John 4:1-42

This story ties in with several of our earlier lessons, especially the deaths of Jacob and Joseph and the lesson on the conquest of Israel by Assyria. The teachers should read for background Genesis 33:18-20; 48:21-22; 50:24-26; Exodus 13:19; Joshua 24:32; and II Kings 17:24-41. These links connecting our chapter with the Old Testament story should be touched on in all classes but not at such length as to leave insufficient time to develop the lesson of the chapter.

Doctrinal Points

The more we learn about the Lord's life and teaching the more we will become convinced that He is God with us.

The Word is our well of living water.

Charity needs faith or truth to maintain it.

Likewise faith needs charity to maintain it. Each perishes when separated from the other.

Notes for Parents

After the first miracle at Cana the Lord with His disciples went down to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Passover. Our story today is about something that happened on their journey back to Galilee.

Between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north lay the province of Samaria. It was so called from the city of Samaria, which had been the capital of the kingdom of Israel before it was conquered by Assyria. The foreigners who were sent in by the king of Assyria to take the place of the people of Israel kept Samaria as their chief city and came to be called the Samaritans. And in our lesson we find that their descendants were still despised and shunned even after seven hundred years, and in spite of the fact that from

the first they had accepted the God of the Jews as an object of worship and had learned much from their sacred Scriptures.

The Samaritans were Gentiles, but our story shows us that they were well-disposed and open-minded, for they believed the Lord much more readily than did most of the Jews. The Lord told the woman of Samaria plainly that He was the promised Messiah, and when she and her people had listened to His teaching, they accepted Him as the Christ, the savior of the world.

It is this acceptance which can turn the water of truth which everyone to some extent draws from the Word of God-Jacob's well-into living water springing up into everlasting life. It is only as we see and acknowledge that Jesus Christ was indeed "God with us," the "Word made flesh," that we begin to find the real truth in the Word and to love it. Sometimes people-people who honestly think they are looking for truth in the Scriptures-say that of course Jesus was limited by the ideas and conditions of His times, and that if He had lived in our country and our times, He would have said different things. They are thinking of Jesus as merely the best man who ever lived and setting their own opinions up as more valid than His. Their ideas are like the pitcher of the woman of Samaria, which could draw only a little water from the deep well. But when we believe that Jesus was God Himself, living for a time in a finite human like ours, we know that He always spoke the eternal truth and that only as we receive His teachings and try to form our lives according to them can His Spirit enter our souls with the life of heaven. As He had told Nicodemus in Jerusalem just before the time of our story for today, "Ye must be born again," and, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Primary

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The history of the parcel of ground may be used to bring back to the children's minds the names Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. Then tell them who the Samaritans were and why they were despised, so that they will understand the woman's words in verse 9 when you read the story. If they

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show any curiosity about the Lord's words, tell them simply that the living water is truth about the Lord and heaven, which our souls need just as our bodies need water. Stress the fact that the Samaritans readily believed the Lord.

After the wedding in Cana, where the Lord turned water into wine, He went down to Jerusalem to the Passover feast. On His way back to Galilee He was going through the part of the land called Samaria, and He stopped to rest at Jacob's well.

Do you remember who Jacob was? He was Isaac's son and Abraham's grandson. Long, long before the time of our story he had bought a piece of ground near the center of the land and had dug a well there. And when he died, he left this particular piece of land to his son Joseph. Perhaps you remember, too, that when Joseph died in Egypt, he commanded his people not to bury him in Egypt but to preserve his body and take it back with them when they went home. So they embalmed his body and put it in a coffin, and when Moses led them out of Egypt, they took Joseph's body with them. They carried it all through the journey in the wilderness and, after they conquered the Holy Land, finally buried it in this very piece of land which Joseph had received from his father. So Jacob's well was a very fitting place for the Lord to rest.

But the people who lived in the neighborhood at this time were not Jews. They were called Samaritans. They were descended from the foreigners whom the Assyrians had sent in to take the place of the people of Israel when their kingdom was overthrown by Assyria. So now, even after hundreds of years, the Jews still despised the Samaritans, although the Samaritans to some extent had accepted the religion of the Jews. We need to know this to understand our story for today.

