



### 1. Jesus' journey to Galilee from Jerusalem.

In response to his growing number of followers and conflicting reports about his baptizing activity (he didn't baptize but his disciples did), he leaves Judea to return Galilee. Note that because of the conflict between Jews and Samaritans, many Jews would go out of their way to avoid passing through Samaria (even crossing the Jordan river twice!). Scripture tells us, however, that Jesus had to pass through Samaria. This seems to be for the purpose of his interaction with the woman and the well and not for physical restrictions.

### 2. The history of the Jews and Samaritans.

Israel was historically divided into the northern and southern kingdoms. When the northern kingdom fell to Assyria in 720 B.C., most, but not all of the Jews were transported to Assyria (2 Kings 17:6). The Jews who remained eventually married into the population of other captives that were brought in by Assyria to populate the captured land (from Babylon and other places). Subsequently, the southern kingdom (Jerusalem) was also captured and the Jews there carried off to exile in Babylon. Unlike the northern Jews, the

Jews from the southern kingdom remained a nation and did not intermarry with the foreigners. The distinctiveness of these populations was made clear when the Jews returned to repair and rebuild the temple (about 450 B.C.) and they refused the help offered from the Samaritans because of their lost Jewish heritage and purity. As time passed, the Samaritans also built their own house of worship on Mt. Gerizim. They held to the Pentateuch as their scriptures (Genesis-Deuteronomy). In John 4, roughly 400 years later, the conflict remains strong.

**3. The significance of Jacob's well.** Jesus rests at Jacob's well. This region had a long history with the Jews as well, as beginning with Abraham, God interacts with his people in unique ways here. (The passage here references Sychar, which is a short walk from Shechem.) At Shechem, Abram is told to build an altar (Genesis 12:1-3, 6-7), Jacob (Abraham's grandson), also buys land here and digs a well and builds another altar (Genesis 33: 18-20). This land is later given to his son Joseph. In other passages, we see Moses hearing from God about the mountains there (Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal – Deuteronomy 11:26-32), Joshua carrying out covenant renewal after the battles of Jericho and Ai (Joshua 8:30-35), and the return of Joseph's bones from Egypt for burial there (Joshua 24:32). Clearly this place has deep significance to Israel and is an appropriate place for God to break in again by the revelation of Jesus as the Messiah (fulfilling Genesis 12:7, Deuteronomy 18:15).

4. **The cultural context of male/female interactions.** In strict Jewish culture, Rabbis (Jewish teachers) were forbidden from greeting women (even relatives) in public. In an effort to keep this man-made rule, some Pharisees were known as the “bruised and bleeding Pharisees” since they would go to such lengths to avoid women as to close their eyes and run into things! It would have been very risky and damaging to Jesus’ reputation as a Jewish teacher to be seen talking with a woman.
5. **What would have been understood by the terms “sixth hour”, “living water”, and “Messiah”?** Some of the language here only makes sense by understanding the context.
  - a. **The sixth hour** – Jewish time runs from 6:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. and so the sixth hour is noon.
  - b. **Living water** – For an educated Jew, the term “living water” would signal back to several Old Testament passages of scripture that reference thirsting after God himself (*the* living water). These include Psalm 36:8-9; Psalm 42:1-2; Isaiah 55:1; Jeremiah 2:13; and Jeremiah 17:13. Clearly the Samaritan woman does not hear the term “living water” with this in mind.
  - c. **Messiah** – The Samaritans would have held to the idea of the coming “Prophet” predicted by Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-18). They may also have heard and adopted the term “Messiah” from hearing John the Baptist who had been baptizing in their region (John 3:23). Taken literally, Messiah means “anointed.” While the Messiah was anticipated by the Jews, both the Jews and the Samaritans likely expected him to be a political savior rather than a servant king. We’re not fully clear how much she understood of his declaration, but it was enough to warrant bringing others to investigate. True belief of Jesus as the “Savior of the world” seems to follow for many Samaritans.