

The Gospel of John Seven Signs, Seven Statements

Lesson #2

We begin today to look at the seven signs and the seven statements in John, only to realize that there are really 8 signs in John's gospel. John uses the term signs, "*semeion*" in the common Greek, 17 times in his Gospel [Fr. Brown, *The Gospel of John*]. Since these "signs" or miracles are concentrated in chapters 1-12 many scholars call the first half of John's Gospel the "Book of Signs."

John uses the word *semeion*, or "sign," because these works performed by Jesus are not just supernatural miracles but are signs that unveil the glory and power of God working through Jesus the Messiah. These "signs" also recall the signs performed by God's first holy prophet Moses in Exodus 4:8; 4:28-31.

In John's Gospel there are a total of 8 miracles, 7 public and 1 private. 7 is the number of symbolizing perfection [especially "spiritual" perfection], and 8 is the number symbolizing rebirth [circumcision is on the 8th day of a boy's life when he is "born" into the Sinai Covenant] and it is the number of salvation and resurrection; 8 people were saved in Noah's Ark.

Of the 8 miracles in John's Gospel, 6 of are not recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, 7 of these miracles are public "signs" that reveal Jesus as the Messiah. That John records 7 public signs draws attention to 7 as a number indicating perfection and fullness.

The Seven Public Signs of Jesus in St. John's Gospel

#1 2:1-11	The sign of water turned to wine at the wedding at Cana
#2 4:46-54	The healing of the official's son
#3 5:1-9	The healing of the paralytic
#4 6:1-14	The multiplication of the loaves to feed the 5,000
#5 9:1-41	The healing of the man who was born blind
#6 11:17-44	The raising of Lazarus from the dead
#7 2:18-20*	The Resurrection of Jesus that will be fulfilled in 20:1-10

*this sign is prophesized by Jesus in 2:18-20 but not fulfilled until chapter 20.

The private sign is found in chapter 6 when Jesus walks on the Sea of Galilee and calms the storm, a private revelation for the Apostles that identifies Jesus as the prophet "greater than Moses."

Sign # 1 – The wedding feast at Cana

"On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited."

Cana in Galilee is probably the modern village of Keb Kenna, which is about four miles northeast of Jesus' hometown, Nazareth and a two day walk from the site of Jesus' baptism on the Jordan River.

This miracle we can safely assume happened on a Wednesday. The Jewish Talmud directs that the marriage of a virgin should be on the fourth day of the week, our Wednesday. The only day with a "name" was the Sabbath, Saturday. Sunday was the "first" day of the week [**Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1-2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1**], therefore, as the ancients counted the "fourth" day is Wednesday [there was no concept of a 0 mathematical place-value in the 1st century AD]. Today this custom is still observed and marriage feasts are generally held in the afternoon or evening.

If this custom was observed in Jesus' day that would make the day Andrew and John were called as disciples the Jewish Sabbath, Saturday. That they "stayed with him the rest of the day" would certainly make sense since travel was (and still is for Orthodox Jews) restricted on the Sabbath.

So the question rises, "**On the third day from what?**" This would be on the third day from the previous day mentioned in **1: 43**. In chapter **1 verses 29, 35, and 43** you may have noticed the repetition of the words "the next day." In each case the Greek word **epaurion** is used. The literal translation of this word is "on the morrow." If there is "a tomorrow" that suggests that there was a previous day:

- Day #1 took place in chapter 1:19-28,
- Day #2 in verses 29-34, (Jesus' Baptism)
- Day #3 in verses 35-42, and
- Day #4 in verses 43-51.

The next verse, which is John 2:1, begins 3 days later, "on the third day" from the last day mentioned in verse 43.

It is important to notice how St. John's Creation imagery from the prologue is continued. In John 1:1-5 of the prologue John gave us Creation imagery in his use of the words "light" and "darkness" and in the "Word" of God who brought Creation into being. Then in verse 32 "*I saw the Spirit come down on him like a dove from heaven and rest on him*" there is the imagery of God the Holy Spirit descending from heaven and hovering above the waters of the Jordan River over Christ just as God's spirit descended and hovered over the waters of creation in Genesis chapter 1. Chapter two is a continuation of that creation imagery.

What day is it then, numerically, at the beginning of chapter 2? The fourth day (v. **43-51**) plus three more days yields **the 7th day**.

