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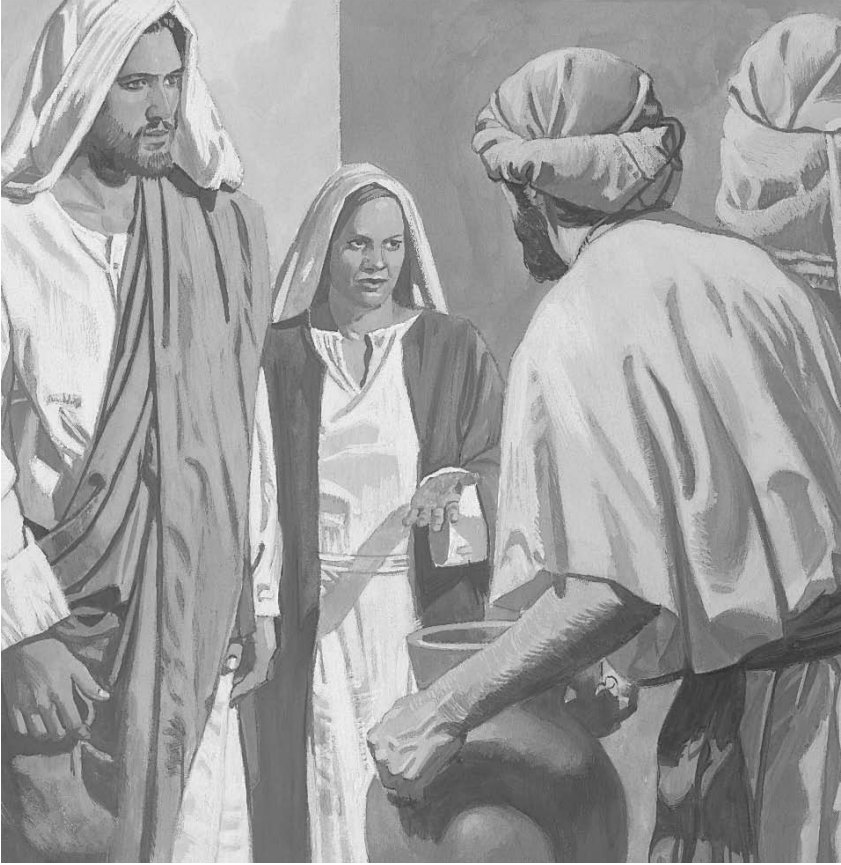
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**The miracle of turning the water to wine demonstrates that Christ has power to alter substance.**

Robert Barrett, © 1999 Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

# Miracles of Jesus in the Gospel of John

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The opening lines of the Gospel of John introduce Jesus Christ as the Word: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The phrase “in the beginning” echoes Genesis 1:1, suggesting John’s intent to depict the power of Jesus Christ by hearkening back to the omnipotence of the Creator of the world. On the surface, the title or name “Word” suggests divine communication. To be sure, Christ is the means through which the will of the Father is communicated.<sup>1</sup> From John’s perspective, then, he is introducing Jehovah of the Old Testament—a being of such power, might, and dominion that words cannot fully capture His magnificence. Furthermore, John writes, “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). That is to say, Jehovah was born as Jesus Christ and grew to adulthood possessing all of His power in the flesh. In essence, John’s Gospel is centered on the omnipotence of Jesus Christ.

John’s Gospel has been reasonably viewed as a two-part document. Chapters 2–11 are frequently referred to as the “Book of Signs” and treat the public ministry of the Master as He traveled to and from Galilee and Judea performing miracles, teaching, and publicly engaging His adversaries.<sup>2</sup> Chapters 12–20 are sometimes called the “Book of Glory” and capture the private ministry of Jesus as He taught His disciples in closed settings and progressed toward the atoning sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> The focus

of this article will rest upon the miracles found in the first section of the Gospel of John.

