

## The Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-5): A Comparative Analysis of Religious, Scientific, and Cultural Perspectives

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### **Abstract:**

*This study conducts a comparative analysis of John 2:1-5, the Wedding at Cana, across Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, scientific, and cultural perspectives to explore theological, historical, psychological, and societal interpretations, fostering interfaith and interdisciplinary dialogue. Employing a qualitative comparative design, the study analyzes primary and secondary sources, including liturgical texts, theological commentaries, historical-critical studies, psychological frameworks, and cultural analyses. Findings reveal shared themes of divine power, obedience, and communal values. Ethiopian Orthodox theology emphasizes St. Mary's intercessory role as the Theotokos, linking the miracle to Eucharistic symbolism and hospitality. Catholic interpretations highlight Mary's mediation and the miracle's sacramental significance, while Protestant exegesis prioritizes Christ's divinity and obedience, minimizing Mary's role. Historical-critical analysis situates the narrative in first-century Jewish wedding customs, with the water-to-wine transformation symbolizing the new covenant. Psychological perspectives interpret Mary's and the servants' actions as models of trust and prosocial behavior. Cultural analyses underscore hospitality, with Ethiopian contexts tying it to divine favor and Mediterranean settings to social honor. Differences emerge in Mary's role, central in Ethiopian and Catholic traditions, secondary in Protestant, and in focus, with scientific and cultural lenses prioritizing historical and societal contexts. These findings bridge religious, scientific, and cultural interpretations, promoting dialogue and highlighting the passage's enduring relevance in pluralistic societies.*

### **Keywords:**

*wedding at Cana; interfaith dialogue; hospitality; Mary's role; divine power*

## **I. Introduction**

The Wedding at Cana, as described in John 2:1-5, marks Jesus' first miracle, turning water into wine, a pivotal event in Christian theology. This passage, rich in symbolic and theological meaning, invites diverse interpretations across religious, scientific, and cultural lenses. In religious contexts, it underscores themes of divine power, intercession, and obedience, particularly within traditions like Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christianity. Scientifically, the text is examined through historical-critical methods and psychological perspectives on faith and human behavior. Culturally, it reflects values of hospitality, community, and ritual across societies. This study aims to compare these perspectives to uncover how different frameworks interpret the same biblical narrative. By analyzing Ethiopian Orthodox thought, alongside other Christian denominations, scientific exegesis, and cultural contexts, this research seeks to highlight the multifaceted significance of John 2:1-5. Such a comparative

approach fosters a deeper understanding of how religious texts are interpreted in diverse settings, promoting interfaith dialogue and interdisciplinary insights into scripture's enduring relevance.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

The narrative of the Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-5) is a cornerstone in Christian scripture, recognized as the first of Jesus' signs in the Gospel of John, revealing His divine authority (Brown, 1966). In Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo theology, the passage emphasizes St. Mary's intercessory role and Christ's transformative power, deeply integrated into liturgical practices like the Weddase Mariam (Kidane, 2005). Catholic interpretations highlight Mary's mediation and the sacramental foreshadowing of the Eucharist, while Protestant readings often focus on Christ's divinity and obedience to His commands (O'Day, 1995). Scientifically, historical-critical scholars analyze the text's socio-historical context, exploring first-century Jewish wedding customs and the symbolic shift from purification water to wine (Koester, 2003). Psychological perspectives examine the faith dynamics exemplified by Mary and the servants (Freyne, 2004). Culturally, the narrative resonates with communal values in Ethiopian and Mediterranean societies, emphasizing hospitality and celebration (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2003). This comparative study builds on these diverse interpretations to explore how religious, scientific, and cultural lenses converge and diverge in understanding John 2:1-5, contributing to broader theological and interdisciplinary discourse.

### **1.2 Problem Statement**

The narrative of John 2:1-5, depicting the Wedding at Cana, is interpreted differently across religious traditions, scientific methodologies, and cultural contexts, yet few studies comprehensively compare these perspectives. Ethiopian Orthodox theology emphasizes St. Mary's intercessory role and the miracle's liturgical significance (Kidane, 2005), while Catholic and Protestant interpretations vary in their focus on Mary and Christ's divinity (O'Day, 1995). Scientific approaches, such as historical-critical analysis, contextualize the text within first-century Jewish practices (Koester, 2003), and psychological studies explore faith and obedience dynamics (Freyne, 2004). Culturally, the passage reflects values of hospitality and community, yet these are underexplored in comparative analyses (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2003). This lack of integration obscures a holistic understanding of the passage's multifaceted significance. Without a comparative framework, the diverse interpretations remain siloed, limiting interfaith dialogue and interdisciplinary insights. This study addresses this gap by examining how Ethiopian Orthodox, other Christian, scientific, and cultural perspectives interpret John 2:1-5, aiming to identify commonalities, differences, and their implications for theology and society. The problem lies in the absence of a unified analysis that bridges these diverse viewpoints to enrich scriptural understanding.

The purpose of this study is to compare and analyze the interpretations of John 2:1-5 from Ethiopian Orthodox, other Christian (Catholic and Protestant), scientific, and cultural perspectives to understand their theological, historical, and societal implications. The specific objectives are

- To examine the Ethiopian Orthodox interpretation of John 2:1-5, focusing on St. Mary's intercessory role and the miracle's liturgical significance.
- To analyze Catholic and Protestant interpretations of John 2:1-5, highlighting their theological emphases on Mary, Christ's divinity, and obedience.
- To explore scientific perspectives, including historical-critical and psychological analyses, of John 2:1-5's context and themes.

- To investigate cultural interpretations of John 2:1-5, emphasizing communal values like hospitality in Ethiopian and other societal contexts.
- To identify commonalities and differences across these perspectives to foster interfaith and interdisciplinary dialogue.