Day #1	1:23-28, This was the witness of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem..." "This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.
Day #2	1:29-34, The next day.. " "I have seen and I testify that he is the Son of God.
Day #3	1:35-42, The next day.. " "You Simon son of John; you are to be called Cephas—which means Rock.
Day #4	1:43-51, The next day.. " "...you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man.
Day #5-6	
Day #7	2:1, On the third day... [from the last day which was day 4] there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee.

Now recalling the "Creation" imagery from Genesis chapter 1 in St. John's prologue with words like "light" and "darkness" and the creative Word of God, what is the connection between Genesis' seventh day and the 7th day of John 2:1? In the story of Creation on the 7th day God rested. Yes, but there is more.

On the 6th day of Creation God created the beasts and Adam, and then knowing that Adam needed a companion [in chapter 2 of Genesis] God put Adam into a deep sleep and created the woman [Adam would not name her Hawwah, "Eve," "the mother of all living," until after their fall from grace in Genesis 3:20]. According to Old Covenant Hebrew tradition Adam and the woman awoke from their deep sleep the next day, the 7th day, and God joined them together with Adam acknowledging the union by saying these words:

*"This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh! She is to be called **Woman** because she was taken from Man."* And Scripture continues: *This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife and they become one flesh [Genesis 2:23-24].*

On the 7th day of Creation, according to tradition, there was a WEDDING! This is why, in the Old Covenant tradition, a wedding celebration lasted 7 days. It was the father of the groom who would decide when the wedding could take place. The usual festivities consisted of a procession in which the bridegroom and his friends would escort the bride to the groom's house. The blowing of a trumpet (shofar) signaled the beginning of the procession [see **1 Thessalonians 4:16** where the shofar announces Christ the Bridegroom coming for His Bride, the Church]. After the Bridegroom escorted the Bride to His Father's house, the wedding feast would last **7 days**. For a Biblical reference see **Genesis 29:27; Judges 14:8-10,18; Tobit 11:15-20.**

According to the ancient custom, it was on the 7th day of the feast that the bridegroom finally lifted the veil that covered the face of his bride. For the first time she would be fully revealed to Him and the marriage could be consummated. In the first century this moment of revelation in the lifting of the veil was called "the apocalypse," which means, "the unveiling." **Understanding the significance of this moment is a significant key to understanding St. John's other great book: "The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ to His Servant John."** It is the last book in the New Testament and it is a book about the "unveiling" of the Bride as she is received by Christ, the Bridegroom. The Bride is the Church.

In John chapter 2 St. John brings the Creation imagery established in chapter 1 to the 7th day of Creation which recalls the wedding of the Adam and Eve and now unites that imagery to the wedding at Cana. It was immediately after that first wedding that Adam and Eve fell from grace. Now Jesus, the “new Adam” [1 Corinthians 15:22-45] will begin His ministry and restore the grace that was lost through Adam and Eve’s sin. The connection between this wedding and the Genesis story of the woman’s connection with man’s fall from grace is further connected, as we will discuss, through Jesus’ peculiar way of addressing His mother when she makes her request to him. **The wedding at Cana is the 7th day of the New Creation.**

But there is a nagging question that must first be addressed: Why didn’t John just number the days up to the Wedding at Cana in a more straightforward manner? Why did he purposely establish a “third day” reference [John 2:1 On the third day..] which is also the 7th day? Remember, nothing in Sacred Scripture is just an accident. There is always a reason why the inspired writers use certain wording or word order. The answer is that there is another Old Testament connection to the 3rd and the 7th day. The Old Testament book of Numbers lists the prescribed rules and regulations for water purification when an Israelite comes in contact with a dead body. The “holy water” to be used in this rite must be mixed with the ashes of a red heifer that was without fault or blemish and has never borne a yoke [Numbers 19:1-10]. These ashes were then mixed with the water and blessed by a priest. This “holy water” was to be used for ritual purification.

Please read **Numbers 19:11-13**.

*“Anyone who touches the corpse of anyone whatever will be unclean for seven days. **Such a person must be purified with these waters on the third and seventh days and will then be clean; otherwise he will not be clean. Anyone who touches the corpse of anyone who has died and is not purified, defiles Yahweh’s Dwelling [Tabernacle]; such a person will be outlawed from [dead to] Israel, since the water for purification has not been sprinkled over him; he is unclean, and his uncleanness remains in him.**”*

