

# Introduction

## Introducing John's Gospel

by James Montgomery Boice

*In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.*

*(John 1:1)*

The gospel of John has blessed the hearts of God's people through the centuries. It has been called "God's love letter to the world." Luther wrote of it, "This is the unique, tender, genuine chief Gospel. ...Should a tyrant succeed in destroying the Holy Scriptures and only a single copy of the Epistle to the Romans and Gospel according to John escape him, Christianity would be saved." Luther must have especially loved the gospel because he preached on it for many years from the pulpit of the parish church of Wittenberg.

Some of the most widely known and best-loved texts in the Word of God are from this gospel—John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"; John 6:35: "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst"; John 10: 11: "I am the good shepherd"; John 11:25: "I am the resurrection, and the life"; John 15:1: "I am the true vine." There is the beloved fourteenth chapter: "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also. And where I go ye know, and the way ye know....I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:1-4, 6).

Because of these and other passages it is not surprising that the gospel of John has been a source of blessing to untold generations of God's people. It has probably been the means by which more persons have come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord than any other single portion of Scripture.

## ***A UNIQUE GOSPEL***

But the gospel of John is merely one of four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—all of which tell of the life of Jesus Christ on earth. So we need to ask: What makes this gospel unique? What makes John different? As one begins to read it, he soon notices some very obvious differences. Because of their similarities, Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the synoptic gospels; the three look at the life of Christ from similar viewpoints and employ similar and, at times, even identical language. But John stands apart.

In the first place, John omits many things that either one or more than one of the synoptic gospels include. John gives no account of Christ's birth. There is no mention of His baptism, although John clearly presupposes a knowledge of Christ's baptism on the part of his readers. The institution of the Lord's Supper is not included. There is no ascension. What is perhaps most striking of all, there are no parables, those pithy sayings of Jesus that occupy such a prominent place in the other accounts of Christ's teachings.

At the same time John shows a detailed knowledge of things that the other gospels omit. For instance, John reports on an early ministry of Jesus in Judea. He indicates that the duration of Christ's ministry was close to three years, not one year, which is the impression one gets from reading the synoptic gospels. John alone speaks of the changing of the water into wine at Cana. He alone tells of Nicodemus, of the woman of Samaria, of the raising of Lazarus. Only in John do we find the great discourses spoken by Jesus to His own disciples during the final week in Jerusalem.

## ***JOHANNINE SCHOLARSHIP***

It is probably because John is so different (and so spiritual) that some scholars have attacked this book strongly. Otherwise, it seems strange that this gospel, which has been such a blessing to Christian people, should become the outstanding example among the New Testament books of what a section of God's Word can suffer at the hands of the higher critics of the Scriptures. One would have thought that the historical accuracy and apostolic authorship of John would have been defended stoutly. But this has not been the case until recently. Instead there had been a generation of scholarship (not so many years ago) which thought that

John was not at all reliable. In this period all but the most conservative scholars said that the gospel must have been written at least 150 or even 200 years after Christ's death. And many placed it in a literary category of its own as being something very much like theological fiction.

Today this is no longer true. There has been a remarkable change in the scholarly climate surrounding John's gospel, with the result that it is becoming increasingly inadequate to deny the Johannine authorship. A new claim is even being made for the reliability of the gospel as history. Moreover, this claim has come about, not because the scholarly world itself is becoming more conservative, but because the evidence for the reliability of John has simply overshadowed the most destructive of the academic theories. Thus today men of such academic stature as Oscar Cullman of the University of Basel, Switzerland, and J. A. T. Robinson of this country argue that the gospel may well embody the testimony of a genuine eyewitness, as it claims. And some, like the late Near Eastern archaeologist William F. Albright, are willing to date the book in the A.D. 60s, that is, within thirty or forty years of Christ's death and resurrection.

At this point someone may say, "What has produced such a turn-about in the ways these men view the gospel?" It is a good question. The answers to it are significant.

First, many ancient manuscripts and parchments of John or parts of John have been discovered, and these have pushed back the dating of the book. For a long time, before the great harvest of archaeological discoveries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the earliest copies of the fourth gospel were from the fourth century, about A.D. 325 to 340. While this was much more impressive than any manuscript evidence for other ancient writings—for instance, the earliest manuscripts of Homer's verses were written about 2,000 years after his death—nevertheless, it gave scholars liberty enough to date John so late that it could not have been written by anyone who knew Jesus or even by anyone who could have known those who had known Him.

The discovery of more ancient manuscripts has changed this. One ancient scrap of papyrus, which was originally found in Egypt as part of the wrapping of a mummy and is now part of the papyrus

collection at the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England, alone destroys these theories. This piece of papyrus contains just a few verses of John 18 (vv. 31-34, 37, 38). But it dates from the first quarter of the second century—in other words, less than one hundred years after Christ—and thus shows that John's gospel had been written early enough to have had a copy pass to Egypt to be used there and then to be discarded by the year A.D. 125. This is conclusive evidence for a fairly early dating of the gospel.

## **THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS**

The second major factor in a reassessment of the dating and historical accuracy of John's gospel has been the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These were uncovered in 1947 and the years immediately following, but the impact of their discovery is continuing even now as the scrolls are being unrolled, assembled, translated, and published.

Before the scrolls were discovered, scholars looked at the differences between John and the synoptic gospels and compared them in a way that was highly unfavorable to John. For instance, they noticed the unique language of John's gospel, with its contrasts between light and darkness, life and death, the world below and the world above, and so on. They noticed that the contrasts were generally lacking in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. "Well," they said, "it is obvious that the first three gospels are Jewish and reflect a Jewish setting. But it is also obvious that John's work is not. John's gospel must come from a Greek setting. Therefore, we must seek the origin of these unique terms not in the actual speech of Jesus of Nazareth but in Greek thought and particularly in Hellenistic Gnosticism."

Then the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. These revealed a whole world of non-conformist Judaism that had simply not been known to scholars previously. The home of the scrolls was Qumran, not far from Jerusalem, in the very area where John placed the earliest events of Christ's ministry. And what was most significant, the literature revealed the same use of the so-called Greek terms (*logos*, light, darkness, life, death) that are found in John's gospel and actually provided a far closer parallel to them.

