

## John 4:1-30 The Woman at the Well

**Purpose:** Arguably, John wrote this Gospel to unbelieving Jews not living in the Promised Land.

ESV **John 20:30-31** . . . these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

**Focus:** The key question of John's Gospel concerns the question, *Who is Jesus?*<sup>1</sup>

**Application:** The key application of John's Gospel is for you to believe in Jesus, so that you too may have life.

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**\*\*\*\*What news made Jesus leave Judea and return to Galilee (4:1-6)?** Jesus left Judea when he learned that the Pharisees heard that He was baptizing more people than John the Baptist.

**Why did Jesus care if the Pharisees learned that He had the most disciples (4:1)?** No reason was given by the author. It was common to baptize Gentile converts to Judaism, but what called special attention to John and Jesus is that they were baptizing Jewish people.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps it was because it was not yet time to clash with the religious establishment head on.

**Incarnation Insight: Jesus is God in human form (1:1, 14). God knows all things, yet here we see that Jesus "learned" (4:1) something. How did that work?** When the Son of God became the Son of Man, He voluntarily veiled certain aspects of His deity, including His omniscience. Jesus operated as the perfect man, totally dependent on God the Father, and only knew what the Father revealed to Him.

**Curious Information: Why do you suppose that Jesus Himself did not baptize, but only His disciples (4:2)?** No reason was given by John, which seems to be given as an incidental, parenthetical remark. It is interesting that Paul followed Jesus' example in this:

ESV **1 Corinthians 1:14** I thank God that I baptized none of you . . .

**Geography:** Draw backwards letter "C" = Mediterranean; at end of sea, strawberry = Sea of Galilee; crooked line downwards = Jordan River; cucumber with bite taken out of it = Dead Sea. The area to the left of the Dead Sea is Judea. The area to the left of the Sea of Galilee is Galilee. **Joke:** In order to get from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north, Jesus had to pass through "some area" in between the two, so we'll call it "Samaria". Samaria is left of the Jordan River.

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, *John*, 95.

<sup>2</sup> Carson, 215.

**How did the region of Samaria *really* get its name (4:4)?** Years previous, after King Solomon's death, the nation of ancient Israel split into two nations (931 B.C.). The southern kingdom, composed of two tribes, was called Judah and had Jerusalem as its capital. The northern kingdom, composed of ten tribes, retained the name Israel, and established a new capital city called Samaria. Over time, the whole area came to be called Samaria as well as Israel. Years later, the Assyrians (from modern eastern Iraq) attacked and destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel (722 B.C.). The capital city, Samara, was conquered. The ten tribes were deported and scattered elsewhere. (They are now known as the ten lost tribes of Israel). Since neither the nation called Israel, nor the original population, existed any more, the entire devastated region retained only the name Samaria (rather than Israel).

**What was the name of the town in Samaria where Jesus rested (4:5)?** The town was Sychar, near Mount Gerizim. Sychar was about half way between Jerusalem in Judea and Nazareth in Galilee.

**According to 4:5, Sychar was near a field that Jacob had given to Joseph (see Genesis 33:18-19, 48:21-22, Exodus 13:19, Joshua 24:32), and where Jacob had a well. Who were Jacob and Joseph?** Father Abraham, who lived around 2000 B.C., was the start of the ethnic group we know today as the Hebrews. Abraham had a son named Isaac, and Isaac had a son named Jacob (alias Israel). Jacob had twelve sons (who became the twelve tribes of Israel); one of those sons was Joseph, to whom Jacob gave this field, and where Joseph was buried.<sup>3</sup>

**Incarnation Insight:** Around noon (the 6<sup>th</sup> hour by Jewish time keeping), Jesus, wearied from his trek across Samaria, and sat down next a well that had belonged to Jacob (4:6). Though He was God in human form, Jesus lived life as a true human being. He got tired and thirsty, just as anyone would.

ESV **Hebrews 4:15** . . . we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses . . .

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**\*\*\*\*What odd statements about water did Jesus make to a woman at the well (4:7-15)?**

Jesus told her that He had access to living water (4:10) that permanently quenched thirst (4:13) and that gave eternal life (4:14).

**Application:** Jesus was tired and thirsty, yet He made it a priority to speak to this woman about spiritual matters.

**Why was Jesus dependent on someone else for a drink (4:7-8)?** See 4:11. He asked her for a drink because 1) his disciples were not there to help and 2) the well was deep and he had nothing to draw the water out with).

**Why was she surprised that Jesus spoke to her (4:9)?** The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, 4:9b.

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<sup>3</sup> Dennis & Grudem, *ESV Study*, 2027.

