

The woman by the well

An exposition of John 4:1-43 (3)

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D. Ephraim today: a woman without a husband

WE NOTED in [Part 1](#) of this study ([Oct. p. 356](#)) that the unbelieving Jews who inhabit the Land at Jesus' second advent will comprise the latter-day Judah. Having returned to the Land which God has promised to the faithful, their deliverance from Gog, their repentance at the voice of Elijah and cleansing in the fountain of living waters at the return of Christ are graphically described in passages such as Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi 4. That repentance and baptism will bring them the gift of God, the hope of eternal life at the second resurrection.

Ephraim in the latter days

The latter-day Ephraim comprises those Jews who have chosen to remain in foreign lands. Professing allegiance to the Law of Moses but blinded to its spiritual meaning, and unable therefore to discern Christ, they incur God's displeasure: "that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone" (Ezek. 20:32; note the context). Ephraim, although minded to cohabit with the nations, will not be allowed to do so; she will be brought out from among them.

She will be made to face her double-mindedness when Elijah appears in the Land with the challenge which he put to her ancestors: "How long halt ye between two opinions?" (1 Kgs. 18:21). His task is described in Isaiah 40:3-5: "Prepare ye the way of the LORD". And this, as at the first coming of Christ, will be quickly followed by the appearance of the Lord Jesus (Mal. 3:1).

It is at this time, the time of the "latter rain", the second advent of the Teacher of Righteousness (Joel 2:23 and mg.), that Israel, both Judah and Ephraim, will repent and be espoused to him through the fountain of living water. And this will be in the place where God has chosen to place His Name, the place where He will be worshipped, the place from which He will rule over the earth.

The context of the meeting at the well is significant. It began with the Pharisees' attitude to baptism, which they rejected. It closed with Jesus' vision of the harvest which was to come, not at his first advent, but immediately after the latter rain, his second appearing.

This was the challenge put to the Samaritans whom Jesus met by the well. Whether or not they responded by coming to baptism is unclear (*cf.* Acts 1:8; 8:5-13). But the repentant in latter-day Ephraim will.

The reconciliation

"O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake Thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from Me shall be written in the earth [*cf.* Jno. 8:6-8], because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters" (Jer. 17:13).

That fountain was offered to Judah by Jesus. It was rejected by those who clung to the letter of the law and rejected the spirit; who, as recorded in John 8:1-11, demanded the life of the adulteress but were blind to their adulterous condition because the love of the truth was not in them. Their names, it seems, were written in the earth to which they will return, and not in the book of life, because "they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters". They "shall be ashamed" when "the hope of Israel" is revealed to the world, because they were the rebels, the sheep who could not recognise the voice of the shepherd. The "fountain of living waters", which was offered by Jesus at his first advent (Jno. 4:13,14), remains available to Judah and to Ephraim today, and will be accepted with reverence, gratitude and joy by the faithful when Messiah appears. They have rejected Christ, but he has not rejected them. Both will yet be offered the gift of God. But the process of reconciliation will be different.

Those of Ephraim who have returned to the Land before Christ's return, but who do not accept that Jesus was the Christ, will become part of the latter-day Judah. This was the position in Jesus' day, when those of the ten tribes who had fled the northern apostasy had been absorbed into Judah.

Judah will be purged of her rebels by the onslaught of Gog. The faithful will recognise their saviour, the Christ whom they crucified, and their remorse and repentance will lead them to baptism. Espoused to Christ, they will become God's people again, a people for His Name. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1). The true God will be worshipped in the place where He has chosen to put His Name. Thereafter Judah will be instrumental in cleansing the Land.

Ephraim will not be allowed to continue her worship of false gods in far-off places. She, too, will be brought to the place which God has decreed.

Moses declared that the Jews would return to the Land in one of two ways. If they repented they would return under the covenant with the fathers, the Abrahamic covenant. If they did not then they would be compelled to return under the covenant made at Sinai (Lev. 26:40-45).

These returns were foreshadowed in the creation of modern Israel. First the inhabitants of the latter-day Judah were tempted back to the Land, and then, as a result of the most cruel persecution, they were driven back (Jer. 16:15-17). Some returned voluntarily, by desire; others through compulsion. The parallels with the Abrahamic covenant and with the Law are clear.

And here is the pattern for Ephraim. Those of Ephraim who throughout the ages have accepted Christ and have part in the resurrection at Christ's return will come to Jerusalem under the Abrahamic covenant. Those who have not accepted Christ by the time of his second advent will be compelled to return under the covenant made at Sinai.

