

John 2 (HCSB)

The First Sign: Turning Water into Wine

² On the third day a wedding took place in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and ² Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding as well. ³ When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother told Him, "They don't have any wine."

⁴ "What has this concern of yours to do with Me, ^[a] woman?" Jesus asked. "My hour ^[b] has not yet come."

⁵ "Do whatever He tells you," His mother told the servants.

⁶ Now six stone water jars had been set there for Jewish purification. Each contained 20 or 30 gallons. ^[c]

⁷ "Fill the jars with water," Jesus told them. So they filled them to the brim. ⁸ Then He said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the chief servant." ^[d] And they did.

⁹ 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 ¹⁰ 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."

¹¹ Jesus performed this first sign ^[e] in Cana of Galilee. He displayed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

¹² After this, He went down to Capernaum, together with His mother, His brothers, and His disciples, and they stayed there only a few days.

Cleansing the Temple Complex

¹³ The Jewish Passover was near, so Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple complex He found people selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and He also found the money changers sitting there. ¹⁵ After making a whip out of cords, He drove everyone out of the temple complex with their sheep and oxen. He also poured out the money changers' coins and overturned the tables. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling doves, "Get these things out of here! Stop turning My Father's house into a marketplace!" ^[f]

¹⁷ And His disciples remembered that it is written: Zeal for Your house will consume Me. ^[g]

¹⁸ So the Jews replied to Him, "What sign of authority will You show us for doing these things?"

¹⁹ Jesus answered, “Destroy this sanctuary, and I will raise it up in three days.”

²⁰ Therefore the Jews said, “This sanctuary took 46 years to build, and will You raise it up in three days?”

²¹ But He was speaking about the sanctuary of His body. ²² So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this. And they believed the Scripture and the statement Jesus had made.

²³ While He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many trusted in His name when they saw the signs He was doing. ²⁴ Jesus, however, would not entrust Himself to them, since He knew them all ²⁵ and because He did not need anyone to testify about man; for He Himself knew what was in man.

Footnotes:

- a. [John 2:4](#) Or *You and I see things differently*; lit *What to Me and to you*; [Mt 8:29](#); [Mk 1:24;5:7](#); [Lk 8:28](#)
- b. [John 2:4](#) The time of His sacrificial death and exaltation; [Jn 7:30](#); [8:20](#); [12:23,27](#); [13:1](#); [17:1](#)
- c. [John 2:6](#) Lit *2 or 3 measures*
- d. [John 2:8](#) Lit *ruler of the table*; perhaps *master of the feast*, or *headwaiter*
- e. [John 2:11](#) Lit *this beginning of the signs*; [Jn 4:54](#); [20:30](#). Seven miraculous signs occur in John’s Gospel and are so noted in the headings.
- f. [John 2:16](#) Lit *a house of business*
- g. [John 2:17](#) [Ps 69:9](#)

Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*¹

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2:1-2 **Third day** is probably counted from Jesus' encounter with Nathanael. **Cana of Galilee** was later the site of Jesus' third sign ("the second sign" performed in Cana; [4:54](#)). Jewish weddings were community events, a time of special focus not just on bride and groom but also on their extended families. **Jesus' mother** may have been a friend of the family, helping behind the scenes. Jesus' **disciples** probably included the five mentioned in [1:35-51](#).

2:3 The wedding party's running out of **wine** ironically calls to mind the spiritual barrenness of first-century Judaism.

2:4 Jesus' use of **woman** to address His mother established a polite but firm distance between them, as did His question, **What has this concern of yours to do with Me?** On Jesus' **hour has not yet come**, cp. [7:6,8,30](#); [8:20](#). Because of misconceptions about the coming Messiah, Jesus chose not to reveal Himself openly to Israel (though He did perform numerous messianic "signs"; see note at [2:11](#)). John portrayed Jesus as the "elusive Christ" via Jesus' pattern of occasional withdrawal ([7:6-9](#); [10:40-41](#); [11:56-57](#)), His realism about people's true motives ([2:23-25](#)), and His ability to elude His opponents when charged with blasphemy ([7:44](#); [8:59](#); [10:39](#)). Jesus remained elusive until His time finally arrived ([12:23,27](#); [13:1](#); [16:32](#); [17:1](#)).

2:5 Mary's instructions, **Do whatever He tells you**, recalls Pharaoh's instructions in [Gen 41:55](#).

