

The Marriage at Cana: John 2.1-11

Level 1

For guidance on how to use these readings, [see here](#); for conventions, abbreviations and definitions, check [here](#). Answers to the Questions are at the end of these pages. The purpose of the Questions is not to test you, but to call your attention to significant features of the passage and so help you to improve your reading skills. If you can't answer some, don't worry: look at the answers and you'll learn! Boldface in the text indicates a direct quotation from the Old Testament. Proper names that you can easily guess by transliterating have not been glossed.

The story of the marriage at Cana might seem almost frivolous, given Jesus' later miracles. Only John records it, and after the exalted Prologue in the previous chapter, one might wonder why the first of Jesus' miracles that John records is sorting out a catering miscalculation. However the story shows Jesus' supernatural power and his involvement in the ordinary lives of ordinary people; the role of his mother throughout his life; and also foreshadows other events, such as the feeding of the multitudes and the Last Supper. The text presented below is lightly modified, harder structures being simply glossed. Proper names have not been glossed: you can figure them out by transliterating.

Practice Passage 1

Καὶ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ

γάμος ἐγένετο

> γίνομαι

ἐν Κανὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας,

καὶ ἦν ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐκεῖ·

Helps 1

γάμος: wedding ἐγένετο

ἐκλήθη δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς

meaning 'invite'

ἐκλήθη > καλέω, here

Helps 2

καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ

εἰς τὸν γάμον.

Helps

1. The dative is used here to indicate the time when something happened: *on* the third day.
2. You might wonder why the verb (ἐκλήθη) does not seem to be agreeing with the subject (ὁ Ἰησοῦς and οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ). This is what's called a compound subject: x and y, or x, plus a, b, and c, are something or do something. In many languages, compound subjects can behave strangely, taking either a singular or plural verb. It comes down to how you think about the subject: as one entity (the group) or as several individuals. In this case, the singular verb may suggest that Jesus was the one who was actually invited and the disciples were just . . . following. This would be called gate-crashing in the modern Western world but according to the customs of the first century Mediterranean world, maybe not.

Questions 1

1. How would you translate γάμος ἐγένετο?

2. What is the lexical form of ἦν? (what verb does it come from?) and what tense is it?
3. What word completes the sense of ἦν?
4. What tense and voice is ἐκλήθη? What phrase completes its meaning?
5. Why are there two instances of καί: καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ?

Answers 1

1. γάμος ἐγένετο: a wedding took place.
2. The lexical form of ἦν is εἰμί. ἦν is imperfect. If you struggled with this, revise all the forms of εἰμί: this is one verb you simply have to rote learn in all its forms.
3. ἐκεῖ completes the sense of ἦν: Jesus' mother was *there*.
4. ἐκλήθη is a 1st aorist passive. The clues are the augment, the -θ- and the -η. The words that complete its meaning are εἰς τὸν γάμον: invited . . . to the wedding.
5. καὶ . . . καὶ means 'both . . . and'.

Practice Passage 2

καὶ εἶδεν ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ
 ὅτι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς οἶνον οὐκ εἰμί + dat = is not to them = they don't have
 λέγει πρὸς αὐτόν
 Οἶνον οὐκ ἔχουσιν.

καὶ λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς
 Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι
 οὐπω ἦκει ἡ ὥρα μου.
 ἦκω: I have come

Helps 1	Helps 2
οὐπω: not yet	ἦκει >

Helps

1. Translate this phrase word-for-word first: 'What to me and to you?' Then make it sound more like idiomatic English, so: 'What's that to do with you and me?'
2. γύναι: this is the vocative form of γυνή, γυναικός, not the plural, as you might suppose (the plural is formed from the genitive: γυναικες). For the most part, vocatives won't bother you much, because they're usually easy to spot from context, but this one occurs ten times in the GNT, so it's worth noting. The larger problem for a speaker of English is that it may seem shocking for Jesus to be addressing his mother baldly as 'woman'. In Koine, however, this connotes no disrespect.

Questions 2

1. What is the lexical (dictionary entry) form of εἶδεν?
2. λέγει πρὸς αὐτόν: what is the subject of λέγει?
3. Is the referent of αὐτόν singular or plural?
4. What is the subject of ἔχουσιν?
5. λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς: what is the subject of λέγει? And the object?

Answers 2

1. The lexical form of εἶδεν is ὁράω.
2. The subject of λέγει is ἡ μήτηρ so the pronoun has to be 'she'.

3. αὐτόν is singular and therefore denotes Jesus, not he and his companions or the servants.

4. The subject of ἔχουσιν is 'they'. It could denote the hosts, having no more wine to provide; the guests, who have no more to drink; or both.

