

# MIRACLES OF JESUS

*Bible Study*



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*“What are we going to do?” they asked each other. “This man certainly performs many miraculous signs. If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him.”*

John 11:47–48

# Miracles of Jesus

*“Jesus the Nazarene ... practiced sorcery,  
incited people to idol worship,  
and led the Jewish people astray.”*

—Babylonian Talmud, c. 5th century<sup>1</sup>

What goes through your mind when you read this statement from ancient Jewish wisdom literature? Does it make you angry? Trouble your faith? Or does it point out to you one thing that history simply cannot deny?

Jesus did impossible things. *Repeatedly.*

Throughout the ages, people have argued about every minor detail of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection—but there’s one thing everyone agrees on: Jesus performed *many miracles*. Regardless of how or why he did them, Christ was known both far and wide for doing gasp-worthy feats of astonishing power, time and time and time again. He did these works so often and with such effortless effectiveness that his followers called him God—and his enemies had to invent theories to try to explain the signs they couldn’t deny.

Celsus, a Roman philosopher who lived in the second century, derided Jesus as a meaningless man who, after supposedly visiting Egypt, “acquired certain (magical) powers which Egyptians pride themselves on possessing.”<sup>2</sup> For some, apparently, it was easier to believe in magic than to accept Christ’s miracles.

Other less hostile sources also acknowledge Christ’s penchant for the marvelous. First-century Jewish historian, Josephus, in his short summary of the life of Christ, famously wrote, “Now, there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man ... [and] a doer of wonderful works.”<sup>3</sup>

Of course, the most complete source for Jesus’s “wonderful works” is the New Testament Gospels, which record dozens of distinct miracles that he performed. John’s gospel says that Jesus did many more miraculous deeds that went unrecorded (John 20:30; 21:25). Each of these supernatural events reveals something special about our miracle worker—about who Jesus is and what he cares about. Thus, through the testimony of his ancient miracles, we can know him better today. That’s what this study is about.

The miracles of Jesus are not simply encouraging “Bible stories” nor lovely myths nor imaginative lies created to bolster a new religion; they are actual, historical facts. They happened at a particular time, in identifiable places, and to real flesh-and-bones people. Imagine for a moment: What do you feel when you put yourself in the place of a witness to Christ’s miracles and ...

- hear the bones creak and snap as they reform within a once-withered hand?
- taste the sweet burn of new wine made only from water found in jars?
- see with your own eyes a dead man stumble back to life, straight out of the tomb, and walk before you?

And if you take a little time here, now, in this study to immerse yourself in a few of the miracles of Jesus, what might you discover?

Perhaps you’ll find a new miracle of Christ, now made fresh in you.



# WATER INTO WINE

*John 2:1-11*

# Water into Wine



There is something special about a Jewish wedding. In the New Testament era (as today), Jewish weddings were defined by *joy*. The festivities in Jesus's time typically lasted one full week (sometimes two!). During that time, the bride and groom were treated as a queen and king by their families and friends. Guests and members of the wedding party participated in games, singing, and dancing, often with the newlyweds looking on as a regal audience would. There would be feasting and music and wine and speeches and love songs and poetry—and very little sleep!

Finally, on the appointed day, the groom would gather his friends. Accompanied by tambourines and a band, he would lead them all to the door of the bride's house and call for his beloved. Adorned with jewels and dressed in her beautiful wedding outfit, she would be accompanied by her bridesmaids as she came outside and began a celebratory parade to her husband's home. There, another joyful feast would occur until, at the exhausting end of it all, the bride would be conducted by her parents to her new husband's bedchamber, a symbol that the bride and groom now belonged to each other in marriage.

It was into this wildly celebratory setting that Jesus chose to perform his first public miracle.



# *Read It*

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## **Key Bible Passage**

John 2:1–11

## **Optional Reading**

Revelation 19:1–9. Some believe that the wedding at Cana foreshadows the heavenly wedding of Christ (the Lamb) and his church described in Revelation.

“A host always serves the best wine first.... But you have kept the best until now!”

