

## Stage III. The Early Judean Ministry

### E. Jesus Makes Disciples in Samaria

#### 4. Jesus Teaches on True Worship

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20 The woman said: "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you all claim that the place where it is necessary to worship is in Jerusalem."

21 Jesus commanded her: *"Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans keep on worshipping what you do not know; we continue to worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.*

23 *"Yet a time is coming and has now come, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father is seeking. 24 God is spirit, it is therefore necessary for his worshipers to worship in Spirit and in truth."*

26 The woman said, "I know that the Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

26 Then Jesus declared, *"I AM the Messiah--the one speaking to you."*

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = <sup>MT</sup>, Mark = <sup>M</sup>, Luke = <sup>L</sup>, John = <sup>J</sup>, Acts = <sup>A</sup>. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *the words of Jesus are italicized in red*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

| CONTEXT DIGEST      |                                      |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Location            | Sychar in Samaria                    |
| Timeline            | August 30 AD (Month seven)           |
| Jesus' Life Context | Stage III: The Early Judean Ministry |
|                     | E. Jesus Makes Disciples in Samaria  |
| Title               | 4. Jesus Teaches on True Worship     |

#### COMMENT:

Jesus made two epic declarations to the Samaritan woman in this passage. The first was regarding true worship...the second addressed his identity. It is hard to overestimate the importance of these two declarations.

The issue of true worship was at the heart of the enmity between Jews and Samaritans. The issue of worship still divides people today. The background of the "true worship" issue between Jesus and the woman is critical for understanding the passage, so we will briefly summarize it now.

The Samaritan Bible consisted only of the Pentateuch—the first five books of Moses in the Old Testament. This gave them a truncated Bible with far less revelation than the complete Old Testament. Therefore, the Samaritan version of the "Messiah" was basically a "teaching Prophet" (their term was for him was "Taheb") rather than

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the “Son of David” and the “Son of Man” of Jewish expectation. The Davidic covenant, the Psalms, and and the Prophets did not enter into the Samaritan world-view. That is why the woman said in 4.25: **“When Messiah has come, He will explain all things to us.”** She saw Jesus as a Prophet who might well be the “Taheb,” or teaching Prophet that Moses spoke of in Duet. 18.15, 18

Not only did Jews and Samaritans differ over the content of the Bible, this conflict caused them to divide deeply over the issue of worship. When 34 books of the Old Testament (Joshua to Malachi) were eliminated by the Samaritans they lost a huge portion of Divine truth. The Samaritans acknowledged none of this revelation. So they established an alternative Temple and loci of their worship on Mount Gerazim, which was located less than 2 miles from Jacob’s well.

After centuries of conflict over that Temple, a Judean King had destroyed the Gerazim Temple more than 100 years before Jesus. It lay in ruins within the eyesight of Jesus and the Samaritan woman as they spoke. She had probably pointed to those toppled stones when she asked about the proper place of worship.

This was not just a theological or philosophical question. It was the defining issue separating Jews from Samaritans, and a clear answer was essential for any seeker after God. Just how “necessary” was Jewish insistence that “it is necessary to worship in Jerusalem” alone?” Jesus was about to declare what is truly “necessary” for everyone to know about worship, and it is another blockbuster, world-changing revelation.

10 bedrock principles of worship make up the content of Jesus’ teaching in these verses. I have prepared supplemental [notes](#) examining these 10 principles. This text is the most important passage on worship in the New Testament—straight from Jesus’ lips—it merits serious study and passionate obedience.

Worship was very specifically prescribed under the Old Covenant. The shift in approach that Jesus commands in verses 21-24 is radical in every sense of the word. It eliminated all the outer forms of worship entirely, including the Temple, sacrifices, Levitical priesthood, and all the established times and rituals of the Old Testament. Christians will end up shifting the central day of worship from “Saturday—the “last day of the week” to “the Lord’s Day” (Sunday), in direct “violation” of the Ten Commandments! The authority for all these unthinkable changes (for an Old Covenant Jew) all come directly from Jesus himself, and this text.

In spite of the radical nature of what Jesus teaches here, it is totally consistent with the true spirit of worship that the Old Testament advocated. The outer forms have been eliminated, but Jesus’ “new” kind of worship is the perfect fulfillment of everything old. Jesus came to fulfill the Law, not destroy it. His brilliance and wisdom as the Son of God shines brighter than the sun in this passage.

The fact that the woman was willing to ask Jesus, a Jewish “Prophet,” to instruct her on the most controversial and significant issue of her life shows how much the Samaritan woman already trusted in Him. No prophet had ministered in Samaria for over 600 years. She seized the opportunity to get a definitive answer from Someone who could settle the question of true worship forever.

That brings us to the second major declaration of this text: the first “I AM” saying of Jesus in the gospel of John.

The Samaritan woman had obviously been overwhelmed with the authority and wisdom of Jesus’ teaching about True Worship. He has spoken as only God has the right to speak, about an inherently God-centered topic. She had moved beyond seeing Jesus as a Prophet. Her words in 4.25 imply she is ready to believe in Him as the promised Messiah: **“We know that when Messiah comes—the One who is called the Christ—when That One has come, He will declare all things to us.”**

Once again, John quotes a statement of Jesus with two simultaneously true meanings. First, Jesus says **“I AM”** in a construction that requires inserting “the Messiah” as the predicate. That is the only option indicated by the context. He is saying: “You just called me the Messiah. Well, I am.” This is an incredibly powerful thing to say, in and of itself.

But there is a second and even greater meaning to these words. Jesus laid down His bedrock “I AM” statement of the fourth Gospel here. The Greek phrase “I AM” is the equivalent of YAHWEH—“I am that I am”—in Hebrew.

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This is the ultimate Name of God in the Old Testament. So Jesus applied this distinctive Divine Name and Identity to Himself when He said: "I AM."

In the Old Testament, seven compound-names for God using YHWH were revealed. In the Gospel of John, Jesus unveiled seven compound-names for Himself using "I AM." Not only is Jesus claiming to be the Biblical Messiah, He was also taking the mantle of Full Divinity upon Himself, as YHWH of the Old Testament in human flesh, by using these two words.

This first claim to be the "I AM," or "YAHWEH," was followed by the seven "I AM" statements by Jesus in John's gospel. John 4.26 is therefore one of the key turning points in this Gospel, and in the composite four gospel witness about Jesus as well.

The fact that Jesus began to use this Divine Name for himself in a conversation about true worship with a sinful Samaritan woman is too infused with grace for us to fully appreciate!

### APPLICATION:

Jesus is the only absolute authority on the nature of true, God-pleasing worship because he IS God! He speaks of the Father and Spirit in a life of worship as the Son of God, who has received worship from all angels and the other heavenly beings from the moment they were created. He IS YHWH, in every way that the Father and Spirit are also Divine.

We need to be true worshipers, because the Father seeks people who are worshipers in all they are and do. That is what Jesus commanded in this passage: **"Believe what I am telling you about true worship."**

Jesus teaches that all of our outer expressions of worship must come from a heart-attitude of worship that infuses everything we are and do.

*On a scale of 1 to 10, how strong is your identity as a worshiper of God, among all the things you do each day?*

*On the same scale, what is the priority of worship among all the things you do each day?*

We should all answer "10" to both of those questions. The truth is that none of us can. We are always in process as worshipers. However, we should be growing and reaching toward "10" with all of our hearts, minds, souls, and strength... for worship is the utmost expression of love for our God.

*How will you seek to grow as a worshiper today? What area of worship do you need to work on the most at this point in your life? How will you do that this week? For the rest of this month? And beyond?*