One scholar, A. M. Hunter of Aberdeen University in Scotland, writes of these discoveries: "The dualism which pervades the Johannine writings is of precisely the same kind as we discover in the Dead Sea Scrolls."<sup>1</sup> J. A. T. Robinson writes: "I detect a growing readiness to recognize that this [the historical background of John's gospel] is not to be sought at the end of the first century or the beginning of the second, in Ephesus or Alexandria, among the Gnostics or the Greeks. Rather, there is no compelling need to let our gaze wander very far, either in space or time, beyond a fairly limited area of southern Palestine in the fairly limited interval between the crucifixion and the fall of Jerusalem." He adds that the Dead Sea Scrolls "may really represent an actual background, and not merely a possible environment, for the distinctive categories of the Gospel."<sup>2</sup>

## **OTHER FACTORS**

The historical trustworthiness of John's gospel is also supported by John's accurate knowledge of the geography of Palestine. This has been vindicated increasingly by archaeological discoveries.

To be sure, John mentions many places that are also mentioned by the synoptic gospels, so critics could say that these were only known secondhand from their writings. For instance, John could hardly tell the story of Jesus without mentioning Bethsaida (1:44; 12:21), the praetorium (18:28, 33; 19:9), Bethany (11:18), and so on. But John also speaks accurately of Ephraim (11:54), Sychar, which is probably to be identified with Shechem at Tell Balatah (4:5), Solomon's Porch (10:23), the brook Kidron, which Jesus crossed to reach Gethsemane (18:1), and Bethany beyond Jordan, which John carefully distinguished from the other Bethany near Jerusalem (1:28). All of these places are now known, and John himself has again and again been demonstrated to be accurate.

Two archaeological discoveries are particularly interesting. In 5:2, John mentions a pool called Bethesda which, he says, had five porches. For years no one had even heard of this pool. What is more, since John's description made it sound like a pentagon, and since there had never been any pentagon-shaped pools in antiquity, the existence of this pool was thought by many New Testament scholars to be doubtful. Now, however, approximately fifty to seventy-five feet below the present level of the city of Jerusalem, archaeologists have uncovered a large rectangular pool surrounded by

four covered colonnades and having an additional colonnade crossing it in the middle somewhat like a bridge. In other words, there was a pool with five porches, as John said. It is conclusive evidence of John's accurate knowledge of the city of Jerusalem as it was before its destruction by the Roman general Titus in A.D. 70.

The second archaeological discovery involves the probable identification of Aenon near Salim, which John mentions in 3:23, as having "many waters" with Ainun ("little fountain") in the Jordan valley. It was obviously the place where John the Baptist found adequate water for his baptizing.

These three lines of evidence—the evidence of the manuscripts, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the knowledge of ancient geography—are also supported by other lines of discoveries. There has been an attempt to show that the author of the fourth gospel (whoever he may have been) must have spoken in Aramaic because, according to those who are experts in this field, Aramaic idiom underlies John's gospel. Careful study of the text has convinced other scholars that the material preserved by John may be as old as Pauline theology or the traditions preserved by the synoptics. Thus, a better knowledge of the author of the fourth gospel and his times has succeeded in pushing scholars away from the critical postures they once held, and has caused them to admit not only the possibility of apostolic authorship, but to speak even more surely of an early and very reliable tradition which underlies, and is in fact preserved in the writing of the gospel.

## ***JOHN'S PURPOSE***

What does this have to do with a study of what is obviously a spiritual gospel? Just this: John himself insists upon the reliability of the things about which he writes. Take 1 John 1:1, 3 as an example. There John writes, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life....That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." In other words, John says that he is writing to them about a person whom he has heard, seen, and touched. Hence, he is writing about something objectively true which will bear the brunt of historical investigation.

It is the same in the gospel. In John 20:30, 31, John declares, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

There are always people who will say that faith is something that must be entirely divorced from evidence. But that is not stated in the Bible. Faith is believing in something or someone *on the basis of evidence* and then acting upon it. In this case, John has provided evidence for the full deity of Jesus Christ so that readers, whether in his age or ours, might believe it and commit their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior.

In John's gospel we have an accurate record of things that were said and done in Palestine almost 2,000 years ago by a Jew named Jesus of Nazareth and which are presented to us as evidence for His extraordinary claims. If one will believe this and approach the record honestly with an open mind, God will use it to bring him to fullness of faith in the Lord Jesus as God's Son and his Savior. This was John's purpose in writing his gospel. It is primarily my purpose in writing these studies.

What will happen in your case? It all depends upon whether or not you will open your mind to John's teaching. Sometime ago I was talking to a young man who was very critical of Christianity.

"Have you investigated the evidence?" I asked him.

"What do you mean? How does one do that?" he asked.

"Go home this week and begin to read John's gospel," I answered. "But before you begin, take a moment to pray something like this: 'God, I do not know if You exist or, if You do, whether You hear me. But if You exist and if You hear me, I want You to know that I am an honest seeker after truth. If this Book of John is a book that can really speak to me and show me that Jesus is the Son of God and is God, I ask You to prove that to me while I read it. And if You prove it, then I will believe in Him and serve Him forever.' " I told him that if he did that, God would speak to him and that he would be convinced that all the things that are written about Jesus of Nazareth in this book are true and that He is the Son of God and our Savior.

The young man went home. I saw him a week later, and I asked, "Did you read the book?"

He answered, "Well, I have to admit that there are other things to which I give a higher priority."

Here is another case. A girl at the University of Pennsylvania entered into a series of Bible studies in John's gospel with another girl who was a Christian. The two girls went through several chapters where Jesus is declared many times to be God but none of it clicked with the girl who was not yet a Christian. Suddenly, in the midst of a study of the third chapter of John, and after many weeks of study, the first girl exclaimed, "Why, I see it! Jesus Christ is *God! He is God.*" That was the turning point, and several weeks later she became a Christian.

That is what we are looking for in the following studies of John's gospel. Moreover, as that happens, we will also look for a strengthening and encouraging of believers in the service of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God and our Lord.

## **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup>A.M. Hunter, "Recent Trends in Johannine Studies," *Expository Times*, 71 (1959), p. 166.

<sup>2</sup>J. A. T. Robinson, "The New Look at the Fourth Gospel," *Twelve New Testament Studies* (London: SCM Press, 1962), pp. 98, 99.