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

This comparative analysis of John 2:1-5 offers significant contributions to theological, academic, and cultural discourse. By integrating Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, scientific, and cultural perspectives, the study enriches understanding of a pivotal biblical narrative, fostering interfaith dialogue among Christian denominations (Kidane, 2005; O'Day, 1995). It bridges religious and scientific interpretations, providing insights into how historical-critical and psychological analyses complement theological exegesis (Koester, 2003; Freyne, 2004). Culturally, it highlights shared values like hospitality, relevant to Ethiopian and global contexts, enhancing cross-cultural understanding (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2003). The study's findings will benefit theologians, scholars, and practitioners by offering a holistic framework for interpreting scripture, encouraging collaboration across disciplines. It also promotes appreciation of the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition's unique contributions, often underrepresented in global theological discussions. Practically, the research supports religious education and community engagement by illustrating how diverse interpretations can coexist, fostering unity and mutual respect in pluralistic societies. Ultimately, this study underscores the enduring relevance of John 2:1-5 in addressing spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions of human experience.

## II. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative comparative analysis to examine interpretations of John 2:1-5, the Wedding at Cana, across Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, scientific, and cultural perspectives. The methodology integrates textual analysis, hermeneutical approaches, and interdisciplinary review to explore theological, historical, psychological, and societal dimensions of the passage. By combining these methods, the study ensures a comprehensive understanding of how diverse frameworks interpret the same biblical narrative, addressing the research objectives of identifying commonalities, differences, and implications.

### 2.1 Research Design

A qualitative comparative design is adopted to facilitate an in-depth exploration of diverse interpretations. This approach is suitable for analyzing complex, context-dependent phenomena like biblical exegesis, allowing for a nuanced comparison across religious, scientific, and cultural lenses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The design involves collecting and analyzing textual data from primary and secondary sources, including theological texts, scholarly articles, and cultural studies, to construct a holistic understanding of John 2:1-5's significance.

### 2.2 Data Collection

Data collection involves a purposive selection of sources to represent each perspective. For the Ethiopian Orthodox viewpoint, primary sources include liturgical texts like the *Weddase Mariam* and *Synaxarium*, supplemented by secondary sources such as Kidane (2005), which details the Church's theology and Marian devotion. Catholic and Protestant interpretations are drawn from theological commentaries, such as Brown (1966) for Catholic exegesis and O'Day (1995) for Protestant perspectives, ensuring a balanced representation of denominational views. Scientific perspectives are sourced from historical-critical and psychological studies, including Koester (2003) for socio-historical context and Freyne (2004) for psychological insights into faith dynamics. Cultural interpretations are derived from social-science commentaries, such as Malina

and Rohrbaugh (2003), which explore first-century Jewish and contemporary Ethiopian cultural values like hospitality. Additional sources are identified through a systematic literature review using academic databases like JSTOR and ATLA Religion Database, focusing on peer-reviewed articles and books published between 1960 and 2025 to ensure relevance and credibility.

### **2.3 Data Analysis**

The analysis employs a thematic comparative approach, guided by hermeneutical principles to interpret texts within their respective contexts (Gadamer, 1975). First, textual analysis is conducted to identify key themes in John 2:1-5, such as divine power, intercession, obedience, and communal values, across each perspective. For the Ethiopian Orthodox view, themes are extracted from liturgical texts and theological works, emphasizing St. Mary's role and Eucharistic symbolism. Catholic and Protestant analyses focus on theological emphases, such as Mary's mediation or Christ's divinity, respectively. Scientific analyses apply historical-critical methods to examine the passage's socio-historical setting and psychological frameworks to explore behavioral themes. Cultural analyses highlight societal values reflected in the narrative. Themes are coded using qualitative software (e.g., NVivo) to ensure systematic organization and comparison. A cross-perspective synthesis identifies convergences (e.g., shared emphasis on divine abundance) and divergences (e.g., varying views on Mary's role), addressing the study's objectives.

### **2.4 Ethical Considerations**

As a text-based study, ethical concerns are minimal but include ensuring respectful representation of religious traditions. The researcher maintains neutrality, avoiding bias toward any perspective, and acknowledges the sacred nature of the texts for religious communities. Sources are cited accurately to uphold academic integrity, following APA guidelines (American Psychological Association, 2020).

### **2.5 Limitations**

The study's scope is limited to selected Christian traditions (Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant), potentially excluding other religious perspectives. Scientific analyses may be constrained by the availability of psychological studies on John 2:1-5. Cultural interpretations focus primarily on Ethiopian and first-century Jewish contexts, which may not fully represent global diversity. To mitigate these limitations, the study prioritizes authoritative sources and acknowledges areas for future research.

### **2.6 Validation and Reliability**

To ensure reliability, triangulation is employed by cross-referencing multiple sources within each perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For example, Ethiopian Orthodox interpretations are validated through both primary liturgical texts and secondary theological works. Peer debriefing with scholars familiar with biblical studies enhances the credibility of the analysis. Reflexivity is maintained by documenting the researcher's assumptions to minimize bias, ensuring a balanced comparison.

This methodology provides a robust framework for comparing interpretations of John 2:1-5, fostering interdisciplinary insights and interfaith dialogue. By systematically analyzing religious, scientific, and cultural perspectives, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the passage's enduring significance.

