

Lesson 4
John 4:1 – 54

JESUS' MINISTRY IN SAMARIA AND RESUMPTION IN GALILEE

Memory verse: "but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:14 NIV)

Jesus moved north in this chapter, from Judea into Samaria, where He had another important conversation with a person who was completely different from Nicodemus. As in the previous chapter, theological explanation follows personal encounter in this one.

There are several connections between this section and the preceding ones that provide continuity. One is the continuation of water as a symbol (cf. 2:6; 3:5; 4:10-15). Another is the continuation of discussion in which Jesus reveals Himself as the fulfillment of what the Old Testament anticipated. There are also significant contrasts: an unnamed woman who was an ordinary, low-ranking Samaritan and a dissolute sinner, contrasts with a named man who was a high-ranking, morally upright teacher of the Jews and a Pharisee. Nicodemus sought out Jesus at night, but the Jesus sought out the Samaritan woman at noon. Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to do something (be born again), but he offered the woman a gift (the water of life). Concern over worship (the result of salvation) replaces concern over the new birth (the condition for salvation).

Politically, Samaria was part of the Roman province of Judea in Jesus' day. Nevertheless culturally, there were ancient barriers that divided the residents of Samaria from the Jews who lived in Galilee and Judea.

The most direct and most popular route from Judea to Galilee went "through Samaria." Even though the Jews and the Samaritans did not get along, most Galilean Jews chose to travel through Samaria rather than taking the longer route through Perea, east of the Jordan River, which Judean Jews preferred. The trip from Galilee to Jerusalem via Samaria normally took three days. Therefore, John's statement that Jesus "had to" pass through Samaria, does not necessarily mean that divine compulsion alone moved Him to choose that route. However, most students of this passage have believed that one of the reasons Jesus took this route was to minister to the Samaritans.

The Jews who returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian Exile regarded the residents of Samaria as racial half-breeds and religious compromisers. The Samaritans resisted Nehemiah's attempts to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 4:1-2). They built a rival temple on Mt. Gerizim opposite Shechem about 400 B.C., which they dedicated to Zeus Xenios. Centuries later, John Hyrcanus, the Hasmonean ruler of Judea, destroyed both the rival Samaritan temple and Shechem about 128 B.C.

As Jesus moved through this area, our Lord ministers to a variety of people: the sinful Samaritan woman, His own disciples, the many Samaritans who trusted in Him, and finally, a nobleman and his household. What did these have in common? Faith in Jesus Christ. John was fulfilling the purpose of his gospel in showing his readers how various kinds and classes of people came to believe in Jesus as the Son of God.

Scripture Reading: John 4:1-26

To learn in this lesson: 1) The Living Water 2) The Christ 3) Jesus' authority over space

Discussion Questions:

1) Discuss how the faith of the Samaritan woman began, grew and did to her in John 4:1-30 and 39 – 42.

2) What did the disciples (in verses 31 to 38) learned from Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman and how can we apply this section (verses 1 to 38) as a whole for evangelistic ministry?

3) Discuss the event and teachings from verses 43 to 54.