

SAMARITAN WOMAN

Spiritually Thirsty Woman

SCRIPTURES: John 4:1-42

NATIONALITY: Samaritan

DESCRIPTION: Adulteress, probably poor

WELL: Jacob's Well, outside Sychar, near ancient ruins of Shechem (1/2 mile from town)

LOCATION: convergence of two main routes from Judea to Galilee near the land that Jacob granted to Joseph. Joseph's body was returned from Egypt and buried here.

TIME: Month of December, after Passover; John the Baptist in prison.

BACKGROUND: Jesus and his disciples, shortly after their calling, go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. They were on the return trip to Galilee, through Samaria, on foot. This was not the usual route for Jews to travel, because of the animosity between the two peoples. Let's look a little at the historical reasons for this:

Samaritans: Samaria (capitol of northern tribes of Israel) was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC (2 Kings 17:21-23). The majority of the Jews were deported to Assyria. The conquered area was repopulated by the Assyrian colonists, who intermarried with the few Jews that were left. The region depopulated by the Assyrians was not large and did not include Jerusalem or the northern region of Galilee, but was limited to the city of Samaria and its surroundings. Thus the Samaritans gradually became a mixed race of heathens.

The discord between the Jews and the Samaritans is first told in chapter 4 of Ezra. The relation between Jew and Samaritan was one of hostility. In order to avoid going through the land of Samaria, Jews traveling between Galilee and Jerusalem would cross the Jordan and travel on the eastern side, going an extra 17 miles. The direct route through Samaria took 3 days on foot. The Samaritans rejected all the Old Testament except the Pentateuch and claimed to have an older copy than the Jews. The Jews repaid hate with hate. The Samaritan was publicly cursed in the synagogues and could not be a witness in the Jewish courts. As far as the Jews were concerned, the Samaritan was excluded from eternal life. And yet both Jew and Samaritan were looking for the promised Messiah.

And this is the setting for today's story..

Jacob's Well: The well is still there today. Sychar is near the ruins of ancient Shechem. This is the location where Jacob buried the alien gods under the oak tree in Genesis 34. Two routes came together at this site. Mount Gerizim (sacred mountain to the Samaritans) can be seen from the well (about 3000 feet elevation). This is also on the land purchased by Jacob (Genesis 33:19).

The well has a narrow opening of 4 feet which leads from the floor of the vault into the well through limestone. The depth is not determined. The John 4 account calls it "deep". One explorer in 670 AD claimed it was 240 feet; another in 1697 measured it at 105 feet. A Major Anderson found it to be 75 feet in 1861. For centuries tourists cast pebbles into it until Greek Catholics bought the site and put it under guard.

The area of Shechem is where Jacob was buried. His body was brought back from Egypt and placed in the tomb that Abraham bought from the sons of Hamar (Acts 7:12-16).

TODAY'S STORY: The Samaritan woman has not been given a proper name. Her name is not important, but her race and gender are. I have chosen to call her “the spiritually thirsty woman”. Lockyear in *Every Woman in the Bible* calls her “the woman who left her waterpot”; Liz Curtis Higgs in *Bad Girls of the Bible* calls her a “pushy broad” and “feisty female”, J. Vernon McGee suggests she was a “hussy”, while Gien Karssen in *Her Name is Woman* calls her “the woman who said yes to Jesus”.

Jesus sat down at the well, tired and thirsty, to wait while his disciples went into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman approached with her water jar to draw water. It is mid-day. Not the usual time for the women to draw water; instead it is the time that (as we learned when we studied Rachel) the sheep are watered.

Jesus asked her if she would give him a drink. It was forbidden by Rabbinic precepts for a Jewish man to talk to a woman in public (even his own wife). Not to mention the stigma of a Jew talking to a Samaritan! She responded as expected – “why are you, a Jew, asking a drink of me, a Samaritan woman?”

Then an actual conversation occurred between them! Jesus told her about “living water”, which, of course she wanted so she wouldn't have to come to the well all the time. She took Him literally. Living water to them was running water from a spring or fountain. Jesus then told her to go get her husband and come back. She truthfully answered that she had no husband. At this point, she changed from an argumentative frame of mind to an attitude of humility. Her husbands may have all died (war, famine, disease or injury) but regardless of that, she was living in sin, and knew it. She perceived that He must be a prophet. He told her He was the Messiah.

I recorded this entire conversation as recorded in Scripture and clocked it at 2 ½ minutes. There was a delay of time before the woman appeared at the well or more conversation, because at this time the disciples returned from town. I doubt they could have done it in 2 ½ minutes. In any case, they were amazed that he was talking with a Samaritan woman, but said nothing.

She left her water pot and went back to town to tell the people and bring them. They also heard Jesus and believed and urged Him to stay with them. He did for two days and many of them believed. They acknowledged Him as the Savior of the world.

THE SEQUEL: Later (after Jesus' ascension) came a great persecution of the church and early Christians. Stephen was martyred. The church in Jerusalem was scattered into Samaria and Judea. Phillip ended up in Samaria and preached Jesus there. Crowds in many villages turned to Christ. (Incidentally, he may have met our woman there!) Acts 8:4-8 tells this story. The differences between Jews and Samaritans were forever abolished.

BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR THIS LESSON: *Atlas of the Bible (Readers Digest)*; *Unger's Bible Dictionary*; *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary*; *Bible Atlas* by Jesse Lyman Hurlbut; “*Her Name is Woman*” by Gien Karssen; “*52 Bible Characters*” by Kenneth Osbeck; J” *Bad Girls of the Bible*” by Liz Curtis Higgs; “*All the Women of the Bible*” by Lockyear, “*A Woman Jesus Can Teach*” by Ellis Matthews, “*Gospel of John*” by Wm. Barclay; “*John*” by McGee.