The Seventh Johannine Sign: A Study In John’s Christology

Andreas J. Köstenberger
Trinity International University

A proper identification of the Johannine signs significantly sharpens one's grasp of John’s Christology. While there is substantial agreement regarding six signs, no consensus has yet been achieved regarding possible further signs in John. After an exploration of the “signs” concept in the OT, three criteria for Johannine signs are established, resulting in a working definition. These preliminary considerations then function as parameters in the search for potential additional signs in the Fourth Gospel. The essay concludes with a brief discussion of the implications of the study’s findings for the structure of John’s Gospel.

Key words: signs, Johannine sources.

Introduction

Studies on the “signs” in John’s Gospel are legion. It is therefore surprising that there is no treatment of the exact number and identity of the Johannine signs. Such a work, however, is needed for the following reasons.

First, as will be seen, while six Johannine signs are commonly acknowledged, there is no agreement regarding possible other signs in the Fourth Gospel. Indeed, some even question whether one should look for further signs in John at all. By a thorough exploration of the alternative proposals, perhaps greater clarity, if not consensus, could be achieved.

Second, if a seventh or even other signs could be identified with a significant degree of plausibility, a closer investigation may aid in our apprehension of the characteristics of the Johannine signs in general.

Third, such a study would be important since the signs occupy a central place in John’s christology (cf. 20:30-31). Clarity regarding the number and identity of the Johannine signs would therefore result in a refined understanding of the christological presentation of the Fourth Gospel as a whole.

Fourth, since the Johannine signs function as an important structural component, a precise delineation of the signs may also help clarify the structure of the Gospel.

The Six Commonly Acknowledged Signs In The Fourth Gospel

How many signs are there in the Fourth Gospel, and what are they? The Fourth Gospel explicitly identifies, and commentators generally acknowledge, the following six signs:

(1) the changing of water into wine (2:1-11);
(2) the healing of the nobleman’s son (4:46-...