

PART 2

RESPONSE TO JESUS

4:4--6:15

Part 2 deals primarily with response to Jesus in which the Evangelist makes use of antithetic parallelism to balance sequence with sequence. He creates antithetic parallelism between (a) and (a') by contrasting the willing belief of the Samaritan woman with the blind refusal of the Galilean Jews to accept and believe in Jesus. In (b) and (b'), he creates antithetic parallelism by contrasting the belief of the Samaritan townspeople, based only on the word of Jesus, with the unbelief of the Jerusalem Jews, even after Jesus had cured a paralytic practically before their eyes.

The center (c) also deals with the theme of response and shows a royal official (probably intended to represent the response of the pagans to Jesus) believing in Jesus even before he comes to find out that his son had been healed. Thus, all five sequences of Part 2 deal with different kinds of response to the credentials of Jesus. By emphasizing the negative response of the Jews in Sequences 9 and 10, the Evangelist prepares for his turning point in Part 3 (6:16-21).

Parallel Structure of Part 2

4:4--6:15

- (a) Sequence 6 (4:4-38): The **Samaritan woman believes.**
- (b) Sequence 7 (4:39-45): The **Samaritan townspeople believe.**
- (c) Sequence 8 (4:46-52): The royal official believes.
- (b') Sequence 9 (5:1-47): The **Jerusalem Jews refuse to believe.**
- (a') Sequence 10 (6:1-15): The **Galilean Jews refuse to believe.**

AN OVERVIEW OF SEQUENCES 6-10

Sequence 6 (The Samaritan Woman Believes; 4:4-38)

- (a) Jesus, **wearied** (KEKOPIAKOS), sits at the well (4:4-6).
- (b) The Samaritan woman is **surprised** (4:7-18).
- (c) Worship in spirit and truth (4:19-24).
- (b') The apostles are **surprised** (4:25-34).
- (a') Others have **labored** (KEKOPIAKASIN) (4:35-38).

Sequence 7 (The Samaritan Townspeople Believe in Jesus; 4:39-45)

- (a) Many **Samaritans from that city believed in Him** (4:39).
- (b) **He stayed there two days** (4:40-41).
- (c) This is indeed the Savior of the world (4:42).
- (b') **After the two days He departed** to Galilee (4:43-44).
- (a') The **Galileans welcomed Him**, having seen all that He had done (4:45).

Sequence 8 (The Royal Official Believes; 4:46-54)

- (a) So he **came again** to Cana in **Galilee**, where he had **made the water into wine** (4:46-47).
- (b) Go; **your son will live** (4:48-50a).
- (c) The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him (4:50b).
- (b') The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him "**Your son will live**" (4:51-53).
- (a') This was now the **second sign** that Jesus did when He **had come from Judea to Galilee** (4:54).

Sequence 9 (The Jews Reject Jesus; 5:1-47)

- (a) The **Jews** contest **Jesus'** healing a man **on the sabbath** (5:1-11).
- (b) The **Jews** ask the **man** who it was that **healed** him (5:12-13).
- (c) Jesus and the healed man in the Temple (5:14).
- (b') The **man** tells the **Jews** that it was Jesus who **healed** him (5:15).
- (a') The **Jews** persecute **Jesus** because he healed **on the sabbath** (5:16-18).

Sequence 10 (The Galilean Jews Refuse to Believe; 6:1-15)

- (a) Followed by the **multitude**, **Jesus** goes up into **the hills** (6:1-3).
- (b) The multitude is **hungry** (6:4-9).
- (c) The multitude is seated (6:10).
- (b') The multitude is **filled** (6:11-13).
- (a') Misinterpreted by the **multitude**, **Jesus** flees again to **the hills** (6:14-15).

SEQUENCE 6

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN BELIEVES

4:4-38

CHIASTIC STRUCTURE FOR SEQUENCE 6

- (a) Jesus, **wearied** (KEKOPIAKOS), sits at the well (4:4-6).
- (b) The Samaritan woman is **surprised** (4:7-18).
- (c) Worship in spirit and truth (4:19-24).
- (b') The apostles are **surprised** (4:25-34).
- (a') Others have **labored** (KEKOPIAKASIN), and you have entered into their **labor** (KOPON) (4:35-38).

A commentary on any part of John's Gospel requires a good working knowledge of John's literary techniques. In the Sequence 6, the artistic that they represent practically a showcase of his talent. It will be helpful, therefore, to outline some of these techniques the Evangelist utilizes in this artfully told narrative.

