

The Woman at the Well Rotation Background Information

The Woman at the Well: Background Information

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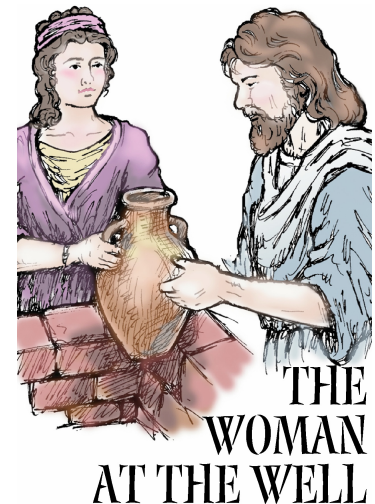
Bible Text: John 4:1-42

with other individual references cited in “A Biblical Explanation” and in specific workshops.

Memory Verses:

“Worship in spirit and in truth.” John 4:24^{NIV}

“Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst.” John 4:14^{NIV}



Objectives:

After completing this Rotation, participants will be able to:

- Name that the story is found in the New Testament. Identify the meaning of the word “gospel.”
- Locate the story in John. Identify the four Gospels.
- Retell the story in his/her own words.
- Discover how radical it was for a Jewish person to associate with a Samaritan.
- Explore the woman’s position in society; discuss the significance of the compassion that Jesus offered.
- Define “living water” as what Jesus offers us: a close relationship with God - assurance that God loves us, no matter what.
- Recognize the change that took place in the woman. Recognize how our wanting this living water can change us.

Theme:

God’s Kingdom is for all the peoples of the earth and for any individual; God uses His people to proclaim His name and salvation through Jesus Christ.

Concepts:

1. God loves all people of all cultures and backgrounds at all times.
2. God loves each child at all times, in all circumstances.
3. Our sins separate us from God, creating a “lost” condition, but Jesus came to reconcile us to God.

Biblical Explanation and Background

The beginning of John chapter 4 seems to give a partial answer to the question, “Why did Jesus and his disciples go through Samaria?” Obviously, Jesus wanted to get to Galilee, and maybe the faster route appealed to him, but there may be other reasons. The question is important because most Jewish people of Jesus’ time would have taken

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the longer route through the Jordan river valley, passing through the regions of Perea and Decapolis to go north to Galilee. They would have done this because they hated and looked down upon the Samaritans. Their attitude had to do with both the history and the religious beliefs of the Samaritans.

II Kings 17:24 – 34 explains the history of the Samaritans. They were people from foreign nations brought into Israel after the conquering Assyrians deported the northern kingdom of Israel, around 700 B.C. These foreigners brought their own religions with them, but “the LORD sent lions among them.” The king of Assyria was told, “The people you settled in the towns of Samaria do not know what the god of that country requires. He has sent lions among them...”. The Assyrian king sent one of the Jewish captives, a priest, back to Samaria “to teach the people what the god of the land requires.” “Nevertheless, each national group made its own gods...and set them up in the shrines the people of Samaria had made.” II Kings 17 goes on to say, “They worshipped the LORD, but they also served their own gods...”. Later in their history, the Samaritans decided that Mt. Gerizim, located just southwest of the town of Sychar where Jesus met the woman at the well, was their sacred mountain for worshipping God. They changed the record of the Old Testament, and only accepted the first five books, Genesis through Deuteronomy. They changed the story of Abraham to include Mt. Gerizim. Most offensive of all, they were breaking the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me.” (Deuteronomy 5:7)

Jesus **chose** to go through Samaria, and the route took them past the historic place called “Jacob’s Well”. (This well still exists today, and is reputed to be 75 to 100 feet deep and to still give good water.) They arrived at midday, no doubt hot, tired and thirsty. While Jesus rested, the disciples went into the nearby town to buy food.

John 4:7 records another deliberate choice Jesus made. He spoke to a Samaritan woman who had come to the well to get water, and he asked her to give him a drink. To us this seems inconsequential, but in Jesus’ time, it was unheard of for a Jewish man, let alone a Rabbi, to speak to a Samaritan woman. This woman seems to have come alone to the well at a time when other women were home resting in the cool shade. Jesus knew she had great emotional and spiritual needs; he loves all people at all times, and he was not considering his own reputation. He was reaching out to her by asking her for a drink.

The woman immediately questioned Jesus about his asking her for a drink; she knew the social prohibitions; she knew the Jews hated the Samaritans, and she no doubt knew Jesus was a stranger, not from the local town. Jesus replied with a revelation about himself, (verse 10) “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” (The term “living water” can mean “fresh, flowing water” as opposed to stagnant water.) We know from our memory verse, John 7:37, that Jesus meant that if she believed that he was the “anointed one” or the Messiah that God had promised to take away the sins of the world, that she would have “living water”. “Living water” refers to Jesus’ spirit, the Holy Spirit, who lives in the believer. John 7:38 quotes Jesus saying, “Whoever believes in

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me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” John 7:39 explains that this refers to the Holy Spirit in the believer.

The woman was intrigued by Jesus’ words; she asked him two more questions. First, she wanted to know where and how Jesus would get “living water”, and second, she was awed by Jesus’ authority; she asked him to tell her who he is. Notice that Jesus had deliberately invited her into this conversation, and she was willing to learn more about Jesus. She was not proud; she was not rejecting him because of her own religious beliefs or prejudices. She had the attitude of a child, willing to know Jesus. Remember, Jesus said when he blessed the little children, “I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” (Luke 18:17)

Jesus answered the woman with the promise, “...whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst...the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:14) The woman asked Jesus for the living water “that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” (John 4:15) She wasn’t sure what Jesus was offering her, but she wanted it. Children also sometimes are not sure what Jesus is offering, but they know they “love Jesus”. Still, Jesus sees to the core of human nature, and he saw sin in the core of the woman. Isaiah 59:2 says that our sin has separated us from God, but John 3:16 gives us God’s solution for sin, eternal life through his Son.

Faith in Jesus, the Son of God, is the “spring of water welling up to eternal life”. To expose the woman to her own need, Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband and come back.” (John 4:16) She admitted honestly (again, like a child) to Jesus that she had no husband, and Jesus told her that he knew she’d had five husbands and was now living with a man to whom she was not married. Inwardly, this shocked the woman, for we know that later she told the people in the town to “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” (John 4:29) Outwardly, in verse 20, she betrayed her spiritual hunger to Jesus by saying, “Sir, I perceive you are a prophet..” and asking about where God should be worshipped. Jesus again answered her eager question; he explained that “God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24)

The woman’s reply to Jesus indicated that he had reached her heart. She said, “I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” (John 4:25) And then Jesus openly told her, since she was ready to receive him, “I who speak to you am he.” (John 4:26) What love Jesus showed for her in revealing himself to her as the Son of God! She joyfully believed him, and she ran off to tell the town’s people that she’d found the Messiah. Children also can joyfully believe Jesus when they learn that their sins separate them from God, and that Jesus, God’s Son, has paid the penalty for sin.

Jesus’ disciples were puzzled when they returned and found him talking with a Samaritan woman. They urged him to eat, and his answer, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about” reminds us of his mission: “The Son of Man came to seek and to

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save that which was lost.”(Luke 19:10) The joy Jesus felt in the woman’s faith filled him; it was enough.

The end of the story shows the results of “harvest”; “Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.” (John 4:39) Jesus had to stay two more days, and the people 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 Savior of the world.” (John 4: 42) Likewise, even children, when they believe on Jesus, can share **who he is** with other people, and other people will come to believe in Jesus.