## **SOURCE**

Boice, James Montgomery. *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975.



# John's Theological Purpose

by Leon Morris

We are not left to guess at what John was aiming to do in writing his Gospel. He tells us explicitly: "Jesus did many other signs before his disciples, which have not been written in this book; but these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (20:30-31). This statement of purpose directs our attention to the "signs" that Jesus did, to the fact that John has made a selection from "many" of these, and to the evangelistic and theological aim that directed all that he has written. John has written about many things in his Gospel: the ministry of John the Baptist, the discourses of Jesus, the magnificent account of what went on in the upper room on the last night of Jesus' life, stories of events both heartening and disappointing, reaching their climax in the passion and the resurrection.<sup>1</sup> But when he comes to put in a sentence the purpose of it all, John singles out the "signs". This does not, I think, mean that for John the signs were the most important part of the Gospel. But it does mean that when he wanted to make clear the purpose of it all, it was the signs to which he turned.<sup>2</sup>

## **THE SIGNS**

John has his own distinctive way of using the word "sign". It is an important word which points to something beyond itself.<sup>3</sup> When a miracle is designated by this term, it is seen as a happening that is not self-contained, not an end in itself. It has a meaning that is fulfilled elsewhere than in the miracle. The term is, of course, not confined to John. The Synoptists use the expression quite often (Matthew has it 13 times, Mark seven times, and Luke 11).<sup>4</sup> But they use it for such things as the "sign" the angels gave the shepherds that they would see a baby wrapped in baby-clothes and lying in a manger (Luke 2:12), or the "sign from heaven" that the Pharisees asked Jesus to produce (Mark 8:11). Jesus condemned the people of his day as "an evil and adulterous generation" for their seeking for a sign, and went on to say that the only sign they would be given was the sign of Jonah the prophet. God had been

at work in Jonah, and thus he was a “sign.” As that reluctant prophet was in the sea monster’s belly three days and three nights, so, Jesus said, would the Son of man be “in the heart of the earth three days and three nights” (Matt. 12:38- 40). On another occasion when the Pharisees and Sadducees combined to ask for a sign Jesus complained that they knew how to interpret the weather, discerning from the sky the signs of fair weather and foul, but they could not handle “the signs of the times”. Again, he says that “an evil and adulterous generation” is looking for a sign, but none will be given other than “the sign of Jonah” (Matt. 16:1-4).

Jesus’ disciples could look for a sign. They asked Jesus, “When will these things happen, and what will be the sign when all these things will come to their fulfillment?” (Mark 13:4; cf. Luke 21:7).<sup>5</sup> Matthew has this in the form “When will these things happen, and what will be the sign of your coming...?” (Matt. 24:3). In the discourse that followed, Jesus spoke not of “the sign” that they had asked for but of a multiplicity of great signs and wonders that would in due course appear (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22; Luke 21:25-28), though Matthew speaks specifically of “the sign of the Son of man” which would appear in heaven (Matt. 24:30).

It may be significant that the demand is always for a sign, not for signs. Nobody asks that Jesus perform a multitude of miracles. The reasoning behind this seems to be that the “sign” would be an unmistakable proof that he came from God. Nobody says what the sign was expected to be, so apparently there was no expectation of some specific happening that would constitute *the* sign. But people thought that if there was just one incontrovertible happening that showed in a blaze of light that Jesus was a heavenly being, all would be made clear. It was this kind of sign that Jesus steadfastly refused to produce. He was to be recognized by who and what he was<sup>6</sup> and what he habitually did. There were signs there for those who had eyes to see, but there was to be no dazzling performance that would compel belief of some sort from everyone who saw it. The demand for such a sign is basically a demand that God should act in accordance with the ideas of the scribes and Pharisees, that God be a god made in the likeness of humankind. So Jesus calls those who asked for this kind of sign “an evil and adulterous generation.”

## SIGNS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

John uses the word *sēmeion* 17 times, of which 11 refer to the miracles of Jesus. It may be a general reference such as Nicodemus had in mind: “Rabbi, we know that it is from God that you have come as a teacher, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (3:2). Notice that Nicodemus both discerns that the miracles are not ends in themselves (they are “signs”) and sees this as showing that Jesus is “from God” (he correctly discerns what “signs” mean). We find a somewhat similar attitude in some of the Pharisees when Jesus gave sight to the man born blind. One Pharisaic opinion was, “This man is not from God because he does not keep the Sabbath,” but others of this party asked, “How can a man that is a sinner do such signs?” (9:16). This opinion was not refuted, but neither did the holders of the other view change their verdict. But the second opinion shows an insight into the signs. Those who uttered the words discerned that God was at work in Jesus, and this outweighed what the Pharisees in general could not but regard as a breach of Sabbath regulations.

The signs could lead people to come to Jesus, as those did on the day he fed the 5,000 with a few loaves and fish (6:2).<sup>7</sup> Coming with such a motive is perhaps not ideal, but Jesus does not reject those who came in this way. Indeed, a little later he complains about some who came to him with a lesser motive than the signs: “You seek me out,” he said, “not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled” (6:26). Faith that rests on signs may not be the highest kind of faith, but it is better than none and certainly much better than coming to Jesus on the basis of a good meal. Signs are meant to elicit faith, and Jesus welcomes those who react to signs by believing in him.<sup>8</sup> This does not mean that he worked the kind of sign that leaves no possibility for people to reject him. A little later in the same incident people asked, “What sign do you do, then, so that we may see it and believe you?” (6:30). But the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel just as consistently refused to produce this kind of sign as did the Jesus of the Synoptics. The signs could and quite often did lead to faith. But they were never the kind of thing that smashed down all opposition so that no alternative was left.<sup>9</sup> There was always the possibility that people might refuse to see the hand of God in them and accordingly that they would not believe. Only people who were open to what God was saying would respond in faith. But those people would and did respond in this way.

