**A narrative-critical study of the character of the Samaritan Woman in the Gospel response of this character to the character of Jesus?**

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1. **Abstract**

Samaritans are a subject of particular concern to John; this interest is most evident in John 4:4–42. The passage relates Jesus’ encounter with a Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob next to the city of Sychar. This essay demonstrates that John 4:4–42 represents an attempt to delineate the outline of a mixed Jewish–Samaritan community. This account had a twofold aim: in the first place, it was designed to overcome the Jews’ reluctance to deal with Samaritans, by depicting Jesus as disregarding prejudices about their alleged ritual impurity; secondly, it was intended to make the faith in Jesus accessible and relevant to the Samaritans.

These varied expressions are used to convey a response to Jesus that entails faith and commitment, a reaction that the characters of the Gospel may embody to varying degrees or not at all. In assessing the reactions depicted in the Gospel, we will look at responses from Jesus or the narrator that either affirm or challenge a particular expression of faith and commitment, along with any links drawn to the reward of eternal life, which is the result of genuine belief. Using these markers is preferable to seeking evidence of imperfections in expressions of faith, as it may be that the response which Jesus accepts may still include some flaws.

1. **Introduction**

It has often been pointed out that Samaria and the Samaritans are a subject of particular concern to John. This interest is most evident in John 4:4–42, which relates Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob (next to the city of Sychar). During their conversation, Jesus succeeds in overcoming the obstacle of the controversies between Jews and Samaritans by expounding the faith he brings. Thus, by the end of their dialogue, the Samaritan woman expresses her belief in Jesus and alerts her fellow Samaritans that the Messiah has come. Afterwards, Jesus remains among the Samaritans for two days, and many of them come to believe in him. As John P. Meier has rightly stressed John 4:4–42 is 'the most explicit and well-informed passage about Samaritans in the New Testament'.1 The precise origin and significance of John 4:4–42 have sparked an intense scholarly debate. It has been contended, for instance, that the passage reflects John's willingness to foster the mission to 1 John P. Meier, 'The Historical Jesus and the Historical Samaritans: What Can Be Said?', Bib 81 (2000), pp. 202–32, at 229.

Questions of Ritual Purity in the second major issue addressed in John 4:4–42 concerns questions of ritual purity. the reason we believe that the charactor of Jesus and his disciples in this passage would have had a particular resonance for Jewish believers in Jesus. According to strict Pharisaic regulations, Jesus would have incurred defilement by his very encounter with the Samaritan woman.

The vessels of the Samaritan woman were not the only presumed vehicle of impurity. The passage clearly states that Jesus sat by the well from which the woman used to draw water. Thus, following the regulations mentioned above from Leviticus, Jesus would have become unclean from this physical contact. Moreover, merely by speaking with a Samaritan woman, he would have incurred the risk of becoming defiled by her drool, which was considered to be highly contaminating. Similarly, Jesus' subsequent encounter with Samaritan men was problematic concerning the purity laws (John 4:40). The ruling implied that, since Samaritan women were perpetually menstruants, their husbands were therefore under suspicion of having been defiled by them. Consequently, any contact with a Samaritan (either male or female) incurred defilement, while any place where a Samaritan had lain or sat was Levitical impure.

There is also a further consideration that warrants some attention. It is remarkable indeed that, according to the narrative, Jesus and his disciples showed themselves ready to eat Samaritan food. Thus, the disciples are reported to have 'gone to the city to buy food' (John 4:8); later on, when they came back, they urged Jesus to eat something (John 4:31). Additionally, the very fact that Jesus stayed for two days with the Samaritans (John 4:40) implies that he shared their food.

1. **The Topographical Details**

The setting of the account in Samaria and the few topographical details it contains presumably had strong resonances for Samaritans. John 4:4–42 is the only passage in the Gospels where Jesus himself is unambiguously described as having entered Samaritan country. In contradistinction, in Matthew (10:5b) Jesus is said to have expressly forbidden the apostles to enter into any city of the Samaritans. He did not infringe this prohibition going from Galilee through Transjordan (rather than Samaria) en route to Jerusalem was a matter of debate in post-destruction Jewish literature.

