



# Believe

## JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Examining the text & our hearts:

*Bible Reading: John 4:1-16*

When Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard he was making and baptizing more disciples than John (though Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were), he left Judea and went again to Galilee. He had to travel through Samaria; so he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar near the property that Jacob had given his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, worn out from his journey, sat down at the well. It was about noon. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. "Give me a drink," Jesus said to her, because his disciples had gone into town to buy food. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" she asked him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus answered, "If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would ask him, and he would give you living water." "Sir," said the woman, "you don't even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do you get this 'living water'?" You aren't greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and livestock." Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life." "Sir," the woman said to him, "give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and come here to draw water." "Go call your husband," he told her, "and come back here."

### I. Jesus' journey 4:1-2

- Historicity
  - "R. Brown remarked regarding this passage in John 4: 'Either we are dealing with a master of fiction, or else the stories have a basis in fact.'...A. Lincoln...severely questioned the historical validity of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman...Most scholars today would probably be moderately skeptical about the historical value [of John

4]...While the?basic historicity...is not doubted...we are dealing with a skillful...creative composition...Other...scholars have...[are] more positive about [its] historical reliability...’The story betrays a?considerable knowledge of Samaritan beliefs, local color, geographical factors, & Jew-Samaritan relationships that...point us in the direction of an historical account.’ (B. Witherington).” [Philipp F. Bartholomä,?Johannine Discourses...,? pp. 136-7]

## II. The Samaritan Issue

### A. Jesus “had to” go through Samaria

- “Scholars are fairly evenly divided on whether the necessity of this Samaritan journey is strictly geographical or has theological overtones. The geographical necessity of the trip is supported by Josephus who notes that the most expedient route from Judea to Galilee during the first century was through Samaria. The word translated as “had to” however, usually is associated in the Fourth Gospel with God’s plan (e.g. 3:14, 30; 9:4). It seems best, therefore, to read the necessity of the journey through Samaria as both geographical and theological.” Gail O’Day, NIB, John,
- “Much has been written about whether the necessity was geographical or theological. Did Jesus “have to” go through Samaria for the same reason a person “must” be born from above (3:7), or the Son of man “must” be lifted up (3:14), or Jesus “must” grow and John diminish (3:30)? Or did he “have to” go there simply because it was the most direct route? Was it a matter of God’s will (compare 4:34), or geographical convenience? Some commentators are quick to introduce the theological factor, but the reference should probably be read simply as a geographical observation, carrying forward the story line by explaining how a journey to Galilee brought Jesus to a well in Samaria.” J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, pp. 214-215
- Jesus?had to pass?this way because of geography (it was the shortest route), but the words may also indicate that Jesus’ itinerary was subject to the sovereign and providential plan of God (“had to” translates Gk.?dei, “to be necessary,” which always indicates divine necessity or requirement elsewhere in John:?[3:7](#), [14](#), [30](#); [9:4](#); [10:16](#); [12:34](#); [20:9](#)).?Through Samaria?was the usual route taken by travelers from Judea to Galilee, though strict Jews, in order to avoid defilement, could bypass Samaria by opting for a longer route that involved crossing the Jordan and traveling on the east side. The Samaritans were a racially mixed group of partly Jewish and partly Gentile ancestry, who were disdained by both Jews and non-Jews (see?[Luke 10:33](#); [17:16](#);?[John 8:48](#); see also?[2 Kings 17:24–31](#), which describes how the king of Assyria brought foreign people to settle in Samaria in 722?B.C.; over time they had intermarried with some Jews who had remained in the area). See also note on?[John 4:20–21](#). Many inhabitants of this region between Judea and Galilee were descendants of the OT northern kingdom of Israel, although from the Jewish perspective these Samaritans had assimilated strongly into non-Jewish culture and had intermarried with Mesopotamian colonists. The Samaritans had their own version of the Pentateuch, their own temple on Mount Gerizim (see?[4:20](#)), and their own rendering of Israelite history. Copies of their Pentateuch in Hebrew (and in Targumic Aramaic) remain extant, as do their basic historical narratives. Tensions often ran high between Jews and Samaritans; thus Josephus recounts fighting between Jews and Samaritans during Claudius’s reign in the first century?A.D.?being so intense that Roman soldiers were called in to pacify (and to crucify) many of the rebels (Jewish War?2.232–246). ESV Study Bible
- ?Because it was the most direct route taken by Jewish travelers heading from Judea to Galilee (see map, p. 2155) and it was part of the mission on which God sent Jesus (cf. “had to” in?[20:9](#)). Jews despised Samaritans ([8:48](#);?[Luke 10:33](#)) because they were defiled with Gentile

