

The Gospel of John

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Chapter Four

John 4:1-3

Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (2) although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were) (3) He left Judea and went away again into Galilee.

This report follows 3:36 that was a statement that forever separates followers of Jesus Christ from the rest of the world. That verse and 3:18 form the critical view of two categories of people. Those who believe on Jesus and those who do not believe:

John 3:18 "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

The Pharisees might have seen the two baptismal ceremonies as competition and, if so, would have tried to use that to drive a wedge between the two "camps". There were other groups of people doing baptismal ceremonies but only those of John and Jesus were done only once. The other involved repeated dippings. Although Jesus was not baptizing people himself, any baptism done by another agent had the authority of the person in charge. Jesus had turned away to Jerusalem for the Passover but he now returned to Galilee. Perhaps He left the area to not possibly assist the Pharisees in their efforts to damage both groups.

John 4:4-6

*And He had to pass through Samaria.(5) So He *came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; (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.*

Samaria was between Judea and Galilee so anyone going from one to the other would have to go through Samaria unless the traveler took a much longer route through Transjordan, which is a mostly Gentile area.



Jesus took the direct route and arrived at Sychar (a small village near Shechem) in Samaria at noon. This city is a small village about half a mile from Jacob's well. The piece of land that Jacob gave to Joseph is mentioned in Gen 48:22. Many years later the Israelites buried Joseph's bones at Shechem in that portion of land. Joseph's tomb is still there and is covered by a dome. The location of Jacob's well is well-known as being 326 yards S.E. of Joseph's tomb. It is at the foot of Mount Gerizim where the Samaritan's worshiped. In AD 400 a church was there and another church was built there 700 years later. Both churches were destroyed by the Muslims and now an unfinished orthodox church is there. John emphasizes the humanity of Jesus by saying that He was wearied from His journey. Noon would have been an appropriate time for someone to need rest and certainly any traveler would have looked for a well after such a trip. The Greek word for well here is *pege* that means a fountain or spring and the word translated well in verses 11 and 12 is *phraer* that means a dug-out well. Both words describe the well since it was dug and it was fed by an underground stream.

John 4:7-8

*There *came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus *said to her, "Give Me a drink." (8) For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.*

The disciples had gone to buy food so there was nobody else to help Jesus obtain some water from the well. Probably the woman was from the same city to which the disciples had gone. The relationship between the Israelites and the Samaritans was very serious and deep-rooted. The northern kingdom fell in 722 BC and the Assyrians had deported the Israelites from their land and resettled the area with other captives who brought with them their gods. These captives had a religion that was a combination of Jewish and Baal beliefs. Then when the descendants of the southern captivity returned from Babylon in 539 BC to renew their worship under the Law they found a huge rift between themselves and the inhabitants of Samaria. The Samaritans built a temple on Mount Gerizim about 400 BC. Although the temple was destroyed in about 108 BC the rift between the two religious groups remained harsh. Strictly observant Jews would have considered themselves unclean if they ate food handles by Samaritans but some kinds of dry foods were regarded as less defiled.

John 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.)*

The woman would have been very familiar with the religious differences between the Samaritans and the Jews. The differences were even harsher because this Samaritan was a woman and Jews considered Samaritan women to be perpetually unclean. She probably recognized Jesus as a Jew because of His dress and His dialect. To drink from her container would have conferred uncleanness to Jesus according to Jewish tradition.

John 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."

Jesus did not pursue the philosophical/religious discussion concerning the differences between the Jews and the Samaritans. He was not concerned with winning an argument but with winning the woman. This tactic would be what all Christians must consider when discussing Christianity with anyone. Had she known that this man was God and that He could offer her a free gift from God, she would have requested this gift from Jesus rather than wondering why He wanted a drink of water from her. The apostle John has already introduced the spiritual significance of water in the sign at Cana (John 2:6) and the conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:5). In our reading of books of the Bible we must remember that the people at the time of the writing were reading or having the book read to them so they would have just finished reading about the spiritual significance of water. As at the sign at Cana, there is a contrast between the Jewish old order as depicted by the water of the well and the new order of the gift of the Spirit. The expression "living water" was used also to designate the difference between fresh, running water and water collected at the bottom of a cistern. In the OT God speaks of Himself as the contrast between living water and stagnate water of false religions: "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water." (Jer 2:13) The living water illustrates the fresh and perennial supply of God's grace.

