



# Woman at the well



By

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Bible Study

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## WHERE DID THE ACTION TAKE PLACE?

The scene for the meeting at the well is at Jacobs well near a town in Samaria called Sychar.

This is a picture of Sychar taken at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. The well is near the bottom of the mountains that you can see in the background. In this picture if you replace the modern cows in this picture with an older breed or with sheep or donkeys then nothing much would have changed since the time of Jesus. Although now you would not recognize the place as it sits in the West Bank with the sprawling developments of the occupied territory all around; see the picture at the end.

Sychar was in Samaria and the Samaritans have a complicated history and relationship with the Jews. It is not unknown for hostilities to flare up into fatal mob violence. This is commented on in Josephus (see additional reading). For a Jew



*Sychar. See the hills in the background*



*Map of Judea and Samaria*

calling someone a Samaritan was truly hardcore abuse; something akin to you stupid half breed. Jesus made this clear in *Matthew 5:22* (NIVUK)<sup>22</sup> *I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, "Raca," is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

The Jews believed that Samaritans were confused in race, mind and religion. However to get to and from Jerusalem or to Jerusalem from Galilee it was quicker to cut through Samarian lands rather than take the long walk around it. This is how Jesus came to be here (read Luke 9:51-56). Reconstructed maps of the time show many different borders for Samaria, but it was clearly between Jerusalem and Galilee, Josephus describes also describes as being between Judea and Galilee.

During His living ministry Jesus directed His teaching primarily at the Jews and He Himself uses Samaritans in lessons to His disciples and to the crowds. The Jewish attitude would have been that there was no such thing as a *good* Samaritan, which is the very reason He uses one in His story. In His discussions with the woman at the well He tells the woman - 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.

In Mathew 10:5 He tells His disciples to specifically not teach in Samaria.

In short Samaritans aren't Jews, but they aren't Gentiles either. See Acts 1:8, the disciples are sent to Jews, Samaria and Gentiles (check the order, Read it!). They are in the middle, a bit half and half.

Lastly Jesus Himself is called a Samaritan, when Jews listening to Him could not understand Him, He is accused of talking nonsense; they said – What are you a Samaritan? Very rude (John 8:48).

## TWO DAYS – OUR TIME IS SHORT

Jesus spends two days teaching in this Samaritan town whilst the disciples baptize, but the woman at the well **only** gets a mention in John's Gospel. Was Jesus in a hurry to get somewhere? He had been in a hurry to get away from somewhere, which is why they ended up taking the Samaritan short-cut. At the end of the time it says many Samaritans believed. But the time was short and Jesus was very anxious about the time.

It is evident that sometimes, although grown men, Jesus' disciples were afraid to talk to Him. Before they go into this town they try to stop him and urge Him to eat. It had been a tough journey to get there and they were clearly concerned that He should eat, but for their trouble Jesus rebukes them.

31-38

*Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."*

*But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."*

*Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"*

*"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."*

*Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who sows draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour."*

In our talk about the amour of God we talked about the feet being prepared in readiness. Here we see Jesus demonstrate this. It is the middle of the day He is tired and hungry, and thirsty no doubt, but when the work is there and it has to be done. There is no time to take a break,

no time for lunch, and the work is urgent. Angus Buchan said you can no more take a break from your walk with God than your Heart can have a day off, it stops beating, you die.



A German colleague of mine uses a saying “let’s get this cow off the ice”. Apparently it is a common saying and even used by Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission.

Like fat heavy cows we have been skating around on thin ice and we have to decide on what our role in spreading the word of God is going to be, before it is too late. As Jesus put it the reaper is already drawing his pay.

Our woman at the well is now revered in many places as a saint equal to the disciples. That is a pretty high ranking saint. Why or how did she become so?

Let’s take a look at what happens in the short time between her getting in to town followed by Jesus and the disciples. The town’s folk said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world”. Wow, what a witness, in such a short time they had heard her story and believed. She continued this powerful witnessing until her martyrdom.

Much has been made of this reading, but this major point of the teaching is frequently ignored. We need to hear and we need to change and we need to be witnesses that sow or that reap, not like the miserly, cowardly servant that buried the money he was given in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-28).

One day you will be skating along and crack...Time’s up.

## OH WHAT A LAUGH

There really isn’t anything funny. Our Woman at the well is a Samaritan! For a Jew another and vulgar way of calling someone stupid. She well knew this, but did not allow others prejudices stop her from spreading the good news with her own compelling story. What she wasn’t was stupid.

Her name: Photini/ Photina/ Photine (Spelt in a number of ways) the name she chose at her baptism, and it means **enlightened**.

