

# The Gospel of John

## Week 8

### The Woman at the Well (4.1-26)

#### 1. Introduction and Review

- All information, study notes and related material can be found on the internet at <http://www.rtrc.net/biblestudy/john/john.htm>
- Course Syllabus
- Weekly Outlines (notebook)
- Discussion Forum: <http://www.rtrc.net/forum/> [go to the forum marked "Bible Studies"]
- Audio files are available on the web site

#### 2. Outline for the next two weeks

- John 4.1-45 (Jesus and the Samaritans)
- Background (vv. 1-5)
  - The Woman at the Well (vv. 6-26)
    - Cultural barriers
      - Ethnic gulf (vv. 7-10)
      - Religious gulf (vv. 19-26)
      - Mortal gulf (vv. 16-18)
      - Social gulf (v. 6)
    - The Living Water (vv. 10-15)
  - The Disciples Mission (vv. 27-42)

#### 3. Background (4.1-5)

- "He had to pass through Samaria" --typically there were three major routes to Samaria:
  - near the seacoast
  - through Perea, beyond the Jordan
  - through the heart of Samaria
- It is possible that the phrased used here and the verb "had to" refers merely to circumstances, namely in order to save time and steps. In view of the fact that the Lord was aware of His need to fulfill the divine plan (a fact stressed often in the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel) and is implied in the immediate context it is more probable that the

meaning here is that he had to go through Samaria in agreement with the orders of His heavenly Father.

- Sychar – this town is near the burial place of Joseph and Gerizim is west northwest of Sychar (see Deuteronomy 27.12)
- The well mentioned here is likely a spring fed well since the term here used is different than that of a typical well.

### The Woman at the Well (4.6-26)

- Some observations of this dialog are necessary:
  - Four barriers are clearly discernable from this passage:
  - Verses 7-10 – ethnic gulf. Consider:

The reason for the hostility of the Jews to the Samaritans goes back a long way. When the Assyrians took Samaria captive they deported large numbers of the inhabitants and replaced them by men from all over their empire (2 Kings 17.23f). These people brought their own gods with them (2 Kings 17.29-31) but they added the worship of Jehovah to their other worships (2 Kings 17.25, 28, 32f). In time their polytheism disappeared, and they worshipped Jehovah alone, though their religion had its peculiarities. For example, they acknowledged as sacred Scripture only the Pentateuch. Thus they cut themselves off from the riches in the Psalms and the Prophets and other books. Their religion was marked by pronounced bitterness towards the Jews. When the Jews returned from exile in Babylon the Samaritans offered to help them rebuild their temple but the offer was refused (Ezra 4.2). This naturally engendered great bitterness. One might have expected that the Jews would have appreciated the fact that the Samaritans worshipped the same God as they did. But it did not work out this way. The Samaritans refused to worship at Jerusalem, preferring their own temple built on Mt. Gerizim (c. 400 B.C.) When this was burned by the Jews c. 128 B.C. relations between the two groups worsened.

- Verses 19-26 – religious gulf. As indicated above the Samaritans dispensed with major sections of the Old Testament. Only the Pentateuch was authoritative in their lives. The place of worship was also a source of irritation between the two camps. For the Jews, Jerusalem was the rightful place of worship but the Samaritans took Gerizim as their place of worship. (see Deuteronomy 27.4 “Ebal” replaced with “Gerizim”). The Jews, however, pointed to passages such as 2 Chronicles 6.6; 7.12 and Psalm 78.68 as proof that Jerusalem was the rightful place.

- Verses 16-18 – moral gulf. This woman had been married and divorced five times. This was very unusual in those days as Rabbi’s would normally only grant a divorce 2-3 times.
- Verse 6 – social gulf. It is likely though not completely clear that this woman went to the well at 12 Noon when the normal custom of the day was to go in the early morning or evening to avoid the heat of the day. Perhaps the reason for going at this time was that she was an outcast from the community where she lived. People would have certainly known about her immoral life and she would have been seen with great reproach.

### The Living Water (4.10-15)

Some observations:

- The conversation immediately goes to a higher plane when Jesus mentions the aspect of God’s gift and of seeking “living water”. The word here translated as “gift” is used only here in the 4 gospels and stresses the freeness of it all. One commentator writes:
 

It is a matter of bounty. Jesus is referring to the new life He brings. Has the woman been aware of the realities of the situation in which she found herself, and especially of the fact that she was speaking to Him whom God had sent to give life to the world, the asking would have been the other way round.
- When Jesus mentions “living water” it is a reference to water that flows. It was water in a river or stream as opposed to water in a pond or cistern.
- Compare verse 10 with John 7.38. Note that in the 4<sup>th</sup> gospel Jesus makes many “I am” statements yet here he does not say “I am living water”. Living water as seen in 7.38 refers to the Holy Spirit. One scholar even demonstrates that in a number of Jewish writings water symbolizes teaching or doctrine. Thus there could be a dual emphasis in view here. (Holy Spirit = teacher)
- Like Nicodemus before her the woman misses the profound spiritual realities offered in the words of the Christ.
- Contrast the well of Jacob and the water that Christ is offering:

Physical Waters from Jacobs Well	The Living Water which Jesus gives
Cannot prevent one from becoming thirsty again...	Makes one lose this thirst for all time to come. Gives lasting satisfaction. Once a believer, always a believer. Once reborn, always reborn (6.35; Is. 49.10; Rev. 7.16-17; 21.6; 22.1, 17)
Remains outside of the soul, and is incapable of filling its needs	Enters into the soul and remains within as a source of spiritual refreshment and satisfaction
Is limited in quantity, lessens, disappears whenever we drink it.	Is a self-perpetuating spring (the progressive idea see 1.12). Here on earth it sustains a person spiritually, with a view to the everlasting life in the realms above

- Consider Matthew 5.6
- The climax of this encounter is the revealing of Himself as the Messiah to the woman who did, in fact, expect the Messiah to come. Notice the use of the phrase: "I who speak to you am he". In the original the word "he" is absent. The phrase is *egō eimi*. We this exact Greek construction elsewhere in the Gospel, (John 8.58; 18.5-6) (Read Kruse, p. 138)