

## Lessons from Bible Women 3 – The Woman at the well

**Reading: John 4:19** “.... *Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet* <sup>1</sup>.”

### **Introduction:**

This lesson is a continuation of the series where we are looking at various women recorded in the scriptures, with the aim of learning some biblical lessons from either the women themselves, or events that occurred during their lives.

In the last lesson, we looked at Rahab the harlot, who lived in Jericho until it was destroyed in the days of Joshua. We saw in **Joshua 2:4** how she hid the two Hebrew men who had come to spy out the city. When the king’s men came to her, they obviously could not see the two spies anywhere, and so they believed the story that Rahab told them about the spies already having left town. Such is the limited knowledge of man in that we don’t know everything. People can keep some secrets from us and we wouldn’t even know it.

But such is not the case with God. **Psalm 139** tells us of the infinite knowledge of God. And so in this lesson, we will be looking at an incident that happened in a woman’s life that shows us that nothing is secret from God. We don’t know the name of this woman, but she was a Samaritan, and in **John 4**, we have a record of her meeting and spending time in discussion with Jesus. Among the various lessons that we can learn from this chapter, I want us to see how our God is an all-knowing God, and that there is nothing hidden from His eyes.

## **LESSON**

### **1) Background.**

To help us appreciate some of the things that the woman said in **John 4**, we need to look at a bit of history behind Samaria.

Around 931 BC, the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms because of an issue regarding taxes (**1 Kings 12:1-20**) – the dividing line between the two kingdoms ran roughly east/west a few miles north of Jerusalem. The southern kingdom was called Judah, and the northern kingdom was called Israel. The northern kingdom (Israel) very quickly turned away from following the Lord, and set up its own religious system and priesthood, including the worship of idols (**1 Kings 12:25-33**).

After repeated warnings from various prophets<sup>2</sup>, the people of Israel did not repent, so in 722 BC, God sent the Assyrians down to conquer them as punishment (**2 Kings 17:5-18**). The people of Israel were taken away captive to Assyria (**2 Kings 17:23**), and people from other countries were brought in to repopulate the land of Israel (**2 Kings 17:24**). These new inhabitants did not fear the Lord, so God punished them with lions. Therefore, they asked the king of Assyria sent to them one of the priests who had been taken from Israel to Assyria. This priest was to teach these new people the ways of God (**2 Kings 17:25-28**). However, while the priest taught them how to fear the Lord, they still kept their old religious customs of serving idols, *etc.*, and handed down these traditions to their children (**2 Kings 17:29-41**).

---

<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotes are from the New King James Version Bible.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Hosea and Amos.

## Lessons from Bible Women 3 – The Woman at the well

By the time of Jesus, this area of land was called Samaria. The population were primarily the descendants of the various nations brought into the land by Assyria – at best, this mixed race had only a very small part of Jewish blood in them. They did not follow the teachings of the Law of Moses, and, in fact, their fathers had worshipped on the mountain near Sychar<sup>3</sup> rather than at Jerusalem. Because of these things, the Jews had no dealings with them.

### 2) The woman at the well

#### a) Jesus meets the woman

**John 4** opens with Jesus making a decision to go from Judea up to Galilee, but instead of going by the usual route<sup>4</sup> that the Jews took, He needed to go via Samaria (vs.1-4). Around midday (the “*sixth hour*”), Jesus and the disciples arrived at Sychar, the place where Jacob had dug a well (vs.5-6). The disciples then went into the town to buy food (vs.8), but while Jesus rested at the well, a woman came to draw water (vs.7). When Jesus asked her for a drink, she expressed her surprise that Jesus had asked for this, given that He was a Jew and she was a Samaritan (vs.9).

Jesus then had a discussion with her about “*living water*” (vs.10-15). At first, she was a little puzzled by what Jesus was talking about. She was thinking about literal water, and so asked Him how or where He would get this water. The patriarch Jacob had dug this well and it had been left it for the benefit of people like her (vs.12). But where would Jesus find this water that He claimed would be better than what was in the well?

However, Jesus was talking about spiritual water – water from which a soul would never thirst again; water that leads to eternal life (vs.14).

#### b) The woman’s marital status

The next few verses cover the main point of this lesson, *i.e.* how all things are known to God – there is nothing hidden from His sight.

