

# Jesus as Creator in the Miraculous Signs of the Fourth Gospel and the Influence of Isaiah's Creation Theology

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## **Abstract**

In this essay, the investigation focuses on the portrayal of Jesus as Creator in the miraculous signs, as proposed by some scholars. The traditionally accepted seven miraculous signs present several significant features which portray Jesus as Creator. The features depict Jesus as the Word incarnate, who utters words to effect creative transformation. He is sent by the Father to the world in order to accomplish the work of new creation, which is partly expressed in the miraculous signs. The depiction of Jesus as Creator in the miraculous signs corresponds with the ideas in Isaiah 55:11. The 'sending' of the Son in the miraculous signs (John) parallels the 'going forth' of Yahweh's word from his mouth (Isa 55:11) and the efficacy of Jesus's words corresponds with the efficacy of Yahweh's word (*dbr*; LXX: *rhēma*). The efficacy of Yahweh's word is witnessed in Jesus Christ.

## Keywords

High Priest, creation theology, servant of the Lord, Isaiah, Fourth Gospel

### 1. Introduction

The Fourth Gospel presents the theme of creation right from the beginning of the Gospel (John 1:1–3, 10). The prologue alludes to the Genesis creation narrative when it opens with the phrase “in the beginning” (*en archē*), resembling Genesis 1:1 LXX. It explicitly mentions the Word (*logos*), identified as Jesus (1:14–18), as the agent of creation who has come into the world he created. Since the prologue serves “as an entry point in which key themes are broached and woven together in a liturgical celebration of the advent of the divine Word” (Lioy 2005, 57; cf. Carson 1991, 111; Coloe 2011, 2; Köstenberger 2009, 176; Kruse 2003, 20; Lindars 1972, 81; and Marshall 1982, 1082), it is assumed that the theme of creation also appears in the rest of the Gospel. Consequently, some interpreters have identified the theme of creation in the signs (*sēmeia*), which John depicts in the first half of his Gospel (ch. 2–12) (e.g., Brown 2010, 286–288; Moore 2013; Rae 2008, 302–308). In conjunction with the theme, Jesus is also portrayed as Creator in the miraculous signs.

This essay is the first in a two-part series, which is written based on the author’s capstone project (dissertation) under the supervision of Prof. Dan Lioy at the South African Theological Seminary. In this particular essay, the investigation focuses on the portrayal of Jesus as Creator in the miraculous signs, which appear in the book of signs (John 2–12).

The study begins with a brief literature survey on the theme of creation in the miraculous signs in order to set a foundation for the subsequent investigation. Then, it analyses the constitution of the signs

since interpreters differ concerning what these are. This analysis provides a delimitation to the study area. In the subsequent two sections following the analysis, the essay centres on the main focus of the entire treatise—the portrayal of Jesus as Creator in the miraculous signs and how they seem to be influenced by Isaiah’s creation theology.

## **2. The Theme of Creation in the Miraculous Signs: Literature Survey**

Interpreters such as Brown (2010), Moore (2013) and Rae (2008) have identified the theme of creation in the miraculous signs. Brown (2010) accepts the traditional seven signs and agrees with Painter (2002, 77) that Jesus’s signs “are miracles, new acts of creation.” Brown argues that the signs “point ahead in the narrative toward that final and greatest of signs, the resurrection of the Messiah—the first moment of re-creation.” (p. 287; cf. Wright 2004, 131). She further contends that John presents the seven signs in order to “echo the seven days of creation, offering a final and eighth sign precisely to indicate the arrival of renewed creation” (p. 287). She points out as evidence Jesus’s declaration in the temple concerning the “rebuilding” of the temple of his body when the Jewish authority demands a sign (*semeion*; John 2:18). She also highlights the connection between the first and the seventh signs, pointing out the foreshadowing of Jesus’s resurrection as the eighth sign in the raising of Lazarus.

Moore (2013) agrees with Brown on several matters. He accepts the traditional seven signs and argues that there is an eighth sign, which is the resurrection. He also supports Brown’s contention that the signs echo the seven days of creation and goes further in detailing how each of the seven signs is seen “to correspond to the ‘seven days’ of creation” (p. 131; cf. pp. 135–192). The eighth sign, he says, “completes the sequence, representing

the octave day of the ordering of creation, the work of Jesus continuing beyond his earthly life and ministry into the ‘new week’” through the commissioning of the apostles (p. 132).

Rae (2008, 302–308) argues that the series of seven signs in the Gospel of John alludes to the seven days of creation. However, Rae’s view of what the signs are excludes the miracle of Jesus walking on water and includes as the seventh sign at Jesus’s great hour: “his mother, the cross, and the issue of blood and water from Jesus’s side (John 19:25–37)” (p. 304). Rae contends that the signs are to be understood as a foreshadowing of Jesus’s crucifixion-glorification and “a participation ahead of time in the new life that is to come” (p. 303). Following a chiasmic arrangement (cf. Girard 1980, 315–324; Grassi 1986, 67–80) which centres on the multiplication of loaves and fish (John 6), Rae argues that the pairing between the first and the seventh signs, the second and the sixth signs and the third and the fifth signs “is concerned unmistakably with the redemptive transformation of the old creation and the ushering in of the new” (p. 304).

