

**What are the implications of transposing the Gospel narrative from a first century Middle Eastern context to that of twenty-first century Britain?**

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In memory of Adi

Always asking thoughtful inquisitive questions

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**Word Count:** 11,999 Words

## ***Abbreviations***

### **Bibles**

GNT	Good News Translation
NRSVA	New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Edition
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version

## ***Abstract***

There is a common call from Christian preachers to imagine Jesus Christ conducting his earthly ministry (as described in the Gospel accounts) in the present day, and within the context of the local community in which they are preaching. Artists re-imagine Jesus in contemporary settings and yet it is argued that there is a lack of contemporary portrayals of Jesus that make sense to the world. Using the Gospel passages that describe Jesus' engagement with a Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42) and a woman accused of adultery (John 7:53-8:11) this dissertation explores the context of Jesus' ministry and identifies potential parallels of people and places within twenty-first century Britain. Through developing a contextualised portrayal of Jesus' ministry this thesis examines possible implications for the mission and ministry of the Church. Samaritans are transposed as Jews, Pharisees as evangelical Christians, Jacob's Well as a supermarket and the Temple Mount as Parliament Square. The conclusion calls for multi-faith (particularly Christian-Jewish) dialogue, anti-discriminatory preaching, compassionate public theological engagement and the advancement and promotion of inclusive spirituality that leads to redemption and renewed wholeness through engagement with Christ.

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# 1 Introduction

This thesis aims to examine the historical, Biblical Jesus and identify a contemporaneous depiction that places him in a context of twenty-first century Britain, to offer a contemporary reading and understanding of the Gospel narrative. It seeks to explore the implications of transposing the narrative through time and across cultures for understanding Jesus and shaping contemporary theology and missiology.

Calvin reasons that to understand God requires understanding of humanity, yet comprehension of humanity requires understanding of God.<sup>1</sup> Jesus himself claims to be one with God,<sup>2</sup> and the apostle Paul writes that the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form in Jesus.<sup>3</sup> Wright suggests that if you start with the God of the Hebrew Bible ‘and ask what that God might look like were he to become human, you will find that he might look very much like Jesus of Nazareth’.<sup>4</sup> If you want to know what God is like, look at the revelation of himself; look at Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. by Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845) (Grand Rapids, MI: CCEL, 2005), pp.37-39.  
<<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.html>> [Accessed 13 September 2016].

<sup>2</sup> John 10:30.

<sup>3</sup> Colossians 2:9.

<sup>4</sup> N.T. Wright ‘The Divinity of Jesus’ in *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* by N.T. Wright and Marcus J. Borg (London: SPCK, 1999), 157-168 (p.167).

<sup>5</sup> Graham Watts, *Introduction to Christian Doctrine (Unit 133) Session 2: How do we know what we know? ‘I believe in God...’*, Spurgeon’s College, 10 February 2015.

Jesus interacted and ate meals with prostitutes and tax collectors;<sup>6</sup> came into conflict with some religious leaders;<sup>7</sup> healed the sick and lame;<sup>8</sup> and, cast out demons.<sup>9</sup> Artists attempt to re-imagine Jesus in contemporary settings and styles,<sup>10</sup> and there is a common call from preachers to imagine where Jesus would walk, and the people with whom he would interact if he were physically incarnate today. The political, geographic, socio-economic, religious and cultural landscapes of Britain and the Middle East are vastly different today and the gulf between contemporary Britain and first century Palestine contrast further still.

Jones argues that we do not have a contemporary portrayal of Jesus that makes sense to this world.<sup>11</sup> Hans Küng describes the problem of a plurality of Christs and the vital and inescapable question of 'Which Christ is the true Christ?'<sup>12</sup> Given the diverse representations of Jesus and lack of contemporary rendering how can the world look to him for an understanding of either God or humanity? Migliore argues that 'new situations call for new confessions of Christ' and adds 'Christians have both the freedom and the obligation to confess Christ in appropriate and relevant ways in their own specific contexts, in continuity with the New Testament witness.'<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mark 2:13-17; Luke 7:36-50, 19:1-7.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 15:1-20; Matthew 23; Mark 11:27-12:17.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 8:1-4; 9:1-8, 18-31; John 5:1-15, 9:1-11.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 12:22-23; Luke 4:31-36; 8:26-39.

