

## ***The Woman at the Well: Part One***

***4:1 Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John***

***4:2 (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were),***

***4:3 He left Judea and went away again into Galilee.***

One must recall the tremendous success of John's early ministry (Mk. 1:5; Matt. 3:5; Lk. 3:7, 15) in order to see the significance of the statement that Jesus had forged ahead of him in popular favor (RWP).

Though the Pharisees had many reservations about both John and Jesus, they would have had fewer objections to John's ministry since he made no claim to be Messiah, performed no miracle, and stood on the law (Plummer, 113). Each time after this when Jesus appears in Jerusalem and Judea, there is an open breach with the Pharisees who attack him (Jn 5:1-47; 7:14-10:21; 10:22-42; 11:17-53; RWP).

One might assume that Jesus fled out of fear that the Pharisees would attempt to crush His rising popularity. But in John 3:35 it says, "The Father . . . has given all things into his hand." Jesus' decisions are not reactions to changing circumstances. Nobody can touch Him without His permission. Jesus said, "No one takes [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord" (Jn. 10:18). Jesus is leaving Judea for his own purposes.

***4:4 And He had to pass through Samaria.***

In Jesus' day, Samaria had no separate political existence (it was united with Judea under a Roman procurator), but it was separated from the Jews by history and religion.

After King Solomon, the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms: Judah in the south and Israel in the north. Though Jeroboam was the first king of the northern tribes, it was Omri who named the capital of the northern kingdom Samaria (I Ki. 16:23-25). This then became the name of the entire area. In 771-772 B.C. the whole northern kingdom (including Samaria) was conquered by the Assyrians who took the most important and wealthy Jews into exile and populated the land with foreigners (II Ki. 17:23ff.). It was common for foreign powers to do this in order to strengthen their rule over newly conquered territories. The foreigners held to their ancient religions (II Ki. 17: 29-31) and intermarried with the Jews in the area.

After the exile, the Jews who returned to the land viewed the Samaritans as half-breed radicals whose religion was tainted with foreign elements (II Ki. 17:25, 28, 32ff, 41), and throughout their history there was a running hostility. The returning Jews refused the Samaritans' help in rebuilding the temple and were then harassed by them throughout the project (Kent, 70; Morris, 256).

In time, the Samaritans' polytheism disappeared and they worshipped Yahweh alone, though their religion had peculiarities (Morris, 256). In about 400 B.C. the Samaritans set up a rival temple on Mt.

Gerizim , but it was destroyed at the end of the second century (128 B.C.) by John Hyranus, a ruler of Judea. This fueled a greater hatred between the groups. By the first century the Samaritans had developed their own religious heritage using only the Pentateuch (Gen- Deut), and rejected the rest of the Hebrew Bible (Carson, 216; Morris, 256). The bitter enmity between the Jews and Samaritans continued in the time of our Lord.

[for more see Edersheim, L&T of Jesus, Vol.1; 396- 401]

When Jesus departed from Judea to go to Galilee in the north, John writes, “He *had* to travel through Samaria.” This was the route normally traveled by Jews since it was shorter and faster. However, strictly speaking, Jesus didn’t *have* to travel this way. It was also possible to cross the Jordan near Jericho, travel north up the east bank (the Transjordan) through mostly Gentile territory and then cross it again near Lake Galilee. Therefore, some commentators see a divine necessity in the words of John 4:4; Jesus *had* to travel through Samaria, not because it was the only way to get there, but because He was led by the Spirit and had a divine appointment He needed to keep.

***4:5 So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph;  
4:6 and Jacob's well was there. So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.***

Jacob’s well is between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. It is one of the few undisputed sites (Plummer, 115; Bruce, 102; Carson, 217; Alford, 725). The well was lined with masonry as it was dug (Westcott, 145), and in May 1866, a man descended approximately 75 feet and found it dry. After the debris was removed, it was discovered to be 100 feet deep (Bernard I, 135; Morris, 257 n. 20) and still active (Carson, 217; Bruce, 102). Jacob’s tomb is about 200 yards north of this (Bruce, 101; Carson, 217).

There was an abundance of springs in the area so one wonders why Jacob would go to such an effort to dig a well (Morris, 257; Westcott, 145). Some speculate that he dug it either to mark his land and provide a personal source of water (Alford, 726), or to avoid the troubles his father had (Gen. 26:15-33; Bruce, 105). The other places could have already been claimed by other tribes (Carson, 220).

