

- f. Jesus' insight into her marital history caused this woman to conclude that He must be a prophet of God (4:19). Working from the fact that the Samaritan scriptures consisted of a version of the Pentateuch (Books of Moses), some believe she was associating Jesus with the prophet Moses promised (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). This is possible, but unlikely. For John's account has her identifying Jesus simply as *a* prophet and not any particular prophet (cf. 1:21, 6:14, 7:40). One thing is certain; at this point she wasn't at all thinking that Jesus was the Messiah (ref. 4:25).

But this woman *was* convinced that this Jew was a prophet and this made Him a person suited to speak to the matter of Yahweh's worship (4:20). Her question catches many contemporary readers off guard; it seems to come out of nowhere and has no relation to the topic she and Jesus had been discussing. Why, having concluded that Jesus was a prophet, did the place of God's worship enter into her thoughts? With all the things she could have asked Him, why was this particular matter foremost in her mind?

Part of the reason may be that the two of them were standing at the foot of Mount Gerizim, which was the site of Samaritan worship (so her expression, "*this* mountain"). The setting was certainly suited to her question, but it was provoked by something more significant than the sight of Gerizim to the west. This woman recognized that the dispute over the place of Yahweh's worship held a place of honor in the long-standing enmity between the Jews and Samaritans; what, then, could be a more appropriate issue to raise with a Jew who seemed to be a prophet? The Jews and Samaritans despised and rejected each other, and yet they shared a common history as the Abrahamic people. *Though completely alienated from each other, the Jews and Samaritans were inextricably bound together by God's design in Abraham and its outworking in the salvation history.*

- The Samaritans tacitly affirmed this connection with the Jews by holding the Pentateuch as their sacred scriptures; by doing so, they showed that they believed those scriptures – which set forth *Israel's* identity, calling and relationship with Yahweh – pertained to *them*.
- The Samaritans regarded themselves as covenant descendents of the patriarchs. Whatever had transpired in past centuries, they, too, belonged to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And while the Samaritans (at least in the main) were likely not aware of the prophets' promises regarding Israel's restoration and reunification with Judah, they knew that Yahweh was their God and they were committed to His worship.

The Samaritans worshipped Israel's God, but were excluded from worshipping Him in Jerusalem. The Judean exiles had not allowed the people of Samaria to participate in rebuilding the temple and the latter responded by opposing that work (Ezra 4:1ff). That opposition only strengthened the Jews' resolve to keep the Samaritans from Jerusalem and Mount Zion. The result was that the people of Samaria founded their own sacred site for Yahweh's worship on Mount Gerizim.

In fact, the Samaritans constructed a temple on Mount Gerizim a little more than a century after the completion of the second temple in Jerusalem. From that point, the question of where Yahweh's true sanctuary was located was a primary point of contention between the Jews and Samaritans. The presence of another temple in Samaria so vexed the Jews that they later rallied against it and destroyed it. (This much is certain, though different Jewish sources provide differing accounts of the timing and details of this event.) But even after their temple was demolished, the Samaritans continued to insist that Mount Gerizim was the rightful place for Yahweh's worship and carried on their worship there right up to the time that Jesus met the woman at Jacob's well. This only added fuel to the fire of the Jews' resentment. As far as they were concerned, the Samaritans were apostates and blasphemers. In this regard, at least, they would have gladly acknowledged the Samaritans as descendents of Israel's northern ten tribes, for those Israelites had followed Jeroboam into apostasy as he built altars for Israel's worship at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12).

- g. For centuries the proper site of Yahweh's sanctuary and worship had been a fundamental bone of contention between the Jews and Samaritans. It was an enduring controversy in the forefront of both groups' thinking and now this Samaritan woman had the occasion to actually speak with a Jew whom she perceived to be one of Yahweh's prophets. There couldn't have been a more natural question for her to pose to Him: *"Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, but you Jews insist that Yahweh is to be worshipped in Jerusalem."*

The *Samaritan* fathers were obvious referents in her statement, but the Samaritans' Israelite ancestry suggests something more: The *covenant patriarchs* Abraham and Jacob were also "fathers" who worshipped Yahweh in "this mountain." In fact, Abraham's altar rendered Shechem the very first sacred site in the land of Canaan; a thousand years before Jerusalem was set apart as Yahweh's dwelling place – indeed, while Jerusalem was still a pagan stronghold untouched by the Abrahamic household, the patriarchs were worshipping Yahweh in the vicinity of Mount Gerizim. In the case of Jacob, he worshipped there as a *resident*, with his small plot of land testifying in a foundational way to the covenant household's possession of the promised inheritance (Genesis 33:18-20). Shechem enjoyed historical (covenant), physical (land) and sacred (worship) preeminence in Yahweh's relationship with His covenant people; if anywhere in Canaan could claim the title of "sacred space," it ought to be Mount Gerizim.