She is considered a Patron Saint for those repentant and those suffering carnal temptations, for those with physical or spiritual blindness, and for those suffering diseases of the head and trembling disorders. It is written that the people of Smyrna in Asia Minor have great love and devotion to the Saint, so much so that they constructed her magnificent Metropolis Church in only 40 days.

She left her sinful life and immediately, preaching Christ to her family and community. After Pentecost, she, her five sisters (Anatole, Phota, Photis, Paraskevi, & Kyriaki) and her two

sons (Victor, who later was renamed by Christ "Photinos", and Joses) were baptized. They became great preachers of Christ in many different places, including Smyrna in Asia Minor, Carthage in North Africa, and finally in Rome, where they stood up to the Emperor Nero's endless tortures (including beatings, poisonings, blindings, imprisonment, temptations, crucifixion, burning in a furnace, etc.), all while managing to convert St. Sebastian, his daughter (St. Anthousa), and his magician (St. Theoklitos), who all were martyred. Their entire story is found in the Neon Eklogion by St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain. Most of the details can be found online.

One feature of her martyrdom is her continual witness and spitting in the eye of Nero.

The first shall be last... and the stupid called enlightened. Are we enlightened? Do we really see or are we still spiritually blind?

In the film, already mentioned previously, *Left Behind*, the daughter goes to her mother's church only to find that everyone has been raptured except the pastor. Spiritual blindness is not broken through your qualifications or titles. Knowing the bible inside out and quoting and preaching on it isn't enough. Even before becoming a Christian I could have done that myself.

For me the example was Esther, not Esther the wife Esther, but Esther the queen and book Esther. Without Grace we cannot stand before the King.

Who can go to the King or President or other ruler, imagine going to the Iranian Ayatollah, Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of Iran and asking of him anything that you wanted. Or what about North Korea's Supreme leader: Kim Jong-un. That sort of grace isn't available to everyone, it was available to Esther and she bravely asked. We, have access through grace, through Jesus to the highest authority that there ever was, is or will ever be. Beyond any comparison to any Supreme Leader.

My actual coming to Christ was truly more like Photini's. I was chatting with Jesus and reading my Bible before it was revealed to me who and what He is. Like the woman at the well, although the woman at the well had a head start on me because she already knew about Christ and Jesus had to tell me what that was. My point I am trying to make is that God can be intimidating though through Jesus we achieve intimacy with God, but intimacy without the appreciation of who Jesus is cannot be worship.

## PAUSE

Lessons we have so far

1. Why is it important to know where this took place? Because Jews may well have thought that Samaritans were beyond reach. And we know that no one is beyond God's reach. It also serves to explain how Jesus and His disciples may be feeling.

2. We have work to do and time is short. If it means foregoing a meal then that's understandable the work is urgent.
3. Someone labelled stupid can become a Saint equal to the apostles and be called enlightened
4. We can chat to God and He will reveal who He is as we have to know that in order to do His work.

## WHAT HAPPENED

The reading is John 4 1-42

Jesus after walking sometime reaches a well around noon. They are in Samaria and His disciple are off looking to buy food. They have already been chased away from one town.

The disciple show their concern for Jesus when they get back. They know that He must be hungry, thirsty and probably in need of a bit of a rest. The ground is mountains, valleys and foothills. But before they get back He is at a deep well with no bucket. It is noon and no one comes to fetch water at the hottest part of the day.

To the right is a picture from nearby at the beginning of the twentieth century. Women fetching water. Notice they go together and the long shadows as it is still early in the morning. If you have a journey to make with a 15kg jar of water on your head then you really don't want to do it in the scorching hot noon day sun. You meet up and go in groups too, only women fetch the water and you don't know who or what may be about, plus it is a good time to gossip. No men about and anyone else you want to gossip about doesn't need to be invited to come with you.



*Women carrying water*

So there is Jesus a deep well and no bucket.

Along comes Photini with her water jar in the middle of the day. How does she feel about fetching the water? She talks quiet cheeky to Jesus, you're a Jew and you don't have bucket, but at the thought of not having to come back to the well. She suddenly changes; "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." There is no fun in drawing water when you have to go alone.

Lots of people have speculated why she was there alone and why so late. Would you want to bump into your ex-husband's new wife? Or moreover four ex-husbands new wives. Take a look at number two there with her arms folded, friendly? Number 3 there can hoist that

massive jar up on to her head, she could well hoist you into the well or down some hole in the ground. Like Joseph's bothers. Could be worse they could all be ex-step daughters, or mother-in-laws. The thing is in a small town when you have been married 5 times and living now with potentially number six, that you are "living-in-sin" with. You just aren't going to be popular with the other women of the town. Clearly also if you are avoiding them and for who knows how long. It can become a habit. You don't talk to them and they don't talk you.

