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The Divine Identity of Jesus in John 4

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Abstract

The account of the Samaritan woman and her encounter with Jesus places significant attention upon Jesus' identity. Yet like the Samaritan woman it is possible to fail to see beyond the surface presentation of Jesus as an essentially human Messiah and into the deeper significance of Jesus' words and actions that convey his divine identity. Jesus takes on God's role as giver of the Spirit (4:10), by taking on a divine prerogative in determining the location of worship (John 4:21–24) and replacing the temple with himself as God's presence. Jesus is shown as the bringer of divine salvation (4:22). He takes on the role he ascribes to God in seeking true worshippers (4:23), before alluding to his divine identity declaring 'I am' (4:26). This connects Jesus' divine identity with his messianic identity, presenting Jesus as the divine Messiah.

The story of Jesus in Samaria in John 4 is a classic example of Johannine misunderstanding.[1] The Samaritan woman struggles to grasp Jesus' identity, misinterpreting his words about 'living water' (4:10–15), by taking them in a physical rather than symbolic sense. But what if readers interpret the story like the woman interpreted Jesus, understanding the surface meaning but failing to recognise the deeper symbolism of the encounter? John draws attention to Jesus' identity with the question that Jesus raises, 'who is speaking to you' (4:10). The opening scene presents a very human Jesus, arriving at the well tired from his travels (4:6).[2] The following narrative depicts Jesus' identity in terms of prophet (4:19), Messiah (4:25,29), and the 'Saviour of the World' (4:42). For the woman, though, there is the sense of a journey incomplete. While she accepts Jesus is a prophet, she only questions whether he is the Messiah. Her announcement to her village and their confession in 4:42 suggests a positive conclusion to her questioning. Yet Jesus' response in 4:26 also points to her need to continue to go deeper in understanding his identity. On one level, Jesus' words are an admission that he is the Messiah. At the same time, the use of ἐγώ εἰμι (I am) and its divine use in Isaiah form an implicit claim to divinity—a depth to Jesus' identity that the woman does not yet recognise.

The implications of the 'I am' in 4:26 should point the reader towards a deeper understanding. Yet it is possible to overlook the symbolic significance in Jesus' words that, like the 'I am', point

1 On Johannine misunderstanding, see esp. Carson, 'Understanding Misunderstandings',.

2 Thompson, *Humanity of Jesus*, 3.

towards his divine identity. A focus on a non-divine messianic presentation of Jesus in John 4 is evident in previous scholarship.[3] It has explored the prophetic and revelatory dimension, including connections to the Samaritan concept of the *Taheb*, a primarily revelatory messianic figure.[4] At other times a royal dimension is seen, as with the imperial resonances of Saviour of the World.[5] A common feature of such approaches is a focus on what the characters within the story could have perceived about Jesus' identity at the time. While this accounts for the interaction between Jesus and his audiences within the narrative, it fails to appreciate the full picture of Jesus' identity as presented to the audience of the Gospel.[6]

When Jesus speaks to the woman, there is a surface meaning and a deeper symbolism, and the situation is similar for the reader. When the significance of Jesus' words is recognised, there are implications for Christology, as we see Jesus taking on divine roles. The connections are conveyed in part through scriptural links, some of which may have been accessible to the woman in the story but are more evident for the reader. Aside from the implications of 'I am' in 4:26, these scriptural links that convey Jesus' divine identity have been given little attention. The close connection between the implicit presentation of Jesus as divine and his identity as Messiah further suggests that beyond a kingly or prophetic messiah, this story functions to present Jesus as a divine messiah. Rather than focusing on the human messianic dimensions, there is a need to see the way scriptural connections are used to construct an implicit presentation of Jesus as divine.

1. A Gospel Communicating to an Audience

In order to appreciate the way in which the Gospel works for the audience, it is vital to recognise the two levels at which the text works. At one level, the Gospel relates the story of the events of Jesus' ministry, while at another level it arranges and frames the elements of the story for the Gospel audience.[7] The work of literary theorist Seymour Chatman has previously been applied to the Gospel, and his categories of the story level and discourse level respectively are useful for understanding the function of the two levels in the text.[8] The story level refers to the characters and events within the narrative. The discourse level, which will be the focus here, is the communication between the author and the audience. It encompasses the way in which the story is told, including the words or actions that are highlighted, the choice of words which may introduce ambiguity, or may link together events. It also encompasses the input of the narrator

3 Those considering Jesus in John 4 in human messianic terms include: Loader, *Jesus in John's Gospel*, 76; Kruse, *John*, 148–51; Michaels, *John*, 256–7; Carson, *John*, 224; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 61. Where development in Christology is identified in John 4, it is an expansion of scope from Messiah of Israel to saviour of the world. Thompson, *John*, 95–96. In discussions of Jesus' divine identity, John 4 is overlooked, as seen in Schnelle's chapter where in the section on divine identity, the only reference to John 4:1–42 refers to Jesus completing his work (4:30). Schnelle, 'The Person of Jesus', 322.