First, there is the usual Johannine dialogue technique, which begins with the oracular statement of Jesus in 4:10, continues with a first misunderstanding on the part of the woman (v. 11), followed by Jesus' explanation of what she has failed to understand (vv. 13-14), and later a second misunderstanding (v. 15). Unlike Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus, His dialogue with the Samaritan woman does not develop into a monologue.

Second, the use of the "rule of two" is evident in this sequence. The dramatist's rule of two makes it desirable that as often as feasible no more than two speakers appear and speak in any one scene. It is a technique derived from an ancient oral

telling style and is scrupulously followed by John in this sequence. At the very beginning, John studiously gets the disciples off the stage when Jesus begins His dialogue with the Samaritan woman (cf. 4:8) and just as studiously gets the woman off the stage when the disciples return (cf. 4:27-28).

Third, the technique of double-meaning words is employed. John regularly uses words that have one meaning for the characters in his narrative and another for Jesus or for the Evangelist's readers. The following are notable in 4:4-38: "living water" (4:10); "not thirst" (4:15); "food" (4:32); and "harvest" (4:35). Examining the "living water" a little closer, the woman is surprised that a Jewish male would take the double risk of ritual impurity by sharing a dipper with one who was both a Samaritan and a woman (v. 9). Jesus quickly moves the conversation to a deeper level. If she knew His real identity, she would have asked Him for a drink and would have received "living water" (v. 10). As with Nicodemus, the conversation now proceeds on two levels, with Jesus unfolding "heavenly things" which the woman understands on a purely "earthly level" (cf. 3:31f.). It is the double meaning of "living water" which makes this misunderstanding possible. She continues to misunderstand as Jesus explains that His living water will quench one's thirst forever (vv. 13-15).

Fourth, John uses the misunderstanding technique. The technique is used twice with the woman (4:11-15) and once with the disciples (4:31-33), in each case allowing Jesus to correct the misunderstanding and thus by contrast express His real meaning more emphatically.

And finally, fifth, the Evangelist uses "stages." John uses three stages in this sequence. He has a front stage for Jesus and the Samaritan woman, a back stage in town for the disciples' quest for food and for the Samaritan woman's dialogue with her townspeople, and an in-between stage for the townspeople coming out to meet Jesus (cf. 4:30).

In sequence 6 the uniqueness of Jesus is now set forth against movements that extend beyond the boundaries of Palestinian Judaism. The Temple cleansing and the dialogue with Nicodemus took place in Jerusalem. Now Jesus departs for Galilee, taking the direct route through Samaria. It is high noon. Weary and thirsty from travel, He sits down by a well, no less than Jacob's well, outside the town of Sychar. As in the other sequences, so here the supersession of Jewish traditional worship is provided by Jesus' earthly deeds and words.

TEXT (4:4-38) The NASB Text

(a) (4:4) And He had to pass through Samaria. (5) So He came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the **parcel of ground** that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; (6) and Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being **wearied** from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about **the sixth hour**.

(b) (4:7) **There came a woman of Samaria** to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." (8) For **His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food**. (9) The Samaritan woman therefore said to Him, "**How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?**" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) (10) Jesus answered and said to her, "IF you knew the gift of God, and **who it is** who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." (11) She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? (12) "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" (13) Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; (14) but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." (15) The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty, nor come all the way here to draw." (16) He said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband'; (18) for **you have had five husbands**, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."

(c) (4:19) The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. (20) Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." (21) Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father. (22) You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews. (23) But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

(b') (4:25) The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is

called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." (26) Jesus said to her, "**I who speak to you am *He***." (27) And at this point **His disciples came**, and they **marveled that He had been speaking with a woman**; yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her?" (28) So **the woman** left her waterpot, and **went into the city**, and said to the men, (29) "Come, see a man who told me **all the things that I *have* done**; this is not the Christ, is it?" (30) They **went out of the city**, and were coming to Him. (31) In the meanwhile **the disciples** were requesting Him, saying, "Rabbi, **eat**." (32) But He said to them, "I have **food** to eat that you do not know about." (33) The **disciples** therefore were saying to one another, "No one brought Him ***anything*** to eat, did he?" (34) Jesus said to them, "My **food** is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work."

(a') (4:35) "Do you not say, 'There are yet **four months** and *then* comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the **fields**, that they are white for harvest. (36) Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal; that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. (37) For in this *case* the saying is true, 'One sows, and another reaps.' (38) I sent you to reap that for which you have not **labored**; others have **labored**, and you have entered into their **labor**."

