

# The First Sign of Jesus

John 2:1-12

## INTRODUCTION:

This morning, we are going to be looking at the first miracle of Jesus where he, in the company of his fellow disciples and his family, turns water into wine. Yes, wine! 😊 We often call this the first miracle of Jesus, but the Apostle John's description of it was that of a sign. We must, therefore, ask ourselves, "What is a sign?" A sign is something, be it a road sign or a symbol, that reveals information. So, the description that John gives of what most people call Christ's first miracle is a "sign" that which reveals information.

## N.T. Wright

John's **gospel** is planned as a kind of treasure hunt, with careful and sometimes cryptic clues laid for us to follow. Now that he's set the scene with the opening stories about **John the Baptist** and Jesus' early followers, he gives us the first clue, telling us that it's the first one so we know where we are. He will tell us about the second one, too, two chapters later; from then on, we're on our own, and he wants us to use our initiative and imagination in following the clues to the very end. I won't spoil it for you by telling you the answer at the moment, but if you wanted to sit down and read right through the gospel you might be able to work it out for yourself.<sup>1</sup>

## John 2:1-12 Holman

On the third day a wedding took place in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding as well. When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother told Him, "They don't have any wine."

"What has this concern of yours to do with Me, woman?" Jesus asked. "My hour has not yet come."

"Do whatever He tells you," His mother told the servants.

Now six stone water jars had been set there for Jewish purification. Each contained 20 or 30 gallons.

"Fill the jars with water," Jesus told them. So, they filled them to the brim. Then He said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the chief servant." And they did.

When the chief servant tasted the water (after it had become wine), he did not know where it came from—though the servants who had drawn the water knew. He called the groom and told him, "Everyone sets out the fine wine first, then, after people have drunk freely, the inferior. But you have kept the fine wine until now."

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, T. (2004). [John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10](#) (p. 21). Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Jesus performed this first sign in Cana of Galilee. He displayed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

After this, He went down to Capernaum, together with His mother, His brothers, and His disciples, and they stayed there only a few days.

A. The location of the wedding was in Cana of Galilee –

### **Hendriksen & Kistemaker**

The statement that the mother of Jesus, who lived at Nazareth, was also present, may indicate that Cana and Nazareth were not very far apart. There seem to have been several Cana's, however, even in the province of Galilee. The exact location of the one where the wedding was held no one knows. Present-day commentators and geographers favor a spot situated about 8 or 9 miles north of Nazareth.<sup>2</sup>

B. Jesus' mother was there, as well as Jesus and his disciples.

C. The fact that Mary in the passage tells the servants what to do may give insight that she was not simply a guest but some sort of help to the wedding party, maybe relation of some sort.

### **Andreas Köstenberger,**

The fact that Mary is able to give instructions to the servants may indicate that she was helping the bridegroom's mother with the preparation of dishes. The wording of Mary's instructions to the servants appears to constitute an allusion to Pharaoh's words to the Egyptians to go to Joseph and to "do what he tells you" (Gen. 41:55).<sup>3</sup>

D. What was a Jewish wedding like?

### **Dr. Bob Utley**

Village weddings were major social events. They often involved the entire community and could last several days.<sup>4</sup>

E. The situation is that the wedding party had run out of wine.

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<sup>2</sup> Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [Exposition of the Gospel According to John](#) (Vol. 1, p. 113). Baker Book House.

<sup>3</sup> Köstenberger, A. J. (2004). [John](#) (pp. 95–96). Baker Academic.

<sup>4</sup> Utley, R. J. (1999). [The Beloved Disciple's Memoirs and Letters: The Gospel of John, I, II, and III John](#): Vol. Volume 4 (p. 24). Bible Lessons International.