Beginning with Jesus turning water to wine (John 2) and ending with Him raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11), John the Beloved leads his readers through a series of seven miracles performed by Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Since John's Gospel is generally understood to have been directed toward an audience that already believed that Jesus is the Christ, we may reasonably conclude that the purpose of these seven miracles (commonly referred to as signs of power) is to deepen faith in Christ.<sup>5</sup> This article will explore each of these miracles, hoping to elicit a clearer understanding and richer appreciation of how sharply John's Gospel focuses on the divine power of Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

### **Water to Wine**

A wedding feast was held at Cana of Galilee, and Jesus was invited to attend with His disciples. During the course of the celebration, the wine supply ran out. Mary approached her son Jesus and said, "They have no wine" (John 2:3). He answered, "Woman, what wilt thou have me to do for thee? that will I do; for mine hour is not yet come" (Joseph Smith Translation, John 2:4).<sup>7</sup> In essence, He said, "Mother, this matter is not my concern. Nevertheless, your faith is such that I will fulfill your request even though the time that I will completely reveal my divinity has not yet come."<sup>8</sup> Jesus directed the servants to fill six large stone waterpots with water. Each large pot was ritually cleaned and held approximately eighteen to twenty-seven gallons apiece (see John 2:6).<sup>9</sup> Each pot was filled "to the brim" (John 2:7). Jesus then commanded the servants to "draw out" some of the contents of the jars and serve it to the governor of the feast (see John 2:8). At some point between the filling and the drawing out of the jars, the Savior miraculously changed the water to wine of high quality, which was acknowledged by the governor (see John 2:10).<sup>10</sup>

John refers to this sign of power as the "beginning of miracles" (John 2:11). However, it was performed in private and witnessed only by the servants and the disciples. One of the Savior's intentions seems clear: He desired to manifest His glory and bring His disciples to a deeper belief in His divinity through this glorious act (see John 2:11). The fact that Jesus performed this miracle almost exclusively for the benefit of His disciples beckons the question, what would He have them learn from the experience? We cannot know the answer to this question for certain; however, two basic elements of this miracle deserve further consideration.

First, we learn that Jesus has power to alter substance. We trust that if He can turn water to wine, He can also turn wood to stone and stone to liquid all in an instant to fulfill His purposes. While Jesus is subject to natural laws, He is not limited by the chemical and physical boundaries as they are perceived and described by mere mortals.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps John is also showing that Jesus has power over time. The process of making wine takes years—one must plant a vine, nourish it to a point where it bears fruit, harvest the fruit, crush and press it, and gather and store the juice. But Jesus is not limited by time as we understand it in mortality (see D&C 38:2) and possesses the power to create wine instantaneously.<sup>12</sup>

This sign of God's power has ramifications that are more personal in nature. For example, Christ's power to alter substance makes His ability to heal the human body an immediate reality. Similarly, healing an emotional wound, easing remaining ache over sins that have been repented of or pain associated with a broken family—these disappointments and others that might require years from which to recover can be healed with far greater expediency, even an instant, if Jesus Christ deemed it so.

Among other things, this miracle manifests that Jesus possessed power over substance and time. Acknowledging this power and its relationship to significant doctrines such as Christ as Creator and Redeemer may lead to greater and deeper faith in the Messiah and His role in our lives.

### **Healing the Nobleman's Son**

Following the first Passover feast of His public ministry, Jesus returned to Galilee from Jerusalem, stopping in Cana, where He previously turned water to wine. There He encountered a nobleman whose son was sick to the point of death at Capernaum, about twenty miles away.<sup>13</sup> The meeting between the nobleman and Jesus was not happenstance. The prominent man heard that Jesus was back in the region and actively sought Him out, finally finding Him at Cana (see John 4:47). Despite this effort, Jesus deemed it necessary to test the man's faith. He said, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" (John 4:48). The nobleman was not fazed by the challenge; instead he more fervently submitted his faith in the power of Jesus to heal his son. He urgently pled, "Sir, come down ere my child die" (John 4:49). Jesus rewarded the man's faith by healing the child at that moment, saying, "Go thy way; thy son liveth" (John 4:50).

The nobleman's faith was explicit; he "believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way" (John 4:50). One gets the impression that he took his time returning to Capernaum, possibly taking care of business or other interests on the way (see John 4:50–51).<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, his servants met him the next day to notify him that the dying child had been healed. When the nobleman inquired after the time of the healing, he was informed that it occurred at the precise moment that Jesus proclaimed, "Thy son liveth" (John 4:53). John then added, "This is again the second miracle that Jesus did" (John 4:54).