The word “sign” in itself has no necessary connotation of the supernatural. It can be used “of marks in the landscape showing direction.”<sup>10</sup> Using the word in a sense like this, Paul tells the Thessalonians that the greeting in his own handwriting “is the sign in every letter” (2 Thess. 3:17). He can also speak of circumcision as a “sign” (Rom. 4:11), and of course this is a divinely instituted sign: God had long ago established circumcision as a sign of the covenant he made with Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 17: 10-14). This brings us to the more characteristic use of the term in the Bible, its use in connection with the presence of God. This may, as with circumcision, refer to something that God has commanded and which is of importance in the practice of religion, or it may be something that God himself is doing. An important and characteristic example is the use of the expression “signs and wonders” to describe what God did in bringing Israel out of Egypt (e.g., Deut. 26:8). While the term did not lose its ancient secular connotation as a general term for all sorts of things in which significance may be discerned, it came to have special relevance for religious people; a “sign” could show the activity of God.

It is this “presence of God” that is looked for in some of the passages in which the term is used in John.<sup>11</sup> Nicodemus recognizes this, for when he came to Jesus he greeted him with the words, “Rabbi, we know that it is from God that you have come as a teacher, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (3:2).<sup>12</sup> We do not know to which signs Nicodemus was referring at this point in his narrative.

Since John has mentioned only the changing of the water into wine at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, it is unlikely that the Pharisee from Jerusalem would be referring to this rustic happening. But John has let us know that Jesus had done a plurality of signs known to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (2:23), and evidently Nicodemus had heard of them. And he had not only heard of them but recognized them for what they were. Thus he was ready to acknowledge Jesus’ heavenly origin.

I want to go on to speak of things John says about Jesus and what the signs tell us about him, but before I do, let us notice that the signs tell us a lot about God. No one in his senses is going to minimize the place of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, but we should be clear that this Gospel puts the Father in the highest place. In the signs none less than the supreme God is at work and makes himself

known. C. K. Barrett draws attention to an important difference between writers like Philo and the Gnostics on the one hand and John on the other. Philo and the Gnostics both began with an understanding of the nature of God: He is to be understood as pure goodness or pure being, as omnipotent and thus able to bring his purposes to pass. They ask questions like, "How can such a God love and redeem creatures who are manifestly unworthy to be loved and on the whole unwilling to be saved?" So they develop "elaborate systems of mediation" as to how the God they postulate can do all this. But John begins with the Mediator, the Mediator who brings people to "the God of the biblical tradition, who, high and lifted up though he was, was the Creator of all things, an active participant in human affairs and ready at all times to dwell with him that is of a lowly and contrite spirit."<sup>13</sup> We should be clear that behind the Fourth Gospel is not some high-flown theory about the nature of God and how such a God might span the gap between creation and himself. There is a Mediator, one who in what he is and what he does reveals none less than God himself. And the God we find in this Gospel is a God who is interested in his creation, who loves his people, who never forsakes those he has made. In Jesus it is this God who is active and who is effecting his purpose. At the tomb of Lazarus Jesus prayed, "that they may believe that *you* (emphatic *sy*) sent me" (11:42). He was not looking for something for himself to emerge from the "sign" that was about to take place, but for people to see that God had sent him. John paints a vivid picture of Jesus, to be sure. But he also confronts his readers with the living God.

The signs tell us something about the way God works and the way the hand of God is to be seen in them. But the signs also tell us something about Jesus. As John tells the story, the signs were not such as could be performed by any godly man; they could be performed only by one who stood in a special relationship to God. They are a mark of Jesus' superiority to godly men, not an indication that he belonged among them. R. Schnackenburg, having looked at the theological significance of the signs, holds that "we are led finally to assume an intrinsic connection between the incarnation and the revelation of Jesus Christ in 'signs' which it introduces and renders possible."<sup>14</sup> The signs point us to what God is doing certainly, but it is what he is doing in Jesus not what he is doing in the human race at large, that is their object.

And what God is doing in Jesus is accomplishing the decisive act for the salvation of sinners. He is making a revelation—it is because of what he did in Jesus that we know that “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). But he is also bringing about atonement, for his love issued in the giving of his only Son “so that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have life eternal” (3:16). The signs point to this decisive act. Thus Alan Richardson can say of the first sign John records, the turning of the water into wine, that it carries some highly suggestive symbolism, and there is a sense in which the whole Gospel is a commentary upon it.” He points out that in chapter 3 Nicodemus “is shown the inadequacy of Judaism and the necessity of a re-birth through Christ. The meaning of the miracle at Cana is that Judaism must be purified (cf. ii.6) and transformed in order to find its fulfillment in Christ, the bringer of new life, the eternal life of God, now offered to the world through His Son.”<sup>15</sup> The meaning of the individual signs is to be discerned only in the light of the great work of salvation God is doing in his Son. J. D. G. Dunn insists on this. He can say, “The real significance of the miracles of Jesus is that they point forward to Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension, to the transformation brought by the new age of the Spirit, and thus lead to a faith in Jesus the (crucified) Christ, the (risen) Son of God.”<sup>16</sup> This may be seeing a little more in the signs than others would be prepared to admit, but that they point beyond themselves to Jesus’ saving work is surely beyond dispute.

It is not without its importance that sometimes John records that people believed simply on the basis of the signs. This happened in the case of the first of them, the miracle at Cana in Galilee. After this sign we find that “his disciples believed in him” (2:11). There is no discourse, no teaching about the significance of what had been done. There is just the sign and then faith. The same is true of the healing of the nobleman’s son. When the nobleman found that the boy had recovered in Capernaum at the very time Jesus spoke the healing words in Cana, “he believed, and his whole household” (4:53). Again there is no discourse; Jesus does not explain that God is in it all, nor does he ask for faith. He just does the sign and faith follows.