2:6 The number of jars (**six**) may indicate incompleteness since seven represented fullness. Since **each contained 20 or 30 gallons**, this added up to as much as 180 gallons. The **Jewish purification** ritual may have involved the washing of the guests' hands and certain utensils used at the wedding.

2:7 **Filled them to the brim** points to the abundance of Jesus' messianic provision ([3:34](#)).

2:9 The **chief servant** may have been the head waiter in charge of catering. He supervised the serving of food and drink, and employed several servants.

2:11 The fact that Jesus' turning of water into wine at the wedding is called the **first sign in Cana of Galilee** leads the reader to expect more signs to follow. The corresponding reference in [4:54](#) is to Jesus' healing of the royal official's son again while at Cana, "the second sign Jesus performed after He came from Judea to Galilee." Beyond this, Jesus' signs include the non-miraculous but prophetic temple clearing ([2:13-22](#); one of Jesus' Judean signs; cp. [v. 23](#); [3:2](#)); His healing of a lame man ([5:1-15](#)); the feeding of the crowds ([6:1-15](#)); the healing of the man born blind (chap. 9); and the raising of Lazarus (chap. 11).

In each case, the emphasis is on the way the "sign" revealed Jesus' messianic nature ([12:37-40](#); [20:30-31](#)) and on the striking nature of the feat. These signs pointed unmistakably to Jesus as Messiah—whether it be the large quantity and high quality of wine ([2:6,10](#)); the short span required by Jesus to "rebuild" the temple ([vv. 19-20](#)); the long-distance healing of the royal official's son ([4:47,49-50](#)); the

¹ Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "John 2".

lame man's 38 years as an invalid ([5:5](#)); the abundance of food Jesus produced ([6:13](#)); the man's congenital blindness ([9:1-2](#)); or Lazarus's four days in the tomb ([11:17,39](#)). The phrases **He displayed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him** hark back to [1:14](#).

[2:12](#) Jesus **went down** from Cana (in the hill country) to **Capernaum** (situated by the Sea of Galilee). Capernaum was about 15 miles northeast of Cana and could be reached in a day's journey. Capernaum served as Jesus' headquarters after John the Baptist's imprisonment ([Mt 4:12-13](#); [Lk 4:28-31](#); cp. [Mt 9:1](#)).

[2:13-22](#) Jesus' first major confrontation with Jewish leaders in John's Gospel took place when He cleared the Jerusalem temple at Passover. The Synoptic Gospels record a later clearing, just before the crucifixion ([Mk 11:15-19](#)). By clearing the temple, Jesus displayed zeal for God's house ([Jn 2:17](#); cp. [Ps 69:9](#)) and performed a sign of judgment on the Jewish leaders who had allowed worship to deteriorate into commerce. His action also prophetically foreshadowed His crucifixion and resurrection, which would establish Him as the new center of worship, replacing the old temple.

[2:13](#) This is the first reference to a Jewish festival in John's Gospel and the first reference to **Passover**. Later, John referred to two more Passovers at [6:4](#) (Jesus in Galilee) and [11:55](#); [12:1](#) (Jesus' final Passover in Jerusalem). Beyond this, [Mt 12:1](#) may refer to another Passover not recorded in John. If so, Jesus' ministry included four Passovers and extended over about three and one-half years, spanning from A.D. 29 to 33 (see note at [Jn 1:28](#)). Apart from these Passover references, John also mentioned Jesus' activities at an unnamed Jewish festival in [5:1](#) (possibly Tabernacles); at the Festival of Tabernacles (or Booths) in [7:2](#); and at the Festival of Dedication (or Hanukkah) in [10:22](#). People are described as traveling **up** to Jerusalem because it was located at a higher elevation than Galilee.

[2:14](#) **Temple complex** (Gk *hieron*) denotes the area surrounding the temple, including the Court of the Gentiles, in distinction from the temple proper (Gk *naos*). Merchants (**selling oxen, sheep, and doves**) and **money changers** (exchanging idol-free coins for those tainted with pagan engravings) eased the logistical burden on pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem from afar by providing them with appropriate animals and coins for sacrifices and offerings. By conducting their business within the temple complex, however, they disrupted worship (esp. for Gentiles) and obstructed the temple's purpose.

[2:17](#) Jesus' clearing of the temple reminded His disciples of the righteous sufferer in [Ps 69:9](#). First-century Jews expected Messiah to purge and reconstitute the temple. Jesus was passionately concerned for the holiness and purity of God's **house**.