blood and pagan worship practices. When the northern kingdom of Israel and its capital of Samaria ([1 Kgs 16:24](#)) was defeated by the Assyrians in 722 BC, the Assyrians deported many Israelites to Assyria and repopulated Israel with foreigners ([2 Kgs 17:24-31](#)) who intermarried with the remaining Israelites. The result was Samaritans, whom Jews regarded as ethnic half-breeds. Samaritans had their own version of the Pentateuch and rejected the rest of the OT.  
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## B. Samaritans were despised by the Jews

### 1. Mixed race – part Jewish and part Gentile

- Northern Israel defeated by Assyria and other people were moved into this area and intermarried

### 2. Despised by both Jews and Gentiles

- “Samaritans occupied a middle position between Jews & Gentiles, considering themselves Jews, but being viewed by Jews as Gentiles. This middle position required that the early church bear witness not just in Jerusalem & in all Judea, & then to the ends of the earth, but also in Samaria (Acts 1:8; cf. Acts 8). This sequence is also reflected in the fact that Jesus first witnesses to the Jew Nicodemus (3:1-15), then to the Samaritan woman (4:4-42), & then to a Gentile official (4:43-45) [i.e. the ‘Cana Cycle’].” [Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John*, p. ]

### 3. They had the Pentateuch

### 4. They had their own temple on Mount Gerizim, destroyed by the Jews 128 BC

- “Around 128 BC Jewish forces zealous for the purity of the Jerusalem temple...destroyed the [Samaritan’s] Gerizim temple. In AD 6-9 the Samaritans defiled the Jerusalem temple on Passover by scattering bones in the temple precincts...As far as doctrine & practice were concerned the Jews viewed the Samaritans as schismatics, not Gentiles. The main problem was the Gerizim temple...In the 1st century AD, the relations between the Jews & Samaritans continued to be quite strained. Jews regarded Samaritans as unclean religious apostates.” [RB. Hughes, JC. Laney, Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary, ?p. 470]

### 5. Their territory was part of what was given to the tribe of Joseph

### 6. In this territory was the well of Jacob to which Jesus and the woman came

- “Jacob’s well [is] near Sychar (4:5), the successor to Shechem, where Abraham built his 1st altar in...the Promised Land (Gen. 12:6-7), & where true worship began. The scene is closely parallel to...Gen. 24, where Abraham’s servant meets Rebecca, & to... Gen. 29, where Jacob finds Rachel, at the village well...Both Rebecca & Rachel are presented as beautiful maidens, [However,] Samaria, by contrast, the kingdom of Ahab & Jezebel, had in the eyes of orthodox Judaism, been further corrupted [when the] “king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, & Sepharvaim (5 cities with 5 patron gods) & settled them...in the cities of Samaria. [They] took possession of Samaria & lived in its cities.’ (2 Kings 17:24). Yet, Hosea’s great promise (‘I’ll take you to be my wife forever;’ Hos. 2:19) & Ezekiel’s (‘I’ll restore the fortunes of?Samaria?& her?daughters...[& they] will return to their former state.’ Ezek. 16:53, 55) stood firm, & so Jesus comes to

Jacob's well. He comes not like a young man seeking a spotless virgin bride, but... bringing pardon & reconciliation, in fulfillment of Hosea's words. The Samaritan woman has had 5 [husbands]." (John McHugh, "In Him was Life," J. Dunn (ed.) Jews and Christians, p. 131]

### C. Conflict like we see historically and today all over the world

1. Europe, Northern Ireland, French/English in Quebec, Rwanda,
2. Far east, history with Japan
3. History between people often involves conflict, oppression
4. Jesus is walking into that kind of environment
5. How do you handle things like this?