4 On Samaritan messianic ideas, see Coloe, *God Dwells with Us*, 101–2; MacDonald, *Theology of the Samaritans*, 359–71.

5 On the imperial connections of 'Saviour of the World', see Koester, 'Saviour of the World', 665–80. Schnackenburg also notes the 'element of majesty and royalty'. Schnackenburg, *John*, 1:458.

6 Botha is one who focuses more on the audience of the Gospel, but the concern is primarily on the effect of the text rather than on Christology. Botha, *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman*.

7 The two levels at which the narrative operates have been recognised by Frey, *Glory of the Crucified One*, 93–7; Carson, 'Understanding Misunderstandings', 81.

8 Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 19, 43. On the application of Chatman's theory to the Gospel of John, see Seglenieks, 'Faith and Narrative', 23–40. These two levels are not to be confused with the two levels advocated by Martyn, *History and Theology*.

that may explain further the events of the story. The Prologue demonstrates the narrator's role as it sets the readers up as a privileged audience, knowing more of Jesus' identity than the characters within the story. Recognising this way that narratives work facilitates posing two distinct sets of questions, one focusing on the depiction of the events of Jesus' ministry, and the other examining the interaction between the Gospel and its audience. At the story level, John presents Christology with historically plausible details, such as the disciples' lack of christological understanding (2:22; 12:16; 20:9), or the similarly incomplete understanding of the Samaritan woman. Yet the author also explains to the audience his post-resurrection understanding of the true significance of Jesus' words and deeds. To fully come to grips with the Johannine text, we must also ask the question of how the text is shaped to present the identity of Jesus to the Gospel audience.

If we are to consider the interaction between text and audience, we must outline what the audience is assumed to know beyond the text of the Gospel. In what was likely a mixed Jewish and Gentile audience, knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures can be presupposed for the Jewish component, while their prominence in the early church means a Gentile audience would likely also be, or would soon become, familiar with them.[9] Thus, texts such as Deuteronomy and Isaiah can be assumed as part of the repertoire the early audience brings to the text.

More controversially, some of the following arguments will involve reading John alongside Revelation. Rather than arguing for a direct literary connection or common authorship, the two texts represent a shared theological thought world. The texts are connected by a similar place and time of origin. For John, at least the final stages of composition are located by most scholars in Ephesus, often around A.D. 80–90.[10] Revelation is tied to Asia Minor by the text itself, both by placing John on Patmos (1:9) and in the seven churches addressed, including Ephesus (1:11). The predominant dating of Revelation is to the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81–96), following Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 5.30.3, which coincides with the dating of the Gospel of John.[11] Modern scholars tend to reject common authorship, yet Alan Culpepper and Martin Hengel identify the Gospel and Revelation as either emerging from a common group or showing links at an earlier stage in their composition.[12] This commonality means that Revelation provides evidence of the thought world of the Gospel audience; thus we can use Revelation to add to our understanding of the audience's repertoire. While audience knowledge of the text of Revelation cannot be assumed, the concepts within Revelation can be used to guide the interpretation of what may be implied or assumed in

9 On a mixed audience for John, see Klink, *Sheep of the Fold,* 176–7; Koester, 'The Spectrum of Johannine Readers', 5–19; Hengel, *The Johannine Question,* 119. On drawing conclusions about the real audience based upon the implied audience see Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel,* 211–23; De Boer, 'Narrative Criticism', 35–48.

10 The early sources for locating the Gospel in Ephesus include: Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.1.1, 2.22.5 and Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.1.1, 3.23.6, 5.8.4. On the early witnesses to the place and authorship of the Gospel, see esp. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses,* 412–71. On the date and setting of the Gospel, see Klink, *John,* 59–60; Thompson, *John,* 20–22; Frey, 'The Diaspora-Jewish Background', 190; Hengel, *The Johannine Question,* 119–33; Barrett, *John,* 128–32.

11 On the date and setting of Revelation, see Paul, *Revelation,* 11–22; Beale, *Revelation,* 4–33; Aune, *Revelation,* 1:xlvii–lxx.

12 Culpepper, *The Johannine School,* 1–5; Hengel, *The Johannine Question,* 126–7; Frey, 'Erwägungen zum Verhältnis', 329–49; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation,* 36. Not all scholars reject common authorship. Most recently, the connection between the Gospel and Revelation is advocated by Behr, *John the Theologian,* 72–76. Modern as well as ancient assertions of common authorship (such as Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 4.20.11, Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.16.141.7) add weight to the argument that the two texts are at least theologically aligned. While some early sources reject common authorship (such as Dionysius of Alexandria, in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.25.6–7), these come later and often in the context of theological controversies where contested interpretations of Revelation feature.

the Gospel, reflecting how an early audience may have understood the text of the Gospel.[13]

The final methodological consideration is to outline how the Gospel communicates to the reader in John 4. Unlike in the Prologue, in John 4 the narrator does not make explicit chistological statements. The audience is not directly given information beyond what those present could have known. In the absence of such narration, we must consider more implicit features that convey Jesus' identity. The consideration of implicit Christology builds on the work of Jerome Neyrey and Richard Bauckham.[14] Neyrey examines sections of the Gospel, making the argument that the attribution of God's creative and eschatological powers to Jesus in John 5 is the way that the evangelist seeks to portray Jesus as equal to God.[15] Bauckham investigates the ways Jesus shares in the divine identity by taking on roles that are uniquely God's.[16] Bauckham's focus is upon God as creator and as sovereign Lord as the two defining features of God in his relationship to the world. These approaches to implicit Christology can be extended to consider the ways in which Jesus is shown in John 4 as fulfilling a role or acting in a way that is ascribed to God.