One compelling lesson is that Jesus was not limited by geographic distances. It was not necessary for Him to travel to Capernaum. His word was efficacious regardless of physical location. This power is particularly comforting since unknown distances exist between mortals on earth and God in heaven. Even so, our prayers are heard, gains and losses acknowledged, and priesthood blessings honored as though He were present with us. This miracle verifies that Christ's physical location is not the fulcrum upon which the power of God rests in our lives—our faith in Christ is.

### **"An Infirmity Thirty and Eight Years"**

Near the temple at Jerusalem there was a pool with five porches that was called Bethesda. The porches were shaded by covered colonnades and accommodated "a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, [and] withered" (John 5:3).<sup>15</sup> A tradition of the day claimed that the waters in the pool possessed curative powers. Specifically, the tradition stated that an unseen angel went to the pool at certain times and stirred the water. The invalid that was first to enter the water after it was moved by the angel would be healed of whatever malady he suffered (see John 5:4).

While in Jerusalem for a feast, Jesus came to the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath. There He encountered a man laid out on one of the porches "which had an infirmity thirty and eight years" (John 5:5). John's narrative suggests that he suffered from paralysis of some kind that made it impossible for him to reach the waters of the pool without assistance. The connotation is that the malady may have been the result of sinful behavior committed earlier in his life (see John 5:14). Whatever the case, Jesus looked upon the man and said, "Wilt thou be made whole?" (John 5:6). The invalid said, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me" (John 5:7). At that moment Jesus

proclaimed, “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk” (John 5:8). Immediately, strength surged into his body sufficient to allow him to gather up his mat and walk after almost four decades of infirmity. This miraculous sign of power caught the attention of all present and soon thereafter garnered the ire of the Jewish religious leaders.

While this miracle negated disease, stirred Jesus’s enemies, and likely caused some to believe, it also served a very public purpose of the ministry of Jesus. It invited people to look to Christ and His power rather than to trust in superstition or false traditions of the day. A brief discussion related to the waters of the pool of Bethesda and Sabbath observance will serve to illustrate this purpose.

First, Christ’s power dispelled the tradition that waters of the pool possessed miraculous capacities. Before Christ’s intervention, this view was accepted by many in Jerusalem—nevertheless, it was false. The waters were as impotent as the man who hoped to be cured by them. Ultimately, yielding to prescribed dictates associated with this tradition could lead only to disappointment. However, in a very public way Christ exercised His power and turned the eyes of the impotent man to the only legitimate source of healing. For believers prone to be persuaded by the claims of this tradition, this miracle nullified any reasonable semblance of efficacy associated with the waters and pointed them instead to the Living Waters, Jesus Christ (see John 7:37–38; Zechariah 13:1).

Second, because this miracle was performed on the Sabbath, Christ’s manifestation of power led to a public clarification regarding false traditions associated with appropriate Sabbath observance. The healing and the fact that the man carried his bedroll were both serious breaches of tradition that the religious establishment had elevated to the stature of divine law regarding the Sabbath. More to the point, there were thirty-nine “laws” regulating what could or could not be done on the Sabbath, the last of which prohibited the carrying of a load from one home to another.<sup>16</sup> Under this tradition, the formerly crippled man was condemned. Similarly, these traditions painted Jesus’s use of power as an unlawful labor for the Sabbath, and the Jews sought to kill Him (see John 5:16).

When confronted by these prominent religious leaders, Jesus said, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). Put another way, “God the Father’s labors do not cease because it is the Sabbath, and neither do mine.” He further explained, “The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19). The question

posed here is straightforward: does God break the Sabbath when He oversees the rising of the sun, the rotation of the earth, and other conditions essential for sustaining life on His holy day?<sup>17</sup> The answer is obviously no. From this we may conclude that God's rest and therefore our rest on the Sabbath is not a rest from all labor but a rest from worldly pursuits. It is a rest reminiscent of what we may someday experience in the celestial kingdom. Regardless of the day of the week, life is precious, and every effort should be made to sustain it. In the minds of believers, Christ's miracle at Bethesda negated false tradition promoted by the prominent religious leaders of the day.

One aspect of the miracle at the pool of Bethesda illustrates that Jesus possessed power to eclipse and correct a variety of false religious traditions. Regardless of the great multitudes that may embrace them, Jesus consistently moved to publicly expose and dispel false traditions.