## **Andreas Köstenberger,**

In Jewish thought, wine is a symbol of joy and celebration: “There is no rejoicing save with wine” (*b. Pesah*. 109a). The running out of wine at the Cana wedding may be symbolic of the barrenness of Judaism. Prophetic expectation cast the messianic age as a time when wine would flow freely. At a cultural level, running out of wine was considered to be a major social faux pas, since the host was responsible to provide the wedding guests with wine for seven days. There may even have been legal obligations. It is also possible that the hosts were of limited means.<sup>5</sup>

- F. The Greek word for wine is “oinos.” This is the same word Paul uses when he says to the Ephesians, “do not get drunk on ‘oinos.’” The fact that he warns against drunkenness is an indication alone that it was a fermented drink. Not to mention if you know anything about the fermentation process, it could not help but be fermented because there was no refrigeration.

## **Hendriksen & Kistemaker**

In Palestine, grapes ripened from June to September. There is, accordingly, no good reason to suppose that wine served at weddings which took place during the period October–May would be anything else but fermented grape-juice, in other words, actual wine. Nevertheless, intemperance, as has been indicated, is contrary to the spirit of both Old and New Testament. There is, therefore, nothing in this account which can in any way give comfort to those who favor the abuse or excessive use of the gifts of God.<sup>6</sup>

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## **Dr. Bob Utley**

### A. Old Testament

1. *Yayin* = This is the general term for “wine” which is used 141 times. The etymology is uncertain because it is not from a Hebrew root. It always means fermented fruit juice, usually grape. Some typical passages are Gen. 9:21; Exod. 29:40; Num. 15:5, 10.
2. *Tirosh* = This is “new wine.” However, because of climatic conditions of the Near East, fermentation started as soon as 6 hours after extracting the juice. This term refers to wine in the process of fermenting. For some typical passages see: Deut. 12:17; 18:4; Isa. 62:8–9; Hos. 4:11.
3. *Asis* = Joel 1:5 and Isa. 49:26 show that it is obviously alcoholic.
4. *Sekar* = This is the term “strong drink.” It has something added to it to make it more intoxicating. The same Hebrew root is used in the term “drunk” or “drunkard.”

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<sup>5</sup> Köstenberger, A. J. (2004). *John* (p. 93). Baker Academic.

<sup>6</sup> Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (Vol. 1, p. 115). Baker Book House.

## B. New Testament

1. *Oinos* = This is the Greek term parallel to *yayin* (cf. Prov. 20:1; 31:6; Isa. 28:7).
2. *Gleukos* = The unfermented juice of grapes (cf. Acts 2:13).

## II. Fermentation

- A. Fermentation begins very soon, often the first day (6 hrs. after juice is extracted).
- B. When a slight foam appears on the surface, Jewish tradition says that it is liable to the wine-tithe (*Ma aseroth* 1:7).
- C. The primary fermentation is over in one week.
- D. The secondary fermentation takes about 40 days. At this stage it is considered aged wine and can be offered on the altar (*Edhuyyoth* 6:1).
- E. Wine that is resting on its “lees” (aging sediment) is considered good, but wine must be strained well before use.
- F. Three years is the longest period of time that wine can be stored. It is called “old wine.” It is considered the best usually after one year of fermentation.
- G. Only in the last 100 years, with sterile conditions and chemical additives, has it become possible to postpone the fermentation process.

## III. Biblical Usage

### A. Old Testament

1. Wine is a gift of God (cf. Gen. 27:28; Ps. 104:14–15; Eccl. 9:7; Hos. 2:8–9; Joel 2:19, 24; Amos 9:13; Zech. 10:7).
2. Wine is a part of a sacrificial offering (cf. Exod. 29:40; Lev. 23:13; Num. 15:7, 10; 28:14; Jdg. 9:13).
3. Wine is used as a medicine (cf. 2 Sam. 16:2; Prov. 31:6–7).
4. Wine can be a real problem (Noah: Gen. 9:21; Lot: Gen. 19:33, 35; Samson: Jdg. 16:19; Nabal: 1 Sam. 25:36; Uriah: 2 Sam. 11:13; Ammon: 2 Sam. 13:28; Elah: 1 Kgs. 20:12; Rulers: Amos 6:6; Ladies: Amos 4).
5. Wine has accompanying warnings against abuse (cf. Prov. 20:1; 23:29–35; 31:4–5; Isa. 5:11, 22; 19:14; 28:7–8; Hos. 4:11).
6. Wine was prohibited to certain groups (Priests on duty, Lev. 10:9; Ezek. 44:21; Nazirites, Num. 6; rulers, Prov. 31:4–5; Isa. 56:11–12; Hos. 7:5).
7. Wine is used in an eschatological setting (cf. Amos 9:13; Joel 3:18; Zech. 9:17).

