

The Gospel of John

Lesson 2

John 2:1 - John 3:36

From the beginning of this Gospel, John has created a timeline of events; however, as we have already noticed, John's record leaves out many of the details about the Lord's ministry.²⁸ After Jesus' baptism by John, He goes to the wilderness for 40 days, but John does not record this event. Instead, John says the Lord is seen walking by the river the day after His baptism and two of John's disciples begin following Him that day. It seems that John is recounting the story of what took place following the Lord's wilderness and temptation experience. In the following passage, John moves ahead three days in the story. We do not know if it has been three days since the two disciples began following the Lord, or if it has been three days since their arrival in Cana. Perhaps there is another possibility for the meaning of John's words.

The wedding, day three

John 2:1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; ² and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.

From Bethany beyond the river to the town of Cana in Galilee is 75 miles, or a hard three day walk. Perhaps this is what John means when he says, "On the third day." Nevertheless, arriving in Cana, Jesus and the six disciples who have begun to follow Him everywhere are invited to a wedding along with His mother, Mary.

We have to wonder why John fails to call Mary by name. John will never mention her by name in this entire Gospel, although he will mention Joseph by name. Why? By AD 90, the Gnostics, the secret knowledge seekers, had infiltrated the church with cultic errors. One of those errors teaches that Mary was immaculately conceived in the same manner as Jesus. The false teaching will also develop that she ascended bodily into heaven as did the Lord. They will give her the name "Mother of God" as well as the Babylonian name "queen of heaven." By the AD 300's, she will be seen as a co-redeemer with her Son. Millions of church members through the ages will pray to her as if she is omniscient. She will be accredited as personally causing miracles to happen from her place in heaven, as if she is an all-powerful God. Millions will bow to worship her, prayers will be offered to her, and chants will be repeated about her. Surely John could not foresee all these mistakes in the future, but Jesus could, and that is why he addressed Mary only as the mother of Jesus.

The wedding is in the hometown of Nathanael, just five miles from Nazareth, the hometown of Mary and Jesus. Although we do not know the name of the wedding party, they know the Lord and His mother as well as Nathanael.

Wine, the first sign

John 2:3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus *said to Him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus *said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother *said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." ⁶ Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. ⁷ Jesus *said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." So they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And He *said to them,

²⁸ See the Synopsis of Events in the first lesson recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke, but not in John.

"Draw *some* out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it *to him*.⁹ When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (~~but the servants who had drawn the water knew~~), the headwaiter *called the bridegroom,¹⁰ and *said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when *the people* have drunk freely, *then he serves* the poorer *wine*; *but* you have kept the good wine until now."¹¹ This beginning of *His* signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.²⁹

An emergency has occurred at this middle-eastern wedding and it seems that Mary is embarrassed by the circumstance. It could be that she feels somewhat responsible since there are seven extra guests at the party.³⁰ She wants Him to do something, but He answers with a strange phrase that will be repeated throughout the Gospel, "My hour has not yet come."³¹ He says it to his half brothers when they come to get him. John says it of Him when no one can touch Him as He leaves the temple. But in the upper room, His hour is near. In the garden He prays to the Father saying, "My hour has not come yet." The first time His hour is mentioned is to His mother; that last time it is to His Father. He is firm with His mother, yet He does not disappoint her. She knows He is the Messiah, but it is not time for her to press that point. He distances Himself from her as the Messiah. "Whatever He says to you, do it," is her announcement to the staff. The purification water pots are brought to Him.

The Jews are sticklers for rituals and the cleanliness and purification laws are at the top of their list. The six pots that once held up to 180 gallons of water for the ritual washing of every guest at the wedding are empty, but they are to be filled to the brim. Without a magic word and without a magic touch, when the pots are set before the Lord, He simply instructs them to take a sample to the headwaiter. It is already wine, the best wine, better than any vineyard in the region could produce. It is made by the Creator.

To Capernaum with the family and disciples, end of February AD 27

John^{2:12} After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother and *His* brothers and His disciples; and they stayed there a few days.

Capernaum is a day's journey from Cana and the whole family travels there with Jesus. His half brothers are now with Him. Some theologians try to pass these brothers off as sons of Joseph by a former marriage, but we know nothing of another wife. The brothers are mentioned nine times in the Scripture, six of which shed great light on their relationship to Jesus, but they all mention Mary as the mother.³²

Jesus, His mother, His brothers, and His six disciples visit Capernaum for a few days. More than likely, they stay in Peter's home which becomes Jesus' northern headquarters during His ministry. It has been only three and a half months since His baptism. He has six disciples on record and He has performed only one sign. No other gospel writer records anything about this time and neither is anything recorded about the days they stay in Capernaum.