JOHN 2:10





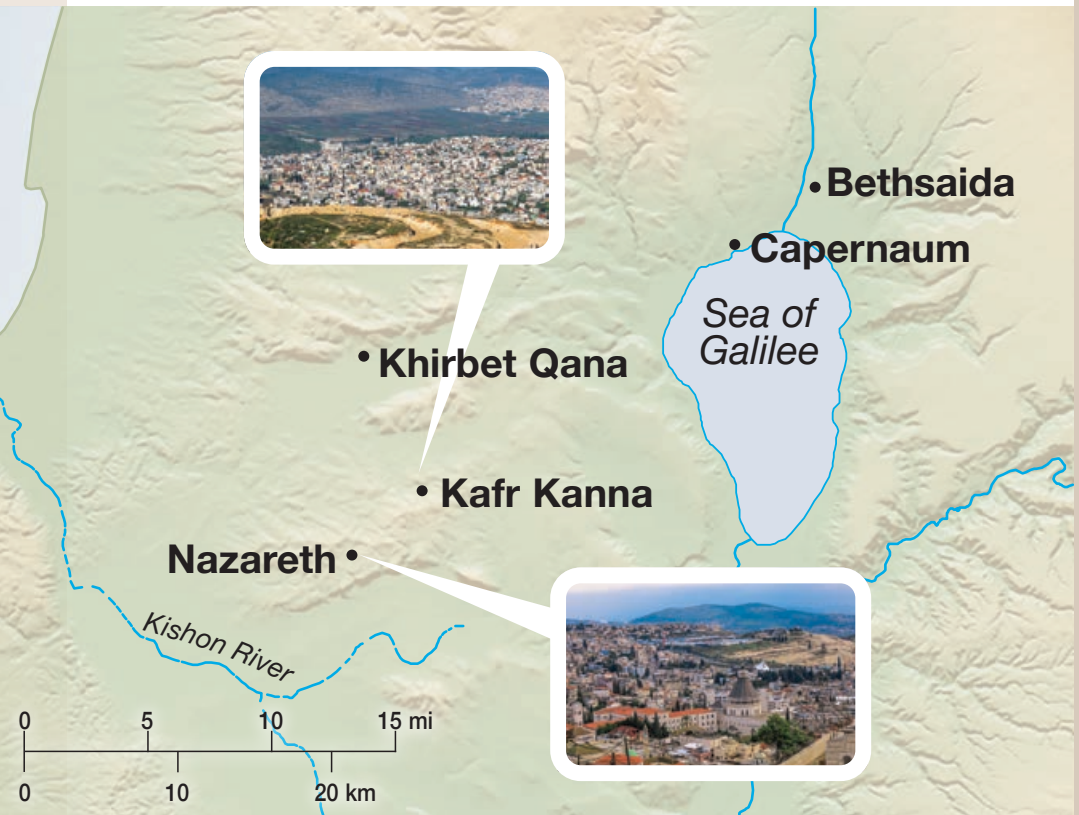


## Explore It

### Magic vs. Miracle

In New Testament times, pagan priests used a parlor trick to appear to change water into wine. It involved a sleight of hand and a small pitcher with hidden chambers that stored water in one side and wine in another. By flicking back and forth between chambers, a conjurer could make it appear as though he was converting water into wine and back again. Jesus's transformation of water into wine put to shame that little trick.

MAGIC TRICK	JESUS'S MIRACLE
The priest alone supplies the elements, already tampered with.	Jesus brings nothing; all he uses is what's already there (v. 6).
A very small amount of water and wine is used.	An very large amount (over 120 gallons) is used (v. 6).
The priest closely guards the vessel holding both the water and wine, never allowing others to inspect it.	Jesus never touches the water or wine. Instead, servants of the wedding host handle all the materials the whole time (v. 7).
The priest recites an incantation to invoke invisible spirits.	Jesus appeals to no authority besides himself.
The wine is never tested or tasted for authenticity.	The wine is deemed the finest quality by an impartial observer (vv. 9–10).
The priest makes a great show of his magical ability in performing the trick, demanding admiration for and acknowledgment of his power.	Jesus doesn't tell anyone what he has done. He seems content to let the matter go unnoticed by the vast majority of the crowd (vv. 9–11).



The consensus today is that Cana of Galilee still exists; it's likely either the modern Arab town of Kafr Kanna in northern Israel or nearby Khirbet Qana. Both of these places would have been within reasonable walking distance of Jesus's home in Nazareth at the time of the wedding.

## An Awkward Conversation

It's possible that Jesus and Mary were relatives of the bride or groom. That would explain both Mary's concern about the host running out of wine and Mary's authority to command the host's servants. Still, there is no way to know that for sure. Regardless, at a critical moment during the weeklong festivities, the stores of wine ran dry, and Mary felt compelled to do something about it. She turned to Jesus for help.

The exchange between Mary and her son reads oddly to us today. She says to him, "They have no more wine" (John 2:3). She doesn't ask for anything outright, but the implication is clear: *Do something, Jesus.*

In response, Jesus curtly says, "Dear woman" (a formal address instead of the more affectionate "Mother"), and he appears to dismiss her request: "That's not our problem" (v. 4). For explanation he adds, "My time has not yet come" (v. 4). Almost the exact same phrase is used in John 7:30, and there it's a clear reference to the timing of Jesus's death and resurrection. So at the wedding, Jesus was likely telling Mary something along these lines: Once I act and reveal who I am, my course is fixed, and I will have set out for the cross.

That would seem a pretty good reason for Christ to stay out of this situation of the wine running out. But Mary is unfazed. Instead, she immediately turns to the servants nearby, instructing them, "Do whatever he tells you" (v. 5).

