

Comment: Jesus' feeding of the masses recalls Moses' provision of manna for the Israelites in the wilderness. On the next day the crowd finds Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum and they press him to provide manna yet again. But the sign of physical bread was intended to point to something greater, more lasting, and more satisfying. This Jesus explains in his declaration that he is the bread of life. He is like Moses in performing this miracle, but he is greater than Moses because he can provide bread that will satisfy eternally. Jesus is also greater than Moses because he is the bread. Those who feed on Jesus are eating the bread that God gives and they receive life with God.

Sign #6: Jesus restores sight to the blind (9:1–10:21)

Significance: to point to Jesus' identity as the Son of Man who does the works of the Father

Comment: The one who is light now offers sight to those who recognize their blindness and act in faith. After the blind man receives physical sight, he gradually receives spiritual sight as he recognizes that Jesus is a prophet who does the works of God and is in fact from God. By contrast, the Pharisees are blind to the power of God in their midst. Thus the one who was blind can see and those who think they can see are in fact blind (9:35-41; cf. Isa 29:13-24).

SIGN #7: JESUS IS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE THROUGH WHOM ALL MAY LIVE (11:1-12:11)

Significance: to point to Jesus' identity as the resurrection and the life through whom all may live

Comment: Jesus' ultimate miracle, and the seventh sign in John's Gospel, is his bringing the dead back to life. The raising of Lazarus was to demonstrate in a bold and unmistakable way Jesus' claim to be the God who gives life. He is the one who could give spiritual life to the spiritually dead. The seventh sign is an appropriate final climactic sign in its foreshadowing of Jesus' raising of himself from the dead.

PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Read Acts 1-3. Pay attention to verses about the kingdom, the church, and Jesus. How are the kingdom and church related? What is Jesus doing now?

THE SEVEN SIGNS OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read John 1-12. Keep an eye out for the (seven?) signs and try to determine their significance. (For instance, why does Jesus change water into wine?) What do they tell us about who Jesus is?

THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL

The Gospel of John was written to present Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God in order that people would believe in him (20:30-31). This faith is necessary in order to move the reader from darkness into light and from death into life. John presents Jesus as the source of life who gave his life in order that others might have life. Jesus is the Lamb of God who comes from the Father in order to lay down his life as a substitute for sinful men.

The Gospel of John consists of two parts. The first half (1:1–12:19) describes the signs that Jesus did which point to his true identity. Jesus explained the meaning of these signs and revealed how he was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures and festivals. The book turns with his decisive rejection by the Jewish leadership following the seventh sign (12:20-50). The second half is thus concerned with the crucifixion (chs. 13–21). John is doing more than just recording a life of Jesus; he is reflecting on the identity and character of his Savior in order to present him as one fully worthy of complete faith.

THE PURPOSE OF THE SEVEN SIGNS

The reader has already been told that Jesus is God, but through the signs Jesus demonstrates that his works are in accord with the character, purpose, and design of the Father. As Jesus will say, "Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father" (10:37-38). Signs did not compel faith, and thus it could be said, "Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their

presence, they still would not believe in him” (12:37). John’s intention in writing this Gospel is that another generation will recognize from the signs that Jesus is Messiah and Son of God, worthy of being completely entrusted with their lives.

The signs that Jesus did were not simply powerful works of God, but they were markers that pointed to Jesus’ identity. His signs showed not that he was a miracle worker or a prophet, but God himself. A sign has three characteristics: (1) a public work; (2) identified by John as a sign; (3) that reveals Jesus as God’s representative.

Most interpreters agree that John intended to provide seven signs that point to Jesus’ character. This use of the number seven is found in the “I am” statements, possibly in the number of witnesses, and throughout John’s book of Revelation. Six of the signs are generally agreed upon, but the seventh is in dispute. Instead of walking on the water or the resurrection, I believe that the seventh sign is the clearing of the temple.

SIGNS #1-3: JESUS IS THE MESSIAH AND SON OF GOD WHO GIVES LIFE (2:1-4:54)

Sign #1: Jesus changes water to wine (2:1-12)

Significance: to point to Jesus’ identity as the Messiah who establishes the kingdom

Comment: Jesus’ first sign was not simply a miracle for the convenience of the wedding host. By producing wine from water, Jesus revealed that he was the Messiah who would establish the kingdom which would be characterized by exceeding joy, as reflected in the symbol of abundant wine (Isa 25:6; Amos 9:13-14). Many interpreters draw attention to parts of the story that are less than significant; this sign is not primarily about Mary, the jars, the quality of the wine, or the delight of the master of the banquet. It is, as John notes in the conclusion of the story, in the revelation of Jesus’ glory such that his disciples believed in him (2:11). In his first sign, Jesus wanted his followers to recognize his character on the basis of his messianic work.

Sign #2: Jesus clears the temple area (2:13-22)

Significance: to point to Jesus’ identity as the Son of God who has authority over the temple

Comment: This event was not miraculous per se, though it certainly demonstrated significant courage and physical exertion. But in the purging the temple of unclean business, Jesus displayed not only his authority over the religious center, but also his concern for the things of God. By calling the temple his “Father’s house,” he desired that he would be recognized as the Son of God. That this event is considered a sign in the Gospel is demonstrated in Jesus’ response to the Jewish leaders and in John’s summary (2:18-23).

Sign #3: Jesus heals the official’s son (4:43-54)

Significance: to point to Jesus’ ability to give life

Comment: By speaking the word, Jesus reverses a sick boy’s condition, thereby imparting life. In response to this sign, the official and his family recognize Jesus’ ability to give life and they believe in him.

SIGNS #4-6: JESUS WAS SENT BY THE FATHER AND DOES THE WORKS OF THE FATHER (5:1-10:42)

Sign #4: Jesus heals a lame man (5:1-47)

Significance: to point to Jesus’ unity with the Father

Comment: This miracle is not about compassion (many were not healed) or about faith (the lame man didn’t even know who Jesus was). Jesus’ miracle was a display of the Father’s work. Just as the Father restores the legs of the lame, so does Jesus (cf. Ps 146:8). Just as the Father works on the Sabbath, so does Jesus (5:17). Jesus’ work, like that of the Father, overthrows the effects of the power of sin in the world.

Sign #5: Jesus feeds the five thousand (6:1-71)

Significance: to point to Jesus’ identity as the bread of life sent by the Father