**Why did Jews have no dealings with Samaritans (4:9)?** Think back to when the U.S. government (along with the state of Georgia) deported the Cherokee nation from their ancestral land, and white settlers replaced them. This is what happened to ancient Israel. After the Assyrians “lost” the ten tribes of Israel, replacement colonists from foreign lands were brought in to repopulate the land. These foreign colonists eventually intermarried with the few Israelites who were left in the land (just as whites intermarried with the few remaining Cherokee Indians). These foreign colonists even eventually adopted their own false form of Jehovah worship.<sup>4</sup> To the Jews of Judea, the Samaritans were not ethnically impure, had a false form of Jehovah worship, and were a visible reminder of the destruction of Israel.

Thus, the Samaritans were considered ceremonially unclean. That the Jews had no “dealings” with them may mean that the Jews did not share the use of things with them (such as a water jar), lest the Jews also become ceremonially unclean.<sup>5</sup> That Jesus’ disciples went into town to buy food from the Samaritans suggest that they were not as prejudiced as were many other Jews.

**In 4:10, Jesus offered this woman the gift of God, which He called living water. Based on 4:11, what did she mistakenly think he was talking about?** She thought Jesus mean literal, physical, wet water. Well water had to be drawn out of a well. Living water is running water, like water that bubbles up to the surface out of a spring.<sup>6</sup> She was all for not having to draw water from Jacob’s well anymore!

**What did she want to know in 4:12?** She wanted to know, perhaps sarcastically, if Jesus was claiming in some way to be greater than Jacob. For whatever reason, Jacob had to rely on that well to get water.<sup>7</sup> What did Jesus know that Jacob didn’t?

**What did Jesus say in 4:13-14 to indicate that He wasn’t talking about literal water?** Jesus said His water didn’t quench physical thirst, but rather spiritual thirst, and gave people eternal life. Those who drank Jesus’ metaphysical water became themselves springs of water welling up to eternal life.

**Application:** Eternal life (4:14) is a gift from God (4:10).

**ESV Revelation 22:17** . . . let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

A gift is free to you; it does not have to be earned or paid for. Jesus is the One who paid the price for the gift.

**ESV 1 Peter 1:18-19a** . . . you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ . . .

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<sup>4</sup> The white settlers in Georgia also intermarried with the few remaining Cherokees, but since most of the Cherokees had long before converted to Christianity, adopting their religion meant the white people became Christians (which few of them were, considering how they mistreated the Cherokees).

<sup>5</sup> Dennis & Grudem, *ESV Study*, 2027.

<sup>6</sup> “Living” (4:10) is from *zao*, basis for “zoo”. Jacob’s well is spring fed, but so deep a bucket and rope is necessary.

<sup>7</sup> Several springs are nearby (Carson, 219).

**Application:** When you drink of Jesus' spring water, you yourself become a spring of living water, potentially giving life to others by sharing the Gospel with them.

**What in 4:15 indicates that she still didn't quite understand what Jesus was offering?** She thought He meant physical water and physical thirst. (Nicodemus made this same mistake when Jesus spoke to him about being born again). One can't fault her for not understanding—this was crazy talk!

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**\*\*\*\*Earlier, the woman asked Jesus if He were greater than Jacob (4:12); how did Jesus answer her question (4:16-28)?** Jesus told her that He was the long-anticipated Messiah (Christ), 4:26.

**How did Jesus answer her request for water (4:16)?** He upped the ante told her to go get her husband.

**Why did Jesus answer her request for water with a request that she go get her husband (4:16)?** See back to 4:12a. He did so to begin the process of answering her earlier question about him being greater than Jacob. He was about to prove to her that He was indeed greater than Jacob by supernaturally revealing knowledge about her past.<sup>8</sup>

**What did the woman conclude when Jesus told her about her five husbands and live-in boyfriend (4:17-19)?** She concluded that Jesus was a prophet. Normally we think of a prophet as knowing the future, but in this case the prophet knew the past. Prophets are spokesmen for God who prove their authenticity by knowing information about the past, present or future that could only come from God.

**Secondary Application:** Sometimes couples who live together feel themselves to be married in God's sight ("we don't need a piece of paper"). Jesus didn't see it that way. Since there had been no wedding, Jesus considered the man she was living with not to be her husband.

**Why did she start asking about mountains in 4:20?**

- a) The *motive* for her question may have been to change the subject from the fact that she was living with a man who was not her husband. It is interesting that Jesus never returned to the subject of her immorality. He simply stated the facts of her lifestyle.<sup>9</sup>
- b) The *background* to her question is this: when the northern kingdom of Israel came into existence, their first evil king (Jeroboam) created a counterfeit verse of worship, parallel to what Moses commanded, but illegitimate. They had a false temple and renegade priesthood, all designed to keep the Israelites from traveling to the southern kingdom of Judah for worship. After Israel was destroyed, the Samaritans adopted this same false worship, claiming Mount Gerizim was the true place God wanted the temple to be located (not Mount Zion/Jerusalem).