Those of dispersed Ephraim who reject the call of Elijah will be brought out of the nations into the wilderness. Under the covenant made at Sinai they will pass under the rod of Moses. There, at the tabernacle of David, erected for that purpose in the wilderness, they will learn the spiritual lessons of the law which they profess to honour. They will be taught the character and the work of Christ. They will be taught the gospel (Ezek. 20:33-38; Acts 15:16).

Again in a parallel with the past, the rebels will be purged out. They will die in the wilderness. They will not enter the Land. Only then will Ephraim be permitted to return to the Land and, through baptism, be joined with Judah in

espousal to Christ, the Abrahamic covenant, the hope of glory at the second resurrection, the time of the final harvest.

The fountain of living waters

Then will be fulfilled the words of Jesus to the woman by the well: "the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (Jno. 4:14). The Jews will indeed drink of the water that he shall give them. That will come to pass which was foreshadowed when their forebears "did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed [mg. went with] them: and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4).

Thereafter the prophecy of Isaiah 12:3 will be fulfilled: "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation". That short but beautiful prophecy describes the restoration of Israel. It is the fulfilment of that which God decreed when He espoused Himself to her at Sinai, and which is described in Jeremiah 13:11. It promises that Israel assuredly will be "for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory" to the Lord. God's will is not to be frustrated by man.

And then we read of the blessings to be bestowed upon those granted eternal life: "In the last day, that great day of the feast", the eighth day, and speaking of those who will be married to the Lamb, the Lord Jesus cried, referring to Isaiah 12, "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (Jno. 7:37,38). The belly here is the heart, and "this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive" (v. 39).

This is the living water which was offered to the woman by the well and which is offered to Judah, to Ephraim and to all who will hear his voice.

A "people" again

The prophet Hosea, in speaking of these things, stated that, although His bride would break her word and become an adulteress, God would not break His. He would remain faithful to His betrothal vow. He would not and did not divorce Israel. It is with reference to Ephraim that in His poignant appeal for repentance He reminds them that "I am God, and not man" (11:9). God's word, His covenant of betrothal, will not be broken.

Born of the spirit Word, espoused to the returned Bridegroom in baptism, repentant Israel will be cleansed and blessed, "and I will say to

them which were not My people, Thou art My people; and they shall say, Thou art my God" (2:23).

Fulfilment of God's betrothal vow, therefore, requires reconciliation, a desire on the part of His espoused to return to Him in truth and sincerity. And this involves repentance. That, for the faithful in Israel, is assured, because we read that "in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not My people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God". Ephraim and Judah, joined together in fellowship, will be betrothed again unto God in faithfulness (1:10; 2:20).

Note that this will be "in the place". It is in the Land of Israel that the reconciliation of Judah and Ephraim will be celebrated. For them at that time Jerusalem will be the place where they will worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. This was the message to the woman by the well.

E. Blessings and curses: a warning and a comfort

A warning to the nations

THE significance of Sychar lay not only in its location in the plain of Moreh but also in that it was situated between Mount Ebal to the north (or left, according to the Hebrews' understanding) and Mount Gerizim to the south (or right). Those of that city who, like the woman, had some understanding of Moses would have been conscious of the blessings which God had caused to be proclaimed from Mount Gerizim, and of the curses called out from Mount Ebal. Indeed, God had instructed Joshua to write Moses' Law upon Mount Ebal. And, having written it, Joshua read it, every word, to all the congregation (Josh. 8:32-35).

Moses had spoken of the prophet who would be like unto himself, "unto him ye shall hearken". And the Lord had said regarding His words which that prophet would speak, "whosoever will not hearken unto My words which he shall speak in My name, I will require it of him" (Deut. 18:15,19). Moses was speaking of the Teacher of Righteousness.

These things are about to be fulfilled for the nations of the world. They will be brought to account under that Law as fulfilled in Christ. Those on the right hand, the sheep, will receive the blessing; they will enter the Kingdom to be ruled by Christ with the hope of eternal life. Those on the left, the goats, will be cursed (Mt. 25:31-46).

The cry of Elijah: a warning to the believer

That which was a reminder to the woman of Samaria and a warning to the nations is a warning also to the present-day believer.

Elijah came to those who were enlightened, those who had knowledge of God's covenant and who had a corresponding responsibility to reject, to come out from, the ways of the world, to abhor apostasy and to worship God in spirit and in truth, and thereby to prepare the way of the Lord. The wise virgins will take heed when the Elijah cry at midnight announces the approach of the Bridegroom. The foolish will not, because they cannot. The wise will have the Word as a lamp to their feet and a light to their path. The foolish will not. They will possess the lamp, but neglect and lack of application will render it ineffective. They will be lost in the darkness which will cover the earth at that midnight hour (Mt. 25:1-13; Isa. 60,1,2). The blessings and the curses which will fall upon the nations will fall firstly upon those who have knowledge of the Truth. Judgement must "begin at the house of God" (1 Pet. 4:17).