What did the Lord ask of the Samaritan woman?

What did the Lord tell the woman she ought to ask of Him?

She did not understand what He was talking about.

"Living" water means truth from the Lord, for which our souls ought to be thirsty.

The Samaritans had learned about the Jewish religion and accepted part of it.

What question did the woman ask which showed this?

What did the Lord tell her?

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The woman believed Him, and she went and brought other Samaritans to hear Him.

He stayed with them two days teaching them, and they believed what He said.

Junior

After the review have the class look up the Bible references. They will be interested in the story from II Kings 17. The more we can tie the Old Testament and the New together in their minds the better. The Juniors should also be able to get something of the correspondence of the two kinds of water.

Into what parts was the Holy Land divided in the Lord's time? In which part were Jerusalem and Bethlehem? In which part were Nazareth and Cana? In what city in Galilee did the Lord live during His ministry?

The last part of chapter 2 tells us that not long after the wedding at Cana the Lord went down to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. The events of chapter 3 took place there. Then the Lord started back to Galilee.

What part of the land lay between Judea and Galilee? Where did the Lord stop to rest? Who came to the well to draw water? What did the Lord ask of her? Why was the woman surprised?

To understand this chapter we need to look up some passages in the Old Testament. First read Genesis 33:18-20; 48:21-22; 50:24-26; Exodus 13:19; and Joshua 24:32. You see that this particular piece of ground had a great deal of history behind it. Yet it was now part of the district belonging to the Samaritans. This was because it had been part of the kingdom of Israel, and when Israel was conquered by Assyria, all its people were carried away captive and never came back. Foreigners were brought in to settle the land in their place. The Samaritans were the descendants of these foreigners. Now you can see why the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. They despised them because they were not Jews.

Yet you find in our story that the Samaritan woman was aware that the Messiah was to come and was willing to believe the Lord,

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although the Samaritans did not go to Jerusalem to worship. There is an interesting story which tells us how the Samaritans came to accept part of the Jewish faith but not all of it. Read this story in II Kings 17:24-33.

What did the Lord say the woman should have asked of Him? What did He say about this "living" water? What did He tell the woman about herself? What question did she ask Him? What did He tell her about God? What did He tell her about the Messiah? What did He tell His disciples about His food?

The Samaritans believed the Lord much more readily than the Jews did. They were like the Gentile people of Nineveh who believed Jonah and repented. This was because they were not full of pride in themselves and their own wisdom. You know that when a person "thinks he knows it all," it is very hard to teach him anything.

Now let us think a little about what the Lord meant by "living" water. You know that water is the symbol of truth. We sometimes say a person has a "thirst for knowledge." Our minds need knowledge just as our bodies need water. And we need knowledge about the Lord and heaven and about what is right and wrong. This is the water of Jacob's well-the knowledge we get from the Word of God. We are constantly having to learn more of this kind of knowledge. But people may have a great deal of knowledge about the letter of the Word and yet not be good people. This was the case with the scribes and Pharisees. They were proud of their knowledge, but did not use it to correct their own evils. They did not take it to heart. Those who received the Lord, however, wanted truth from Him so that they could live according to it. They came to Him for truth for their souls. This is the living water, because we receive it constantly from the Lord and make it our own by obeying it.

Intermediate

The lesson in its Old Testament background involves some review, in which

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the correspondence will be interesting and helpful, and the meaning of the lesson itself is important. Stress the necessity of recognizing the Lord as God and seeing that all genuine truth and goodness are from Him.

The Lord and His disciples had been to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover and were returning to Galilee. One of the first things to notice in our lesson today is the statement in verse 4 that "he must needs go through Samaria." We have learned that the three divisions of the Holy Land in Gospel days—Judea, Samaria, and Galilee—represent the three planes in our lives—will, thought, and act. The Lord made this journey between Judea and Galilee in one direction or the other many times. In either direction He had to pass through Samaria. Spiritually this is true in our lives. When we have a desire of some kind, in order to carry it out in act we must think about it. And before the circumstances of our outward life and conduct can have any effect on our will or motives, we must think about them. Our minds are the connecting link between our motives and our conduct.