### B. Inter-biblical

1. Wine in moderation is very helpful (Ecclesiasticus 31:27–30).
2. The rabbis say “Wine is the greatest of all medicine, where wine is lacking, then drugs are needed” (BB 58b).
3. Mixed wine and water is not harmful, but delicious, and enhances one’s enjoyment (2 Macc. 15:39).

### C. New Testament

1. Jesus made wine (cf. John 2:1–11).
2. Jesus used wine (cf. Matt. 11:16, 18–19; Luke 7:33–34; 22:17ff).
3. Peter accused of drunkenness on “new wine” at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:13).
4. Wine used as medicine (cf. Mark 15:23; Luke 10:34; 1 Tim. 5:23).
5. Leaders are not to be abusers. This does not mean total abstainers (cf. 1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7; 2:3; 1 Pet. 4:3).

6. Wine used in eschatological settings (cf. Matt. 22:1ff; Rev. 19:9).
7. Drunkenness is deplored (cf. Matt. 24:49; Luke 11:45; 21:34; 1 Cor. 5:11–13; 6:10; Gal. 5:21; 1 Pet. 4:3; Rom. 13:13–14).<sup>7</sup>

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## C.S. Lewis

Temperance is, unfortunately, one of those words that has changed its meaning. It now usually means teetotalism. But in the days when the second Cardinal virtue was christened 'Temperance', it meant nothing of the sort. Temperance referred not specially to drink, but to all pleasures; and it meant not abstaining, but going the right length and no further. It is a mistake to think that Christians ought all to be teetotalers; Mohammedanism, not Christianity, is the teetotal religion. Of course it may be the duty of a particular Christian, or of any Christian, at a particular time, to abstain from strong drink, either because he is the sort of man who cannot drink at all without drinking too much, or because he is with people who are inclined to drunkenness and must not encourage them by drinking himself. But the whole point is that he is abstaining, for a good reason, from something which he does not condemn and which he likes to see other people enjoying. One of the marks of a certain type of bad man is that he cannot give up a thing himself without wanting everyone else to give it up. That is not the Christian way. ....

One great piece of mischief has been done by the modern restriction of the word Temperance to the question of drink. It helps people to forget that you can be just as intemperate about lots of other things. A man who makes his golf or his motor-bicycle the centre of his life, or a woman who devotes all her thoughts to clothes or bridge or her dog, is being just as 'intemperate' as someone who gets drunk every evening. Of course, it does not show on the outside so easily: bridge-mania or golf-mania do not make you fall down in the middle of the road. But God is not deceived by externals.<sup>8</sup>

G. Jesus' mother now involves Jesus in the problem, and Jesus gives a sort of gruff response it seems in part because He was not prepared to go public yet by the statement "My time has not yet come."

## Dr. Bob Utley

**"Woman"** In English this sounds harsh, but it was a Hebrew idiom, a title of respect.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Utley, R. J. (1999). [\*The Beloved Disciple's Memoirs and Letters: The Gospel of John, I, II, and III John\*](#): Vol. Volume 4 (pp. 24–25). Bible Lessons International.

<sup>8</sup> Lewis, C. S. (2003). [\*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works\*](#) (P. S. Klein, Ed.; 1st ed., p. 284). HarperOne.

<sup>9</sup> Utley, R. J. (1999). [\*The Beloved Disciple's Memoirs and Letters: The Gospel of John, I, II, and III John\*](#): Vol. Volume 4 (pp. 25). Bible Lessons International.