The brief literature survey on the theme of creation in the Fourth Gospel reveals three common features. First, the scholars indicate that the signs are God’s acts of renewing creation. Second, they see Jesus as performing the role of Creator in the renewal of creation. Third, they perceive a connection between the creation theme in the gospel with the creation narrative in Genesis, thus suggesting that Genesis provides the background and influence for the theme of creation in the Gospel. This study follows the features but diverges in this way: the portrayal of Jesus’s role as Creator in the Gospel of John is influenced by Isaiah’s creation theology rather than by Genesis alone.

### 3. The Constitution of the Signs (*sēmeia*)

This investigation requires a brief analysis of what constitutes the signs, since interpreters differ concerning what they are. The analysis provides delimitation of the area where the investigation focuses.

Generally, the seven supernatural acts of Jesus in the book of signs (John 2–12) have been accepted as constituting the signs. However, an analysis of the seven signs reveals that only five of them have been explicitly identified as signs (*sēmeia*) in the Gospel. They are, (1) the turning of water into wine (2:11), (2) the healing of a royal official's son (4:54), (3) the feeding of the 5,000 (6:14), (4) the healing of a man born blind (9:16), and (5) the raising of Lazarus from the dead (12:18). The healing of a sick man at the Pool of Bethesda is not called a 'sign' but a 'work' (*ergon*) (7:21; cf. 5:17). In the Fourth Gospel, however, "signs' are the 'works' which Jesus willingly performs in order to bring people to believe in him" (Just 2013, §3 [Signs]). "What Jesus meant by works was identical with what John meant by signs." (Guthrie 1967, 79).

The act of walking on water has no reference to being a sign or a work. Consequently, some scholars do not consider this as a sign (e.g., Köstenberger 1995, 97; 2009, 330; Rae 2008, 304). Köstenberger (1995, 92–93) excludes this act from the seven signs because it does not fit the three general characteristics of signs, which he identifies as: (1) "signs are public works of Jesus's," (2) "signs are explicitly identified as such in the Fourth Gospel," and (3) "signs, with their concomitant symbolism, point to God's glory displayed in Jesus, thus revealing Jesus as God's authentic representative." Consequently, instead of the act of walking on water, Köstenberger argues for Jesus's cleansing of the temple complex as a sign since it fits all his general characteristics (pp. 96–101).

Nevertheless, this study does not exclude Jesus’s act of walking on water in the examination of Jesus’s role as Creator. This act is a supernatural feat that can only be accomplished by someone who possesses a creator-like power. It is the only incident among all the miraculous events in the Gospel of John where Jesus seems to imitate Yahweh’s self-identification *’anî hû’* (LXX: *egō eimi*) (cf. Exod 3:15–16; Isa 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 44:6; 48:12; 51:12; 52:6) when he speaks to his disciples saying, “I am; be not afraid” (*egō eimi; mē phobeisthe*) (John 6:20). Ball (1996, 181–185) insists that the expression in John 6:20 alludes strongly to Isaiah 43:1–13, which, in turn, provides a theological explanation for Jesus’s act of domination over the tempestuous Sea of Galilee and rescuing his disciples. All this makes this particular incident unique in comparison to other miraculous events in the Gospel. Therefore, the investigation of Jesus’s role as Creator in the signs here focuses on the seven miraculous events in John’s Gospel.

#### **4. Significant Features Portraying Jesus as Creator in the Miraculous Signs in Relation to the Entire Gospel**

One may observe three significant features arising from an analysis of the miraculous signs. The subsections below discuss these features, which portray Jesus as Creator in the miraculous signs. The features present Jesus as uttering words to accomplish miracles, performing (*poieō*) miraculous signs (*sēmeion*) or work (*ergon*), and being sent by the Father.

##### *4.1 Jesus utters words to accomplish things*

The words Jesus utters accomplish what they are intended to do. This idea is observed in four instances. In the first instance—the healing of the official’s son—Jesus’s words, “your son will live,” take effect at precisely the

time when Jesus uttered the healing statement (John 4:53). Köstenberger (2004, 98, 171) indicates that Jesus “not only cures the royal official’s son but does so long-distance, a highly unusual way of working miracles (4:50–53)” (p. 98). The healing of the sick child at Jesus’s words suggests that his words entail regenerative power that can accomplish long-distance healing. As the Creator-Word, Jesus can accomplish things that are extraordinary by his words and actions. He grants life to the official’s son by his utterance.

In the second instance, the occasion occurs in the healing of the paralysed man at the Pool of Bethesda. Jesus’s command for the paralysed man to get up, pick up his mat and walk goes against the person’s current condition and prompted immediate healing (John 5:8–9). The command demands action from the man. The effect of Jesus’s words was instant. There seems to be a supernatural, regenerative power in his words of command. The power of his words reconstructs and restructures the paralysed parts of the man so that the old, sick parts are renewed.

The third incident occurs in the healing of the man born blind. Jesus’s instruction to wash in the Pool of Siloam is met with the man’s obedience and an act of faith, resulting in his healing (John 9:7). In this case, the combination of Jesus’s actions and words of command occurs in the whole process of healing. Jesus “spat” (*eptusen*) on the ground, “made” (*epoiēsen*) mud (*pēlon*) from the saliva, “spread” or “rubbed” (*epechrisen*) the mud on the man’s eyes, and “said” (*eipen*) to the man to “go” (*hupage*, imperative) and “wash” (*nipsai*, imperative) in the Pool of Siloam. The man goes to the pool as instructed and comes back seeing (*blepōn*).