This part of the land was inhabited by the Samaritans. You remember that they were descendants of the foreigners who were brought in to settle the land when the kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria and its people were carried away captive never to return. This explains why the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. They were not of their nation. However, the Samaritans to some extent practiced their religion, although they did not go to Jerusalem to worship. In II Kings 17 we are told that when the foreigners first came into the land, they were plagued by lions and thought that it was because they did not know how to worship the gods of this land. So the king of Assyria sent back one of the captured priests to teach them, and they added the worship of Jehovah to the worship of the various gods of their native lands. Verse 41 of II Kings 17 says: "So these nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day." Some of the statements of the woman of Samaria in our chapter are explained by this.

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There is also an internal meaning for us in this condition. We all grow up in the world. Our minds have in them some knowledge of the truths of the Word, but this knowledge is mixed up with all sorts of worldly ideas, many of them accepted because they favor our natural selfishness-our native land. Yet we do have a center which we recognize as the source of genuine truth to which we go regularly when we feel the need, as the woman of Samaria went to Jacob's well. You may remember from our Old Testament lessons that Jacob represents the natural plane of our lives in its relation to the Lord, and a well represents the Word. In Genesis 33:19 we learn that Jacob had bought this "parcel of ground" from Hamor, who was a Hivite-the Hivites were one of the good remnants of the Ancient Church. It was this field which Jacob on his death bed gave to his son Joseph as an extra portion (Genesis 48:22), and it was here that the Israelites, after they reconquered the Holy Land, buried the bones of Joseph, which they had brought back with them from Egypt (Joshua 24:32) in accordance with Joseph's last request (Genesis 50:25-26).

The village of Sychar was in the same general locality as the old sites of Shechem and Shiloh. Shechem was the place where Abraham erected his first altar when he came into the land of Canaan from Ur of the Chaldees, and Shiloh was the place where Joshua set up the tabernacle after the conquest, with Mount Ebal to the north and Mount Gerizim to the south. The importance of this small section of the Holy Land appears clearly from all these references, and now it is finally the scene of the Lord's simple, literal statement that He was the promised Messiah (verse 26). Try to remember this chapter and verse, for you will hear people who do not want to accept Jesus Christ as God actually say that He never claimed to be the Messiah.

Our minds, then, are symbolized by the district of Samaria. Ideally, in the center of our minds we have the Word, to which we go for truth as we need it. If we are in the state represented by the woman of Samaria—wanting to know the truth and yet very much mixed up in our minds because of false ideas there—we have to go

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again and again, drawing only a little "water" (that is, truth) at a time and then thirsting again. Then suddenly one day we come to the well and find the Lord sitting there. We are faced with the necessity of making up our own minds about Jesus Christ instead of just getting along on what we have been taught. It is not until we have reached this point that we can find the *living* water—that the truths of the Word come to be a vital part of our lives, "a well of water springing up into everlasting life," because we see that they come from divine wisdom itself, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The woman questioned the Lord, as we have to question. It takes time to come into understanding. You remember that in general a woman represents affections and a man thoughts. What the Lord told the woman about herself in verse 18 pictures the state of one who wants to be good and tries one system of belief after another hoping it is the right one, yet is never really satisfied. There are many people in that state today. The fact that the Lord could tell her the truth about her condition immediately convinced the woman that He was a prophet, and as she went on talking with Him, she believed more and more and finally brought others to believe in Him. It will be the same with us if we continue to learn of the Lord.

The little incident concerning the disciples balances the story. They already believed in the Lord. They had faith in Him. But they still did not quite understand about charity. Food, in general—in contrast to drink—represents goodness. The disciples had bought food. This pictures the fact that they thought goodness or charity was something they could acquire by their own efforts and so think of as their own. But the Lord would not accept this food. He showed them that true goodness cannot be bought for a price. It comes from the Lord alone. "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." This teaches us the lesson that of ourselves we have no goodness and that true charity is to do as well as we can whatever work the Lord gives us to do in the world, looking to Him for the strength to do it and giving Him credit for all good that comes of it.