<sup>10</sup> Examples of artists presenting contemporary depictions of Jesus include David LaChapelle, *Jesus Is My Homeboy*, 2003, photograph; Everett Patterson, *José Y Maria*, 2014, illustration; Parker Fitzgerald and Brittany Richardson, *Madonna and Child*, 2007, illustration.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Owen Jones, *Small Boat Big Sea* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 2000), p.48.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), p.141.

<sup>13</sup> Migliore, p.144.



## 2 Identifying Key Passages

This thesis will not permit exploration of each and every aspect of Jesus' life and ministry as described by the Gospel writers. The author of *John* emphasises the divinity of Jesus (John 1:1)<sup>14</sup> and the humanity of Jesus (John 1:14).<sup>15</sup>

Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42) provides the first 'serious theological conversation' in *John's Gospel* with the woman growing in faith and contemplating whether Jesus could be the anticipated Messiah.<sup>16</sup> This passage is the first and arguably the clearest in concisely demonstrating the humanity and deity of Jesus. It provides a reasonable foundation for examining the geography, culture and belief systems into which Jesus ministered and onto which a contemporary depiction can be developed.

It is the proposition of some commentators that the Samaritan woman was adulterous or sexually immoral.<sup>17</sup> This accusation will be examined, nevertheless it offers a connection to the passage in which a woman caught in adultery is brought before Jesus (John 7:53-8:11). The circumstances for each passage provide diverse settings, introducing a range of localities and people with whom Jesus interacts. John 4:1-42 and 7:53-8:11 offer a suitable

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<sup>14</sup> Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospels, The Epistles and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), p.148.

<sup>15</sup> Rainbow, p.173.

<sup>16</sup> Gail R. O'Day, 'John' in *Women's Bible Commentary: Expanded Edition with Apocrypha*, ed. by Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 381-393 (p.384).

<sup>17</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Trans. by G.R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), p.188.

basis for examining the first century middle-eastern Jesus from which to transpose him into a twenty-first century British context.

## **2.1 *John's Gospel***

The author of the Gospel is identified by the text as the 'disciple whom Jesus loved' (John 21:20-24). Edwards argues that the 'beloved disciple' cannot be convincingly identified with any specific individual from early Christianity.<sup>18</sup> Köstenberger however asserts that there is enough evidence to point to John (son of Zebedee and disciple of Jesus) being the author of the Gospel bearing his name.<sup>19</sup> It is suggested the Gospel was written sometime between A.D. 70 and A.D. 135, likely in the mid A.D. 80's or early A.D. 90's following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>20</sup> It will have served as an encouragement to the early Jewish Christians grieving the demise of the temple but the purpose of writing was 'so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah' (20:31); for both evangelism and edification.<sup>21</sup>

The Synoptic Gospels follow a similar chronological order whilst *John* has a different form and structure that challenged enlightened critique which saw it fall out of favour. Contemporary scholars argue for the Gospel to be read as

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<sup>18</sup> Ruth Edwards, *Discovering John* (London: SPCK, 2003), p.26.

<sup>19</sup> Andreas J Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), p.72.

<sup>20</sup> Köstenberger, p.83.

<sup>21</sup> Köstenberger, p.85.

a narrative;<sup>22</sup> providing the events of Jesus' life and death but not in strict historical sequence. Burrige reasons that John brings together the Greek and Eastern understanding of dualistic distinctions of God above and world below in his depiction of Jesus.<sup>23</sup>

## **2.2 Context**

The selected passages involve Jesus engaging counter-culturally with women who are publicly ostracised and deemed by their cultures and traditions to be defiled.<sup>24</sup> It is Jesus who enters the territory of the Samaritan woman and instigates conversation with her in John 4:1-42. In the Johannine style there is a simple exchange that has religious and spiritual implications;<sup>25</sup> earthly ideas are directed towards divine truths.<sup>26</sup> There is a clear structure to the passage that begins with separate groups and, following Jesus' dialogue with the woman (4:7-26) and then his disciples (4:27-38), concludes with assimilation (4:39-42).<sup>27</sup> In contrast the woman in John 7:53-8:11 is brought to Jesus and although the passage has been described as a 'controversy dialogue'<sup>28</sup> there is little discourse. The scene is

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<sup>22</sup> David Wenham, 'Paradigms and Possibilities in the Study of John's Gospel' in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, ed. by Lierman, John (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), p.10.