### **Feeding Five Thousand**

At some point after the miracle at Bethesda, Jesus returned to Galilee. The fame of His miraculous powers continued to follow Him in that region (see John 6:2). The throngs of people were so persistent that it became necessary for Jesus to take His disciples to a secluded area on a mountaintop east of the Sea of Galilee that He might instruct them in private. Their privacy was short lived, however, because a multitude of five thousand men (plus women and children) found them. Jesus proposed to feed the throng, but only "five barley loaves, and two small fishes" could be secured from a young boy in the company (John 6:9). It was all the boy had. The food was likely the boy's lunch: the small fishes were probably cured with salt or were pickled.<sup>18</sup> Jesus commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass. He took the meager amount of food, blessed it, and commanded His disciples to serve the fishes and the bread to the throng. When the entire multitude had eaten to their satisfaction, the disciples were commanded to gather the leftover food, which filled twelve baskets. With what began as a meager portion of bread and fishes, Christ fed thousands (see John 6:11–13).

Among other things, this miracle is a sign of Christ's power to multiply. It is reminiscent of the Creation of the earth, wherein anything Jehovah touched was increased, organized, improved upon, and was good (see Genesis 1). It is also reminiscent of the manner in which Jehovah fed Israel manna in the wilderness (see Exodus 16:15). It is significant that leftovers from this sign of power filled twelve baskets. Jesus easily could have multiplied the "exact" amount necessary to feed the throng but chose to multiply an excess of food. From this it



is evident that He wanted to convey at least one principle to His first-century audience that is stated clearly in latter-day revelation: “And it is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine. . . . For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare” (D&C 104:15, 17).

Ultimately, Jesus Christ is a God of bounty. Examples of Christ’s power to multiply abound today. For example, the impact of heartfelt worship on the Sabbath is multiplied in a way that those few hours spent at church result in spiritual growth throughout the week. Blessings associated with paying an honest tithe are multiplied to the point that “there shall not be room enough to receive [them]” (Malachi 3:10). A faithful member’s capacity to love is multiplied as he or she serves and teaches, and so forth.

The miracle of the loaves and fishes illustrates that Jesus possessed power to multiply. It highlights the fact that our smallest offerings are significant and may be multiplied beyond our mortal comprehension. Because this is true, we may trust that if we invite Christ into our lives we may humbly expect our spiritual capacities (such as faith, love, trust, willingness to forgive) and, occasionally, temporal interests to be multiplied (see D&C 104:2, 23, 25, 31, 33, 35, 38, 42, 46).

### **Walking on the Sea**

After Jesus fed the multitude, they rose up to force Him to be their king. He refused their demands and immediately left the throng and His disciples. He retreated to a mountain to be alone. At evening His disciples boarded a ship and rowed toward Capernaum, about five miles away. As they rowed in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, darkness fell across the water and a great wind blew, tossing the ship about in the resulting waves. They rowed through the night, making little progress toward Capernaum (see Mark 6:48). Exhausted and weather-beaten, they looked out over the waves and saw a man walking upon the water. This caused fear to sweep over them because they thought it was a spirit (see Mark 6:49). Their fears increased the closer the man got to the boat. However, it was Jesus who greeted them, saying, “It is I; be not afraid” (John 6:20). With this greeting the disciples immediately received Him into the ship. We learn from Mark that the moment He entered the ship the winds ceased (see Mark 6:51).

This miracle is a sign of Christ’s power over the elements. While there is definitely room for other interpretations of this miracle, several Old Testament prophecies stated that the Messiah would have power over elements, with a particular dominion over water. For example, the Psalmist wrote: “Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains;

being girded with power: . . . Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people” (Psalm 65:6–7; see also 89:9). Furthermore, water in antiquity was often used to figuratively depict chaos and instability associated with the fallen world. The great flood of Noah’s day and the waters of the Red Sea that hindered the path of Moses and the Israelites to the promised land are two examples. In this light, Jesus walking on the water suggests that He rose above the chaos and instability of this world and placed it under His feet.