## III. An unlikely encounter

### A. Jacob's well – in Samaritan territory, it is part of their ethnic pride and heritage

### B. At noon

### C. Jesus alone with a woman – disciples gone

- Expositors who see the 'Woman at the well' (Jn. 4) as "building upon the [OT] betrothal type-scene [observe that] it comes as no surprise that gender dynamics are at play in the interaction of the two characters [Jesus & the woman]. Nevertheless, some interpreters have seen several sexual innuendos & double [meanings] in the dialogue; notably [L. Eslinger, C. Carmichael & J. Bligh, etc.] Since the passage builds upon the betrothal type-scene & the appearance of the 'well terminology' in [the Poetic books] Proverbs, Song of Songs [etc] such a conjecture is not entirely out of order. All the same, the presence of sexual undertones in the exchange clashes with the style of the [author] throughout the remainder of the Gospel... Unless other significant instances of such double [meanings] can be demonstrated throughout the Gospel, a hypothesis of sexual innuendo in John 4 remains unconvincing." [Jason S. Sturdevant, Adaptable Jesus of the 4th Gospel, pp. 108-9 #57]
- "Jewish custom frowned on a man of God carrying on an extended conversation with a woman, and it did not help that Jesus and this woman were alone." J. Ramsey Michaels, The Gospel of John, p. 238

### D. Not what it looks like – 4:27

- We have the script but no tone, attitude, what is it like? How we understand it is important. "The Chosen" did well on this point. Is she flirting? Background doesn't have this in mind.
- "Given the well documented mutual hatred which existed between Jews & Samaritans... of which the woman herself is fully aware (4:9, 20), a **marital design on Jesus on her part would be most unlikely, if not completely out of the question.**" [Teresa Okure, Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1-42, p. ]

## IV. The dialogue/debate between Jesus and the Samaritan woman

### A. Jesus asks and she reacts – 4:7-9

1. “Give me a drink,” Jesus said to her, “... 9” “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” she asked him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.
2. She responds with surprise – For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.
  - Jesus took the initiative in speaking to a Samaritan woman—an astonishing break with culture and tradition, showing his desire to save the lost. ESV Study Bible
  - The comment that “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” explains to John’s readers outside the land of Palestine that Samaritans were considered by many Jews to be in a continual state of uncleanness, thus they would have thought that drinking water from this woman’s water jar would make a person ceremonially unclean. The verb in the phrase rendered “have no dealings” can also have a more specific meaning of “share use of [things].” ESV Study Bible
  - Jews do not associate with Samaritans. The reason the woman is surprised by Jesus’ request (see note on v. 4). Many Jews viewed all Samaritans as ritually defiled. The woman did not expect Jesus to talk to her (cf. v. 27), let alone become ritually defiled by drinking from a Samaritan’s water pot (see NIV text note). She does not know that Jesus cannot become ritually defiled; he sanctifies what he touches ([Matt 8:3](#)). NIV Zondervan Study Bible
  - “On the whole, the scope of the phrase “do not associate” in 4:9 is probably broader than merely the sharing of drinking vessels.... Samaritan women, like Gentiles, were considered to be in a continual state of ritual uncleanness... Apart from these ethnic sensibilities, men generally would not want to discuss theological issues with women. All of this puts Jesus’ dealings with the Samaritan woman into proper context and underscores how Jesus was not afraid to break social barriers in the pursuit of his mission.” G. K. Beale & C. A Carson, Commentary on the NT use of the OT, p. 438

