

The Samaritan Woman Thought Jesus Was A Jew

In the 4th chapter of the Gospel according to the Apostle John we find the record of some astounding teachings of Jesus. In His conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well near the town of Syhchar, He made it plain that salvation was very different in character from that which the Jews (Pharisees) had been teaching the people.

But He also said that salvation is of the Jews. This makes the passage puzzling in the English language, and it has led too many people astray: Causing them to believe a lie; and it needs careful study if it is to be correctly understood, as we shall see. Why is it so important to understand this particular portion of the Bible? It is important for Christians to understand ALL of the Bible.

This passage is of special significance because of the current, but erroneous, opinion among many that Christianity arose out of Judaism, that there exists a Judeo-Christian value system, that Jews have their own covenant with God which circumvents Jesus Christ and His atonement, and that the United States has a special obligation to the religious political Zionist state of Israel. In short, a correct understanding of this Scripture helps to place the above issues in their proper perspectives.

We are faced with THE IMPOSSIBLE TASK OF MAKING THIS CLEAR TO THOSE WHO HAVE LITTLE DESIRE TO STUDY DETAILS, and THOSE WHO DEMAND A MORE SCHOLARLY EXPLANATION. We hope this presentation will meet the needs of everyone. For those who dislike details, please make an effort to "hang in there;" for we believe the results will be worth while.

FIRST: A Synopsis of John 4:5-26:

Verses 5-6: Jesus and His disciples traveled from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north, and stopped on the way at a water well outside of Syhchar, a town in Samaria.

Verses 7-8: A Samaritan woman came to the well for water. Jesus asked for a drink.

Verse 9: The woman wondered why Jesus talked to her because she perceived He was a Jew, and Jews shunned Samaritans.

Verse 10: Jesus told her that if she knew the gift of God and Who was speaking to her, she would ask Him for living water.

Verses 11-12: The woman didn't comprehend what He meant. She noted that He had no container with which to draw water, and besides, did He think He was greater than her forefather Jacob who dug the well and drank from it?

Verses 13-14: Jesus told her that the water from the well would not satisfy thirst indefinitely, but the living water He gave would produce eternal life.

Verse 15: The woman still didn't comprehend, but was eager for such water that would prevent her having to come back to the well repeatedly. She wanted to reduce her work load.

Verses 16-18: Jesus told her to fetch her husband, but she confessed she had no husband, whereupon Jesus acknowledged she told the truth, for she had lived with five men and the present one was not her husband.

Verses 19-20: The woman immediately perceived that Jesus was a prophet because He knew the intimate details of her life. Defensively, she then appealed to her religion and her forefathers, contrasting her beliefs with those of the Jews who worshiped at Jerusalem, and ascribing to Jesus the religious beliefs of the Jews.

Verses 21-24: Jesus disavowed His connection with either Jewish worship at Jerusalem or Samaritan worship at Gerizim, and said the hour was near when no one would worship at either place. He said she didn't comprehend what she worshiped, and that "we know what we worship for salvation is of the Jews." He said the hour had come when true worshipers would worship God in spirit and in truth, for such the Father seeks to worship Him. He said God is spirit, therefore whoever worships Him must worship in spirit and in truth.

Verse 25: The woman said she knew Messiah was coming and He would show them all things.

Verse 26: Jesus then told her that He was the Messiah.

MANDATORY CONSIDERATIONS FOR A CORRECT UNDERSTANDING: A superficial reading of this passage of John's Gospel will not suffice to render a correct interpretation. We must study it very carefully.

In Verse 9 the Bible doesn't state that Jesus was a Jew. The woman ASSUMED He was a Jew. We're not told why she assumed this; perhaps it was because she knew He was traveling FROM Judea to Galilee.

The Bible often records the statements and opinions of the people in it, but their statements are not necessarily true unless the text is clear that God agrees with them, or that the statement is given to them by God. An obvious example of this is when Calaphas the High Priest accused Jesus of blasphemy. (Matthew 26:65) Note also in verse 9 that the Bible doesn't say that the Samaritans hated the Jews, but that the woman said the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans.

The Old Testament and history tell us that the Samaritans were a mixture of the tribes of Israel with outsiders and that is why the Jews shunned them. It was primarily the Jews who were the snobs, although the Samaritans were not guiltless. It is obvious that Jesus was not snobbish.