The Jews measured their days from sunset to sunset and divided both night and day into twelve hours (Morris, 158). Thus, since the length of daylight changed depending on the time of year, the length of the “hour” changed as well (Bernard I, 57). The sixth hour would be noon in our reckoning (Morris, 258; Bernard I, 136), in the heat of the day. This helps explain some of Jesus’ weariness (Carson, 217; Bruce, 102). Most drew water at sunrise or sunset when it was cool, so coming to the well at this time was unusual, but not unheard of (Ex. 2:15 ff.; Morris, 258; Bernard I, 136; Plummer, 116). It may be that if the woman had a bad reputation, such an hour would help her avoid others (Morris, 258; Plummer, 116).

**4:7 There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink."**

**4:8 For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.**

It was probably Jesus' weariness that led the disciples to leave without Him. He was likely alone and thirsty, and the impossibility of Him getting a drink is brought out in verse 11 (Morris, 258).

The city they had gone to was most likely Sychar (Carson, 227).

**4:9 Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)**

This parenthetical statement is most likely John's explanatory comment, not the woman's. The verb translated as "no dealings" means "to use with." It seems to have to do more with the vessels for food or drink than simply transactions. Jews did not use utensils with Samaritans and so the woman was shocked that Jesus would be asking to drink out of her bucket.

**4:10 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."**

In a purely physical sense, living water is flowing water (like in a river or stream), as opposed to water in a pond or collected in a cistern that just sat there until it evaporated. This water was greatly desired for the purposes of ritual cleansing for it was living water that took away defilement and made worshippers out of unclean men (Morris, 260; Bernard I, 138). Up to this point, the woman has no reason to think that Jesus is speaking about anything spiritual, for clean, flowing water is indeed a gift from God in a land as arid as Samaria. Nevertheless, the reader knows that Jesus isn't talking about regular water, and so a deeper meaning must be interpreted.

First, it is debated as to what is "the gift of God." Some see Jesus as the gift, others see it as eternal life or the Holy Spirit.

It appears that Jesus is saying, "If you knew that I was the one who can give the gift of God, you would be asking Me for it." This implies the gift and the Christ are two distinct things; the one who is speaking is the one who gives the gift, not the gift itself (Alford, 727). If the living water is a reference to the Holy Spirit, as I will suggest in 4:13 and 14, then verse 10 could either mean that Jesus is offering the gift of salvation by giving the Spirit, or it could mean that the Holy Spirit is both the gift and the living water that issues forth in eternal life.

**4:11 She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water?"**

A water bucket made of skin was normal traveling equipment, but when the disciples went into town they may have carried it away with them, leaving Jesus without any means of drawing water (Bernard I, 136, Morris, 258; Westcott, 147; Alford, 726).

**4:12 "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?"**

The Samaritans claimed descent from Jacob through Joseph's sons (Ephraim and Manasseh). The woman's comment reveals skepticism about the importance of her new acquaintance. She asks if He could be greater than Jacob, the great progenitor of the race. The "you" is emphatic ("Are YOU greater than Jacob?"), and the form of the Greek grammar implies that she is expecting the answer to be "no" (Bruce, 104).

Without digging a well, or without anything to draw the water with, Jesus was indeed greater than Jacob if He could produce living water. However, misunderstanding combined with irony makes the woman twice wrong - the water doesn't come from a well, and Jesus is greater than Jacob (Carson, 219).

**4:13 Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; 4:14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."**

Though Jesus doesn't directly answer the woman's statement about who is greater, He implies that He is. Those who drink of Jacob's water will thirst again; those who drink the water that Jesus offers will never thirst again (Alford, 728; Morris, 263; Westcott, 151; Bruce, 105). His answer contrasts the impermanent results of drinking water from the well with the permanent consequences of receiving water from Him. The water in Jacob's well was good water (and still is) and it could undoubtedly quench one's thirst, but it could not prevent the thirst from rising again (Morris, 263; Bruce, 105).

At a first reading it seems that living water is salvation. But it is also possible that the living water is the Holy Spirit who brings eternal life. I believe the following arguments provide the strongest support for the latter view.

1) In John 4:14 it says that the living water *springs up to eternal life*. If the living water *results* in life, then it seems unlikely that it is life. Rather, eternal life is the immediate result experienced by the person in which the living water (the Spirit) flows (Plummer, 118).

2) In Jn. 7:38ff the living water that flows from the believer is explained to be the Holy Spirit (Morris, 260; Bernard I, 139).