The miracle of walking on water, including calming the sea, illustrates that Christ possessed power over the elements. The raging waves of this world are beneath Him. Nature’s display of power found in thunder, lightning, mighty winds, earthquakes, floods, and so on need not cause undue distress because Christ has overcome the world spiritually and physically and controls the destiny of the earth and can therefore calm “the tumult of the people” (Psalm 65:7; see also John 16:33).<sup>19</sup>

### **Healing the Man Blind since Birth**

In the fall, approximately six months before Jesus’s death and Resurrection, He traveled to Jerusalem to participate in the Feast of Tabernacles. There, on a Sabbath day, Jesus encountered a man who was blind from his birth. His disciples asked, “Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9:2–3). This man had experienced only darkness since birth. In response to the man’s condition, Jesus spat on the dusty ground and created a small amount of mud with which He anointed the eyes of the blind man. Next Jesus commanded him to go to the pool of Siloam (Shiloh) and wash the clay from his eyes. When the blind man washed the clay from his eyes, he came forth seeing (see John 9:1–7). Christ brought him from darkness into light.<sup>20</sup>

We can draw multiple meanings from this miracle. Among them is Christ’s power over the physical body. This sign of power was different from the healing of the impotent man who suffered for thirty-eight years. In that circumstance, Jesus brought the man to a condition of health he previously enjoyed (see John 5:14). In the case of the man born blind, it seems reasonable to conclude that a new creation was essential. The miracle likely necessitated the creation of cells, tissues,

and nerves that were either present but had never functioned or were altogether absent due to birth defects.

It is also significant that Jesus commanded the man to go to the pool of Siloam to wash the clay from his eyes. The word *Siloam* in Hebrew is rendered *Shiloh* and is one of the ancient titles of Jehovah (see Genesis 49:10). The word means “a messenger sent forth with authority.”<sup>21</sup> In the end, the blind man was able to see only after he submitted his will to Christ, the authorized messenger sent from the presence of God.

The miracle of healing the man who was blind since birth indicates that Christ possessed power over the physical body. To be sure, each of us lives with some physical defect, perhaps even since birth. Furthermore, we are all in decline growing physically older and weaker by the moment. Of course, the process of mortality will end where Job proclaimed it would end—with worms destroying our flesh (see Job 19:25–26). These sobering facts beckon us to look at the account of the man born blind more carefully. If Jesus has power to re-create his useless eyes to make them whole, we may rest assured that He has power to restore our physical bodies from conditions of decline and decay to conditions of wholeness in this life and the next.

### **Raising Lazarus from the Dead**

It was the Sabbath when Jesus healed the man who was blind since birth. As had happened before, this healing on the Sabbath raised the ire of religious leaders to a fevered pitch. Additionally, Jesus taught plainly on this occasion that He was the Son of God. Ultimately, there was a call for His life among the leading Jews for uttering such “blasphemy” (John 10:33).

The danger was real, and Jesus took His disciples out of Jerusalem. They traveled eastward to Perea beyond the Jordan River where John the Baptist had ministered. They stayed there for some time teaching many who gathered to Him (see John 10:31, 40–41). While in Perea, Jesus received word from Martha and Mary that Lazarus, their brother and Jesus’s close friend, was sick at Bethany (see John 11:3). Jesus waited two days and then announced to His disciples that they must return to Judea. They responded in disbelief: “Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?” (John 11:8). “Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead” (John 11:14).

They traveled to Bethany, where Jesus would perform the seventh miracle in the Book of Signs. Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, made their home in Bethany on the eastern slope of the

Mount of Olives near Jerusalem. Martha met Jesus and His disciples as they approached the village. There she exclaimed, "If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee" (John 11:21–22). Martha notified Mary of the Master's arrival. When Mary stepped into the company of Jesus, she fell at His feet and cried out, "If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:32). Obviously, Mary and Martha possessed deep faith in Christ's power to heal the sick. However, by this time, the body of Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. It seems apparent that while Mary and Martha exercised mighty faith in Jesus, they saw no way that the death of their brother could be reversed. Alfred Edersheim notes a common belief among the Jews of the day that the spirit of the deceased lingered near the body for three days. On the fourth day, "the drop of gall, which had fallen from the sword of the Angel and caused death, was then working its effect, and that, as the face changed, the soul took its final leave from the resting-place of the body."<sup>22</sup> Even so, Jesus asked to be directed to the place of burial. Once there, He commanded that the stone covering the entrance to the tomb be removed. Martha warned that the decaying body of Lazarus would likely stink, but Jesus was not swayed (see John 11:39). The stone was moved, and after Jesus prayed He "cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43). The spirit of Lazarus returned to his body, "and he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:44).

