

Gospel of John Lesson 4

Review

The apostle John cites the recognized prophet John the Baptist as the first evidence supporting the prologue's claims about Jesus. The apostle John, who was probably a disciple of John the Baptist, says that John the Baptist "testified" that:

- Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world;
- At Jesus's baptism, the Holy Spirit identified Jesus as the one who surpasses John the Baptist and will baptize with the Holy Spirit;
- the Holy Spirit anointed and remained on Jesus; and
- Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus's first disciples met him within two days of John the Baptist's encounter with the delegation from Jerusalem. Those first disciples were:

Andrew;

An unnamed disciple of John the Baptist [probably the apostle John];

Andrew's brother Peter [also called Simon, Simon Peter, or Cephas];

Philip; and

Nathanael [probably called Bartholomew at Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19;
and Luke 6:13-16]

Commentators generally agree the events in John 1:33 to 4:54 occurred before Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to leave their business and become fishers of men as described in Luke 5:1-10; Matt. 4:18-22; and Mark 1:16-20.

Outline

Prologue (1:1-18): God exists as three persons, including God the Father who sends God the Son/Jesus/the Word/the Light/the Life into the world to make God known. Many people reject Jesus's claims, but Jesus gives people who believe him the right to become children of God.

John the Baptist testifies that Jesus is the lamb of God, the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, the one who surpasses John the Baptist, and the Son of God (1:19-33)

Jesus meets 5 of the 12 disciples and shows a supernatural ability to instantly discern a person's true character (1:35-51)

First Sign: Changing water into wine (John 2:1-11)

- "On the third day" John probably means the third day since the exchange with Nathanael, which would make it the sixth or seventh day since the delegation

interviewed John the Baptist. For it to be a week, the day when Andrew brings Peter to Jesus needs to be the day after Andrew met Jesus even though John does not expressly say it is the next day. This seems plausible because Andrew started following Jesus at 4:00 pm. This result in the following 7-day period:

Day 1: John the Baptist confesses a greater one is coming;

Day 2: John the Baptist IDs Jesus as lamb of God, Son of God, the greater one, etc.

Day 3: John the Baptist repeats Jesus is lamb of God and Andrew follows Jesus;

Day 4: Andrew tells Peter, "We have found the Messiah"

Day 5: Nathanael says Jesus is "Son of God; King of Israel"; they leave for Galilee

Day 6: Traveling to Cana

Day 7: Wedding in Cana, i.e., the third day since Nathanael's comments

John does not clarify the significance of this time period being a week, and it is the subject of much speculation. The theory that seems most persuasive to me is that John sees the week as an inauguration of Jesus's Messianic mission, marked by John the Baptist's testimony, the disciples' testimony, and crowned by the wedding miracle.

- "Cana in Galilee" Generally believed to be a ruin site now called Khirbet Cana, about nine miles north of Nazareth.
- "Jesus's mother" John does not use the name Mary. No one knows why. Perhaps John did not want to create further confusion with the other women named Mary that he mentions—Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 11:1) and Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2 and John 19:25, 20:1). Perhaps John wants to emphasize the relationship of mother and son.
- "Jesus and his disciples" John does not specify how many disciples went to the wedding. Given the short time frame, it could easily have been just the five mentioned thus far (Andrew, Peter, John, Philip, and Nathanael/Bartholomew), plus, perhaps, John's brother James.
- "They have no more wine." Historians say first-century Jewish weddings were a very important social occasion that could last for days. Paying for the wedding, including the wine, was the groom's responsibility, more specifically his family's responsibility given the young age at which most people married. Running out of wine was a big problem. John does not specify why Mary mentions the issue to Jesus, but Jesus's response shows he understood it to be a request for him to solve the problem. This raises multiple interesting questions that John does not answer. Why would Mary care enough to make this big ask? Perhaps the groom was related to Mary, so she wanted to spare him and his family from embarrassment. In addition, she almost certainly hoped that Jesus was the Messiah based on her conversation with the angel Gabriel. (Luke 1:29-33.) Perhaps Mary saw solving this friendly gathering as a great way for Jesus to begin building public support for a messianic campaign. Did Mary expect Jesus to do something miraculous? It sure seems like it, because it's hard to see how Jesus could have solved this problem through worldly means, but the gospels haven't discussed a previous miracle. It's possible, however, that Mary had already seen Jesus perform miracles in private settings that aren't recorded in the gospels.