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Basic Correspondences

"this" water = natural truth

"living" water = the truth when we recognize the Lord's presence in it.

Senior

The lesson for this class may well be centered on the Samaritan state in our minds. Young people take into their minds in school and through their friends many things which they are not prepared to evaluate. If they know this, they will find it less difficult to hold their faith until understanding comes to them with maturity.

Our chapter for today really carries one step further the lesson of the miracle at Cana. Between that miracle and the story of the Lord at Jacob's well, the Lord had been to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and there had given Nicodemus the teaching concerning the necessity of rebirth or regeneration. Of the three divisions of the land in the time of the Lord, Judea represents the plane of will or motive, Samaria the plane of thought, and Galilee the plane of outward life or conduct. In the miracle at Cana in Galilee the Lord teaches us that only as we use the truth in our daily lives can we come to enjoy right living. In His instruction to Nicodemus in Judea (chapter 3) He points out that our motives must be made heavenly instead of selfish. Now in returning to Galilee he "must needs go through Samaria" and His lesson there has to do with our thoughts.

Our minds—at least during the early years of our lives—are a sort of "no man's land." We have in them knowledges of right and wrong given us from the Word by our parents and teachers, the "parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph." And we also have in our minds "Jacob's well," the Word in its letter. But the land is in the possession of the Samaritans, who were Gentiles although they knew and accepted many of the precepts of Judaism. The Samaritans were descendants of the foreigners whom the king of Assyria sent in to take the place of the ten tribes of Israel who were carried away and never returned. In II Kings 17 you will find

the story which explains the religious confusion in which the Samaritans were. The Jews despised them and would have no dealings with them, but throughout the Gospels they are represented as well-disposed people and more open to instruction by the Lord than were the Jews. Swedenborg tells us that every new religious dispensation, while it begins among the good remnant of the former dispensation, has its real growth among the Gentiles. This was true of the First Christian Church and it will be true of the New Church.* Right now the New Church is growing much faster in Asia and Africa than in the so-called Christian countries.

There is also a Gentile state in many people living in Christian countries. Many people all around us are well-disposed but in complete confusion as to their religious belief. The Lord said of the Samaritan woman, "Thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband." We remember that in general a woman represents affections and a man thoughts. The Samaritan woman had never found the right husband. So good people today may drift from one denomination to another without ever finding a doctrine in which they can really believe. It is just such people that we of the New Church organization should recognize as the fields "white already to harvest." Because, like the disciples, we have accepted the Lord and have the knowledge these Christian Gentiles are seeking.

The contrast in our chapter between the Lord's words to the Samaritan woman and His words to His disciples is very striking. The Samaritan woman came to Jacob's well to draw water. Good intentions or charity must seek truth. The disciples, who had accepted the Lord as the truth, had "gone away unto the city to buy meat." Here the disciples stand for those who seek goodness, but think they can obtain it by their own efforts apart from the Lord. Faith must be united to charity, but often those who have

^{*}Although some statements in Swedenborg give this impression (e.g., AE 49, 52), there is considerable reason to doubt that this is his final position. See, for instance, AR 547, which strongly implies that the New Church will grow from "the former church" once falsities are removed. -Ed.

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faith look to themselves as the source of goodness and to the world about them for direction in exercising it. The Lord did not accept the food which the disciples brought Him. He told them, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." True charity is not in obvious external benefactions, but in humble obedience to the Lord in whatever work He gives us to do.

One of the most striking passages in our chapter if found in verses 13 and 14. "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again . . ." We get truth from the letter of the Word as we go to it to draw for ourselves, but we can get only a little at a time and with much effort. The well is deep and our own "pitcher" is very limited in capacity. But when we accept the Lord Jesus Christ as our one God, the source of all truth and goodness, the truth in the Word becomes living from His presence in it. The Word then becomes in our minds "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

One more thing in this chapter we need to note carefully. You will meet people who wish to think that Jesus Christ was merely the best man who ever lived, and such people will sometimes tell you that Jesus Himself never claimed to be the Messiah. Then remember that in verse 26 of chapter 4 of the Gospel of John He told the woman of Samaria without hesitation or circumlocution that He was the Messiah.

