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Q&A#143 The Creation Days and the Seven Signs of John

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Today's question: "Is there a legitimate connection between Jesus' 7 signs in John 1-11 and the creation week in Gen 1-3?"

I reference my earlier episodes on the creation days of John 1-2 (<https://adversariapodcast.com/2019/02/09/creation-days-in-johns-gospel/>), the healing of the man at the sheep pool (<https://adversariapodcast.com/2018/09/29/video-whats-the-deal-with-the-weird-healing-pool-in-john-5/>), and the meaning of the catch of 153 fish in John 21 (<https://adversariapodcast.com/2019/03/16/numerology/>). I also reference Peter Leithart's numbering of the signs (<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/leithart/2008/07/book-of-signs/>).

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, is there a legitimate connection between Jesus' seven signs in John 1-11 and the creation week in Genesis 1-3? Theopolis has just started a new podcast series on John's book of signs. We begin with an introduction to John more

generally, and then we get into a number of the sign narratives.

And so hopefully you will have a far more complete answer to your question within that series. But before then, I would like to give some inconclusive reflections on the matter, because my mind is not yet settled. And I'm hoping in the next few weeks I'll come to a better understanding of these themes.

But before then, I thought I would share some of my unsettled and inconclusive reflections, because people have often said that they appreciate my inconclusive thoughts because it gives a better sense of how I arrive at a position, some of the working behind the scenes, how I try and fit pieces together, etc. And that helps to understand how to work out passages, not just what we should believe about a particular passage or what reading I find convincing. So I would begin by saying that John uses a lot of creation symbolism.

Creation is very much a theme that plays throughout the Gospel. We can see that from the very outset. The very beginning of John's Gospel begins with an allusion back to the very outset of Genesis.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made.

So there are two things there that draw our mind back to Genesis. First of all, the explicit introduction in the beginning, and then the reference to the creation of all things. And that is, of course, the subject matter of Genesis 1-2.

Beyond that, we have a movement into a series of different days. In Genesis 1-2, I've commented upon this before and I'll link the video below, I've mentioned that there is a creation days pattern within those series of days. And there are creation themes there that very much stick out.

The light coming into the world, and the division of the waters in the baptism, and other things that come up within that account, all draw our mind back to the events of Genesis chapter 1. So there's creation themes being played out already within John's Gospel. So it should not surprise us entirely if his signs follow a similar pattern. And those creation days, I think, can be mapped fairly loosely onto the days of creation, the specific events that occur upon them.

So it's not just a general seven-day pattern. It's slightly more developed than that. The other thing that you can see are other images associated with the creation, such as the garden and the woman at the very end of Jesus' appearance with the resurrection to Mary Magdalene.

That is an account that recalls the events of Genesis chapter 2 and 3. Now, what else

might we think about? The numbering of the signs that there is seemingly seven. And that is a generally accepted number. Even people who would suggest that the number, that the signs that should be reckoned as signs are different, will often suggest there are seven signs, or at least that the number seven is being played with in a very significant way.

So either it is seven signs plus one, the one being the sign of new creation, or it's seven signs with the culminating sign being maybe the resurrection or something like that. But that suggests that there isn't a clear numbering, and that is one of the things that we'll have to tackle at the outset. There are debated signs.

Do we count, for instance, John chapter 2? In John chapter 2, verse 18, the Jews said to him, what sign do you show for us doing these things? Jesus answered them, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. So there is a sign mentioned there, but is that a sign that should be numbered with the others? Probably not, because in chapter 4 we have the statement that this was the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee in verse 54 of chapter 4. So it seems that there are two signs by that point, the first sign being the changing of the water into wine, and the second sign being the healing of the official's son. The sign in Cana of Galilee is mentioned as the first of his signs in verse 11 of chapter 2. He manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him.

So there are two signs that we have numbered. The other signs are not numbered in the same way. Rather, we're supposed to work out that there are five further signs.

Signs play an important role in John's gospel. These aren't just generic miracles or demonstrations of Christ's power, and I'll get to this in a moment. They seem to have some symbolic and typological dimension to them that they're authenticating symbols, that they present who Christ is in what is done.

Now, you'll see some of the miracles in the other gospels have that character too, but John foregrounds that aspect, and it's not just Jesus as the performer of exorcisms and miracles and healings and other things like that, but Jesus as the one who is testified to by these signs. So what can we see? There are two initial signs, both of them numbered, turning of the water into wine and the raising of the official's son as the second sign. Then we have the division of John's gospel fairly loosely in the literary form into a book of signs and a book of glory sandwiched by a prologue and an epilogue.

So that would seem to present, as the questioner suggests, chapters 1 to 11 as a selection of signs. Chapters 12 following has a rather different character to it. So the suggested numbering, some have suggested that we drop out the events, that we drop out the sign of walking upon the water, that that is actually connected with the changing of the multiplication of the bread and the feeding of the five thousands, five thousand, and others have suggested that we add in as the seventh sign the death and resurrection of Christ, which is connected with sign imagery elsewhere in the gospel as

Jesus is lifted up, as it were, as a sign to the people and he signifies the sort of death that he's going to die when he talks about being lifted up.

