

# EXPLORATION: BIBLE

By Chip Thompson

## Jacob's Well, Jesus, and the Woman of Samaira

This is Jacob's well. Jacob and his sons dug this well about 3,850 years ago. How can we be certain that this is indeed Jacob's well? Read on...



**Jacob's well is housed in the Church of St. Photina, in Nablus, Israel, just outside the ancient biblical city of Shechem. [Photo by Chip Thompson, March 2023]**

The only mention of this well in the Bible is in John chapter 4. In this story, Jesus and his disciples stop at "Jacob's well." Here Jesus met and talked with a woman of Samaria. So, what evidence supports the fact that Jacob and his sons dug this well?

First, from archeological work conducted in and around this well, we know this is a Middle Bronze Age well that dates to the time of Jacob. Second, we learn from the biblical story that Jacob purchased land from the leaders of Shechem in about 1,850 B.C. (Genesis 33:18-20). This well is located about a block from the East Gate of Shechem. Third, this is the only Bronze Age well in the entire valley of Shechem.

So, if this well is located on land that Jacob purchased, and the well dates to the time of Jacob, and there are no other Bronze Age wells in the entire area, then there is no reason to doubt that Jacob dug the well.

There is another biblical reference to the land Jacob purchased near Shechem. In 1406 B.C. when Joshua and the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, the Bible says they buried the

bones of Joseph, Jacob's son, on the plot of ground that Jacob had purchased from the leaders of Shechem, (Joshua 24:32).

Today Joseph's tomb is located just outside the eastern gate of Shechem, remarkably close to Jacob's well.



**The traditional site of Joseph's tomb is beneath the white dome in this picture. This site was commemorated at least from the Roman period as Joseph's tomb. [Photo by Chip Thompson, October 2019].**

Justin Martyr (an Apostolic Church Father) is an early witness from the Greek city that was built around the ruins of ancient Shechem. He states, in 105 A.D., that he "was born at Flavia Neapolis (modern Nablus) very near Jacob's well."

Another early witness is St. Jerome who lived in Bethlehem and translated the Latin Vulgate Bible. He said, "by 384 AD there was a Cruciform Church built over Jacob's well." So, there is no doubt that for thousands of years this well has been identified as Jacob's well. (See: photo of cruciform church in the next column)

Knowing Jacob's well is an authentic site helps us understand that the story of the Woman of Samaria is also an authentic story, rooted in real history. So, what happened here that warrants all the fuss? Maybe it is the fact that Jesus, a Jew, reached out in love to a Samaritan Woman and at the time this was total socially unacceptable behavior.

The story in John chapter 4 tells us "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." Why? Because Jews considered Samaritans to be "unclean half-breeds" who followed a counterfeit Mosaic religion. It was also socially inappropriate for a male to talk publicly with a female who was not a close relative. Plus, this Samaritan Woman was also a "wicked sinner."

So, Jesus was totally out of line to even think about having an intimate conversation with her. But Jesus often did not follow the socially accepted norms.

In this story Jesus lovingly offers this sinful Samaritan woman forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. Wow! He knew she was a hurting woman who was abused not only by Jewish society but also by Samaritan society. In this story Jesus, in typical fashion, showed this hurting woman kindness, mercy and grace.



**This is a "Cruciform Church" that stands over the birthplace of Jesus in Bethlehem. By the 4th Century A.D. a church like this commemorated "Jacob's Well." [Aerial photo by Joel Kramer, YouTube - Expedition Bible, 2018]**

At one point in the story the Samaritan woman said, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." Then, "Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am he.'" This is one of the clearest statements ever made by Jesus as to his true identity and He reveals this truth to an outcast, sinful, Samaritan, who is a woman.

Wow! Yes, this helps us understand that Jesus was sent to open blind "eyes, so that [ALL] people may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Him" (Acts 26:18).

There is so much more to this story, but all my allotted space is gone. If this topic interests you, following is a link where, just a week ago, I explained all the amazing details of this story at Gunnison Valley Fellowship Church:

<https://www.facebook.com/100064917303377/videos/2339523979769777>