

The Meaning of Worshiping in “Spirit and Truth” (John 4:23)

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One of the familiar stories in the New Testament is that of the Samaritan woman in John 4. This story is found only in the Gospel of John,¹ so understanding it can lead to understanding the distinctives of Johannine theology.² More broadly, Johannine literature consists of the Gospel according to John, the three Johannine Epistles, and the Book of Revelation.³ Therefore, in order to determine what Jesus meant by worshiping in “Spirit and truth” in John 4:23, we must consider the broad implications of what “according to John” means. To view John’s purposefully reconstructed scene of the woman at the well from the perspective of Johannine theology and to draw an exegetically sound answer for what Jesus meant by worshiping in “Spirit and truth” in John 4:23, this paper explores the following three points: (1) the background of the story of the Samaritan woman, (2) the meaning of John 4:23 in its context, and (3) the consistency of Johannine theology drawn from Johannine literature.

Background of the Story of the Samaritan Woman

To capture the meaning of John 4:23 and the whole story of the Samaritan woman accurately, exploring the background of the Samaritan-Jewish relationship will be helpful. Before the historic breakup of the nation of Israel,⁴

¹ Jan Van der Watt, *An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 84.

² The Gospel according to John is considered distinct from the Synoptic Gospels and reflects Johannine theology.

³ The authorship of each writing is still disputed; the Apostle John and his community are the primary candidates.

⁴ Aaron’s two sons died around the thirteenth century BCE, and after Solomon died around 930 BCE, the united kingdom of Israel split into two kingdoms, the northern

the Israelites knew the seriousness of properly approaching the Lord. According to Leviticus 10, Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, suddenly died by God's consuming fire because they offered in their worship unauthorized fire in the presence of the Lord. The Lord said, "Among those who are near me, I shall be proved holy, and before all the people, I will be honored.' Aaron remained silent" (Lev 10:3).⁵ Later, both Jews and Samaritans shared this same unforgettable memory of *properly approaching and worshiping* the Lord, the Most High God.

At the time of Jesus, the Jerusalem-Gerizim controversy was already recognized as part of "the ancient dispute"⁶ between Jews and Samaritans. According to Kuate, in 721 BCE, the Samaritans were deported to Assyria. After their return to Samaria, they accepted pagan idols and married pagans. This made the Jews angry because the Samaritans violated the Mosaic Law. Later, in 587 BCE, the Jerusalem temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and the people in the kingdom of Judah were deported to Babylon. In 538 BCE, they also returned and started rebuilding the destroyed temple of Solomon. The Samaritans tried to participate in this rebuilding by giving offerings, but the Jews did not accept them because they never wanted themselves to be corrupted. This Jewish rejection triggered the decisive split between both sides and led to the establishment of the Samaritans' own temple on Mount Gerizim in Samaria.⁷

Bultmann points out that the Samaritans found their basis of establishment and authority for their temple on Mount Gerizim from Deuteronomy 27, where Moses commanded that the Israelites should establish an altar on

kingdom of Israel (with its capital as Samaria) and the southern kingdom of Judah (with its capital as Jerusalem).

⁵ בְּקִרְבֵי אֶקְדֹשׁ וְעַל־פְּנֵי כְלֵהֶם אֶבְבֵד וְיָדָם אֶהָרֹן (Lev 10:3b [BHS]) Translations from BHS and NA³⁸ are by Kengoro Goto, unless otherwise attributed.

⁶ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 224-225.

⁷ Joseph Kuate, "Towards Christian Foundations of Dialogue: Jesus' Encounter with the Samaritan Woman (Jn 4:1-42)," *Grace & Truth* 35, no. 2 (Oct 2018): 36.

Mount Gerizim for the Lord so that his blessings might gush out from there. Though the Samaritan temple was destroyed by Hyrkan I in 128 BCE, the Samaritans’ worship on Mount Gerizim was never quenched, even up to Jesus’ time.⁸ Scaer points out that this controversy developed further because of Moses’ commandment to build an altar on Mount Gerizim. The Samaritans considered Mount Gerizim as a holy place because that is where Jacob saw a vision of the gate of heaven in Genesis 28.⁹ Thus, historically, “Samaritans restricted their sacrificial worship to this mountain, just as the Judeans confined all sacrificial worship to the temple in Jerusalem.”¹⁰ Both sides insisted on their own legitimacy based on their own Torah. Although Jews and Samaritans shared many common beliefs, the Samaritans accepted only the Torah from the *Tanakh* as their Scripture. This narrow canon also amplified the importance of Mount Gerizim and was used by the Samaritans to claim legitimacy.