[2:20](#) **This sanctuary took 46 years to build** seems to indicate that the reconstruction of the second temple had taken 46 years. Alternatively, it can be read: "This sanctuary was completed 46 years ago [and has stood since that time]." The Jews were amazed that Jesus claimed He could **raise it up in three days**, an impossibly short time. The misunderstanding is cleared up in [verse 21](#).

[2:22](#) **The Scripture** may be [Ps 69:9](#) (cited in [Jn 2:17](#)). **The statement Jesus had made** refers to [verse 19](#).

[2:23-25](#) **Trusted... would not entrust Himself** is a wordplay in the original Greek. Jesus' knowledge of people's hearts was displayed in His encounters with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman; see note at [verse 4](#).

[2:23-4:42](#) The bulk of chapters 3 and 4 is devoted to Jesus' encounters with Nicodemus, a representative of the Jewish religious establishment, and an unnamed woman representing Samaritan religion. Interspersed are explanatory sections ([3:16-21,31-36](#)) and a vignette on John the Baptist ([3:22-30](#)). The encounters with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman are a study in contrasts. Nicodemus's status as a Sanhedrin member differs sharply from the lowly Samaritan woman who had a sinful past and present. Yet in both cases Jesus discerned deep spiritual need. He confronted Nicodemus about his need for regeneration and the woman about her sin.

The Apologetics Study Bible²

John 2

[2:4](#) Jesus' literal words to Mary sound brusque: "What has this concern of yours to do with Me, woman?" But another translation would be "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" It was not yet His time to provide for all the needs of all the world's people through His sacrificial death, but His turning water into wine was a sign that the messianic times had arrived (see [Jl 3:13](#); [Am 9:13-14](#)).

[2:6-7](#) Creating this much wine would seem to encourage drunkenness. Worse, this miracle seems to be frivolous from start to finish, hardly meeting any acute human need. On the other hand, wedding festivities often lasted for a week and an entire village could have been involved, so the amounts consumed by any individual at one time may have been quite moderate. Furthermore, one of the points of the miracle was to stress the new joy associated with Jesus' ministry and the kingdom He was inaugurating. [Mark 2:21-22](#) makes much the same point in the parable of the wineskins.

[2:13-25](#) At first glance this passage seems out of place since the other Gospels all have Jesus clearing the temple during the last week of His life ([Mk 11:15-17](#)). But John may have thematically relocated this passage as a kind of "headline" over his entire Gospel (there are no precise chronological links with previous or subsequent material in the Greek), or Jesus may have cleared the temple twice—once at the outset of His ministry when He had the people's sympathies and once later when it proved too much for the authorities to tolerate.

[2:15-16](#) Doesn't Jesus' "temple tantrum" show a cruel, vindictive side to Him—abusing animals and exhibiting uncontrollable rage? Actually, the Greek text says He applied the whip only to the wicked people He was confronting. Rabbinic sources suggest that using the temple for trading in sacrificial animals was a recent development; the Kidron Valley below had been the earlier site. Commercial convenience created the change, but it prevented the Court of the Gentiles from being used as God had intended it—as a place of worship. Godly wrath is eternal opposition to what is evil. As such, it is not at all opposed to love but is really the action of holy love in the face of evil. Love for those who are outcast often requires judgment against their oppressors.

² Ted Cabal, ed., *The Apologetics Study Bible: Understanding Why You Believe*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1573-1574.

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

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2:1, 2 Jesus was on a mission to save the world, the greatest mission in the history of humankind. Yet he took time to attend a wedding and take part in its festivities. We may be tempted to think we should not take time out from our "important" work for social occasions. But maybe these social occasions are part of our mission. Jesus valued these wedding festivities because they involved people, and Jesus came to be with people. Our mission can often be accomplished in joyous times of celebration with others. Bring balance to your life by bringing Jesus into times of pleasure as well as times of work.

2:1-3 Weddings in Jesus' day were weeklong festivals. Banquets would be prepared for many guests, and the week would be spent celebrating the new life of the married couple. Often the whole town was invited, and everybody would come—it was considered an insult to refuse an invitation to a wedding. To accommodate many people, careful planning was needed. To run out of wine was more than embarrassing; it broke the strong unwritten laws of hospitality. Jesus was about to respond to a heartfelt need.