By this time, Jesus was thirty years old and (according to most Bible historians) his father Joseph had already passed away. That meant Jesus, as the eldest son, would have been head of the household where he and Mary lived, so it makes sense that she would have gone to him for help. But why did she demonstrate such an enthusiastic response to her son's apparent dismissal of the situation?

Mary was neither cowed nor offended by their conversation. Her immediate response to Jesus indicates there was something to their mother-son relationship that is unseen when we simply read their words. They apparently knew each other well and cared deeply for one another (see John 19:25–27). What’s more, she showed *zero* concern that Jesus might refuse to help, despite what he had just said. She acted with full expectation that he would do something impossible, on her behalf, as a gift to the host of the wedding celebration.<sup>4</sup> After living with him for thirty years, Mary’s trust in the character and ability of her son was complete and unshakable.

That was enough for a miracle.

## Christ’s Hour

“My time has not yet come,” Jesus said plainly to Mary in John 2:4. In the original Greek, the word we translate as “time” is *hora*, which means, literally, “hour.” Christ made it clear that a heavenly schedule had been set in regard to his coming, his revealing, and the *hour* of his death and resurrection. Despite this truth, he decided to do his first public miracle. He chose to start his earthly ministry—and that inexorable march toward execution—earlier than planned, simply to keep the joyous wedding celebration from faltering.

## Twenty-Four Hundred Cups

Sitting empty nearby were six large stone jars. “Fill the jars with water,” Jesus said, and the servants obeyed. “Now dip some out,” he said, “and take it to the master of ceremonies” (John 2:7–8).

There was no flash of lightning. No pious prayer or declaration. Jesus didn’t even give thanks and bless the moment, as he would do in the future when miraculously feeding over 5,000 people (John 6:10–11). The way John tells it, Jesus did nothing but sit by and watch. And something



truly amazing happened! Somewhere between dipping out a cup of water and handing it to the master of ceremonies, the atomic structure of the liquid radically changed.

Plain water had become wine—six enormous jars of it, up to 150 gallons or more. Some estimates figure that as being equivalent to 2,400 cups.<sup>5</sup> Those thousands of cups of wine were enough to provide an *abundant* supply for the rest of the wedding festivities in Cana.

The first public miracle Jesus chose to do was an impossible transformation of water into wine to keep a joyful party going. And what was the result? *Heavenly revelation and bolstered faith.* John 2:11 reports: “This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”



## Live It

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Jesus's transformation of water into wine is a mind-boggling and fabulous first miracle that reveals something wonderful about our Savior: *Joy is important to Jesus*. Joyfulness is inherent in his nature: "I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!" (John 15:11).

When Jesus chose to create new wine, he did so within the long tradition and understanding that wine—a necessity as much as water at that time—was "an important image of joy, celebration, and festivity ... expressive of the abundant blessing of God."<sup>6</sup> For instance:

- Isaac's blessing to his son included a prayer for God to give his son "bountiful new wine" (Gen. 27:28).
- Isaiah's prophecy of the Lord's salvation includes the promise of "your choice of wine or milk" (Isa. 55:1).
- Joel 3:18 and Amos 9:13 describe the day of God's salvation as a time when the hills will "drip with sweet wine."

With this history and understanding as a backdrop, it becomes more significant that Jesus not only created wine out of water—but that he did so *abundantly*. As Rev. Michael Lindvall comments, "The copious amount of wine is a symbol of the sheer abundance of God's blessing."<sup>7</sup> As part and parcel of this wedding miracle, Christ gave more than was necessary, making a free and joyful contribution to the celebration at Cana that day.



**4.** Jesus didn't make just any wine from water—he made “the best wine” (John 2:10). When have you seen God bless you or others in a way that was better than you could've imagined?

**5.** How can you imitate Jesus's example of joyfulness during the coming week?

## Living Outside the Book

Now it's time to take your study outside of this book and into your real life. Try this:

At every meal during the coming week, pray the prayer indicated below. Then pay attention during the day to see how God responds. Each night before bed, make notes to yourself about the experience, so you can keep a record for future-you to remember.

*Day 1:* Jesus, help me to see moments of your joy placed into my life today. Amen.

*Day 2:* Dear Lord, what might I do today that would bring you joy? Amen.

*Day 3:* Lord Jesus, today please give me a new vision for how to consistently share your joy in the lives of the people who surround me. Thank you. Amen.

*Day 4:* Heavenly Father, my soul longs for a taste of the joy found in your Spirit. Will you make that happen today—and help me to notice when it does? Amen.

*Day 5:* Jesus, let's celebrate your goodness today! Show me how I can do that. Thank you. Amen.

*Day 6:* Holy Spirit, today would you speak joy through me into the hearts of those I love most? Thank you. Amen.

*Day 7:* Lord, today I'd like to do one thing that makes one person very happy. Will you please show me how to do that? Thank you. Amen.

# Notes