### B. Jesus replies and she challenges him – 4:10-12

- Jesus’ words about “living water” again involve double meaning (see notes on [3:14](#); [8:24](#); [11:50–51](#); [19:19](#); cf. also [3:7–8](#)). Literally, the phrase refers to fresh spring water ([Gen. 26:19](#); [Lev. 14:6](#)), but [John 7:38–39](#) identifies this “living water” as the Holy Spirit dwelling within a believer (cf. [Jer. 2:13](#); [Ezek. 47:1–6](#); [Zech. 14:8](#); also [Isa. 12:3](#)). ESV Study Bible
- The question [vv.11-12] implies a negative answer. The woman thinks that Jesus is a charlatan, but she is twice wrong: (1) Jesus’ “living water” does not come from an ordinary well.... (2) Jesus is far greater than Jacob. NIV Zondervan Study Bible

### C. Jesus replies again and she asks – 4:13-15

- “The water that I will give him” is the “living water” of [v. 10](#), identified in [7:37–39](#) as the Holy Spirit dwelling within believers. “never be thirsty again. A person’s deepest spiritual longing to know God personally will, amazingly, be satisfied forever. The phrase “will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” is reminiscent of [Isa. 12:3](#) (see also [Isa. 44:3](#); [55:1–3](#)). ESV Study Bible
- the water I give them. “Living water” (see [v. 10](#) and note). “never thirst. For God and eternal life in his presence (see [Isa 12:3](#); [44:3](#); [49:10](#); [55:1-3](#); [Rev 7:16](#)). “spring of water welling up to eternal life. The Spirit, who produces spiritual life and indwells believers ([6:63](#); [7:37-39](#)). NIV Zondervan Study Bible

- The woman still does not understand who Jesus is and what “living water” is (see note on? [vv. 11-12](#)). NIV Zondervan Study Bible

D. Jesus’ reply has a double meaning – 4:16

1. Indicates he knows everything about her
2. Desires to reach all the Samaritans, not just her

## V. Comparing Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman

A. Two different people with two narratives

Nicodemus	Samaritan Woman
Male	Female
Named	No name
High rank with honour	Low rank and despised
Pure Jew	Mixed
He was seeking Jesus	Jesus was seeking her
Came to Jesus at night	Met Jesus at noon
Proud of his standing	Proud of her heritage “our father Jacob”
Doesn’t understand	Doesn’t understand
Representative of Pharisees	Representative of Samaritans

B. Her positive response (which we will see later) gives hope

- “The placement of the Nicodemus narrative alongside the Samaritan woman narrative was no accident; the **two narratives have a united function**...The Samaritan woman represents for the reader the ethnic & religious outcast, the Samaritan & even the non-Jew, who is beyond any Jewish hope...The positive response of the Samaritan woman provides hope of belief for the Samaritan (non-Jewish) type.” [Edward W. Klink, Sheep of the Fold...John, pp. 199-200]

C. What might be considered as low status is ignored

- The Samaritan woman’s “narrative characteristics would normally be considered markers of very low status: a female, a Samaritan, an unclean person, a sinner, & even an adulteress. Ironically these are ignored or even utilized positively in the narrative. She might well typify that the last is first, the outsider is an insider, unclean is clean, etc. Even if she does not enjoy high status, **she is certainly superior to Nicodemus, whom the author holds in contempt. Her juxtaposition with Nicodemus increases her status**: he came to Jesus in darkness (cowardice?), but she appears in sunlight; he never ceases misunderstanding Jesus, but **with her there is some progress**, even if in the interrogative mode, she declares Jesus ‘Messiah’; both mock Jesus, but she is never mocked by him...Role is more significant than status.” [Jerome H. Neyrey, Gospel of John in Cultural and Rhetorical Perspective, p. 43]

