

# The Testimony of the Samaritans



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *John 4:1–42, John 3:26–30, Jer. 2:13, Zech. 14:8, Ezek. 36:25–27.*

**Memory Text:** “Then they said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world’ ” (*John 4:42, NKJV*).

**W**ho were the Samaritans? The northern kingdom of Israel had been taken captive by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. To create political stability, the Assyrians dispersed their captives throughout their empire. Likewise, captives from other nations were brought to populate the northern kingdom, and these became the Samaritans, who practiced their own form of Judaism.

Relations, however, were not good between them and the Jews. For instance, the Samaritans worked against the rebuilding of the temple at the return of the Jews from Babylon. The Samaritans, meanwhile, had built their own temple, on Mount Gerizim. But this temple was destroyed by the Jewish ruler John Hyrcanus in 128 B.C.

At the time of Christ, this animosity continued. The Jews avoided Samaria as much as possible. Though commerce may have gone on, other interaction was taboo. The Jews would not borrow from Samaritans or even receive a favor from them. Within this context, John recounts the encounter between Jesus, the woman at the well, and the people of the Samaritan city of Sychar.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 2.

## The Setting of the Encounter

**Read** John 4:1–4. What was the background issue that led Jesus through Samaria?

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The Pharisees discovered that the disciples of Jesus were baptizing more people than did those of John the Baptist. This situation could create tensions between John's followers and Jesus'. The disciples of John, quite naturally, were jealous for their master's reputation and status (*compare with John 3:26–30*). John's impressive reply was that he must decrease, but Jesus must increase (*John 3:30*). Probably to avoid confrontation, Jesus departed Judea to go to Galilee. Samaria provided the most direct route between those two locations, but it was not the only route possible. Devout Jews would take the long way around, going east through Perea. But Jesus had a mission in Samaria.

**Read** John 4:5–9. How did Jesus use this opportunity to open a dialogue with the woman at the well?

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Jacob's well was located right next to Shechem, while Sychar, where the woman was from, was about a mile away (1.5 km). Jesus sat by the well while His disciples went into the city to buy food. He had no access to the cooling water of the well. When the woman came to draw water, He asked her for a drink.

In John 3, it was surprising that Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews and a rabbi, would lower himself to come to Jesus. He came by night to avoid discovery. But, in John 4, the woman hides in broad daylight, perhaps avoiding contact with other women who came either at the beginning or end of the day when it was cooler. After all, why did she go such a long way to fetch water, and in the middle of the day when it was hot? Whatever the reason for her being there, meeting Jesus would change her life.

What scene unfolds next? A Jewish teacher is compared to a Samaritan woman of poor reputation. What a contrast! And yet, in this exact context, a remarkable encounter unfolds.

**What are some of the taboos in your own culture that could hamper your witness to others? How do we learn to transcend them? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**

## The Woman at the Well

**Read** John 4:7–15. How does Jesus use this encounter to start witnessing to this woman?

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“The hatred between Jews and Samaritans prevented the woman from offering a kindness to Jesus; but the Saviour was seeking to find the key to this heart, and with the tact born of divine love, He asked, not offered, a favor. The offer of a kindness might have been rejected; but trust awakens trust.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 184.

As was the case in His encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus knows what is in the woman’s heart. In response to her surprise that a Jew would ask such a favor of a Samaritan, Jesus goes directly to the point. “ ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water’ ” (*John 4:10, NKJV*).

The woman’s response was like that of Nicodemus, who asked, “ ‘How can these things be?’ ” (*John 3:9, NKJV*) in the context of a new birth. She asked, “ ‘You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?’ ” (*John 4:11, NKJV*). In both cases, Jesus was pointing them (one, a prominent Jewish teacher; the other, a Samaritan woman of dubious character) to the transcendent spiritual truths that each one needed to hear and understand. In each case, Jesus was basically telling them both the same thing: they need a conversion experience.