John 7:38-39 "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

3) This would be similar to Isaiah 44:3-4 and to Joel 2:28-32 where the Holy Spirit is likened to water.

Isaiah 44:3-4 "For I will pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring and My blessing on your descendants; and they will spring up among the grass like poplars by streams of water."

4) The gift of the Holy Spirit is a mark of Messianic days (Brown I, 179), and the conversation with Jesus leads the Samaritan woman to speak of the Messiah (4:25).

Though the Spirit was not given until after Jesus' ascension, the giving of the Spirit is a key element of the New Covenant (Ezek. 36:27). In John 1:33 God told John the Baptist, "He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit" (see notes there). In John 3:8 the Holy Spirit is the source of the new birth; He mediates eternal life. In John 6:63 Jesus says, "It is the Spirit who gives life." This is a parallel idea to John 4:14 which says the living water "leaps up to eternal life." The coming of the Spirit in Acts 1:5,8 is explained in Acts 2:17 in "water" terminology: "in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh."

If the gift of John 4:10 is the living water that Jesus offers, and if the living water is the Holy Spirit, then the thirst one has for God is not quenched by removing the desire, but by pouring the Spirit out upon the person. "The Spirit of God, imparted by our Lord to His people, dwells within them as a perennial wellspring of refreshment and life" (Bruce, 105). Having once tasted the living water, the lifetime drought will end. The woman shall never thirst again for she shall have the spring within her "drawing water with joy out of the wells of salvation" (Isa. 12:3; Alford, 728).

***4:15 The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw."***

If the woman has any inkling as to what Jesus is talking about she chooses not to show it. She desires the water for her own personal convenience that she might not thirst and have to come here to drink. The thought of not having to come such a distance nor go through the labor of drawing the water sounds pleasant. Though such a thing is impossible, it's a nice idea to toy around with (Morris, 264). In a larger sense, her whole life up to this point had been characterized by seeking temporal and emotional satisfaction by yielding to her physical impulses (Kent, 75).

She speaks half in irony (Bernard I, 142), for she was still thinking in terms of physical needs. Had she been a Jew she could have scarcely misunderstood the metaphor of water so frequently found in the prophets (Plummer, 118).

**4:16 He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here."**

**4:17 The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband';**

**4:18 for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."**

The change in subject is abrupt, but not artificial. The woman has failed to see who Jesus was and the significance of the water He was promising. By this time Jesus also knew that she had misunderstood the true dimensions of her own need, the real nature of her own thirst. By revealing His knowledge of her morally messy past Jesus is exhibiting that He has more than human knowledge, something that the woman understands (4:19). Nevertheless, the remark is not meant to be merely self-revealing; it is designed to help the woman see the nature of the gift He is offering (Carson, 221; Alford, 729).

The flexibility with which Jesus speaks to men leaps from the pages, but also the fact that he often drives to the individual's greatest sin, hopelessness, guilt, despair, and need. He is the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. He must deal with the sin of those who show interest (Carson, 221). The giving of the water was not as simple of a matter as the woman had assumed. The heart must first be laid bare before God (Alford, 729). The thirst must be awakened before the water is desired (Dods, 727).

The woman was no doubt taken aback by the abrupt change, even more so because the stranger touched on an area in her life to which she was naturally sensitive (Bruce, 106). In the fewest possible words she tries to stop a dangerous subject before it gets started (Plummer, 118). Her response illustrates what is stated in John 3:20: everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. She cannot open herself to the living water because her inner life is locked up against everything that might expose it. It is too painful and too dirty. God means to have this woman as a worshiper in spirit and truth (Jn. 4:24), but in her present condition, she doesn't even have a living spirit. She is dead and hard and blind. And Jesus understands this condition perfectly. He will not stay on the surface of things (Piper).

Jesus' words appear to be irony. "What is being exposed here is something that almost always goes hand in hand with secret sin, namely, a devious, subtle, manipulation of language to conceal the truth by saying true things. Devious people don't usually lie. It's too risky. They deceive by the way they use the truth." (Piper) Jesus commends her for her truthfulness while pointing out that she has five husbands, and the man she is now sleeping with is not her husband at all (Carson, 221).

**4:19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet."**

**4:20 "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."**

This verse marks contemplation, continued progress, not immediate perception. We cannot understand how Christ's words spoke to her, but she was under the conviction that her whole life was open to the

eyes of the speaker (Westcott, 154). Such a declaration is an admission that the things Christ had said about her were correct (Kent, 76).

