

# The Book of Signs

- I. Prologue & John the Baptist (1)
- II. **The Book of Signs** (2—12)
- III. The Book of Glory (13—20)
- IV. An Epilogue (21)

- I. John calls Jesus' miraculous acts “signs” (Greek σημεια, *semeia*)
  - A. *semeion* – sign, signal, portent; *by extension*: a miraculous occurrence interpreted as such
  - B. **sign** – *noun*. a word, image, gesture, or act which indicates something beyond itself
    - a. a sign has “semantic overflow,” that is, it “means more” than just itself.
  - C. **Semiotics** is the study of meaning-making, a field that explores the role of signs and symbols in meaningful communication
  
- II. The first major division of John contains several miraculous events called “signs”
  - A. Most commonly divided into 7 signs (but see 2:23, 21:1-6)
  - B. Function of “signs” - to make Christ known
    - 1. the signs “reveal Christ's glory” (2:11; cf. 1:14)
    - 2. the signs testify about Christ (5:36, 10:25, 10:37-38, 14:11)  
 (“the works themselves testify on my behalf”)
    - 3. To inspire belief: “These signs are written that you may believe” (20:31)
  - C. Longer accounts than similar miracles in the synoptic gospels
    - 1. John's signs are not bare accounts, but include theological reflection
    - 2. Feeding 5,000 (6:1-15), then “Bread of life” discourses (6:16-71)
    - 3. healing a blind man, (9:1-7), then “Now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains (9:8-41)
  - D. John's accounts of the “signs” are like *icons* of Jesus' miracles
  
- III. “More than,” not “Instead of” -- relationship between the signifier and the signified
  - A. John's signs are symbolic, but also literal
    - 1. their “spiritual” meaning does not negate the literal miraculous event (e.g., a healing)
  - B. Similarly, while the signs have a *spiritual* meaning,  
this does not devalue the material, physical realities they are made of
  
- IV. Signs are not *violations* of nature
  - A. nature is Christ's own (τα ιδια), because “everything that is came into being through him, and apart from him not one thing came to be” (1:3)
    - 1. signs are the continuation of the same process of creation by which the Word made the world.
  - B. Instead, the sort of questions inspired by miracles in the gospels are:
    - 1. “does this power come from God or Satan?”
      - cf. 5:36, 10:25, 10:37-38, 14:11 (“the works themselves testify on my behalf”)
      - “no one can do these signs apart from God” - 3:2
      - “how can a sinner perform such signs?” 9:16
    - 2. “What is this power being used for?”
    - 3. What does power in this mean that God is doing? - cf. 5:17.  
“When the Christ comes, will he do more *signs* than this man has? - 7:31;  
cf. 6:14 “this is indeed the prophet”

### Sign Narratives in John (and their outcomes)

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Water into Wine (2:1-10)	“And his disciples believed in him” (2:11)
Healing an Official's Son (4:46-52)	“He and his whole household believed” (4:53-4)
Healing a Man on the Sabbath (5:1-9)	resistance, controversy, some “seek to kill him” (5:10-18)
Feeding of Five Thousand (6:1-13)	Proclaim him “the prophet,” wish to make him king (6:14-15)
Walking on Water (6:16-21)	the disciples were terrified (6:19)
Healing a Blind Man (9:1-7)	controversy, Pharisees cast him <i>aposynagōgos</i> (9:4-41)
Raising of Lazarus (11:1-44)	many believe; Pharisees & priests plan to kill Jesus (11:45-53)
Miraculous Catch of Fish (21:1-6)	disciples recognize Jesus (21:7-14)

#### V. John the Baptist

A. Insertions in the Hymnic Prologue (1:6-9, 15), see Kittredge pp. 15-16

1. “He himself was *not* the light, but he came to testify to the light”

B. Initial appearance and testimony (1:19-34)

1. “I am *not* the messiah.”

2. Declares Jesus “The Lamb of God” and sees the Spirit rest on him

C. Last Appearance: “He must increase, I must decrease” (3:22-30[31-36])

D. Compared to John in the synoptic gospels:

1. More explicitly and self-admittedly inferior to Jesus

2. Not explicitly said to have baptized Jesus

3. Jesus’ early disciples from among John’s disciples; Jesus (or his disciples) baptized others