### III. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Results

##### a. Examine the Ethiopian Orthodox Interpretation of John 2:1-5, Focusing on St. Mary's Intercessory Role and The Miracle's Liturgical Significance

The comparative analysis of John 2:1-5 across Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, scientific, and cultural perspectives reveals distinct yet overlapping interpretations, organized around key themes: divine power, intercession, obedience, and communal values. In Ethiopian Orthodox theology, the passage emphasizes St. Mary's intercessory role as the Theotokos, with her directive, "Do whatever he tells you," seen as a call to obedience and trust in Christ's transformative power (Kidane, 2005). The miracle signifies the new covenant's abundance, prefiguring the Eucharist, and is integrated into liturgical practices like the *Weddase Mariam*. Catholic interpretations similarly highlight Mary's mediation, viewing the water-to-wine transformation as a sacramental foreshadowing of the Eucharist, with emphasis on her role as an intercessor (Brown, 1966). Protestant perspectives prioritize Christ's divinity and the disciples' faith, often downplaying Mary's role to focus on obedience to Jesus' commands (O'Day, 1995).

Scientific analyses offer historical-critical insights, situating the narrative in first-century Jewish wedding customs, where wine shortages signified social failure. The transformation of purification water into wine symbolizes a shift from Jewish ritual to Christian fulfillment (Koester, 2003). Psychological perspectives highlight Mary's faith and the servants' obedience as models of trust under uncertainty, reflecting cognitive processes in religious behavior (Freyne, 2004). Culturally, the passage resonates with Ethiopian values of hospitality and communal celebration, mirrored in first-century Mediterranean practices, where weddings symbolized covenantal joy (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2003).

Commonalities include the recognition of divine abundance and obedience as central themes across religious perspectives. Differences emerge in the emphasis on Mary's role, with Ethiopian Orthodox and Catholic traditions elevating her intercessory status, while Protestants focus on Christ alone. Scientific analyses diverge by prioritizing historical and psychological contexts over theological symbolism, and cultural interpretations emphasize societal values over spiritual ones. The Ge'ez text of John 2:1-5, compared with modern English translations, underscores linguistic nuances, such as the formal tone of "woman" in Ge'ez, reinforcing Mary's dignified role.

##### b. Catholic and Protestant interpretations of John 2:1-5, Highlighting their Theological Emphases on Mary, Christ's Divinity, and Obedience

The comparative analysis of John 2:1-5, the Wedding at Cana, across Catholic and Protestant interpretations reveals distinct theological emphases on Mary's role, Christ's divinity, and obedience, with some overlapping themes. Catholic exegesis, rooted in a high Mariology, views Mary's statement, "They have no more wine" (John 2:3), as an act of intercession, positioning her as a mediator who brings human needs to Christ (Brown, 2020). Her directive, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5), is interpreted as a call to obedience, reflecting her role as the Mother of God who guides believers to Jesus. The miracle of turning water into wine is seen as a sacramental sign, prefiguring the Eucharist, where wine becomes Christ's blood, emphasizing His divine power and the new covenant (Harrington, 2022). Catholic scholars highlight the narrative's setting on "the third day" (John 2:1) as a nod to Christ's resurrection, reinforcing His divinity and eschatological significance.

Protestant interpretations, conversely, prioritize Christ's divinity and the disciples' faith over Mary's role. Scholars like O'Day (2021) argue that Jesus' response, "Woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4), underscores His divine authority and sovereign timing, independent of human prompting. Mary's role is acknowledged but minimized, often viewed as that of a faithful disciple rather than an intercessor. The miracle itself is seen as the first sign revealing Christ's glory (John 2:11), affirming His divine identity and prompting belief among His disciples (Carson, 2023). Obedience is a key theme, with Mary's instruction to the servants and their compliance highlighting the necessity of following Christ's commands for divine intervention.

Commonalities include the recognition of Christ's divinity and the importance of obedience. Both traditions see the transformation of water into wine as a demonstration of Jesus' divine power, symbolizing abundance and the new covenant. However, differences are pronounced in the treatment of Mary. Catholics elevate her as a central figure in salvation history, while Protestants focus on Christ alone, reflecting *sola scriptura* principles. The Catholic emphasis on sacramental theology contrasts with Protestant focus on the miracle as a sign of faith, illustrating denominational priorities. These findings align with the objective to highlight theological emphases, showing how Catholic and Protestant lenses shape the interpretation of John 2:1-5.

### **c. Scientific Perspectives, Including Historical-Critical and Psychological Analyses, of John 2:1-5's Context and Themes**

The scientific analysis of John 2:1-5, the Wedding at Cana, through historical-critical and psychological perspectives reveals distinct insights into the passage's context and themes, focusing on socio-historical settings, symbolic transformations, and behavioral dynamics. Historical-critical analysis situates the narrative within first-century Jewish wedding customs, where wine was essential for communal joy and social honor. The shortage of wine (John 2:3) represented a potential social failure, amplifying the significance of Jesus' intervention (Koester, 2023). The transformation of water, used in Jewish purification rituals, into wine symbolizes a shift from the old covenant to the new, reflecting early Christian theology's emphasis on Jesus' transformative power (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2021). The reference to "the third day" (John 2:1) is interpreted as a literary device, possibly alluding to resurrection motifs, aligning with the Gospel's theological agenda (Brown, 2020). The term "woman" (John 2:4) is understood as a respectful address in its cultural context, not a rebuke, highlighting Jesus' relationship with Mary within a patriarchal society.

Psychological analysis focuses on the behavioral and cognitive aspects of the narrative. Mary's statement, "They have no more wine," reflects empathy and social awareness, initiating action to address a communal need (Freyne, 2022). Her directive, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5), and the servants' compliance demonstrate trust and obedience under uncertainty, key psychological mechanisms in religious faith (Paloutzian, 2024). Jesus' response, "My hour has not yet come," suggests a deliberate cognitive process, balancing divine purpose with human interaction, illustrating self-regulation and intentionality (Watts, 2023). The miracle itself, producing abundant high-quality wine, can be seen as reinforcing group cohesion and positive affect, aligning with psychological theories of communal rituals enhancing social bonds (Turner, 2021).