As related by John, the purpose of this sign of power was at least twofold. First, it deepened the faith and belief in Christ held by the disciples (see John 11:15, 45). Second, this miracle allowed the disciples to see the glory of God through Jesus's power over death (see John 11:40). Furthermore, it is interesting that the name Lazarus means "helped of God." This sign communicated our outright dependence upon Christ. He alone is our sole source of lasting help when facing death.

It is significant to note that Lazarus was not resurrected. He was still mortal and would eventually die again. Perhaps this is why John carefully described Lazarus exiting the tomb wrapped in His burial clothing. Literally, this image communicates that Lazarus was actually dead and properly buried. Figuratively, it conveys to the reader that he was not leaving death behind permanently but would one day be dressed in grave clothes a second time. In contrast, when Christ was resurrected, John carefully describes how Jesus's burial clothes were

left in the tomb, never to be worn again since He had conquered death (see John 20:6–8).<sup>23</sup>

This miracle shows that Christ possessed power over death. Earlier, He brought light to the world of the man born blind. In the case of Lazarus, He brought life to a dead man. Taken together, Jesus is the light and the life of the world.<sup>24</sup> Because Lazarus was raised from the dead, we know more securely that death (as well as life) is part of the stewardship of Christ. Passing out of this life and into the next is not a random action dictated by statistical probability. Quite the opposite—we can establish deeper faith through experiences with death, and we may detect the glory of God couched in the encounter as well.

Finally, the words of Jesus to Martha on this occasion, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25–26), indicate that Jesus had power not only to raise Lazarus from the dead in an instant but also to resurrect him for eternity. This miracle serves as the pinnacle of the Book of Signs (see John 2–11) and provides a fitting transition to the Book of Glory (see John 12–20), wherein Christ overcame death forever.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

The Gospel of John unveils the majesty and power of Jesus Christ. The Word was made flesh, dwelt among us, and manifested His glory to the world. As we have just seen, the first half of John’s Gospel describes seven major miracles performed by Christ. These chapters are occasionally referred to as the Book of Signs. These seven miracles (or signs of power) constitute a general construct upon which the first half of the book rests. These miracles confirm that Jesus Christ is a God of power and that His ministry was complete, whole, and perfect. He can alter substance and has power over time. He is not limited by geographic distance, can terminate disease and dispel false tradition, multiply good things, control the elements of nature, re-create the body, and bring the dead back to life. This part of the Gospel of John clearly depicts the omnipotence of Jesus Christ, who is worthy of our explicit faith and trust. **RE**

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## Notes

1. James Richard Mensch, *The Beginning of the Gospel According to Saint John* (New York: Peter Lang, 1966), 17–20; see also F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 29–30.

2. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, ed. Francis J. Maloney (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 300.

3. John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 279. John 1 is generally viewed as an introductory chapter—a preface to the Gospel, if you will.

4. There are eight miracles if one counts calming the Sea of Galilee *and* moving the ship to shore as completely separate events (see John 6:21).

I express appreciation to S. Kent Brown, professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University, who, while teaching at the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies in 1988, introduced me to the role that miracles play in the structure of John's Gospel.

5. Indeed, the English word *miracle* is somewhat misleading in that the associated action caused one to wonder in awe. That was not the purpose of the miracles Jesus performed. Brown suggests that a better designation would be “sign” of power. Simply, the miracle was not external proof of the truthfulness of Jesus's ministry; rather, it was the power by which the kingdom was actually established (see Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* [New York: Paulist Press, 1994], 63–65; see also Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* [New York: Doubleday, 1997], 339–40n15; James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977], 147).

For additional reading on the intended audience of the Gospel of John, see C. Wilford Griggs, “The Testimony of John,” in *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 111; Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 1:65; Alexander B. Morrison, “‘Plain and Precious Things’: The Writing of the New Testament,” in *How the New Testament Came to Be*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Frank F. Judd Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 5.

Furthermore, the number seven in John's writings suggests completion, wholeness, and perfection. Of course, Jesus performed more miracles than seven. It is commonly accepted that John's use of seven miracles is a literary device that communicates to his audience that the ministry of Jesus was whole, complete, and perfect.