In the fourth instance, Jesus’s loud voice calling Lazarus to come out from the grave produces life in Lazarus’s dead body (John 11:43–44). His shout of command is “wonderfully succinct” (Morris 1995, 498, note 89; cf. Barrett 1978, 403) and one “of raw authority” (Burge 2000, 320). The Creator-

Word raises the dead through his life-giving words. It can be said that Jesus's words have given Lazarus a new life. A reconstruction of Lazarus's decomposing body and all the elements inside it may have happened. The power of his voice expresses "the power of God by which the dead are brought to life" (Ridderbos 1997, 406). He can bring back life because he is the Creator of life, exercising his "Creator-like power" (Brodie 1993, 397).

In all four instances, the Greek term *legō* (speak, say; *legei* [John 4:50; 5:8]; *eipen* [9:7]) and the statement *phōnē megalē ekraugasen* ("he shouted with a loud voice" [11:43]) are employed to indicate that Jesus utters something. Although the term and statement inform readers that Jesus speaks, the effect of the words which come forth from his mouth makes *legō* and *phōnē megalē ekraugasen* significant. Thus, in his role as Creator, Jesus's words are effective in accomplishing what they are meant to do. He is the Creator-Word, whose utterances are sovereign and authoritative, powerful and effective.

The idea that Jesus accomplishes things by his utterances is enhanced when one considers the notions of the *logos* and *rhēma* in connection with Jesus. Special use of the term *logos* (Word) occurs in the prologue when John associates it (*logos*) with Jesus. The prologue identifies Jesus as the incarnate Word. In the rest of the Gospel, the term is used thirty-six times. McDonough (2009, 218) shows that the majority of the thirty-six usages cluster around words connected to Jesus and God. In most cases (twenty-two times), John employs *logos* to describe the words that Jesus speaks (2:22; 4:41, 50; 5:24; 6:60; 7:36, 40; 8:31, 37, 43, 51, 52; 10:19; 12:48; 14:23, 24 [twice]; 15:3, 20 [twice]; 18:9, 32). In some instances, the usages describe reports about Jesus by different people (4:39 [the Samaritan woman]; 17:20 [the disciples]; 19:8, 13 [the Jewish leaders]). In several cases, *logos* is used to speak about God's Word, whether directly (5:38; 8:55; 10:35; 17:6, 14, 17) or by means of the Scriptures (4:37; 12:38; 15:25).



The clustering of the *logos* usages around words connected to Jesus and God is not surprising because in the Gospel of John, “Jesus’s words are God’s words” (McDonough 2009, 218). In John 14:24, Jesus tells his disciples, “the word that you hear is not mine but of the Father who sent me.” Moreover, the use of the phrase “the word of Jesus” (*ho logos tou Iēsou*) in conjunction with the fulfilment formula (“might be fulfilled” [*hina ... plērōthē*]) (John 18:32; cf. 12:32–33) “indicates that Jesus’s words are tantamount to Scripture” (McDonough 2009, 219). Since Scripture is understood as God’s Word, the fulfilment of Jesus’s word is no less than the fulfilment of God’s Word.

Therefore, when Jesus speaks, he speaks as the Creator-Word. He speaks God’s words. Indeed, “the identity between Jesus’s word of proclamation and God’s word is grounded in Jesus’s being as the Word” (Silva 2014c, 166). Schnackenburg (1968, 483) points out that Jesus’s words “have the force of God’s words because he is the *Logos*, that is, the divine revealer and redeemer.” The fact that Jesus speaks the words of God is made clear in John 3:34: “For he whom God has sent utters the words [*rhēma*] of God.” Even though *rhēma* is used instead of *logos* here, it clearly describes Jesus, the Creator-Word, as uttering God’s words.

#### 4.2 *Jesus performs (poieō) miraculous signs (sēmeion) or work (ergon)*

Jesus’s performance of the miraculous signs involves the use of the Greek word *poieō* (do, perform) in conjunction with the word *sēmeion* (sign) or *ergon* (work). This juxtaposition of terms is observed in all the miraculous signs except in the instance of walking on water. Jesus is portrayed as the one who performs (*poieō*) the signs (*sēmeia*) (John 2:11; 4:54; 6:14; 9:16; 12:18) or the work (*ergon*) (7:21). The combination of these terms also appears in several instances with similar connotation (2:23; 3:2; 6:2, 30; 7:31; 11:47; 12:37; 20:30). Since the LXX word for the Hebrew ‘create’ (*bara*) in Genesis 1:1 is

*poieō*, it seems reasonable to posit that when the Gospel of John refers to Jesus performing a miraculous sign, it denotes an act of creation.

Nevertheless, the signs are not replications of the primal creation. Rather, they are an expression of Jesus doing the Father's work of new creation. In this sense, Jesus is not only portrayed as Creator of the primordial creation but also of the new creation. He is the "new Creator" (Du Rand 2005, 43). He renews all creation, including human life, which has been marred by sin. Rae (2008, 295–296) contends that the work Jesus does is the work of creation. The work was established at the beginning and continues toward its consummation at the end through redemption. The miraculous signs are works of "redemptive transformation of the old creation and the ushering of the new" (Rae 2008, 304).