2. Divine Identity in John 4

A shift of focus from Jesus' identity as perceived by the Samaritan woman to the way it is presented to the reader, reveals no less than six indicators of Jesus' divine identity.

2.1 Jesus, Giver of the Spirit

The first allusion to Jesus' divine identity comes in the verse which raises his identity as a key issue in the dialogue. Jesus offers to give living water (4:10), a provision that leads to eternal life (4:14).[17] The idea of living water echoes Exodus and the provision of water by God at Meribah, water that sustains God's people in the wilderness (Exod. 17:1–7; cf. Ps. 68:8–9).[18] This is an initial allusion to Jesus as divine, as he takes on the role that God took for his people in Exodus by providing living water.

The image of living water, in the context of the Temple themes of this chapter, also alludes to Ezekiel 47:1–12. There too God provides flowing water, this time coming from the Temple rather than a rock. It is not a natural phenomenon, as the water flowing out gets deeper and wider as

13 See for example Keener's use of Revelation to explain 'worship in the Spirit' in 4:21–24; Keener, *John*, 1:616. This approach has a long history, as Origen (*Comm. Jo.* 1.1–3) presents Revelation as providing an interpretative key for the Gospel.

14 Neyrey, *Ideology of Revolt*; Bauckham, *God Crucified*; with further development in his later book *Jesus and the God of Israel*. Cf. McGrath, *John's Apologetic Christology*; Loader, *Jesus in John's Gospel*, 331–7.

15 Neyrey, *Ideology*, 9–36. Cf. Koester, *Word of Life*, 100–1.

16 Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 25–42. While the characteristics explored in this article are not as unequivocally divine as those which Bauckham focuses upon, the framework of Jesus as divine in John (1:1; 20:28) along with the collocation of so many indicators of divine identity, justifies a broader range.

17 While there is no explicit connection, often commentators connect the 'gift of God' with the 'living water' and understand both as referring to the gift of the Spirit, thus: Thompson, *John*, 99–101; Michaels, *John*, 241. Others see the gift as revelatory, linked to Torah, thus: Carson, *John*, 218; Barrett, *John*, 233.

18 Willoughby argues that the water in John 4 is about purification, but the echoes of Meribah and the eschatological temple of Ezekiel both point to a life-giving water, not a cleansing water. The context in John 4 is one of a thirsty Jesus needing water to drink not wash. The mention of Samaritans not having dealings with Jews may suggest an element of clean/unclean in the scene but there is no language of cleansing or purification. Willoughby, 'The Word Became Flesh', 135–6. Curiously, Estelle omits John in his work on Exodus in the rest of Scripture, *Echoes of Exodus*.

it goes. An explanation for the symbolic significance of the water comes in John 7:37–39. Jesus speaks of living water flowing from his belly, adapting the image of Ezekiel in light of the temple replacement theme.[19] The narrator explains to the Gospel audience that the water symbolises the gift of the Spirit. Returning to John 4, by offering the gift of living water, Jesus is offering to give the Holy Spirit.[20] In the Old Testament, it is God who gives his Spirit (Num. 11:25–30; 1 Sam. 16:13–14; Ps. 51:11; Isa. 42:1; 44:3; 61:1; Joel 2:28), while from a Johannine perspective the Spirit is beyond human comprehension (John 3:8) and its gift is not to be understood in worldly terms (14:26–27), thus making the gift of the Spirit an action only God can take. The narrator's explicit commentary in John 7 enables the audience to understand the symbolism of Jesus' words in John 4, and therefore to see how Jesus is presented as sharing the divine identity on account of his ability to give the Spirit.

2.2 Jesus and the Place of Worship

The next indicator of Jesus' divine identity in John 4 is the role he assumes in determining the place of worship.[21] In response to the question about the right place of worship, Jesus states, 'Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem' (4:21). This statement functions as a declaration regarding the right place to worship God. The discussion of worship in 4:21–24 is more complex than merely denoting an alternative physical location for worship. Nevertheless, the focus in the opening verses (4:20–21) on physical places of worship means that we must consider earlier biblical paradigms regarding the right place to worship God.

The key passage for framing a biblical perspective on the right place to worship God is Deuteronomy 12.[22] Deuteronomy directs the people of Israel to worship the Lord in the place which he will choose (Deut. 12:5,11,18,21,26). This is an injunction against taking over the sacred places of those in the land before them (Deut. 12:1–4). But it also establishes that the determination of the location of worship is a divine prerogative.