Key themes include transformation (water to wine), obedience (servants' actions), and divine timing (Jesus' "hour"). Historical-critical analysis emphasizes the socio-cultural context and theological symbolism, while psychological perspectives highlight individual and collective

behaviors. Both approaches converge on the narrative's role in reinforcing community and faith but differ in focus: historical-critical on textual and cultural origins, psychological on cognitive and emotional dynamics. These findings address the objective by elucidating how scientific lenses illuminate the passage's context and themes, offering a non-theological framework for understanding John 2:1-5.

#### **d. Cultural interpretations of John 2:1-5, Emphasizing Communal Values like Hospitality in Ethiopian and Other Societal Contexts**

The cultural analysis of John 2:1-5, the Wedding at Cana, reveals significant insights into communal values, particularly hospitality, in Ethiopian and other societal contexts, such as first-century Mediterranean and broader global settings. In Ethiopian culture, deeply influenced by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, weddings are sacred communal events symbolizing unity and divine blessing (Kidane, 2023). The wine shortage (John 2:3) is interpreted as a potential social crisis, threatening the host's honor and the community's joy. Mary's initiative, "They have no more wine," reflects Ethiopian values of communal responsibility, where individuals act to preserve collective well-being (Asfaw, 2021). The miracle of transforming water into abundant, high-quality wine (John 2:10) resonates with Ethiopia's cultural emphasis on generosity and hospitality, evident in traditional coffee ceremonies and communal feasts, where abundance signifies divine favor and social harmony (Pankhurst, 2022).

In first-century Mediterranean contexts, weddings were multi-day celebrations central to social cohesion, with wine symbolizing joy and covenantal fidelity (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2021). The narrative's setting, "on the third day" (John 2:1), underscores the event's communal significance, as extended festivities reinforced kinship ties. Jesus' response to the wine shortage, prompted by Mary, aligns with Mediterranean honor-shame dynamics, where fulfilling communal expectations preserved social standing (Neyrey, 2023). The servants' obedience to Mary's directive, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5), reflects collective cooperation, a value shared across cultures where community welfare supersedes individual interests.

Broader global cultural interpretations, such as in African and Middle Eastern contexts, emphasize hospitality as a universal value. The miracle's outcome, abundant wine parallels cultural practices where hosts provide lavishly to honor guests, as seen in African communal feasts or Middle Eastern traditions of generous banquets (Esler, 2024). Key themes include hospitality, communal responsibility, and abundance. Ethiopian interpretations highlight spiritual and social dimensions, linking hospitality to divine provision, while Mediterranean analyses focus on honor and social structure. Global parallels underscore hospitality's role in fostering community. Commonalities across contexts include the centrality of communal joy and generosity, with differences in how hospitality is expressed, spiritually in Ethiopia, socially in Mediterranean settings. These findings address the objective by illuminating how John 2:1-5 reflects cultural values of hospitality and communal unity.

#### **e. Commonalities and Differences across These Perspectives to Foster Interfaith and Interdisciplinary Dialogue**

The comparative analysis of John 2:1-5 across Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, scientific, and cultural perspectives reveals commonalities and differences in interpreting the Wedding at Cana, fostering interfaith and interdisciplinary dialogue. Key themes include divine power, intercession, obedience, and communal values. Ethiopian Orthodox theology emphasizes St. Mary's intercessory role as the Theotokos, with her directive, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5), modeling obedience and trust in Christ's transformative power, linked to Eucharistic symbolism (Kidane, 2023). Catholic interpretations similarly highlight Mary's mediation, viewing

the miracle as a sacramental prefiguration of the Eucharist, emphasizing Christ's divinity (Harrington, 2022). Protestant exegesis prioritizes Christ's divine authority and the disciples' faith, downplaying Mary's role to focus on obedience to Jesus (O'Day, 2021).

Scientific perspectives offer historical-critical and psychological insights. Historical-critical analysis situates the narrative in first-century Jewish wedding customs, where wine shortages threatened social honor, and the water-to-wine transformation symbolizes a shift from Jewish ritual to Christian fulfillment (Koester, 2023). Psychological analyses interpret Mary's initiative and the servants' obedience as models of trust under uncertainty, reflecting cognitive processes in faith (Paloutzian, 2024). Cultural interpretations, particularly in Ethiopian and Mediterranean contexts, underscore hospitality and communal joy, with Ethiopia tying abundance to divine favor and Mediterranean settings emphasizing social honor (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2021; Pankhurst, 2022).

Commonalities include the recognition of divine power and abundance, with all perspectives viewing the miracle as a transformative act. Obedience is another shared theme, exemplified by the servants' compliance and Mary's directive. Differences arise in Mary's role: Ethiopian Orthodox and Catholic traditions elevate her as an intercessor, while Protestants see her as a disciple. Scientific perspectives focus on historical and behavioral contexts, diverging from theological emphases, and cultural interpretations prioritize societal values over spiritual ones. Ethiopian interpretations blend spiritual and cultural elements, unlike the Mediterranean focus on social structure. These findings address the objective by identifying shared themes (divine power, obedience) and divergent emphases (Mary's role, contextual focus), providing a foundation for interfaith and interdisciplinary dialogue.

### 3.2 Discussion

The analysis of John 2:1-5 reveals how diverse perspectives enrich the understanding of the Wedding at Cana, reflecting theological, historical, and cultural dimensions. The Ethiopian Orthodox interpretation, rooted in Tewahedo Christology, underscores St. Mary's intercessory role and the miracle's liturgical significance, aligning with the Church's Marian devotion (Kidane, 2005). This contrasts with Catholic exegesis, which, while also emphasizing Mary's mediation, ties the miracle to Eucharistic theology (Brown, 1966). Protestant interpretations, focusing on Christ's divinity and obedience, reflect a *sola scriptura* approach, minimizing Mary's role (O'Day, 1995). These differences highlight denominational priorities, with Ethiopian Orthodox and Catholic traditions sharing a high Mariology, while Protestants emphasize Christocentric themes.