Since the miraculous signs are an expression of the Father's work through Jesus, it is instructive to examine the concept of 'work' (*ergon*) in the Fourth Gospel in subsequent discussions. That work is linked to creation can be seen in the language Jesus uses in his statements concerning God's work. The echo to Genesis 2:1–3 is noticeable. First, the phrase "his work(s)" (*autou to ergon* [John 4:34]; *ta erga autou* [14:10]) in John is similar to that in Genesis LXX (*ta erga autou* [Gen 2:2]; *tōn ergōn autou* [2:2, 3]). Second, the verb *poieō* in relation to doing the work appears in both places (Gen 2:2 [twice], 3; John 4:34; 5:36; 7:21; 10:25, 37, 38; 14:10, 12; 15:24; 17:4). Third, the use of the root verb *teleioō* occurs in both cases (*sunetelestēsān, sunetelesen* [Gen 2:1, 2]; *teleiōsō* [John 4:34; 5:36]). Fourth, the relation of work to the Sabbath appears in Genesis 2 and John. In Genesis, God rests on the Sabbath from all the works that he has done (Gen 2:1–3); in John, Jesus carries on the works of God and performs them even on the Sabbath (John 5:16–18; cf. 9:14–16). Fifth, the description of the work Jesus does as "good works" (*erga kala* [John 10:32]; *kalou ergou* [10:33]) seems to echo God's declaration that

the work of creation is “good” (*kalon* [Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18]; *kala* (vv. 21, 25); *kalian* [v. 31]).

Through these links, John signals that the work Jesus does in the incarnation is the work of creation. His activities in the incarnation constitute the work of restoration of creation after the Fall. The healing of the paralysed man and its aftermath in John 5, in particular, reveals that Jesus’s work (John 7:21; cf. 5:17) is a work of creation (cf. Rae 2008, 295). When the Jews criticize him for healing on the Sabbath, Jesus responds, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (5:17). The Jews perceive Jesus’s statement as making himself equal to the Creator-God since it was understood among the Jewish rabbis of Jesus’s day that God was continually working on the Sabbath (Carson 1991, 247; *Genesis Rabbah* 11:10; *Exodus Rabbah* 30:9). For example, *Genesis Rabbah* 11:10 indicates that God “rested from the work of [creating] His world, but not from the work of the wicked and the work of the righteous” because he works with both groups, showing their “essential character” (Freedman and Simon 1961, 86). Brown (1970, 217) points out that many rabbinic statements show God continually being active on the Sabbath because “otherwise, the rabbis reasoned, all nature and life would cease to exist.”

The healing of the paralysed man on the Sabbath can be seen as Jesus’s work of restoration in maintaining the existence of God’s creation. In the same way, the restoration of sight to the man born blind on the Sabbath (John 9) is a work of creation, restoration, or renewal. Both miraculous signs, Köstenberger (2009, 351) asserts, “are designed to elicit faith among the Jews.” They are also a display of Jesus, “the Creator and that Word-made-flesh,” engaging in his messianic activity “in powerful extension and escalation of creation and new creation theology.” Indeed, “as the Creator, Jesus is the Giver and Restorer of life, and the one who has authority over the Sabbath.”

Rae's (2008, 296–300) examination of three significant passages in the Gospel where Jesus speaks of his work—John 5:16–47; 10:22–39; 14:1–14—reveals four noteworthy themes. First, Jesus's work is “linked with the theme of life” (p. 296). The work of creation is brought to its consummation in eternal life through the work of Christ. Second, “the requirement of belief [is] set against the prevalence of unbelief” (p. 297). Participation in the new creation requires belief in Jesus. Third, “Jesus's works are said to provide testimony to him.” Knowing Jesus's works means to discern the fulfilment of God's purpose in creation in the works that Jesus performs (pp. 297–298). Fourth, the work testifies to “the intimate relationship between the Son and the Father,” thus bringing a transformation of life formed by God's creative word (p. 298). The last theme concurs with McDonough's (2009, 233) assertion concerning Jesus's agency in creation—that the act of creation and redemption of humanity is performed within the framework of a loving relationship between the Father and the Son.

The work that Jesus says he is sent to accomplish (John 4:34; cf. 5:36) is reaching its completion at the cross when, “knowing that all things are now finished [*tetelestai*]” (John 19:28), Jesus declares, “It is finished [*tetelestai*]” (19:30). Several scholars see the connection between John 4–5 where Jesus clarifies his given task of finishing the work of the Father who sends him, and John 19:28, 30 where Jesus declares the completion of “all things” (e.g., Brown 2010, 284–385; Brown 1970, 908; Keener 2003, 1147; Lincoln 2005, 478). Jesus's declaration “It is finished” (John 19:20) at the cross, followed immediately by John's mention that the Sabbath is about to begin (19:31) reveals a significant image concerning Jesus's act of completing the work of creation. Besides echoing the creation narrative in Genesis where God ceases from his creative work on the Sabbath (Gen 2:2–3) (Brown 2010, 286; Brown 1970, 908; Keener 2003, 1147; Wright 2004, 139), the narrative also

signals the completion of God's work (in creation) through the death of Jesus, "ushering in Sabbath rest and re-creation" (Brown 2010, 286).