2:4 Mary was probably not asking Jesus to do a miracle; she was simply hoping that her son would help solve this major problem and find some wine. Tradition says that Joseph, Mary's husband, was dead, so she probably was used to asking for her son's help in certain situations. Jesus' answer to Mary is difficult to understand, but maybe that is the point. Although Mary did not understand what Jesus was going to do, she trusted him to do what was right. Those who believe in Jesus but run into situations they cannot understand must continue to trust that he will work in the best way.

2:5 Mary submitted to Jesus' way of doing things. She recognized that Jesus was more than her human son—he was the Son of God. When we bring our problems to Christ, we may think we know how he should take care of them. But he may have a completely different plan. Like Mary, we should submit and allow him to deal with the problem as he sees best.

2:6 The six stone water jars were normally used for ceremonial washing. When full, the pots would hold 20 to 30 gallons. According to the Jews' ceremonial law, people became symbolically unclean by touching objects of everyday life. Before eating, the Jews would pour water over their hands to cleanse themselves of any bad influences associated with what they had touched.

2:10 People look everywhere but to God for excitement and meaning. For some reason, they expect God to be dull and lifeless. Just as the wine Jesus made was the best, so life in him is better than life on our own. Why wait until everything else runs out before trying God? Why save the best until last?

2:11 When the disciples saw Jesus' miracle, they believed. The miracle showed his power over nature and revealed the way he would go about his ministry—helping others, speaking with authority, and being in personal touch with people.

Miracles are not merely superhuman events, but events that demonstrate God's power. Almost every miracle Jesus did was a renewal of fallen creation—restoring sight, making the lame walk, even restoring life to the dead. Believe in Christ not because he is a superman but because he is the God who continues his creation, even in those of us who are poor, weak, crippled, orphaned, blind, deaf, or with some other desperate need.

³, *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1752-1755.

God specializes in finding and changing people we consider out of reach. It took a while for Nicodemus to come out of the dark, but God was patient with this "undercover" believer.

Afraid of being discovered, Nicodemus made an appointment to see Jesus at night. Daylight conversations between Pharisees and Jesus tended to be antagonistic, but Nicodemus really wanted to learn. He probably got a lot more than he expected—a challenge to a new life! We know very little about Nicodemus, but we know that he left that evening's encounter a changed man. He came away with a whole new understanding of both God and himself.

Nicodemus next appears as part of the Jewish high council ([7:50](#)). As the group discussed ways to eliminate Jesus, Nicodemus raised the question of justice. Although his objection was overruled, he had spoken up. He had begun to change.

Our last picture of Nicodemus shows him joining Joseph of Arimathea in asking for Jesus' body in order to provide for its burial ([19:39](#)). Realizing what he was risking, Nicodemus was making a bold move. He was continuing to grow.

God looks for steady growth, not instant perfection. How well does your present level of spiritual growth match up with how long you have known Jesus?

Strengths and accomplishments

- One of the few religious leaders who believed in Jesus
- A member of the powerful Jewish high council
- A Pharisee who was attracted by Jesus' character and miracles
- Joined with Joseph of Arimathea in burying Jesus

Weakness and mistake

- Limited by his fear of being publicly exposed as Jesus' follower

Lessons from his life

- Unless we are born again, we can never be part of the Kingdom of God
- God is able to change those we might consider unreachable
- God is patient, but persistent
- If we are available, God can use us

Vital statistics

- Where: Jerusalem
- Occupation: Religious leader
- Contemporaries: Jesus, Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Joseph of Arimathea

Key verse

"'What do you mean?' exclaimed Nicodemus. 'How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?'" ([John 3:4](#)).

Nicodemus's story is told in [John 3:1-21](#); [7:50-52](#); and [19:39-40](#).

2:12 Capernaum became Jesus' home base during his ministry in Galilee. Located on a major trade route, it was an important city in the region, with a Roman garrison and a customs station. At Capernaum, Matthew was called to be a disciple ([Matthew 9:9](#)). The city was also the home of several other disciples ([Matthew 4:13-19](#)) and a high-ranking government official ([4:46](#)). It had at least one major synagogue. Although Jesus made this city his base of operations in Galilee, he condemned it for the people's unbelief ([Matthew 11:23](#); [Luke 10:15](#)).

