



## International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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### **John 4:20-29 Commentary New Revised Standard Version**

**Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse [\*International Bible Study Commentary\*](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [\*International Bible Study Forum\*](#).

**(John 4:20) “Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”**

The woman told Jesus that she perceived He was a prophet; therefore, she asked Him a religious question. It is difficult to know the exact motivation for her question. Perhaps she wanted to turn the conversation away from further discussion of her past sinful life. Many times, people prefer to talk about theological or Biblical controversies and disagreements rather than make the moral changes and choices that God has commanded in

the Bible. Others think that because Jesus' statement convicted her of sin that she wanted to know where she could go to find forgiveness and a new beginning. If her question was motivated by a desire to go before the true God to offer sacrifices and find forgiveness; then, her question could have referred to the right place for true worship: should she go to Mount Gerizim where the Samaritans worshiped or should she go to the temple in Jerusalem. Since she knew Jesus was a Jew and a prophet, she probably expected Jesus to tell her to go to the temple in Jerusalem. She even said to Jesus, grouping Him with the Jews she knew of, "but you say." If Jesus had told her Jerusalem, as she probably expected, she was probably ready to discuss their religious differences and why the Samaritans were right and the Jews were wrong.

**(John 4:21) Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem."**

Jesus did not answer as she expected. Jesus did not choose between the two choices she gave Him. Rather, as a prophet, Jesus spoke as a prophet. Jesus did not speak exclusively of Samaritans or Jews; rather, He spoke of her situation and what she should and would do personally. Notice particularly what Jesus said to her, "Believe me." Believing Jesus is the key to understanding the truth about God, salvation, where, and how people should worship. Jesus kept the discussion personal. He looked to the future and told her about HER future. After talking to Him, She

would come to believe Jesus. In the future, on that very day, in the presence of Jesus, she would praise and worship the Father, the true God, without needing to go to a mountain or a temple. Her worship of the true God, the Father, would not be either the Samaritan place of worship or the Jewish place of worship, but Jesus' way—through faith in Jesus. When Jesus used the word “you” in speaking to her, he was not speaking about Samaritans or Jews, for even today some Samaritans worship on Mount Gerizim and some Jews in Jerusalem; rather, He spoke to her directly as a woman and foretold what she would soon do. Those who truly worship the Father can worship the Father anywhere on earth. In their heart and mind the person who believes in Jesus, the Son of God, can worship God any time and any place. Through faith in Jesus, the woman would soon worship the Father near Jacob's well.

**(John 4:22) You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.**

In John 3:11, Jesus told Nicodemus, “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen.” Very soon, the woman would know by experience the meaning of John 3:34, “He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.” The woman's way of life indicated that she did not know the true God or how to worship the true God. But Jesus and His disciples did worship the true God, the Father. Jesus and His disciples worshiped the true God according

to the Scriptures, which included the prophets, and according to the revelation of Jesus to His disciples up to that time. Salvation (Jesus the Messiah) would come from the Jews, as a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and King David according to Biblical prophecy. The Samaritans did not know all they needed to know about the Messiah coming from the Jews because they only accepted the first five books of Moses as Scripture—not the prophets. When Jesus changed her life by telling her the truth about himself and giving her the Spirit (the living water), the woman soon learned that indeed salvation was from the Jews.

**(John 4:23) But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.**

Jesus answered her questions about the proper location for worship. He told her that special “religious” physical locations for worship are not important. Worshiping God “spiritually” and “truthfully” and worshiping God as “the Father” from the heart and mind are important to God, and always will be important to God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When Jesus told the woman that the hour is now here, He indicated that in that very hour she would become a true worshiper and she would worship the Father in spirit and in truth, with all her heart and mind. She would soon learn enough truth from Jesus to believe in the true Father and in Jesus the Messiah. After

receiving the living water from Jesus, she would also worship the Father in Spirit and truth. For more than 2,000 years, this statement of Jesus has applied to all who would follow Him. The true worship of the Father must be in spirit and in truth, and in the Holy Spirit that Jesus gives His followers and in the truth of Jesus' words and the Bible—words that believers can understand with their minds and with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Father seeks the worship of those committed to the truth of His words and of who He is: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as revealed in the Bible.

**(John 4:24) God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”**

God is Spirit. God is not material or physical. God is not a golden calf, an idol, or any other manmade representation of God. When Jesus was born, He was born in material, physical, human flesh: fully God and fully human. Believers must worship God with their mind based on the truth about God—the truth revealed by the Bible. Jesus came to reveal the truth about God. In worship, we mentally thank God for the truth He has revealed in Jesus, and we praise God for all God is and all God does. The followers of Jesus must worship God according to the way God is, and not according to what they or others might imagine God to be. People either believe that Jesus spoke the words of God because He is the Son of God, or they choose to disbelieve the truth that God has revealed in the Bible (see John 3:34).