The Passover in Jerusalem, April AD 27

John^{2:13} The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

²⁹ Deuteronomy 5:24; Psalm 72:19

³⁰ Jesus, John, James, Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael

³¹ John 7:30; John 8:20; John 12:23; John 13:1; John 17:1

³² John 2:12; John 7:3-5, 1 Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19, Matthew 12:46; 13:55; Mark 3:32; 6:3; Luke 8:19-20.

During Jesus' ministry, He makes the 85 mile journey to and from Capernaum several times. It takes about four days to travel one way.

Jesus clears the temple, April AD 27

John ^{2:14} And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated *at their tables*. ¹⁵ And He made a scourge of cords, and drove *them* all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; ¹⁶ and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business."

John records the first cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry; the other three gospel writers do not. The temple has become a center of commerce that feeds on the religious practices and requirements of the Jewish system. It is the heart of Judaism and it is the place where Jesus begins His public ministry. Lest we forget, Jesus came to bring an end to the Mosaic system that had transformed it into a corrupt social network. The people in the system need a Savior.

The Passover began at the birth of Judaism the night before the Exodus out of Egypt. It occurred on the 14th of Nisan known today as the full moon that occurs somewhere toward the end of March or the first two weeks of April. Today, the festivities of Passover last seven days as they have from the beginning. Jews from all over the world desire to be in Jerusalem at Passover. On the day before Passover starts, the head of the household would clean the house of all leaven, essentially cleaning the house from top to bottom. But the temple that was to be leaven free was never cleaned and the activities in the court of the Gentiles are despicable.

Coming into the temple from the east, visitors have to walk through the court of the Gentiles, the court of the women, the court of Israel, and finally the court of the priests. The court of the Gentiles has become the place where deceptive trade practice occur, local Jews taking advantage of visiting Jews and proselytes. It is the place where approved animals can be bought to offer as sacrifices on the altar. Because money with the images of Caesar and other officials cannot be thrown into the treasury of the temple, money changers extort the visitors by exchanging their Roman coins for temple shekels at an exorbitant rate. The whole system is corrupt. Jesus drives them out of the temple by himself and no one does anything about it.

The Jews question Jesus' authority in the temple

John ^{2:17} His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME." ³³ ¹⁸ The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

The words of Psalm 69 come to the minds of the disciples when they see Jesus react to the sin in the temple. His act of clearing the temple is zealous and their sin consumes Him; after all, He came to take away their sin.

After clearing the temple, Jesus' disciples ask for a sign that declares His authority to do what He has just done. It is His first discussion with them in His public ministry declaring the means by which He will pay for the salvation of the world; He speaks of His death,

³³ Psalm 69:9

burial, and resurrection. The priest and the Sanhedrin hear the discussion and misunderstand His meaning. Later in His ministry they will use these words against Him.³⁴

Within 90 days of His baptism, Jesus announces His death and resurrection

John 2:20 The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

The Jews take Jesus at face value and think He is speaking of the physical temple, but He is speaking of His earthly temple of flesh. However, this reference by the Jews reveals the year of this interaction. In 20 BC, Herod the Great began refurbishing and enlarging the temple that was constructed by Zachariah. Josephus tells us that over eighteen thousand men worked on the temple to complete Herod's design from 20 BC to AD 64. If the men had been working on the temple for 46 years to that point then the year is AD 26; however, the work had been stopped on the temple for a year, making it AD 27.

At His resurrection the disciples will remember

John 2:22 So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.³⁵

John speeds ahead in his story to the resurrection of the Lord and the response of the disciples that heard Him speak in the temple. Most of them had not been following Him before He cleaned the temple, but when they see Him do it by Himself and hear the words He speaks in that court of the Gentiles, they begin following Him that day. Their remembrance of the Lord's words at His resurrection is a fulfillment of prophecy from Psalms 16.

