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John

A Commentary

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Put differently, the one who is *anthrōpos* (human) and *ho huios tou anthrōpou* is such by virtue of the "enfleshment" (incarnation) of the Word: Jesus is "Son of Man" because he is the Word made flesh (*sarx*). It is no accident that the Fourth Gospel speaks of the flesh of the Son of Man (6:51-56), since "son of man" regularly denotes human beings in Scripture. Precisely this human being will be lifted up (crucified but exalted, 3:14; 8:28; 12:34) and glorified (12:23; 13:31; cf. Acts 2:33-36; 5:30-31; Phil 2:5-11). Thus, even though the Johannine Jesus speaks of the descent of the Son of Man (3:13), "Son of Man" as such does not denote a preexistent being or figure. The Word was in the beginning: "Son of Man" (human being) denotes the Word made flesh. Through this incarnate Word, "the Son of Man," the heavens are opened (1:51), judgment is passed (5:27), and life is given (6:51-58). This human being, this "Son of Man," is the "ladder" upon which God's angels ascend and descend, the place where God's glory is revealed, because he is God's own Word, incarnate. "Son of Man" "identifies Jesus as the person in whom God is revealed."⁶⁰

In spite of the fact that in biblical usage "son of man" connotes humankind, it is too neat, even misleading, to say that "Son of Man" refers to Jesus in his humanity, while "Son of God" denotes his divinity. "Son of God" can refer either to human figures (as in Judaism) or to divinized or divine beings (as in Greco-Roman literature). More important: all three designations—Son, Son of Man, and Son of God—refer to the same person, Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Word-made-flesh. From his identity as the Word who was with God and who was God, who became flesh, and who in his vocation as the Messiah gives his flesh for the life of the world—from that identity these diverse filial terms derive their meaning.

2:1-11 Jesus' First Sign: The Messianic Provision of Abundance

Having promised Nathanael that he would "see greater things" (1:51), Jesus performs a sign at a wedding in Cana, with the result that the disciples saw his glory (2:11; 11:40). The account of the wedding feast at Cana also serves as a transition to the next portion of the Gospel. John (the Baptist) and Jesus' first disciples have borne witness to Jesus: he is the Lamb of God, the one who baptizes with the Spirit, the Messiah, Son of God, and King of Israel. Now Jesus becomes the central actor in the narrative, and the accounts of his works and words explicate his identity, and what it will mean to do the work and will of the one who sent him. In particular, the sign done at Cana bears witness to Jesus as the one who brings the rich fullness of the messianic age.

Jesus' glory is revealed not in his sheer power to transform water into wine, but in the generous provision of superior wine for the wedding feast. His deed calls to mind the Old Testament promises of the feasting and drinking that

60. Koester 2008b, 97.

will characterize the (messianic) age to come. The one proclaimed by Jesus' disciples to be the Messiah, from whose "fullness we have all received" (1:16), is the host of the feast who provides abundantly for the guests at this wedding. But unlike the revelation of God's glory in a burning bush or a theophany in the temple, the glory that is revealed here remains decidedly hidden, unobtrusive, embodied in a human being, and unseen by most of those at the wedding. To see the "heavens opened" (1:51), to see the manifestation of Jesus' glory (2:11), will mean neither to see angels nor visions; rather, it will be to see the revelation of heavenly glory in and through the act of Jesus' providing plentiful choice wine for the celebration of a wedding. He is the host who provides abundantly.⁶¹

2:1 On the third day, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Both Jesus and his disciples had been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with me?^a My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

6 There were six stone jars, for the Jewish rites of purification, standing there. Each held twenty or thirty gallons.^b 7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the water jars." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 Then he said to them, "Draw some out now and take it to the manager of the banquet." They took it. 9 And when the manager of the banquet^c had tasted the water that had become wine, but did not know where it had come from—although the servants who had drawn the water knew—he called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, "Every one serves the good wine first, and when they have become intoxicated,^d then the inferior wine; but you have kept the good wine until now."

11 This was the first of the signs that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee. He manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

a. Lit., "What to you and to me?"

b. In the Greek, "each holding two or three *metrētas*." A *metrētēs* is a liquid measure of about 39 liters, slightly more than 10 gallons (BDAG s.v.); hence, each jar held ca. "twenty or thirty gallons" (NRSV/RSV).

c. *Architriklinos* is the slave or servant responsible for managing a banquet; often translated "steward" (BDAG s.v.).

d. *Methyskomai* means "to get drunk, to become intoxicated"; cf. Luke 12:45; Rev 17:2.

61. As with the feeding of the five thousand, the sign at Cana is more aptly titled a "gift" or "supply" miracle than a "nature miracle" (Theissen 103–6).

