

Swept off your Feet

Beyond Worship-as-Usual

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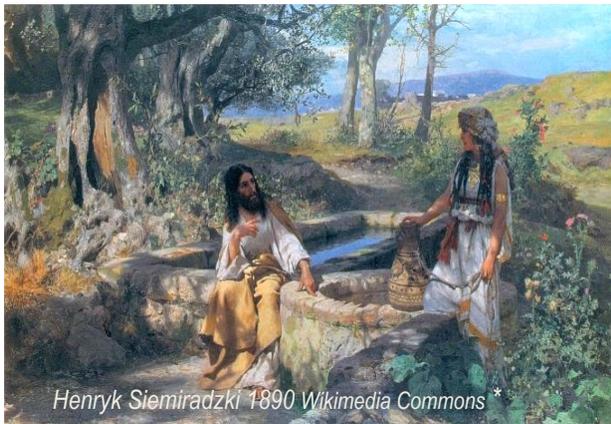
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CHAPTER 17

The Father's Quest

For True Worshipers

No one escapes the gaze of our Heavenly Father. Peering past tokens of piety and spectacles of devotion, He seeks authentic worshipers—informed responders that venerate Him in spirit and truth.¹ Swept off their feet by the intensity of His love, true worshipers transform scripted songs into ardent praise. They convert routine religion into radical reverence.



Henryk Siemiradzki 1890 Wikimedia Commons*

Our Heavenly Father sent Jesus on a mission to connect us with His love—so we would become *“the Bride of Christ”*. Waiting beside Jacob’s Well, Jesus asked an inquisitive Samaritan for a drink of water.² Ever courting His spiritual bride, Jesus used a proven pick-up line applied by Moses, Jacob, and Eliezer. They too requested water at a

well from Zipporah, Rachel, and Rebecca respectively. Each encounter led to an extraordinary marriage relationship.

Stigmatized for her mixed race and questioned for her marital status, this woman had secured the favor of five husbands. Each man, normally with the approval of both families, had considered, chosen, and taken her as their bride. Samaritans and Jews practiced similar wedding customs based on Torah Law. The

¹ John 4:23

² John 4:26

* https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ASiemiradzki-Chrystus_i_Samarytanka.jpg

matchmaking, betrothal contract, formal consummation, and festive celebration evolved into a lengthy tradition with intricate layers of responsibility, expectation, and accountability. Liberating a bride from patriarchal authority required legal documents, a dowry of gifts, service, servants, land, finances, resources, influence, and/or reputation. The end of this document details traditional wedding and marriage customs.³

This woman's sixth relationship, though not finalized by matrimony, was not necessarily promiscuous. She may have been dependent on an extended family member for food, shelter, and support. Without the designated covering of a male relative and/or lacking a sufficient dowry for another husband, widows beyond child-bearing age lived with a relative or resorted to a common law arrangement by living with a man for a set period of time, often 2 years.

After widowhood or divorce, remarriage occurred with heightened scrutiny and critical social awareness. For the widow of a childless husband, Torah Law mandates a "levirate marriage".⁴ This duty obligates a surviving brother to bear offspring for his deceased brother. David's great grandfather Boaz purchased Elimelech's estate from the widow Naomi and acquired her daughter-in-law Ruth with the deal. He said, *"I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon [Elimelech's son], to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance"*.⁵ Because Naomi's next of kin refused this obligation, Boaz served as her kinsman redeemer.

John's Gospel does not impugn this woman's moral character based on when she drew water from Jacob's Well. It specifies Jesus' arrival around noon but does not suggest this woman performed this chore at this time everyday year-round. The biblical text does not indicate that she was alone, and it does not cite a burden in excessive heat. Jacob's Well sits on the east side of Sychar, Old Testament Shechem and modern-day Nablus (570 meters above sea level). Situated in a mountain pass between Mt. Ebal (938 m above sea level) and Mt. Gerizim (836 m above sea level), this location offers a temperate Mediterranean climate with record low temperatures below freezing during January, February, and March and

³ <http://www.bible.ca/marriage/ancient-jewish-three-stage-weddings-and-marriage-customs-ceremony-in-the-bible.htm>;
<http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/revelation/related-topics/the-jewish-wedding-analogy.html>

⁴ Deuteronomy 25:5-6

⁵ Ruth 4:10 NAS

annual precipitation over 25 inches (650 mm) per year.⁶ Based on data below, she may have drawn water in the afternoon to avoid cooler wet weather.