#### 4.3 *Jesus is sent by the Father*

Jesus indicates that the Father sends him to accomplish his (God's) work. Jesus repeats the idea of being sent by the Father in three instances of the miraculous signs. First, in the dialogue that follows the healing of the paralysed man, Jesus indicates that the Father sends him. In the passage where Jesus speaks about the testimonies concerning him, he declares: "The Father who sent me has himself testified about me" (*ho pempas me patēr ekeinos memarturēken peri emou*; John 5:37). Second, in the interchange following the feeding of the crowd, Jesus indicates several times that the Father is the one who sends him (John 6:29, 39, 44, 57). The idea of being sent coincides with the idea of him coming down from heaven (6:32, 33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 51, 58). The Father sends him. He comes down. He returns to his sender. Jesus's question—"What if you see the Son of Man going up to where he was before?" (6:62)—implies a returning to the Father. Third, Jesus utters the idea of being sent in his prayer to the Father at the tomb of Lazarus. Jesus prays to his Father so that the crowd "may believe that you sent me" (*hina pisteusōsin hoti su me apesteilas*; John 11:42). The fact that the Father sends him is testified to by the works which he does (John 5:36; cf. 10:25). They are works of creation (Rae 2008, 295–296).

The theme of sending also appears in several other texts scattered throughout the Gospel of John. The theme is expressed by the Greek verbs *pempō* and *apostellō*. Both verbs appear a total of sixty times in the Gospel—*pempō* thirty-two times and *apostellō* twenty-eight times. John uses both verbs without any obvious semantic difference (cf. John 4:34, 38; 5:36–38; 7:28–29; 20:21) (Silva 2014c, 703–704). Of the total number of occurrences,

thirty-nine are found in Jesus's speeches. Most of the time, he speaks about the one who sends him in the third person. Only in seven occurrences does Jesus speak to the Father directly using second-person language (11:42; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 27 [all use *apostellō*]). The relationship between God's works and the sending occurs in John 4:34 and 5:36, where both motifs coincide. In 4:34, Jesus indicates the centrality of his task in accomplishing the work of the one who sends him. In 5:36, Jesus asserts that the work(s) that he does testify to the fact that the Father has sent him (cf. 10:25). In most cases, Jesus reiterates the idea that he is doing the will of the Father who sends him. Mercer (1992, 457) points out that "the primary thrust of the motif is that God sends Jesus into the world with a special commission." Arguably, that commission is to bring redemption to humanity through the work of new creation (cf. Rae 2008, 295–296).

The theme of sending concerns the concept of agency. The sent one is an agent of the one who sends. In order to understand the concept of agency, McDonough (2009, 226–234) analyses several instances where sending is modelled by Jesus. The examples include the calling of the first disciples (John 1:35–51), the aftermath of the story of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), the story of the man born blind (John 9), the account of Lazarus raised from the dead and its aftermath (John 11), the passion narrative (John 13–17, 20:21), and a reflection of the disciple whom Jesus loved. Two of the examples are part of the miraculous signs. In the story of the man born blind, Jesus telling the man to wash his eyes at the Pool of Siloam serves "to reinforce the gospel's emphasis on Jesus as the sent one" and "to highlight the healed man's role as a sent witness to Jesus's as evidenced later in the story" (McDonough 2009, 229). In the story of Lazarus's miraculous restoration to life, Lazarus is deemed to be "a visible sign of God's glory" (p. 230). McDonough's analysis of the significance of all

the instances leads him to conclude that “personal relationship” is the main emphasis, “that it [personal relationship] is manifestly a central part of his [John] theological vision” (p. 231). Thus, it becomes apparent that between the Father and the Son, loving relationships are so central that they “are an end in themselves” (p. 232; cf. John 17:23–26).

McDonough (2009, 233) further argues that the transference of the work of creation to Jesus “serves the deeper purpose of enacting and nurturing the Father’s love for the Son.” Because of the Father’s love for the Son, he (the Father) shares all things with him, including the Messiah’s participation in his (the Father’s) life and work, “including the work of creation” (McDonough 2009, 233). The Messiah, therefore, is not a mere tool in creation but “the fully personal executor of God’s will,” and as the Creator-Word, “He is the one who brings to realization the desire, ‘Let there be ...’ of Genesis 1.” Thus, whatever the Son does on behalf of the Father and whatever the Father does for the Son are seen within the framework of a loving relationship. The Son’s activity is “a constitutive element” of their love for one another. He “expresses his love for the Father by actively creating the world according to the Father’s will and rescuing it from its fallen state” through the work of new creation (McDonough 2009, 233).

#### *4.4 Jesus as creator in the miraculous signs: a synthesis*

The characterisation of Jesus as Creator in the miraculous signs seems to fall within a framework that involves the incarnation of the Creator-Word in Jesus. The incarnation of the Creator-Word seems to coincide with the depiction of the Father sending his Son. The Son comes from the Father into the world to accomplish the work he is sent to do, which is partly expressed in the miraculous signs.

In a concise statement, the characterisation can be written in this way: the Son, who is also the Word (*logos*), is sent by God the Father to the world in order to accomplish the work of new creation. This statement is similar to Du Rand's (2005, 23–24) assertion concerning the creation motif, which underlies the theological perspective of John's Gospel. He states that "God's mission in this world is manifested through the pre-existent *Logos*, the Son of God, who became man, destined to return to the Father after a mission of glorification" (p. 24).