ANALYSIS OF THE CHIASTIC STRUCTURE

The Apostle John creates parallelism between (a) and (a') in several ways: (1) by the repetition of different forms of the Greek word for "labor": KEKOPIAKOS in (a), and KEKOPIAKASIN and KOPON in (a'); (2) by the repetition of the word "parcel of ground" (CHORIOU) in verse 5 and in verse 35 (CHORAS); and (3) by a time reference in each section (cf. 4:6b and 35b).

John has (b') look back at (b) in several ways. First, in (b) he has the woman come and the disciples leave; in (b') he has the disciples come and the woman leave (comp. 4:7-8 with 4:27-28). Second, in (b) he has the woman express her surprise that Jesus, a Jew, should speak to her, a Samaritan and a woman; in (b') he has the disciples express surprise that Jesus should be found talking to a woman (comp. 4:9 with 4:27). Third, in (b) Jesus raises the question of His identity by saying, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink . . .'" (4:10); in (b') the Evangelist has Jesus respond to the woman's statement "I know that Messiah is coming" by identifying Himself as the Messiah with the words "I who speak to you am *He*" (comp. 4:19, 26 with 4:10). Fourth, in (b) the Evangelist has

Jesus express His knowledge about the Samaritan woman's private marital situation (4:17-18); in (b') he has the woman announce to the people: "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I *have* done; this is not the Christ, is it?" (comp. 4:29 with 4:17-18). Finally, the disciples, who had departed the scene in 4:8 to buy food, return to engage Jesus in a discussion about food in 4:31-34.

The center (c) in 4:19-24 is clearly set off from (b) and (b') by its subject matter, i.e., the place and nature of true worship, and by the tenfold concatenation of the word "worship" (vv. 20, 21, 22, 23, 24).

Parallels Between Sequences 6 (4:4-38) and 16 (10:40--12:11)

Just as Sequence 1 (1:19-51) parallels chiastically with Sequence 21 (20:19--21:25) and Sequence 2 with Sequence 20 and so on, so Sequence 6 (the Samaritan woman) parallels chiastically with Sequence 16 (the Martha, Mary, and Lazarus story). The parallels, as with the parallels between Sequences 2 (Mary, the woman at Cana) and Sequence 20 (Mary, the woman at the tomb), are few in number, but significant.

In both narratives, Jesus arrives from afar. In 4:4ff, He arrives from Galilee. In 10:40ff, He arrives from Bethany beyond Jordan. In both narratives, Jesus is outside of the town. In 4:8, His disciples go off to the town to buy provisions, and later the Samaritans come out from the town to meet Jesus (4:30). In 11:30, it is expressly stated: "Now Jesus had not yet come into the village [Bethany]"

In both sequences, women are the central characters. These two balanced sequences, along with Sequences 2 and 20, are the only extensive narratives about women in the entire Gospel. In both sequences, the women speak about Jesus as the Messiah. In 4:25, the Samaritan woman says, "I know that Messiah is coming" In 4:29, she wonders, "this is not the Christ, is it?" In 11:27, Martha says, "Yes, Lord; I believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, *even* He who comes into the world."

In both sequences, something is said about the Temple of Jerusalem. In 4:20, the Samaritan woman says, ". . . you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place (HO TOPOS) where men ought to worship." In 11:48, the Pharisees fear that the "Romans will come and take away both our place (TON TOPON) and our nation."

In both sequences, the disciples are concerned about Jesus. In 4:31, they are concerned that He should eat. In 11:8, they are concerned for His safety when He determines to go back to Judea. In both stories, people associated with the women come out to meet Jesus and believe in Him. In 4:30, townspeople of the Samaritan woman "They went out (EXELTHON) of the city, and were coming to Him" because of what the woman said about Jesus. In 12:9, "The great multitude therefore of the Jews learned that He was there; and they came (ELTHON), not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead." As John goes on to mention in 12:11, "... because on account of him many of the Jews were going away, and were believing in Jesus" on account of Lazarus.

In both sequences, there is a strong emphasis on "eternal life." In 4:9-15, Jesus' entire discussion with the woman deals with the water of "eternal life," and Jesus specifically says, "... whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to **eternal life**" (4:14). In 11:25-26, Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die."

Finally, it is hardly insignificant that in 4:4-38 Jesus is concerned for Samaritans who did not belong to Israel and might well be characterized as "dispersed people of God." In 11:51-52, it is said of Jesus that He "was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but that He might also **gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad**," precisely what Jesus does in His ministry to the Samaritans.