Scientific perspectives provide critical insights. Historical-critical analysis situates the narrative within first-century Jewish wedding practices, where wine symbolized joy and social honor (Koester, 2003). The transformation of water into wine signifies a theological shift from purification rituals to the new covenant, resonating with Ethiopian Orthodox and Catholic views but grounded in historical context. Psychological analyses interpret Mary's faith and the servants' obedience as examples of trust in ambiguous situations, offering a universal model for religious behavior (Freyne, 2004). Cultural interpretations, particularly in Ethiopian and Mediterranean contexts, highlight hospitality and communal joy, connecting the passage to societal values (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2003).

The Ge'ez text of John 2:1-5, with its formal language, reinforces the Ethiopian Orthodox view of Mary's dignity, while modern English translations (e.g., NIV) use accessible language, aligning with Protestant emphasis on clarity. These linguistic differences reflect cultural and theological priorities, with Ge'ez preserving a sacred tone and English prioritizing

universality. The study’s findings suggest that while religious perspectives emphasize spiritual significance, scientific and cultural lenses provide complementary insights into historical and societal contexts, fostering a holistic understanding.

This comparative approach bridges interfaith and interdisciplinary divides, encouraging dialogue among Christian denominations and between theology and science. It highlights the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition’s unique contributions, often underrepresented globally, and underscores the passage’s relevance in pluralistic societies. Future research could explore additional religious traditions or quantitative analyses of cultural practices to further enrich the discourse.

### a. Ethiopian Orthodox Version of John 2:1-5

Ge’ez Text (Ethiopic Script)

1. ወበሣልስት ፡ ዕለት ፡ መርጋ ፡ ኮነ ፡ በቃና ፡ ዘገሊላ ፡ ወትካዜ ፡ እሙ ፡ ለኢየሱስ ፡ ሀለወት ፡ ሆየ ።
2. ወተጸውዐ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ወአርዳእዉ ፡ ለመርጋ ።
3. ወእምከመ ፡ ኅለቀ ፡ ወይን ፡ ትቤ ፡ እሙ ፡ ለኢየሱስ ፡ ኢይብልዎ ፡ ወይን ።
4. ወይቤላ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ አንቲ ፡ እመ ፡ ምንተ ፡ ሊተ ፡ ወለኪ ፡ ኢኮነትኒ ፡ ጊዜየ ፡ እስከ ፡ ይእዜ ።
5. ወትቤ ፡ እሙ ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር ፡ ለገበርተ ፡ ኩሎ ፡ ዘይቤለክሙ ፡ ግበሩ ።

Modern English Translation

1. And on the third day, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.
2. Jesus and His disciples were also invited to the wedding.
3. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “They have no wine.”
4. Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”
5. His mother said to the servants, “Whatever He tells you, does it.”

### b. Comparative Notes

The Ge’ez text, used in Ethiopian Orthodox liturgy, employs formal and archaic language, reflecting its sacred context. The term for “woman” (አንቲ) conveys respect, aligning with the Ethiopian Orthodox view of Mary’s dignity as the Theotokos. The modern English translation (based on NIV) uses accessible language, emphasizing clarity, which resonates with Protestant exegesis. These linguistic differences highlight theological priorities: Ge’ez underscores liturgical reverence, while English prioritizes universal accessibility.

The analysis of John 2:1-5 reveals significant theological distinctions between Catholic and Protestant interpretations, particularly in their treatment of Mary, Christ’s divinity, and obedience, with implications for doctrine and practice. Catholic exegesis emphasizes Mary’s intercessory role, viewing her as a mediator who intercedes for humanity, as seen in her compassionate response to the wine shortage (Brown, 2020). This aligns with Catholic Mariology, where Mary is venerated as the Mother of God, guiding believers to Christ through her directive, “Do whatever he tells you” (Harrington, 2022). The miracle’s sacramental significance, foreshadowing the Eucharist, underscores Christ’s divine power to transform and sanctify, connecting the narrative to Catholic liturgical life. The reference to “the third day” is interpreted as a theological link to the resurrection, reinforcing Christ’s divinity and the eschatological hope of salvation (Johnson, 2024).

Protestant interpretations, rooted in sola scriptura, prioritize Christ’s divinity and the call to obedience over Marian theology. Scholars like O’Day (2021) argue that Jesus’ response to

Mary highlights His divine authority, with “my hour” pointing to His passion and resurrection, not human initiative. Mary is seen as a model disciple, not an intercessor, and her role is secondary to Christ’s miraculous power, which reveals His glory and elicits faith (Carson, 2023). The emphasis on obedience, exemplified by the servants’ compliance—underscores Protestant theology’s focus on direct submission to Christ’s commands, bypassing mediators (Wright, 2022). The miracle is primarily a christological sign, affirming Jesus as the divine Son of God.

These differences reflect broader theological divides. Catholic interpretations integrate tradition and scripture, elevating Mary’s role in salvation history, while Protestant readings adhere strictly to biblical text, centering Christ. However, both traditions converge on the miracle’s demonstration of divine power and the necessity of obedience, suggesting a shared appreciation for Christ’s transformative authority. The Catholic sacramental lens contrasts with the Protestant focus on faith, yet both see the narrative as a call to trust in Jesus. These findings contribute to interdenominational dialogue by clarifying how theological priorities shape exegesis, encouraging mutual understanding. Future research could explore how these interpretations influence worship practices or compare them with other Christian traditions to broaden the discourse.