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<sup>8</sup> Most people drew water in the cool of the evening. Due to her mess-up life, she may have come to the well in the heat of the day to avoid people (Dennis & Grudem, *ESV Study*, 2027).

<sup>9</sup> It has been speculated that most people drew water in the morning or evening when it was cool and that this woman purposely went there at noon to avoid people since she was living a messed-up life.

**The Truth About Worship: According to Jesus, where is the correct place to worship (4:21-24)?** Jesus said that in their near future, legitimate worship would take place in spirit and truth, and would not be linked to any physical location or temple. A game change was coming.

The temple on Mount Gerizim had always been illegitimate. The need for the legitimate temple on Mount Zion became obsolete when Jesus died on the cross as the ultimate sacrifice to which all Mosaic sacrifices had pointed. Now, in the new covenant era:

ESV **1 Corinthians 3:16-17** . . . you are God's temple . . . God's Spirit dwells in you . . . you are that temple.

**Application:** A believer's worship beside a chimney was no less valid than a believer's worship beside a steeple.

**Based on 4:22, what did Jesus think about the Samaritan version of Jehovah worship?**

Jesus made it clear that Samaritan version was a perversion! It was based on ignorance, whereas the Jews still retained the truth about Jehovah as revealed through Moses.

**What did Jesus mean when He said that salvation is from the Jews (4:22)?** God's plan from eternity past was to undo the effect of Adam's sin by becoming a man from the tribe of Judah and dying on the cross as payment for man's sin.

**What does it mean to worship God in spirit (4:23)?** *Compare 4:24.* First, God Himself is Spirit, but moreover the idea is that worship is not about a particular location. We must worship God sincerely, from the depth of our inner being, out of a heart of faith, and not based on outward ritual or ceremony.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore:

ESV **John 3:5** [Jesus]: . . . unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

ESV **John 3:34** For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.

**What does it mean to worship God in truth (4:23)?**

ESV **John 14:6** Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

ESV **Romans 10:2** [With reference to unbelieving Jews]: . . . they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

**What can we, as new covenant believers, learn about God and worship from 4:23-24?** As relates to God, we learn that God, in His essence, is a spirit being. It is wrong to think of God as a white-bearded man sitting on a throne. Jesus is all of God we will ever see.

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<sup>10</sup> Steven Cole, "Lesson 22: Coming to Salvation (John 4:15-26)", Bible.org. Accessed July 03, 2019.

**ESV 1 Timothy 6:16** [God] who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.

As relates to worship: **1.)** Under the new covenant, true worship is not tied to any particular building or place. It is a matter of the heart. There is no longer a holy temple or a holy mountain or a holy land or a holy geo-political nation. **2.)** True worship must be based on truth. We must not create a pet god of our own imagination.

**ESV Romans 12:1** . . . present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

**What is the difference between the title Messiah and the title Christ (4:25)?** They both mean “anointed one”. Messiah is Hebrew way of saying “anointed one” and Christ is Greek way to say it.

**The Gospel:** Jesus is the long-awaited, prophesied Messiah (Christ), God in the flesh, who lived a perfect life, died on the cross to pay for sin, came back to life from the dead, and ascended into heaven from whence we await His return. Jesus conquered death and offers eternal life as a gift of His grace through faith. *Do you believe?*

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**\*\*\*\*What convinced the woman that Jesus was the Christ (4:27-30)?** The fact that Jesus told her all that she ever did really impressed her (4:29).

**Why did the disciples marvel that Jesus was talking with a woman (4:27)?** They were familiar with the common prejudices of the time.

**Why didn't any of the disciples ask any questions (4:27)?** Perhaps they had already learned that Jesus was on divine agenda that defied their logic and expectations. Or, perhaps other pressing matters seemed more important.

**Why is it noteworthy that she left her water jar (4:28)?** She was so excited about meeting Jesus that her original errand (to fetch water) was forgotten.

### So What?

**Why did John record this incident with the Samaritans? What point did he want to make to the unbelieving Jews who originally read this?** The take away is that God's plan for salvation is much larger than simply saving Jewish people. That even the despised Samaritans believed and received eternal life proves this.

**What secondary applications does John 4:1-30 hold for those who already believe in Jesus?**

1) We need to realize that we never know who God is going to save, especially among those we deem the least likely to be open to the Gospel. The woman at the well wasn't seeking Jesus, but He sought her!

ESV **Luke 19:10** For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

2) Eternal Life is a gift (4:10,14).

ESV **Ephesians 2:8-9** . . . .by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

3) New covenant worship should not be tied to any particular location, but is to be a matter of the heart. God is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

4) Though Jesus was tired and thirsty, he make it a priority to speak to the woman at the well about spiritual things.

\*\*\*\* = Ask this question before reading the text. This will engage people's minds and focus their attention.

You can hear this lesson being taught at [SermonAudio.com/NTRF](http://SermonAudio.com/NTRF).

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