(Matt. 19:1).46 Likewise, Luke never clearly states that Jesus entered Samaritan territory. The emphasis put on the links between Sychar and the patriarchs in John 4:4–42 should also be stressed. The overwhelming view is that Sychar was located in the close vicinity of Shechem. John (4:5) describes it as being ‘near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph’. According to the book of Genesis, Jacob bequeathed a parcel of land ‘from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father' (Gen. 33:19), which he later gave to Joseph (Gen. 48:22); it was there that Joseph's bones were long afterwards interred (Josh. 24:32). Sychar is also depicted as the site of Jacob's well, of which there is no mention in the Old Testament.

Nonetheless, we note with Ellen B. Aitken that the well is mentioned in John 4:6 as if it were well known. Its identification is likely to have rested upon local tradition, as seems to be indicated by the Samaritan woman saying: 'our father Jacob, which gave us the well and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle' (John 4:12). It has been argued with some reason that the mention of Jacob and Joseph in John 4 was significant since the patriarchs in a generation.

1. **The socio-historical context of the Samaritan woman**

The Gospel accounts record a pattern where Jesus spent personal time with key people such as Zaccheus, Nicodemus, Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene and the Samaritan woman. In these times, he discussed pertinent subjects related to his mission. in the narative story of the Samaritan woman, the significance of Jesus crossing national and religious boundaries as well as his self-disclosure as Messiah may have been the focus of the encounter.

The Samaritans and Jews were divided by history and religion. King Omri named Samaria capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 16: 24). During the Assyrian exile of 722 BC, Israelites were deported from their land, foreigners intermarried with the surviving Israelites, and the people were called Samaritans". The Samaritans were considered racial half-breeds. Consequently, the Jews rejected the Samaritans. The Jewish/Samaritan historical background gives significance to the choice Jesus makes to travel through Samaria.

Given the aversion of the Jews to the Samaritans, this choice suggests the compulsion of divine appointment and not geography (Carson 1991, 216). Could it be that the meeting and discussion Jesus has with the Samaritan woman, where Jesus makes a significant self-disclosure, adds to the importance of the detour through Samaria? The fact that it is a woman with whom Jesus has a lengthy discussion in which he reveals his identity and divinity, could be a signal to Jesus" recognition of women and their role as influencers and change agents in a highly discriminatory context.

Jesus talks to the Samaritan woman as an equal. Several boundaries that would have made the conversation impossible are crossed. Firstly, it was not usual for a man to speak to a woman in public; yet Jesus does so with this woman. Secondly, there was the age-old hostility between Samaritans and Jews (Luke 9:51-53). Jesus crosses the bounds of national hatred (Hendricksen, 1989: 59) in his conversation with the Samaritan woman, as he has done in other parts of the Bible (Luke 9:54, 55; 10:25, 37; 17:10-11). Thirdly, in speaking to a woman, Jesus crossed a religious boundary. The Jews considered every Samaritan woman a menstruant (Hendricksen 1989: 59) and therefore, unclean. For Jesus to engage her in conversation and even ask a favour of her was unthinkable to the Jewish mind.

Notwithstanding these apparent barriers, Jesus has the dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well, and in this dialogue, he reveals his identity as Messiah. She, in turn, brings the townspeople of Sychar to see Jesus. The setting of this account in the first century is interpreted utilising a contemporary model of leadership to highlight the direction of the Samaritan woman.

Her perception of Jesus matures as she continues to dialogue with him. The progression of her perception is as follows: a Jew (4:9), a prophet (4:19), and the Messiah (4:29). Gradually, she crosses every social, cultural, and theological barrier that separates her from Jesus. Finally she she becomes the heroine who brings her people (the Samaritans) to Jesus, and people blive that Christ is the Saviour of the world (4:42). The plot of this episode resembles Aristotle's comic mimesis, where a morally flawed person experiences "undeserved good fortune". The Samaritan woman, despite all her negative characteristics, manages to see the truth by the end of the episode. Thus, she becomes an example for the reader to follow. B. The Master of Irony: Jesus Jesus is again the eirōn in this episode. Jesus’ initial request, “Give me a drink” (4:8) is uncustomary because he is crossing the social and cultural boundaries of the day. The response of the Samaritan woman clarifies the dissonance because Jesus is a Jew, and she is a Samaritan.

