

More on Jacob's Well

Jacob courted Rachel at a well in Haran. In fact, he rolled a stone away from the top of the well for her, kissed her and then wept. In the legends about Jacob, mention is made of a miracle whereby water would automatically surge to the top of this well and overflow, a phenomenon well attested in the Targums of Genesis 28 and in other midrashic accounts.

The OT background suggests a parallel between the courtship meetings at a well of Abraham's servant and Rebekah (Gen 24:1ff.), Jacob and Rachel (Gen 29:1-14), Moses and Sipporah (Ex 2:15-22) and Jesus and the Samaritan woman. In Josephus' account of these well encounters, only the Jacob-Rachel story contains a story of a tender and elaborate courtship (Ant. 1.286-292). Justin was quick to see Jacob's marriages as types of what Christ was to accomplish: Leah was the synagogue who was replaced by Rachel, the Church (Dial. 134). See <https://www3.nd.edu/~jneyrey1/jacob-trad.html>

In John 4 Jesus "supplants" Jacob both by uncovering a better and more miraculous well than Jacob (himself), and by presenting himself as bridegroom to the Bride, which the Samaritan woman joins when she believes.

John 4:13-14--"Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Like Jacob revealing himself as Rebekah's son to Rachel at the well, Jesus reveals positively for the first time his identity to the Samaritan woman:

John 4:25-26 - "The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he."

The woman's remarks to Jesus that he has no bucket and that the well is deep set the stage to ask how Jesus expects to draw water from the well. The "bucket" represents any man-made effort or rational way to gain the living water of eternal life. Without such a "bucket," it's impossible from a human point of view. The only alternate way to get the water would be to perform a miracle like Jacob's. Jacob's miraculous overflowing of water, therefore, seems to be presupposed in the dialogue in 4:11.

Jesus in **John 4:10** says if only the woman knew "the gift of God and who it is that speaks to you," then she would ask and he would "give you living water." Thus the person of Jesus is equated with the true "gift of God," the true well of Israel, which tradition says was known as the "gift" and was the same as Jacob's well, and followed them in the wilderness.

What does this mean for us?

Isaiah 12:3 - "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."

Isaiah 55:1 - "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters ..."

Jesus' announcement at Tabernacles

On Tabernacles, "He that never has seen the joy of the Beth he-She'ubah [water-drawing] has never in his life seen joy" (m. Sukka 5:1; cf. **Deut 16:14-15**; **Jubilees 16:20, 25**).

John 7:37-39 - "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

This invitation to come and drink is the climax of a series of references to water in this Gospel:

- the water turned to wine (chap. 2),
- the water of the new birth (chap. 3),
- the living water (chap. 4),
- the cleansing water of Bethesda (chap. 5)
- and the calming of the waters (chap. 6).

All of these have revealed Jesus as the agent of God who brings God's gracious offer of life.

"Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Rev 22:17).

Old Testament references

David prayed, "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (**Psalms 63:1**).

Jeremiah 2:13 - "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

Compare the gift of water from the rock (**Ex 17:1-6**), the water from the eschatological temple (**Ezek 47:1-11**; cf. **Joel 3:18**) and the water from Jerusalem that will flow in the age to come (**Zech 14:8**).

In Nehemiah there is a reference to the water from the rock in the wilderness (**Neh 9:15**), which is followed by a description of God's gracious provision: "You gave your

good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst" (**Neh 9:20**).