**What** is the Old Testament background to Jesus’ statement about living water? (*Jer. 2:13, Zech. 14:8*).

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Water is necessary for life; humans cannot exist without water, and so water can be a powerful and appropriate image of eternal life, as well. Hence, Jesus says, “ ‘Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life’ ” (*John 4:14, NKJV*).

**Read** John 7:37, 38. What is Jesus saying to us in these verses, and how do we experience what He is promising here?

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## “ ‘Sir, Give Me This Water’ ”

“ ‘Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them’ ” (*Ezek. 36:25–27, NKJV*).

**How** does Ezekiel 36:25–27 reflect the truths Jesus was seeking to give to Nicodemus and to the woman at the well?

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In both cases, Jesus was seeking to reach these people with spiritual truths, even though He used illustrations from the natural world to do so.

At first, neither person understood what Jesus meant. How, asked Nicodemus, can a man be born again? That is, how can he return to his mother’s womb? Nicodemus clearly was functioning at a mundane and earthly level, even though Jesus clearly was pointing him toward spiritual truth. This woman, too, took Jesus’ words about the water in a literal sense when Jesus was clearly talking about something spiritual.

The woman’s response to Jesus’ offer of living water was, “ ‘Give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw’ ” (*John 4:15, NKJV*). She reasoned that the water Jesus offered would obviate trips to the well, thus reducing the risk of facing others. It is striking that the conversation shifted so quickly from Jesus’ asking for a drink to the woman’s asking *Him* for a drink.

**Read** John 4:16. How did Jesus respond to the woman’s request?

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Abruptly, Jesus changes the topic of discussion, telling the woman to go call her husband and come back. Why the sudden shift in topic? The woman’s actions bespoke avoidance. Jesus could read her heart. She must face her situation to find healing. “Before this soul could receive the gift He longed to bestow, she must be brought to recognize her sin and her Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 187.

## The Revelation of Jesus

**Read** John 4:16–24. What did Jesus do to show this woman that He knew her deepest secrets, and how did she respond?

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The light was too blinding to look at directly. While recognizing Jesus as a prophet, the woman practices avoidance again. She asks Jesus a question of religious controversy between Jews and Samaritans—the proper place to worship.

In response, Jesus pointed out that the Samaritans did not know what they worshiped. Their worship was a synthesis of Judaism and paganism. The Jews worshiped the God who reveals Himself—another important admission for a Samaritan.

Worship of the true God is not tied to a place. The discussion, therefore, about a place of worship was irrelevant to the conversation. For God is spirit, and those who worship Him must do so in spirit and in truth. The woman accepted the plain truth conveyed by Jesus and was ready for more.

**Read** John 4:25, 26. How did Jesus reveal His identity to her?

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In all four Gospels, this is the only passage before His trial in which Jesus plainly stated to someone that He was the Messiah. And He did it not to some large crowd or important personage but to an unnamed Samaritan woman, alone, at Jacob's well. He is interested in any lonely soul who feels separated.

And so to this woman, who not only was from a foreign culture but also was not of the highest moral character, Jesus openly reveals who He is. And, having revealed to her His knowledge of her darkest secrets, He also gave this woman a great reason to believe in Him, as well.

**What should this story tell us about why the gospel needs to break down the barriers that we humans create with each other?**

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## The Testimony of the Samaritans

**Read** John 4:27–29. What surprising action did the woman take?

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Jesus' discussion with the woman was interrupted by the arrival of the disciples. Though surprised that He was speaking with a woman, they did not question Him. Instead, they urged Him to eat.

The woman, meanwhile, left her water pot and rushed into the city to share with others what she had just experienced with Jesus.

**Read** John 4:30–42. What happened following this encounter, and what does it teach about how the gospel can be spread?

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It seems strange that Jesus' narrative about a harvest would interrupt the story of the conversion of many in the city. But John wants us to see how Jesus understood what was happening. Sharing the plan of salvation with a Samaritan woman was far more important to Him than eating. To lead souls to salvation was His purpose, and He used this occasion to teach His disciples the urgency of sharing the gospel with all people, even with those not like them.