1. **The Functions of the Irony in the Samaritan Woman**

Episode Now, we will discuss the four functions of irony in the Samaritan woman episode. The irony here aims to persuade readers to believe in Jesus because he is indeed the Saviour of the world (4:42). The satire subverts the division between the readers and Jesus through the example of the Samaritan woman. As demonstrated in the ironic characterisation, the Samaritan woman is portrayed as a victim of the irony while Jesus is the master of the irony. In the analysis of the two-level phenomenon, the Samaritan woman is at the lower level of irony while Jesus is at a higher level, causing the readers to favour Jesus over the Samaritan woman. The irony revolves around the identity of Jesus, which the reader knows better than the Samaritan woman. Thus, the reader can grasp the situational irony and verbal irony in this episode.

Nonetheless, the ironic division between Jesus and the Samaritan woman becomes smaller as the story progresses. The Samaritan woman changes her perspective from being concerned about drinking water (4:11) to be worried about the worship of God (4:20). Her perception of Jesus also changes from a Jew (4:9) to a prophet (4:19). Finally, the ironic division ends in John 4:39-42 as the Samaritans believe in Jesus as the Saviour of the world. As readers follow the conversation, they too are challenged to change their perception of Jesus and to believe in him as their Saviour. In terms of the sociological functions, the irony in this episode subverts the social and cultural boundaries that hinder people from accepting Jesus. Jesus crosses the social and cultural barriers as he initiates the conversation with the Samaritan woman and reveals his identity to her.

Meanwhile, the Samaritan woman crosses social, cultural, and theological barriers to receive Jesus. Jesus also affirms the universality of the eschatological worship in John 4:22-24, where worship is no longer limited to any ethnic group or geographical location. In the new age, which is at the point of encountering Jesus (4:23), true worshippers will worship God through Jesus.167 The most explicit declaration of the universality of God’s salvation plan is John 4:42, where the Samaritans declare that Jesus is the Saviour of the world. 168 Carson suggests that the Samaritan woman episode probably represents the first cross-cultural evangelism effort and serves as an example for the church to evangelise to the ends of the earth.

 The theological function of the irony in this episode conveys the message regarding Jesus asks the Samaritan woman for a drink (4:8), but ironically he is the giver of living water (4:10). The discussion of (4:4-15) leads to the debate of true worship (4:20-24), and the revealing of Jesus’ identity as the Messiah (4:25-27). Ultimately, the episode ends with the proclamation of Jesus as the Saviour of the world. In the dialogue, Jesus implies that he is the gift of God (4:10) which surpasses the well of Jacob and the temples in Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim (4:23-24). Hence, those who desire to worship the Father must accept the gift of the living water that is Jesus.

1. **The Biblical Motif of an Encounter at a Well**

Various scholars have argued that John 4:4–42 draws on the recurrent biblical motif of an encounter at a well, and most specifically from Gen. 24:10–21, which tells of the meeting of Abraham’s servant with Rebecca, when he was sent to look for a wife for Isaac. Other similar parallels are to be found in Gen. 29:2–12, which relates Jacob’s encounter with Rachel at the well in Haran, and Exod. 2:15–17. Some have interpreted the marital imagery in John 4 as a symbolic device; Mark W. G. Stibbe, for instance, has claimed that ‘John 4 is an ironic betrothal scene in which infidelity is false worship and marriage true worship’. For others, Jesus is depicted as entering into a spiritual marriage with the Samaritan woman, which was to result in the conversion of the Samaritan people. A more practical explanation may be proposed: by using this pattern, the author of John 4:4–42 sought to defend the legitimacy of marital unions between Jews and Samaritans. The question of Jewish–Samaritan intermarriages.

1. **example of a biblical story wherein the notion "water of life."**

Is the site of confusion, contestation, and ultimately reinterpretation is that of the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John? In John 4, a thirsty Jesus approaches a Samaritan woman and asks her for a drink of water. Yet this is no simple or straightforward request. Instead, a conversation about the "water of life" ensues (De Wit 2008:44), wherein it becomes apparent that the underlying relationships between water, life, and thirst are rhetorically ambiguous and open for reinterpretation. At first, Jesus approaches the Samaritan woman with a request for water. The mutual experience of thirst draws Jesus and this unnamed woman together (De Wit 2008:43). However, not only does the shared experience of thirst enable the ensuing conversation on water, but it also frames the discussion about water.