**(John 4:25) The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”**

With this statement, the woman revealed and proclaimed her faith in the Messiah who was to come. She believed what the Bible taught about the Messiah and His coming based on as much of the Bible that she knew, that the Samaritans claimed to be inspired by God (the five books of Moses). She believed that when the Messiah came, He would proclaim the truth that would explain and settle all theological arguments. He would proclaim all they needed to know for salvation. When she expressed her faith in all the truth she knew, Jesus confirmed her belief and pointed to himself as the Messiah, as the fulfillment of what she believed about the Messiah. Jesus had revealed and would continue to proclaim to her all the truth that she would need to know to believe in Him, along with the help of the Holy Spirit that He would give to her without limit as “a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” as He promised her (John 4:14). Jesus’ work of redemption for all (Jews and Gentiles) who would believe in Him preceded what Paul later told the Jews in Acts 28:28, “Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”

**(John 4:26) Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”**

In this verse, Jesus boldly proclaimed to her that He was the Messiah; furthermore, as the Messiah He was speaking to her, a Samaritan woman, and He was clarifying and explaining and settling once and for all time her theological questions. This is the first time in the Gospel of John that Jesus made this bold declaration that He in fact was the Messiah, and He made it to a Samaritan woman. Others may have these or similar questions later, and these are the answers of the Messiah on how to worship God the Father, and that true worship is of God the Father according to Jesus' teachings. Furthermore, after she had perceived that Jesus was a prophet, if the woman did begin seeking to worship the true God, the forgiveness of her sins, and a new beginning, after learning from Jesus that He was the Messiah and after believing in Him, she began to receive from Him all that she sought.

**(John 4:27) Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"**

The disciples expressed the typical viewpoint of the Pharisees and many Jews. Jewish men avoided, as much as possible, speaking to a woman in public. In this verse, they did not express the ideas of Jesus and His way of treating either women or Samaritans. They had not been with Jesus long enough to recognize the fact that Jesus did not hold any prejudice or resentment against those of a different gender or race. Jesus never prejudged anyone,

for He knew what was in everyone. God and Jesus loved the world, and Jesus did not come to condemn the world. He came to save everyone who would believe in Him, and that included women and those of all races. By the grace of God, they did not interrupt Jesus' and the woman's conversation by speaking to either one of them. They quietly watched.

**(John 4:28) Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,**

When the woman heard Jesus' claim to be the Messiah that the Samaritans expected (and not because the disciples had said anything to her), she was so excited she left her water jar and went back into the city and spoke to people. When Jesus had told her that "salvation is from the Jews," He was not being racist or claiming the Jews were superior to Samaritans (see John 4:22). Rather, Jesus was explaining that the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah (which was in the former Southern Kingdom). This was a fulfillment of prophecy by Jacob as recorded by Moses in Genesis 49:8-10, "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness—who dares rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his." The Samaritans believed

this prophecy was the word of God because these verses were included in the five books of Moses. The woman believed according to the Bible as Jesus and the Holy Spirit gave her understanding.

**(John 4:29) “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”**

With the woman’s reputation, the Holy Spirit did not lead her to directly proclaim her newfound belief to her neighbors or the residents of Sychar. They would probably have ridiculed her. She told them how Jesus had known and revealed all she had ever done (that the whole town probably knew about); therefore, she helped the townspeople perceive that Jesus was a prophet. Then, she simply asked them if they thought Jesus could be the Messiah. This question along with the change they perceived in the woman led them to go see for themselves—at least out of curiosity. Jesus fulfilled, would fulfill, and will completely fulfill the prophecy in Genesis 49:8-10. He was of the tribe of Judah. He was a Jew. He was the long-expected Messiah. He was the fulfillment of the prophecy given by their ancestor Jacob, the one who dug Jacob’s well. The woman did not claim that Jesus was the Messiah, because she knew she would not be believed (perhaps because of her past behavior). She told them what Jesus had said (they also had expectations about the Messiah’s coming). Then, she asked them a question (as though seeking their help). So, the townspeople went and

met Jesus and decided for themselves that Jesus was the Messiah based on the words He spoke to them directly and from their experiences with Him. Jesus' testimony and their results among these Samaritans give us good and sufficient reasons to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God.

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. Why do you think the Samaritan woman asked Jesus a question about where people should worship?
2. What did Jesus tell the woman to do in John 4:21? What does that command mean to you?
3. How does a true follower of Jesus worship? What kind of person does the Father seek to worship Him?
4. What did the woman tell Jesus she believed about the Messiah? Was her belief right or wrong? What did Jesus tell her in response?
5. What did the woman do after she believed in Jesus? Why did she do this?

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