

February 11-17, 2019

John 2-4

“Ye Must Be Born Again”

Summary: *Jesus turns water into wine in Cana—He attends the Passover, cleanses the temple, foretells His death and resurrection, and performs miracles.*

Jesus tells Nicodemus that men must be born again—God so loved the world that He sent His Only Begotten Son to save men—John the Baptist testifies that he that believes on the Son has everlasting life.

Jesus teaches a woman of Samaria—All must worship the Father in spirit and truth—Those who harvest souls gain eternal life—Many Samaritans believe—Jesus heals a nobleman’s son.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

The Land of Israel

There are many people who mistakenly think of Israel as a flat, dry and dangerous land. In contrast to popular opinion, Israel is mountainous, the rainfall equals that of London (average of 26-inches per year), and peaceful feelings envelope visitors the moment they arrive!

Abundant Rainfall – “40-Days and 40-Nights!”

Water has always been a concern because most of the 26-inches of rainfall occurs within the months of December, January and February. If it doesn’t rain then, Israel is in risk of a drought. Water has been a metaphor of life throughout the scriptures and “Living Waters” is one of the many names used for the Savior, the giver of life.

Protecting Water Sources

“Although the country is described as ‘a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths springing forth in valleys and hills’ (**Deuteronomy 8:7**) there is no evidence that in ancient times there were more than the hundreds of small springs and the few significant water sources which now exist. The ancient Israelites were careful in their use of rain, which was often stored in cisterns. They mastered the cultivation of the soil, often farming the hills as well. In order to protect the topsoil from erosion, they built contoured stone terraces, some of which may still be seen today.

“The soil was plowed twice, first to allow the rainwater to penetrate, and then to level the ground before planting or sowing. The ancient wooden plow used in Israel had a plowshare made of bronze, or later of iron. The heads of the oxen were framed in a wooden yoke, which was tied to the plow, and a hoe was used to remove weeds in mountain areas where the plow could not reach. Water for irrigation was drawn from a well in earthenware or metal pitchers attached to a rope or chain.

Emptying Water Containers at Death

“When a person dies, the body is covered with a sheet and a lighted candle placed at the head. There is an ancient custom to cover all the mirrors in the house and to pour out any water that was in containers or vessels at the time of death. This latter practice may be the result of superstitious beliefs but it has been suggested that it was a way to tell the neighbors that a death had occurred without having to say the actual words.

Washing with Living Water Before and After Every Meal Prayer

“It is a particularly important religious duty to wash the hands before eating bread and this washing must be performed by pouring water over the hands from a utensil with a wide mouth, the lip of which must be undamaged. Prior to this ritual washing, the hands must be clean and without any foreign object (such as a ring) to intervene between hand and the water. After this ritual washing, and the washing on rising from bed in the morning, the benediction "on the washing of hands" (*netilat yadayim*) is recited.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

Latter-day Saints Bless Israel with Water Resources

It is interesting to note the desire of Israelis to bring more water to the ever-growing population. Many resources have come from Latter-day Saints who have taught the Israelis about water conservation and distribution. Two of them include the late Joel Fletcher from Southern Utah, the developer of Doppler Radar, and John Hanks of the northern Utah city of Logan and the Utah State University. On his last visit, Brother Hanks told me, “I’m not teaching them anymore; they’re teaching me!” Israel’s water conservation and distribution system has become a model to many of the world’s under-developed communities.

“In order to solve the water problem in this arid country, a national water system was devised, by which water is drawn from the northern portion of the Jordan River via pipelines all the way down to the Negev. This main pipe also links all the local and regional water works. Israel has also developed very efficient irrigation systems which increase the agricultural output.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

Water Blessings

Biblical accounts of finding and using water to bless the population include the prophet Elisha blessing a brackish spring at Jericho. It is still running pure water to this day. Also, David brought life back to Jerusalem by using a water tunnel.