It was different with some of Jesus’ opponents who asked him, “What sign do you show us, because you do these things?” (2:18), and those who said, “What sign are you doing, then, so that we

may see and believe you?” (6:30).<sup>17</sup> The first example follows the cleansing of the temple and is a demand that Jesus should authenticate what he did that day by producing some clear evidence of divine approval. The demand was that Jesus produce some evidence to show that God was in what he did. If he did not do this, they could conclude only that he was engaging in a purely human activity and therefore need not be heeded. But if he could produce a “sign”, that would be different. Then they would know that God was at work in what Jesus was doing and they would take notice. That, at least, was their claim. But doubt is thrown on their sincerity by the second passage, for that demand for a sign followed on the feeding of the 5,000 and it is not easy to see what more could be wanted as a sign than that.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Jesus complains of their attitude in the address he gives on that occasion and says, among other things, “Truly, truly, I tell you, you seek me out not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled” (6:26). The physical satisfaction of the enjoyment of a meal could attract them, but they were not able to perceive the “sign” in what Jesus did on that occasion.<sup>19</sup> This is all the greater pity in that this sign pointed to a truth of great importance, namely that Jesus provides for our deepest spiritual need and this provision is not made apart from him.<sup>20</sup>

On another occasion Jesus remarked that his hearers would not believe unless they saw “signs and wonders” (4:48). They looked for spectacular, miraculous acts and would not recognize the Messiah unless they saw them.<sup>21</sup> They wanted, moreover, acts of their own choosing. One would have thought that the series of “signs” narrated in this Gospel would be sufficient evidence of miraculous power, but Jesus’ opponents were not convinced. In time they recognized that Jesus did work miracles and even used the word “signs” to describe them (“this man is doing many signs,” 11:47). But even so, they did not discern the hand of God and were all the more ready to oppose Jesus. Of course from ancient times individuals who did not belong to the people of God had done miracles (such as the magicians in Egypt in the time of Moses), and Israel was warned not to be misled by such people and their deeds (cf. Deut. 13:1-5). Evidently the Jewish leaders had some such view of Jesus’ signs: they recognized them as the kind of thing that ordinary people could not do, but that did not tell them anything about Jesus’ person or his relationship to the Father. They did not discern the hand of God in them.

And that is to miss the whole point. R. T. Fortna points out that “to witness a miracle, even to benefit from it and seek out its author... and yet not to perceive it as a *sign* is to miss its point. A sign, to be understood, or ‘seen,’ must be recognized as full of theological meaning.”<sup>22</sup> There were people who saw Jesus make a small amount of bread and fish into a meal for a multitude and who shared in the feast themselves, but who still asked for a sign (6:30). They had seen the miracle. They had themselves benefited from it. But they had failed to discern its meaning; they had not understood that God was active in what Jesus had done, they had not discerned the sign.

What John is saying is that they ought to have done so. What Jesus was doing was not merely miraculous (John never uses *teras*, “wonder”, of what he did); it was “significant”. The signs were not meant to cause people to recognize that Jesus was a wonderful person; they were meant to teach them about God, to cause them to see that God was active in what Jesus was doing, to challenge them to respond in faith to the divine initiative.<sup>23</sup> The trouble with the Jewish leaders was that they could not recognize the hand of God when it was actively at work before them. They saw that there was a connection between the signs and faith: “this man does many signs; if we leave him alone in this way, all will believe in him” (11:47-48). They denied neither the reality of the signs nor their power to elicit faith. They denied that God was at work in them. What should have led them to faith they saw as no more than works of power (though they used the word “signs” of them, they did not discern their significance). And because the miracles were to them no more than works of power, the result was hardening, not faith.

In one important passage John regards this failure as a fulfillment of prophecy. He says of Jesus, “But although he had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled which he spoke, ‘Lord, who believed our report...?’” (12:37-38; John is quoting Isa. 53:1; he adds Isa. 6:10). John is sure that Jesus’ signs did point to God and that people ought to recognize this and behave accordingly. But he is sure also that evil people have never been conspicuous for their obedience to divine direction, as the prophets amply document. So he finds support in Isaiah for his convictions about the reason for the slowness of so many Jews to believe Jesus. They were simply walking in the classic ways of unbelief.



The quotations from Isaiah are followed by the words, “These things Isaiah said because he saw his glory, and he spoke about him” (12:41). The idea of glory is specifically linked with some of the signs. Thus at the first of them Jesus “manifested his glory (2:11), and when Jesus was informed of the sickness of Lazarus he said, “This sickness is not with a view to death, but on behalf of the glory of God, so that the Son of man may be glorified through it” (11:4). Later he said to Martha, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” (11:40). Glory in this Gospel is complex and includes the thought of the glory that we see in lowliness, so that the cross is the place where Jesus can be said to be glorified. But making full allowance for that, John is making it clear that in the signs the believer may discern the glory that properly belongs to Christ.

God does not work only through signs. This Evangelist records the words of “many” who came to Jesus in that part of the country in which John the Baptist had done his work, “John did no sign” (10:41).<sup>24</sup> There is no denying that the hand of God was to be discerned in the work of the Baptist as the Fourth Gospel depicts him. God can and does work in people without the appearance of the miraculous But God worked in Jesus in a special way; the signs showed this. And it is what the signs showed that is John’s special concern.

John’s use of the term “sign”, then, is very important. For him it is a way of drawing attention to the hand of God in the ministry of Jesus. John makes no attempt to be comprehensive: he simply selects a group of signs that show the sort of thing God did in Jesus. For him it is important that these happenings not be regarded simply as miracles. He never describes what Jesus did as a *teras* (wonder). The fact that the deed is inexplicable is not for him the significant thing. It is true that the deed cannot be explained on purely human premises, but it is not that that matters to John. For him the important thing is that the deed bears the stamp of God. We are to bear in mind that the Baptist, godly man though he undoubtedly was, did no sign. Signs were something special. They did not belong to godly men in general but to Jesus. It was what God was doing in Jesus that was significant. He was present in Jesus in a way he was not present in other people. That for John is very important, and the signs bear witness to it.<sup>25</sup>

## WORKS

The importance of “signs” for John is indisputable. But we should not overlook the fact that in this Gospel Jesus mostly refers to his “works” rather than to his “signs.”<sup>26</sup> “Works” of course is a general term; it has no necessary connection with the miraculous (which we have seen is true also of “signs”). It may be used of the works of God (6:28) or of those of men (8:39). When it is used of what people do, it may refer to good deeds (3:21; 8:39) or to bad deeds (3:19; 7:7).

The deeds people do may be characterized with reference to someone other than the people in question. Thus in responding to a claim by certain Jews that “Abraham is our father”, Jesus said, “If you were children of Abraham, you would do the works of Abraham” (8:39). To be Abraham’s children is to act like Abraham, to do the kind of deeds that Abraham did. But these people did not live like Abraham. They did the deeds of their father, Jesus said (8:41), and went on to explain that the devil was their father (8:44) and that was why they acted as they did.