5. The subject and object of λέγει are Jesus and her (his mother). Don't be fooled by the fact that αὐτῇ comes before ὁ Ἰησοῦς: αὐτῇ is dative (he speaks *to* her) and ὁ Ἰησοῦς is nominative. It takes time to acquire the habit of ignoring word order as a clue to syntax because word order is so important in English. Learning to read Greek is about not carrying over habits and sentence expectancy patterns that are important in one language into another, where they're misleading. Reading Greek with ease and pleasure comes with learning to attend to the semantic signals being sent by, among other things, these little endings.

Practice Passage 3

λέγει ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ τοῖς διακόνοις διάκονος: servant
Ὅτι ἂν λέγῃ ὑμῖν, Helps 1
ποιήσατε.

ἦσαν δὲ ἐκεῖ λίθιναι ὑδρίαὶ ἕξ λίθινος: stone (adj) ὑδρία: water jar
ἕξ: six
κατὰ τὸν καθαρισμόν τῶν Ἰουδαίων καθαρισμός: purification [rites]
κείμεναι, κείμεναι: standing Helps 2
χωροῦσαι ἅνα χωροῦσαι:
holding ἅνα: each
μετρητὰς δύο ἢ τρεῖς. μετρητής: a
measure of ca 40 litres

Helps

1. Ὅτι ἂν λέγῃ: 'Whatever he says to you'. Ὅτι ἂν means 'whatever'. It is always followed by a verb in the subjunctive, which explains the form of λέγῃ, which will look odd to you if you're in the early stages of Greek, since it's a form typically taught near the end of an introductory course. The subjunctive is the mood of possibility and hence, unreality: it concerns what may or may not happen in the future. It is common in the GNT, so it's as well to get used to seeing it, even if you don't know its forms yet.

2. ἦσαν . . . κείμεναι = were standing. It would be more usual to express this idea with just the imperfect of κείμαι, but sometimes Greek uses εἰμί + a participle (-ing), as here.

Questions 3

1. What number and case is τοῖς διακόνοις? Why in this case?
2. What person, number and case is ὑμῖν?
3. What person, number, mood and tense is ποιήσατε? Why this person and number?
4. What tense, person and number is ἦσαν? What is its lexical form?
5. What number and case is μετρητὰς?

moment, the story's dramatic highpoint, the discovery that what used to be plain old water has somehow become wine. Notice that ἤνεγκαν also has no object.

8. ἤνεγκαν must be aorist because of the personal ending, which is third plural. Some perfects take an augment rather than reduplicating the stem consonant but even though this form is wildly irregular, there would be no reason for φέρω to do that.

Practice Passage 5

ὡς δὲ ἐγεύσατο ὁ ἀρχιτρίκλινος ἐγεύσατο > γεύομαι, taste
τὸ ὕδωρ
οἶνον γεγεννημένον, γεγεννημένον:
[which] had
become

καὶ οὐκ ἤδει ἤδει: he did not know
πόθεν ἐστίν, πόθεν: whence, from where
οἱ δὲ διάκονοι ἤδισαν ἤδισαν: knew
οἱ ἠντληκότες τὸ ὕδωρ, ἠντληκότες > ἀντλέω, 'had drawn'

φωνεῖ τὸν νυμφίον ὁ ἀρχιτρίκλινος νυμφίος: bridegroom
καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ

Πᾶς ἄνθρωπος πρῶτον
τὸν καλὸν οἶνον τίθησιν, τίθησιν: see Helps 1

καὶ ὅταν μεθυσθῶσιν[,] μεθυσθῶσιν > μεθύω. See Helps 2
τὸν ἐλάσσω· the less

good
σὺ τετήρηκας τὸν καλὸν οἶνον τετήρηκας > τηρέω
ἕως ἄρτι. until now

Helps

1. τίθησιν comes from τίθημι, which has a wide range of meanings, including, place, set, lay. It's the third person singular present indicative active with a movable -ν. -μι verbs differ a lot from -ω verbs and tend to get little attention in textbooks—too little because although there are only a few of them, they are very common, workhorse verbs, not only on their own but in combination with prefixes. Take this opportunity to revise at least the present indicative active of the basic -μι verbs.

2. μεθυσθῶσιν is another subjunctive. Here the subjunctive is dictated because of ὅταν: we're talking about a hypothetical situation in the future. One sign of the subjunctive is the long vowel, in this case -ῶ-. The -σιν ending suggests (even if you don't know the paradigm yet) that it might be third person plural, as it is.

Questions 5

1. What is the direct object of ἐγεύσατο?
2. The glosses tell you that ἤδει and ἤδισαν are forms of the pluperfect, which you almost certainly haven't learnt yet. However, from your knowledge of other tenses,

what person and number are these forms likely to be? (You can figure this out from context, but take a stab at doing it from morphology.)

