The first conclusion of the Fourth Gospel establishes a clearly positive link between the signs and faith in the Messiah (20:30–31). Based on a selection of signs that have been included in his writing, the evangelist hopes his readers will continue to believe (πιστεύητε) or will start to believe (πιστεύσητε) that Jesus is “the Messiah” (ὁ χριστός). The evangelist

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explains the title “the Christ” directly in the apposition “the Son of God” (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ) and points out the soteriological meaning of this faith: this faith gives them eternal life in His name. When Jesus visited Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles, a discussion was held between the people in the temple on whether Jesus was the Messiah (7:25–31, 40–44) and many of them believed in him because they were convinced. Their line of reasoning is made clear in a rhetorical question in 7:31, which implies that when the Messiah comes he will not perform more miracles than Jesus (ὁ χριστὸς ὅταν ἔλθῃ μὴ πλείονα σημεῖα ποιήσει ὤν οὐτος ἐποίησεν). In the Gospel’s conclusion as well as in 7:31, by seeing the signs that Jesus performed (σημεῖα ποιέω), one comes to believe (πιστεύω) that he is the Messiah (ὁ χριστός).

Many commentaries point out that there are no Jewish sources from the first century that contain an expectation that the Messiah will perform wonders or signs. How can the Fourth Evangelist indicate that Jesus is the Messiah through the narratives of signs? To answer this question we will first inquire whether there is any evidence in Jewish sources that there was an expectation that the Messiah would perform miracles, secondly we will discuss the crowd’s exclamation in 7:31 within its context, and to conclude we will explain how the evangelist came about giving the signs a central place in his gospel, and how we can see them as a manifestation of the Messiah.

1. The Wonders of the Messiah in the Jewish Sources

The messianic problem in 7:31 can be formulated as follows: “Is there evidence to suggest that Jewish groups (or even one Jewish group) of the first century expected the Messiah to be a worker of miracles?”

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BETL 100; Leuven; Peeters, 1992) 3:2193–2205, we argue that “the present subjunctive is the original text in both 19,35 and 20,31” (2205).