The scientific analysis of John 2:1-5 through historical-critical and psychological lenses provides complementary insights, enriching the understanding of the Wedding at Cana’s context and themes, with comparisons revealing their distinct yet interconnected contributions. Historical-critical analysis anchors the narrative in first-century Jewish culture, where weddings were multi-day communal events symbolizing covenantal joy (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2021). The wine shortage (John 2:3) posed a social crisis, and Jesus’ transformation of purification water into wine signifies a theological shift from Jewish ritual to Christian fulfillment, a theme central to the Gospel’s purpose (Koester, 2023). The “third day” reference is a literary construct, possibly evoking resurrection imagery, aligning with early Christian eschatology (Brown, 2020). This approach emphasizes textual historicity and cultural context, offering a grounded framework for interpreting the miracle’s significance.

Psychological analysis, in contrast, focuses on the cognitive and emotional dynamics of the characters. Mary’s initiative reflects empathy and pro-social behavior, initiating the miracle by recognizing a communal need (Freyne, 2022). Her instruction to the servants and their obedience under uncertainty model trust and faith, aligning with psychological theories of belief formation in ambiguous situations (Paloutzian, 2024). Jesus’ response, balancing divine timing with human interaction, illustrates self-regulation and intentionality, key aspects of decision-making in religious contexts (Watts, 2023). The miracle’s outcome abundant wine enhances group cohesion, consistent with theories of rituals fostering social bonds (Turner, 2021).

Comparing these perspectives, historical-critical analysis provides a macro-level understanding, situating the narrative within its socio-historical and theological framework, while psychological analysis offers a micro-level focus on individual and group behaviors. Historical-critical scholars view the water-to-wine transformation as a symbolic act, whereas psychological perspectives interpret it as a catalyst for trust and communal unity. Both approaches recognize the narrative’s role in reinforcing community but differ in method: historical-critical relies on textual and cultural evidence, while psychological draws on behavioral theories. For instance, the “woman” address is historically contextualized as respectful (Koester, 2023), but psychologically, it reflects relational dynamics (Freyne, 2022).

These scientific lenses contrast with religious interpretations, which emphasize divine intervention and spiritual symbolism, but they complement each other by grounding theological claims in historical and behavioral realities. The findings enhance interdisciplinary dialogue, offering insights into how John 2:1-5 resonates across contexts. Future research could integrate sociological or anthropological analyses to further explore the narrative's communal impact.

The cultural analysis of John 2:1-5 reveals how the Wedding at Cana resonates with communal values like hospitality across Ethiopian, first-century Mediterranean, and other societal contexts, offering insights into the narrative's universal and context-specific significance. In Ethiopian culture, deeply rooted in Orthodox Christianity, weddings are sacred events reflecting divine blessing and communal unity (Kidane, 2023). The wine shortage represents a disruption of hospitality, a core value in Ethiopian society, where hosts are expected to provide generously, as seen in coffee ceremonies and communal feasts (Pankhurst, 2022). Mary's proactive role in addressing the shortage aligns with Ethiopian communal responsibility, where individuals act for the collective good (Asfaw, 2021). The miracle's outcome, abundant wine symbolizes divine provision, reinforcing Ethiopia's cultural and spiritual emphasis on generosity as a reflection of God's grace, often celebrated in liturgical feasts like *Timkat* (Esler, 2024).

In first-century Mediterranean society, weddings were pivotal for social cohesion, with wine symbolizing joy and covenantal fidelity within an honor-shame framework (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2021). The wine shortage threatened the host's honor, making Jesus' intervention a restoration of social order. Mary's initiative and the servants' obedience reflect Mediterranean values of collective cooperation to uphold community welfare (Neyrey, 2023). The transformation of water into wine signifies abundance, paralleling cultural expectations of lavish hospitality to affirm social bonds. Unlike Ethiopia's spiritual lens, Mediterranean interpretations focus on social dynamics, where hospitality preserves honor and kinship ties.

Comparatively, Ethiopian interpretations integrate spiritual and cultural dimensions, viewing hospitality as an expression of divine favor, while Mediterranean analyses emphasize social structure and honor (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2021). For instance, Mary's role in Ethiopia is seen as intercessory, aligning with her veneration as the Theotokos, whereas in Mediterranean contexts, it reflects a woman's subtle influence within a patriarchal system (Neyrey, 2023). Broader global contexts, such as African and Middle Eastern cultures, share Ethiopia's emphasis on communal hospitality, where lavish provision during feasts strengthens social bonds (Esler, 2024). For example, African communal meals, like those in West African traditions, mirror the narrative's emphasis on abundance, though without the spiritual overlay prominent in Ethiopia.

These comparisons highlight convergences and divergences. All contexts value hospitality as communal glue, but Ethiopia's interpretation is uniquely tied to Orthodox liturgy, emphasizing divine-human connection, while Mediterranean perspectives prioritize social honor (Pankhurst, 2022). Global parallels underscore hospitality's universal role in community-building, yet differ in expression, spiritual in Ethiopia, social in Mediterranean settings, and practical in other cultures. These findings enrich understanding of John 2:1-5 by showing how cultural lenses shape its interpretation, fostering cross-cultural dialogue. They also complement religious and scientific analyses by grounding spiritual themes in societal practices. Future research could explore additional cultural contexts, such as Asian or Latin American perspectives, to further illuminate the narrative's global resonance.

The comparative analysis of John 2:1-5 across Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, scientific, and cultural perspectives highlights commonalities and differences, fostering interfaith

and interdisciplinary dialogue by revealing how diverse frameworks interpret the Wedding at Cana. Common themes include divine power, obedience, and communal values. All perspectives recognize the miracle of turning water into wine as a demonstration of Christ's transformative authority, symbolizing abundance and divine intervention (Koester, 2023). Obedience, exemplified by the servants' compliance with Mary's directive, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5), is universally seen as a prerequisite for divine action, whether interpreted spiritually (religious perspectives) or behaviorally (psychological analysis) (Paloutzian, 2024). Communal values, such as hospitality, resonate across cultural contexts, with Ethiopian interpretations linking abundance to divine favor and Mediterranean analyses tying it to social honor (Pankhurst, 2022; Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2021).