Adult

There are two especially important discussion topics for the Adults in this chapter: the necessity of recognizing the sole deity of Jesus Christ if we are to find the living water in the Word, and the receptiveness of the Samaritans in contrast to the closed minds of those of the established church. Both points have an immediate bearing upon our thought of our own church and of our responsibility in our relations with people of other churches.

When the kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria, all its people were carried away captive, never to return. To take their place in the land the king of Assyria sent in people from the East.

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We read this story in II Kings 17, which tells also how, when these foreigners were troubled by lions and believed it was because they did not know the manner of worship of the gods of this new land, a priest of Israel was sent back to teach them, after which they worshiped Jehovah, but continued also to worship their own gods. Now we read in John 4 that after seven hundred years their descendants were still regarded as aliens and shunned with Pharisaic fanaticism. Yet Samaria was the central one of the three great divisions of the Holy Land, the link between Judea and Galilee. Judea pictures the inmost plane of our life-the will or motive-and Galilee the outmost-the conduct. Between these two is Samaria, the thought plane. When the Lord went from Judea to Galilee, "he must needs go through Samaria." Before we can carry out our desires in external conduct, we must think about them. We know how far astray we often go through trying to carry out our desires without thought. When we think of the Holy Land as picturing the church in us, Judea pictures the celestial church, worship of the Lord in the heart; Samaria the spiritual church, worship of the Lord in the mind; and Galilee the external church, worship of the Lord in the outward life. The spiritual church is the church which is in the affection of truth, and its associated good is the good of charity toward the neighbor (AC 27025; AE 37542). When Israel was carried away captive, spiritual truth was lost, and the people who replaced the Israelites remained Gentiles, ignorant of the truth, although they had some knowledge of the letter of the Scriptures.

In the Lord's time the Samaritans were symbols of "the gentiles who were in the good of charity toward the neighbor" (AE 375⁴²). The parable of the Good Samaritan embodies this significance. So, too, the woman in our lesson today had been married five times and was now living with one not her husband. This pictures one who wishes to do good and who has tried one religious faith after another, and whose idea of truth still is not adequate to her desire. Her water jar pictures her limited doctrine. It is evident from the story that the Samaritans heard the Lord gladly and accepted Him as the Messiah; so they picture all Gentiles "that were to receive

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Divine truths from Him" (AE 483¹²). Because of their humility and desire to be instructed they received the Lord much more readily than the Jews, and we know that the Christian Church grew up among the Gentiles, although it was begun among the Jews. The Lord told the woman of Samaria that the Jews had the knowledge which was necessary to salvation, but He also told her that worship at Jerusalem as well as worship on the mountain in Samaria would shortly be superseded by a different and more spiritual type of worship. Swedenborg tells us that every new dispensation, although it begins with the good remnant of the former one, develops principally among the well-disposed Gentiles, and he says that this will be true of the New Church.*

The region around Sychar was hallowed ground. It was the "parcel" bought by Jacob from Hamor the Hivite, the father of Shechem, and given to Joseph as an extra portion (Genesis 48:22). Joseph's bones, brought up out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus, were buried there. Jacob's well, the "fountain of Jacob," is also mentioned in Deuteronomy 33:28. Jacob's well is a picture of the Word (AC 27025). The Samaritans possessed and used this well, picturing those who possess and use the Scriptures. But the well was deep. The fact that they drew their water from the well in small quantities and with great effort symbolizes the way many draw their truth from the Word. And, as the Lord said, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again." Mere external knowledge, even of the Scriptures, does not satisfy. The Lord must "sit on the well" and give us "living" water. The truth must be made living by our consciousness of His loving presence in the Word. So long as we see only the external sense of the Word, its harsh commands, its condemnation of evil, its stories of wars and destruction, we draw refreshing truth from it only in small amounts and with great labor. But when we see the Lord within it, showing us the hideousness and destructiveness of evil only so that we may avoid it, and accommodating His truth to us in all our states, however far away

^{*}See footnote to Senior notes. -Ed.