- “Ma’am, what does this have to do with me?” Jesus’s tone has been much debated. Some theologians contend he was rebuking Mary. I don’t buy it. If Jesus had meant this as a rebuke, I don’t think Mary would have continued to believe/hope that Jesus would solve the problem. On the other hand, commentators agree that the word translated as “Ma’am,” or “dear woman,” is a polite term of address that could be used with any woman. There are more informal or affectionate terms a son could use with his mother. Although I don’t think Jesus meant to rebuke Mary, the formality politely communicates that how and when Jesus would publicly reveal himself as Messiah was subject to divine control. Jesus undoubtedly loved, respected, and honored Mary, but the gospels indicate that Jesus was the only person who fully understood God the Father’s plan for his life, and Jesus would not deviate from his mission, even for his family members. This must have been a difficult experience for his family members, especially Mary.
- “My hour has not yet come.” Jesus’s “hour” is significant in John’s gospel. (John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1.) It appears to be the time when Jesus would publicly own the title of Messiah and be glorified as such without restriction. The hour arrives after Jesus’s triumphal entry and includes his suffering, crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation, although John devotes more material to the crucifixion.
- “Do whatever he tells you.” Mary knows Jesus well enough to understand that he may still address the problem, and she demonstrates her faith by telling the servants to follow Jesus’s orders even though she does not know what he has planned. Mary’s conversation with the servants is one reason some speculate that Mary was related to the groom and may have assisted with the wedding banquet.
- “six stone water jars” As I mentioned last week, first-century Jews often used ceremonial washing with water for purification purposes. The capacity of the jars was two to three “measures.” Commentators don’t know the exact amount of a “measure,” but estimate the jars held 100 to 150 gallons or 500 to 750 liters, and Jesus said to fill them “to the brim.” A modern bottle of wine is typically .75 liters, so Jesus created the equivalent of 667 to 1,000 bottles. John probably mentions the capacity to show that Jesus made a huge amount of wine. There are a couple of possibilities why John mentions that the jars stored water for purification rites. Some argue this reminder of the Mosaic covenant shows how the messianic age inaugurated by Jesus surpasses the previous age., i.e., fine wine is better than water. Or maybe it points to the sacred nature of this miraculous wine.
- “you have saved the best till last” The master of the banquet was probably someone knowledgeable about wine, and his comment shows that the wine created by Jesus was excellent. This shows that the messianic age inaugurated by Jesus has not only abundance but also surpassing quality. Some people have tried to argue that Jesus made grape juice or non-alcoholic wine. But the word “oinos” means fermented wine; there is a different word “trux” for unfermented grape juice. And the master of the banquet refers to “methysko” which implies the ability to intoxicate. Nothing in the context indicates this was nonalcoholic wine. On the other hand, first-century wine was generally diluted with water so it was served at a lower proof than modern wine. The steward’s comment does not mean that the wedding guests were falling down drunk. He is merely stating the reason hosts generally serve the best wine first.

- Turning water into wine at a wedding is a fitting miracle for the Messiah to perform because the OT associates fine wine and feasts with the Messianic age. (Isaiah 25:6-9; Jer. 31:11-14; Amos 9:13-14.) The ability to transform one substance into another effortlessly is also consistent with John's claim that Jesus is divine and possessed the ability to create life. This is not meant to encourage anyone to drink. In this lifetime, there are many good reasons to avoid alcohol. In my opinion, the gospel writers never suggest that Jesus's death means the messianic age did not arrive or was delayed. They consistently portray some aspects of that age arriving (i.e., the Messiah himself and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit to indwell all believers), but others awaiting future fulfillment (i.e., the Messiah's exercise of political authority).
- "the first of his miraculous signs" John calls this the first of Jesus's "signs," which is John's favorite word for a miracle. Jesus had probably already done things involving supernatural power, such as his conversation with Nathanael, but this is the first miracle John views as significant enough to call a sign. Interestingly, the audience was quite small. Only the disciples, Mary, and a few servants knew about it—at least during the wedding. Like the other gospel writers, John portrays Jesus as carefully managing the time when he would publicly claim to be the Messiah.
- He "revealed his glory" The concept of glory is important to John but hard to define. It involves the manifestation of goodness, which in God's case includes many traits, including holiness, love, mercy, faithfulness, life, power, etc. John does not mean that Jesus revealed his full glory at this point. But this miracle gave the disciples a glimpse of Jesus's power, generosity, and ability to provide life, all of which is part of his glory.
- "his disciples put their faith in him" As the gospel progresses, we will see that the disciples' understanding of Jesus and his mission was still flawed and incomplete, but they trusted Jesus, which is what John wants the readers to do.