There are many high points in the Gospel of John. Surely John 4:39–42 is among them. Many of the Samaritans believed because of the woman's testimony: " 'He told me all that I ever did' " (*John 4:39, NKJV*).

The Samaritans asked Jesus to stay with them. The result was that many more believed because of the Word of Jesus. "Then they said to the woman, 'Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world' " (*John 4:42, NKJV*).

**What should this story tell us about how powerful the witness of even one person can be? How powerful a witness are you to what Jesus has done in your life?**

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**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “At Jacob’s Well,” pp. 183–195, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“As soon as she had found the Saviour the Samaritan woman brought others to Him. She proved herself a more effective missionary than His own disciples. The disciples saw nothing in Samaria to indicate that it was an encouraging field. Their thoughts were fixed upon a great work to be done in the future. They did not see that right around them was a harvest to be gathered. But through the woman whom they despised, a whole cityful were brought to hear the Saviour. She carried the light at once to her countrymen.

“This woman represents the working of a practical faith in Christ. Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink of the water of life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 195.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, go over your answers to Sunday’s final question. Be brutally honest about it. What are the taboos and prejudices found in your culture that could indeed hamper your own witness to others?
- 2 Why do you think Jesus got such a warm reception among the Samaritans in contrast to the reception among His own people?
- 3 Put yourself in the place of that Samaritan woman. A total stranger comes and lets her know that He is aware of her deepest secrets. How could anyone, much less a stranger, have known these things? No wonder she was impressed by Jesus. What should this story tell us about how the Lord knows everything about us, even the deepest, darkest secrets that we would not want anyone to know? And yet, what does the way He treated her say to us about how He wants to deal with us, even when He knows our secrets? What comfort can we draw from this truth?
- 4 What themes in the Gospel of John that we have studied thus far are found in Jesus’ ministry to the Samaritan woman at the well?

## Unsolicited Book in the Mail

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

For most of his life, Rob Schetky, a retired U.S. Navy officer, had struggled with the Bible and its meaning.

Once an agnostic, Rob was seeking God's will, but the Sabbath posed a problem. He fumed when people skipped church and engaged in everyday activities on Sunday. He asked, "Why are you playing golf on Sunday?" But inside he wondered, *Where in the Bible did God change the Sabbath?*

Rob stopped going to church. He was looking for a new church in Fairbanks, in the U.S. state of Alaska, when an unsolicited book arrived in his post office mailbox. "That's an interesting name," he thought, examining the book. "I wonder what *The Great Controversy* is."

Leaving the post office, he passed a stack of *Great Controversy* books that other people had discarded on a counter. It had been a mass mailing.

At home, Rob became engrossed in the book. He grew excited as he read how humans, not God, had changed the Sabbath day of worship. *Wow!* he thought. *Someone is telling the history of the church in a very logical way.*

Contacting a friend, he said, "I've found a great history of Christianity. It's called *The Great Controversy*." Later, the friend called back. "You've got to get away," he said. "That's the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They're a cult!"

Rob was surprised. He hadn't noticed the name of the book's author, Ellen White, and didn't know that she had cofounded the Adventist Church. "No, they are not a cult," he said. "They just believe in the Word of God."

After the conversation, Rob wondered if Adventists worshiped in Fairbanks. Looking online, he found a church located only a 10-minute drive away. On Sabbath, he grabbed his Bible and *The Great Controversy* and went to church. He had been reading the book for less than a month.

The first person to greet him at church was a Sabbath School teacher, Helen. She expressed surprise when she learned that he had come because of *The Great Controversy*. "You just destroyed my complaints," she said.

She had been worried that the small size of the book's text made it impossible to read. Yet Rob had already read three-fourths of the book—and he had come to church to learn more.



Today, seven years later, Rob is 70 and a church deacon. He still reads the Bible and the writings of Ellen White daily. "When I found the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I found a home, and I found truth," he said.

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*Join the Adventist world church in 2024 in the mass promotion and distribution of *The Great Controversy*. Ask your pastor or visit [greatcontroversyproject.com](http://greatcontroversyproject.com) for more details .*