## **F.F. Bruce**

Mary probably failed to realize adequately that since her Son had left home (some months before) something had happened which must make a difference to their former relationship. He had been anointed with the Holy Spirit and had received power to undertake the special work which his Father had given him to do. Now that, after the long “silent years” at Nazareth, he had entered on his public ministry, everything (including family ties) must be subordinated to this. This at least lies behind his surprising answer to her, translated in the older versions as “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” The English word “woman,” used thus in the vocative, carries with it a flavor of disrespect which is not present in the original. (Perhaps the Ulster expression “Woman dear” would convey the sense fairly well.) Our Lord addressed his mother by this same term (Greek *gynai*, vocative of *gynē*) when he hung on the cross (19:26); and indeed the term was consonant with the utmost courtesy, being translatable as “madam” or “my lady.” But when the NEB makes him say “Your concern, mother, is not mine,” it misses the point, which is that “mother” is precisely what he did *not* call her. If she sought his help now, she must not seek it on the basis of their mother-and-son relationship.<sup>10</sup>

H. Mary’s response to push the point by telling the servants to do whatever He tells them to do may indicate her panic, not necessarily her disrespect to Jesus.

I. There were six stone jars there for purification.

## **D.A. Carson**

Each jar held two or three ‘measures’ (*metrētēs*), each measure the equal of eight or nine (imperial) gallons. The pots together held, roughly, between one hundred and one hundred and fifty gallons (between 500 and 750 litres). The six water jars were made of stone, because stone, being more impervious than earthenware, did not itself contract uncleanness. They were therefore the more suitable *for ceremonial washing*. In the context of a wedding feast, perhaps the ritual washing of certain utensils and of guests’ hands is especially in view (*cf.* Mk. 7:3–4; for the regulations on washing *cf.* SB 1. 695–705), but if so John sees this as representative of the broader question of the place of all ceremonial washings (*cf.* 3:25). Their purpose provides a clue to one of the meanings of the story: the water represents the old order of Jewish law and custom, which Jesus was to replace with something better (*cf.* 1:16).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Bruce, F. F. (2018). [The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes](#) (p. 69). Kingsley Books.

<sup>11</sup> Carson, D. A. (1991). [The Gospel according to John](#) (p. 173). Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

- J. One can see from Carson's analysis, this is a lot of wine.
- K. Jesus performs the miracle and then asks the attendants to go, dip some out, and take it to the chief servant in charge.
- L. Some critics who are committed to the worldview of Materialism, meaning there is no spiritual or supernatural, push back against the idea of miracles because by definition this would be supernatural. But if Jesus is the incarnation of the Creator God, which is a foundational belief of Christianity, then it would be logical that He could perform miracles.
- M. What is a miracle? A miracle is simply the extension or suspension of a law of nature. Again, if Jesus is the incarnation of the Creator God, then He is the one who created the regulatory laws of nature to begin with and can extend or suspend them as He sees fit.
- N. By going ahead and performing the miracle, Jesus was honoring His mother by the act as well as saving the wedding party social embarrassment.
- O. The response of the chief servant to the groom proves that the wine that was created was the best of wines.
- P. What is the takeaway?

**Ben Witherington,**

The institutions of Judaism were being replaced with Jesus Himself. Here the ceremonial water which could only cleanse the outside is being replaced with the new wine of the Gospel which makes glad the heart from the inside.

- Q. If this is the opening scene of the ministry of Jesus, then we see at the heart of this event what will take place all the way through it. This makes sense why there is a bumping of heads between Jesus and the religious leaders because they are simply representatives of the institution whereas Jesus is the institution itself. The cross represents the evil powers within religious clothing seemingly winning, but the resurrection gives the climatic, full reason for the celebration of the Gospel. Similarly, the water took on a new modality of existing at its transformation into wine, so Jesus took on a new modality through the transformation of His resurrection unto the first citizen of the New Creation.

R. What Christ revealed in the water to wine in Cana was a foreshadowing of what He would do and be in the Cross and Resurrection at the end of His ministry. This makes sense as to why this “sign” was the first revelatory act to His ministry.

**John Lennox**

Jesus is replacing the chilly waters of religion with the new wine of relationship and celebration.

**CONCLUSION**

**Adrian Rogers**

“The same Jesus Who turned water into wine can transform your home, your life, your family, and your future. He is still in the miracle-working business, and His business is the business of transformation.”