John 4:11-12

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

So when Jesus said "living water" she thought of the pure running water like the underground spring that feeds Jacob's well. Today the well is over 100 feet deep and it was probably even deeper then and He had no bucket for drawing the water. This lack of understanding is similar to that of Nicodemus's lack of understanding of Jesus' statement about being born again. To make such a claim and then to fulfill it would require that Jesus be greater than Jacob and she reasoned that nobody was that great. She was also probably trying to raise her standing before this Jew because the Samaritans viewed their lineage as through Joseph, Ephraim, and Manasseh. They viewed the well as a gift to them from Jacob. The neighborhood had many springs so one wonders why Jacob dug the well. Probably the strained relationships between the groups led Jacob to provide a separate well supply

John 4:13-14

Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; (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."

Jesus continues with the spiritual analogy between the offerings of the religion of the Jews and the Samaritans to what He had to offer. Following the religion of the Jews or of the Samaritans required continual offerings for sin throughout their lives. Not only will what Jesus supplies fill the needs of His people forever they also will be a source of knowledge of the water required for others to have eternal life. The Holy Spirit will indwell the child of God providing the grace needed to fulfill that person forever and will be available to offer such to others reached by the

born-again person as promised also in the NT: “Therefore you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation.” (Isa 2:3)

John 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."*

She still did not understand that Jesus was talking about a spiritual event. She had come a long way to obtain water and had probably passed many springs on the way where others would have been drawing water. But she would not have wanted to be among those who would think lowly of her so she came a long way past those places to get to this well where she knew there would not be many people, especially at noon.

John 4:16

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

Jesus was the master teacher. He knew that He had to change the subject to get her mind off the physical water metaphor. He knew her marital situation as we will see but He wanted her to speak about her situation and to think about her true spiritual needs. It would have been improper for a married woman to be speaking so much with a stranger so Jesus knew this approach would make her think more deeply about her situation.

John 4:17-18

*The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus *said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; (18) for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."*

It seems that the statement by Jesus did prompt an emotional response in the woman and she probably thought that she could stop this trend of the conversation with a simple answer. Her answer was true but it was also potentially misleading. However Jesus responded in a way that would truly have shocked her. We cannot know why she had so many husbands. Some of them may have died and she may have been released from marriage because of some problem like stated in the OT: “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house,” (Deut 24:1) Several attempts have been made to try to explain her situation in terms of some relationship to the false worship of the Samaritans but it is probably best to just accept the situation only as offered by the apostle. She is revealed to also be living with a man out of wedlock.

John 4:19-20

*The woman *said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. (20) "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."*

She showed great respect for Jesus by calling Him a prophet and addressing Him as “Sir”, but she also tried to divert the conversation away from such a personal discussion of her sinful past. They were at the foot of the mountain on which the Samaritans built their temple so she brought

up that distinction between the religion of the Samaritans and the Jews. Also the Samaritans did not accept the second portion of the Jewish Bible. They accepted the following as still absolute:

Deut 34:10-12 "Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, for all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel."

The Samaritans were still waiting for this Second Moses and she may have thought that perhaps this prophet was the One they expected. She then brought to the discussion an important distinction between the two religions and that is the place of worship of God. The authoritative text is:

Deut 12:5-7 "But you shall seek the LORD at the place which the LORD your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come. There you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. There also you and your households shall eat before the LORD your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the LORD your God has blessed you."

This text does not specify the place of worship and the Jews and the Samaritans inferred two different places for this worship. The Samaritan bible reads "the place which the Lord your God has chosen" and that means the choice had already been made. They took that to be Mount Gerizim because Shechem was the first place where Abraham built an altar upon entry into the promised land and Israel was blessed there in Joshua's day:

- Gen 12:6-7 "Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land. (7) The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him."
- Deut 27:12 NASB "When you cross the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin.

Also in the Samaritan bible after the covet commandment (Deut 5:21) there is a long paragraph concerning the building of a temple on Mount Gerizim. The place "in Jerusalem" where the Jews worshipped was the temple first built by Solomon, rebuilt by Zerubbabel, and then embellished by Herod. The woman was asking Jesus for a single passage to support the Jew's claim that the temple should be built in Jerusalem.

I think this background helps us to understand the question of the woman. The controversy was endless but Jesus refused to be drawn into this debate.

John 4:21-24

*Jesus *said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. (22) "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. (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. (24) "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."*

Jesus responded that a day will come when neither location will be used to worship the Father. He does give more credence to the Jewish worship than the Samaritans by stating that salvation is from the Jews and the Samaritans worship what they do not know. This comment reminds me of what Paul observed: *"For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you."* (Acts 17:23) Jesus made the same proclamation. Jesus then elaborated further to say that the time had already occurred when those who worship the Father will do so in spirit and truth. Since spiritual worship does not require some specific location, the worship of the Father is not location-dependent. Jesus often spoke of God as "Father" (John 11:41; 12:27; 17:1; etc.) and He directed others to do the same. Saying that God is spirit is not saying that God is "a spirit" but that He is Spirit and so those who desire to worship Him must do so in spirit and truth. Such a relationship requires a rebirth for without such an action from above, man is spiritually dead. Thus this last statement has imbedded requirements that the woman would not have understood.