Both Jews and Samaritans accepted this divine injunction. The Samaritans believed that Mt Gerizim was the place that God had chosen for worship. Drawing solely on the Pentateuch, their beliefs rested upon the role of Shechem, located beside Mt Gerizim, as the place where Abraham first sacrificed in the land (Gen. 12:6–7). Further, Mt Gerizim is the place where the terms of the covenant were declared (Deut. 11:29–30; 27:12). The Jews, however, identified Jerusalem as the

19 Beale, *Temple and The Church's Mission*, 196. There is debate as to whether the water flows from Jesus or the believer; the role of giving the Spirit is not attributed to believers at any other point, making the latter option unlikely. Favouring Jesus as the source see Brown, *John*, 1:320–21; Lincoln, *John*, 254–5; Bennema, 'The Giving of the Spirit', 199–200; Marcus, 'Rivers of Living Water', 328–30. For the believer as the source see Michaels, *John*, 463–65; Carson, *John*, 322–9.

20 For an extensive argument that in John 4, 'living water' represents the Spirit and not revelation, see Um, *Theme of Temple*, 130–66; cf. Brown, *Spirit in the Writings of John*, 134–5.

21 As a possible further indicator of Jesus' divine identity, Jesus' knowledge about the woman and her situation (4:17–18) may be accounted as an instance of divine omniscience, as suggested by Haenchen, *John*, 1:222. However, the woman does not take it as such, rather interpreting it as merely prophetic knowledge. If the audience of the Gospel accepts the other indicators in this chapter regarding Jesus as divine, then they may read this event as an instance of divine knowledge. However, there are no interpretative clues that lead the audience in this direction within these verses, nor is Jesus' knowledge of people elsewhere presented as divine knowledge (cf. 2:23–25; 5:6; 6:15,61).

22 On the relationship of Deut. 12 to the earlier instructions in Exod. 20, see Foreman, 'Sacrifice and Centralisation', 1–22. While some commentators note the connection between Deuteronomy 12 and John 4:21, they do not draw implications for Jesus' identity, so Beasley-Murray, *John*, 61; Carson, *John*, 222.

place where the LORD was to be worshipped. The word given through Nathan (2 Sam. 7:12–13) constitutes divine authorisation for Solomon to build the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 5:5). Solomon's actions are endorsed by prophetic word (1 Kgs 6:11–13), and then by the divine presence entering the newly built Temple (1 Kgs 8:10–11, cf. 8:29). Thus, the decision to build the place to worship God in Jerusalem remains a divine prerogative, guided by prophetic words and endorsed by divine action. After the Exile, the prophetic commands to rebuild the Temple indicate a continuing divine endorsement of Jerusalem as the place where God is to be worshipped (Hag. 1:1–2:9; Zech. 6:9–15).

The location of the dialogue in John 4 in the shadow of Mt Gerizim evokes the Deuteronomistic context. Jesus rejects the ongoing significance of Mt Gerizim as the place for worshipping the LORD, which alone is nothing more than a typical Jewish position. However, Jesus also rejects the ongoing significance of Jerusalem as the established place of worship. That is the implication of his declaration that worship will be *neither* here *nor* there.[23] While it does point to the end of geographic limitations, it also speaks to the end of the unique role of the Temple in Jerusalem, which will no longer be the place where the LORD is to be worshipped.[24] Thus, Jesus goes beyond contemporary critiques of the Temple. For while the community of Qumran reject the Temple as corrupted, they still anticipate a messianic cleansing of the Temple, not its permanent rejection.[25]

By rejecting both Jerusalem and Mt Gerizim as the place in which the LORD is to be worshipped, Jesus assumes a divine prerogative. He does not seek to arbitrate between the two positions that claim divine sanction, neither does he seek divine approval for his pronouncement, nor are Jesus' words cast in the form of a prophetic pronouncement.[26] Jesus declares the new situation regarding the proper place where God is to be worshipped, and by taking on this divine prerogative, the Gospel audience is pointed towards the divine identity of Jesus.

Jesus does not replace Jerusalem and Gerizim with yet another physical location. John 4:23 highlights the mode of worship more than the place, saying that God desires worship in spirit and truth. This might be seen to lessen the argument, because Jesus does not establish a physical place for worship. However, the act of setting aside what God has previously established is significant enough. But going further, Jesus establishes a new locus of worship, by making himself the new Temple.

2.3 Jesus the Temple

One area where a higher Christology in John 4 has been considered is in relation to the temple replacement theme.[27] John begins linking Jesus to the temple in the Prologue, describing the

23 Ashton notes that 'the holy city of Jerusalem…has lost all relevance', while Loader states that 'both are to be left behind'. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 79; Loader, 'Jesus and the Law', 142.

24 This end is pronounced without a note of judgement, not condemning the Jewish system but announcing something new and greater.

25 Regev, 'Community as Temple', 604–31.

26 While in John all of Jesus' words find their origin with the Father (7:16; 8:26; 12:49–50), this is part of the Johannine presentation of Jesus as the Son whose will is entirely aligned with that of the Father. It is distinct from Old Testament patterns where the words of the prophet appear in the form 'Thus says the LORD'. While Haenchen says that Jesus speaks as a prophet, this is on account of assuming that Jesus' words are a prediction of the destruction of the Temple. Yet there is no language of destruction, while it is at odds with the implication that worship at Gerizim will also cease, despite the destruction of that temple being long past. Haenchen, *John*, 222.

