

Echoes of Scripture

Lent 3a ~ John 4:5-42

Summary of John 4:5-42

Jesus “needed” (divine imperative) to travel through Samaria and stops to rest at Jacob’s well where he meets one of the lost sheep of Israel, a woman of ill-repute, and offers her living water; water that will quench her deepest thirst. Convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, she goes back to town and invites the crowds to come and see Jesus. As a result many and they invite him to stay for two more days. The disciples, too, went into town, but they only returned with lunch.

Suggested Course of Study

- Consider the religious significance and symbolism of Jesus doing ministry in Samaria particularly his travel to the location of the ancient city of Shechem at the base of Mount Gerizim (see Genesis 12, 22, 33-35, the footnote at Genesis 48:22; Deuteronomy 11:29-30; Joshua 20-21, 24:32; Judges 8-9; 1 Kings 12, and 2 Kings 17; 1 Chronicles 6:67, 7:28; 2 Chronicles 10; Psalm 60, 108; Jeremiah 41:5; and Hosea 6:9).
- Read John 4:5-42 and notice the similarities between this story and the Nicodemus story (John 3) as well as the significance of Jesus’ words to Nicodemus for the people of Samaria.
- Consider the journey of discovery and freedom experienced by this woman as she begins to understand who Jesus is. She asks the rhetorical question “Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob?” “Are you a prophet?” “I know that Messiah is coming.” “He cannot be the Messiah can he?” She returns to her village and the people there listen to her and they come and see!

Immediate Context

John 2:1-12 The Wedding at Cana

John 2:13-25 Jesus Cleanses the Temple

John 3:1-21 Nicodemus visits Jesus

John 3:22-30 Jesus and John the Baptist

John 3:31-36 The One Who Comes from Heaven

John 4:1-42 Jesus and the Woman of Samaria

John 4:43-54 Jesus Returns; Heals Official’s son

John 5:1-18 Jesus heals on the Sabbath

John 5:19-29 Jesus talks about his authority

John 5:30-47 Witnesses to Jesus

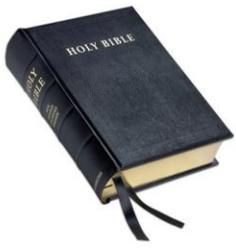
John 6:1-15 Feeding the 5000

John 6:16-21 Jesus walks on water

Key Words

HE HAD TO – In John 4:3-4, it says ³*He left Judea and started back to Galilee.* ⁴*But **he had to go** through Samaria.* In Greek, the word is *ἐδει* which suggests a divine imperative; that “it is necessary”—God has a purpose for it. The direct route from Judea to Galilee passes through Samaria, but Jews (who despise Samaritans) often bypass Samaria by traveling east of the Jordan River. If Jesus “needed to go through Samaria,” then there is more happening here than Jesus trying to save time.

SAMARITAN – Read 2 Kings 17 (Israel conquered by Assyria); In Acts 1:8 Jesus makes it clear that Samaria and its people are part of the mission of God. ⁸*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea **and Samaria**, and to the ends of the earth.”*



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SYCHAR – Sychar (Greek: Συχάρ) is only mentioned in John 4:5 and many think the name refers to the city named Shechem (Greek: Συχέμ) which is mentioned in Acts 7:16. Shechem (the name means “shoulder” or “upper part of the back”) is an ancient Canaanite city located on the southeastern end of a narrow pass (500 yards) between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, just 41 miles north of Jerusalem where it dominated an important trade route and controlled the fertile valley. It is mentioned 60 times in the Bible (Genesis, Joshua, Judges, 1 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Psalms, Jeremiah, and Hosea). In the New Testament, Shechem didn’t exist as a city as it had been destroyed by the High Priest and King of the Jews, John Hyrcanus in 10.

Abraham and Shechem – See Genesis 12:6-7 (God appears to Abram and promises that his descendants will inherit the land). Abram built an altar to the Lord there. Could this also be the place where Abraham was instructed to sacrifice Isaac? (see Genesis 22).

Jacob and Joseph at Shechem—Jacob purchases land near Shechem and builds an altar (Genesis 33). Rape of Dinah takes place at Shechem resulting in the murder of the men of Shechem (Genesis 34). Jacob’s son Joseph is sold into slavery near Shechem (Genesis 37).

Joshua at Shechem—Joshua performs the ceremony at Shechem with half the people standing on Mount Gerizim (blessings) and half the people standing on Mount Ebal (curses)—see Deuteronomy 11:22-30; 27:1-13; Joshua 8:30-35. Becomes one of the six cities of refuge for those who kill without intent or by accident (see Joshua 20-21). Following the conquest, Joshua again assembled the people to renew the covenant “Choose this day whom you will serve... but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). Joseph’s bones are brought up to Shechem and buried on the plot of ground purchased by Jacob (see Joshua 24:32).

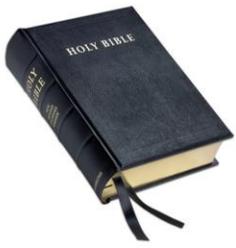
Abimelech at Shechem (Time of the Judges)—Following the death of Gideon, Abimelech, son of Shechemite concubine (Judges 8:31) claimed kingship. He persuaded citizens of Shechem to follow him. Murdered 70 his brothers except youngest. Fought against the city and razed it. Shechemites tried to save themselves in the “the stronghold of the temple El-berith (Judges 9:46).

