

Episode: One-Hit Wonders No. 9

Narrator: Woman at the Well

Primary Scriptures: John 4:1-42

Story Summary: Jesus talks to a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well

Location: Sychar, Samaria

Time: Circa 28 AD

Suggested Memory Scriptures: John 4:14, 23-24

Any story in the New Testament having to do with Samaritans cannot be properly understood unless there is corresponding knowledge of the bitter history of the Samaritans and Jews. The antagonism starts with King Jeroboam splitting Israel into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms in about 930 B.C.

All of the kings of the Northern Kingdom led their people into idolatry or at least continued its practice. God's patience finally ended when he allowed the Assyrians to take over the Northern Kingdom in about 721 B.C. and scatter its leaders throughout the Assyrian empire. From then on, the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom were "lost".

In 538 B.C., members of the Southern Kingdom began returning from their exile in Babylon and started rebuilding the Temple and the country. They found the remnant of Jews living in the Northern Kingdom had intermarried with the Assyrians and others, and no longer considered them Jews; instead, they became known as Samaritans, named after the former capital of the Northern Kingdom. Animosity between the two groups started at this time.

About 140 years before the ministry of Jesus, one of the leaders of the Jews, John Hyrcanus, led a fearsome persecution against the Samaritans, including killing them, enslaving them, forcing them to convert to Judaism, and destroying their worship center. This treatment was fresh in the minds of the Samaritans of Jesus's time, who certainly detested the Jews.

The antagonism between the Samaritans and Jews set the stage for the meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in Sychar. That was exacerbated by the disparity of the social standing of men and women, especially a woman of questionable reputation. The woman raises these differences as a defense to establishing a relationship with Jesus, but Jesus casts them away as nothing of importance compared to improving her spiritual well-being.

When Jesus tells her about her past, she concludes he most certainly is a prophet worth listening to. The things Jesus offers her are so valuable that she cannot wait to share her good news with those of her village. The village's response is so overwhelming that the whole village becomes Jesus followers even though he didn't do any healings or miracles. Perhaps that is why Philip will have a positive response in Samaria when comes a few years later.

It is worth noting the difference in the Sychar's response and those of Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin where Jesus taught often. He condemned those three villages because they rejected him despite all the miracles and teachings he did there.