27 Works on the temple theme include: Greene, 'Jesus as the Heavenly Temple', 425–46; Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment*; Salier, 'The Temple in the Gospel', 121–34; Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body*; Coloe, *God Dwells With Us*. Of these, Coloe most emphasises the christological implications of the temple theme in John 4.

presence of the Word made flesh as ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν (1:14), evoking the Exodus tabernacle (ἡ σκηνή Exod. 25:9).[28] Another allusion that has implications for the temple theme is the image of the ladder to heaven drawn from Genesis 28:12. In John 1:51 this allusion is extended to present Jesus as the place where heaven and earth meet. Furthermore, in 2:19–21, the narrator explains that Jesus spoke of himself as the temple.[29] In John 4 images of the temple continue, as the offer of living water evokes the eschatological temple of Ezekiel 47:1–12.[30] Beale describes the offer as presenting Jesus as 'the beginning form of the true temple from which true life in God's presence proceeds'.[31] The replacement of the temple conveys a new locus for the worship of God, which has, necessarily, christological implications.

At this point, placing John 4 alongside Revelation 21 illumines the christological implications of Jesus as the replacement for the Jerusalem Temple. Revelation points to the future role of the temple within the new creation. More precisely, it speaks of the obsolescence, and thus absence, of the temple from the new Jerusalem because of God's direct, unmediated presence in the city (Rev. 21:22).[32] The cubic city, patterned on the shape of the Holy of Holies of Solomon's Temple (1 Kgs 6:20), will be filled with God's presence.[33] So, when John 4:21 is read in light of Revelation 21 it suggests that to abrogate the physical sanctuary is to say that God is now pervasively present.[34] Jesus in John 4 not only says that we can now worship anywhere, but effectively he declares that the object of worship is immanent.

The implications for Jesus' divine identity are apparent as it is 'the hour' which is the decisive transformation of worship. 'The hour' has as its central focus Jesus on the cross, but the inclusion of 'now is' (4:23) implies that it is the incarnation, not merely the cross, which transforms worship through the presence of the object of worship.[35] Jesus is not explicitly identified as the temple in John 4, but the image of living water evokes the temple of Ezekiel 47. For the reader who has already encountered the connection of Jesus and temple in John 2:19–21, this image confirms that Jesus is the replacement for the Jerusalem temple. The replacement of the temple with a person, in light of Revelation 21, is an indication of the presence of God. The connection is further strengthened as in Revelation 21:3 the same verb is used to describe God's presence in the new Jerusalem as was used for Jesus' incarnation (σκηνῶω, cf. John 1:14). There is no further need for an earthly temple for God is now present in the person of Jesus.

2.4 Jesus, Bringer of Salvation

The following verse provides another indicator of the divine identity of Jesus, through the

28 Greene, 'Jesus as the Heavenly Temple', 430–1; Brown, *John*, 1:32–33.

29 Beale, *The Temple*, 192–5.

30 Coloe also connects the imagery of Ezekiel 47 to the similarly eschatological image of the harvest in 4:31–38. Coloe, *God Dwells With Us*, 93–6, 111; cf. Beale, *The Temple*, 196.

31 Beale, *The Temple*, 197; cf. Greene, 'Jesus as the Heavenly Temple', 438; Thettayil, *In Spirit and Truth*, 225–7.

32 The connection between the temple and God's presence builds upon the Old Testament presentation of the tabernacle/temple as the dwelling place of God. Beale, *The Temple*, 48.

33 Beale argues that Revelation 21—22 portrays the new creation as the ultimate temple. Beale, *The Temple*, 24–25, 365–72.

34 Um, *Temple Christology*, 190.

35 Contra those who argue a conflation of the time of the narrative and the post-resurrection time of the author (e.g. Haenchen, *John*, 222–3), the Gospel widely presents the effects of Jesus' coming as available in the present, particularly having life now (3:16–18; 4:36; 5:24; 6:50–51). Bultmann also points to the way the Gospel presents the eschatological hour as having come with Jesus (so 3:19, 5:25). Bultmann, *John*, 190. For a discussion of time in relation to this verse and the original context, see Brown, *Spirit*, 99–101, 136–7.

statement that salvation comes from the Jews (4:22). While the full significance of the statement is not evident to the Samaritan woman, the construction of the chapter for the reader brings out the connections. The first indicator that this statement refers to Jesus is the identification of Jesus as a Jew earlier in the discourse (4:9).[36] The subsequent identification of Jesus as 'Saviour of the World' (4:42) by the villagers confirms Jesus as the focus of salvation, for these are the only instances of both σωτήρ and σωτηρία in the Gospel. As with other aspects of Christology in this chapter, the significance of Jesus as 'Saviour of the World' has been explored regarding what it could have meant within the story, with a frequent focus on the use of the term by the Roman emperors, as well as Graeco-Roman gods.[37] Outside of these passages, the verb σῴζω is used occasionally, with a focus on Jesus' role in bringing salvation, which is connected to eternal life and opposed to judgement (3:16; 12:47; cf. 5:34; 10:9).[38] Thus in John 4 the reader is to identify Jesus as the one who brings salvation.