Imagine then their surprise when you come running into town calling them and forgetting how disliked you might be to tell them that the Christ is at the well. You're not doing that for fun, which would only make you the butt of more jokes. If you've not gone mad in the heat then you must be telling the truth.

Clearly Photini is very persuasive in the short time she has before they meet Jesus for themselves, they do believe her. After all in her hurry she left her jar at the well. The joke is on her if she has to go back and get it.

Some may say that she was there on the prowl for a new man. Not likely with a heavy water jar. That I think she would love to not to be carrying that thing. Some may say that she was prostituting, but she had a man and had been married 5 times. I am not an expert on prostitutes but do they usually marry all their customers? Some say she was searching for Jesus, after knowing what went on in the neighbouring town. Do you go searching for a mob of 13 foreigners on your own with a heavy jar on your head? What is more you would not be allowed to if the men of your town knew anything about it. Even if you thought that it was Jesus, who else might you meet? Read Josephus and you'll that women and children don't get spared when mobs go on the rampage. There is no need to search for strange reasons for her to be there. If we look at the interaction we see that she does not know who Jesus is, Jesus says if you knew who it was you were talking to.

Listen carefully and you can hear her suck her teeth, you're a Jew and have no bucket... cha, don't talk to me, we don't talk to Jews. You Jews don't even worship God here on our mountain. Jacob is our father and he made this well and drank from it do you think you are as good as him?

Sorry I have been listening to the patois bible. Although I couldn't get to John 4. Look for it on YouTube it is dramatic.

Are there lesson in their meeting so far?

Look at Photini's reaction. Are we so keep to run off tell people where to find Jesus?

Does make a difference to her life? I think so, she go goes from being a town pariah, to being a high standing saint. Do we let meeting Jesus change us?

This is not all that happens here though, as with me Jesus goes on to tell her who He is. Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he." He has told her who she is too.



John is telling us this story and in it he tells us about living water.

## LIVING WATER

This is a little confusing, it is clear that living water is a well enough known phrase in Jesus time Isaiah and Zechariah both use it. But let's not dwell too much on this at this time because John explains this later in the same book later on. However ever one small bit of clarification may be necessary.

In simplest terms living water is water with a motion, usually described as flowing, where as well water stand flat and motion less. Living water springs as opposed to collects.

*John 7:37-39*

*New International Version - UK (NIVUK)*

*37 On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.' 39 By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.*

*If the water or Holy Spirit within us is to be alive it needs to have motion. It needs to flow.*

## DISCUSSION

1. Living Water
2. Have our lives changed?
3. Are we ready?
4. Are we treating the Lord's work as urgent?
5. Is God revealed to us; do we know God in Glory and intimacy?

## THE END

Newer picture 2013



## USED BIBLE REFERENCES

Matthew 5:22

Matthew 10:5

Matthew 25:14-30    Luke 19:12-28

Luke 9:51-56

John 4:4-42

John 7:37-39

John 8:48

Acts 1:8

Read also the reading from Sunday  
From Esther.

## OTHER READING(S)

Murdered Galilean Avenged

232    Next (about 50 CE) came a conflict of Galileans and Samaritans. For at a village called Gema, which lies in the great plain of Samaria, a certain Galilean was murdered, one of many Jews going up to the feast [in Jerusalem].

233    Thus, many from Galilee gathered to make war on the Samaritans.

234    And when the unfortunate murder was announced in Jerusalem, the masses were agitated. And, abandoning the feast, they set out to fight with the Samaritans. They lacked a general and heeded none of the rulers, who held back.

235    A certain Eleazar ben Deinai and Alexander incited the bandits and partisans among them to attack those [Samaritans south of Shechem] on the borders of the toparchy

Acrabatene. And they massacred them, sparing no one regardless of age, and burned their villages.

236 But [the Roman procurator] Cumanus set out from Caesarea, taking one troop of cavalry called the "Augustans". And he arrested many of those around Eleazar and killed more.

237 But when the rest of the (Judean) masses rushed to fight the Samaritans, the rulers of Jerusalem ran out, wearing sack-cloth and pouring ashes on their heads. And they begged them to return and not to anger the Romans against Jerusalem by revenge on the Samaritans. (They urged them) to have mercy on their country and temple, their own children and wives, who all were at risk of being destroyed, on account of revenge for one Galilean.

--- Josephus, Jewish War 2.232-237

In my Bible Dictionary it also says that in AD36 On the mountain, conned into believing that there were sacred vessels of Moses there many Samaritans gathered and were massacred by Pilate.