## 5. The Influence of Isaiah's Creation Theology

The framework of Jesus's characterisation as Creator noted previously (4.5) corresponds to the ideas depicted in Isaiah 55:11. The text (Isa 55:11) highlights two components: (1) the efficacy of God's word (cf. Friesen 2009, 346–347; Motyer 1993, 457–458; Young 1972, 383) and (2) the "going forth" of the word from God (Dahms 1981, 78–88). Both are tied with the theme of accomplishing what the word is intended to do.

Isaiah 55:11 in context is considered a creation passage despite the absence of explicit creation references (in the cosmological sense) in the text. There exist indications in the context (Isa 55:6–13) that creation in the redemptive and eschatological sense is in view. In the redemptive sense, the reference to repentance in verses 6 to 7 is, in essence, creative because it involves God's transforming act in dealing with human hearts. In the eschatological sense, the allusion to the new creation in verses 12 to 13 depicts a transformed environment restored to its original condition before the Fall (cf. Motyer 1993, 458). The context of Isaiah 55:11 (i.e., vv. 6–13), therefore, emphasizes new creation rather than the cosmological aspect. Yahweh's word is efficacious in the regeneration of the sinner's heart (v. 11). When sinners respond to God's word calling them to repent (vv. 6–7), the



effective power of that word (v. 11) brings them into an experience of God's love, forgiveness (v. 7) and peace (v. 12) and "lifts them into membership of a new world of eternal duration" (Motyer 1993, 458). Concerning Isaiah 55:11, Friesen (2009) remarks: "The word calling for light flowed from God's mouth" then "the creation of light accomplished the purpose for which the word was spoken" (pp. 346–347).

The influence of the two components in Isaiah 55:11 on the framework concerning Jesus's role as Creator in the miraculous signs may be discerned through three correspondences: (1) the sending of the Son and the going forth of Yahweh's word, (2) Jesus's utterances and the word from Yahweh's mouth, and (3) Jesus's works and the accomplishing of Yahweh's will.

### *5.1 The sending of the Son and the going forth of Yahweh's word*

The sending of the Son in the miraculous signs seems to parallel the going forth of Yahweh's word from his mouth in Isaiah 55:11. The origin of the Son, who is the Word, is the Father in heaven. The origin of the word in Isaiah 55:11 is Yahweh. The concept of sending is related to the idea of origin or "coming forth from" God. The Greek word used in the Gospel of John is *exēlthon* (aorist of *exerchomai*). The Greek word reflects the idea of "going forth" of the word (*rhēma*) from Yahweh's mouth in Isaiah 55:11 LXX which uses the aorist form of *exerchomai* (*exēlthē*) as in the Gospel of John.

John 8:42 and 17:8 indicate that the idea of coming/going forth from God or the Father is analogous to being sent by God or the Father. In 8:42, Jesus mentions that he came from (*exēlthon*) God, not on his own but sent (*apesteilen* [*apostellō*]) by God. The context depicts Jesus as repeatedly speaking of the fact that the Father has sent him (8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42). God sends Jesus as "God's messenger" (Michaels 2010, exposition §III.L). The aorist tense *exēlthon* "indicates that the reference is rather to the mission

of the Son, in other words, the Incarnation” (Brown 1966, 357). In 17:8, Jesus again indicates that he has come from the Father. The phrase “I came from [exēlthon] you” seems to parallel “you sent me [apesteilas].” The last part of verse 8 can be put in this way (cf. Mueller 2019, 3):

They truly understood that I came from you  
 ...they believed that you sent me

The parallel suggests that ‘coming from’ God or the Father may be the same as being ‘sent’ by God or the Father. Morris (1995, 641–642) posits that the two expressions are very similar and yet not identical. The first phrase (“I came from you”) “concerns the Son’s divine origin” while the second one (“you sent me”) deals with his mission. “Jesus was sent to perform a divine task. It was this that the disciples had come to believe” (p. 642).

The parallel between coming/going forth from and being sent signifies strong Isaianic (Isa 55:11) influence on the concept of sending in John (cf. miraculous signs). The picture is that the Creator-Word is sent by the Father to carry on the work of new creation in the incarnation. The Son is being sent on his Father’s mission, just as the word goes forth from the Lord’s mouth to accomplish its mission.

### *5.2 Jesus’s utterances and the word from Yahweh’s mouth*

The efficacy of Jesus’s words seems to parallel the efficacy of Yahweh’s word (*dbr*; LXX: *rhēma*) in Isaiah 55:11 (cf. 48:3, 13). The idea of God’s efficacious word in the work of creation may have influenced the way some miraculous signs portray Jesus’s act of speaking to accomplish something. Jesus’s utterances accomplish their purpose and are expected to result in those who witness the signs believing that Jesus is the Messiah (cf. John 20:31).

In several instances of the miraculous signs, Jesus speaks in order to

effect transformation in the created order. When he speaks, he also acts to accomplish what he speaks about. Speaking itself is his act of accomplishing restoration. For instance, in the healing of the paralysed man at the Pool of Bethesda, Jesus asks the man, “Do you want to get well?” (John 5:6). He acts to accomplish the healing by commanding the man to get up, pick up his bedroll and walk. The aftermath of this healing features Jesus speaking a long discourse. The raising of the dead Lazarus to life provides another example. Jesus repeatedly mentions his intention to wake Lazarus up from the dead (11:11, 23, 25–26, 40). He acts to fulfil what he speaks about by commanding Lazarus to come out of the tomb (11:43–44). His voice carries creative force to effect the restoration of life to the dead body.