Because of this historical background, hostility and discrimination existed between Jews and Samaritans, as evidenced in the Gospel of John. The Samaritan woman at the well unhesitatingly showed that animosity existed between these groups when she said, “Jews do not associate with Samaritans” (John 4:9c [NIV]).¹¹ This implies that *loving* as the core principle of the entire law (cf. Gal 5:14; Lev 19:18; 1 Cor 13) was totally lost in their formal worship. A few chapters later, the Jews even said to Jesus, “Aren’t we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?”¹² Since Jesus did not acknowledge “his Jewish audience as the seed of Abraham, Jesus

⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 189.

⁹ Peter J. Scaer, “Jesus and the Woman at the Well: Where Mission Meets Worship,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (Jan 2003): 9.

¹⁰ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 100.

¹¹ οὐ γὰρ συγχρῶνται Ἰουδαῖοι Σαμαρίταις (John 4:9c [NA²⁸]). “συγχρῶνται” is a compound word of σύν and χράομαι, and literally means “to use jointly” something or implicitly means “have an association.”

¹² οὐ καλῶς λέγομεν ἡμεῖς ὅτι Σαμαρίτης εἶ σὺ καὶ δαιμόνιον ἔχεις; (John 8:48b).

was in their eyes no better than the Samaritans, who on account of their worship on Mount Gerizim and their encroachment on Israel's national existence, were avoided by Jews as despisers of true religion and as enemies."¹³ Barrett points out that "the Samaritans who claimed to be sons of God, were regarded as mad (possessed)" by the Jews,¹⁴ and they were fearlessly applying this principle to Jesus, who was revealing himself as the Son of Man!¹⁵

Thus, it would be reasonable to say that the Jerusalem-Gerizim controversy and the hostility and animosity between Jews and Samaritans continued for centuries, and there seems to have been no solution and hope. However, according to the Apostle John, Jesus had existed since "before Abraham was born" (John 8:58) and knew all the claims of both Jews and Samaritans. He was about to show them the meaning of *true worshipers* whom the Father seeks.

The Meaning of John 4:23 in Its Context

To begin with, the Samaritan woman must have been shocked at being spoken to by Jesus, a Jew, because this was something Samaritans had to avoid. To break through this kind of centuries-long deadlock, Jesus seems to have intentionally rested beside the well of Jacob and to have spoken to the woman, leading her to a deeper understanding of who he actually was and the meaning of true worship. Jesus revealed the core point of worship in vv. 21-24, but she did not seem to have understood what he meant (cf. v. 25). So, he needed to add v. 26, "I am he (Messiah)."¹⁶ Though sometimes Jesus'

¹³ Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 318.

¹⁴ Charles Kingsley Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 350.

¹⁵ By the time of Jesus, Jews already well immersed themselves in their apocalyptic expectations. Therefore, the Son of Man in John's gospel could have been taken by them as the son of man in Dan 7:13-14. Jesus was revealing *who he actually was* throughout John's gospel but most Jews did not understand it and rather tried to stone Him (see also the end of ch. 8).

¹⁶ In v. 25, λέγει αὐτῷ ἡ γυνή· οἶδα ὅτι Μεσσίας ἔρχεται ὁ λεγόμενος χριστός· ὅταν ἔλθῃ

teaching was not immediately understood by his original audience, fortunately, a reader of the text can consider it *exegetically*. The following section focuses on examining what Jesus meant by John 4:23 in its context based on Johannine theology.

In v. 22, Jesus pointed out the Samaritans’ incomplete understanding of God while comparing the Samaritans with the Jews who found out who Jesus was through his self-revelation. Verse 23 begins with “Yet” (ἀλλ’) because now Jesus’ self-revelation was reaching the Samaritans by virtue of God’s great mercy and grace. This was so that the Samaritans, who were long discriminated by Jews, also might know who Jesus was and worship the Father *properly*.