Then we might think about the events of chapter 21 as a sign. It's a sign of what will later on occur to the church and what happens in that chapter is clearly symbolic in some way of the mission of the church to the nations, that they will be fishers of men and that they will receive a great bountiful harvest for their labors. We can connect it with the events of Ezekiel chapter 47 with the gematria and other references and the reference to 153 fish.

I think I've done a video on that at one point. So there are sign elements in the later book of glory in the section and the prologue that follow the epilogue that follows it. So people have suggested that we should include those in the numbering of the signs but the suggestion for the seven that I'm generally going to go with and it's one suggested by Peter Lighthouse and others is the numbering as follows.

The first sign is the multiplication or the changing of the water into wine. The second sign is the raising of the official sun. The third sign is the events of chapter five with the raising of the paralytic.

The fourth sign is the feeding of the five thousand. The fifth sign is the walking upon the water. The sixth sign is the healing of the blind man in chapter nine and then the well that's the sixth sign sixth sign and then the seventh sign is the raising of Lazarus.

You can think about the various sign elements within these. They are forms of authentication and revelation of Christ's identity and they're not just miracles as I've suggested already. In the events of John chapter two we see some of this that Jesus is the bridegroom and he comes at a wedding feast and he does what the bridegroom was supposed to do in providing wine.

It's a secret sign that's performed so that most people don't recognise what's taken place. It's a hidden event but yet it testifies to his true identity not just to his power but to his identity as the bridegroom and those bride groom themes and wedding themes pervade the book of John and continue into the book of Revelation where they're really consummated in the fighting final wedding supper of the lamb and the descent of the bride etc. Another example of sign elements might be seen in chapter five with the healing of the man at the sheep pool.

It's an event where he there's a healing pool he needs to cross over he needs to go into the land into the city he's kept out of it and he's been in that state for 38 years. 38 years is a significant number it's the number of years that Israel wandered in the wilderness after their failure to enter into the land. Now the man is seen as someone who has sinned and his sin is associated with his condition so he symbolises something more than just himself it's not just a an event of power and grace in Christ reaching out to this man

but rather it's an event in which Israel represented in the state of exile is brought into the city is brought into the land and Christ as the new Joshua is the one that brings them in.

So there are sign elements within these various signs these signs have elements within them that are authenticating that are revelatory they express who Jesus is not just being a demonstration of his power and his as it were his divine muscle that's not what they're really about they're about something more than that demonstrating who he is and what his mission is about what he has come to achieve. Now can we see any parallels and connections between signs and days of creation? It's worth asking at this point whether there need to be these sorts of things for creation symbolism to be a play. I think for a creation symbolism to be a play all you would need is seven signs and a significance given to that number maybe in the seventh sign being a climactic sign maybe that is the one where there is a connection with the days of creation or maybe in the next sign a new creation sign the eighth day as it were.

So it doesn't have to be a mapping on to day by day for there to be creation creation symbolism but there has been a suggestion there have been suggestions of this mapping of the signs on to creation days. Peter Lighthouse suggests the following that the water into wine is associated with Christ manifesting his glory that's the way it's described at the end when the sign is described as a sign he's giving light in the darkness and then the second sign doesn't seem to have a very clear connection with the second day what sort of connection could we think of? I think any connection would be a bit of a stretch I'm not seeing a clear connection here maybe the distance the separation heaven and earth Christ healing from a great distance I think that is a fairly tenuous connection I don't think that it's likely to be the right one. The third sign there's the separation of water and land the man has to cross over the water the healing pool and enter into the land into the city it's connected with the events of crossing over the Jordan entering the promised land after the exodus so maybe that is that water land theme that's playing there is something that connects it with the third day.

The feeding of the five thousand the significance it would have to be connected with the sun moon and stars in the firmament how would it do that? Lighthouse suggests this because they want to make Jesus king and kings and rulers are in the firmament perhaps I'm not sure I find that very convincing other connections might be the division of the people among the disciples that they are established as sort of rulers over this multitude that it's connected with the mountain it's connected with the themes of exodus and Sinai they surround the time of the Passover they cross over the sea Jesus followed by a multitude into the wilderness they go to the mountain he provides bread miraculously so it's manna themes maybe there are themes of sun moon and stars as he's establishing the structure the authority structure of a new Israel with his disciples as he divides the people among them that's a possibility I think it's a fairly hmm it's a tenuous one again I'm not very convinced by it the fifth day would be Jesus walking on the water and so it's