A comfort to the weary

Jesus knew that he would be rejected. And what was in his mind as, "wearied with his journey", he sat by the well (Jno. 4:6)? It was "about the sixth hour", the hour when they would cry out, "crucify him", and speaking of which he said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (19:14,15; Lk. 12:50). In him, in his faith, we see the fountain of living water, the gift of God. We see also the life-giving rain and the assurance of the Kingdom.

Would he not be strengthened, then, by God's word through David, who, when speaking of these things and of his second advent, said, "Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby Thou didst confirm Thine inheritance, when it was weary" (Ps. 68:9)? He who was the former rain, confirmed, in his weariness, the latter, plentiful, rain and the inheritance of the faithful. These words, then, are a comfort to the believer in these latter days, when, weary of the world and its confusion, he is encouraged to "lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees" and to "look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Heb. 12:12; Lk. 21:28).

A question unanswered

But the question remains. How was it that Jesus knew of the marital circumstances of the woman?

We may not know the answer to that, but we can get the message. He Who knows the end from the beginning has revealed through His Word the circumstances of Ephraim—past, present and future—in order that that Word might be

accomplished in the believer. Perhaps it was for that reason that Jesus was given to know the circumstances of, and understand, the woman by the well.

(Concluded)

Out of the earth

News from the world of archaeology

Tony Benson

The home town of Jesus

THE HOME TOWN of Jesus for most of his life was, of course, Nazareth, then just a village, but now an Arab town with a population of perhaps 50,000. It is not mentioned in the Old Testament, nor by Josephus. Is there anything in the modern town to link it with the place where Jesus lived? The answer to this question is, 'Very little'.

Visitors to Israel are taken to a large Roman Catholic Church called the Church of the Annunciation. It is built over a cave, which is allegedly the place where the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her she was to be the mother of Jesus. There is nothing to support this claim, and the Greek Orthodox Church has its own site nearby. Excavations in the grounds reveal that a church has been there since the fourth century, the time when Christianity was officially accepted in the Roman Empire. A nearby site is traditionally supposed to be where Joseph's workshop was situated. Remains of agricultural and storage buildings going back to the time of Jesus have been identified here, but there is nothing specifically to link them with Jesus.

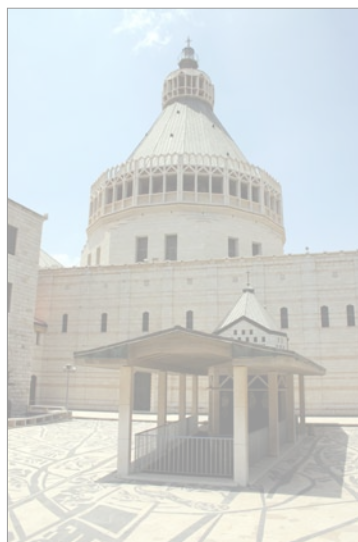
In the area of the present market the remains of a synagogue

have been discovered, though apparently dating to the post-Roman period. Tombs from the Second Temple period have also been discovered, making it unlikely that a synagogue was built there at the same time, which means it is unlikely to be the place where the synagogue in which Jesus taught was located. Nearby is a site known as Mary's Well, which is actually a water trough dating to Turkish times that was filled by water from a spring. A neighbouring Greek Orthodox Church has a spring inside it, and the presence of these two springs indicates that

here was the water supply for the village, to which Mary and the other women of Nazareth came to get their supplies.

It does not add up to much, and the Christadelphian tourist with any knowledge of the Land may well wish to give the place a miss. Perhaps God in His wisdom has deliberately arranged that there should be nothing to attract people to the place where His Son grew up, knowing that apostate churches would exploit any such remains to make money.

Source: "Nazareth: the cradle of Christianity", Danny Herman, *Archaeological Diggings*, Dec. 2005/Jan. 2006.



The Roman Catholic Church of the Annunciation at Nazareth.

(www.holylandphotos.org)

The search for Hazor's archives continues

ONE of the most important archaeology sites in Israel is Hazor in northern Galilee, the chief city of the northern confederation of Canaanite cities destroyed by Joshua, as recorded in Joshua 11, and the city of Jabin, who oppressed Israel until his army was destroyed by Barak and Deborah, with Divine assistance, as recorded in Judges 4 and 5. In Joshua 11:10 we have the significant remark, "Hazor beforetime was the head of all those kingdoms", a statement in accordance with the fact that the archives at