Note: the literal translation of verse 13 is: such a person will be **dead** to Israel. Please also read **Hebrews 9:11-13**. *“The sacrifice of the red heifer is a foreshadowing of Christ’s self-sacrifice: But now Christ has come, as the high priest of all the blessings which were to come. He has passed through the greater, the more perfect tent, not made by human hands, that is, not of this created order; and he has entered the sanctuary once and for all, taking with him not the blood of goats and bull calves, but his own blood, having won an eternal redemption.”* The blood of goats and bulls **and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkled on those who have incurred defilement**, may restore their bodily purity. How much more will the blood of Christ, who offered himself, blameless as he was, to God through the eternal Spirit, purify our conscience from dead actions so that we can worship the living God. (see CCC# 1214-15, 1002-4)

So a person is restored or **resurrected** to his community by being ritually purified on the 3rd day and the 7th day. In other words, under the old Law two resurrections are required before the impure individual can be completely restored or resurrected to the covenant people of God.

So are we who are “dead” to sin, are we meant to experience two resurrections? **Yes.** We also have the promise of two resurrections.

Our first resurrection is in the Sacrament of Baptism where we are buried into Christ's death from which "he raises [us] up by resurrection with him, as 'a new creature.'" CCC# 1214

The 2nd resurrection will be experienced with the 2nd Coming of Christ in the resurrection of the dead. It is at that time that the living and the dead will receive their glorified bodies. Christ promises that those who experience the "second resurrection" will not experience the "second death" (see **Revelation 2:11; 20:6; 21:8**). This is the fullness of Christ's promise to us.

The Fathers of the Church expressed this teaching of a double resurrection and a double birth as: born twice, die once; born once, die twice.

The "born twice" refers to natural, physical birth and the supernatural re-birth that is the gift of God through the sacrament of baptism. Those who are born twice will only experience physical death. But to those who are born only once through a natural, physical birth will not only experience physical death but also spiritual death, the "second death."

The symbolism then illustrated by the reference to the 3rd day and the 7th day in John's Gospel refers to how Jesus has come to cleanse the defiled people of the Old Covenant who are dead in their sins.

Now we know that Jesus kept the Laws of the Sinai Covenant perfectly, in fact He was the only one who could keep them perfectly. So when we read in **John 2: 'Woman, what do you want from me? My hour has not yet come?'** Is it possible that Jesus rebuked his own mother publicly in this passage? Absolutely not. He would have been in violation of the Law and a scandal at the wedding feast. It is unthinkable that He should do such a thing!

This verse is a scandal to some and a stumbling block to many. It becomes a stumbling block to those who incorrectly interpret this passage as an expression of Jesus' separation from Mary—that she is not any more important to Him than any other sinner in need of salvation. It is also a scandal for Catholics who love Mary and cannot understand why Jesus would speak so disrespectfully to His mother! The problem lies in the interpretation of a Hebrew idiom, which is rendered in Greek as **ti emoi kai soi**. This idiom should be literally translated: 'What to me and to you?,' which means, "What has it to do with you and me?" This expression implies a divergence of views but the precise meaning must be determined, as always, from the CONTEXT of the passage. The context of this passage clearly shows that His comment to His mother was not a rebuttal much less a rebuke!

Did you know that the commandment to Honor your parents is the only commandment that contains a promise? The promise is long life. However, the penalty for not showing honor and respect to one's parents was death [**Leviticus 20:9**].

What did Jesus mean by the statement my hour has not yet come? References to "the coming hour" will be made repeatedly in John's Gospel. There are 12 references to the "coming hour."

To some scholars this reference to "the hour" refers to the "hour" of his glorification. To others it is the "hour" that marks the beginning of His public ministry and His manifestation as the

Messiah. But all scholars will agree that in John’s Gospel the reference to Jesus’ “hour” most often points to the “hour” of Christ’s passion and death on the cross—an hour that man will not determine but an “hour” that completely in God’s control. That interpretation fits in the context of this passage where He mentions the “hour” of his death in association with the “best wine” in **John 2:10** that was provided through Jesus’ miracle at the wedding at Cana, for it will be His blood that is shed that will become the “best wine” of Holy Communion that provides the blessings for all of mankind through His sacrificial death.

The question remains if Jesus isn’t rebuking His mother, why does He call her “Woman”? Hint: Remember the reoccurring Genesis imagery and see **Genesis 3:15**: “*I shall put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring [seed] and hers [her seed]; He will strike at your head while you strike at his heel.*” This prophecy is known as the Protoevangelium = the first Gospel. It is the first prophecy of the future Messiah who will redeem mankind and defeat the serpent. Jesus calls Mary “Woman” because that is her title. She is the “Woman” whose seed will defeat the serpent. Only two women in salvation history have been given the title “Woman,” Eve and Mary. (see **Genesis 2:23; John 2:4, 19:27**).