The seven day Passover and feast produce many disciples

John 2:23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. ²⁴ But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, ²⁵ and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.³⁶

Jesus enters the temple in Jerusalem during the feast of Passover with just six disciples. At the end of the seven days, a multitude believes He is the Messiah and begins to follow Him everywhere. He knew each heart, just like He knew the heart of Nathanael when He saw him under the fig tree. His supernatural knowledge of the thoughts of men is a mark of His deity. He hasn't chosen His twelve Apostles yet; that will not occur for at least seven or eight months. In the meantime, Jesus trusts no one.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the dark of night

John 3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; ² this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." ³ Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴ Nicodemus *said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."³⁷

³⁴ Matthew 26:61; Mark 14:48

³⁵ Psalm 16:10

³⁶ 1 Samuel 16:7

³⁷ Ezekiel 36:25-27

⁶ "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
⁷ "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Jesus cannot trust the men in the temple that He has just cleaned out, but when Nicodemus comes to Him in the middle of the night, Jesus knows he is trustworthy. Nicodemus is a Greek name and why John uses this name we do not know. He is a wealthy Pharisee who would have had a Hebrew name. Nicodemus is keen on the truth that only God can do the things that Jesus is doing. The Lord's ability to take over the temple is nothing short of Messianic in nature and Nicodemus cautiously comes to Him in the night to learn for sure that He is the Messiah.

Nicodemus completely misses the idea of spiritual birth and Jesus has to explain it to him. He thinks that heaven awaits him because of his birthright, having been born into the chosen nation, being a spiritual leader of the people and a member of the elite of the human race. He believes that he belongs to the kingdom of God, the kingdom which the Messiah would rule over physically on earth when he arrived. Jesus' authority in the temple seems like a good start for the Messiah's takeover of the political and religious world, but Nicodemus misunderstands the plan. But even in his misunderstanding, he does not question "why" he needs to be reborn; he asks "how" to be reborn. The night winds may have been blowing through the streets that evening and Jesus uses its sound to make His point. The Holy Spirit is in charge of calling the world to the Messiah and He has called Nicodemus to the Lord that night. It is a heavenly calling and Nicodemus has lived his life in the earthly ways of religion. The words of Jesus are different from anything he has ever heard before.

Nicodemus questions and Jesus replies

John ^{3:9} Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? ¹¹ "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. ¹² "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

Nicodemus is out of his comfort zone. The concept Jesus is teaching him is new. He is testifying the truth and Nicodemus is having a difficult time wrapping his mind around it. It doesn't make earthly sense to him. He is not prepared for a heavenly secret from the Lord, but Jesus is about to tell him one.

Earthly versus heavenly

John ^{3:13} "No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.

Jesus is the only One Who has come down out of heaven to live on earth as the Son of Man. The term "Son of man" is the Lord's nickname for Ezekiel, used to remind him of his frailty. In Daniel, ³⁸ Matthew, Mark, Luke and John the term "Son of Man" is a direct reference to the Lord.

³⁸ Daniel 7:13

Tragically, someone has misquoted this verse and inserted it into Ephesians 4:9-10.³⁹ It does not belong there and the oldest and most reliable manuscripts do not have it there.

Moses lifted up the serpent, a promise

John 3:14 "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;⁴⁰

Jesus knows that Nicodemus understands the symbol of the serpent lifted up in the wilderness to allow people to look upon it and live. It is a compliment to the intellect of Nicodemus. In this promise Jesus takes Nicodemus back to the last miracle of Moses just before Joshua leads Israel into the Promised Land. The sinful people had been bitten by the fiery snakes and were dying without hope. Moses had the craftsmen make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. All they had to do to live was look upon the snake. Even though poison was running through their bodies, if they would put their trust in the symbol of the snake on the pole, they would live. Just as Moses lifted up the snake on a pole for the people to live, so too, the Messiah must be lifted up on a pole and the people must look to Him to live eternally.

Jesus promises eternal life, not judgment

John 3:15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. **16** "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. **17** "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. **18** "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

After using the graphic illustration from the wilderness story, Jesus points Nicodemus to Himself as the One who will be lifted up on the pole, the One in Whom he must put his belief and trust. If Nicodemus desires eternal life, he must trust in the Son of God. Jesus came the first time to provide salvation for the world. The next time He makes His appearance on earth, it will be to judge the world. The greatest promise in the entire world is given to believers in verse 16. There is another promise in verse 18 also, a promise of punishment for those who do not believe in the Son of God. These are two promises that the Lord Himself will fulfill.

The Light is hated

John 3:19 "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.⁴¹ **20** "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

John returns to his favorite subject concerning Jesus. In the introduction of this Gospel he says, "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men." The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."⁴² John explains that the people in darkness do not comprehend the Lord's Light because their deeds are evil and they do not want the Light of the eternal God to shine on them and expose their sins. Jesus brings life to those who accept Him and His Light brings judgment on those who will not accept Him. They hate the Light because it reveals who they are and what they are.