the day associated with sea creatures there upon the waters and Jesus is walking upon the waters that is possible but again it's not a particularly clear one the sixth day the blind man receiving his sight Jesus is making a man new with the use of clay just as man was fashioned from the clay there's a possible connection there and then Lazarus being raised is new life and Sabbath those are Peter Lighthouse's suggestions and I think those can be fleshed out a bit but again they're possible connections and I think there's some weight to them but I wouldn't put that much weight upon them their initial connections now if anything can be connected then nothing can really be connected and I can see a number of ways in which some of these signs could be connected with various days some that don't really fit any day neatly at all like the raising of the official sun the changing of the water into wine I mean I can see that being connected with a number of other days it could be connected with the seventh day with the wedding feast it could be connected with the third day the provision of wine and the trees bearing fruit or it could be connected with the sixth day man and woman being brought together in marriage and at that point I think we're beginning to see that these connections maybe aren't as strong as they seem when you can connect anything there is no real firm connection between any particular items and so what we're looking for are connections that are very distinct and unique to two elements so the sort of connection that would suggest that this day belongs with this sign and that sign would neatly fit into any of the other days it fits fits very neatly into one day and one day only that is what we're looking for and I'm not sure we have that level of proof so I wouldn't place that much weight upon it but yet the connections are suggestive there's something there and I would suggest that we should look further into it and see what else might turn up now can we see any parallels and other structures between these signs I think we can you can see for instance we think about the signs the first one water into wine then there's the child raised from the dead the paralytic that's healed the feeding of the five thousand the crossing of the sea the blind man receiving his sight and then Lazarus raised from the dead there are ways in which those have a sort of internal structure so we can connect the first sign and the fourth sign the first is connected with the provision of wine and the fourth is connected with the provision of bread and so bread and wine go very naturally together and those two food miracles food and drink miracles would seem to make a nice pairing the third miracle the third sign and the sixth sign also seem to fit together very neatly if you read chapters five and nine of John you'll see very close parallels between them it's the description of someone who's been in a bad state for a very long time encounter with Jesus Jesus heals them on the Sabbath and there is then a conflict with the Jews they do not the person who's been healed does not know who Jesus who or where Jesus is and then Jesus encounters them a second time and there is a divergence at that point with the first one going to tell the Jews and the second one following Jesus and then there's further parallels such as the fact that there's a reference to a healing pool in both cases the first one the pool at the sheep gate and the second one the pool of Silo and so those two parallels are very clearly literal in the literary structure of John's Gospel they're closely juxtaposed they're juxtaposed as two different patterns one of encounter with

jesus and turning away and another of encounter with jesus and following him both framed against the backdrop of conflict with the jews and healing on the sabbath so i think there are ways in which those two signs fit neatly together too so we've got signs one and four and signs three and six fitting very neatly as we look through the creation days of chapter one of genesis we'll see a similar thing the days map onto each other there are days of forming and then there are days of filling the first day is the creation of light the fourth day is the placing of light in the firmament the second day is the creation of heaven and the division between the waters above and the waters beneath the fifth day is the filling of the waters beneath with fish and birds flying across the face of the firmament the third day is the creation of dry land and then as a second stage the planting of vegetation the sixth day is the creation of animals to fill the land and as a second stage the creation of mankind upon the earth so there seem to be parallels there and within john's creation days maybe there are symmetries too maybe what we're seeing is a panel structure with two panels going alongside each other and those two panels would suggest that if there are connections between signs one and four and three and six that we should expect some parallels between two and five there i don't see any clear parallels beyond the fact that both of them are associated with and that i think might be the connection that we're supposed to run with but i'm not sure it's not a very strong connection one way or another i would want to look for quite a bit more to rest upon and so we've seen parallels between the first and fourth second and fifth perhaps and then the quite definitely those two sets of or those three sets of two signs which leaves the final sign as the raising of lazarus and the raising of lazarus has given a particular prominence within the gospel of john the other gospels don't record that event but in john's gospel it's associated with jesus as the one who is the resurrection and the life and it is both an anticipation of jesus resurrection and a precipitating event for jesus's death in the other gospels it's the temple action that jesus performs in jerusalem that leads that really precipitates the plot against his life whereas in john's gospel it's his raising of lazarus and his raising of lazarus his action for his friend he lays down his life for his friends in john's gospel and so the significance of the raising of lazarus is quite important for the architectonics of john's narrative putting all these things together then i think that there is some creation symbolism playing out john's gospel has quite an abundance of creation symbolism elements of the different elements of creation a reference to creation at the very outset and very clearly presenting christ as the agent of the original creation and then as the agent of new creation the signs that represent christ as the one who's the one who has the power of resurrection the life the one who brings healing the one who brings light etc all of those things would suggest that jesus is being presented in these things in a way that presents him as the one with the power of creation he's the one that has power over distance he can speak a word and have it act from a distance he's the one who can change water into wine he's the one that can multiply bread he's the one that has power over the creation in walking over the sea walking upon the sea and in making the blind man to see and in every single one of these respects we see christ as the agent of new creation so i would not be surprised if

there are step by step a playing out of the creation days within the signs of john but i would want to see a lot more um certain evidence before making very clear parallels between the days and the signs i don't think that i'm quite there yet if you have any thoughts please leave them in the comments below if you found this video helpful and other podcasts and videos like it please consider supporting using my patreon or my paypal accounts it really does make a difference and lord willard i'll be back again tomorrow if you would like to ask a question on this or anything else please do so using my curious cat account thank you very much for listening god bless