After talking about “*living water*”, Jesus then asked her to call for her husband (vs.16). It is at this point in the text that we find out that she had had five husbands, and was currently living with another man (vs.17-18). This may be why she had come to the well at this time of the day.

Normally, the women in those days came to draw water in the mornings and in the evenings (*e.g.* **Genesis 24:11**), not in the middle of the day when it could be quite hot. It was also a time for the women to socialise together as they walked to and from the well and took turns drawing water. But this woman in **John 4** came to the well alone, and at midday. Perhaps her multiple-marriage lifestyle had resulted in her being shunned by the other women of the community.

To the best of our knowledge, and particularly judging by the woman’s statement in verse **19**, Jesus and the woman had never met before. Yet Jesus knew all about her married life without the need for her to say anything.

---

<sup>3</sup> The mountain is believed to be Mt Gerizim, the place where Joshua read the Law to the Hebrews in the early days of the conquest of the Promised Land (**Joshua 8:30-35**).

<sup>4</sup> When travelling between Galilee and Judea, the Jews usually travelled by the east side of the Jordan River in order to avoid any contact with Samaria.

## Lessons from Bible Women 3 – The Woman at the well

### c) Discussing other spiritual matters

What usually happens when we are in a discussion that is dealing with something that makes us feel uncomfortable, we change the subject. And so, perceiving Jesus to be a prophet, and wanting to move the conversation away from her marital status, she raised a different topic – where to worship God (vs.20). She mentioned that “*our fathers worshipped in this mountain*”, i.e. Mount Gerizim. She may have been referring back to the time when Jacob built an altar there (**Genesis 33:18-20**<sup>5</sup>), but probably more so was referring to the temple<sup>6</sup> that the Samaritans had there for 2 or 3 centuries prior to 100BC. Jesus then told her about the true worshippers (vs.21-24).

After Jesus told her about the true worshippers, she raised the subject of the coming Messiah, and how He would tell them “*all things*” (vs.25). She was obviously aware that there was a Messiah, and she appears to have been keen to learn from Him. Jesus then said that He was the Messiah (vs.26).

When the disciples returned, the woman left, went to the city, and told the men of the city about the man she had just met, suggesting that He could be the Christ (vs.28-29). The men of the city came out to hear from Jesus Himself. As a result of this woman spreading the news, many of the Samaritans believed in Him, and so Jesus stayed there for two days talking to them (vs.39-42).

### 3) Lessons for us

Once again we see that the most unlikely of people can be mindful of spiritual matters, and be keen to learn more. The last time we saw this was with Rahab the harlot. This time it was a woman with a dubious marital history. A common lesson from both of these women is that we should never “rule anyone out” when it comes to spreading the gospel – you never know who will respond, and God wants everyone to hear it (**Matthew 28:19**).

But so as not to repeat one of the main points from the lesson on Rahab, I want to look at another aspect of this encounter of the woman at the well<sup>7</sup> - the fact that Jesus knew all about the woman’s marital history.

#### **No secrets with God**

Nothing we ever do is secret from God. Sometimes we can do things and keep them secret from one another. But not so with God. Nothing is hidden from His

---

<sup>5</sup> Shechem is also next to Mt Gerizim.

<sup>6</sup> The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible, Volume 2, D-G, Page 701-703, Gerizim.

<sup>7</sup> Other lessons from this encounter include;

- God’s providence in that this woman happened to come to the very well in Samaria where Jesus was resting (vs.6-7). She in turn led others to Christ (vs.39).
- Jesus was indeed God in the flesh. He experienced physical weariness (vs.6), just like we all do at times.
- Jesus is the source of “living water” (vs.14) for souls that hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- Our worship of the Father must be in spirit and in truth (vs.24).
- Jesus’ “food” was to do the will of God and to finish His work (vs.34).

## Lessons from Bible Women 3 – The Woman at the well

sight - He even knows the thoughts of our hearts (**Psalm 139:2**). This can be a source of comfort for those who are earnestly seeking Him, but can also be a source of fear for those whose lives are not what they ought to be. For example,

- if you are the type of person who puts on a good “front” to give the impression that you are caring and loving, but on the inside you harbour envy, jealousy and hate, then you have good reason to fear, for God is not mocked (**Galatians 6:7**).
- if you are the type of person who wilfully continues to sin with no sign of repentance, even though no-one else may know about it, God does (**Ecclesiastes 12:14**).

