



Carl Bloch, *Healing at the Pool of Bethesda*

## The Symbolism of the Seven Miraculous Signs in John

THE WORD MADE FLESH: JESUS CHRIST IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Eric D. Huntsman, Education Week 2018

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## Greek Words for Miracle

The English word miracle comes from the Latin *miraculum*, an object or action causing wonder. The three most common words used in Greek are:

Greek	English	KJV Rendering	References
<i>dynamis</i>	“powerful deed or work”	“mighty work”  “miracle”  “power”  “virtue”	Mark 6:2, 5; Matth 11:20–21, 23; 13:54, 58; 14:2; Luke 19:37  Mark 9:39 (“miracle” in 6:52 understood by translators)  Luke 5:17  Mark 5:30; Luke 6:19; 8:46
<i>sēmeion</i>	“sign,” miraculous sign	“miracle”  “sign”	Luke 23:8; John 2:11, 23; 3:2; 4:54; 6:2, 14; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18, 37  John 20:30
<i>ergon</i>	“work”	“work”	Matthew 11:2; John 5:20, 36; 7:21; 9:3; 10:25, 32; 14:10–11

Other Greek words used include *endoxon*, *paradoxon*, and *thausasion* but never *thauma* or *sēmeia kai terata*.

## Gospel Portrayals of Miracles

- **Mark (10 stories; 4 summaries; 1 report):** Miracles as powerful deeds (*dynameis*) are the signs that Jesus is the Son of God
  - Miracles, rather than explicit teachings, open Jesus' ministry (see Mark 1:21-45)
  - Marcan miracles are **described in detail and very dramatically** (remember this is the "Harry Potter gospel!")
- **Matthew (21 stories; 10 summaries; 4 reports):** Miracles are **secondary to Jesus' authoritative teaching**
  - With the exception of a passing summary of healings (Matt 4:23-24), mention of specific miracles (Matt 8:1-17) is delayed until *after* the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7)
  - Miracles are not portrayed so magically . . .
- **Luke (21 stories; 4 summaries; 4 reports):** Authoritative teaching and miraculous deeds are balanced
  - Luke 4:16-30, esp. vv. 18-19 (= Isaiah 61:1-2)
  - Luke adds miracles that bless women; also more medically interesting miracles
- **John (7+1 signs):** Seven specific signs (*sēmeia*) reveal **who Jesus is and what he has come to do** "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31)

## Miracles and Their Symbolism

- **Power over the elements**
  - *Revealing the divine identity of Jesus*
- **Healing the sick**
  - *Reflecting the healing, strengthening, and purifying power of the atonement*
- **Casting out devils [none in John]**
  - *Liberating those who are enslaved to forces beyond themselves*
- **Causing the blind to see and the deaf to hear**
  - *Opening spiritual eyes and ears*
- **Raising the Dead**
  - *Overcoming spiritual as well as physical death while pointing to a more eternal kind of life*

## Sēmeia: Miraculous Signs and Enacted Signs

- **Σημεῖον (sēmeion):** a sign token, a representative symbol; a portent or sign that signifies something greater
- **Miraculous signs:** miracles that reflect or reveal something greater than the act itself
- **Enacted Signs:** prophetic actions
  - “Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. (John 2:23; cf. 2:23; 3:2 )
    - At this point, Jesus had changed water to wine at Cana (the first miraculous sign) but had not performed any recorded miracles in Jerusalem
    - **He had cleansed the temple—a symbolic act or “enacted sign”**
      - Isaiah walked naked and barefoot for three years! (Isaiah 20:2–6)
      - Ezekiel could not mourn for his wife, built a model of Jerusalem, and baked symbolic bread (Ezekiel 4:1–17; 24:15–25)
  - Being lifted up (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34; **19:18**)
  - Blood and water from his side (John 19:34–35)

## Miraculous Signs in John

- **Seven Important “Signs”**
  - 1 - Water into Wine (2:1–11)
  - 2 - Healing of Nobleman’s Son (4:46–54)
  - 3 - Healing of the Lame Man at the Pool of Bethesda (5:1–18)
  - 4 - Feeding of the 5,000 (6:1–15)
  - 5 - Walking on Water (6:16–21)
  - 6 - Healing of the Man Born Blind (9:1–41)
  - 7 - Raising of Lazarus (11:1–57)
- ***The greatest sign, the resurrection of Jesus!***
- Also, an astonishing catch of 153 fish after the Resurrection (John 21:14–14)