COMMENTARY

We should not overlook the thematic development of messianic universalism. Nicodemus was an eminent representative orthodox Judaism. Now John records an interview Jesus had with one who stood for a class which was wholeheartedly despised by orthodox Judaism. The rivalries and hatreds which were meat and drink to the Jews of His day did not matter to Jesus. His was a ministry for all people. In the former incident Jesus spoke of the importance of the new birth. Here His theme is the living water which He came to bring to men. The terminology is different, but the basic message is the same. A feature of this narrative is the way the woman persistently attempts to avoid the issues that Jesus raises. But just as persistently Jesus brings her back to them until finally the desired result is secured.

(A) Jesus, wearied (KEKOPIAKOS), sits at the well (4:4-6).

4:4 And He had to pass through Samaria. The route normally followed by Jewish travellers heading north from Judea to Galilee passed through Samaria. Geography therefore dictated that **He had to pass through Samaria** when He embarked on the three-day walk to Galilee. The only alternative was to cross the Jordan near Jericho, travel north up the east bank (the Transjordan) through largely Gentile territory, and cross back to the west bank near the Lake of Galilee. Popular commentators has sometimes insisted that the longer route through the Transjordan was the customary route for Jewish travellers, so great was their aversion to Samaritans; this in turn suggests that the "had to" language (EDEI) reflects the compulsion of divine appointment, not geography. Josephus, however, provides ample assurance not only that the antipathy between Jews and Samaritans was strong, but also that Jews passing from Judea to Galilee or back nevertheless preferred the shorter route through



WHO WERE THE SAMARITANS

Samaria had no separate political existence in Jesus' day: it was united with Judea under the Roman procurator. Nevertheless for both Jews and Samaritans the area was defined by both history and religion. King Omri named the new capital of the northern kingdom "Samaria" (1 Kgs. 16:24), which name was then transferred to the district and sometimes to the entire northern kingdom. After the Assyrians captured Samaria in 722-721 B.C., they deported all the Israelites of substance and settled the land with foreigners, who intermarried with the surviving Israelites and adhered to some form of their ancient religion (2 Kgs. 17--18). After the exile, Jews returning to their homeland, the remains of the southern kingdom, viewed the Samaritans not only as the children of political rebels but as racial half-breeds whose religion was tainted by various unacceptable elements (Neh. 13; cf. Josephus, *Anti.* xi, pp. 297-347, esp. 340). About 400 BC the Samaritans erected a rival temple on Mount Gerizim; toward the end of the second century BC this was destroyed by John Hyrcanus, the Hasmonean ruler in Judea. This combination of events fuelled religious and theological animosities. Certainly by the first century the Samaritans had developed their own religious heritage based on the Pentateuch (they did not accept the other Books of the Hebrew Bible as canonical), continuing to focus their worship not on Jerusalem and its Temple but on Mount Gerizim. A small number of Samaritans survives to this day.

Samaria (*Ant.* xx. 118; *Bel.* ii. 232; *Vita* 269). This does not mean that the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman was outside the sweep of divine providential appointments; for indeed, the "had to" may refer to God's will for Jesus.

John may intend a contrast between the woman of this narrative and Nicodemus of chapter 3. The contrast could hardly be greater between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman in this narrative. One was a man, the other a woman; one was a Jew, the other a Samaritan; the one was a respected ruler, the other a social outcast; the one was seen as a moral man, the other an immoral woman; the one came to Jesus by night, the other came at mid-day; the one had no arguments, only a wondering *how*, the other was full of questions and debate; the one was cautious, the other was bold; the one did not seem to know what he wanted, the other knew only too well; the one fades out of the story unnoticed, the other went back to her crowd and brought them all to Jesus; the one we hear of again (7:50; 19:39), the other fades into women's usual invisibility in patriarchal society. But both need Jesus.

4:5 So He came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Sychar, the name of the Samaritan town at which Jesus arrived, is not attested in earlier literature, but is probably to be identified with the modern village of 'Askar, on the shoulder of Mount Ebal, opposite Mount Gerizim. Jacob's well, attested by a continuous line of tradition, lies about a half mile to the south of the modern village.

Sychar, John tells us, was **near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph**. The reference is to Genesis 48:22, where Israel (=Jacob) on his deathbed tells Joseph, "And to you, as one who is over your brothers, I give the ridge of land (in Hebrew, literally, "shoulder" of a mountain) I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow." When the Israelites conquered and settled Canaan, they brought with them out of Egypt the bones of their ancestor Joseph, and buried them "at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph's descendants" (Joshua 24:32). Sychar (if it is to be identified with 'Askar) lies about a mile from the ancient town of Shechem (modern Balata). Joseph's tomb lies but a few hundred yards northwest of Jacob's well.