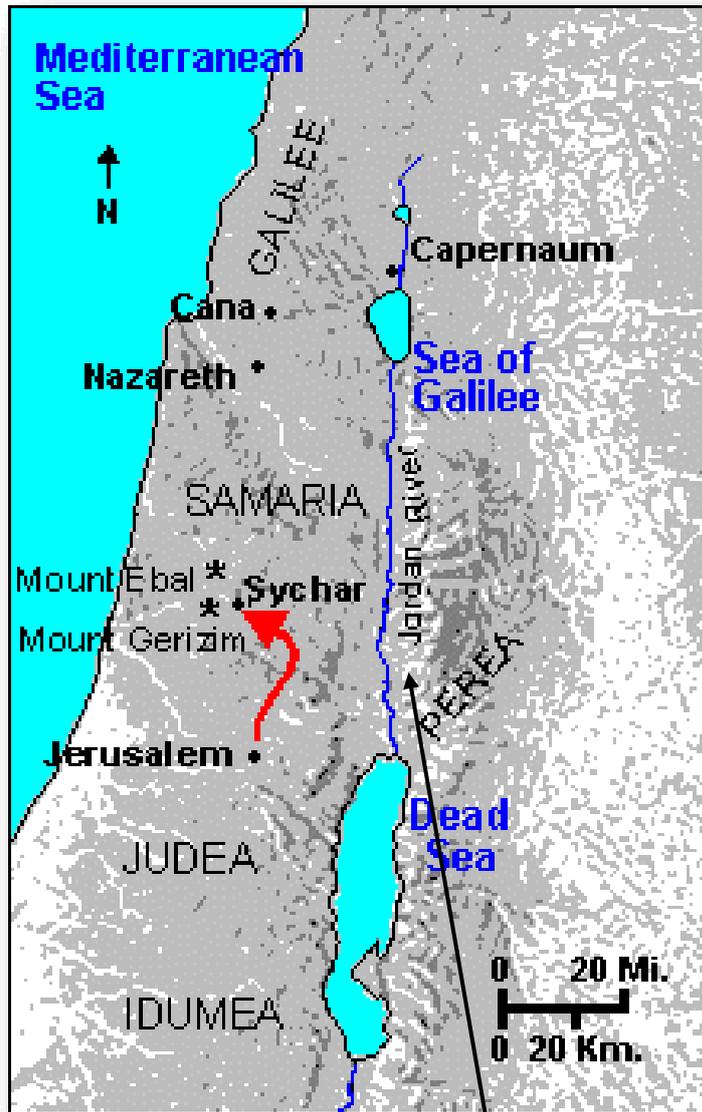
But,

- if you are genuinely trying to follow God, even if you are having internal struggles with temptation, God knows and understands (**Hebrews 4:15**).
- if you are doing what you can to minister to and serve others for their benefit, but no one else seems to notice, or you don't seem to get any recognition for it, God knows about it and will reward you accordingly (**Matthew 6:3-4**).

Knowing that nothing is secret from God should cause us to be honest with ourselves. If we know that we hold bad attitudes or deliberately engage in sin, then we should not fool ourselves into ignoring it, or even trying to justify it. We would only be deceiving ourselves under those circumstances. The Lord is always ready to forgive (**Nehemiah 9:17b**). But forgiveness involves repentance (**Acts 8:22**), and repentance involves acknowledgement and change (**Psalm 51:3, 10; 1 John 1:8**). When we do that, the Lord will forgive us (**1 John 1:7**).

The Lord knows who are His (**2 Timothy 2:19**), and we can be confident that on the day of judgement, He will be judge righteously (**2 Timothy 4:8**). Other people may not understand us, but God knows us intimately. He will reward each one accordingly, based on what they have done, whether good or bad, whether great or small, whether they were done in secret, or whether they were done before men (**John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 4:5**). If we have walked faithfully with God, be assured that He knows it, and will give us a crown of righteousness.

ANNEX A Location of Sychar



The normal Judea-Galilee route was east of the Jordan