*, 17). On the Johannine replacement motif, cf. especially Carson, *It Is Written*, 254–56.

Jesus had the authority to lay down his life and to take it up again (cf. 10:18). In this, Jesus is confirmed to be God's authentic representative.

If the temple cleansing is indeed the seventh sign of John's Gospel, the question arises why interpreters have generally failed to identify it as such. A few possible reasons come to mind. Scholarship on the temple cleansing in John has frequently focused on its placement at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in John's Gospel in contrast with the synoptic placement at the end of Jesus' work. Moreover, the temple cleansing is not a "healing miracle" as are four of the other Johannine signs, nor is it a "nature Miracle" as are two other signs in John. Therefore the temple cleansing does not seem to fit the common stereotype of a Johannine sign. Indeed, signs in John have often been understood in terms of the miraculous in line with the synoptic portraits of Jesus' miracles. The six commonly acknowledged Johannine signs appear to fit the stereotype of a synoptic-style miracle very well: they are amazing feats, displays of Jesus' power over nature, indeed, even over sickness and death. The temple cleansing, on the other hand, if measured by those characteristics, appears to fall short.

While providing a number of possible explanations for the failure of some to identify the temple cleansing as the seventh Johannine sign, however, none of these obstacles is insurmountable.⁴⁰ Once one substitutes the Johannine concept of "signs" for the synoptic framework of "miracles," the temple cleansing fits the category of "Johannine sign" very well indeed. As has been argued, what John considers a "sign" is not primarily an amazing feat of power but an event in Jesus' public ministry that has special symbolic significance in attesting to Jesus as God's authentic representative. Not the so-called "miraculous" element but the christological symbolism and Jesus' messianic authority are significant for John. Ultimately, all signs point to *Jesus* as the true messenger of God, the giver of life, a reality that finds its fullest expression in Jesus' resurrection from the dead, but a reality that is already given preliminary expression in the signs performed during Jesus' public ministry. According to John, the "signs," including the temple cleansing, are revelatory pictures of Jesus' true identity: he is the Christ, the Son of God (cf. 20:30–31).

Implications for the Structure of the Fourth Gospel

⁴⁰Note also that there have been a significant minority of scholars, including C. H. Dodd, D. A. Carson, or G. R. Beasley-Murray, who have identified the temple cleansing as a Johannine sign.

The identification of the temple cleansing as an additional Johannine sign would have significant implications for one's understanding of the structure of the Fourth Gospel. The inclusion of the temple cleansing has two important effects on the structure of the Fourth Gospel: first, it makes the raising of Lazarus the seventh climactic sign, providing the ultimate sign of Jesus' own resurrection; second, it reveals the probable division of the first six Johannine signs into two categories, i.e., three inaugural signs, and three further signs which are characterized by mounting controversy.

Jesus' raising of Lazarus, of course, is linked with Jesus' saying, "I am the resurrection and the life," and shortly followed by the conclusion of the Fourth Evangelist that "even though Jesus had done all these signs, they would not believe." It appears that after Jesus' raising of Lazarus no greater sign could be given. The Jews' unbelief in the face of such evidence for Jesus' messianic identity made it clear that they would not believe Jesus' own resurrection either. The number seven, indicating completeness and perfection, shows that Jesus' performance of a resurrection provides a climax in the number of the Johannine signs.

John himself gives some clues that signs 1 and 3, and then signs 4 and 6, form the outer parameters of two groupings of three signs each. In the case of signs 1 and 3, John numbers them as having both been performed in Cana of Galilee (4:54). The two healings in chaps. 5 and 9 contain numerous textual connections. The sequence of locations for the six signs would reflect Jesus' continued movement from Galilee to Judea and back again in the Fourth Gospel. The progression would be as follows: Galilee/Judea/Galilee; Judea/Galilee/Judea. The climactic sign, finally, occurs in Judea.

With all seven signs taking place during Jesus' public ministry in chaps. 1–12, the references to Jesus' signs in the concluding sections of parts one and two of the Fourth Gospel appear to relate to one another in the following way. The conclusion in 12:37 shows that Jesus' messianic signs had been rejected by the old covenant community. The conclusion in 20:30 indicates that Jesus' messianic signs would be witnessed to by the new covenant community. Between these two conclusions, one finds sections on the implications of Jesus' exaltation for the new covenant community (chaps. 13–17); on the reality to which the signs point, i.e., Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection (chaps. 18–19); and on the resurrection appearances and commissioning of the new covenant community (chaps. 20–21).

On a different note, it is crucial to view the Fourth Gospel's signs, not in an isolated fashion, but in their interrelationships with one another. All Johannine signs *jointly* point to various aspects of Jesus' messianic

identity, authority, and mission. Any one sign may only reveal a *part* of this mission. Taken together, the signs provide a complete picture of the Christ who is Jesus.

Finally, why are the messianic signs of Jesus emphasized in the Fourth Gospel? One reason may be John's expectation that a focus on Jesus' messianic signs would add persuasiveness to the portrait of a crucified and risen Messiah, especially if Jews were at least part of his envisioned audience.⁴¹ The added emphasis on the earthly ministry of Jesus points also to the abiding value of Jesus' works, demonstrating that Jesus' works are reflections of who he is. Thus for John, christology is not limited to soteriology, and Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection are shown to be in continuity with his earthly ministry.

Conclusion

It appears that the temple cleansing, and it alone, meets all the criteria for inclusion in the Johannine signs. It is a work performed by Jesus as part of his public ministry, it is identified as a "sign" in the Fourth Gospel, and it symbolically points to God's glory displayed in Jesus, thus revealing Jesus as God's true representative.⁴² Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, on the other hand, should not be considered as signs, since they relate to the seven signs featured in chaps. 1–12 as does reality to symbol.

If the thesis argued here is correct, greater clarity regarding one's understanding of the signs in John's Gospel may indeed be achieved. The discussion of the Old Testament background and the investigation of the characteristics of a Johannine sign have illuminated not only John's concept of a sign but also his entire christological presentation. The identification of the temple cleansing as an additional sign also provided a proposed clarified structure for the Fourth Gospel. While not everyone may agree with the thesis argued here, it is at least hoped that the plausibility of an additional Johannine sign in the temple cleansing has been established.

⁴¹This, of course, is hotly disputed. The point cannot be argued here, but in the light of the internal clues provided in the Fourth Gospel itself, there appears no good reason why Jews (diaspora Jews as well as proselytes) could not have been the intended audience of the Fourth Gospel.

⁴²If the temple cleansing is a Johannine sign, this would also provide an antecedent sign, notably in Jerusalem, for references to "the signs" Jesus was doing shortly thereafter in the Gospel narrative (cf. 2:23; 3:2). It appears that the reference to "the second sign" in 4:54 merely pertains to Jesus' working of signs *in Galilee*, though this is disputed.