2:13 The Passover celebration took place yearly at the Temple in Jerusalem. Every Jewish male was expected to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem during this time ([Deuteronomy 16:16](#)). This was a weeklong festival—the Passover was one day, and the Festival of Unleavened Bread lasted the rest of the week. The entire week commemorated the freeing of the Jews from slavery in Egypt ([Exodus 12:1-13](#)).

2:13 Jerusalem was both the religious and the political seat of Palestine, and the place where the Messiah was expected to arrive. The Temple was located there, and many Jewish families from all over the world would travel to Jerusalem during the key festivals. The Temple was on an imposing site, a hill overlooking the city. Solomon had built the first Temple on this same site almost 1,000 years earlier (959 B.C.), but his Temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians ([2 Kings 25](#)). The Temple was rebuilt in 515 B.C., and Herod the Great had enlarged and remodeled it.

2:14 The Temple area was always crowded during Passover with thousands of out-of-town visitors. The religious leaders crowded it even further by allowing money changers and merchants to set up booths in the Court of the Gentiles. They rationalized this practice as a convenience for the worshipers and as a way to make money for Temple upkeep. But the religious leaders did not seem to care that the Court of the Gentiles was so full of merchants that foreigners found it difficult to worship. And worship was the main purpose for visiting the Temple. No wonder Jesus was angry!

2:14 The Temple tax had to be paid in local currency, so foreigners had to have their money changed. But the money changers often charged exorbitant exchange rates. The people also were required to make sacrifices for sins. Because of the long journey, many could not bring their own animals. Some who brought animals had them rejected for imperfections. So animal merchants conducted a flourishing business in the Temple courtyard. The price of sacrificial animals was much higher in the Temple area than elsewhere. Jesus was angry at the dishonest, greedy practices of the money changers and merchants, and he particularly disliked their presence on the Temple grounds. They were making a mockery of God's house of worship.

2:14ff John records this first clearing, or cleansing, of the Temple. A second clearing occurred at the end of Jesus' ministry, about three years later, and that event is recorded in [Matthew 21:12-17](#); [Mark 11:12-19](#); [Luke 19:45-48](#).

2:14-16 God's Temple was being misused by people who had turned it into a marketplace. They had forgotten, or didn't care, that God's house is a place of worship, not a place for making a profit. Our attitude toward the church is wrong if we see it as a place for personal contacts or business advantage. Make sure you attend church to worship God.

2:15, 16 Jesus was obviously angry at the merchants who exploited those who had come to God's house to worship. There is a difference between uncontrolled rage and righteous indignation—yet both are called anger. We must be very careful how we use the powerful emotion of anger. It is right to be angry about injustice and sin; it is wrong to be angry over trivial personal offenses.

[2:15, 16](#) Jesus made a whip and chased out the money changers. Does his example permit us to use violence against wrongdoers? Certain authority is granted to some, but not to all. For example, the authority to use weapons and restrain people is granted to police officers, but not to the general public. The authority to imprison people is granted to judges, but not to individual citizens. Jesus had God's authority, something we cannot have. While we want to live like Christ, we should never try to claim his authority where it has not been given to us.

[2:17](#) Jesus took the evil acts in the Temple as an insult against God, and thus, he did not deal with them halfheartedly. He was consumed with righteous anger against such flagrant disrespect for God.

[2:19, 20](#) The Jews understood Jesus to mean the Temple out of which he had just driven the merchants and money changers. This was the Temple Zerubbabel had built over 500 years earlier, but Herod the Great had begun remodeling it, making it much larger and far more beautiful. It had been 46 years since this remodeling had started (20 B.C.), and it still wasn't completely finished. They understood Jesus' words to mean that this imposing building could be torn down and rebuilt in three days, and they were startled.

[2:21, 22](#) Jesus was not talking about the Temple made of stones, but about his body. His listeners didn't realize it, but Jesus was greater than the Temple ([Matthew 12:6](#)). His words would take on meaning for his disciples after his resurrection. That Christ so perfectly fulfilled this prediction became the strongest proof for his claims to be God.

[2:23-25](#) The Son of God knows all about human nature. Jesus was well aware of the truth of [Jeremiah 17:9](#), which states, "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?" Jesus was discerning, and he knew that the faith of some followers was superficial. Some of the same people claiming to believe in Jesus at this time would later yell "Crucify him!" It's easy to believe when it is exciting and everyone else believes the same way. But keep your faith firm even when it isn't popular to follow Christ.