Average High Temperatures °C (°F) for Nablus 1972-1997												
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
13.1 (55.6)	14.4 (57.9)	17.2 (63.0)	22.2 (72.0)	25.7 (78.3)	27.9 (82.2)	29.1 (84.4)	29.4 (84.9)	28.4 (83.1)	25.8 (78.4)	20.2 (68.4)	14.6 (58.3)	22.35 (72.23)

Greco-Roman culture forbade a woman from divorcing her husband for any reason. Under Roman law implemented by Caesar Augustus, if a man divorced his wife she could not remarry as long as he remained alive. Some historians claim that Parthian Civil Law governed domestic affairs in Samaria during the 1st century CE, with Roman approval.⁷ In that case, a woman in Sychar was permitted to divorce her husband after two years of marriage, with a lifetime divorce limit of five, not counting husbands that divorced her or had died.⁸ After this limit, she was legally permitted to share living quarters with a male relative or friend— for practical reasons.

Torah Law “permitted” men to divorce their wives to accommodate their hardness of heart.⁹ Men literally sent wives away for trivial faults, indecency, and barrenness, but women were obligated to prove abuse or abandonment.¹⁰ Though seldom implemented, adultery (conjugal infidelity) evoked the death penalty rather than separation or divorce.¹¹

Perhaps death, divorce, abandonment, or another necessity separated this woman from each of her five husbands. For whatever reason, she experienced complex grief with compound sorrow; she likely suffered from guilt, shame, regret, anguish, and rejection. Nevertheless, during this unique encounter with Jesus, her need for healing, comfort, and forgiveness did not dominate the conversation. Instead of seeking personal assistance, reconciliation, or justice, this wounded woman focused on worship—as the topic of priority.

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nablus#cite_note-amb-48 (accessed 3-2-21)

⁷ Ron Charles, “The Search, A Historian’s Search for Historical Jesus”, Bloomington, IN, 2007, p. 262. B.S. Civil Engineering, B.A. Theology, M.A. Ancient History, M.A. Historical Theology, Ph.D. Ancient History, Ph.D. International Relations, Th.D. Historical Theology.

⁸ Ibid, p. 263-264

⁹ Matthew 19:8; Mark 10:4-5

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 24:1-3; Isaiah 50:1; Jeremiah 3:8

¹¹ Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 22:20

Given a similar opportunity, what would you ask Jesus—first and foremost? Once she noticed His keen spiritual insight and penetrating prophetic authority, this extraordinary woman launched a provocative question demanding to know why the Jews required worship in Jerusalem. She cared more about worship than her emotional relief or social and material welfare.

Jesus addressed this woman's where to worship question with a confidence building proclamation. He said, *"a time is coming when **you will worship the Father** neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem."*¹² Next, He addressed her why question with comparative candor. Jesus declared, *"You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we **worship what we do know**, for salvation is from the Jews"*.¹³ Without taking offence, this humble Samaritan boldly asserted what she knew.



The woman said to him, "I know [eido (Gk), perceive, ascertain, and understand] that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he." John 4:25-26 NIV

Nowhere else in the Bible does Jesus reveal Himself as the Messiah with such forthright veracity. Jesus admired this woman's Messianic hope. He savored her faith more than the meal His disciples had brought. The authenticity of her faith had released divine favor with her eternal Bridegroom. In John 2, Jesus transformed water into wine at a wedding feast in Cana. In John 3, the baptizer announced, *"The one who has the bride is the bridegroom"*. In John 4, Jesus encountered a Samaritan bride—five times over, and immediately began courting her soul, to be the Bride of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 11:2-3; Eph 5:25-32). Jesus chose this experienced bride because she qualified as a true worshiper; she possessed informed faith and the inclination to reciprocate true love.

This presumed social outcast was sensible, sensitive, and steadfast. Unintimidated by a candid Jewish Prophet, she proved herself theologically aware, persistent, perceptive, and alert. Her pointed question concerning worship suggests an urgency to know the truth about God and a desire to please Him. Sympathetic to her underlying motives and overriding desires, Jesus addressed four unspoken

¹² John 4:21 NIV

¹³ John 4:22 NIV

* https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affreschi_di_Palazzo_Sampieri#/media/File:Annibale_Carracci_-_The_Samaritan_Woman_at_the_Well_-_WGA4446.jpg

questions concerning worship: when, who, how, and why. His response affirms the extraordinary value of this woman and validates her longing for understanding and approval as an authentic worshiper.