So Jesus is the “new Adam” [see **Romans 5:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45**] and Mary is the “new Eve.” St. Irenaeus writing in circa 180AD expressed Mary’s role as the “new Eve” this way: *Eve, however, was disobedient; and when yet a virgin, she did not obey. Just as she, who was then still a virgin although she had Adam for a husband,--for in Paradise they were both naked but were not ashamed; for having been created only a short time, they had no understanding of the procreation of children and it was necessary that they first come to maturity before beginning to multiply,--having become disobedient, was made the cause for death for herself and for the whole human race; so also Mary, betrothed to a man but nevertheless still a virgin, being obedient, was made the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race...Thus, the knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. What the virgin Eve had bound in unbelief, the virgin Mary loosed through faith.* St Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3,22,4 written circa AD 180.

Approximately 30 years later the great Christian apologist Tertullian wrote:

For it was while Eve was still a virgin that the word of the devil crept in to erect an edifice of death. Likewise, through a Virgin, the Word of God was introduced to set up a structure of life. Thus, what had been laid waste in ruin by this sex, was by the same sex re-established in salvation. Eve had believed the serpent; Mary believed Gabriel. That which the one destroyed by believing, the other, by believing set straight. Tertullian, *The Flesh of Christ*, 17, 4 AD 208-212

The two Eves contrasted:

THE VIRGIN EVE	THE VIRGIN MARY
Daughter of the first Covenant	Daughter of the Sinai Covenant
Pledged obedience under the covenant	Pledged obedience under the covenant
Eve’s disobedience resulted in the fall into sin of the entire human race. The result was death, physically and	Mary’s obedience to God resulted in the offer of the gift of salvation to the entire human race. The result was

spiritually.	eternal life
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How perfect is God's plan that although sin and death entered the world through the disobedience of the woman Eve who led the man Adam into sin, now we can compare the role of women in salvation history to the woman Mary, the new Eve, who leads her son, Jesus—the new Adam—to His first glorious work at Cana! All women now have Mary as their role model in fulfilling their vocation as mothers to raise up holy children who will continue to work for God's plan of salvation. Satan used the virgin Eve to bring destruction and God used the Virgin Mary to bring about our redemption from sin. Just as a woman and a man cooperated to bring sin into to world now a woman [in her obedience to God] and her Son will cooperated to bring salvation. Without Mary's role as the new Eve, women, as a sex, would still bear the burden and condemnation for leading Adam into sin. Mary releases women from that burden.

Mary directs the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them. She knows that He will solve the problem of the wine. She has confidence that her Son will fulfill her request and so she instructs them to do exactly as He tells them. This is the same advice Mary gives to all her spiritual children in the family of God: to do as her Son tells them—to be obedient to the will of God in their lives.

Writing to a predominantly Gentile-Christian community, John once again instructs his readers about Old Covenant customs. Ritual purification was very important under the Laws of the Old Covenant. We know that these jars held "holy water" because John tells us that they are stone vessels not the usual fired pottery vessels that held wine. Holy water was kept in stone vessels. Using the symbolism of numbers, John may be calling attention to the number 6 as just short of perfection, which according to tradition is the number 7. The Old Covenant rituals of purification were not complete or perfect but were only a preparation for the purity and perfection promised in the New Covenant.

There are several Old Testament passages that deal with purification rites found in the books of Leviticus and Numbers: (**Lev15:11, Num 19:11**).

"Anyone whom the afflicted man touches with unrinsed hands shall wash his garments, bathe in water, and be unclean until evening."

"Whoever touches the dead body of any human being shall be unclean for seven days"

These purification rites were an important part in Old Covenant Law and sanctity. The 6 stone vessels, which John mentions, that were placed outside the wedding reception room are the same type of vessels especially mentioned in the Talmud as being expressly used for the purification of the hands. It was customary to have these large water jars of stone in or near the room where a feast was being held so that water might be available for the ceremonial washing of hands prescribed before and after meals. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread when on the first night the Passover lamb or kid was eaten, hands were ritually washed three times: before, during, and after eating the food. In this case, each of the stone vessels held two or three measures. A measure is about eight gallons so each jar held between 20 to 30 gallons of water for a total of approximately 150 gallons of water!

Since this event took place part way through the feast some of the water had already been drawn out of the jars for the purification of hands before the meal. Now Jesus instructs the servants to make sure the jars are filled to the brim, which emphasizes the superabundance and magnificence of the gift produced by the miracle.