Although the so-called Johannine literature consists of the Gospel of John, the Johannine Epistles (1-3 John), and the Book of Revelation, the authorship of each writing is still debated. Scholars also debate Johannine eschatology that is evidenced in each of these writings. For instance, whereas the Gospel of John emphasizes the eschatological time as a *present reality*, the Book of Revelation emphasizes it as a *future reality*. If this is so, the statement of Jesus at the well, “a time is coming and has now come”¹⁷ (John 4:23, NIV), would vividly express the significance of accepting the eschatological time as a *present reality*.

What Jesus brought to the Samaritan woman as *present reality* was the eschatological reality in which “the true worshipers will worship [or prostrate themselves before] the Father in the Spirit and truth” (John 4:23b).¹⁸ Jesus did not compare “true worshipers” with the opposite concept of “false worshipers” because his intention here was not to condemn those who had not yet received the revelation of who he was (the Μεσσίας or χριστός). He seems to have wanted the Samaritan woman not only to *notice* the meaning of “true worshipers” but also to *become* a true worshiper herself. Before

ἐκεῖνος, ἀναγγελεῖ ἡμῖν ἅπαντα. Then in v. 26, λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἐγώ εἰμι, ὁ λαλῶν σοι.

¹⁷ ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν (John 4:23a) seems to emphasize the immediacy and advent of *the hour*.

¹⁸ οἱ ἀληθινοὶ προσκυνηταὶ προσκυνήσουσιν τῷ πατρὶ ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ (Jn 4:23b)

Jesus' revelation at the well regarding worship (John 4:23), Jews and Samaritans must have thought that only their own traditional and cultic worship was genuine and authentic and was what the Father sought and accepted. Therefore, another option for what Jesus, the Revealer, meant by "*the true worshippers*" could have been a totally new and radical presentation for both. According to the Johannine community, Jesus was saying that only the worship by "the true worshippers" would be satisfactory before the Father. The Johannine community emphasized that in the already inaugurated eschatological era, anachronistic and unsatisfactory worshippers needed to be upgraded by Jesus.

Since Jesus defined "the true worshippers" as those who "worship the Father in the Spirit and truth," the meaning of worshipping "the Father in the Spirit and truth" also has to be clarified. According to the flow of the story of the Samaritan woman, it would be clear that Jesus and the woman were talking in vv. 20-21 about the site or location to worship. Therefore, "in the Spirit and truth" (v. 23b) would also need to be understood primarily in terms of the concept of the "site or location" proper for true worshippers. In the story of the Samaritan woman, possible sites or locations for worship could be (1) in (ἐν) Jerusalem, (2) on (ἐν) Mount Gerizim, or (3) in (ἐν) spirit and truth.

Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim were considered holy places for each group of followers since their prayers and bloody sacrifices had been continuously offered in both places. Jews and Samaritans thought that through their own sacrificial system and procedures, they could approach and please the Lord. Jews were even proudly claiming that "*in Jerusalem* is the place where they ought to worship"¹⁹ (v. 20b) and denying Samaritans' worship altogether as improper. However, Jesus disagreed with their approaches (v. 21) and proposed a third way (vv. 23-24) in which the worshippers should worship the Father in (ἐν) spirit and truth (vv. 23-24).

Jesus' disagreement can be confirmed by his later statement in John 14:6, where he clearly revealed the impossibility of worshipping (coming to)

¹⁹ ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ἐστὶν ὁ τόπος ὅπου προσκυνεῖν δεῖ (John 4:20b).

the Father without Jesus by saying, “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except *through me*.”²⁰ Ephesians 2:18 also agrees with John 14:6 by saying, “through him, we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”²¹ It is discernable that “through him [Jesus Christ]” and “in [ἐν] one Spirit [of Christ]”²² are equivalent and interchangeable for Paul. According to the chronological order of the books of the New Testament, it is possible that John the Apostle could have already had Pauline Christology and pneumatology in mind when he wrote his Gospel as his summary and evaluation of forerunning accounts and theologies. Thus John (cf. John 14:6) and Paul (cf. Eph 2:18) could theologically agree with the point that “through Jesus,” people could approach the Father and worship him *in a full sense*.²³

It is also important to know that John uses *literary devices* in this account to affect his readers based on the theology he embedded in this story. John prefers to use at least (1) *dualistic concepts*—truth and lie (cf. John 8:44), light and darkness (John 1:5), etc., (2) *hendiadys*, and (3) *repetition* such as ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ [“in spirit and truth”] in v. 23 and v. 24. These all emphasize the point he is trying to make. In particular, (2) hendiadys seems to be the key to understanding v. 23. As Ridderbos comments, “‘Spirit’—here linked with ‘truth’ in a hendiadys as with ‘grace and truth’ in 1:17—refers to the time of salvation that has come with Christ and to the

²⁰ ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ· οὐδεὶς ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸν πατέρα εἰ μὴ δι’ ἐμοῦ (Jn 14:6b).