[2:1-2] "On the third day," that is, three days after the events just narrated,⁶² Jesus appears at a wedding in Cana of Galilee.⁶³ Jesus' first sign, his abundant provision of choice wine, takes place at a wedding feast, to which Jesus, his mother,⁶⁴ and his disciples have been invited. The subsequent comment that Jesus went to Capernaum with his mother, siblings, and disciples indicates that members of Jesus' family may also have been at the wedding (2:12). There are many unanswered questions in the account: no indication is given of whose wedding it is, why Jesus and other family members were invited, why Jesus' mother would be particularly concerned about the lack of wine, why she expected Jesus to do something, or indeed, what she might have expected him to do. Since Jesus and members of his family have been invited, this may be the wedding of a relative, and on that basis some commentators have suggested that Jesus could have been expected to help supply provisions for the wedding. But the relationship of Jesus to the bride, the groom, or the host of the wedding does not feature in the telling of the story. References to a feast, to several servants, including one who oversees the feast, and to six large stone jars in the house—all indicate the relatively high social and economic status of the host. He could be expected to provide for his guests.

But from beginning to end, the story focuses on the wine that Jesus—not the host—provides and on the origins, the quantity, and particularly the quality of this wine. Wine for the feast has run out (v. 3); but six stone jars, together capable of holding about 120–180 gallons, contain water that will eventually be used to provide wine for the feast. Although plenty of wine has been served up to this point, the wine that Jesus provides proves to be superior. In short, there is a lack of wine, and no one to supply what is lacking; but Jesus can and does provide choice wine in abundance.

[3–5] Commentators have long struggled with the sharpness of Jesus' reply to his mother and have sought to soften it: addressing her as "Woman,"⁶⁵ Jesus

62. While "on the third day" recalls the NT's witness that Jesus was raised "on the third day" (Matt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; par. in Luke; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor 15:4), the phrase does not appear elsewhere in John; here it likely means "on the third day after the previous events" or perhaps "after a short while." The phrase "on the third day" occurs frequently in the OT (e.g., Gen 22:4; 31:22; 34:25; 40:20; 42:18; Exod 19:11, 16; Lev 7:18; 19:7; Num 7:24; 19:12, 19; 29:20; 31:19; etc.).

63. Cana is probably to be identified with contemporary Khirbet Qana, nine miles north of Nazareth; a village flourished there in the first to sixth centuries, due to its favorable location on the Roman road that ran from Ptolemais (Acco, 'Akko) to Taricheae (Magdala). At least sixty cisterns for storing water have been excavated. See Deines; von Wahlde 2006.

64. In John, the "mother of Jesus" is never called Mary.

65. Note the NIV84's "Dear woman," revised in TNIV simply as "Mother." Although "woman" (NIV, NRSV) seems dismissive, even contemptuous, it appears as a form of address elsewhere in the Gospel (John 4:21; 19:26; 20:13, 15) and in the NT (Matt 15:28; Luke 13:12; 22:57; 1 Cor 7:16, typically translated "wife"), although in these other instances the woman is not known to the speaker; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 17.74.

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essentially tells her to leave him alone,⁶⁶ since his hour has not come. But Jesus' reply follows a pattern, typical of John, demonstrating that Jesus acts not at the instigation of others, but at his own initiative; implicitly, he acts in keeping with the Father's will (5:19). When Jesus' mother informs him that the hosts of the wedding have run out of wine, he initially deflects her request, even as he later deflects the petition of the royal official (4:47–48),⁶⁷ rebuffs his brothers when they urge him to go up to Judea (7:3–8), and deliberately stays away from Bethany upon hearing of Lazarus's illness (11:5–6). In each account, Jesus does act eventually, but having distanced himself from the original request, he shows that he is not acting under pressure of others' agenda for him (cf. 6:14–15; 7:6–10). In this light, Jesus' statement, "My hour has not yet come," may simply mean that he will act only when he has judged that his time to do so has come.⁶⁸

Jesus thus distances himself from his natural family—here from his mother and later from his brothers—even as he does in the other Gospels (cf. Matt 12:48–50; Mark 3:33–35; Luke 2:49; 8:19–21). Later the dying Jesus entrusts the care of his mother to the "beloved disciple," rather than to his natural brothers, further redefining the contours of his kin (John 19:26–27). After his resurrection, he refers to his disciples as his "brothers" and to God as "my Father and your Father" (20:17–18), showing that the Son (*huios*) has now brought "his own" (*hoi idioi*) into the larger family of the children of God (*tekna tou theou*), a family whose identity is not drawn along natural lines of descent and blood relationships (1:10–13; 3:3–5; 11:52).