And yet, the Jews insisted that *Jerusalem* was the place where Yahweh was to be sought and worshipped and they substantiated that claim with their own sacred history. God had told Moses that He would identify a place to "put His name" when the children of Israel took possession of Canaan (the "law of the central sanctuary" – Deuteronomy 12:1-27). David later determined that Jerusalem was to be that place and he installed the tabernacle there and instructed his son Solomon to build Yahweh a permanent house in Jerusalem. After the Babylonians destroyed it, the Lord directed the exiles to rebuild His sanctuary on the same site.

- h. Once again, Jesus' response was completely unexpected. Almost certainly this woman expected Him to defend the Jews' position regarding Jerusalem; but maybe, in doing so, He'd at least give her some insight from the Jewish perspective to further her understanding. Instead, He told her that both positions were about to be rendered irrelevant; *both reflected important features and developments of the salvation history, but the salvation history itself had reached its apex and point of fulfillment precisely as God intended.* Jesus answered by announcing that a time was coming when men would not worship Yahweh *either* in relation to Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim (4:21). In effect He was insisting that the whole question of where to worship God was soon to become nonsensical.

Nevertheless, it was true that the Jews had a primacy in relation to God which the Samaritans could not claim (4:22). This was true in several respects:

- 1) First, the Samaritans were the product of apostasy within Israel which saw their forefathers (the ten northern tribes of Israel) excised from the covenant household and David's kingdom. Yahweh rejected Israel such that His purposes for the world through the Abrahamic seed should proceed only through Judah as the remnant of the covenant kingdom (ref. again 1 Kings 12-13; also 2 Chronicles 10).
- 2) In fulfillment of His word, Yahweh had left the northern sub-kingdom of Israel in exile, scattered among the nations, while orchestrating the return to Judea of a remnant of Judah (cf. Hosea 1:1-9, 4:17; Isaiah 44:24-28). And Israel's continuing diaspora – especially in light of the people's intermarriage with foreigners and the influence of foreign cultural and religious patterns – resulted inexorably in the corruption of Yahweh's worship among the Samaritans. They continued to worship the God of Israel, but their knowledge of Him had become diluted and colored. In Jesus' words, the Samaritans worshipped that which they did not know.
- 3) In contrast, the Jews (i.e., the remnant of David's kingdom) retained a closer connection with the pattern of worship Yahweh had established for Israel and therefore a more accurate understanding of Yahweh Himself. This doesn't overlook the fact that various rabbinical traditions developed during the second temple period which distorted the people's understanding and practice of Torah. Neither does it deny the corruption within the priestly system and its worship practice. But, it remains that Israel derived their instruction largely through the priestly administration (ref. Malachi 2:1-9) and the Samaritans were deprived of this. This is one sense in which Jesus could assert, "*We worship that which we know.*"
- 4) But there was a particular way in which the Jews enjoyed primacy, and that was their election to be the vehicle of Yahweh's *salvation* (4:22b) – His work of deliverance, purging, renewal and ingathering – by which He would establish His kingdom in the earth. There are two aspects to this:

The first is that Israel's election as the Abrahamic people had its goal in God's purpose to restore His creation to Himself. Yahweh chose Israel to bring His blessing of reconciliation and restoration to all the earth by faithfully living out their sonship in the sight of the Gentiles. But there was a narrower aspect to Israel's election; Precisely because Israel could not fulfill its calling, God had determined to embody Israel in an individual Israelite – a son of Abraham, Judah and David – and, in Him, see Israel fulfill its role in His design (Isaiah 49:1ff; Galatians 3). As it pertains to both the Jewish nation (the remnant of David's kingdom) and the elect son of Judah, it was eminently true that salvation was of the Jews.

- i. Jesus was here announcing a radical alteration of the whole scheme and practice of worship – not just for Israel, but all men (“*you shall worship the Father*”; cf. 8:31-44, 20:17). All ancient peoples carried out their worship in connection with a *place*, whether a temple, a shrine or a sacred site (such as a mountain or other “high place”). Gods and spiritual powers were associated with certain locations; thus Yahweh had to reveal to Jacob that He was not confined to the land of Canaan (Genesis 28:10ff). The underlying premise was that a deity needs to be encountered where it resides; one must enter into the presence of that which one worships, even if the divine presence is mediated through a representative image or other physical entity. This was the basis for Yahweh establishing a central sanctuary, and it was the premise behind the Jewish/Samaritan controversy.