²¹ δι’ αὐτοῦ ἔχομεν τὴν προσαγωγὴν οἱ ἀμφότεροι ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα (Eph 2:18).

²² Paul here would have meant “one Spirit” as “πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ” (cf. Rom 8:9).

²³ John and Paul, who argued much about Christology in their writings, would have wanted to emphasize that before Jesus, only the Levitical sacrificial system was given to the Israelites as a means of grace but it was not satisfactory in the eyes of the Father; according to Johannine and Pauline theologies, it rather functioned as a prototype of Christ’s Atonement and its decisive effects. Thus, in addition to their argument of accessibility to the Father, their stress on Jesus’ function in worship also should be understood in the light of the contrast between the systemic limitation (in the OT) and the inaugurated eschatological liberation (in the NT by Jesus).

concomitant new way in which God wants to relate to human beings.”²⁴ If so, πνεύματι and ἀληθεία (vv. 23, 24) are no longer separable (cf. also 1 John 5:6 saying, τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν ἡ ἀλήθεια, “the Spirit is the truth”). Rather, πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθεία as one of the emphatic Johannine expressions of hendiadys can denote one reality of *Jesus*, whose Spirit is true and through whom one can have access to the Father.

Investigating the grammatical points of the original Greek text is also important for understanding v. 23 and Johannine theology. For instance, in the phrase, ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθεία (“in spirit and truth,” vv. 23-24), ἐν is not repeated for each noun but only one time before πνεύματι (“spirit”). Carson points out, “Both in v. 23 and in v. 24, the one preposition ‘in’ governs both nouns. There are not two separable characteristics.”²⁵ This use of ἐν would also support the idea of oneness drawn from the Johannine hendiadys. In addition, the range of the meaning of ἐν also does not discount my interpretation; ἐν can mean *in, on, at, by, with, among, during, through,* or *within*, and which of these is meant depends on the context and Johannine theology. In my opinion, ἐν in v. 23 and 24 can be translated as “through” since the Johannine hendiadys of these verses can denote *Jesus*, and “through Jesus” matches Johannine theological emphasis on “who Jesus is” presented throughout his gospel. Thus, for John, worship ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθεία (“in spirit and truth”) would have been equivalent to worship “through Jesus,” who is the only way for approaching to the Father (cf. John 14:6). John 4 and 14 beautifully agree with one another, and this would be a key point of Johannine theology.

The Gospel of John emphasizes eschatology as *present reality* since John believed that it was already inaugurated by Jesus. John did not change his view of this since in John 14:16, he introduced ἄλλος (another) παράκλητος (Advocate/Helper) and ensured his readers that worshiping the Father “through Jesus” would last forevermore through ἄλλος παράκλητος. According to John 14:16-17, ἄλλον (another) παράκλητον (Advocate/Helper) is the

²⁴ Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 163.

²⁵ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 225.

same as τὸ πνεῦμα (the Spirit) τῆς ἀληθείας (of truth). The unique Johannine saying, *the Spirit of truth* (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:6), could be a paraphrase of “*the Spirit of Jesus*” by Luke and Paul (cf. Acts 16:7; Phil 1:19). *Another Advocate* is *the Spirit of truth*, in Johannine expression, and is the Spirit of Jesus, as Jesus says, “You know him, for he abides with you and will be in you. I will not forsake you as orphans; I am coming to you.”²⁶ Thus, it is clear that another Advocate, who is the Spirit of truth, is equivalent to “the Spirit of Jesus” through whom one can still offer his or her worship to the Father forever.