John 4:25-26

*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." (26) Jesus *said to her, "I who speak to you am He."*

Again, some background information helps our understanding of this woman's reply to Jesus. The Samaritan religion taught of an expected Second Moses (Deut 18:15) as mentioned earlier. This expectation mirrors the Jewish expectation of a Messiah from David's heritage. This Second Moses was expected to be able to explain all mysteries similar to that expected by Elijah in the Jewish tradition. This prophet was known as the Taheb or "restorer" in similar fashions to that expected of Elijah (Mal 4:4-6; Mark 9:11-13). The woman had said that Jesus must be a prophet (vs 19) and now He had now given an authoritative statement about the true worship of God. She stated that when the Messiah came He would explain all mysteries. Perhaps she meant this as a way of testing Jesus to determine if He was this One expected by the Samaritans. Probably to her shock, He affirmed His identity to her. She could now understand how He could be greater than Jacob since He was the Coming One. However, she could not yet understand His true identity because of the religious teachings of her people that was a mixture of the Jewish religion and that of other religions.

John 4:27

At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her?"

The disciples of Jesus interrupted this discussion as they arrived and were appalled to find Jesus speaking with a Samaritan woman. It was not proper for a Jewish man to be speaking with a strange Jewish woman and much less was it appropriate for a Jewish man to be interacting with a Samaritan woman. However they respected Jesus and did not ask the woman what she was seeking nor did they ask Jesus why He was speaking with her. He was their leader and they knew that He would explain the situation to them if they needed to understand His interaction with her. They were content to leave the situation unexplained if that was His desire.

John 4:28-30

*So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and *said to the men, (29) "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?" (30) They went out of the city, and were coming to Him.*

Her behavior indicates that she is a changed woman. She would not have previously been interacting with the men from her home for all would have known her history. Now she went to the man and told them that this person knew all about her history and nobody but the Christ could have had such intimate knowledge. Her leaving of the waterpot is symbolic of leaving behind the old religion and running to tell others about the true spiritual worship of God as told by this stranger. This revealing of information about someone that could not have been known by any natural method is reminiscent of the knowledge of Nathanael by Jesus: "Nathanael *said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." (John 1:48) She knew that this person must be the one foretold by Moses and expected by both Jews and Samaritans. The immediate response by the men of the city to come to Jesus is indicative of their sensing that this woman had been changed by her interaction with Jesus. They had all been expecting this prophet so they went to meet Him.

John 4:31-34

*Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." (32) But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." (33) So the disciples were saying to one another, "No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?" (34) Jesus *said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.*

While the woman (note that she is never named) went to tell others about Jesus, His disciples urged Him to eat for they knew He needed food and water. They had gone into Sychar to get food for all of them and wanted Him to stay strong as their leader. We note a parallel between His discussions with them about food and His interaction with the woman about water. His reply is also reminiscent of God's interaction through Moses with His people that were led to the promised land: "He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD." (Deut 8:3) Jesus revealed to them that He had food that was unknown to them. He received His sustenance from the Father for His work and bringing new life to the woman brought Him strength and joy that they would not understand until after Pentecost. Since the disciples were not filled with the Holy Spirit they could not understand so they asked each other the rhetorical question. Jesus replied to them that His food was to do the will of the Father as He would later state: "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. (John 17:4). He will have a similar conversation with them later about food that will totally baffle many of them (John 6:32-58).

John 4:35-38

"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. (36) "Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who

reaps may rejoice together. (37) "For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' (38) "I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."

Jesus related to them in agricultural terms they would have understood meaning that normally one prepares the ground, plants the seeds, and tends to the garden until a harvest occurs. But the present situation is different in that the harvest is spiritual. His ministry had just started and already there is a harvest as they see the men from the city coming to hear His message. God had already prepared the soil by giving faith to some of the approaching crowd so that a spiritual harvest could occur. Jesus had already acted as the sower and now His disciples could share the joy of a spiritual harvest that would last for eternity. While Jesus lives the disciples can reap with the Sower. **In this case His disciples were not sowers so they did not labor but they now entered the harvest.** This interchange is similar to that related by Paul: *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth."* (1Cor 3:6-7) Of course Jesus is the ultimate seed that must die so that many may have life eternal with God. Today we still enter the harvest and hopefully are used by God in the planting or watering. In any case we should all have the "great commission" clearly in the front of our minds: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* (Mat 28:19-20)

John 4:39-42

From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I have done." (40) So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. (41) Many more believed because of His word; (42) and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."