6. When offering possible interpretations of the significance of the miracles of Jesus in the first half of John, I frequently use a phrase like, “Among other things, this miracle is a sign of . . .” and then proceed to suggest *one* way of viewing the event. I do this because the scope of this article does not allow me to explore multiple interpretations, and I in no way suggest that my interpretation is final or comprehensive. Each of the seven miracles is richly imbued with figurative types and literal elements that, if treated thoroughly, would fill volumes. In that spirit I invite the reader to use this article as a springboard from which to launch into deeper and more comprehensive studies of the miracles found in this part of John's Gospel.

7. Jesus's reference to His mother as “woman” was a title of respect for the day (see Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 144; see also Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 268–69).

8. See Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 145.

9. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 247–48; see also Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John*, 29.

Before partaking of food, guests at the feast would ritually cleanse themselves with water provided by the host. This would require many water pots and much water. Stone pots were preferable to ceramic because if a ceramic pot came in contact with an unclean person or substance the law required that it be destroyed (see Leviticus 6:24–28; 11:29–30; 15:12). A stone vessel, on the other hand, could be ritually cleansed and used again. Griggs explains: “A Jew was not to pray, worship, or eat, even at a public wedding banquet, without first washing off the filth and corruption of the world around him, and thus arose the necessity for having a number of large vessels available for the guests invited to this feast. . . . At an earthly feast for a bride and bridegroom, then, the Heavenly Bridegroom provided the necessary and desired wine from jars in which water was placed for the cleansing and purification of the mortal body. When his hour came, however, this Bridegroom would provide through the shedding of his blood the wine of eternal life and the means for cleansing the spiritual being. The number seven signifies perfection and completeness in John’s writings (and elsewhere, to be sure), and some suggest that only Jesus can compensate for the incompleteness or imperfection of the *six* water vessels” (Griggs, “Testimony of John,” 113–14; emphasis in original).

10. Lightfoot explains that the governor of the feast was likely a religious leader that pronounced blessings at feasts like the wedding celebration at Cana. He writes: “The *bridegroom’s blessing*, recited every day for the whole space of the seven days, besides other benedictions during the whole festival time, requisite upon a cup of wine, . . . (for over a cup of wine there used to be a blessing pronounced;) especially that which was called . . . *the cup of good news*, when the virginity of the bride is declared and certified. He, therefore, who gave the blessing for the whole company, I presume, might be called . . . *the governor of the feast*. Hence to him it is that our Saviour directs the wine that was made of water, as he who, after some blessing pronounced over the cup, should first drink of it to the whole company, and after him the guests pledging and partaking of it” (John Lightfoot, *Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997], 3:255; emphasis in original).

Furthermore, wine was emblematic of life, fertility, and health in the ancient world. Jesus turning water to wine at a wedding feast further substantiates this idea (see Griggs, “Testimony of John,” 113; see also Jo Ann H. Seely, “The Fruit of the Vine: Wine at Masada and in the New Testament,” in *Masada and the World of The New Testament*, ed. John F. Hall and John W. Welch [Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1997], 207–27). Ancient scripture and apocryphal writings identified the messianic age as a time wherein wine in great quantities would be present. Figuratively, this imagery suggests that physical and spiritual abundance is made possible by the Messiah (see Proverbs 9:4–5; Amos 9:13–14; Genesis 49:10–11; Joel 3:18; 2 *Baruch* 29:5–8; 1 *Enoch* 10:17–22).

11. Elder Talmage wrote: “Miracles cannot be in contravention of natural law, but are wrought through the operation of laws not universally or commonly recognized. . . . In the contemplation of the miracles wrought by Christ, we must of necessity recognize the operation of a power transcending our present human understanding” (*Jesus the Christ*, 148–49). Similarly, Joseph Fielding Smith taught: “A miracle is not, as many believe, the setting aside or overruling of natural laws.

Every miracle performed in Biblical days or now, is done on natural principles and in obedience to natural law. The healing of the sick, the raising of the dead, giving eyesight to the blind, whatever it may be that is done by the power of God, is in accordance with natural law. Because we do not understand how it is done, does not argue for the impossibility of it. Our Father in heaven knows many laws that are hidden from us” (*Man: His Origin and Destiny* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954], 484; see also Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986], 86).

12. A similar manifestation of power is evident in the multiplication of bread (see John 6:11). Jesus did not plant seed, water, fertilize, harvest, thresh, grind the grain to flour, mix the dough, allow it to rise, and cook the dough in order to provide bread for thousands. He was able to circumvent this lengthy process and produce bread immediately. In a way that we do not understand, He has power over time (see Robert J. Matthews, *Behold the Messiah* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994], 131).