Throughout the Gospel of John, the author, John, describes Jesus using various kinds of metaphors such as the word, the light, the living bread, the way, the truth, the life, and others, so as to tell his readers who Jesus is from various aspects of his richness and wonderfulness. This Johannine way of expression would also have been employed for the Spirit. As Barrett comments, “One of the characteristic Johannine titles of the Holy Spirit is τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας (cf. 14.17; 15.26; 16.13).”²⁷ For John, the Spirit of truth was equivalent to Jesus, and John wanted to emphasize Jesus’ rich nature in the Spirit rather than just following a Pauline understanding and expression.

The last part of v. 23 says, “for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks” (NIV).²⁸ Jews and Samaritans may have focused too much on their own *cultic worship* rather than the *eschatological worship* already inaugurated by Jesus, the Revealer,²⁹ and they did not seem to have seriously considered what kind of worshipers the Father desires. If their cultic worship had been sufficient for the Father, Jesus would not have brought the new way, that is, worshiping the Father “*through Jesus*.” Ridderbos admits

²⁶ ὑμεῖς γινώσκετε αὐτό, ὅτι παρ’ ὑμῖν μένει καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσται. Οὐκ ἀφήσω ὑμᾶς ὀρφανούς, ἔρχομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς (John 14:17c-18).

²⁷ Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 238.

²⁸ γὰρ ὁ πατήρ τοιοῦτους ζητεῖ τοὺς προσκυνούντας αὐτόν literally means that “For the Father seeks such people who worship Him.”

²⁹ Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 190.

that through “Christ the way to the Father is being opened in a totally new manner (14:6), the limits of the old patterns of worship are being broken through, and the true worshipers are being brought together in a single fellowship.”³⁰ At about noon at the well of Jacob, who was the father of both lines, Jesus graciously revealed to the Samaritan woman, who was despised by Jews, the Father’s will, which neither Jews nor Samaritans could even imagine, and was calling her also to become a true worshiper *through Him*.

Consistency of Johannine Theology Drawn from the Johannine Literature

In addition, the point presented by Marshall supports the consistent claim of Johannine theology that the interrelation between worship and salvation is crucial in the story of the Samaritan woman. Marshall argues that according to John 3:16-17, 6:45 (which is Jesus’ interpretation of Isaiah 54:13), and 12:32, it is obvious that Jesus offered *salvation to all*.³¹ If so, *anyone* who has believed in Jesus and been saved is able to worship and approach the Father satisfactorily “*through Jesus*” and is thereby considered *a true worshiper* whom the Father seeks, regardless of ethnicity, gender, status, or religious background. This Johannine consistency would have had a serious impact on Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles at that time. Jesus’ ministry that had started at Galilee (John 2) was now reaching the well of Jacob in Sychar in Samaria.

The Johannine Epistles also keep this Johannine theological consistency. For instance, John 3:16 says, “so that *whoever* believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.”³² This seems to echo at least the following verses: 1 John 5:12, “*one* who has the Son has life;”³³ 2 John 9b, “*one* remaining in the teaching has both the Father and the Son;”³⁴ and 3 John 11b,

³⁰ Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 164.

³¹ I. Howard Marshall, *A Concise New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2008), 198.

³² ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ’ ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον (John 3:16b).

³³ ὁ ἔχων τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει τὴν ζωὴν (1 John 5:12a).

³⁴ ὁ μένων ἐν τῇ διδαχῇ, οὗτος καὶ τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει (2 John 9b).

“Whoever does good is from God.”³⁵ These verses agree with the claim within Johannine theology that God welcomes *anyone* willing to follow Jesus. This implies that anyone can also be saved and be a *true worshiper*.

Though the authorship of the Book of Revelation is disputed because its apocalyptic style is very different from other Johannine writings, including this book in my discussion is meaningful since it also provides points showing Johannine theological consistency related to John 4:23.

Revelation 3:7 says, “the Holy One, the True One says these things” (ESV).³⁶ Mounce comments about this verse, “In Jewish culture, the Holy One was a familiar title for God (e.g., Isa 40:25; Hab 3:3; Mark1:24; John 6:69; *1 Clem.* 23:5). Here it is joined with ‘the True One’ and applied to Christ.”³⁷ Jesus’ nature as “ἀληθινός” (True) agrees with both John 14:6 and the earlier comments on John 4:23. Revelation 19:11 also supports this point by stating that the Apostle John saw “the one sitting on it [the throne], called Faithful and True.”³⁸ As for this verse, Roloff writes, “Leading the army is the Christ. . . . Jesus proves himself faithful to his promises.”³⁹ Thus, in the Book of Revelation, the truth is also equivalent to and interchangeable with Jesus. The consistency of this in Johannine theology is crucial for understanding John 4:23.