4:6 and Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. The site of Jacob's well is as certain as such things can be. At various periods churches were built there, but they were destroyed by the Muslims. Today the well lies in the shadow of the crypt of an unfinished Orthodox church.

It is often pointed out in the commentaries that the word for **well** in this verse is PEGE, denoting a running spring; in verses 11 and 12, the word is PHREAR, meaning a cistern or dug-out well. Jacob's well is both: it was dug out, but it is fed by an underground spring that is remarkably reliable to this day.

Jesus arrived at Jacob's well **about the sixth hour**, almost certainly about noon (beginning the count about sunrise) when the heat of the day and the progress of the journey explain Jesus' thirst and tiredness. In addition, this scene is reminiscent of the scene in Exodus 2:15, in which Moses sits at the well. In addition, the reference to the **sixth hour** may be a reference to the passion narrative (19:14, "the sixth hour").

(B) The Samaritan woman is surprised (4:7-18).

4:7-8 There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. With the Samaritan woman on stage and ready for the dialogue with Jesus, the Evangelist removes the disciples by having them go into town to buy food, thus preserving the rule of two and at the same time setting the stage for the return of the disciples and their subsequent discussion with Jesus about food in verses 31-34 of (B').

Apparently, the woman came to the well alone. Women were more likely to come in groups to fetch water, and either earlier or later in the day when the heat of the sun was not so fierce. Possibly the woman's public shame (4:16ff) contributed to her isolation.

The connection between verse 7 and the parenthetical explanation of verse 8 suggests that normally Jesus' disciples would have helped Him draw water, but their absence prompted Jesus to breach social custom and ask the Samaritan woman for a drink. That Jesus and His disciples were willing to purchase food from Samaritans betrays a certain freedom from the self-imposed regulations of the stricter sort of Jews, who would have been unwilling to eat food that had been handled by Samaritans.

4:9 The Samaritan woman therefore said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.). The opposition between Jews and Samaritans had roots going back to the time of the Judges (cf. Judges 6--9). Later, following the division of Solomon's kingdom in 922 B.C. into a northern kingdom (Israel)

southern kingdom (Judah), Samaria became the capital of the rebel northern kingdom. After the destruction of Samaria by the Assyrians in 722 B.C., the city became half Israelite and half pagan when the Assyrians repopulated it with pagans deported from other parts of the empire (cf. 2 Kings 17:24ff.).

The inherited suspicions and animosities between Jews and Gentiles erupted a practical levels. Although some Jews could imagine eating with Samaritans, doubtless many a Jew would not eat with a Samaritan on the latter's home turf for fear of incurring ritual defilement. Probably this fear was intensified when the Samaritan was a woman: within a generation Jewish leaders would codify a law that reflected long-standing popular sentiment, to the effect that all "the daughters of the Samaritans are menstruates from their cradle" (Mishnah *Niddah* 4:1) and therefore perpetually in a state of ceremonial uncleanness.

The Samaritan woman's surprise is therefore entirely understandable: Jesus was a Jew and she was both a Samaritan and a woman. From her perspective, she dismisses Him as a Jew; later on, Jews will dismiss Jesus as a Samaritan (8:48).

Jesus, as His manner of acting here indicates, is not concerned with rules of uncleanness (cf. Mark. 7:1-15). Nor is He concerned about the impropriety of speaking with a woman, a matter that surprises His apostles (cf. vv. 27-28). As the Savior of the world, He is concerned with all men and women, regardless of social distinctions.

4:10 Jesus answered and said to her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.' In characteristic Johannine style, Jesus gives the dialogue a theological turn by means of a mysterious and almost oracular statement that sums up both the content and the purpose of the conversation that is to follow.

Not only had Jesus' request of the woman proven Him to be above the biases of strictly observant Jews, but He Himself now proffers **living water** of which she knows nothing. She sees in Him a weary Jewish traveller; she does not yet perceive His glory (cf. 1:14). If she had known who it was that was asking her for a drink, she would have been pressing Him for a far better drink. The **gift of God** that she does not recognize is probably the eternal life that only Jesus can bestow.