 It is, I would argue, of rhetorical significance in what follows as the contestation of what "water of life" means. The importance of the "water of life" is defined precisely in the characteristic or ability to satisfy thirst permanently – a quality that the water in the well does not share. A clear distinction between the Samaritan woman's water and Jesus' water, between well water and living water, is maintained in the experience of thirst – an experience that becomes the litmus test for distinguishing one kind of water from another. It is worth considering some of the many meanings of the "living water" – that is the topic of conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman – in greater detail. Yet the Samaritan woman wonders where one can get this living water (John 4:12). In response to her question, Jesus portrays water not only as life but also as a gift freely given.

On the one hand, this story illustrates the giver of the gift. The water of life is the gift that Jesus gives, whereas the water in the well is the gift that Jacob gave (Ngewa 2006:1259). Alternatively, Jesus is the gift of God who, in turn, gives the water of life (Haenchen 1984:220).

1. **The Question of the True Holy Site**

Our account also raises the contentious issue of the dedicated holy site (John 4:20–4), generally regarded as the main obstacle between Jews and Samaritans. From the vantage point of most Jews, the veneration of Mount Gerizim and the rejection of Jerusalem were undoubtedly the most critical constitutive of Mount Gerizim and acceptance of Jerusalem as the only place of worship. In John 4, the question of the proper place of worship is introduced from a glaringly Jewish perspective; Jesus is explicitly identified as a Jew (John 4:9), and as such he is questioned by the Samaritan woman said that the place where the people must worship is in Jerusalem', John 4:20). His treatment of this issue, though, is exceptional. In reply to the woman's query about the proper place of worship, Jesus says: 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain (Mount Gerizim) nor in Jerusalem' (John 4:21). This account was aimed' Salvation is from the Jews' A further perplexing question is raised by Jesus' declaration that 'salvation is from the Jews' (John 4:22b). This verse has been interpreted in divergent ways; Bultmann and others have seen it as a later gloss because it does not fit with the seeming hostility of the Fourth Gospel towards the Jews. In this respect, John 4:22 has often been compared to John 8:31–59, generally regarded as the most anti-Jewish text of the Fourth Gospel (and in which Jesus is charged with being a Samaritan and having a demon; John 8:48). This apparent dissonance at urging Samaritans to abandon worship at Gerizim. Elements of the Samaritan community. It is indeed quite likely that Samaritans felt uneasy with the belief that the expected redeemer had Jewish origins so that it was necessary to justify Jesus' Jewish roots to them.

1. **The Five Husbands of the Samaritan Woman**

The previous and current one who is not her husband. Keener lists three ways of interpreting this verse. First, the five husbands are symbolic references to the five nations settled in Samaria in Second Kings 17:24, or to the five gods of Second Kings 17:30-31.101 Second, the woman was marginalised for reasons such as infertility. Third, she was widowed five times for unknown reasons (perhaps the death of the husbands). Of the three interpretations, the second and third are more probable.

Nonetheless, the rabbis permitted a widow to marry a second or at most a third time. Thus, no matter what the reasons were behind the marital history of the Samaritan woman, she had violated the customs of the day. As Keener rightly concludes, the Samaritan woman may have lost some husbands through death. Still, her coming to the well alone (4:7), her possible designs on Jesus (4:17), and her current nonmarital sexual union (4:18) together would probably suggest to most ancient readers that she had somehow morally warranted at least part of her situation. Moreover, the relationship that the Samaritan woman is currently having can be interpreted as a scandalous relationship or a cohabitation relationship. Even though feminist scholars try to redeem the status of the Samaritan woman, readers in antiquity with their stereotypical perspectives would probably see her as a shameful woman. Because of the betrothal type-scene, her marital background serves as an ironic signal from the author, which hints to the reader of dramatic irony.

As Culpepper concludes, “the woman is no marriageable maiden” Nevertheless, she does not remain as a victim of the irony through the entire episode. Her perception of Jesus matures as she continues to dialogue with him. The progression of her perception is as follows: a Jew (4:9), a prophet (4:19), and the Messiah (4:29). Gradually, she crosses every social, cultural, and theological barrier that separates her from Jesus. As gradual conservation, she becomes the heroine who brings her people (the Samaritans) to Jesus, and they accept him as the Saviour of the world (4:42). The plot of this episode resembles Aristotle's comic mimesis, where a morally flawed person experiences "undeserved good fortune".

Jesus’ initial request, “Give me a drink” (4:8) is uncustomary because he is crossing the social and cultural boundaries of the day.