[6–10] The Gospel hardly narrates the sign itself. It describes no action of Jesus, such as praying to God, or touching or speaking to the jars or the water. Jesus gives only a simple command to the servants to fill the water jars. Whether the jars were already partially full or entirely empty, how long the filling took, and from where the servants drew the water—such details are not recounted here. Almost in passing, the evangelist refers to "the water that had become wine" (*to hydōr oionon gegenēmenon*, v. 9). The miraculous character of the event remains unexplained, even unobserved and hidden, while the words of the banquet manager, who will be the first to taste the wine, interpret the significance of what has occurred: someone has provided choice wine!

66. "What does that have to do with me?" or "This is no concern of mine" translates a Greek phrase that reads, lit., "What to you and to me?" For the phrase, see LXX: Judg 11:12; 1 Kgs 17:18; 2 Kgs 3:13; 2 Chr 35:21; 1 Esd 1:24 (1:26 ET); and Mark 1:24.

67. See the chart with comments on 4:46–50, showing structural similarities between the two Cana narratives.

68. Elsewhere, Jesus' hour refers to the hour of his death (7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1), and glorification (12:23, 27–28; 17:1). Possibly there is a foreshadowing here of the fact that the manifestation of Jesus' glory in his signs (2:11) will eventually also bring about his death: a destiny that Jesus chooses willingly and that cannot be forced on him.

According to the text, "six stone jars" are standing there. Archaeological excavations of Judea and Galilee have discovered bowls, basins, jars, jugs, and other vessels made of limestone and chalk, providing evidence of an industry of manufacturing stone vessels that flourished from the time of Herod the Great (37-4 B.C.E.) to beyond the destruction of the temple (70 C.E.).⁶⁹ Here the number and size of these large vessels points to the high status of the household.⁷⁰ Stone was preferred for household vessels because, unlike clay or pottery, stone vessels did not so easily contract uncleanness and therefore did not have to be destroyed due to such contamination.⁷¹ John notes that the "six stone jars" are for "Jewish rites of purification": that is, the water can be used for washing for purification because it has been appropriately collected, probably from rainfall, and kept from contamination. The "rites of purification" in question are not those of full immersion, since water for these was collected in cisterns (*'ōṣārôt*) and/or immersion pools (*miqva'ot*) specially constructed for such washing; more likely, these rites involve washing various cups and containers and perhaps also the hands before meals (*m. Yad* 3:1-2; *m. Zabim* 5:12).

The evangelist's comment that there were "six stone jars" to be used for "the Jewish rites of purification" has prompted numerous commentators to interpret Jesus' act to mean that the "wine" of the Gospel has replaced the "water" of the law. The miracle at Cana has even been taken to represent the replacement of the entire system of Jewish purification and sacrifice, and sometimes even the "supersession of Judaism."⁷² But the contrast between the "good wine" (*ton kalon oinon*) and the "lesser" (*ton elassō*) wine offered earlier,⁷³ and especially the emphasis on the abundance of the "good wine," draws on the biblical portrayal of the coming age of salvation as surpassing all previous eras in both the quality and quantity of God's blessings: the "new things" have replaced the "former things" (Isa 42:9; 43:9; 65:17; Rev 21:4). The blessings of this age follow and surpass the bounty of earlier blessings. The move is not lateral, from the old reality of "Judaism" to a parallel and new reality in Jesus, outside of Judaism; rather, the move is forward, from Scriptural hope and expectation to the extravagant provision expected in the coming age.

69. A brief, accessible discussion in English can be found in Reed 44-51, 56-57. For a full treatment, see Deines.

70. Stone jars found in excavations of the temple in Jerusalem hold up to seventeen gallons (Meyers and Chancey 136-37, 175-76); against Haenchen (1:173), who thinks the size of the jars is fictionalized.

71. For biblical texts, see esp. Lev 6:28; 11:32-35; in the Mishnah, see *m. Kelim* 10:1; *m. Parah* 3:2; but contrast CD XII, 15-17, which does not exempt stone vessels from transmitting impurity.

72. For various accounts of John's "replacement theology," see R. Brown 1966, 104; Barrett 191; Dunn 2006, 93-35; Koester 1989, 108; Talbert 92-93; for a discussion of some of the problems with this reading of John, see M. M. Thompson 2001, 190, 217-20; cf. Brant 62-63.

73. See 3:30, where John says that he must decrease or become less (*eme de elattousthai*).

Similarly, the coming of the Messiah in Jewish literature implies a transformation or perfection associated with the arrival of the messianic age that surpasses the previous age. A new (Jewish) temple might replace the current temple in Jerusalem, surpassing the old one in splendor and glory; Jerusalem and its people would be purified (Tob 13:11–17; 14:4–7; Bar 2:27–35; 5:5–9; Sir 36:1–19; *Jub.* 23.27–31; *Pss. Sol.* 17.21–30). In other words, biblical (and Jewish) eschatology has a built-in expectation of “replacement” since the coming messianic age surpasses the former in righteousness, justice, purity, and holiness. But this “replacement” of the old age with the age of abundant blessing in the Messiah is akin to the turning of a page to a new chapter in the narrative, rather than discarding the old story and introducing an entirely new one. Put differently, Jesus does not replace “Judaism”: as Messiah, he fulfills the hopes for God’s promised blessed age. The choice wine has been saved until the end and is now offered in abundance. This is the next chapter in the story of scriptural hopes and promises.