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from Him we have willfully gone, so that we may be led back to the way of peace, then the truth becomes to us "a well of water springing up into everlasting life," satisfying us at every turn with knowledge of the Lord's loving purpose and guidance and of His providence over us.

In Revelation 22:17 the Lord's invitation to the woman of Samaria is given to all: "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The Christian Church, springing from the Lord's living presence with men, was to be an internal church, observing the external forms of worship not as religion itself, but as symbolic expressions of the true worship in the heart and mind. God is Spirit, dwelling within the good works of those who look to Him for guidance and power. He is with us just as really today as He was with the woman of Samaria, ready to give us living water if we ask Him.

It is interesting to consider the fact that, while the Lord talked of water to the Samaritan woman, who pictures goodness desiring truth, He talked to His disciples, who picture those instructed in truth, of living food. The food which they went away to the city to buy and which they offered Him on their return is a symbol of natural goodness, just as the water the woman drew for herself from Jacob's well was the symbol of natural truth. The Lord contrasted it with His food, just as He contrasted natural water with living water. The woman had charity and needed faith. The disciples had faith and needed charity. The Lord's food, the food which nourished His real life, was "to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." To do the Lord's will instead of our own is what nourishes and strengthens our spiritual bodies, our heavenly character. To forget self in doing the Lord's work is what brings happiness. The same lesson is taught in verses 35 to 38. In AE 91116 Swedenborg tells us that these verses treat of the establishment of a new church, and that the one who labors is the Lord, and we enter into His labors. He, as we learn from the familiar parable, is the Lord, and we enter into His labors. He, as we learn from the familiar parable, is the sower.

Then, as if to give us a concrete example of the working of His

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Spirit, we are told how the Samaritans came to Him and urged Him to stay with them, and how they accepted Him as the Christ, the savior of the world. At first they believed because of the testimony of the woman, but afterward because they had heard Him themselves. Our first acceptance of the Lord should be from an impulse of the heart, but this must be followed by acceptance by the reason. Verse 26 of our chapter is an important one for us to remember, for people who do not wish to acknowledge the Lord as God sometimes claim that He never Himself said He was the Messiah. Only recognition of the Lord as the one God of heaven and earth harmonizes all the Scripture and enables us to go to the Word with confidence for guidance and strength and to receive it with joy.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 1074²: "As the Divine truth, in passing from the Lord Himself through the three heavens down to men in the world, is recorded and becomes the Word in each heaven, so the Word is a bond of union of the heavens with each other, and a bond of union of the heavens with the church in the world. For the Word is the same everywhere, differing only in perfection of glory and wisdom according to the degrees in which the heavens are; consequently the holy Divine from the Lord flows in through the heavens into the man in the world who acknowledges the Lord's Divine and the holiness of the Word whenever he reads the Word; and so far as such a man loves wisdom, he can be instructed and can imbibe wisdom from the Word as from the Lord Himself, or from heaven itself, and can thus be nourished with the food with which the angels themselves are nourished, and in which there is life; according to these words of the Lord:

The words that I speak unto you are spirit and are life. (John 6:63)

The water that I will give you shall become . . . a fountain of water springing up unto eternal life. (John 4:14)"

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. What were the three divisions of the Holy Land in the Lord's time? Galilee, Samaria, Judea
- J. Which was the middle one? Samaria

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- J. Who were the Samaritans? foreigners brought in by Assyria
- J. What journey was the Lord making at the time of our lesson for today?

 Judea to Galilee
- P. Where did He stop to rest? Jacob's well
- J. What can you tell about the parcel of ground where Jacob's well was? Jacob had bought, and later gave to Joseph
- P. Who came to the well as the Lord sat there? a Samaritan woman
- J. Why was she surprised when the Lord asked her to give Him a drink? Jews didn't talk to Samaritans
- J. What did the Lord tell her? you should have asked me . . .
- J. What did He tell her about herself which showed her He was a prophet? five husbands
- J. What did He tell her about Himself? I am Christ
- J. What did He tell the disciples about His food? to do God's will
- J. What made the Samaritans believe in the Lord? His words
- I. What does Jacob's well represent? the Word
- S. What is "living" water? divine truth lived