Jesus prophesied,

*“Yet a **time** is coming and **has now come** when the **true worshipers** [who] will worship the Father **in spirit and truth** [how] for **they are** the **kind of worshipers the Father seeks** [why].”*

(John 4:23 NIV)

Jesus deliberately chose this aspiring worshiper. Her concealed backstory contains a potent mystery. After this unnamed woman shared her encounter with a Jewish stranger, the inhabitants of Sychar responded instantly. They must have respected her credibility—enough to overcome historical suspicion, hostility, and animosity against Jews. Her words influenced this Samaritan community to make their way “*out of the town*” to hear a person whom they would otherwise avoid.¹⁴

Worshippers Connect with Reality

Since God rarely speaks in audible tones and seldom displays His visible form, our relationship with Him relies on spiritual rather than natural perception. Our Heavenly Father summons us to where He is looking. While bystanders squint and strain to discover the truth about God, worshipers broadcast their global coordinates for Him to notice. Bowing facedown, they deposit themselves where He promises to seek and find them. Worship serves as a reliable connecting point because worshipers attract God’s attention—and they sustain His eternal focus.

Jesus said, “*the Father seeks*” worshipers. He pursues an intimate union with present day responders. While we wait for a breakthrough in our connection with God, He awaits a breakthrough in His connection with worshipers. The God of hope searches optimistically, redeeming the past, restoring the present, and securing the future. Eventually, “*true worshipers*” will populate this earth *en masse* just as they populate heaven.

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations will worship before You. (Psalm 22:27 NAS)

“All the earth will worship You, And will sing praises to You; They will sing praises to Your name.” Selah. (Psalm 66:4 NAS)

¹⁴ John 4:29-30,39

From heaven's vantage point, God's expectation never wavers; plausible hope sustains His quest. Generations of worshipers are poised for eternity because their time *"has now come"*.¹⁵

Prophecy Evokes Worship

Writing to an imperfect Church at Corinth, Paul describes the response of an unredeemed or ungifted worshiper. Transformed by sensitive prophetic insight, similar to that experienced by the Samaritan Woman, unbelievers are inspired to worship God with facedown reverence. A consensus of wisdom and revelation, shared with reliable precision and relevant timing, confirms the reality of God's presence. Paul wrote:

But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters [the assembly], he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you. (1 Corinthians 14:24-25 NAS)

God's Special Pleasure

Circumstances on earth provide a unique opportunity for worshipers—one that residents in heaven no longer have. Until we see and hear Jesus with fully restored senses, our response comes seasoned with faith. Without this cherished ingredient of faith, *"it is impossible to please God"*.¹⁶ The Samaritan Woman pleased Jesus with her faith in the coming Messiah. Jesus told Thomas, *"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*¹⁷ By faith, worshipers on earth connect with God's pleasure and they experience the thrill of His favor.

Shielded from heaven's magnificent splendor, faith guides our focus to where God's priorities lie. Apparently, audiovisual manifestations are reserved for the future, except for extremely rare circumstances on earth. Connecting with His invisible qualities takes precedence over His visible features. Jesus offers us the advantage of first knowing Him by faith from the inside out, lest we overlook or trivialize vital details ensconced in His divine nature.

God's invisible attributes include being ever-present, almighty, eternal, all knowing, unchanging, and self-existent. God is love. He is perfect, holy, sovereign, wise, merciful, gracious, compassionate, forgiving, kind, good, patient, joyful,

¹⁵ John 4:23 NIV

¹⁶ Hebrews 11:6 NIV

¹⁷ John 20:29 NIV

righteous, faithful, just, truthful, and more. By learning to appreciate the value of God's inner traits, we prepare ourselves to keep His physical features in perspective. When Jesus finally appears to us, our relationship will be more than skin deep. It will be informed by spiritual perception and affirmed by personal intimacy.

God's Quest—To Find Worshipers Grounded in the Truth

Our Heavenly Father seeks worshipers—He rends the heavens to find them. Looking beyond outward appearance, He pursues His called-out bride chosen for His only begotten son.

When religious routines fall short, God elevates our perspective. He reinforces the truth and clarifies our understanding until informed passion guides our response. Though sights and sounds decorate perfunctory religion, God's attention settles on the solitary core of the human heart. He looks for more than superficial lip service delivered with a modicum of emotion. He sees through exaggerated hype and flashy facades. With meticulous insight, God stares into the command-and-control center of our heart where values are determined, and decisions are made.