But here was Jesus saying that the connection between worship and particular places was coming to an end. This might seem to suggest that He was opposing the Mosaic requirement of a central sanctuary or, alternatively, that Yahweh was now changing His own law. But Jesus was indicating *fulfillment*, not abrogation or alteration: He was affirming that the law of the central sanctuary – like the entirety of the Mosaic Code – was now attaining its fulfillment in relation to Him (cf. Matthew 5:17-19 with 11:11-15 and Luke 24:44-45). The worship of Yahweh could no longer be tied to a place because His presence – and so His worship – was now localized in His *Son*. Yahweh had pledged through His prophets both His return to Zion and His re-enthronement in His sanctuary (cf. Isaiah 40:1-11, 52:1-10, 59:15-60:14; Ezekiel 43:1-8; Micah 4:1-8; Zechariah 2, 14; etc.); *both had now been fulfilled in the incarnation of the Word* (cf. again 1:1, 14, 2:13-22).

Jesus was affirming the woman's conviction that He had the authority and knowledge to speak to the issue of Yahweh's sanctuary and worship, but this was not, as she surmised, because He was a Jewish prophet. Rather, it was because these matters and questions had their ultimate referent and answer in Him. He could make these astonishing assertions about the radical transformation of Yahweh's worship, not because He had prophetic insight other men lacked, but because the things of which He spoke found their “yes and amen” in Him. It was precisely because of who He is and the significance of His presence in the world that Yahweh's worship was now to be a matter of “spirit and truth.” It was for this reason that Jesus could assert, “*an hour is coming and now is...*” (4:23-24).

Jesus' presence meant that the Jerusalem temple had served its purpose; indeed it would soon pass away altogether. And if this was the case for the temple, how much more was Mount Gerizim irrelevant? An hour of passing was imminent for Israel's sacred places, but that was because the hour had already come for the transformation of Israel's worship. *Spirit* and *truth* were the new paradigm of authentic worship, and yet Jesus wasn't implying that there was no truth or spiritual dimension in Israel's worship preceding the incarnation. The issue is how the concepts of spirit and truth correlate with the reality of Jesus as the fulfillment of Yahweh's promise concerning His return, His sanctuary and His kingdom.

Scholars debate whether *spirit* refers to the human spirit or the Holy Spirit; the truth is that Jesus was indicating both. For the prophets had spoken of the day when Yahweh would pour out His Spirit on all flesh, thereby rendering them *spiritual* men: human beings animated, empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit through His indwelling presence (cf. Numbers 11:24-29 with Isaiah 32 and Joel 2). Such men "worship in spirit" because they are *of* and *in* the Spirit (Philippians 3:1-3). This sort of worship conforms to and expresses the truth of man as truly human – man as image-son in the true image-son by the Spirit, and thus it is worship in *truth*. It is the authentic worship that flows from man as true.

Jesus, then, wasn't speaking of worship which is undistracted by natural (non-spiritual) concerns and which celebrates and praises God in conformity to orthodox doctrine and practice. He was announcing a new *species* of worship which reflects and expresses *man* as new – man as consummately human by virtue of sharing in the life and likeness of the Last Adam by and in His Spirit.

- j. When Jesus spoke these words, the woman's thoughts turned immediately to the coming *Messiah* (Samaritan *Taheb*). Two observations are important: First, this highlights the fact that the Samaritans had a messianic doctrine and expectation, though their scriptures were limited to the Pentateuch. This accords with Jesus' own insistence that Moses – i.e., the writings associated with Moses – spoke of Him (cf. 5:39-47 with Matthew 11:11ff, Luke 24:25-27, 44-45; Acts 24:10-15, 26:1-23). More importantly, it shows that the Samaritans perceived the messianic age in terms of the transformation of Yahweh's people and their worship.
- k. The woman expressed her confidence that the Messiah would give light to the things Jesus spoke of. She rightly associated those matters with Messiah's coming and the inauguration of the messianic age; she failed, however, to make the same connection when it came to the man standing there declaring to her that the hour of fulfillment had come. Jesus had to make that connection for her (4:25-26).

In that brief encounter Jesus marvelously brought together in Himself the central images of the kingdom and its inauguration: Messiah and Spirit effecting Yahweh's return and renewal of His sanctuary, the end of exile in the cleansing and ingathering of Israel and the Gentiles, and creational renewal yielding the transformation of Yahweh's worship (cf. 7:37-39; Isaiah 32, 40-61; Ezekiel 36-37, 47:1-12; Hosea 1-3; Zechariah 2, 4, 8, 14; etc.).