Clearing the Temple (John 2:12-25)

- "After this" A common transition phrase for John. It indicates sequence, but does not tell the reader how much time passed between the wedding at Cana and the trip to Capernaum.
- "Capernaum" A town larger than Nazareth located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. John says Bethsaida was Peter and Andrew's hometown, (John 1:44), but Mark indicates that, by the time the gospels took place, Peter and Andrew were living at Capernaum. (Mark 1:29-30.) Later, after John the Baptist was imprisoned, Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum. (Matt. 4:12-13; Mark 2:1, 9:33.) Capernaum is lower elevation than Nazareth, so one literally went downhill to get there.
- "his mother and brothers" John again does not identify Mary by name, nor does he name Jesus's brothers. Some have argued that the "brothers" were actually cousins or perhaps that Joseph was married before he married Mary. But there's no theological or text-based reason to avoid the natural meaning of the term "brothers." The other gospel writers state that Jesus had siblings. (Matt. 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-34; Luke 8:19-21; Acts 1:14.) Paul referred to James as the Lord's brother. (Gal. 1:19.)

- “Up to Jerusalem” Jerusalem was uphill from Capernaum. It is unclear why John used the phrase “Jewish Passover.” Some contend he did this for gentile readers. Others think even gentiles knew Passover was a Jewish festival. DA Carson contends “Passover of the Jews” is just how all people outside Jerusalem referred to Passover. The OT law strongly preferred Passover to be celebrated in Jerusalem, (Compare Deut. 16:5-6, 16 with Num. 9:10-13), and the other gospels indicate Jesus’s family celebrated it in Jerusalem every year while Jesus was growing up. (Luke 2:41.)
- John’s gospel distinctly refers to three Passovers: (1) this passage, 2:13-25; (2) 6:4; and (3) 11:55 to the end of the gospel. There is a fourth unnamed festival at 5:1 that could conceivably be a fourth Passover. The Passovers appear to be presented in chronological order.
- “In the temple courts” At the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus encountered people selling animals (probably to travelers who had not brought animals with them) and changing money (probably because most coins made outside Jerusalem included an image such as the Emperor or a pagan deity that would be offensive to devout Jews, making it unsuitable for paying the temple tax). Most commentators believe this was occurring in the Court of the Gentiles, which should have been a place of worship.
- “How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!” John reports that Jesus made a whip from cords and drove the animals out of the temple; he disrupted the money exchange; and ordered the dove sellers to leave. The only explanation is Jesus’s comment that the temple should not be a market. Commentators are not sure what Jesus found most offensive. Some argue that the merchants were price-gouging, but that is speculation. It seems more likely that Jesus was upset that this space had been diverted from worship to a noisy, messy animal market, depriving Gentiles of the most holy place they could worship and creating a distraction for Jews worshipping in the inner courts. When Solomon built the original temple, his reverence was so great that he did not permit chiseling or other noisy work at the temple site during construction; it had to be done elsewhere. (1 Kings 6:7.) Allowing a virtual zoo with loud bartering inside the temple itself is quite a contrast.
- “His disciples remembered . . .” Commentators disagree whether the disciples connected this event with Psalm 69:7-9 when the temple was cleared or after Jesus’s resurrection. One argument for the latter view is the next few verses indicate that the disciples did not understand Jesus’s remark about the temple until after the resurrection, so perhaps that is when they connected this incident with Psalm 69. In Psalm 69:7-9, the Psalmist’s zeal for the Lord and His temple is so great that he honors the Lord even when it brings insults and alienation from his friends and family. Jesus lived that principle in this event and even more so as he stuck to God the Father’s plan for the Messiah even though it led to his crucifixion.
- “What sign can you show?” The Jewish leadership recognized Jesus’s actions as a claim of authority concerning the temple and demanded a miraculous sign from Jesus to establish that authority. John indicates at the end of the passage that Jesus was performing miracles at that time, indicating that no sign would have been persuasive to these leaders.