Our Heavenly Father operates with an irrefutable search warrant from heaven. His top priority, however, is not debunking tyrants and terrorists or reprimanding backsliders and sinners; punitive action does not dominate His agenda. God seeks worshipers who worship Him in spirit and truth. He seeks a dauntless response that flows from spiritual revelation reinforced by authentic relational encounters.

Our Heavenly Father does not need worship to validate His status as God—or for any other reason. Operating at the pinnacle of perfection, He requires no proof to support His deity. Expressions of reverence contribute nothing to His supreme authority and they certainly do not stroke His ego. God knows the full value of His infinite worth. He realizes how much honor and respect He deserves.

Worship is not what the Father longs to receive from us because He needs it. Instead, He wants to find men, women, and children that recognize and appreciate the truth about Him. Jesus said, "...*true **worshippers*** [from the Greek word *proskunetes*, used once in the New Testament] *will **worship*** [from *proskuneo*, used 60 times in the New Testament] *the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His **worshippers*** [from *proskuneo*, a verb, curiously rendered only here as a noun, i.e., once out of 60 times].¹⁸ This linguistic quirk im-

¹⁸ John 4:23 NAS

plies that we are His worship, i.e., “for such people the Father seeks to be His worship”.

Acts of worship are not the primary focus of the Father’s quest. He seeks worshipers, the individuals, not the mechanics of their worship. People are more important than the expressions they generate. In other words, God is more interested in the worshipers doing the worship than the worship that they do.

Something about worshipers captivates our Father’s attention. In short, they get it. Worshipers know who they are, and they recognize God for who He is. The implications associated with these two truths transform worshipers from religious performers into a cohesive bride fit for an eternal union. Worshipers possess an eternal quality of life, which God favors. He recognizes their immense value and esteems their everlasting importance despite their checkered past. Reverent responders are primed for a magnificent future loving Jesus.

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS¹⁹

The woman at Jacob’s Well was chosen by five different men to participate in five different weddings based on or influenced by the following historical traditions.

Shiddukhin: A preliminary screening in the selection process.

Though exceptions exist, the father of the groom generally chose a bride for his son or enlisted help from a marriage broker or matchmaker (*shadkhan*).

Kiddushin: The family of the groom and bride negotiate and execute a legally binding contract (*ketubah*) filed at the synagogue and annulled only by divorce.

This betrothal covenant specifies the groom’s vowed support for his bride and guarantees the dowry set by the father of the bride. After the groom acquired his support, a date was set to consummate the marriage—traditionally one year after signing the *ketubah* (though Jacob served Laban 7 years for Leah and another 7 years for Rachel). Beyond this formal betrothal, neither civil nor religious ceremony appears in the Bible—in contrast to the details specified about other behavior, e.g., sabbath rest, eating food, priestly sacrifices, etc.

Mohar: The groom’s gift to the bride's family

¹⁹ <http://www.bible.ca/marriage/ancient-jewish-three-stage-weddings-and-marriage-customs-ceremony-in-the-bible.htm>

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/revelation/related-topics/the-jewish-wedding-analogy.html>

Some scholars also cite the bride's dowry to the groom's family in this custom. These gifts of service, servants, land, finances, or resources liberated the bride from her father's formal authority.

Family Feast: Before consummating the marriage, either family hosted this evening meal for friends and relatives.

Chuppah: The bridal chamber used for consummating the union and formally monitored (Psa 19:5 and Joel 2:16).

After waiting with her maidens for the bridegroom and his companions, the couple entered this prepared room under escort (Tobit 7:16). They consummated their union over a cloth while companions waited and celebrated outside their room. Immediately afterward, the groom voiced proof of his bride's virginity while presenting the bloodied cloth to designated witnesses. The bride's parents retained this legal evidence as insurance against false accusations (Deu 22:13-21).

Wedding Feast: An extended celebration featuring special foods, wine, music, and dancing—often lasting one or two weeks.

For Perspective, King David Married Many Wives

In contrast to this unnamed Samaritan woman, Israel's renowned worship leader, King David, overdosed on women. Though God forbade royal polygamy, he acquired 8 named wives (Michal, Ahinoam, Abigail the widow of Nabal, Maacah, Haggith, Abital, Eglah, and Bathsheba) besides additional unnamed wives from Jerusalem and an unspecified number of palace concubines

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