Specifically, the provision of choice wine at the end of the feast calls to mind those scenes in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament that depict the time of salvation as a time of feasting in abundance and joy, when the mountains shall “drip with sweet wine” (Amos 9:13–14; Isa 25:6–9), and when God shall gather Israel together and provide abundantly for them (Jer 31:10–14).⁷⁴ Although there is little evidence that the royal Messiah was expected to be a miracle worker himself, certain apocalyptic texts describe the days of the Messiah as a time when vineyards will become surrealistically fruitful: “on one vine will be a thousand branches, one branch will produce a thousand clusters, and one cluster will produce a thousand grapes, and one grape will produce a cor⁷⁵ of wine” (2 Bar. 29.5; cf. 1 En. 10.19).⁷⁶ And the wine cup, grape leaf, and grape are frequently found on coins minted during both the first (66–73 C.E.) and second (132–35) Jewish revolts.⁷⁷

It was also expected that “the treasury of manna will come down from on high” in those years (2 Bar. 29.7–8). The sign in John 2, with the plentiful provision of wine, should be read in tandem with the feeding of the five thousand in John 6. In each case Jesus provides a surplus, an abundance that sustains life. The visions of plenty in the messianic age are realized in the Messiah, who brings abundant bread and wine as tokens and conduits of God’s abundant grace (1:14, 16) and abundant life (10:10). Not only has the good wine been saved till the end, but it also far surpasses expectations. The “lesser” has given way to the

74. In Isaiah, the coming time of Israel’s renewed fellowship with God is also pictured as a marriage (54:4–8; 62:4–5); notice also the parables featuring weddings in the Synoptic tradition (Matt 22:1–14; Luke 12:35–38; 14:8–11).

75. About 350–400 liters, or 100 gallons (cf. 1 Kgs 5:2, 25 LXX [4:22; 5:11 ET]; Ezek 45:14).

76. Also found in Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.33.3.

77. Meshorer 154–69, plates 19–28.

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"greater" even as the Scriptures have anticipated. There is therefore both continuity and discontinuity in the Gospel's portrayal of Jesus' relationship to "his own" (1:11), to the law, and to the institutions and practices of worship enjoined in the Scriptures. In the present, as in the past, God provides generously for the sustenance of his people and of the world, to bring joy and gladness.

In the pagan world, wine was connected with the festivals of the god Dionysus. One writer recounts that at a festival of Dionysus three empty pots were sealed in a room and then discovered to be full of wine the next morning.⁷⁸ Several authors refer to springs or rivers that inexplicably flowed with wine, and these are sometimes linked with Dionysus (e.g., with his birthplace or a festival).⁷⁹ John's account may appear to have some elements in common with such traditions that show Dionysus providing a plentiful supply of wine.⁸⁰ Those readers acquainted with such traditions could have read the account of Jesus' sign as surpassing the acts of the pagan deities as well. As often in John, a particular narrative that takes up biblical imagery and subsequent interpretive traditions nevertheless can be understood by those unfamiliar with that milieu and, indeed, by those steeped in other religious contexts. But awareness of the scriptural context not only enriches the texture of the narrative; it also orients the reader to a particular narrative and to the God portrayed in it.

[11] The account closes with the statement "This was the first of the signs that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee."⁸¹ He manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him." This is the first use of the term "signs" (*sēmeia*) in the Gospel, and it is not surprising to find it linked with "believe" or "trust" (*pisteuō*). John distinctively refers to Jesus' deeds as *signs*, pointers to and manifestations of Jesus' identity as the Messiah and Son of God.⁸² While the disciples now believe in him (cf. 20:31), not all those who see signs do so. In fact, later the Evangelist will lament that signs do not lead those who see them to believe (John 12:37-41), citing passages from Isaiah to drive the point home (53:1; 6:10).⁸³ The disciples' initial responses to Jesus, which entail both acknowledgment of his messianic identity (1:45, 49) and "following" him (1:40, 43-44), now become "trust" or "belief." Having seen Jesus' glory, they "believed" or "trusted" in him.⁸⁴

78. Pausanias, *Descr.* 6.26.1-2; also recorded in Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 1.34.

79. Euripides, *Bacch.* 707; Diodorus Siculus, *Hist.* 3.66.2; Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 2.231; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 6.10; Lucian of Samosata, *Ver. hist.* 1.7.