 Jesus begins the discourse by requesting for water from the Samaritan woman (4:7). As mentioned in the analysis of the characters, Jesus' request initiates the irony of the episode. The Samaritan woman replies with astonishment that Jesus, a Jew, would ask her, a Samaritan, for a drink (4:9). She is responding correctly according to the custom of the day where Jews and Samaritans do not share things in common. Comments that the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman was indeed scandalous for the society of that time. The Samaritan woman chooses to interpret these symbols based on the surface meanings. She misunderstands the “living water” as “running water” from the well (4:11a). Thus, she remains at the lower level of the story world.

1. **Faith response of the Samaritan women**

Jesus intended his claim to be an invitation to discover his identity. This is demonstrated as Jesus clarifies to the Samaritan woman that it is, she who should be asking him (Jesus) for the living water instead if she knew about his identity (4:10). Thus, Jesus’ request is intended to draw the Samaritan woman attention to his identity. Jesus uses a similar technique in John 4:16, where he says, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” The request is not merely a simple change of topic. The real intention of the proposal is to help the Samaritan woman and the reader to see Jesus as the revelation of God.116 It starts a discussion that changes the Samaritan woman’s perception of Jesus (4:19). Like the previous episode (with Nicodemus), Jesus uses double intenders and symbols to undermine the Samaritan woman. In this episode, the key phrase that Jesus uses is a double entendre for it could either be “spring water” or “living water”.

The phrase is also a symbol alluding to the water imagery from the Hebrew Bible (cf. Isaiah 49:10; 58:11; Jeremiah 31:25; Amos 8:11f; Psalms 107:5, 9). In John 4:32, Jesus uses a similar ironic technique on his disciples with the word "food", but Jesus meant it to be, "to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work" (4:34The usages of double extenders and characters establish the two levels of meaning in this episode. They invite the reader to read more in-depth into the literal meaning of the words and to decide for themselves the appropriate definition.

Similar to the Nicodemus episode, the irony in this episode also separates the world of the story into two, where Jesus is at the higher level, and the Samaritan woman is at the lower level (the disciples of Jesus also fall into the lower level). The Samaritan woman replies with astonishment that Jesus, a Jew, would ask her, a Samaritan, for a drink (4:9). She is responding correctly according to the custom of the day where Jews and Samaritans do not share things in common. Jesus continues to speak with the Samaritan woman and gradually reveals himself to her. The Samaritan woman chooses to interpret these symbols based on the surface meanings. She misunderstands the “living water” as “running water” from the well (4:11a). Thus, she remains at the lower level of the story world. Based on her false assumption of she challenges Jesus for not being more significant than Jacob, who had provided the physical well (4:12).

The woman tries to avoid the issue by replying with an ironic understatement, saying that she does not have a husband. Jesus exposes her irony by saying that she is right (ironically as well); for she has been five husbands, and the one she is living with is not her legal husband (4:18). With the betrothal type-scene in mind, the reader would find that the Samaritan woman is not the right candidate for a wife.

Nevertheless, Jesus' words certainly change the Samaritan woman's perspective towards him. As Michaels notes, the Samaritan woman is "amazed at his (Jesus') knowledge of her past and present". Her attitude toward Jesus has progressed from a "Jew" to a "prophet" (4:19). She changes her focus and begins to ask Jesus about the proper place to worship (4:20). Even though she recognises Jesus as a prophet, she still holds on to the division between "our ancestors" and "you" (plural).

Nonetheless, without her knowing, she is opening a discussion that will reveal the identity of the Messiah. Therefore, the Samaritan woman may worship God if she accepts Jesus. Rightly explains, If the woman can recognise that she is speaking with the person who makes the eschatological age a present reality, she will be able to participate in the spirit as a true worshipper. If not, the ironic distance between her perspective and Jesus' will remain.

However, the Samaritan woman is still unable to comprehend the message in totality. She only manages to follow part of Jesus' words but misses the most crucial point: the person who fulfils the eschatological promise is here right now (4:25). She is still expecting another Messiah to fulfil what Jesus has just mentioned. At this point, Jesus reveals himself as the Messiah (4:26). When the disciples return, the narrator informs the readers that the Samaritan woman leaves her water jar and goes back to the city (4:28). The reason that she came to the well was to draw water, and she has now found a new reason after encountering Jesus. She persuades the people to go and see Jesus by saying, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" (4:29). She still doubts whether Jesus is the Messiah.