## VI. Four Questions

## A. What is the Gift of God? – The Spirit

- “The gift of God” could be the law, “given through Moses” (1:17), or it could be Jesus himself, God’s “one and Only Son” (3:16). But if John’s farewell speech, still fresh in the reader’s mind, is allowed to provide the framework, God’s gift is the Spirit, given “without measure” to the Son, to whom all things are given (3:24-25). “Gift” as a term for the Holy Spirit recalls the book of Acts (2:38; 10:45; 11:17), most notably in Samaria itself (8:20). Where Peter speaks of the “the gift of God” in connection with Simon Magus’s attempt to buy from the apostles the power of conferring the Spirit by the laying on of hands.” J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, p. 241

## B. Who is the one who asks for a drink?

- “Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us the well?”
- The merits of the well become for the woman a matter of ethnic pride. What water source could be greater or more satisfying than that which “our father Jacob” left for his Samaritan children?” J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, p. 242
- “But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life.”
- “Now finally, Jesus begins his formal self-revelation, identifying himself plainly as the sovereign Giver of life: “whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never ever thirst. Instead, the water I will give him will become in him a spring of water, rushing to eternal life.” The promise, however, is generalized, and not addressed to the Samaritan woman in particular. . . . While the pronoun is generic and by no means excludes the woman, it does move the center of attention away from her and the scene at the well, as if to say to the reader, male or female, “This means you.” . . . This not a story about a bridegroom meeting his bride at a well. It is a promise of eternal life for you, whoever and wherever you may be.” J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, pp. 244

## C. What is the living water? – the Spirit

- Jesus is moving from physical to spiritual
- Both Nicodemus and woman are stuck with physical and Jesus has moved on to spiritual
- Hence they both misunderstand
- Later we see the living water is the Spirit  
*John 7:38-39 The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him.” 39 He said this about the Spirit. . .*
- “In John’s Gospel Jesus is identified explicitly with the Creator and Life-giver (5:26), and he dispenses the gift of “living water,” later unveiled as the Holy Spirit (7:37-39).” G. K. Beale & C. A. Carson, *Commentary on the NT use of the OT*, p. 438
- “For the first time Jesus explains that the “living water” he has in mind is not from Jacob’s spring. “This water” [from the well] is not the same as the water that “I will give.” . . . His extraordinary promise redefines both water and thirst. The point is not that he offers some magic water that quenches physical thirst forever. . . , but that he offers a different kind of water to quench forever a different kind of thirst. His words make clear to the reader, if not to the woman, that the phrase with which he concluded his last speech, “living water” (v. 10b), was a metaphor. It is a very odd metaphor, in that only when it is taken literally (that is, as “living” rather than simply “running” water), does it disclose the reality to which it is pointing. If Jesus’ last two words before were “living water” (v. 10b), his last two words now are “eternal life” (v. 14). “Living” water means “life-giving” water. Just as in the dialogue with Nicodemus, “eternal life” is the burden of Jesus’ message (3:15, 16).” J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, p. 243

- “The spring is not itself ‘eternal life,’ but rather ‘the gift of God’ (v. 10), the Spirit, an identification made explicit later (7:39). Jesus is simply promising to do what John said he would do: baptize in Holy Spirit (1:33). Just as in the encounter with Nicodemus (3:5), ‘water and Spirit’ amount to much the same thing, and together guarantee a person ‘eternal life’ (see 3:15,16).” Rushing” confirms that the “spring” Jesus has in mind is the Spirit.” J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, p. 244

D. How does one obtain the living water? – by believing

1. By believing that Jesus is the Saviour of the world – 4:39, 41-42

- “The Samaritan community speaks for all Gentiles, acknowledging Jesus as “Savior” not simply of Samaritans in addition to Jews, but of the whole world. While “Savior,” or being “save,” is not necessarily limited just to eternal of heavenly salvation (see 11:12; 12:27), the accent on “eternal life” in Jesus’ earlier pronouncements (3:14-16) suggests that the Samaritans are looking to Jesus for more than temporary help or deliverance. They are embracing nothing less than the hope of “eternal life.” J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, p. 270