80. See here Hengel 1987; 1995a.

81. Since the only other numbered sign takes place when Jesus is in Cana (4:46, 54), the sense may be that this is the first of two signs that Jesus did in Cana.

82. See Excursus 3: "The Signs in the Gospel of John."

83. *Pisteuō* may mean "believe" with reference to a promise or words spoken, but more typically means "trust" or "rely on" with reference to a person (BDAG).

84. See Excursus 8: "The Johannine Vocabulary of Faith and Discipleship."

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The narrative does not indicate what the disciples saw that constituted Jesus' "glory." This is the first reference to Jesus' glory (*doxa*) since the prologue, where "glory" was ascribed to the Word made flesh, the Father's only Son, "full of grace and truth" (1:14), from whose "fullness we have all received" (1:16). Here Jesus has provided fully, and so revealed his glory as the one who provides abundantly for his people. Both in the prologue and here, Jesus' glory can be seen. And yet few of those at the wedding know what has transpired: the steward of the wedding attributes the provision of wine to the bridegroom. The servants apparently know what has happened, but they are not reported to have seen Jesus' glory or to have believed in him. Jesus' glory, his identity as God's agent through whom the fullness of grace and truth are given (1:14, 16), is not manifested to all, but to those with eyes to discern who he is and what he has done. While some discern the truth about Jesus, such discerning faith is never mechanically explained: there is no formula that orders "signs" and "faith" in a predictable or wooden way. If the changing of the water to wine at Cana is the "first" sign that demonstrates the opening of the heavens as Jesus promised (1:51), that revelation remains mysteriously opaque to most.

Excursus 3: The Signs in the Gospel of John

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus' acts of healing, feeding, and raising the dead are called *dynameis* ("mighty deeds," Matt 11:20–21, 23; 13:58; Mark 6:2, 5, 14), *thaumasia* ("marvels," Matt 21:15), and *paradoxa* ("remarkable things," Luke 5:26); John refers regularly to Jesus' deeds as *sēmeia*, "signs."⁸⁵ Jesus himself speaks of his deeds as the Father's works (*erga*), a point enunciated most sharply in his claim that he works when and as his Father works, to exercise God's authority to give life and to judge, even on the Sabbath (John 5:19–36; 10:25, 38; 14:10–12; 17:4).

"Signs" (MT *ōtôt*, LXX *sēmeia*), often linked with "wonders," occurs frequently in the Old Testament to refer to the plagues and other acts accompanying God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Exod 4:9, 17, 28, 30; 7:3; 10:1; et al.). But many other things are also called "signs": the rainbow (Gen 9:12–13, 17); circumcision (17:11); the lamb's blood on the doorposts (Exod 12:7, 13); the Sabbath (31:13, 17); the words of God, to be bound on one's hand, forehead, and doorposts (Deut 6:8); the birth of a child (Isa 7:11–14);

85. There is no single Greek equivalent to the English "miracle," nor would NT authors have accepted the rationalist definition that miracles are deeds "contrary to the laws of nature." The Synoptics use "signs" (*sēmeia*) to refer to events that would offer divine ratification—such as a heavenly voice—of Jesus' actions (e.g., Matt 12:38–39; 16:1–4) or the coming of the "end of the age" (e.g., Matt 24:3; Luke 21:11, with *phobētra*, "horrors"; 21:25). False prophets do "signs and wonders" (*terata*, Matt 24:24); Herod hopes to see Jesus perform a "sign" (Luke 23:8). "Signs" can also be used generally to mean "token" or "indicator" (Luke 2:12, 34; 11:30). Elsewhere the NT speaks positively of "signs and wonders" done by the apostles (Acts 4:30; 5:12; 14:3; 15:12; Rom 15:19; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:4) and in keeping with the pair in the OT (Exod 7:3; Deut 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; Ps 135:9; etc.). In Revelation (13:13–14; 19:20), the beast does "great signs" in order to deceive.

the fertility of crops in the land (37:30; 55:13); and heavenly portents (Jer 10:2). Such things are "signs" because they are indicators of God's work in the world. Whether extraordinary (portents in the heaven) or ordinary (the slaying of a lamb; the circumcision of a baby), these things are "signs" because they are not ends in themselves: signs function primarily to point to God's work. "Work" refers more broadly to all that God does. For example, in the LXX creation is God's "work" (*ergon, erga*, Gen 2:2-3), as is the exodus (Exod 34:10; Ps 77:12; MT *mēlā'kā* or *ma'āšeh*). While all of Jesus' words and deeds are his "works," or God's work through him, it is less clear what falls under the rubric of "signs" in John. Certain deeds, such as changing water to wine, the healing of the royal official's son, and the feeding of the five thousand are explicitly called signs (2:11; 4:54; 6:14). At other times summarizing comments refer to Jesus' many signs (2:23-25; 11:47; 12:37; 20:30-31), but such summaries do not specify whether some or all of Jesus' deeds, such as the temple cleansing (2:23-25) or resurrection appearances (20:30-31), should be understood as signs.⁸⁶ Given the range of meanings of "sign" in the Old Testament and the absence of a clear and univocal use of the term "sign" in John, it is best to cast the net widely: Jesus' signs include his various kinds of miracles (2:11; 4:54; 6:14); actions such as the temple cleansing that point to another event, truth, or reality (2:23-25); and the resurrection appearances, since they are not ends in themselves but testify that Jesus lives (20:27-29). In every case these are signs because they are witnesses to the work of God. As such, they call for faith (10:37-38; 12:37; 20:31).