Isaiah’s creation theology presents a similar idea. Yahweh speaks and acts on accomplishing what he speaks about. In Isaiah 48:3, Yahweh declares (*ngd*) past events long before they happen. He acts (*sh*) on what he speaks about and it occurs. Again, in 48:13, Yahweh calls (*qr*) the earth and the heavens and they “stood up together.” The calling of the earth and the heavens parallels Yahweh using his hands to create them.

A remarkable depiction of the concept of speaking-acting can be observed in Isaiah 44:24–28. Isaiah 44:24 introduces Yahweh as “your redeemer who formed [*ytsr*] you from the womb.” He speaks to Israel, identifying himself as the Lord who creates. Focusing on verses 26–28, one can see that Yahweh also identifies himself as one “who says [*mr*] to Jerusalem/cities of Judah ... who says [*mr*] to the depths of the sea ... who says [*mr*] to Cyrus” (emphasis mine). In each self-revelation, Yahweh announces what will happen (“she will be inhabited/they will be rebuilt ... be dry ... my shepherd ....”) then declares his promise to fulfil them (“I will restore her ruins ... I will dry up your rivers ... he will fulfil all my pleasure”).

The context of Isaiah 44:24–28 is Yahweh’s announcement of the restoration of Israel through Cyrus. This restoration is sometimes called

the second exodus. It is a creative act of redemption of Israel. Similarly, the contexts of the healing of the paralysed man and the raising of Lazarus fall within a broad picture of the restoration of humanity. On the one hand, the restoration involves an individual's transformation of both the physical and spiritual life. On the other hand, the two miraculous signs serve the purpose of inviting people to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing they will have life in his name (John 20:30–30). This transformation and restoration of humanity is a creative act of redemption, a re-creation of humanity.

Perhaps the most helpful example of how Jesus's words or utterances are affecting people's hearts and accomplishing what the words are intended to do can be observed in the discourse of the bread of life (John 6:26–59). One can see the progression of the effect of Jesus's words on those who hear him. Jesus's words intend to persuade them to accept and believe him through the bread of life discourse. Their response to the discourse progresses from simple questions and statements to intensified misunderstanding. The Jews's complaints about Jesus's origin (vv. 41–44) and further misunderstanding of Jesus's speech about eating his flesh in verse 52 reveal how Jesus's words are affecting the hearts and decisions of the Jews.

Following the discourse is the response of those who heard Jesus's teaching (John 6:60–71). John's Gospel refers to this particular teaching of Jesus as *logos* (v. 60). The passage reveals that the words (*rhēmata*) that Jesus has spoken are spirit and life (v. 63). Peter's answer to Jesus in verses 68 to 69 exposes the truth about Jesus possessing the words (*rhēmata*) of eternal life. The words (*rhēmata*) that Jesus has spoken have taken effect in Peter's heart to the extent that he has come to believe and know that Jesus is the Holy One of God. In other words, Jesus's words have accomplished the purpose

for which they were uttered. An allusion to Isaiah 55:11 can be observed here. Yahweh's word (*rhēma*) goes forth to accomplish what it is intended to do.

There is a further connection between Isaiah 55:10–11 LXX and John 6:28–71 (cf. Burkett 1991:131–132; Endo 2002:241). John 6 describes Jesus as the living bread sent by God (vv. 29, 38, 39, 44, 57) from heaven (*ek tou ouranou*, v. 33) to do the will (*thelema*, v. 38) of the Father who sends him. This description corresponds with the description of Yahweh's word in Isaiah 55:11—the word comes forth from God (v. 11), descending like the rain and snow from heaven (*ek tou ouranou*, vv. 10–11) to do the will (*ēthelēsa*, v. 11) of God who sends it. The will of the Father is to give life to the world (as implied repeatedly in John 3:16; 5:21, 26; 6:39–40; 12:50) and the ministry of the Son is said to accomplish the Father's will (as indicated in 6:38: “I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me”) (Endo 2002, 242).

### *5.3 Jesus's works and the accomplishing of Yahweh's will*

Jesus, the Word (*logos*), seems to embody all the will of the Lord in the word (*dbr*; LXX: *rhēma*) that goes forth from the Lord's mouth in Isaiah 55:11. In other words, the efficacy of the word (*rhēma*) of Yahweh is witnessed in the person of the Word (*logos*) and the works that he performs in his incarnation. However, Jesus is not to be equated with Yahweh's word itself, emanating from the Father. Despite the portrayal of Yahweh's word in a personified manner in Isaiah 55:11, it is not Jesus Christ. The correspondence, however, is remarkable. Just as Yahweh's word accomplishes repentance and regeneration of hearts in God's people (Isa 55:11), so the Word (**logos**) in John's Gospel accomplishes repentance and regeneration of spiritual life through his works in those who believe him.