When read in the canonical context, salvation is often an activity of God in the Old Testament, with the Psalms and Isaiah referring to God as 'my salvation' (Ps. 18:2; 25:5; 38:22; Isa. 12:2). There is some sense that God is the only source of true salvation, although this is rarely explicit.[39] The closest indication of this is the statement that salvation belongs to the Lord (Ps. 3:8; Jonah 2:9) which may simply express confidence that God will save. However, it could be an assertion that God is the only one who saves.[40] While the Messiah is connected to salvation and can be seen as the one inaugurating the era of salvation, the language of salvation is rarely connected to the Messiah.[41] Zechariah uses salvation in a way that might be interpreted messianically in 9:9, as the king brings salvation/victory (ישע). That said, when the word is repeated soon after, it is explicitly 'the LORD their God' doing the saving (Zech. 9:16). Similarly, 1 Enoch draws some connection between salvation and the Messiah (1 Enoch 48:7), but salvation is still the result of the name of the Lord of the Spirits (i.e. God), and not the Son of Man (also 1 En. 50:3).[42] In the rest of the New Testament, salvation is often depicted as coming through Jesus, but, as with the Old Testament, rarely in exclusive terms (except Acts 4:12).

The Johannine understanding of salvation here in John 4 can be illuminated through attention to the place of salvation in the Book of Revelation. The idea that salvation belongs to God is repeated (Rev. 7:10; 19:1), albeit with several key differences to the Old Testament pattern. First is the eschatological context, which is only occasionally in view in some prophetic material (Isa. 45:17; cf. 51:6,8). Salvation, especially in Rev. 19:1, refers to a final salvation. In the Gospel, Jesus' salvation has both present and future elements (John 3:16–17; 5:28–29) albeit with both elements closely connected (John 11:25–26). The connection to eschatological salvation in John 4 implies

36 Coloe, *God Dwells With Us*, 105.

37 Koester, 'The Saviour of the World', 665–7; Thatcher, *Greater Than Caesar*, 136. For inscriptions using 'saviour' with regard to Roman officials or Artemis in Ephesus, see van Tilborg, *Reading John in Ephesus*, 47–51.

38 Barrett, *John*, 216; Michaels, *John*, 270.

39 Beasley-Murray observes that 'saviour' is a divine title, especially in Isaiah, and not applied to the Messiah by Jews. Yet he then speculates with little evidence as to how the Samaritans could have used it as a title meaning 'converter' or 'deliverer' of the world, rather than conveying any implications of divine identity for Jesus. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 65.

40 Thus while Stuart reads the statement in Jonah as implying God as the sole source of salvation, Goldingay, while acknowledging similar views of the statement in Psalm 3, sets it in the context of the question of whether God will save the psalmist. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 478; Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1:114–5.

41 While Boccaccini sees 1 Enoch reflecting expectation of salvation from the evil of the world by a superhuman saviour, only God is the explicit agent of salvation. Boccaccini, 'From Jewish Prophet', 344. It is indicative of the lack of explicit connection that Novenson, *Grammar of Messianism*, does not discuss salvation language related to the Messiah. Cf. Brown, *John*, 1:175.

42 Gieschen, 'The Divine Name', 393.

a divine role, beyond the scope of this-worldly salvation that could be provided by humans. Additionally, salvation is ascribed to God and the Lamb in the context of worship in both Rev 7:10 and 19:10. Both God and the Lamb are objects of worship, which points to their shared divine identity.[43] Indeed, it is their enacting of salvation which is the basis for worship. Thus when John 4 is read in light of the wider scriptural witness, the depiction of Jesus as Saviour is a depiction of him as sharing in the divine identity of God, as he performs an action that belongs to God, which is also an action that forms the basis for the worship of Jesus as God.[44]

2.5 Jesus and Worship

Alongside Jesus' statement on the nature of worship, God is described as not merely desiring worship but actively seeking (ζητέω) worshippers such as these (4:23). While the Gospel narrative focuses upon the role of Jesus, God the Father plays an active if less visible role in the story, notably as the one sending his Son (3:16–17; 8:42), providing the example for his Son to follow (5:19; 7:16, 8:26; 12:50), and giving his Son authority (5:21–22,26–27).[45] Yet despite the statement that God seeks worshippers, he is not seen to act directly to bring about such worship.