“David managed to capture Jerusalem with relative ease by infiltrating his men into the city through the water tunnels and surprising the enemy within the city walls. He used his own private army for this purpose rather than the combined armies of all the tribes. The city therefore became his royal domain -- the "City of David," capital of Israel.

“One of the points that has intrigued archaeologists and historians alike is the way in which Jerusalem has been supplied with water throughout the ages. There is only one natural water source in the Jerusalem vicinity --- the Gihon spring on the eastern slope of the Old City. The Canaanites built a tunnel leading from the spring into the city and it was through this tunnel that David made his historic entry into the city. At the end of the eighth century B.C.E. Hezekiah, king of Judah, had a new tunnel built which conducted the waters of the Gihon to the Siloam pools within what were then the city limits. This tunnel is still in existence today. One can wade through it and read the inscription placed there by the builders over 2,500 years ago. It tells how the workers,

digging from both ends, met at an exact point in the center in what must have been a great engineering feat for those days.

“There were other pools, cisterns and reservoirs built around the city to increase its water supply but they proved to be inadequate for the growing population. So, Pontius Pilate, the Roman ruler, built an aqueduct to bring more water from the springs near Hebron in the first century C.E.”

([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

Water Celebration

There are also traditions that teach the value of water. The following explains “The Water-Drawing Celebration.” Note the connection of light with water (both are names of the Lord).

“In the days of the Temple, each day during the last six *hol ha-mo'ed* days of the festival (though not on the Sabbath), the priests used to fill a golden flagon with water drawn from the beautiful spring of Siloam in the valley to the south of the Temple Mount, and carry it up the hill for a ceremony at the altar. This ceremony was called *Simhat Bet ha-Sho'evah* (the joy of the water drawing).

According to the Mishnah, whoever failed to witness this ceremony in his lifetime "never witnessed real joy." Golden candlesticks, 50 cubits high, were lit with wicks made out of worn-out garments of the priests, and the light emitted was so bright that "there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light of the Bet ha-Sho'evah." Men of piety and good deeds used to dance before the candlesticks with burning torches in their hands, singing songs and praises. And countless Levites played on harps, lyres, cymbals, trumpets and other musical instruments, on the 15 steps leading from the Court of the Israelites to the Court of the Women.

“King Alexander Yannai, who also acted as High Priest, once chose to ignore the traditional way of conducting this ceremonial. The vast throng of worshipers immediately reacted by pelting him with thousands of *etrogim* (citrus fruits).” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

Meaningful Words for Spirit

Another powerful metaphor in the scriptures is the word “ruah.” In Hebrew, the word ruah means “wind, breath and spirit.” “Ruah Elohim” is the spirit or breath of God.

Contrasting Word to Spirit

“Flesh is the term used in the Bible to distinguish mortal man from God. The Hebrew word for flesh, *basar*, is contrasted with the Divine Spirit, *ru'ah*, with which man is temporarily endowed. Thus: "My spirit shall not abide in man forever, for that he is also flesh; therefore shall his days be a hundred and twenty years" ([Genesis 6:3](#)). The Talmud and Midrash refer to man as *basar va-dam* ("flesh and blood") to indicate his mortality as against the eternity of God.

“*Ruah ha-Kodesh* (holy spirit) is often used as a synonym for prophecy. However, according to some rabbis, unlike prophecy, there are some types of *ruah ha-kodesh* which also can be attained by doing good deeds.

“The Talmudic rabbis thought the body to be separable, in a sense, from the soul. God breathed the soul into the body of Adam ([Genesis 2:7](#)).” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

Multiple Use of Words Give More Meaning

Ezekiel spoke of breath and of wind bringing life into a dead skeleton. As the sticks (ETZ-emet) of the body are clothed again with flesh and come alive, so shall the stick (ETZ) of Judah, the dead skeleton of a once true and living religion, come together with the stick of Joseph. This embodies the true religion and with the “breath” of the Lord, his spirit - a resurrection - a new life begins again. That new life will include a new sanctuary of the Lord.