What Jesus promises is **living water**. The expression has been chosen to allow two levels of meaning. On the one hand, it denotes fresh, running water from springs. On the other hand, the expression belongs to a considerable network of metaphorical

uses. This diversity in the proposed backgrounds betrays the esteem attached to fresh water in a country where so much land is terribly arid, and where most of it is arid for much of the year. In such an environment "living water" is an expression waiting to become a metaphor for highly diverse religious values.

The obvious background, however, is the Old Testament. There God declares: "My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jeremiah 2:13); that is, they have rejected the fresh, "running" supply of God and His faithful goodness, choosing instead the stagnant waters of cisterns they themselves prepared, discovering even then that their cisterns were cracked, and leaving them with nothing to sustain life and blessing. But the prophets look forward to a time when "living water will flow out from Jerusalem" (Zechariah 14:8; cf. Ezekiel 47:9). The metaphor speaks of God and His grace, knowledge of God, life, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit; in Isaiah 1:16-18; Ezekiel 36:25-27 water promises cleansing. All of these themes are picked up in John's use of "water" or "living water" in this Gospel (cf. notes on 3:5; 7:38; 19:34). In John's Gospel there are passages where Jesus is the living water as He is the bread from heaven (6:35), and other passages where He gives the living water to believers. In this chapter, the water is the satisfying eternal life mediated by the Spirit that only Jesus, the Messiah and Savior of the world, can provide.

4:11-12 She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" Because of the double meaning of "living water," the woman finds it easy to think Jesus is talking about fresh, running water, like that of the spring that feeds the well. On the misunderstanding theme, she comments, "You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep [still over 100 feet deep, and probably deeper then]; where then do You get that living water?"

To obtain water on this spot, even the patriarch Jacob had found it necessary to dig a well and to provide the means for raising the water from the deep hole. If Jesus was offering fresh water without expending the energy to dig or using the means provided, He was greater than Jacob, or a cheap charlatan. The woman has little doubt Jesus is the latter: the form of her question (v. 12) implies the answer was a decisive "No!" in her own mind. But misunderstanding combines with irony to make the woman twice wrong: the "living water" Jesus offers does not come from an ordinary well, and Jesus is in fact far greater than the patriarch Jacob--a point John's readers can appreciate, even if the Samaritan woman has not yet grasped the point. (A similarly skeptical question compares Jesus with the patriarch Abraham in 8:53,

with no less irony.)

There is no Old Testament record of Jacob digging this well. Probably it belongs to tradition associated with the account of Jacob's move to the Shechem area (Genesis 33:18-20). Some have wondered why Jacob should have dug a well here at all, since several fine springs are but a short distance away. From this distance we cannot be sure; but it is not unlikely that the best water supplies were already claimed by local tribes, prompting Jacob to conclude that it would be wise to secure an independent water supply. He may have remembered the experiences of his father Isaac (Genesis 26:15-33).

4:13-14 Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." The woman's question (v. 12) is sceptical, perhaps slightly derisory, but Jesus answers it. Some measure of the relative greatness of Jacob and of Himself can be found in the fact that the water provided by the venerated patriarch, as valuable as it was, quenched thirst only for a short while; the "living water" Jesus gives bans thirst forever in the one who drinks it. This thirst is not for natural water, but for God, for eternal life in the presence of God; and the thirst is met not by removing this aching desire but by pouring out the Spirit. Indeed, this water **shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life** (v. 14), clearly a reference to the Spirit who alone gives life (6:63).

Again there are echoes of Old Testament promises. In the day of God's salvation, with joy God's people "will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3). "They will neither hunger nor thirst" (Isaiah 49:10; cf. Revelation 7:16); the pouring out of God's Spirit will be like pouring "water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground" (Isaiah 44:3). The language of inner satisfaction and transformation calls to mind a string of prophecies anticipating new hearts, the exchange of failed formalism in religion for a heart that knows and experiences God, and that hungers to do His will (Jer. 31:29-34; Ezk. 36:25-27; Joel 2:28-32). It is hard not to think of Isaiah 55:1-3: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters . . . that your soul may live." Here God promises to make "an everlasting covenant" with all who come--not only with Israel but with "the peoples," "nations that do not know you" (Isaiah 55:4, 5). The same passage demands that "the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts," for then God will have mercy and "will freely pardon" (Isaiah 55:6,7)--and indeed it is to the woman's sin that Jesus is about to turn (4:16ff). Samaritans who limited the canon to the Pentateuch might not have appreciated such allusions to the prophets (though John's Jewish readers would), but in the later Samaritan liturgy that has come down to us for the Day of Atonement