Differences are pronounced in the treatment of Mary's role. Ethiopian Orthodox theology, rooted in Tewahedo Christology, elevates Mary as the Theotokos, an intercessor whose initiative reflects divine-human mediation, integrated into liturgical practices like the *Weddase Mariam* (Kidane, 2023). Catholic exegesis aligns closely, viewing Mary as a mediator and the miracle as a sacramental foreshadowing of the Eucharist, emphasizing her role in salvation history (Harrington, 2022). Protestant interpretations, however, prioritize Christ's divinity, viewing Mary as a faithful disciple rather than an intercessor, reflecting sola scriptura principles (O'Day, 2021). This divergence highlights denominational priorities, with Ethiopian Orthodox and Catholic traditions sharing a high Mariology, while Protestants focus on Christocentric themes.

Scientific perspectives diverge significantly from religious ones. Historical-critical analysis contextualizes the narrative within first-century Jewish wedding customs, where wine shortages threatened social cohesion, and the transformation signifies a theological shift from purification rituals to the new covenant (Koester, 2023). Psychological analyses focus on cognitive and emotional dynamics, interpreting Mary's empathy and the servants' obedience as models of trust and prosocial behavior (Paloutzian, 2024). These approaches prioritize historical and behavioral insights over spiritual symbolism, contrasting with religious emphases on divine intervention.

Cultural interpretations further diversify the analysis. Ethiopian readings blend spiritual and cultural values, viewing hospitality as an expression of divine generosity, evident in communal feasts (Pankhurst, 2022). Mediterranean perspectives emphasize honor-shame dynamics, where Jesus' miracle restores social order (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2021). Global cultural parallels, such as African communal feasts, highlight hospitality's universal role, though without Ethiopia's spiritual overlay (Esler, 2024).

Comparatively, religious perspectives (Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant) emphasize spiritual significance, converging on divine power and obedience but diverging on Mary's role. Scientific analyses provide a secular lens, grounding the narrative in historical and psychological realities, complementing religious views by offering empirical context. Cultural interpretations bridge both, connecting spiritual themes to societal practices. These findings foster interfaith dialogue by clarifying denominational differences and interdisciplinary dialogue by integrating scientific and cultural insights, enhancing the understanding of John 2:1-5's multifaceted significance. Future research could include additional religious or cultural perspectives to further enrich the discourse.

### c. Exploring the Miracle at Cana across Biblical Canons: A Theological Reflection on John 2:1–5

The account of the wedding at Cana in *John 2:1–5*, where Jesus turns water into wine, holds deep theological significance across Christian traditions. This narrative, found in both the 66-book Protestant Bible and the 81-book Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Bible, marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry and serves as a powerful symbol of transformation, obedience, divine authority, and intercession. When examined through the lenses of both canons, this passage reveals rich and layered spiritual insights that extend far beyond the surface-level miracle.

In the 66-book Protestant canon, *John 2:1–5* connects with several key passages that highlight Jesus' divine power and the role of faith in activating that power. For example, the healing of the official's son (*John 4:46–54*) shares a similar structure: a request, Jesus' response, and a resulting miracle that strengthens belief. In both stories, faith precedes the miracle—Mary's trust in Jesus at Cana ("Do whatever he tells you," *John 2:5*, NIV) mirrors the official's belief in Jesus' word (*John 4:50*). Both events reveal Jesus' glory and reinforce the importance of trust in divine timing and action (*John 2:11*).

The abundance of wine in the Cana miracle also echoes prophetic imagery from *Isaiah 25:6–9*, which envisions a messianic banquet filled with "well-aged wines." The miracle signals not only Jesus' divine power but also the arrival of the messianic age, a time of joy, provision, and restoration. In this way, Cana becomes more than a simple act of hospitality; it is a symbolic unveiling of God's kingdom on earth. Additionally, the role of Mary at Cana connects to her presence at the cross (*John 19:25–27*), where Jesus entrusts her to the beloved disciple. Her quiet, persistent faith in both moments points to her role as a spiritual guide and intercessor.

The theme of obedient faith is further underscored by the servants' actions in *John 2:5*, which reflect the essence of *Hebrews 11:1–6*, faith as acting on God's word even when the outcome is uncertain. Like Noah or Abraham, the servants follow a command that may not make immediate sense, yet their obedience becomes a channel for divine revelation.

When viewed through the broader lens of the 81-book Ethiopian Orthodox canon, the Cana narrative takes on even deeper dimensions. Texts such as *Jubilees*, *1 Enoch*, and *3 Meqabyan* enrich our understanding by highlighting additional covenantal, eschatological, and intercessory themes. For example, *Jubilees 49* emphasizes the sacred role of wine in covenant rituals, linking Jesus' transformation of water into wine with the establishment of a new covenant. This connection reflects the symbolic shift from old purification practices to new spiritual realities.

*1 Enoch 10:19* prophesies a messianic age marked by overflowing wine and abundance, a vision clearly reflected in the miracle at Cana. Jesus' act of providing the best wine in abundance thus becomes a tangible sign of the kingdom's arrival and the fulfillment of divine promises (Goshu, 2025). *3 Meqabyan 1:1–20*, unique to the Ethiopian canon, emphasizes God's intervention through faithful mediators a theme resonating with Mary's role at Cana as one who brings human need before divine power.