He was not only passing through their land which the Jews would not do (and He would not walk in Jewry because the Jews sought to kill Him John 7:1) - but was conversing with one of them, another act forbidden by the Jews. This tells us that JESUS DID NOT PRACTICE THE RELIGION OF THE JEWS in this matter.

Verse 10: Jesus initiated a "witnessing" situation in which He offered universal salvation to the woman. He was doing His Father's business by giving an open invitation to a non-Jew to become a child of God. He was contradicting everything the Jews believed about Messiah.

Verses 11-12: The Samaritan woman considered herself a descendant of Jacob who was the patriarch of all the 12 Tribes of Israel. She thought of Jacob as a great man. She considered herself to be as true to the laws of Moses as the Jews, maybe more so.

She was partly correct, for the Samaritans did not practice Rabbinism as the Jews did. Also the Scriptures attest that the Jews only gave lip service to the Laws of God as given to the Israelites by Almighty God: "For had ye (Jews) believed Moses..." (John 5:46) Thus we have it that the Jews did not believe Moses, nor did they teach the people to obey God Laws, they taught them to observe the Tradition of the Elders (which later became codified as The Talmud) which is totally opposite.

The Scriptures further attest to the fact that Jesus did not recognize the leadership of the Jews, and that they were not the legitimate rulers of Israel by: "Therefore say I (Christ) unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you (because you do not deserve to possess it, as you have no right to it), and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (to the rightful heirs of it)." (Matthew 21:43)

Verses 13-14: Jesus was teaching with metaphors - figures of speech. Living water obviously meant eternal life. He was giving her the gospel of salvation message. Like the Roman Centurion whose servant needed healing (Matthew 8:5-13) and the Canaanite woman whose daughter needed healing, (Matthew 15:21-28) Jesus demonstrated throughout His ministry that salvation was available to anyone, not just to Jews. He found great faith among some non-Jews.

Verse 15: The Samaritan woman dwelt on worldly things, not understanding that Jesus talked to her of spiritual things. God's primary concern is with our spiritual condition, but the Samaritan woman repeatedly focused on her worldly desires. You and I often do the same thing.

Verse 16-18: The woman was a sinner but Jesus did not condemn her to hell for that. He was truthful and firm, but kind. This again tells us that He was not a Jew because the Jews, according to the Bible, were exclusivists. They would not have talked to the Samaritan woman, much less have offered her kindness and salvation. Remember the account of the good Samaritan, recorded in Luke 10:30-36.

Verses 19-20: Because Jesus obviously knew the woman's sins, she at once acknowledged Him as a prophet, but human nature being what it is, she retreated defensively into her own mind-set, i.e., that her religion was just as good as the Jewish religion. She inferred that Jesus was like all other Jews, demanding that she worship at Jerusalem.

Verses 21-24: Did Jesus demand that she confirm to Judaism by worshiping at Jerusalem? No, He did not. Instead, He told her that all true worshipers of God would soon worship Him in spirit and truth and that no true believer would worship at either Jerusalem or at Gerizim (the Samaritan place of worship).

WHY DID JESUS USE "WE?": Why did Jesus use the plural we in v. 22? It is important that we turn to John 3:11 and 14:23 for similar situations. In John 3:11, for example, He was talking to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. Nicodemus had asked how he could be born again, whereupon Jesus said, "...I say unto thee, we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness."

He used the plural four times, and the situation is closely parallel to the one with the Samaritan woman. His use of We was much like our editorial We. Therefore the conclusion that He meant His Father God and Himself.

IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH: What does it mean to worship God in spirit and in truth? For this answer we go to the two great commandments given by Jesus: Love God genuinely and thoroughly (and strive to bring our characters into line with His); and Love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40)-treat others as we would like to be treated, commensurate with the principles of the New Testament.

This is the worship that God is seeking. Jesus gave this message to the Samaritan woman and the people of Sychar. He didn't tell her to go to Jerusalem and worship with the Jews; there is no record that He told her to seek out some synagogue or church to attend. The Jews wouldn't have

received her anyway, and He knew that the temple at Jerusalem would be destroyed a few years hence. The change from old covenant to new covenant was now being implemented. The Samaritan woman and many residents of the town became Christians. Jesus stayed with them two days and taught them.