The lack of direct action by God the Father is contrasted with the visibly active role of Jesus. As Jesus speaks with the Samaritan woman and her fellow Samaritans, Jesus himself is actively seeking those who will worship God rightly. His instruction of the Samaritan woman about the nature of true worship forms an invitation. She is invited to perceive Jesus rightly, and, therefore, to come to him and ask for living water (4:10). While worship is not explicitly referred to in the subsequent interaction with the villagers, they too respond to Jesus positively. They ask Jesus to stay with them, an instance of their receiving Jesus (1:11–12). The significance of their response is augmented as the narrator presents both their request and Jesus' action using the theologically significant verb, μένω (remain, 4:40; cf. 15:1–10), which creates an implicit alignment between the Samaritans and the disciples, who begin their relationship with Jesus by staying with him (μένω, 1:38–39).[46] The Samaritans subsequently demonstrate worship in their acclamation of Jesus as the saviour of the world (4:42). The role of Jesus as seeking those who will worship God in spirit and truth is further highlighted by the mission-themed discourse with the disciples that is framed within the interaction with the Samaritans (4:31–38).[47] Thus, John 4 presents Jesus taking on the role of God by seeking true worshippers.[48]

For John, right worship of God is understood in christological terms. While in 4:23 God desires worshippers of himself, there is a broader pattern which centres on the Father's desire that people respond rightly to Jesus (5:22–23; 6:28–29). The Gospel also makes it clear that a right response to Jesus is equally a right response to God. In addition to calling for belief in both the Father and the Son (14:1), Jesus states that to honour the Son is to honour the Father (5:23).[49] The two are unified

43 Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 11, 25, points to the role of worship as an indicator of divine identity.

44 Coloe, *God Dwells With Us*, 112, makes a connection that worship is a response to God's salvation, and thus the worship of Jesus is suggested by the presentation of Jesus as God's gift of salvation to the world (3:16–17; 4:42).

45 Cf. Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John*.

46 The connection is also made through the repetition of 'come and see' (4:29, cf. 1:39,46). Wang, *Sense Perception*, 176–7.

47 While the mission theme of both 4:31–38 and the wider Samaritan context is often noted, the links between the harvest and the divine search for true worshippers is not made. For example, there is no reference to 4:23 and God's seeking in Köstenberger, *Missions of Jesus*.

48 While Coloe observes that the Father is seeking worshippers through Jesus, she does not draw conclusions about Jesus' identity as a result. Coloe, *God Dwells With Us*, 111; similarly Lincoln, *John*, 178.

49 Fletcher-Louis, 'John 5:19–30', 419, argues that to honour Jesus is to worship him in 5:23.

in mission and message, such that a response to one is indistinguishable from a response to the other (5:41–44; 6:29; 8:19, 42; 14:6–7). Thus, Jesus' mission calling for belief in himself is equally a mission to seek true worshippers of God, a role ascribed to God himself.

The connection between Jesus and worship helps tie together the indicators of divine identity argued for in this article, as well as further clarifying this identity through the inclusion of Jesus in the worship that is rightly directed to the Father. Jesus as giver of the Spirit (§2.1) enables right worship of God, as the Spirit is a necessary condition for worship in Spirit and truth (4:23). The call to worship in spirit and truth (4:23) also foreshadows Jesus' self-identification as the truth (14:6), pointing to the inclusion of Jesus in the response of worship directed towards God. In Deuteronomy 12 the one who is worshipped is the one who determines the place of worship. In John 4, Jesus now determines the place of worship (§2.2), therefore he too is to receive that worship. In the identification of Jesus as the Temple (§2.3), the distinction between place and object of worship is blurred, as the place of worship is identified with a person. The implication is that Jesus as the Temple is both the place and object of worship. In bringing salvation (§2.4), Jesus acts in John 4 in a way that is worthy of worship. Finally, the overlap between the response to Jesus and to the Father leads to the conclusion that in seeking worshippers for the Father (§2.5), Jesus is also seeking worshippers of himself. Thus, the way that John presents Jesus as divine does not mean that Jesus participates in the divine identity in some secondary or limited sense (a divine being like the angels) but as one who is to be worshipped as the Father is worshipped.[50]

2.6 Jesus the 'I am'

The final indicator of divine identity is one that has been observed but often rejected. In Jesus' response to the Samaritan woman in 4:26, he uses the expression ἐγώ εἰμι (I am). In the story context, this expression functions as self-identification, and thus is commonly translated 'I am he'.[51] Jesus identifies himself as the expected Messiah—the only time in the Gospel that Jesus explicitly identifies himself as such. The woman responds to Jesus in a way entirely consistent with such a reading, as Jesus' words merely provoke her to ponder whether Jesus is the Messiah (4:29). We might ask if this is another case where the woman ought to have seen deeper into Jesus' words.[52] This may not have been possible in her time, but the Gospel depicts the way that Jesus' words were the basis for later remembrance and deeper christological understanding (2:22; 12:16).[53] Yet it remains understandable why, if the interpretative horizon is limited to the original events, scholars opt for reading this ἐγώ εἰμι as self-identification.

However, it is well recognised that ἐγώ εἰμι can have deeper significance in John.[54] In addition to the predicate 'I am' statements, John also features several absolute uses of this expression. The use in 8:58 has often been taken as an allusion to the divine name revealed in Exodus 3:14 which is used repeatedly by Isaiah and, therefore, the motive for the violent hostility that ensues in John. Similar uses in John 8:24,28 and 18:5 have also been connected with the Isaianic use of the expression to refer to God.[55] While these instances can function within the story as self-identification, their significance appears to extend beyond that. Thus, in John 18:5 Jesus' words

50 For the significance of worship for the early formulation of Christology, see Hurtado, *One God, One Lord.*

51 Loader, *Jesus,* 348; Carson, *John,* 227; Barrett, *John,* 239; Thompson, *John,* 106.

52 Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story,* 186–8, suggests that Jesus pointed the woman beyond the established title of Messiah.