In the light of this it does not surprise that good deeds may be called “the work(s) of God” (6:28,29). The people asked, “What shall we do that we may work the works of God” (6:28), a question that seeks an answer to the problem of exactly what works God looks for in people, what works will please him. But interestingly in his reply Jesus replaces the plural with a singular, “the work of God”; and this, he says, “is that you believe on him whom he sent.” The Jews were looking for a list of good deeds that they might do in order to please God. Jesus answers with a statement about the necessity of faith: they are not to try to earn merit before God by their own efforts but rather to trust God, which of course involves trusting him whom God sent. We should take seriously the words “of God” in this connection, for a little later Jesus says plainly, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (6:44). Jesus is saying that faith is a work of God in believers, a work which brings them to himself. Good works of any kind we should understand to originate in God. Of ourselves we are not able to do what is pleasing to God. But it is Jesus’ teaching that we are not left to ourselves. God has taken the initiative in sending his Son, and God works in us so that we come to do the things that are right. The saint never congratulates himself on the

wonderful things he does; he thanks God for enabling him to do what little he can do.

Once Jesus looks forward to works that those who follow him will do after his departure. “He who believes in me,” he says, “the works that I do he will do too; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father” (14:12). We should probably understand this not of miracles but of mighty works of conversion and the like.<sup>27</sup> When we turn to Acts we do find the early Christians doing a few very striking miracles, though not I think any that we can fairly say were greater than those of Jesus. But in the power of the Holy Spirit they certainly brought people to commitment to Christ in far greater numbers than occurred during Jesus’ lifetime. In the providence of God it would seem, in Forsyth’s phrase, that Jesus came, not so much to preach the gospel as that there might be a gospel to preach.

But when John uses the term “works”, he mostly has in mind the works that Jesus does (18 of his 27 uses of the word have to do with the works of Jesus). Sometimes this clearly means miracles. They are the works that “nobody else did” (15:24). Again Jesus said, “I did one work and you are all astonished” (7:21). This will probably be in mind also in the passage about the greater works his followers will do which we discussed in the previous paragraph. The “works” are the “signs” under another name.

The works are performed only in the closest connection with the Father. Indeed, they can be called his works: “the Father living in me does his works” (14:10). In this Gospel Jesus never says, “my works” (though he does say, “the works that I do,” 10:25; 14:12; cf. 5:36; but on each occasion the context makes clear that the Father is involved in doing the works as well as Jesus). He is not to be thought of as acting on his own initiative and in isolation from the heavenly Father.

Because of this connection with the Father Jesus can call on his hearers to believe on him “on account of the works” (14:11). They are to believe not because the works are miraculous and arouse amazement (though this is true), but rather because the Father is in them, the Father does them. This makes them of central importance to Jesus, and he can say, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work” (4:34). The giving of sight to the man born blind is instructive. Even the

terrible affliction of blindness is “in order that the works of God may be made manifest in him” (9:3); thus, confronted with the blind man, Jesus says, “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day” (9:4). The word “must” points to a compelling divine necessity; since Jesus had been “sent”, it is imperative that he fulfil his commission. Therefore the “work” of giving sight to the blind man “must” take place without delay. What the Father sends him to do must be done. We do not understand what John is saying to us if we see Jesus as a miracle-worker, a human figure separate from God, moving among the masses and winning divine approval by what he was and what he did. For John it is desperately important that the Father is active in Jesus, so active indeed that he can be said to do the miraculous works. It is none less than God who is active in the life and work of Jesus.

The works were themselves a witness to the closeness of the Father and the Son. In this Gospel it is impossible to view the works of Jesus as either the activity of the human Jesus or of the divine Father. Both are involved, and unless we see this we do not understand an important point John is making. Because Jesus’ Jewish opponents did not see it, they were so vigorously opposed to him that on one occasion they tried to stone him, which caused him to respond, “Many good works I have shown you from the Father” (they were not the works of the man from Galilee; in their essence they were “from the Father”); “on account of which work of them are you stoning me?” (10:32).

When some opponents accused him of blasphemy, Jesus said to them, “If I do not do the works of my Father, do not believe me; but if I do, even if you do not believe me, believe the works...” (10:37-38). Faith is a very important activity in this Gospel, and the works can bring it about; indeed, Jesus is saying here that the works may be more effective in producing faith than his teaching. From a slightly different point of view Jesus says, “The works that the Father has given me so that I should do them, the works themselves that I do, bear witness about me, that the Father has sent me” (5:36). The thought of the works bearing witness comes out again when Jesus responds to the Jews pressing round him in Solomon’s colonnade and asking him to say whether he is the Christ, “the works that I do in the name of my Father, these bear witness about me” (10:25). The works are a standing testimony to the fact that the Father is active in what Jesus is doing. They show

that the Father “has sent” Jesus. If these Jews had considered what Jesus had in fact done or what the Father had in fact done in and through him, they would not have been asking such a question.

In their function as revelation the works come pretty close to the words; thus Jesus can say, “The words that I say to you I do not speak of myself, but the Father dwelling in me does his works” (14:10). So also he says, “of myself I do nothing, but as the Father taught me, these things I speak” (8:28). He moves easily from the words to the works and from the works to the words. Rudolf Bultmann is probably going too far when he says, “the *works of Jesus* (or, seen collectively as a whole: his work) *are his words.*”<sup>28</sup> There is no point in confusing two different things: that they are closely connected does not make them identical. But the connection should not be missed.

The works are astonishing, and Jesus on one occasion speaks of doing greater works than his hearers have seen, “so that you may marvel” (5:20). But this is a by-product, not the essential thing about the works. It is the divine, not the marvellous that should command attention, and not only attention but faith and obedience as well. We should not miss the truth that the works are central for Jesus on account of their origin with the Father.

Mostly the word is in the plural, and we have noticed a number of passages which speak of the “works.” But now and then it is in the singular, referring not to one particular miracle, but to the whole life of Jesus. Thus early in his ministry Jesus spoke of how important it was for him “to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work” (4:34). And right at the end he could say in his prayer, “I have glorified you on the earth, having accomplished the work which you gave me to do” (17:4). The whole of his time here on earth could be seen as one work of God. He came not to do this particular deed or that, but through his whole life to accomplish the saving purpose of the Father.