There are some significant differences between John and the Synoptics in John's use of the tradition of Jesus' miracles. The Synoptics record many deeds of healing and exorcism, typically in short, self-contained narratives; Jesus himself offers little by way of their explanation or interpretation or, if he does, such comments tend to be terse and pithy (e.g., Matt 9:6; 12:12; Luke 13:15-16). Jesus' mighty deeds are reckoned by Jesus or the narrator as manifestations of the inbreaking kingdom or the Spirit (Mark 3:22-30; Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20), Jesus' authority (Mark 1:27; 2:10; 3:15; 6:7; 11:28-33), or the fulfillment of Scripture (Matt 8:17; 11:4-6; 12:15-17; Luke 7:18-23). In the Synoptics, faith is often the premise for healing (Matt 9:2, 22, 29; 15:28; Mark 10:52; Luke 7:50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42), not the response to Jesus' deeds. Instead, the Synoptics record a variety of responses to Jesus' deeds: awe, fear, amazement, astonishment, wonder, and unbelief.

While John alludes to many signs (2:23-25; 12:37-40; 20:30-31), the Gospel presents a relatively small number of them.⁸⁷ Jesus' proclamation and his deeds are not linked with the kingdom, or the power of the Spirit, or the fulfillment of Scripture. Instead, the signs point to Jesus' authority and to his unity with the Father (5:19-30; 10:37-38; 14:10-11). Jesus' signs are often interpreted in lengthy discourses, elaborating these aspects of his identity. Scripture provides imagery—such as Moses' feeding of the Israelites with manna—for interpreting the signs, but otherwise foretells only

86. For various views of the interpretation of 20:30-31, and whether signs include the resurrection appearances, see comments there.

87. John records no exorcisms, healing of lepers, or curing of the deaf, deeds all found in the Synoptics. The lack of exorcisms may perhaps be explained by John's emphasis on Jesus' overthrow of the "ruler of this world" (12:31; 14:30; 16:11), or by his depiction of the primary conflict not between opposed kingdoms or spirits, but between "belief" and "unbelief." See also Twelftree.

the lack of positive response to them (12:37-40). Indeed, there are really one of two responses to the signs: belief or unbelief. One either accepts the testimony of the signs that reveal Jesus to be the one through whom God's life-giving work is accomplished, or one does not (cf. 2:11; 10:37-38; 14:10-11; 12:37; 20:30-31). Faith is not the premise for, but rather the desired response to, Jesus' signs.

Yet the relationship between signs and faith is subtle and complex. Sometimes signs lead to faith (2:11; 3:2; 6:2; 20:30-31), and sometimes they do not (12:37). Sometimes faith is the predisposition necessary to understand what Jesus does (11:4, 40); at other times, Jesus' deeds lead, not to faith, but to misunderstanding (6:14-15, 26) or hostility (9:40; 11:47). Perhaps most vexing, at times John seems to speak positively of believing in Jesus because of his signs (2:11; 20:30-31), but at other times seems to question the genuineness of such faith (2:23-25; 4:48; 6:14-15, 26). Some interpreters have therefore contended that John denigrates faith based on signs when understood as a response to miraculous deeds as displays of power, deeming such faith inferior or provisional (2:23-25; 3:1-2; 4:48-53; 20:29). Response to Jesus based on his miracles could be a first step toward a deeper and more mature discipleship, but it is portrayed in John as fickle, inadequate, or provisional faith at best.⁸⁸ Such an interpretation often arises from an emphasis on the "symbolic" aspect of John's presentation of signs, drawn especially from the interpretations of that work offered in the lengthy discourses interpreting the signs.⁸⁹ Such discourses are understood to articulate the deeper or genuine meaning of the signs. For example, if Jesus feeds five thousand (John 6:1-13), that "sign" points to his identity as the bread of life (6:35, 48) and to the fact that he can grant eternal life in the resurrection at the last day (6:40, 44, 54): its significance is not found in his ability to multiply bread, or even to feed the hungry, but in his identity as the bread of life for all the world. Thus, when compared to the Synoptic miracle tradition, in John "the reference to spiritual deliverance is primary, and the symbolic element is stronger."⁹⁰