³⁹ **Eph 4:9** (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

⁴⁰ Numbers 21:9

⁴¹ Isaiah 5:20

⁴² John 1:4-5

Truth comes to the Light

John 3:21 "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

The word "wrought" is not used in our language today very often. A better word is "accomplished." In one of John's other letters he says the same thing in a negative way. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."⁴³ The Light takes man out of the darkness like a light being turned on, allowing him to practice the truth that is accomplished only in Jesus Christ.

In Judea baptizing

John 3:22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing.

Leaving Jerusalem after the Passover events, all sense of a timeline is lost while Jesus is ministering in the area around the city. Matthew, Mark, and Luke say nothing about this time. We do not know if Jesus actually performed the baptisms. At this same time, John the Baptist is still baptizing elsewhere. Lazarus, Mary, Martha, and Judas Iscariot will come to know Jesus during this ministry in Judea.

John the Baptist still baptizing and his disciples ask about purification

John 3:23 John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and *people* were coming and were being baptized— ²⁴ for John had not yet been thrown into prison. ²⁵ Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him." ²⁷ John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. ²⁸ "You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.'⁴⁴

The city of Salim is on the northern boundary of Judah. Near Salim, in the Jordan valley is a set of springs called Aenon. John the Baptist is baptizing in these springs when his disciples ask him about Jesus and His baptism. John is not the Christ, Jesus is, and John points his men to the Christ.

John is the friend of the bridegroom

John 3:29 "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full."⁴⁵ ³⁰ "He must increase, but I must decrease. ³¹ "He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all."⁴⁶ ³² "What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.

Today, we call the friend of the bridegroom the "best man." John is the Lord's best man in the ministry. In that day, the friend of the groom had many tasks. He asked for the hand of the bride in marriage for the groom, he prepared the wedding for the groom, and he oversaw the reception of the bride and groom. In short, he prepares the way for the marriage. It is the duty of this best man to care for the Groom, prepare the way for Him,

⁴³ 1 John 1:6

⁴⁴ Malachi 3:1

⁴⁵ Song of Solomon 5:1

⁴⁶ Isaiah 9:7

and protect Him as he can. John's cup is full of joy because he has completed his job of preparing for the Lord's wedding and now he must decrease in his duties so the Groom can increase in the marriage relationship.

Receive Jesus for God is true

John ^{3:33} "He who has received His testimony has set his seal to *this*, that God is true. ³⁴ "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. ⁴⁷ ³⁵ "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. ⁴⁸

Before time began and the earth was spoken into being, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created the plan for all time. All three persons of the Trinity are mentioned in this passage. The inspired prophet cannot testify of the Lord's past and neither can the preacher on the street or the professor in the school. He, God in the flesh, is the only one who can testify of God.

Believe in the Son, eternal life, do not believe, no life

John ^{3:36} "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."⁴⁹

It is fearful to reject the Son of God and disobey His words. To do so is not just to disobey; it is a true sign of rebellion against God. He who disobeys God incurs the wrath of God, an expression that means the righteous judgment of God upon a person's life who will ultimately get what he deserves, damnation for all eternity.

Synopsis of an event in the life of Jesus from the other Gospels, not included in John's Gospel

EVENT	SCRIPTURE PASSAGE
Herod imprisons John the Baptist	Matthew 4:12, Mark 1:14, Luke 3:19-20

John fails to mention the imprisonment of John the Baptist by Herod Antipas, an event that spurs the Lord's departure from Judea as recorded in Matthew and Mark. John the Baptist has been preaching for only a year at this time and soon he will be beheaded by Herod at the request of his step-daughter. John leaves the story of John the Baptist unfinished in his gospel probably because the others have already written of his death.

Jesus and the disciples slip off to Samaria for a short time of ministry there and then move on to Galilee. His absence from Judea will allow Herod to focus on John the Baptist and put him to death. At his death, John's disciples will begin to follow Jesus.

The first five chapters of John tell us the beginning of the Lord's ministry, the quiet first year, which the other gospel writers virtually ignore. Without John's gospel we would have known very little about Jesus' life from His baptism to the imprisonment of John. With that story told, John reports that Jesus is on His way to Samaria where a woman is waiting at the well for Him to give her living water.

⁴⁷ Deuteronomy 18:18

⁴⁸ Daniel 7:14

⁴⁹ Habakkuk 2:4