- οἱ δὲ διάκονοι ἤδρουν οἱ ἡντληκότες τὸ ὕδωρ: are the two instances of οἱ here articles or relative pronouns or is one an article and one a pronoun? How can you tell?
- What are the subject and object of φωνεῖ?
- What is the referent of αὐτῶ? How can you tell from the grammar?
- Πᾶς can mean 'every' or 'all'. Which does it mean here? How would you translate Πᾶς ἄνθρωπος?
- τὸν καλὸν οἶνον: καλός can mean a lot of things, good, beautiful, excellent, noble. How would you translate it here?
- What morphological signs tell you the person, number and tense of τετήρηκας?
- Given that the verb tells you what person and number it is, why the pronoun σὺ?

Answers 5

- ἐγεύσατο: the direct object is τὸ ὕδωρ οἶνον γεγεννημένον. οἶνον γεγεννημένον is standing in apposition to τὸ ὕδωρ. ὕδωρ can't be the object, though it's closest to the verb, because there isn't any water in the goblet the MC is drinking from, nor can οἶνον alone be the object, since the narrator hasn't yet told us the water has changed. The whole phrase is the object.
- ἤδει: many third person singular forms end in ε or ι, so that's a reasonable guess. Many third plural forms end in vowel + ν, so that's also a reasonable guess. Those guesses also fit the context.
- They are both articles, so one phrase is standing in apposition to the other: the servants are the same ones who drew the water. You can tell because all the forms of the article that don't begin with τ- have breathing marks but no accent. None of the relative pronouns begins with τ- and all have accents. So if it doesn't begin with τ- and doesn't have an accent, it can only be the article. If it begins with τ- it can only be the article. This is a handy rule to learn.
- The subject of φωνεῖ is ὁ ἀρχιτεράκιος and the object is τὸν νυμφίον. Again, you can't rely on the word order; you must attend to the forms of the articles and the endings on the nouns. In this case, putting the object before the subject highlights the object: up till now, the bridegroom has been absent—though it's his wedding. Now that he's called away from his bride, we know something important has happened.
- The referent of αὐτῶ is τὸν νυμφίον. You can tell this from the grammar and not only the context because καὶ joins items of equal grammatical standing: so two nouns, two verbs and so on. Here it joins φωνεῖ and λέγει. Since the subject of φωνεῖ is the MC, that must also be the subject of λέγει, as the only other noun in the clause, τὸν νυμφίον, is in the accusative and so could not function as the subject of a verb.
- It must mean 'every', since ἄνθρωπος is singular.
- You could make a case for any of these, other than 'beautiful'.
- τετήρηκας: the reduplication and -κ- suggest this is a perfect indicative form and the personal ending tells you it's second person singular.
- Grammatically unnecessary pronouns most often indicative emphasis, as does 'fronting', placing a word early in a sentence or clause. Here we have both: 'Most people

serve the good wine first and keep the cheap stuff for when everyone's drunk—but you have saved the best for last'.

Practice Passage 6

Ταύτην ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς
ἀρχὴν τῶν σημείων
ἐν Κανὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας
καὶ ἐφάνερωσεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ,
καὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτὸν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ.

Questions 6

1. What person, number and tense is ἐποίησεν? What is its object?
2. What is the relation of ἀρχὴν τῶν σημείων to other elements of this sentence?
3. What is the subject of ἐφάνερωσεν?
4. What is the referent of αὐτοῦ?
5. What person, number and tense is ἐπίστευσαν?
6. What is the referent of αὐτὸν?

Answers 6

1. ἐποίησεν: third person singular aorist. Its object is Ταύτην . . . ἀρχὴν τῶν σημείων.
2. As suggested by the answer to (1), Ταύτην ἀρχὴν τῶν σημείων is a single noun phrase, interrupted by the subject and verb of which it is the object. Ταύτην and ἀρχὴν are a demonstrative adjective + noun (so both feminine accusative singular) and τῶν σημείων completes the sense of ἀρχὴν by telling us that this was the beginning (or first) of the signs he performed.
3. The subject of ἐφάνερωσεν is ὁ Ἰησοῦς. Don't be fooled either by the word order, which puts the beginning of the object noun phrase first, or by the movable -ν on ἐφάνερωσεν (which might lead you to believe it's a plural). Remember that καὶ must join items of equal grammatical weight, here the verbs ἐποίησεν and ἐφάνερωσεν. The subject of ἐποίησεν is ὁ Ἰησοῦς and there is no other nominative noun in sight, so the subject of ἐφάνερωσεν must also be ὁ Ἰησοῦς.
4. The referent of αὐτοῦ is ὁ Ἰησοῦς.
5. ἐπίστευσαν: third person plural aorist.
6. The referent of αὐτὸν is ὁ Ἰησοῦς.

While this story is, as noted, a strange miracle because it seems so trivial compared to the later healings and resurrections from the dead, the narrative has some strange twists to it and these are reflected in the grammar, so this story yields some rewards to learners of Koine, enabling them to see how the grammar and the phrasing keep up the suspense. Now that you've done the hard spade work with the grammar, find the passage in your GNT and try reading it through for yourself, more than once, if you need to or would like. Going over what you've wrestled with will help you to build up fluency in reading.