Nevertheless, the description of Jesus' deeds as "symbolic" and of their meaning as "spiritual" must not be taken to mean that Jesus' "signs" are significant apart from what he does in the material realm. Indeed, in a narrative that begins with the creation of the world through the Word (1:1-3) and of the Word's subsequent incarnation in that world (1:14), the signs are revelations of Jesus' identity precisely in the material realm as material deeds.⁹¹ Accordingly, when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, his "material" act does not symbolize his "spiritual" power to grant eternal life; these are alternative expressions of his life-giving power. Because he is the one through whom the world was brought to life, he can raise the dead to life, and he can grant the gift of eternal life at the

88. Schnackenburg 1:358; R. Brown 1966, 127. For the contrast between the fickleness of faith arising from signs and perseverance in discipleship, see Barrett 202; Culpepper 1983, 116; Lindars 145.

89. Bultmann argues that John was critical of faith that depended on signs: revelation occurs primarily through the Word, and authentic faith arises from *hearing* rather than seeing (1971, 113, 119, 206, 208; 1955, 44-45, 56-57, 60). Following in Bultmann's footsteps, Becker argues that Jesus' interpretations of the signs through his word rendered the signs superfluous (Bultmann 1971, 452; Becker 1981, 408). For John's emphasis on seeing, see comments on 12:37-43.

90. R. Brown 1966, 529.

91. Schnackenburg 1:525.

last day. When Jesus' "signs" are understood to be "signs" of the Father's indwelling and working through him to bring life, when their witness to the unity of the Father and Son is grasped, then the signs lead to faith.

Those who do not see the work of God in Jesus have not "seen signs," because they have not understood their witness (John 6:26). Instead, they have seen Jesus' deeds as ends in themselves: amazing deeds, wondrous provisions. But to believe that Jesus has power to work amazing deeds is far short of seeing them *as signs*: to see them as revelatory of his glory (2:11) or of God's glory (11:4, 40); as manifestations of Jesus' identity as bread of life (6:35), light of the world (8:12; 9:5), and resurrection and life (11:25-26); and as testimonies to his unity with the Father (14:10-11). Jesus does not do his works in order to evoke faith; he does them because he does the works of God. As works of God, the signs are witnesses to who Jesus is, and as such they call for faith. Both signs and words may lead to faith in Jesus, but they do so only when understood to be the work and word of God through him (3:2; 5:36; 9:3-4; 10:25, 32, 37-38; 14:10-12).

2:12-25 Jesus and the Temple

Even as the temple, situated on a high point in the city, dominated the landscape of Jerusalem, so too it looms large in the pages of the Old Testament. Its construction is anticipated and described in detail; its sacrificial rituals are both celebrated and criticized; its defilement and subsequent destruction by the Babylonians are lamented; and its rebuilding is pressed for and accomplished, with mixed response.⁹² Later the temple's profanation by Antiochus IV Epiphanes and subsequent rededication by the Maccabees (168-165 B.C.E.) figure in a narrative of hope and victory that undergirded Jewish identity and expectations. Given the temple's geographical, religious, and political role not only in Jerusalem, but also in first-century Judaism as a whole, it is no wonder that it figures importantly in both Jewish and early Christian texts, including the New Testament.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is regularly found in Jerusalem, in the temple precincts.⁹³ As one of the first acts of his public ministry, Jesus clears the temple of money-changers, animals and those who sell them, so that it may be "the house of my Father" rather than a "house of trade" (2:16). Having demonstrated what that temple ought to be, Jesus then also speaks, albeit cryptically, of its destruction and rebuilding in three days. An editorial comment explains that Jesus was actually speaking of "his body" that would be destroyed but raised to life. In brief compass, John presents the need for the expulsion of all trade from the temple so that it may indeed be "my Father's house," but at the same time he points to a future temple. John's account reflects both the conviction

92. On the significance of the temple, see the excellent study by Skarsaune.

93. For studies of the temple in John, see Coloe 2001; Kerr; for the impact of the temple's fall on Judaism and John, see Motyer; Köstenberger 2009, 60-72.

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that the temple is the dwelling of the holy God, or of God's glory and name, and the hope, found in Jewish literature of the time, for a new temple that would replace the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus himself is a temple that, like the Jerusalem temple, will be destroyed; yet he will be raised up—and in three days. In John, the risen Jesus is the new, purified, and indestructible temple that is truly the dwelling of God.

2:12 After this, he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his siblings,^a and his disciples; and they remained there a few days.