- “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” Unbeknownst to the leaders, Jesus does give them a sign by predicting his death and resurrection. Because Jesus had just cleared a literal temple, and no one in the first century was expecting the Messiah to be killed, it is not surprising that the original audience took the remark literally. The Jewish leadership’s reaction shows that they just viewed the remark as proof that Jesus was an irrational dreamer. The disciples sorted it out with the benefit of hindsight. The temple was where God manifested his presence in a special way, and where people could go to meet God, so the temple is a very apt analogy for Jesus. This statement indicates that Jesus was involved in his own resurrection. Other verses emphasize God the Father’s role. (Acts 2:32.) This incident appears to be the background for the garbled accusation at Jesus’s trial that he threatened to destroy the temple, (Mark 14:57-59) and some of the insults during the crucifixion. (Mark 15:29-30.) The gospels do not say how long the temple remained free of the merchants, but it is clear that the merchants had returned by the time of the crucifixion. (Matt. 21:12-13.)
- “It has taken 46 years to build . . .” This is part of a running theme of Jesus speaking spiritual truths and people missing the point because they assume Jesus was talking about material matters.
- “the Scripture” Commentators do not know what scripture reference John had in mind. It could be Psalm 69:9, which was just quoted. Or perhaps John was also thinking of other OT scriptures predicting Jesus’s rejection and death, such as Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 that the disciples did not appreciate until after the crucifixion.
- “Then they believed . . .” In chapter 1, the disciples expressed their belief that Jesus was the Messiah, and at 2:12 John says the disciples put their faith in Jesus at the wedding in Cana, but here he indicates that their belief deepened after the resurrection, indicating genuine faith can grow.
- Many people . . . believed in his name, but Jesus would not entrust himself to them.” In contrast to the leaders, there were other people who saw Jesus performed miracles and “believed in his name.” This sounds just like the disciples, and just what John says people should do in John 1:12, but Jesus knew these people’s faith was not genuine. The ability to know the human heart is a divine characteristic. (Jer. 17:9-10.) What distinguishes this group’s not-genuine belief from the disciples’ genuine belief? The disciples’ faith remained/abided, whereas the other group’s faith faded away. (John 15:5-6; 1 John 2:19.) Consider these two testimonies:

I believe in Jesus’ authority because I like miracles and want to see more miracles.

I believe the miracles show that Jesus is the Messiah, and I believe the Messiah has God-given authority over all humanity, so I submit to Jesus’s authority over my life.

At this point in the gospel, each person would say that he/she believes in Jesus’s name. But what will happen to these two people if Jesus stops performing the kind of miracles people like to see and starts talking about being rejected and killed? Which person’s faith is more likely to be genuine, meaning to abide/remain? (John 11:7-8, 16.)

Faith based on circumstances is unlikely to survive the trials of this world. (Matt. 13:21.) Faith based on the recognition that Jesus is God is better equipped to handle difficult circumstances. As we will see at the end of the gospels, circumstances can make people of genuine faith distraught, depressed, and despondent, and people of genuine faith can have a complete failure of nerve, but genuine faith recovers and perseveres.

How many times did Jesus clear the temple?

The other gospels portray Jesus cleansing the temple at the beginning of his final Passover week. (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-48.) Many scholars who do not have a high view of inspiration tend to assume that Jesus only cleared the temple once at the end of the gospel, but John chose to change certain details and moved the episode to the beginning of his gospel for thematic purposes. Commentators who have a high view of scripture generally argue that there were two cleansing events and John accurately portrayed the timing and details of the first cleansing, while the other three writers accurately portrayed the second cleansing. I agree with conservator scholars who say that there really isn't a persuasive reason to reject the possibility of two temple cleansing events. Here are some of the main reasons:

Although the two events are similar, some details are inconsistent. It is common for gospel writers to tell the same story differently. One gospel writer often includes a detail or two that others will omit. But the temple cleansings have details that seem irreconcilable, forcing a choice between (1) one event inaccurately portrayed by John or the other gospel writers or (2) two events. Those conflicting details include:

Chronology: The other gospel writers unmistakably place the second temple cleansing in the week before the final Passover, (see esp. Mark 11:11-19,) so secular scholars usually argue John is the one who moved that event to the beginning of his gospel. Some say that John wasn't trying to be misleading, he just didn't care about details like chronology. But John is extremely meticulous about sequence (See John 1:19, 29, 35, 43; 2:1, 12, 13; 3:22; 4:1-3, 17, 43, 54; 5:1; 6:1-4, 14-16, 22, 25, 59, 66; 7:1-2, 14, 25, 37, 53; 8:-2; 10:22, 31, 40-41; 11:1, 8, 17, 45-47, 54-57; 12:1, 12; 13:1, 30-31; 17:1; 18:1, 12, 19, 24, 27, 28; 19:1, 16, 30-31, 38, 43; 20:1, 10, 18, 19, 26; 21:1, 15.) Although John doesn't expressly state how long this temple cleansing occurred after the wedding at Cana, I don't see anything in the context of John's account that would permit this episode to be out of sequence, nor is there any apparent thematic reason for him to pull this event out of sequence. In particular, John 2:22's statement that the disciples "recalled" this incident after Jesus's resurrection makes more sense if there was a gap of approx. 3 years between the incident and the resurrection rather than just a few days.

Jesus's explanation for the cleansing. In the other gospels, Jesus says the temple should be house of prayer (i.e., a place where people express sincere, genuine faith, Isaiah 56:4-8), but the leaders have made it made it den of robbers, referring to Jer. 7:11. (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:46.) This critique focuses on the hypocrisy and faithlessness of those running the temple, and the episode is accompanied by a judgment on Jerusalem similar to the one foretold by Jeremiah. (Matt. 3:10, 21:18-19; Mark 11:12-21; Luke 19:41-44.) The incident does not include a request for a sign validating Jesus's authority. In contrast, John portrays

Jesus as citing the market issue, there is no pronouncement of judgment on Jerusalem, the leaders ask for a sign but do not immediately plot Jesus's death, and Jesus predicts his own death. The aftermath of the incident in John 2:23-25 does not sound like the final Passover. In short, this sounds to me like two different events, not one event with some details omitted by one author, but included by another.

If there were two cleansings, why is John the only writer who discusses the first cleansing? John is the only writer who discusses this entire early phase of Jesus's ministry, including the interaction with Phillip and Nathanael, the wedding at Cana, the encounter with Nicodemus, and the Samaritan woman. It is not unusual for John to have unique material in his gospel, especially concerning this early phase of Jesus's ministry. All the gospel writers had limited space, and perhaps the other three gospel writers wanted to focus on the latter phase of Jesus's ministry and felt telling about the second temple cleansing sufficiently covered that theme.

If there were two cleansings, why didn't John discuss the second cleansing? Other than the triumphal entry, John doesn't cover any of Jesus's interactions with opponents during the final Passover week. The other three gospels record many events during this week prior to the last supper that John doesn't talk about besides the second temple cleansing, including: the withering fig tree, various parables, questions by opponents on taxes and marriage and Jesus's responses, woes to the Jewish leaders, and comments to the disciples about the end times. John has a very different focus for that week and could have felt telling about the first temple cleansing sufficiently covered that theme.

Could Jesus have cleansed the temple twice? Many secular scholars give a lot of weight to the argument that the Jewish leaders would not have let Jesus continue to minister for a significant period of time after clearing out the temple, and so logically a temple cleansing could not have occurred early in Jesus's ministry. The weakness with this argument is that the gospels are the best evidence concerning the Jewish leadership's thought process, and they portray the Jewish leadership at times feeling constrained by Jesus's popularity (Matt. 21:45-46; 26:3-5; Mark 11:18; Mark 12:12; 14:1-2; Luke 19:48; 20:19; 22:2,6; John 12:19), and on other occasions being unable to successfully attack Jesus due to divine protection. (John 7:30, 43-44; 9:59; 10:39.) Moreover, the temple cleansing portrayed by John occurred so early in Jesus's ministry that it may have caught the Jewish leadership off guard. If Jesus was popular at that time because he was performing miracles, and Jerusalem was packed with people due to Passover, and the leadership thought he was an irrational dreamer and possibly a fraud, it seems plausible that they could have decided the most politically prudent response was to ignore the event and hope Jesus would fade away rather than risk causing a riot by trying to arrest Jesus and either execute him unlawfully or get the Romans involved (and why would the Romans care?). In short, it seems plausible to me that Jesus could have performed one cleansing at the beginning of his ministry and one at the end. In fact, it fits the them that if Jerusalem failed to respond to the warnings provided by John the Baptist and Jesus by producing good fruit, it would experience judgment. (Isaiah 5:1-7; Mal. 4:5-6; Matt. 3:10, 17; 21:18; 23:37-39; Mark 9:12-13; 11:12-21; Luke 13:6-8.)