<sup>23</sup> Richard A. Burrige, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?*, 2nd Edn. (London: SPCK, 2005), p.135

<sup>24</sup> Bruce Milne, *The Message of John: Here is Your King!*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), p.83.

<sup>25</sup> Gerard Sloyan, *John*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), p.52.

<sup>26</sup> Gary M. Burge, *John*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2000), p.143.

<sup>27</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), p.59.

<sup>28</sup> Beasley-Murray, p.145.

set (7:53-8:2), the challenge is explained (8:3-6) and then Jesus' response to the accusers (8:6-9) and the woman (8:10-11) are described.

John 7:53-8:11 is missing from the earliest manuscripts and cannot be regarded as an original part of John's Gospel. There are different views about the most suitable place to locate the event within the canonical books.<sup>29</sup> Despite this, modern Bible translations include the passage here in John (as will be the case for this thesis), albeit with a proviso explaining the anomaly. Theologically the passage fits better in Luke<sup>30</sup> but textual evidence is stronger in John;<sup>31</sup> the style of material is different but substance is similar.<sup>32</sup> The majority of commentators agree that there is little reason to doubt the occurrence of the events in Jesus' ministry even if they were not initially written down.<sup>33</sup> Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman en-route to Galilee (4:3) having previously spoken with a Pharisee named Nicodemus (3:1-21) and spent time in the Judean countryside (3:22). The encounter of the woman in John 7:53-8:11 follows Jesus' departure from Galilee (7:1-10) to teach at the Festival of Tabernacles (7:14) and a second introduction to Nicodemus (7:45-52). The inclusion of Nicodemus each time provides a comparison of Jesus' engagement with well educated Pharisees and illiterate women.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *John*, NIBC 4 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), p.146.

<sup>30</sup> Following either Luke 21:38 or Luke 24:53.

<sup>31</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary. Vol. 1* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), p.736.

<sup>32</sup> Rodney A. Whitacre, *John*, IVP New Testament Commentary (Leicester: IVP, 1999), p.205.

<sup>33</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester: IVP, 1991), p.333.

<sup>34</sup> Milne, p.83.

### 3 Exegesis of Selected Passages

#### 3.1 John 4:1-42

Up to this point in John's Gospel (4:1) there has been no indication of opposition from the Pharisees<sup>35</sup> (though they were aware of Jesus' ministry (1:24) and growing popularity). There is an early intimation in the passage that water is a significant metaphor; Jesus' disciples baptise with water (4:2) but Jesus baptises with the Holy Spirit.<sup>36</sup> There is speculation that Jesus moved north (4:3) to avoid conflict between his ministry and that of John,<sup>37</sup> though Mark 1:14 indicates Jesus' move to Galilee followed John's arrest, conceivably to avoid trouble himself.<sup>38</sup> Crossing borders of the historic kingdoms of Israel and Judah is symbolic of unification; Jesus' sovereignty over the whole Promised Land. The journey also reflects the leaving and returning of those who were exiled which is further emphasised as Jesus travelled through Samaria (4:4), a route typically avoided by Jews.<sup>39</sup>

Sychar (4:5) is commonly identified as Askar about half a mile north of Jacob's Well.<sup>40</sup> The land was given to Joseph by Jacob (Genesis 48:22) and later Joseph's bones were buried there (Genesis 33:19, Joshua 24:32),

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<sup>35</sup> Whitacre, p.100.

<sup>36</sup> Keener, p.587.

<sup>37</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Basingstoke: Pickering and Inglis, 1983), pp.100-101.

<sup>38</sup> Burge, p.139.

<sup>39</sup> Burge, p.140.

<sup>40</sup> G.A. Smith in *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* by F.F. Bruce (Basingstoke: Pickering and Inglis, 1983), p.101.

giving it ancient and sacred associations. The aquatic symbolism develops as the Greek word *pēgē* (running water) is used to describe the well here (4:6) but later in the passage (4:11, 12) the word *phrear* (cistern or dug out well) is used because Jacob's well was dug out yet fed by an underground spring.<sup>41</sup> Jesus' tiredness (4:6) accentuates his humanity.<sup>42</sup> Being about noon meant that it would have been the hottest and brightest part of the day; a time people typically had a recess,<sup>43</sup> suggesting that the woman (4:7) was avoiding people, possibly that Jesus was too.<sup>44</sup> The meeting in the full light of day contrasts with Nicodemus' night time encounter with Jesus (John 3:2) whilst the whole scenario reflects Jacob meeting Rachel (Genesis 29).<sup>45</sup>