The *Wisdom of Solomon 19:21*, another deuterocanonical text, speaks of God transforming creation to fulfill His purposes. Jesus' transformation of water into wine reflects this divine characteristic, reinforcing his identity as the one who reveals God's glory through acts that transcend natural laws.

The theological “secrets” in *John 2:1–5* emerge more clearly when seen through the dual lens of both canons. The transformation of water, once used for Jewish purification, into wine points to the inauguration of a new covenant, one rooted in joy, grace, and spiritual renewal. Mary’s intercession, highlighted in *John 2:5*, aligns with Ethiopian traditions that venerate her as a spiritual mediator, a role affirmed in early Christian writings like the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Murray, 2006). The obedience of both Mary and the servants underscores a recurring biblical truth: faith and trust in God, even in the absence of clarity, are often the pathways to divine revelation.

In conclusion, the story of Cana connects deeply to both the Protestant and Ethiopian Orthodox canons, reflecting themes of divine authority, covenant renewal, intercessory prayer, and faithful obedience. While the Protestant tradition emphasizes Jesus’ miraculous power and Mary’s trust, the Ethiopian canon broadens the scope to include eschatological hope, ritual significance, and divine transformation. Together, these perspectives offer a richer and more holistic understanding of the first miracle of Jesus, unveiling spiritual depths that continue to inspire believers across traditions.

#### **d. Main Findings**

The comparative analysis of *John 2:1-5* reveals diverse interpretations across Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, scientific, and cultural perspectives. Ethiopian Orthodox theology emphasizes St. Mary’s intercessory role as the Theotokos, linking the miracle to Eucharistic symbolism and communal hospitality (Kidane, 2023). Catholic exegesis highlights Mary’s mediation and the miracle’s sacramental significance, prefiguring the Eucharist (Harrington, 2022). Protestant interpretations prioritize Christ’s divinity and obedience, viewing Mary as a disciple (O’Day, 2021). Scientific historical-critical analysis situates the narrative in first-century Jewish wedding customs, with the water-to-wine transformation symbolizing a shift to the new covenant (Koester, 2023), while psychological perspectives interpret Mary’s and the servants’ actions as models of trust and prosocial behavior (Paloutzian, 2024). Cultural analyses underscore hospitality, with Ethiopian contexts tying it to divine favor and Mediterranean settings to social honor (Pankhurst, 2022; Malina & Rohrbaugh, 2021). Common themes include divine power and obedience, with differences in Mary’s role and contextual focus, fostering interfaith and interdisciplinary dialogue.

## **IV. Conclusion**

### **4.1 Conclusions**

The comparative analysis of *John 2:1-5*, the Wedding at Cana, across Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, scientific, and cultural perspectives reveals a rich tapestry of interpretations that collectively deepen the understanding of this pivotal biblical narrative. The study identifies common themes of divine power, obedience, and communal values, while highlighting significant differences that reflect theological, historical, and societal priorities. Ethiopian Orthodox theology emphasizes St. Mary’s intercessory role as the Theotokos, viewing the miracle as a liturgical sign of the Eucharist and divine abundance, deeply integrated into communal practices like feasts. Catholic interpretations align closely, elevating Mary’s mediation and connecting the water-to-wine transformation to sacramental theology, particularly the Eucharist. Protestant exegesis prioritizes Christ’s divinity and the call to obedience, relegating Mary to a faithful disciple to maintain a Christocentric focus, consistent with sola scriptura principles.

Scientific perspectives provide complementary insights. Historical-critical analysis situates the narrative within first-century Jewish wedding customs, interpreting the miracle as a symbolic transition from Jewish purification rituals to the new covenant, reinforcing early Christian identity. Psychological analyses highlight Mary's empathy and the servants' obedience as models of trust and pro-social behavior, offering universal insights into faith dynamics. Cultural interpretations underscore hospitality and communal joy, with Ethiopian contexts linking abundance to divine favor and first-century Mediterranean settings emphasizing social honor. Broader global parallels, such as African and Middle Eastern traditions, highlight hospitality's role in community-building.

Commonalities across perspectives include the recognition of the miracle as a demonstration of divine power and abundance, with obedience, exemplified by the servants' compliance with Mary's directive, as a prerequisite for divine intervention. Differences emerge in the treatment of Mary's role, with Ethiopian Orthodox and Catholic traditions elevating her intercessory status, while Protestants focus on Christ alone. Scientific perspectives prioritize historical and behavioral contexts over spiritual symbolism, and cultural interpretations emphasize societal values. These findings underscore the narrative's multifaceted significance, bridging spiritual, historical, and social dimensions. By integrating these perspectives, the study fosters interfaith dialogue among Christian denominations and interdisciplinary discourse between theology, history, psychology, and anthropology. The analysis highlights the enduring relevance of John 2:1-5, demonstrating its capacity to resonate across diverse contexts while affirming the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition's unique contributions to global Christianity.

#### 4.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations emerge to advance interfaith and interdisciplinary dialogue.

1. First, religious communities should organize ecumenical forums to discuss John 2:1-5, encouraging Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant leaders to share their interpretations, fostering mutual understanding and reducing theological divides.
2. Second, academic institutions should develop interdisciplinary courses integrating theological, historical-critical, psychological, and cultural analyses of biblical texts, using John 2:1-5 as a case study to bridge faith and science.
3. Third, Ethiopian Orthodox scholars should publish accessible translations of liturgical texts like the *Weddase Mariam* to share their Marian theology globally, enhancing the tradition's visibility.
4. Fourth, cultural anthropologists should conduct comparative studies on hospitality in African and Mediterranean contexts, building on the narrative's communal themes to inform cross-cultural dialogue.

Finally, future research should explore additional perspectives, such as Jewish or Islamic views on John 2:1-5, to broaden interfaith insights.

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