1. **Jesus response: call to believe personally.**

Nevertheless, her action of persuading the people to see Jesus shows her sincerity in finding out more about Jesus. She is getting very close to the higher level of the story world. The Samaritans go to Jesus because of her testimony, and they believe that Jesus is indeed the Saviour of the world (4:42). The narrator does not conclude explicitly whether the Samaritan woman finally believes in Jesus. Yet, based on the statement by the Samaritans in John 4:42, we may surmise that she believes in Jesus and her testimony has convinced the Samaritans to go to Jesus. Highlights that “witness to Jesus” is the primary mark of discipleship in the Gospel of John.

In summary, the Samaritan woman begins as a victim of the irony and places herself on the lower level of the story world. Jesus, on the higher level, provides the necessary knowledge to her so that her perception of him (Jesus) may progress. Generally, at the end of the episode, the ironic division between Jesus and the woman ends with the Samaritans believing in Jesus as the Saviour of the world (4:42). Thus, the irony of the episode is intended to persuade the readers to join the Samaritans in accepting Jesus as their Saviour.

1. **The Messiah**

The next important issue dealt with in the dialogue is that of the person of the Messiah (John 4:25–6). This topic is developed progressively throughout the whole conversation. John P. Meier, indeed, has pointed out that the understanding of the woman evolves in the course of her encounter with Jesus: she refers to him successively as 'a Jew' (John 4:9), 'Lord' (John 4:11), 'a prophet' (John 4:19), and 'the Messiah' (John 4:29). The climax of this progression is reached when the Samaritans recognise in Jesus the 'Saviour of the world' (John 4:42). Interestingly, this account reveals some elements of Samaritan teleology, or at least shows the Samaritans had eschatological expectations that Jesus, according to John, came to fulfil. Thus, the Samaritan woman says to Jesus: 'I know that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ). When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us' (John 4:25). The same belief is further expressed when she tells her brethren: 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' (John 4:29).

. The portrayal of Jesus as instituting worship 'in spirit and truth' also needs to be further considered (John 4:21–4). Here it may be relevant to quote Weeks's conclusion on the story mentioned above of a Samaritan uprising in the days of Pilate. In his opinion, the man who promised to recover the buried sacred vessels wished to restore worship on Mount Gerizim; Meeks have inferred from this that there was at the time a Samaritan expectancy that their proper cult would soon be re-established. Further, he has noted that according to Memar Marka, the Taheb will restore true worship. In the light of this, it may be argued that Jesus fulfilled, but in a radically divergent way, the hopes of the Samaritans by establishing the 'true' form of worshipping the Father.

1. **Excursus: The Reflection of Jesus**

In this episode, the evangelist carefully guides the reader from one character to another. When the disciples return, the narrator informs the readers that the Samaritan woman leaves her water jar and goes back to the city (4:28). This is a "dual stage-setting" where two scenes are happening at the same time. The dialogue between Jesus and his disciples occurs at the front stage, while the Samaritan woman sharing her testimony takes place at the back of the stage. These two scenes are inter-related, where each provides the context for the respective dialogues. Jesus is acting like the Samaritan woman, questioning the Samaritan woman in their hearts (4:27). Just as the Samaritan woman is ignorant about the identity of Jesus, the disciples are clueless about what happened between Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

When the disciples ask Jesus to eat, he replies with verbal irony, saying, “I have food that you do not know about” (4:32). Jesus is using the same ironic technique that he did earlier with the Samaritan woman. As a result, the disciples misunderstand as “ordinary food” just like the Samaritan woman mistakes as “running water” (4:33). Jesus explains that his food is to do the will of the one who sent him (4:34). This provides the reason why the narrator says that Jesus must go through Samaria (4:4). Then, Jesus uses the metaphor of a harvest field (4:35-38) to explain about his ministry and the current situation. Carson comments that John 4:36 is probably alluding to Amos 9:13, “The time is surely coming, says the LORD, when the one who ploughs shall overtake the one who reaps, and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed.”

The content of John 4:4-26 provides the readers with the necessary background to interpret the dialogue between Jesus and his disciples (4:31-38). The conversation between Jesus and the disciples (4:35-38) foreshadows the outcome of the episode in John 4:39-42 and reinforces the key message of the attack, which is the identity of Jesus. In the mode of this, a reader of scripture could know the purpose of Jesus coming to Samaria.