Culturally water was collected by women in company at cooler times of the day.<sup>46</sup> The well was a place of meeting when women would otherwise be isolated.<sup>47</sup> It may be that the woman was collecting water outside of the routine hours so as to avoid others; it is also plausible that she had a larger than common household and needed to return twice each day to collect enough water.<sup>48</sup> Nicodemus sought Jesus out (3:1-2) in contrast, the woman is sought by Jesus based on his need.<sup>49</sup> The woman remains anonymous (as would have been the custom in John's tradition)<sup>50</sup> and emphasises her low

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<sup>41</sup> Carson, p.217.

<sup>42</sup> Milne, p.83.

<sup>43</sup> Keener, p.592.

<sup>44</sup> Whitacre, p.101.

<sup>45</sup> Keener, p.593.

<sup>46</sup> Bruce, p.102.

<sup>47</sup> Burge, p.142.

<sup>48</sup> Ruth Habermann, 'Gospel of John: Spaces for Women' in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker; Trans. by Lisa E. Dahill [and others] (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012) p.666.

<sup>49</sup> Milne, p.84.

<sup>50</sup> Keener, p.584.

and unimportant societal status.<sup>51</sup> Jesus' request for a drink (4:7) from an isolated woman (4:8) is not necessarily flirtatious but it could be interpreted as such.<sup>52</sup> 'In the eyes of many potential first century readers, the beginning of the narrative is fraught with sexual ambiguity that is clarified only as the narrative progresses.'<sup>53</sup>

The Samaritans were certainly 'at least as zealous in their monotheism as the Jews'.<sup>54</sup> The Torah is the sole sacred text of the Samaritans and though there are differences between the Masoretic and Samaritan Texts most are minor in nature.<sup>55</sup> The Samaritans assert they are direct descendants of the Northern Israelite tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh surviving the conquering and deportation by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.<sup>56</sup> However, 2 Kings 17:24-41 describes the resettlement of the area with foreigners stimulating a loss of racial and religious purity and accentuating the divisions between the northern and southern kingdoms which separated following the death of Solomon (1 Kings 12:1-24).<sup>57</sup> The separation between Jews and Samaritans is absolute when Ezra transcribed the Hebrew text still found among Samaritans into the Aramaic script. The Samaritans accused Ezra of not just changing the character of the alphabet but also falsifying and removing key

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<sup>51</sup> Kamila A. Blessing, 'John' in *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. by Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 584-605 (p.597).

<sup>52</sup> Keener, pp.596-597.

<sup>53</sup> Keener, p.598.

<sup>54</sup> Whitacre, p.101.

<sup>55</sup> Aleksandr Sigalov, *Differences between Jewish Torah and Samaritan Torah* (Van Nuys, CA: Interlinear Pentateuch, 2012)

<<https://sites.google.com/site/interlinearpentateuch/differences-between-jewish-torah-and-samaritan-torah>> [Accessed: 9 November 2016].

<sup>56</sup> Robert T. Anderson, 'Samaritans' in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary Volume 5*, ed. by David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 940-947 (p.941).

<sup>57</sup> Milne, p.83.

texts; in particular the tenth commandment (Deuteronomy 27:4) it is argued Mount Garizim is changed to Mount Ebal.<sup>58</sup> The rift increased when the Samaritans built their own temple at Mount Gerizim around mid-fifth century B.C. and its subsequent destruction by John Hyrcanus II in 113 B.C.<sup>59</sup>

The Jewish historian Josephus records an incident whereby a group of Samaritans defile the Jerusalem Temple with 'dead men's bodies'<sup>60</sup> approximately 20 years before Jesus' ministry begins.<sup>61</sup> This would have been around the time Jesus remained in the temple courts without his parents (Luke 2:41-52) thus he will have been acutely aware of the animosity between Jews and Samaritans.

Further to ethnic differences, Jesus engaging with a woman challenges cultural propriety regarding gender.<sup>62</sup> Subsequent to the Babylonian exile and into the Second Temple Period women were 'increasingly segregated in worship and society' to the point where their status was barely more than that of a slave.<sup>63</sup> Rabbinic citations such as "...engage not in much gossip with woman" and 'This applies to one's own wife; how much more, then, to

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<sup>58</sup> Moses Gaster, *The Samaritans: Their History, Doctrines and Literature* (London: British Academy, 1923), p.28.