On a related vein, Jesus Christ can also carve deep canyons in the earth’s surface or create beautiful beaches of fine sand without the passage of millions or billions of years that many scientists recommend are essential to create such geographical formations. Brigham Young taught: “Geologists will tell us the earth has stood so many millions of years. Why? Because the Valley of the Mississippi could not have washed out under about so many years, or so long a time. The Valley of Western Colorado, here, could not have washed out without taking such a length of time. What do they know about it? Nothing in comparison. They also reason about the age of the world by the marvelous specimens of petrification that are sometimes discovered. . . . How long did it take to make this tree into rock? We do not know. I can tell them, simply this . . . [Jesus can] make a tree into rock in one night or one day, if he chooses, or he can let it lie until it pulverises and blows to the four winds” (in *Journal of Discourses* [Liverpool: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1873], 15:126).

Finally, the above examples (wine, bread, geological formations) illustrate Jesus’s power to expedite processes that normally take time. It should be noted that He also possesses power to halt time or even turn time back. The sun standing still in the valley of Ajalon to ensure Israel’s victory over the Amorites (see Joshua 10) and causing the sundial to turn back ten degrees as a sign that Hezekiah’s life would be lengthened by fifteen years (see 2 Kings 20; Isaiah 38) are two examples that illustrate this power (see also Helaman 12:8–15). Perhaps this power was employed by Jesus when He raised Lazarus from the dead—the four days that his dead body lay in the tomb should have resulted in some decomposition but it did not—the normal effects of time in mortality, as we understand them, had no impact on his physical remains. Time possibly stood still or was turned back in conjunction with this miracle.

13. The nobility ascribed to this man likely stems from an attachment to the entourage of King Herod Antipus—tetrarch of Galilee from 4 BC to AD 39 (see Bruce, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 117; Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 177).

14. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 178; see also Bruce, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 118–19. Jesus healed the nobleman’s son at the seventh hour of the day (see John 4:52). The Jews reckoned their day beginning at 6:00 a.m. The seventh hour, then, would be 1:00 p.m. This would have given the nobleman ample time to travel from Cana to Capernaum in that day to confirm the validity of Jesus’s words. His faith



was secure, however, and he did not rush home. Rather, he was met by his servants over twenty-four hours later and learned for certain that his son had been healed by the power of Jesus Christ (see John 4:51–53).

15. John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 186–88; see also Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 28–30.

16. Bruce, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 125; see also Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 215–16.

17. See Bruce, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 126–27.

18. Magdala, on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee, was an important fishing village and exported salt-cured fish throughout the region. The Greek name was *Tarichae*, which means “salted fish” (see Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* [New York: Macmillan, 1977], 231–33).

19. Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1996), 180–83.

20. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John*, 55–58.

21. See Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 3:1330–34.

22. Edersheim, *Life and Times*, 699; see also Frederic W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 480; D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse the Four Gospels* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 452; Jo Ann H. Seely, “From Bethany to Gethsemane,” in *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection: The Savior’s Final Hours*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 42.

23. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John*, 65. Concerning the grave clothes of Jesus, Elder McConkie wrote: “What a picture John has left us of this unique moment in history. Fear fills the hearts of Peter and John; wicked men must have stolen the body of their Lord. They race to the tomb. John, younger and more fleet, arrives first, stoops down, looks in, but does not enter, hesitating as it were to desecrate the sacred spot even by his presence. But Peter, impetuous, bold, a dynamic leader, an apostle who wielded the sword against Malchus and stood as mouthpiece for them all in bearing testimony, rushes in. John follows. Together they view the grave-clothes-linen strips that have not been unwrapped, but through which a resurrected body has passed. And then, upon John, reflective and mystic by nature, the reality dawns first. It is true! They had not known before; now they do. It is the third day! Christ is risen!” (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:841–42).

24. Robert Kysar, “John, The Gospel Of,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 917; see also Brown, *Gospel and Epistles of John*, 64.

25. James D. Purvis, “The Fourth Gospel and the Samaritans,” in *The Composition of John’s Gospel*, comp. David E. Orton (Boston: Brill, 1999), 183–84.