I always see the humorous side of this part of the story. You can imagine the expression of the faces of the servants worrying that they will be blamed for bringing water to the president of the feast instead of wine and then their amazement when the president of the feast enthusiastically pronounces what they have brought him the “most” choice wine? The president of the feast is not a servant but is a friend of the groom. Some scholars suggest that he is what we would call “the best-man”.

What does this superior wine coming at the end of the feast suggest to us symbolically? St.

Thomas Aquinas and other Fathers of the Church saw this abundance of good wine kept for the end of the celebrations as symbolizing the crowning moment in Salvation history when God has sent His own Son whose teaching will perfect the old revelation of God received by the patriarchs and Old Covenant Church. Now the graces Christ brings will far exceed their expectations. The wine replacing the water in essence symbolized the replacement of the Old Covenant and the superabundance of the New Covenant—the temporal blessings of the Old Covenant with the eternal blessings of the New. They also saw this good wine coming at the end as prefiguring the reward and the joy of eternal life, which God grants to those who desire to follow Christ in obedience. [St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on St. John*].

God loves to work in reversals. A good example is in Ex7:19, Moses first “sign” to Pharaoh and the Egyptian people so they might believe in Yahweh and let God’s people leave Egypt. He turned the water of the Nile, which was “holy water” to the Egyptians, into blood. OK, you say water into blood, but is this a foreshadowing? Look again at v19: ***There will be blood throughout the whole of Egypt, even in sticks and stones.***’ The last line is a poor translation. **The literal translation is even in vessels of wood and stone.**

What vessels does God use in John’s Gospel? Ritual stone jars and the wood of the Cross. Jesus is the new Moses sent by God to perform “signs” so that the people will believe. Instead of turning water to blood He turns the water in stone vessels into “the blood of the grape”—into the best new wine which prefigures the best “new wine” which is His precious blood given to His New Covenant people in the sacrament of the Eucharist. It is a promise given in the Old Testament before the event of the Sinai Covenant.

So let’s try to summarize this first sign.

- John frames his Gospel account with Mary in the beginning of her son’s ministry with the events at the wedding at Cana and again at the end of his Gospel at Calvary—from Cana to Calvary her role is significant.

There are several analogies that can be drawn between the two events of Cana and Calvary:

- They are located at the beginning and at the end of Jesus’ public life and link Mary with his ministry from the beginning to the end.

- Her two titles “mother” and “woman” are used in both episodes.
- At Cana wine flowed from vessels intended for the cleansing of impurity while at Calvary the blood of Christ flowed from his side, which “cleanses us for all sin”. (**1 John 1:7**).
- In both episodes Mary demonstrates her special concern toward everyone: In Cana she intercedes when “the hour” has not yet come and at Calvary, when “the hour” has come, she offers humbly to the Father the redeeming death of her Son and accepts from her Son the mission to be the mother of all believers who are represented at Calvary by “the beloved disciple”. Mary is the first Christian and the model disciple for all of us.
- Both events signal the beginning of a family: the wedding at Cana is the beginning of family life for the couple being married, and at Calvary Jesus gives His beloved mother to His Apostle John, who represents the Church and all Jesus’ “beloved disciples.” Through this “adoption” Mary becomes the mother of all the Christian brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. She is our inheritance from the altar of the cross!

The miracle at Cana has no parallel in the Synoptic Gospels.

- The event is unique. It is the event of the first sign performed by Christ inaugurating the New Creation and the first Sacrament of the New Covenant Church, the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. On the 7th day of the New Creation Jesus was present at the wedding at Cana just as God was present at the first marriage in Salvation history. His presence was a sign that He blesses the love between a man and a woman united in the covenant union of marriage. The Navarre scholars sum up Jesus’ presence at Cana this way: God instituted marriage at the beginning of creation; Jesus confirmed it and raised it to the dignity of a sacrament.
- Wine flowed from holy water vessels at the wedding at Cana and at Calvary blood and water flowed from the holy side of Christ, God’s vessel of sacrifice, giving birth to the New Covenant Church in the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. Christ is the Bridegroom of the New Covenant Church and John’s other great book, The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ to John, also known as The Book of Revelation, ends with the Marriage/ Wedding supper of the Lamb when Christ takes the New Covenant people as His bride in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. Cana and Calvary are linked to Mary, the virgin daughter of Israel (Zion) and to Christ the Bridegroom of the new Israel, the Holy Catholic (universal) Church, the spotless virgin Bride of Christ.