The problem of associating Jesus Christ, the Word, with Yahweh's word in Isaiah 55:11 is that both use different Greek terminology. In the Johannine prologue, the Word is *logos*, while in Isaiah 55:11, Yahweh's word (*dbr*) is rendered as *rhēma* in the LXX. The case can be resolved by considering that both words can be, or are, used interchangeably in both Isaiah and John. In the LXX, the word *dbr* is rendered with *rhēma* more than 500 times, and even more frequently with *logos*. In fact, "in some passages where *dbr* is repeated, the LXX alternates between the two Greek terms (e.g., Exod 34:27–28; 2 Sam 14:20–21)" (Silva 2014, 4:207). In the Gospel of John, there seems to be hardly any distinction between the use of *rhēma* and *logos* (outside of the prologue). For instance, there is hardly a real difference in John 12:48: "The one rejecting me and not receiving my words [*rhēmata*] has one who judges him; the word [*logos*] that I have spoken, that will judge him on the last day." Again, in 17:8a, 14: "... the words [*rhēmata*] that you gave me, I have given to them ... I have given them your word [*logos*]...."

The theme of the new creation is a conceptual link that can be drawn from what Jesus performs in John's Gospel and what the word accomplishes in Isaiah 55:11. The concept of new creation in Isaiah is depicted in two strands—historical-redemptive and eschatological. The first strand (historical-redemptive) appears more prominently in Isaiah 40 to 55, where Yahweh is portrayed as performing something new (Isa 42:9; 43:18–19; 48:6), redeeming Israel from exile. Yahweh's involvement in the deliverance of his people means that he is doing a new thing. The second strand (eschatological) occurs mainly in Isaiah 65 to 66, where Yahweh declares his intention to create new heavens and a new earth (65:17). "This act of God involves complete reorganization of life; the hazards of life are removed (65:19–20, 23, 25)" and the redeemed people of God will forever live in a safe environment and with the certainty of life (Towner 1996,

New Creation). Implied in both strands is the idea of reconstruction and transformation.

The Fourth Gospel depicts Jesus performing miraculous signs involving reconstruction and transformation of individuals and their situations. By performing the Father's work, which is expressed through the miraculous signs, Jesus is fulfilling or accomplishing Yahweh's will in his word.

Further enhancing the idea that Jesus embodies the fulfilment of Yahweh's will is an intriguing correspondence between Jesus finishing the work he is sent to do (John 19:28, 30; cf. 4:34; 5:36) and the accomplishing of the will of God (Isa 55:11 LXX) with a creation connotation. The connection can be seen by associating Genesis 2:3, Isaiah 55:11 and John 4:34; 19:28, 30 by means of the words 'finish' (*teleō*) and 'work' (*ergon*). Thus, *tetelestai* (John 19:28, 30), *teleiōsō*, *ergon* (4:34), *suntelesthē* (Isa 55:11), *sunetelesen*, and *erga* (Gen 2:2) all suggest a connection between Isaiah and John in terms of creation. The completed work is a work of creation (John 4:34; cf. Gen 2:2). The one who is sent to finish the work is Jesus Christ (John 4:34) by his death on the cross (19:28, 30). Correspondingly, Yahweh's word goes forth from his mouth to accomplish what the word was willed to do (Isa 55:11). Yahweh's word accomplishes both creation and redemption.

## 6. Conclusion

The Fourth Gospel portrays Jesus as Creator in the series of seven miraculous signs. Several scholars have identified the theme of creation and new creation in the signs. Despite the differences in perspectives on what constitutes the seven signs, these scholars agree that the seven signs allude to the creation narrative in Genesis. This study follows the traditional seven signs but diverges from focusing mainly on allusions to

the creation narrative in Genesis. It contends that Jesus's role as Creator in John is influenced by Isaiah's creation theology rather than the Genesis creation account alone.

The analysis of the miraculous signs from a creational perspective reveals that Jesus, the Son, who is also the Word (*logos*), is sent by the Father to the world in order to accomplish the work of new creation through the utterances of his words (*rhēmata*) and the performance (*poieō*) of the signs (*sēmeion*) and deeds (*ergon*). This depiction of the Creator-Word seems to resemble the idea depicted in Isaiah 55:11 that Yahweh's word is efficacious and that it goes forth from him. Both are tied to the idea that Yahweh's word accomplishes what it is intended to do, which is a renewal of creation in the redemptive and eschatological sense.

The characterisation of Jesus's role as Creator in the Fourth Gospel corresponds with Isaiah 55:11 in three ways. First, the sending of the Son parallels the going forth of Yahweh's word. The Son, who is the Creator-Word, is being sent on his Father's mission just as Yahweh's word goes forth to accomplish Yahweh's will. Second, the efficacy of Jesus's utterances corresponds to the efficacy of Yahweh's word. Just as Yahweh's word accomplishes what it is intended to do, Jesus's utterances accomplish miraculous effects. Third, Jesus's works (deeds) resemble the accomplishing of Yahweh's will. Jesus embodies all the will of the Lord. The efficacy of Yahweh's word is seen in Jesus Christ, the incarnation of the word (*logos*), and the works that he performs. Thus, Isaiah's creation theology influences the characterisation of Jesus's role as Creator in the Fourth Gospel.

The manner in which Isaiah 55:11 influences Jesus's portrayal as Creator in the miraculous signs seems to resemble how the role and function of Yahweh's Servant are fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ in the Fourth Gospel. This resemblance presents an intriguing



connection between Yahweh's word (*rhēma*) in Isaiah 55:11 and his Servant as witnessed in Jesus Christ. The second part of this essay series pursues this intrigue.

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