## Structure of John

- **Prologue (John 1:1–51)**
  - *Logos* Hymn (John 1:1–18)
  - The First Witnesses and Disciples (1:19–51)
- **Book of Signs (John 2:1–12:50)**
  - First Signs and Dialogues (John 2:1–4:54)
  - Signs and Discourses in the Context of Jewish Feasts (John 5:1–10:42)
  - The Raising of Lazarus (John 11:1–54)
  - The Book of Signs Closes: Setting the Scene for the Passion (John 12:11–12:50)
- **Book of Glory (John 13:1–20:31)**
  - The Last Supper (John 13:1–38)
  - The Farewell Discourses (John 14:1–17:26)
  - Crucifixion, Death, and Burial (John 18:1–19:42)
  - Resurrection (John 20:1–31)
- **Epilogue (John 21:1–25)**

17a. John the Theologian

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## The First Sign: Water to Wine



2. the Seven Miraculous Signs in John

- **Symbolism of 6 stone water pots**
  - Old law of Moses (6, imperfect) contrasted with *new law of Christ*
- **Sacramental imagery**
- **Creator symbolism**
  - YHWH creates/organizes, *Jesus re-creates/re-organizes*
- **Incarnational theology**
  - **Water:** divinity, spirit, eternal nature
  - **Blood/wine:** mortality, flesh, physical/fallen nature
  - **Presence of Mary—the means of Incarnation**



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The healing of the son of a nobleman by James Tissot

## The Second Sign: Healing the Nobleman's Son (miracle story, 4:46-54)

- **Jesus Returns to Galilee** (narrative transition report, 4:43-45)
  - "So Jesus came again into **Cana** of Galilee, where he made the water wine.
  - "**Cana**" reference completes the ring begun with chapter 2
  - **Water made wine = Word made flesh**
- **Second Sign: Healing the Nobleman's Son in Cana** (miracle story, 4:46-54)
  - **Healing Power of the Incarnate Word provides segue to the healing of the lame man**

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## Jesus at the Pool of Bethesda

- Jesus goes to Jerusalem for a feast, which is not named (and the emphasis will be on the weekly festival of Sabbath rather than a particular annual festival)
- "Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a **pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches**" (5:2)
  - *bêt ḥeseda* or "**House of Mercy**"
- "In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, **waiting for the moving of the water.** (5:3)
  - "... darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2)



19. Jesus and the Feasts of the Jews 1 (John 5-6)

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## Jesus Heals the Infirm Man at Bethesda

Anticipated by the Healing the Nobleman's Son in Cana: Jehovah creates, Jesus re-creates/heals



Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, Christ at the Pool of Bethesda

19. Jesus and the Feasts of the Jews 1 (John 5-6)

- 5:4 with its story of the angel troubling the water is missing from the earliest and best Greek mss.
- “And a certain man was there, **which had an infirmity thirty and eight years**” (5:5)
  - **38 years**: the period of time that Israel wandered between Kadesh-barnea and Wadi Zereb (Deuteronomy 2:14)
  - 40 years is symbolic of the time of our mortal probation
  - **For most of that time we are in a state of rebellion and sin**
- Jesus comes to him: “**Rise [egeire], take up thy bed, and walk**” (5:8)
  - **egeire, the word used for “rise” is also used for resurrect!**

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## Feeding of the 5,000 (6:5-15)

- Because John is independent of Mark, these two counts provide “multiple attestation of sources” (since presumably Matthew and Luke were drawing upon Mark)
- John’s detail that there were 5 **barley** loaves
  - connects Jesus’ miracle with that of Elisha, who fed 100 men with 20 barley loaves (2 Kings 4:42-44)
- “Then those men, when they had seen the miracle (*sēmeion*) that Jesus did, said, **This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world**” (6:14)
- “When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, **to make him a king**, he departed again into a mountain himself alone (6:15)



Feeding The Five Thousand by Harold Copping

19. Jesus and the Feasts of the Jews 1 (John 5-6)

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## Walking on Water (6:16–21)



19. Jesus and the Feasts of the Jews 1 (John 5–6)

- “It is I [*egō eimi*]” (6:20)
  - *egō eimi* = the Hebrew *‘ehyeh ‘asher ‘ehyeh*, or “I Am that I Am,” by which YHWH revealed himself to Moses (see Exodus 3:14)
- **Jesus’ epiphany on the Sea of Galilee resonates with other powerful Old Testament revelations of Jehovah** (see Job 9:8, 38:16; Habakkuk 3:15)
- As Bertil Gärtner writes, “Just as the Lord ploughed a path for Israel through the sea, leading them to freedom from bondage, so Jesus, when he walks on the water, shows that as Messiah he has power over the seas.”