The Samaritans did not believe in most of the OT. In their belief the statement in Deut. 34:10, "Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses" remained absolute until Messiah came. If therefore, the woman took the word "prophet" seriously, she was on the brink of a great discovery about this stranger's identity (Bruce, 108). However, in light of verse 24, it doesn't seem that she was making such a clear confession (Carson, 221).

The woman hoped to get Jesus off the subject of her immorality with a theological issue (RWP; Morris, 267). The issue was where God had chosen for His name to dwell and worship to take place.

According to Samaritan tradition, it was at the foot of Mt. Gerizim that Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac, and it was there also that he met Melchizedek. Also, according to the Samaritan Pentateuch it was Gerizim, not Ebal where the altar was erected when they entered the Promised Land (Josh 8:33; Deut. 27:4) (- see Morris, 268, n. 49; Westcott, 156; Bruce, 109; Plummer, 119; Bernard I, 145; Carson, 222)

Though the law doesn't specifically say where the temple should be built (Morris, 269), the Jews appealed to such passages as II Chr. 6:2; 7:12; Ps. 78:68-69 to justify their claim that it was to be in Jerusalem. These passages, however, were not recognized by the Samaritans among the OT books they considered inspired (Bernard I, 146).

***4:21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.***

***4:22 "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.***

Dependence upon ritual or physical environment to produce genuine worship of God is erroneous (Kent, 77). The superiority of the Jews was not based on their place of worship, but on their knowledge of the object of worship. The Samaritans worshipped Yahweh, but by rejecting the prophets and the Psalms they had shut themselves off from all revelation of God except that which was contained in the law (Morris, 269). By doing this the woman had condemned herself to ignorance of the God of Israel. She knew whom to worship, but she did not know Him.

***4:23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.***

***4:24 "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."***

The prophets spoke of a day when the whole earth would be a habitation of the Lord (Bruce, 110; Zech. 14:9) and the earth would be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:9). Jesus had also spoken about Himself as the new temple of God, making the temple in Jerusalem obsolete (Jn. 2:19ff; Morris, 270; and my notes on 2:19). The apocalypse closes with the consummated

kingdom which has no temple (Rev. 21:22),” for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple” (Plummer, 121; Carson, 224). The temple will no longer be necessary.

Jesus says this hour is coming and is already present. Here is an example of John’s realized eschatology. Just as in chapter four the life of the age to come may be realized and enjoyed now, so the worship of the age to come can be experienced by those who are alive now (Bruce, 110; Bernard I, 149). The word “true” (ἀληθινός) means genuine, that which reaches its ideal (Plummer, 68). The opposite of true is not necessarily false, but imperfect, shadowy, insubstantial. *True* worshippers suggests that the OT system was in effect only a shadow of the good things to come (Heb. 10:1), pointing forward to the reality which was to come in Jesus (Carson; *Worship: Adoration in Action*, 63).

Two words describe the character of worshipping in one phrase (Morris, 271, n. 58; Carson, 225; Brown I, 172). In other words, there are *not* two separate characteristics of worship that must be offered; all worship must be “in spirit and truth,” that is, God centered (Carson, 225).

In true worship there must be an affinity between the worshipper and the one worshipped (Bernard I, 150). “Spirit” is the meeting place between God and man. To worship God in spirit is to worship Him in the realm of God and no longer in the realm of the world, in reality and no longer just in appearance. Worshipping in spirit is the opposite of worshipping in mere external ways.

Worship involves an expression of feeling and a conception of the object toward which the feeling is entertained (Westcott, 160). There is a need for complete reality in our approach before God. A true idea of God is essential to a right service of Him (Morris, 271) as is being in harmony with His will. To worship in spirit and in truth implies prostration of the innermost soul to divine perfection, and submission of every thought to the will of God (Plummer, 121).

How is man to do this? True worship can happen when we receive the Holy Spirit; when He dwells in us we become the temple of God (Alford, 732), we are born from above (Carson, 225), we are in Christ (TDNT VI, 439).

***4:25 The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us."***

***4:26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."***

The woman realized the authority with which Jesus had spoken to her and may have begun to suspect who He was. She therefore voices her convictions to see how Jesus would respond. He needs no further invitation and openly declares that her suspicions are right; He is indeed the Messiah (Carson, 226-227). This is one of two occasions prior to His trial that He so clearly declared who He was (cf. Mk. 9:41; Morris, 273).