 XIII.  **Conclusion**

What is essential in today's reading of the Holy Gospel is that Christ engages in dialogue, From the Jewish point of view of that time, the characterisation of that woman as Samaritan underscores her status as an ethnic stranger, a foreigner, an illegitimate occupier of Jewish land, but also as a religious enemy: a heretic. It is precise of this religious difference that the woman reminds Jesus when she observes: "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (John 4:9). The evangelist offers then the following gloss: “For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.” The verb employed here suggests a ritual prohibition against sharing the same utensils. It is, therefore, an interdiction against koinonia, against inter-communion; a prohibition against the community created by those who break bread together. In the course of their conversation, and as soon as the Samaritan woman has perceived something of Jesus's identity, she returns to the question of religion in its most eminent sense, for it is a question about the orthodoxy of worship, of the right place of worshipping God Jesus’s answer suggests a radical movement away from the uncritical adherence to religious traditions and their idolatrous preoccupations that split our reality into sacred and secular places.

We need religion and theology (notice how the Samaritan woman’s question “where we ought to worship God?” was a theological question, and from the outset, she engages Jesus in a theological dialogue), but we need religion and theology to avoid God. Confronted with the ultimate—after all, she stands in front of him—the Samaritan woman cannot do otherwise but ask for (more) time, tarry a bit longer over the present, delay, as only religion can, the encounter with Him: The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us (John 4:25). The answer she receives constitutes her own “call to discipleship.” For leaving behind her water jar (John 4:28) in the same way that the disciples had earlier left behind their fishing nets, she went to her village to announce the good news of finding the Messiah.

The Samaritan woman, without being aware, becomes a victim of situational irony. When Jesus asks her for a drink (4:7), the woman responds by emphasising the social and cultural boundaries between Jesus and herself (4:9). The gloss in John 4:9, “Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans”, provides the historical background for the division between Jews and Samaritans. Hence, she seems to be reacting naturally in keeping with the socio-cultural customs of the day. Yet, ironically, she is responding incorrectly as she is not aware of the identity of Jesus.

Nonetheless, it might be thought that the encounter would not have been understood this way by the Samaritan woman, or by the contemporary readers of John’s account. But I think it can be demonstrated that the Samaritan woman did indeed understand what Jesus was saying, and thus it is likely that the contemporary readers would have done so as well.

Firstly, I suggest the actual location of the encounter is significant. There are some apparent connections in this story recorded in John 4:5–29 with previous meetings at a well that resulted in marriage (Isaac and Rebekah, Gen 24:14–16; Jacob and Rachel, Gen 29:1–20; Moses and Zipporah, Exod 2:15–17, 21).

They worshipped the true God, but they also had a history of involvement with the cults of five different nations—these were referred to as the five false gods of Samaria, as demonstrated by Josephus in his writings.31 An account of these false gods is found in 2 Kings 17:24‒34. It is no surprise then that the Samaritans were looked down on by their Jewish neighbours because of their mixed blood, their false gods, and the fact they had their temple on Mount Gerizim which, however, the Samaritans insisted that Moses had designated as the place where the nation should worship. In summary, there were two issues relating to their worship—the five false gods, and the true God the Samaritans worshipped, but at the wrong temple. So, we have the location of the account in the Gospel, the actual site of the story at a well, the substantial intertextual clues, and the reference to the woman's marital status—all these points to a married imagery theme.

 In other words, I suggest that Jesus was purposefully moving to the point he wanted to make—that he is the Bridegroom Messiah, the Saviour of the Jews, the Gentiles, and even of the Samaritans. He is the Christ who is going to sweep away the idea that God could only be worshipped in a particular place. Thus, Jesus points to her five husbands and the fact that the man she is presently co-habiting with is not her husband. The five husbands echo the five false Samaritan gods.

It is therefore suggested that in this conversation with Jesus, the woman is serving as a symbol for lost Israel, just as had Hosea's wife, Gomer, in a previous century. It seems that Jesus is offering the woman, and through her, the Samaritan people (divorced Israel), in this traditional Jewish setting for betrothals, redemption in a new marriage.

This encounter with the Samaritan woman implies that Jesus fully understood his role in that imagery and the significance of it. And as marital imagery is an integral part of all the Gospels, it is difficult to see how this Christology could be a later addition. Thus, this conversation with the woman from Samaria is an indication that Jesus had a self-perception of his deity, and in relating this encounter in some detail, it seems clear that John had seen it also—and was telling his readers such in his account of that meeting.

  **IVX. Bibliography**

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