This directs our attention to another reason for using the word “work” for what Jesus did. It is a term that applies to the non-miraculous as well as the miraculous, indeed to the nonmiraculous more especially. It points us to the truth that while we may distinguish between Jesus’ deeds, labelling some of them as miracles and some as nonmiraculous, for him the distinction was not important.

They were all “works.” It is perhaps significant - that in this Gospel Jesus almost invariably refers to his “works” rather than to his “signs.” John reports him as using the term “signs” on two occasions, once when he referred to those who would not believe without “signs and wonders” (4:48) and once when he spoke of people who came to him because they ate the loaves and not because of the signs (6:26). But on all the other occasions Jesus speaks of “works.” John pictures for us a Jesus for whom “works” was a more natural term than “signs.” “Works” were the things he did, easily and naturally. We may classify them into those that are natural and those that are supernatural, but that is our classification. For Jesus they were all “works.”

This usage points also to the important truth that Jesus’ life was an indivisible whole. We should not say that he did some things as God and some things as man. He was not a split personality, moving from deity to humanity and back. He was one person, albeit a person who quite naturally did some things that we can do and other things that we cannot do. Consistently Jesus did the work of God, whether that meant living quietly the life of a Galilean peasant or whether it meant doing some stupendous miracle. And because he was doing the work of God, the glory of God was shown in all he did; in the miracles, certainly, but also in the quiet deeds of everyday life. There was glory in it all.

For someone as steeped in the Scriptures of the Old Testament as John, there is another feature of the references to works. In the Old Testament there are many references to “the works of God”, and it is impossible that they were completely out of mind when John wrote his Gospel. All the more is this so in that Jesus’ gift of the living water (4:10) brings to mind passages like “the fountain of living waters” (Jer. 2:13; 17:13) and God’s invitation to the thirsty to come to the waters (Isa. 55:1), the references to the manna (6:31,49) remind us of God’s gift to his people of old (Exod. 16:13-15, 33-35), and the true light that lightens everyone (1:9) evokes recollections of God’s creation of light (Gen. 1:3) and of passages like “the Lord is my light” (Ps. 27:1). But the expression “the works of God” is used in the Old Testament more particularly of what God did in creation (Gen. 2:2-3; Ps. 8:6, etc.) and in the deliverance of his people (Ps. 44:1; 78:4, etc.). These correspond to two facets of the work of Christ that are of particular importance in John. This Evangelist says that all things came into existence through him (1:3), and throughout his Gospel he tells of the new

life Christ brings to believers. And, of course, it is the deliverance that Christ brought about by his death on the cross that is the climax to which everything leads up. There is a continuity between the works of God done in days of old and the works of God done in his Son. It is the same God working out salvation.

## ENDNOTES

1. This variety of topics has brought about a wide variety of approaches to the study of this book. Brevard S. Childs remarks: "J. A. T. Robinson and van Unnik have argued that the Gospel served as a missionary handbook to convert the Diaspora Jews. Baldensperger saw an apologetic purpose to counter the sectarianism of a group around John the Baptist. Wilkens finds the Gospel's intention to be primarily one of opposing gnostic heresy and docetic teachings. R. E. Brown, Martyn, and Meeks agree in focusing on the book's role in establishing a community's social identity in the context of conflicting group struggle. Finally, Barrett, as a reaction to the stress on external factors, argues for the primacy of the author's internal reasons which were independent of whether the book was ever read by others" (*The New Testament as Canon*, London, 1984, pp. 123-24). I have not tried to deal with this immense variety of opinion, but simply to follow the text of the Gospel as well as I can.

2. This point is sometimes overlooked. Some scholars write on the theology of the New Testament and specifically on that of John without giving attention to the signs. But on Johannine premises I do not see how the purpose of the Fourth Gospel is to be understood without reckoning with the signs.

3. K. H. Rengstorf rightly comments that in Johannine usage "*sēmeion* is a key word in theological interpretation, and in this respect there is a fundamental difference from its use not only in the Synoptic Gospels...and Acts. . . but also in the surrounding world" (TDNT, VII, p. 247). John has his own way of using "sign", and he is not to be explained by the way other people use the term.

4. Perhaps we should add to Luke the 13 he has in Ads. Paul uses the term eight times, Hebrews once, and Revelation seven times. The New Testament total is 77.

5. "Their question is one that pervades all biblical and extra-biblical apocalyptic. They want to be told what will be 'the sign'—that is, they want an infallible means of recognizing the approach of the End; they want in fact to be relieved from having to 'watch'. But instead of a single sign Jesus gives them a baffling multiplicity of signs. The purpose of his reply is not to impart esoteric information but to strengthen and sustain faith" (C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*, Cambridge, 1959, p. 394).

6. In the Old Testament Isaiah and the children God gave him are said to be signs in Israel (Isa. 8:18), and more than once Ezekiel is said to be a



sign (Ezek. 12:11; 24:24). Perhaps we should understand that Jesus was himself a sign to the people of his day.

7. We should bear in mind that John uses a succession of tenses with continuous force: "A great crowd kept following him because they continually saw the signs which he habitually did on the sick people." John leaves the reader with the distinct impression that Jesus did a great many signs. He has chosen to record only a few of them, but we should not overlook Jesus' continuing healings.

8. J. T. Forestell holds that "a peculiar Johannine theology of miracle can be uncovered from the present text of the gospel. The miracles are works of God which reveal Jesus' glory as the glory of the only Son of the Father. They were a normal way to faith for the first disciples. Properly disposed and drawn by the Father, a man should pass from wonder at the marvellous to recognition of Jesus as a prophet and to faith in his word" (*The Word of the Cross*, Rome, 1974, p. 70). This draws attention to an important aspect of the signs, but I wonder whether seeing the signs as "a normal way to faith" allows sufficiently for the facts that (a) people could come to Christ by other ways than seeing the miracles, (b) many who saw them did not respond to the signs, and (c) John does not regard faith on the basis of the signs as the highest kind of faith.

9. R. Bultmann remarks that Jesus' signs, like his works, "are understandable" (*Theology of the New Testament*, II, London, 1955), p. 44.