13 Since the Jewish Passover was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple^b he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and money changers sitting there. 15 Having made a whip of rope, he drove them all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen. Then he poured out the coins of the money changers^c and overturned their tables. 16 And he said to those who were selling doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a house of trade!"^d 17 His disciples remembered that it is written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

18 So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" 19 And Jesus answered, "If you destroy this temple, in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews said to him, "This temple has been under construction forty-six years. You will raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was talking about the temple of his body. 22 So then when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

23 While he was in Jerusalem for the Passover feast, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he did. 24 Jesus himself did not trust himself to them, 25 because he knew all things; he did not need anyone to testify to him about humankind. For he knew what was within human beings.

a. Although *hoi adelphoi* is almost always rendered "brothers," by form it may include brothers and sisters (see Mark 6:3).

b. *Naos* is sometimes distinguished as the "sanctuary," perhaps the holy of holies or place where God or the deity is understood to dwell, from the *hieros* or temple precincts; here temple translates both *hieros* and *naos* since the words seem to function synonymously, as they often do in Greek literature (see BDAG and LSJM).

c. John uses two different terms for "money changers": *kermatistēs* (2:14) and *kollybistēs* (John 2:15; Matt 21:12; Mark 11:15; *kollybos* is a small coin).

d. "House of trade" (*oikon emporiou*) contrasts with "my Father's house"; it could be rendered "marketplace" (so NRSV).

[2:12–17] Following the wedding at Cana, Jesus went down to Capernaum with family members and his disciples prior to his journey to Jerusalem for

the Passover.⁹⁴ Together Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread that follow it are one of the three pilgrimage festivals, during which Jews were commanded to go up to Jerusalem (Exod 23:14-17; 34:23; cf. Lev 23:4-7; Num 28:16-25; Deut 16:1-8; Josephus, *Ant.* 4.203).⁹⁵ Passover commemorates the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Exod 12-13; Lev 23:4-8; Num 9:1-15; 28:16-25). As narrated in Exod 12, on the night in which the Israelites fled from Egypt, they were to smear the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of their houses so that the angel of death would pass them by (12:7, 12-13). The Israelites were to eat the roasted lamb while dressed for travel, in haste (12:11), and with bitter herbs, symbolic of the bitterness of bondage (12:8). Some features of the Passover celebration that appear in the New Testament are first attested in the literature of the Second Temple period.⁹⁶

Passover had not always been a pilgrimage feast; the injunctions of Exod 12 do not mention the temple, and at certain times and places the lamb was evidently prepared and eaten in homes (even as the Passover meal is today). But in other Old Testament passages, it is clear that Passover must be celebrated in Jerusalem (Deut 16:1-8; 2 Kgs 23:21-23; 2 Chr 30; 35:1-19).⁹⁷ The requirement that the feast was to be kept in Jerusalem, or even within the temple, was tied to the requirement that those keeping the feast would have undertaken appropriate purification (John 11:55-12:1; 18:28). But in John, the focus is on the temple itself and its need of cleansing.

The other two pilgrimage festivals are the Festival of Weeks (Shavuot, or Pentecost) and Tabernacles, or Booths (Sukkot).⁹⁸ The Fourth Gospel regularly presents Jesus in Jerusalem on the occasion of the pilgrimage feasts (2:13, 23; 5:1 [?]; 7:2, 14; 11:55-56; cf. also 10:22; Luke 2:41). In the Synoptic Gospels, it was in conjunction with Passover that Jesus went up to Jerusalem, rode into it on a donkey in fulfillment of the prophecy in Zech 9:9, visited the temple, and

94. For similar "vestigial scenes" (Michaels 897), in which a geographical or temporal notice sets a scene but no action is narrated, see 11:54; 12:9, 20-21.

95. Passover and Unleavened Bread are sometimes conflated (see Mark 14:1; Luke 22:1). For their distinction, see Josephus, *Ant.* 3.248; for the feasts described under the single heading of "Unleavened Bread," see *Ant.* 2.317; 9.271; for the feasts together called Passover, see *Ant.* 18.29. On this point, see Sanders 1992, 132-38; Bokser; and Stern 129, esp. nn. 95-96. See also comments on 19:14 below.

96. In John, these include the need for complete purification (11:55) and alms for the poor (13:29; *m. Pesah.* 10:1); elsewhere, scouring the house to remove the leaven (1 Cor 5:6-8); and drinking wine during the Passover meal (*Jub.* 49.6; Mark 14:23; possibly John 6:51-58).

97. *Jubilees* insists that the Passover lamb must be eaten within the temple precincts (*Jub.* 49.16, 18, 20-21).

98. Deut 16:16; 2 Chr 8:13. Women, children, and certain others are not required to go up to the temple for pilgrim festivals (*m. Hag.* 1:1; see *m. Sukkah* 2:8 for Tabernacles). On the size of the crowds in Jerusalem at Passover and Roman responses to unrest, see Josephus, *J.W.* 6.422-26; *Ant.* 20.106.

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