“. . . and the bones came together, bone to his bone . . . the sinews and the flesh came up upon them . . . and the breath came into them, and they lived . . . Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel . . . And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not show us what thou [meanest] by these? Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. . . . Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side . . . And I will make them one nation . . . Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore.” (Ezekiel 37)

Resurrection of Mankind – Resurrection of God’s True Religion

Since the Hebrew meaning for “bones” and “sticks” is the same, when they came together it was a “skeleton” until God “breathed” spirit into them and they came alive again. The skeleton (sticks) of the once true religion is the Bible (Old Testament). Could the Book of Mormon represent the flesh and the spirit? As the skeleton was brought together with the flesh and the spirit, the old, dead religion was resurrected! When we are resurrected, we will be able to return to God, never to die again. As the true religion was resurrected by God through Joseph Smith, it will never die again. It is the New and Everlasting Covenant.

Samaritans

In Israel’s history, a foreign ethnic group, Samaritans, intermarried with Israelites and wanted to assist in building the temple at Jerusalem, but they were refused. These Samaritans then built their own temple on Mount Gerizim. Thereafter, their interaction with the rest of Israel was tenuous at best.

“Samaritans (are) a small religious sect residing in Israel whose members consider themselves to be direct descendants of the Israelite tribes. According to Samaritan history, they broke away from the Israelites in the 11th century B.C.E., refusing to accept a change in the location of the religious capital. To this day the Samaritans maintain that Mount Gerizim near Shechem (Nablus, in northern Israel) is the place chosen by God as the center of Israelite worship and not Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. They have therefore continued to live around Shechem and to make pilgrimages to Mount Gerizim.

“The Samaritans refused to accept any of the Jewish religious writings which followed their split with the Israelites. Their religion is therefore based mainly on the Five Books of Moses. Neither the Mishnah nor the Talmud is regarded as valid. But Samaritans adhere strictly to the laws of the Pentateuch and have maintained biblical traditions and rituals for thousands of years. Thus, while the Jews ceased to offer sacrifices after the destruction of the Second Temple, the Samaritans still

celebrate the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb on Mount Gerizim each Passover, and all Samaritan families share in the ritual slaughter and feasting. The Samaritans also make pilgrimages to Mount Gerizim on the three pilgrim festivals of Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot, and continue to observe Rosh Ha-Shanah, Yom Kippur and Simhat Torah. They do not celebrate Purim or Hanukkah, however, because these festivals are not mentioned in the Pentateuch and were instituted only after the split between the Samaritans and the Jews.

“As they use a different calendar system, the Jews and Samaritans rarely celebrate their holidays at the same time. Yet there is a distinct similarity between the two groups. The Samaritans also observe the Sabbath on Saturday and also maintain *kashrut* laws. They even have a bar mitzvah ceremony, but instead of on the boy's 13th birthday, they celebrate upon the completion of his basic religious studies, which can take place any time between the ages of six and ten.

“The Samaritan community is headed by priests who are interpreters of the law and keepers of the secret calendar. Until the 17th century these priests claimed direct descent from Aaron. But the last descendant died in 1624 and the priesthood passed to another family.

“The Samaritan population has remained small due to persecutions and plagues throughout the centuries. By the beginning of the 20th century there were only 150 of them left. With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 this minute community was split into two centers --- one under Jordanian rule and the other in Israel. But the Six-Day War in 1967 ended the isolation of the two branches and under the protection of the Israel government, their population has grown to about 500 persons.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

Living Water Makes Us Good

The ethnic character of people did not alter the Lord's mission. He came to provide living water for all. In a later lesson, we'll discover that we are the ones that label a Samaritan as “good.” Neither the Gospel writers nor the Savior referred to a “Good Samaritan.” In the account of the woman at the well, it becomes evident that all people can be “born again,” or in other words, become good, receive new life--His life.