The living water certainly overflowed from this unnamed woman to many Samaritans who believed in (eis) Him. Her witness is an example for all of us today as we tell of the work of Jesus in our lives. The fact that many Samaritans would invite this Jewish Teacher into their homes is a great witness of how the truth can win over false beliefs and materialism. We do not know if this is the same "city of Samaria" evangelized by Philip (Acts 8:5). If so it would offer an explanation as to why such large crowds received him as he taught of Jesus Christ. Personal knowledge and saving faith are required for someone to believe "in Christ" so that He is the Lord of their life. These people then witnessed to the woman to let them know that their faith was real and obtained by their interaction with the Son of God. They knew that He was not just a prophet like Moses as their belief system required but that He was the Savior of the world as stated in John 3:17. The use of this terminology informs us that this was the first mission of the grace of Jesus beyond Judaism.

John 4:43-45

After the two days He went forth from there into Galilee (44) For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. (45) So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans

received Him, having seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves also went to the feast.

There was a great harvest of souls at Sychar and he then left to go into Galilee as He completes the journey stated in verses 1-3. The “home” to which He refers is Judaea that He left to go to Galilee. It is probably especially in relation to the city of Jerusalem that was the headquarters of “his own people” who did not receive Him (John 1:11). This may also give us some more insight into why He left Judaea when the Pharisees were noting the crowds at the baptisms of both John B and Jesus.

John 4:46-47

Therefore He came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a royal official whose son was sick at Capernaum (47) When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and was imploring Him to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.

Jesus now returns to the scene of His first sign concerning the establishment of God’s ministry of grace. The official is thought by some scholars to be a Gentile. If that is true then Jesus would have witnessed to the Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles and such represents all elements of the world He came to save. News of the miraculous actions of Jesus in Jerusalem had been spread into this area by people returning from the recent Passover. Also the turning of water into wine at this location probably had reached this official. The word translated above as “imploring” is imperfect tense implying a repeated or persistent action. The official’s son was near death and he may have thought that the timing of Jesus coming back was a “sign” that this man could heal his son.

John 4:48-50

*So Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe." (49) The royal official *said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." (50) Jesus *said to him, "Go; your son lives." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off.*

The recent experience of Jesus in Jerusalem would have been fresh in His mind. He knew that many of those professing a belief in Him because of the miracles were not really believers (John 2:23-25). We must remember John’s purpose in putting together “signs” and “wonders”. The word translated “wonders” is also translated “miracles” and such is never used in the NT except in combination with “signs”. People without faith cannot differentiate between the two words as they only see the miracle without understanding the sign. Jesus knew the minds of men (John 2:24) so He knew that few people could see past the miracles to the signs. The centurion of the Synoptic gospel (Matt 8:5-13) asked Jesus to speak a word to effect a cure remotely but this man only asked for Jesus to come with him to be with his son. The official showed that he had faith in Jesus as the one who could bring his son from death so Jesus told him that his son lives. Death had been overcome and the man believed Jesus so he started off toward his home leaving Jesus at Cana.

The action of the father showed that he was not interested in signs and wonders but only in the regaining of life for his son. His actions proved his faith as is always true (James 2:17).

John 4:51-54

*As he was now going down, his slaves met him, saying that his son was living.(52) So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. Then they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." (53) So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives"; and he himself believed and his whole household. (54)This is again a **second sign** that Jesus performed when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.*

The words of the slaves corroborated the words of Jesus that the official had already believed. He was only interested in the exact time when his son began to come back from death. He was told that the time was about 1 p.m. the previous day. He could have returned home sooner but by delaying a day he showed his belief in the words of Jesus so that his anxiety disappeared and he probably took care of other business before arriving near home. The father knew that this time was the time when Jesus told him "Your son lives". He had already believed Jesus but by knowing the time corresponded to the time of the news from Jesus his whole household believed in Jesus as the One sent by God.

The first sign of the ministry of Jesus was performed at Cana also: "*This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.*" (John 2:11). Now His second sign was performed after He came from Judea back to Galilee. John does not count any signs done in Jerusalem: "*Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing.*" (John 2:23). Perhaps John did not count the signs in Jerusalem (we are not told what they were) because Jesus did not accept the belief of those people: "*But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.*" (John 2:24-25) The faiths of those in Cana at the first and second signs were true and thus John accepted them because of their fruits.