IS SALVATION FROM THE JEWS?: Now we back up a bit and deal with that troublesome clause in verse 22: "...for salvation is of the Jews." (KJV)

Considering the whole context thus far, did Jesus promote Judaism? It is clear that He didn't. If He didn't promote Judaism, how could salvation be of the Jews? We just learned that He told the woman of Samaria that He was the Messiah, the Living Water. Wouldn't it be a contradiction for Him to tell her that in Him was salvation and then turn right around and tell her that salvation was of the Jews? We know in John 14:6, He said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father, but by me."

What, then, is our answer? The answer will be found by understanding the entire New Testament, history, and the language of this passage. The preposition OF in the KJV (salvation is Of the Jews), or FROM in several other translations, does not accurately reflect the Greek. The Greek language was far more specific than English when using prepositions.

For example, FROM in English could mean that a person walked from the house, but we wouldn't know whether the person was in the house and walked out of it, or standing against the outside wall and walked away from it. Not so with the Greek. We would know exactly what happened if the Greek preposition "ek" were used; the person would have been inside the house and walked out of it, for "ek" means OUT OF. And that's the preposition used by the Apostle John when he recorded Jesus' saying that salvation is out of the Jews. We will return to this later.

However, knowledge about this preposition is insufficient for a complete answer to the problem. The next language barrier is the word Jews. This may come as a surprise to many, but it is impossible for Jesus to have used the word Jews, for the simple reason that the word did not exist in His time. It didn't arrive on the scene of history until the Greek or Latin Bible was translated into English hundreds of years later, and then it had to evolve into its present form. Here's how it happened.

WHO WERE THE JUDEANS?: Judeans were inhabitants of southern Palestine, the area called Judea (Judaea). This was where Jerusalem and the temple were located. Judea is the same as Judah, and Judah was the tribe of Israel that was allocated that geographical area when all twelve tribes conquered the inhabitants of Palestine in about 1400 B.C.

The patriarch of the tribe was the fourth son of Jacob, who was the son of Isaac, and Isaac was the son of Abraham. Jacob, who had been renamed Israel (Genesis 32:28) by God had twelve sons, each of whom was the patriarch of a tribe of Israel, each of which received a portion of the land of Palestine. God had already planned that the "legal" lineage of Messiah would be through Judah, for in Genesis 49:10 Moses wrote: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

The Tribe of Judah was the most influential. It had the place of leadership. God simply said that it would continue in this position until Shiloh, Who was Messiah, came Messiah would then take the leadership and receive the allegiance of the people. We now know that Jesus Christ's legal lineage was traced through Judah back to David and to Abraham, and those who believed on Him gave Him their allegiance in fulfillment of the prophecy quoted above. He took the scepter from Judah.

At the time of Christ's ministry, mixed blood existed in Judea. Not all of its inhabitants were descended from Judah. Many were Edomites, descendants of Esau. However, the Edomites had submitted to circumcision in about 130 B.C. and therefore became co-religionists with the Judahites, who by then were practicing Rabbinism which had been developed during the exile in Babylon.

Some Judeans (were Jews), therefore, were those who practiced the religion which Jesus clashed. Rabbinism was a conglomeration of the context of the Old Testament, Babylonian mysticism, and human rationalizations, it is referred to in the New Testament as the "Tradition of the Elders," (Matthew 15:1-3) and is known today as Talmudism, or Judaism. Its rulers were entrenched at Jerusalem at Judea.

JESUS WOULD NOT WALK IN "JEWRY": We see in the King James Version that Jesus would not walk in "Jewry" (among the Jews or Pharisees) any longer because the Jews sought to kill Him. (John 7:1) The English word "Jewry" is "Ioudaias" (Judean) in Greek, but modern translations no longer use "Jewry." For example the New American Standard Bible (NASB) states: "And after these things Jesus was walking in Galilee; for He was unwilling to walk in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill Him."

It is unfortunate that we have not been taught the exact truth about these expressions. What this verse simply means is that those who practiced the religion head-quartered at Jerusalem wanted to kill Him. Actually, the King James Translators had the right idea - they recognized that "Jewry" was the religion of the Pharisees, and not that of the Israelites.

In our time most people think of the Jews as the people of Israel but that's not correct. An Israelite was one who had descended from Jacob/Israel and who practiced the moral, civil, and ritual laws given by God to Moses. In Jesus' time the Jews may or may not have descended from Jacob/Israel, but they practiced Rabbinism. Jesus fulfilled all things given by God to Moses, whereas the Jews held on to the shell only, and have been trying to take back the birthright their father Esau sold to Jacob/Israel.