Ivan Aivazovsky, *Christ Walks on Water* (although this is clearly depicting the Matthean miracle, because it has Peter walking out to meet Jesus!)

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## Feast of Tabernacles



17. John 7-12

- **Sukkôt: “booths, tabernacles, or temporary shelters”**
  - Commemorated the wanderings of the Children of Israel in the wilderness
  - **One of the three pilgrimage festivals, during Sukkot worshipers filled Jerusalem**
  - modern observant Jews still live, eat, and study in a *sukkah* during this festival
- **Later also celebrated as an autumn harvest festival**
  - Celebrated by waving palm, willow and leafy branches together with a citrus fruit
  - **The time when the king was anointed, some of its imagery will be adopted for Jesus’ triumphal entry**
  - Sukkot at the Western Wall in Jerusalem: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOTxfETVsmo&feature=player\\_detailpage](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOTxfETVsmo&feature=player_detailpage)
- Second Temple Sukkot rituals of **pouring water** and **lighting lights** set the context for **Christ’s discourses on His being the source of living waters and light**
  - See Andy Skinner’s discussion at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYWTReAN87w>

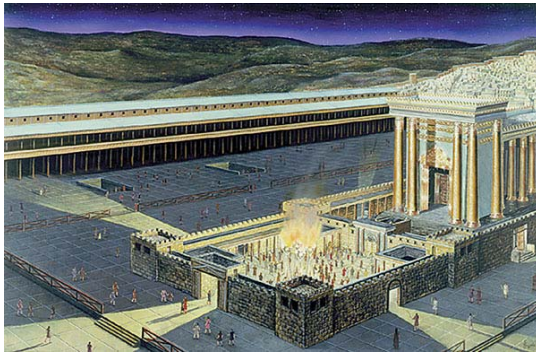
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# Tabernacles and Light

*Great lamps were lit in the temple courts each night*

- **Discourse on the Light of the World** (8:12–59; Sukkot and **Light**)
- **Physical and Spiritual Blindness** (9:1–41; More on Jesus as **Light**)



17. John 7-12



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## Physical and Spiritual Blindness

(9:1–41; more on Jesus as Light)

- **Sixth Sign: Healing of the Man Born Blind** (9:1–12)
  - clay/spittle = dust/water-breath-spirit! (cf. Gen 2:7)
  - Pool of Siloam: *Silohah* means “sent”
    - *Washing away blindness*
    - *Baptism is the means of applying the re-creating power of the Atonement?*
    - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yk24nA4pI8o>
- **Pharisees Persecute the Blind Man** (9:13–34)
- **Jesus and the Blind Man** (9:35–38)
- **Jesus Condemns Spiritual Blindness** (9:39–41)
  - “Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.” (9:41)



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20. Jesus and the Feasts of the Jews 2; Lazarus (John 7-12)

## The Lazarus Cycle (John 11:1-12:11)

- **Threat to Lazarus: his fatal sickness (11:1-16)**
- **Martha and Jesus: her confession (11:17-27)**
  - Belief of some of the “Jews” that came to Mary and the unbelief of others (11:28-37)
    - **Raising of Lazarus (11:38-44)**
  - Unbelief of some of the “Jews” that came to Mary and the belief of others (11:45-57)
- **Mary and Jesus: her act of anointing (12:1-8)**
- **Threat to Lazarus: leaders of “the Jews” plot against him (12:9-11)**

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## Jesus the Resurrection and the Life (11:17-27)

- **Jesus the Resurrection and the Life (11:17-27)**
  - “Many of the Jews came to Mary and Martha to comfort them” (11:19, one of the few neutral uses of the term)
  - ***When Martha speaks in faith, Jesus responds with teaching and testimony***
  - ***Not just an anticipation of Jesus’ own resurrection but a symbol of how all need to be raised from spiritual death***
- **Jesus Mourns with Mary (11:28-37)**
  - ***When Mary weeps, Christ responds with compassion***
- **Seventh Sign: Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead (11:38-44)**
  - “And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin [soudarion]. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.” (11:44)
    - *soudarion* is the same word used in 20:7
    - Jesus leaves his facecloth and graveclothes in the tomb because he will not need them again!



Kirk Richards, Raising Lazarus

20. Jesus and the Feasts of the Jews 2; Lazarus (John 7-12)

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