The Divided Monarchy and Shechem—1 Kings 11-12. Jeroboam receives the message that he will be receiving the ten tribes in the north. After Solomon’s death, his son Rehoboam is next in line. All the Israelites assembled at Shechem to anoint Rehoboam king. Rehoboam told Northern tribes he would tax them heavily and this split the kingdom in two. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained in Judah. The other ten joined Israel. Assyrians invade Israel in 724 BC and Shechem is destroyed.

Return from Exile—Shechem regained importance after the Babylonian exile, when natives excluded from the temple in Jerusalem by repatriated Judean exiles built a rival shrine on Mount Gerizim. Tensions between these rival shrines, each claiming to be the sole heir of Mosaic tradition led to clashes between Jews and Samaritans during the Hellenistic era.

Shechem between the Testaments—It was the High Priest John Hyrcanus (King of Israel; fourth king of the Hasmonean empire) who helped conquer Palestine and Jordan and return it to Judean rule. In the South, he forced the Edomites to accept Judaism. In the north, he destroyed Shechem and burned the temple on Mount Gerizim. When the Pharisees challenged his right to be high priest, he switched his allegiance to the aristocratic Sadducee party (the Zadokites). Ancient Shechem was never rebuilt. But the importance of Mount Gerizim led to the foundation of a small Samaritan town nearer to the well at the crossroads called Sychar.

Jesus appears in Shechem and meets this Samaritan woman at the well. *What did John want the original hearer to understand by placing this story at Shechem?* She says, “Our fathers worshipped on this



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mountain..." Jesus replies "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem..." She says, "I know the Messiah is coming." Jesus replies "I AM, the one who is speaking to you."

Shechem after Jesus—After the Romans destroyed the Jewish temple (70 CE), a new city, Neapolis, was built in honor of the emperor Vespasian 1.5 miles west of the ruins of the historic city. The Arabs changed the name of the city to Nablus. A small community of a few hundred Samaritans with its own high priest still lives in this city, sacrificing lambs each Passover on Mount Gerizim.

JACOB'S WELL – see above, especially Genesis 33-35.

IT WAS ABOUT NOON – The timing is significant. This is the hottest part of the day. People normally gathered water earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon when it is cool; in order to avoid the heat. Yet this woman (who has had five husbands and the man she is currently with isn't her husband) shows up when no one else is around. Being a woman with a bad reputation, she is probably trying to avoid the heat as well; avoiding the cold stares of the other women of the village.

GIVE ME A DRINK – Jesus talks to the woman and asks for a drink. First of all, this woman is a Samaritan. Jews and Samaritans didn't like each other. There was hatred and rivalry between them. The Jewish high priest and king had destroyed the Samaritan's holy temple and the city near this well. Jews tried to avoid all contact with Samaritans, lest they be made ritually impure. And so for a Jew to be seen talking to a Samaritan is a strange thing. But perhaps more strange is the fact that Jesus strikes up this public conversation with a woman. In that day and age, that was not proper, especially for a rabbi.

LIVING WATER – Leviticus 15; Numbers 20:8-11; Jeremiah 2:13; Jeremiah 17:13; Psalm 107:9; Psalm 114:8; Isaiah 35:6-7; 58:11; Zechariah 14:8; John 7:37-38. We remember the story about Moses and the people of Israel in the wilderness where Moses strikes the rock and God provides living water. See the connection between Jesus talking about Living Water and the Feast of Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles or Booths; follow this [link](#) for more information). See also John 6 for how Jesus talks about "bread of life".

ETERNAL LIFE – See John 5:24. Jesus defines "eternal life" in John 17:3. Pay attention to what Jesus says about the Pharisees as he argues with them in the temple in John 8.

ON THIS MOUNTAIN vs. JERUSALEM – see info above

GOD IS SPIRIT – Remember Jesus' comment to Nicodemus (John 3:8), "*The wind (πνεῦμα pneuma—"spirit" "wind" or "breath") blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*"

I AM HE – ἐγώ εἰμι (*egō eimi*) "I AM". This is how God refers to God's self in the Exodus story where God speaks to Moses from the burning bush (see Exodus 3:13-22). When Jesus says "I AM", he is using God's name for himself. When we translate ἐγώ εἰμι into English we add "he" to our translation, saying "I am he" or "I who speak to you am he," but there is no "he" in the Greek. It is simply "I AM". This is the first of Jesus' "I AM" sayings in the gospel of John (see 6:35; 6:51; 8:12; 8:58; 9:5; 10:7; 10:9; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1; and 18:5 for more).

SOW/REAP—"One sows and another reaps" (verse 37), is derived from Micah 6:15, "You will sow, but won't reap." In its original context, it was a warning that the people would not reap the blessings for which they had worked. In Jesus' hands, it takes on a positive character. The disciples will reap a harvest that they did not sow, and they will sow a harvest that others will reap.