53 Kugler, 'New Testament Christology', 373, points to the necessity of words such as this to provide a basis for later recognition of Jesus as divine, and thus as an object of worship.

54 Thompson, *John,* 156–59; Brown, *John,* 1:533–38; Schnackenburg, *John,* 2:79–89.

55 Williams, '"I Am" or "I Am He"', 343–52; Ball, *'I Am' in John's Gospel.*

are followed by the incongruous response of the soldiers who bow down and back away from him, suggesting an awareness (even if subconscious) that the man before them is more than just a criminal they have been sent to arrest.[56] In addition, Williams suggests that John 6:20 may have similar overtones of divine identity, as the use of ἐγώ εἰμι along with the exhortation against fear echoes Isaiah 41:10,13. John draws on Isaiah, both in explicit quotations (John 1:23; 6:45; 12:38–40) and in the titles ascribed to Jesus (1:29,34), and these frequent connections may bring to mind a broader Isaianic context, including the divine use of ἐγώ εἰμι.[57] Thus, while the possible reflection and later understanding of the Samaritan woman remains speculation, for a reader familiar with Isaiah, the use of this language can function as an allusion to divine identity.[58] The implications of divine identity that the reader would have just encountered in 4:21–24 strengthen the case that ἐγώ εἰμι has divine connotations in 4:26. Thus, while Barrett argues that self-identification is the natural sense given the expression is used for self-identification elsewhere in John, the context itself leads towards the symbolic reading.[59] Again, Jesus is presented as divine in John 4.

One further implication of reading the 'I am' in 4:26 as a divine identification is that it connects the divine identity of Jesus to his messianic identity. At times these two aspects can appear as different components of Jesus' identity, with his messiahship treated as his human role as God's anointed representative, while his divine identity entails an ontologically exalted status.[60] Yet Jesus' words in 4:26 constitute both an admission of messiahship and a definition of what sort of messiah he is.[61] The Messiah is often understood in human categories of king, prophet, or priest, and there are prophetic and royal elements present in this passage.[62] There is some suggestion of a divine messiah in Second Temple literature, notably 1 Enoch, although the extent and significance of the exalted position of the Son of Man in 1 Enoch is debated.[63] John goes beyond any previous messianic concepts to present Jesus as the divine Messiah, embodying and acting as God on earth. Thus John 4 defines what sort of messiah Jesus is—the divine Messiah.

3. Conclusion

While John 4 does not explicitly state that Jesus is God, his words and deeds depict him taking on the role of God. Within the story, characters see Jesus as the Messiah and Saviour, but the reader is privileged by the narrator and given further information which presents Jesus as divine. By offering the gift of the Spirit, Jesus assumes the divine role of dispensing the Holy Spirit. Jesus

56 On 18:5 see Moloney, *Johannine Studies*, 470.

57 Lincoln, *John*, 178, is confident of the connection between John 4:26 and Isa. 45:19; 52:6 LXX.

58 Coutts, *Divine Name*, 115–6, suggests the impact would be particularly felt upon rereading the Gospel, noting that the double meaning aligns with the irony already evident in the discourse. Coloe, *God Dwells With Us*, 102; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 62; Botha, *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman*, 153.

59 Barrett, *John*, 281; similarly Carson, *John*, 227; Kruse, *John*, 151. Haenchen's suggestion of a Hellenistic revelation formula is less plausible given the extensive use of the OT in John. Haenchen, *John*, 1:224.

60 Thus e.g. Barrett, *John*, 70–72.

61 Similarly, Son of God functions to define Christ in 20:31. Michaels, *John*, 1023; Carson, *John*, 663; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 388.

62 There may be a priestly connection implied through the references to temple and worship.

63 Boccaccini and Gieschen argue that 1 Enoch depicts a divine Messiah, while Kugler and Hurtado reject the proposition. The problem is in part one of definition, whether divine means superhuman, or if it entails some form of equality with the God of Israel. The argument in this essay uses divine identity in the latter sense, and thus John goes beyond what is found in 1 Enoch. Boccaccini, 'From Jewish Prophet', 345; Gieschen, 'The Divine Name', 390–92; Kugler, 'New Testament Christology', 371; Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 51–6.

takes the divine role of determining the proper place for the worship of God. As the Temple, Jesus is the presence of God on earth. As the bringer of salvation, Jesus takes on a role that is properly God's, and one that results in Jesus being worshipped alongside God. Jesus takes on the role he ascribes to God in seeking true worshippers. Finally, the form of the self-acknowledgement of Jesus' messianic identity evokes an Isaianic resonance, turning it for the reader into an implicit claim to a divine identity. These features together show that while John reflects an interaction from Jesus' ministry in terms that are consistent with that context, the narrative is at the same time shaped to present to the reader a Jesus who shares in the divine identity of God the Father. By tying this divine identity to messiahship in 4:26, John presents Jesus as the divine Messiah, not only God's anointed representative but God's very presence on earth, and the one to be worshipped.

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