10. BAGD, sub *sēmeion*, 1. K. H. Rengstorff notes its use as "a visual sign by which someone or something is recognised" and mentions the "symptom" of illness or of health, the "scent" that shows the presence of an animal, the ensigns by which ships are known, and other examples. "In all the examples given someone or something is to be recognised and a fact or object perceived with a view to conceptual assimilation and correct classification" (*TDNT*, VII, pp. 204-205).

11. "The Johannine miracles are revelations" (Ethelbert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, London, 1955, p. 122). D. S. Cairns says of the Gospel miracles in general (not specifically of those in John), "These signs, therefore, are integral parts of the revelation, and not adjuncts to it. They are revelations of the ideal purpose of God for mankind, and therefore of His character" (*The Faith that Rebels*, London, 1933, p. 98).

12. This beginning "represents open-mindedness on the part of an authority, who might be expected to resent the position which Jesus is gaining for himself among the people. It also has a deeper relation to the following dialogue, in that the argument will turn on Jesus' unique function as

the bringer of revelation from God (11-13)” (Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, London, 1972, p. 150).

13. *Essays on John* (London, 1982), p. 9.

14. *The Gospel according to St John*, I (New York and London, 1968), p. 524. Cf. Stephen S. Smalley, “The principle which makes these six signs what they are is announced in the introduction to the Fourth Gospel, John 1 (the whole chapter). There we learn of the incarnation...” (*John: Evangelist and Interpreter*, Exeter, 1978, p.87).

15. *The Miracle Stories of the Gospels* (London, 1941), p. 121. He goes on: “The truth is known only to those who do His will (‘the servants who drew the water knew,’ ii.9; cf. vii.17).”

16. IBD, III, p. 1450. Cf. O. Hofius, “The Gospel itself stresses the historical reality of the events. At the same time the miracles are understood as signs pointing beyond themselves to the One who performs them. They prove Jesus’ identity as the Christ of God (20:30), who brings the fullness of eschatological salvation...” (*NIDNTT*, II, p. 632).

17. It was Jewish teaching that if a prophet” gives a sign ‘wt and wonder *mwpt*, then one must listen to him; but if not, then one need not listen to him” (SBK, II, p. 480).

18. Dodd comments, “The ‘signs’ which the people expect from the Messiah are mere miracles; yet when they see a miracle they fail to see the ‘sign’” (*The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1953, p. 90).

19. Reginald H. Fuller remarks, “The Jews did not appreciate the signs as signs in the true, Johannine sense, as pointers away from themselves and symbols of the whole work of God in Christ. They saw in them only miraculous physical satisfaction, to be enjoyed for its own sake. The discourse which follows expounds the feeding as a sign in the Johannine sense” (*Interpreting the Miracles*, London, 1963, p. 102).

20. Cf. G. H. Boobyer, “In John 6, the feeding of the five thousand receives a quite definite religious interpretation: it was a revelation of the truth that Jesus feeds men with the bread of life from heaven, and is himself the bread” (SPCK Theological Collections 3: *The Miracles and the Resurrection*, London, 1964, p. 43).

21. Sometimes this point is missed. Thus A. H. McNeile points out that John has given an account of signs “that ye may believe,” and goes on:

“The evangelist evidently realized that many of his readers would not believe without the record of signs and wonders. And in his narratives he relates that many believed because of them. They were a valid proof, though the Christian ought not to need them” (*New Testament Teaching in the Light of St Paul’s*, Cambridge, 1923, p. 286). But when John speaks of “signs”, he does not regard them as the more or less normal prelude to faith. He is speaking rather about a revelation which may be accepted or rejected.

22. *JBL* 89 (1970), p. 157.

23. H. Conzelmann asks, “Can miracles be narrated in such a way that a presentation of them is not only possible but necessary, because the miracle is only understood when it is seen to be directed towards us and to determine us?” (*An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, London, 1969, p. 347).

24. Ernst Bammel has an essay on the topic “John Did No Miracle” (C. F. D. Moule, ed., *Miracles*, London and New York, 1965, pp. 181-202). He notices that the Jews put a good deal of emphasis on miraculous attestation, and concludes that the fact that John’s testimony “deviates so very much from the Jewish scheme points—that can now be said with certainty—to the trustworthiness of the tradition. Being a witness without a sign it testifies to the great miracle that, nevertheless, its message was to come true” (*ibid.*, pp. 201-202).

25. H. van der Loos is somewhat critical of John’s use of the term “signs”. “The great extent to which theological speculation derives the significance of the sign from the miracle emerges from the rendering of the fourth Evangelist. The miracle stories here lack the spontaneous nature which they possess in the Synoptic versions.... If the miracles are evaluated solely as signs and seals, there is the danger that the dynamics of the event itself, the emotion of Jesus, and also man, who is the recipient of salvation, are lost sight of or become secondary” (*The Miracles of Jesus*, Leiden, 1965, p. 249). But it is not easy to see the “signs” in John as any less spontaneous than the “mighty works” of the Synoptists. And how calling the miracles “signs” affects “the dynamics of the event” or the emotion of Jesus or the recipient I cannot understand. Granted that there are other valuable ways of looking at the miracles, we are not justified in minimizing the significance of this way of regarding them.

26. This point is missed by a number of writers. Thus R. Bultmann says simply, “The term used for these miracles is *sēmeia* (‘signs’ and, secondarily, ‘miracles’)” (*Theology of the New Testament*, II, p. 44). I do not wish to downgrade the use of the term “signs” in John; as we have

seen, it is a very important term. But it is not the only term. And Bultmann overlooks something very important when he says of “works” in this Gospel, “the ‘works’ which Jesus does at his Father’s behest. are ultimately one single work” (*ibid.*, p. 52). There is more to John’s use than this.

27.Cf. Eduard Schweizer, “for John the supreme miracle is when a person is brought to faith” (*The Holy Spirit*, London, 1981, p. 71).

28.*Theology of the New Testament*, II, p. 60. He further says, “*The identity of work and word* can be further seen in what is said of the effect of the word. ‘The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life’ (6:68)” (*ibid.*, p.61). But no more than the others does this saying speak of an identity; it speaks of a close connection between word and deed, but this does not make them the same thing.

### **SOURCE:**

Morris, Leon. *Jesus is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989.