In addition, Revelation 21:22 discloses a very important point by saying, “I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (NASB).⁴⁰ John of Patmos did not see any earthly temple “building”

³⁵ ὁ ἀγαθοποιῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστιν (3 John 11b).

³⁶ Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός (Rev 3:7b).

³⁷ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 99.

³⁸ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπ’ αὐτὸν [καλούμενος] πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός (Rev 19:11b).

³⁹ Jurgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 217.

⁴⁰ ναὸν οὐκ εἶδον ἐν αὐτῇ, ὁ γὰρ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ ναὸς αὐτῆς ἐστὶν καὶ τὸ ἀρνίον (Rev 21:22). That ἐστὶν is used for ὁ κύριος, ὁ θεός, ὁ παντοκράτωρ, καὶ τὸ ἀρνίον might have been the Johannine way of revealing the richness of Jesus’ nature.

but recognized “*the True Temple*,” which was *Jesus Himself*.⁴¹ If so, what Jesus said in John 4:23 would make sense. Worshiping in truth does not mean that true worshipers need any physical place for worship, but rather it stresses the need for “*the True Temple*,” which is the Lamb, Jesus himself. Thus, John 4:23 seems to mean that the Father seeks true worshipers who worship him not by certain obsolete forms of cultic rituals done without Jesus in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim but “*through Jesus*” since he as the Lamb is “*the True Temple*” in the eschatological era, which has already begun. Thus, Johannine theological consistency underlying the story of the Samaritan woman also would be worth considering.

Conclusion

The unique Johannine story of the Samaritan woman gives rich insights into the topic of *worship*. Clarifying through exegesis what Jesus meant by worshiping in “Spirit and truth” in John 4:23 is not an easy task because of the purposeful and theological reconstruction of the scene by John. The three approaches of this paper have enabled some conclusions. First, *the historical background of the story of the Samaritan woman* shows the importance of conducting appropriate worship before the LORD. The centuries-long dispute between Jews and Samaritans, also known as the Jerusalem-Gerizim controversy, and the formal worship without mutual *love* showed that there was an acute need for a new way of Worshiping God.

Second, *the meaning of John 4:23 in its context* shows Jesus’ intentional approach to the woman at the well. This approach broke through the historically deadlocked situation. His revelation of the eschatological time as *present reality* opened the upgraded and fullest way of worship. The Johannine use of literary devices and grammar also contributed to expressing

⁴¹ Remember, John the Apostle reports at the beginning part of his gospel that John the Baptist viewed Jesus as the Lamb of God, saying, ἴδε ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου (cf. John 1:29b). Thus, the depiction of Jesus as ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ could also be one of Johannine theological keys penetrating the Johannine literature, and supports my argument regarding the necessity of Jesus for appropriately approaching/worshiping the Father.

John's theological claim about the necessity explained by Jesus in approaching and worshiping the Father in an acceptable way. Examining a variety of depictions regarding Jesus in John's Gospel brings the reader to a deeper understanding of the meaning of John 4:23. Finally, Jesus' revelation of the Father's will—even to a Samaritan woman—proved the reality of the advent of the eschatological time.

Third, the *consistency of Johannine theology*, evident in various testimonies from the Johannine literature, shows the extension of mercy through the salvific ministry inaugurated by Jesus. This ministry led to welcoming true worshipers out of every group of people. John and/or the Johannine community depicted Jesus as ἀληθινός and reconfirmed the impact of Jesus, the Lamb, in the worship in the eschatological era. Therefore, according to Johannine theology, to worship ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ is to worship the Father "through Jesus" who is "the True Temple" in the eschatological era already inaugurated. By taking this new way as revealed by Jesus as the *present reality*, the Jerusalem-Gerizim controversy and the hostility and animosity between Jews and Samaritans would be settled before the Father, who seeks true worshipers to be upgraded. The Johannine community even reminds us that the time has come when *anyone* willing to worship the Father *through Jesus* can become a true worshiper. It also invites us to become true worshipers in our own times and places.

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