

Theology on the *Web*.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbadshaw>

A table of contents for *The Palestine Exploration Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_peq_01.php

THE WATER OF JACOB'S WELL.

I.—By Rev. H. CLAY TRUMBULL, D.D.

In connection with the valuable notes on the supposed medicinal properties of the water of Jacob's Well, as given by Dr. Henry Bailey, and approved by Dr. George Adam Smith, it may be worth while to ask if there is any reason for supposing that the woman of Samaria, mentioned in John (iv, 5-30), came there to draw water for her home or household. It is commonly understood that this was the case, and many a scholar has attempted to account for it; but is it not more probable that her presence there is to be accounted for in another way?

When I came to that spot I had the popular view, but as I looked about me and saw that the well was on the edge of a great grain field in which men were at work, I saw that it was natural to suppose that a woman drawing water at that well was doing it for the supply of the workers in the field. Then as I read the Gospel narrative, on the spot, I was surprised to find that this explanation better accorded with the text than the popular idea, and that nothing there said involved the fact that she wanted the water for her own use.

The well was dug by Jacob for the supply of his own field, so that he need not depend on wells near the towns of other people. The plain is still called the Plain of Mukhnâ, or the Plain of the Cornfields. Workers in that plain still need water, and women now, as formerly, furnish their supply. The Samaritan woman apparently came up to the well from a remote part of the great grain field, and would have gone back there but for her interview with Jesus. Becoming so interested in His words, she wanted to go first to her home, before returning to the workmen with the water. In evidence of this it is said she "left her waterpot (there by the well in the fields) and went away into the city." Is not this a natural explanation of the occurrence?

If the water was in itself preferable to that of springs near her home, as Dr. Bailey suggests, that did not make it any less suitable for those near it in the fields for which it was provided. Why should we suppose that she came to the well for her home supply of water, since there is no mention of such a fact in the Bible narrative?

PHILADELPHIA, U.S.A., *February 10th, 1897.*

II.—By DR. ERNEST W. GURNEY MASTERMAN.

In the *Quarterly Statement* for January, Dr. Bailey, late of Nâblus, suggests that the reason the Samaritan Woman went some considerable distance to obtain water from the well traditionally called Jacob's, was because of the *essential* goodness of the water. In confirmation

of this he remarks that there is a local tradition of the goodness of the water to-day in Nâblus. I venture to suggest, however, that it is rather the sacred tradition than the peculiarity of the water which explains all this.

In the first place it is quite true people in this country frequently send considerable distances for water, but as far as I know it is invariably to get spring-water. Thus in Jerusalem they send to 'Ain Karim and other such springs, and here to 'Ain Lenabeyeh, &c. If spring-water cannot be obtained, running water is, according to the uninstructed native mind, to be preferred to cistern or well-water—"Living" water as contrasted with stagnant or still water.

Secondly, I think it is very improbable that in reality the water in "Jacob's Well" is in any degree less hard than that in the numerous springs round Nâblus. It must percolate through similar layers of limestone. I know from experience that people coming to Nâblus from Jerusalem, Jaffa, Gaza, &c., where well-water is drunk, do suffer from the change, just as many of the people here do when they go to some parts of the Lebanon, but I much doubt if the natives suffer at all who always drink it.

The supply of water in the well evidently does not depend upon a perennial spring, because even now when the well is cleared of rubbish there is no water in it in the autumn. In September, 1895, when I was there, the well was cleared, but it was quite dry.

Thirdly, sacred wells are common in these lands, and, whatever the real character of the water, all kind of excellencies are ascribed to it. If for example you enter the Great Mosque here you will almost at once be presented with a bowl of water from the "Well of the Prophet" in the mosque precincts. This water, which seems to us to be of a very ordinary quality, is praised extravagantly, and somewhat similar virtues are ascribed to it as to the well near Nâblus. That the essential quality of the water is not so important as the associations is shown by the admiration felt by all the Moslems for the waters of the Zemzem Well at

Mecca. A favourite good wish here is *بِسْمِ اللَّهِ يَسْقِيكَ مِنْ بَئْرِ زَمْزَمْ* i.e., "May God let you drink from the Well Zemzem." And yet this water has been scientifically examined and proved to be full of decaying organic matter, and swarming with bacteria!

That the well was not the usual resort of the women is perhaps shown in the Scripture narrative by the fact that the Samaritan woman was alone there, and that our Lord was left alone talking to her so long. The noisy crowd of women gathered round the source of the water supply for the village pretty nearly all day in the spring months, affords a great contrast to this picture. And then we notice how very conscious the woman was of the sacred character of the well. Is it not reasonable to suppose that it was just because her "father Jacob gave us this well" that she came to draw?

The greater difficulty which Professor George Adam Smith points out

in his book ("Hist. Geo. of the Holy Land") is why was so deep a well ever made in the neighbourhood of so many springs? Might not the following be a simple explanation?

The springs have probably always belonged to the townsfolk (since they became settled), and in the case of any wandering tribes with considerable flocks among them it is exceedingly probable that the more settled inhabitants would first resent and then resist the new comers marching twice daily into their midst to water their flocks at their springs. Probably any experienced Nomad with such flocks, accustomed to such a country as this, would know pretty surely when he might, from the conformation of the hills, expect to find water. If then a quarrel arose, what more probable than that he should seek to make himself independent of these disagreeable neighbours. Further, if we can accept the tradition, we have in the story of Jacob two special facts connected with this, firstly, he bought a piece of ground on which he could make a well for himself, and then we gather from Genesis xxxiv that his family made themselves sufficiently obnoxious to the Shechemites to make it very necessary for Jacob to be independent of their permission to use their springs.

DAMASCUS, January 30th, 1897.

FLORA OF SYRIA, PALESTINE, AND SINAI,

By Rev. Canon TRISTRAM.

"Flora of Syria, Palestine, and Sinai: from the Taurus to Ras Muhammad, and from the Mediterranean Sea to the Syrian Desert." By Rev. G. E. Post, M.A., M.D., D.D., Syrian Protestant College, Beirut, Syria.

IT is strange that in the flood of botanical literature which has poured from the Press for the last half-century there has not, so far as we are aware, been any attempt to provide a convenient and portable botanical handbook for any region of the world since the publication of Mr. Joseph Woods's "Tourist's Flora," in 1850. Floras there have been innumerable, of every region of the world, but none for the knapsack. Sumptuous quartos, and long serials with elaborate illustrations, are rarely accessible to the student, and are useless to the traveller. At length Dr. Post has enabled the traveller, and even the tourist with an eye for nature's jewellery, to carry with him a key amply sufficient to open every botanical mystery he may meet with on Syrian shores, mountains, or deserts. His work is more than merely a tourist's Flora for Syria and Sinai. In a thick but portable post 8vo volume, which may be carried in saddlebag or knapsack, he has filled 920 pages of small yet clear type, with the terse yet exhaustive and intelligible diagnosis of no less than 126 orders, 850 genera, and about 3,500 species of phanerogams and acrogens. The lower forms of cryptogams he does not touch. His work adds over 1,000 species to those hitherto registered as indigenous to