<sup>59</sup> Alfred J. Hoerth and John McRay, *Bible Archaeology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2005), p.178.

<sup>60</sup> Flavius Josephus, 'Chapter 2' in *The Antiquities of the Jews: Book XVIII*, trans. by William Whiston (Salt Lake City, UT: Project Gutenberg, 2009), para.2  
<<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2848/2848-h/2848-h.htm>> [Accessed: 9 November 2016].

<sup>61</sup> Whitacre, p.102.

<sup>62</sup> F. Scott Spencer, *Dancing Girls, Loose Ladies and Women of the Cloth*, (New York, NY: Continuum, 2004), p.88.

<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Achtemeier, 'Women: An Overview' in *People and Places in the Bible*, ed. by Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 323-325 (p.324).

the wife of one's neighbor [sic]?<sup>64</sup> are suggestive of a certain Jewish attitude at the time. The religious law assumed the Samaritan women to be in a perpetual state of ceremonial uncleanness<sup>65</sup> and therefore Jesus' dialogue with this woman is radically counter-cultural as her own response reveals (4:9).

Jesus continues the aquatic theme and begins to introduce the spiritual dimension of the conversation (4:10) though this is not immediately clear to the woman (4:11). Palestine is arid<sup>66</sup> so 'living water' denoting a spring was a valuable commodity<sup>67</sup> and played a significant role in purification in strict Jewish tradition.<sup>68</sup> Water was a symbolic image of God's revelation to the Torah and the Spirit<sup>69</sup> with prophets looking forward to living water flowing out of Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:8; Ezekiel 47:9).<sup>70</sup> Living water referenced through the Jewish scriptures (Proverbs 18:4; Isaiah 44:3; Jeremiah 2:13, 17:13) appears to chiefly denote the life mediated by the Spirit.<sup>71</sup>

The Samaritans identify as the elect of God and as such Jacob represents the last in the line of Patriarchs and the beginning of the new line of the elect. To be greater than Jacob (4:12) would be to supersede the covenant central

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<sup>64</sup> The Men of the Great Synagogue to Hillel and Shammai, 'Chapter 1' in *The Sayings of the Jewish Fathers [Pirkei Avot]*, trans. by Josphe I. Gorfinkle, 2nd edn (Mount Vernon, NY: Library of Jewish Classics, 1913), para.5, <<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8547/pg8547.html>> [Accessed: 14 November 2016].

<sup>65</sup> Bruce, p.103.

<sup>66</sup> Milne, p.84.

<sup>67</sup> Burge, p.143.

<sup>68</sup> Keener, p.604.

<sup>69</sup> Whitacre, p.103.

<sup>70</sup> Carson, p.219.

<sup>71</sup> Beasley-Murray, p.60.

to both Jews and Samaritans.<sup>72</sup> Jacob had impeccable credentials which contrast acutely with the Samaritan woman who we learn is a polygamist (4:18).<sup>73</sup> Although the woman does not fully grasp what Jesus is offering she recognised him as superior to Jacob and puts her faith in him (4:15) to provide for her corporeal needs.<sup>74</sup>

Mentioning the woman's husband (4:16) brings to light a further cause for disapproval of the woman by original readers of the narrative. It is possible the woman interpreted Jesus' inquiry as flirtatious;<sup>75</sup> stating that she is unmarried (4:17) could have been the woman expressing her availability to Jesus. Jesus does not take advantage of the woman but helps her to recognise that he is speaking about the relational desert she is living in.<sup>76</sup>

'Serial marriage was not altogether frowned upon, though rabbis generally taught that three marriages was a tolerable maximum.'<sup>77</sup> We don't know why she had five husbands (divorce or death are possibilities) or why she was not married to her current partner (4:18).<sup>78</sup> It is not clear that she had committed adultery but the circumstances suggest it is a possibility<sup>79</sup> and whilst Gentiles, Jews, Samaritans, Romans each had different views of appropriate sexual behaviour they all disapproved of adultery.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Whitacre, pp.103-104.

<sup>73</sup> Sloyan, p.54.

<sup>74</sup> Whitacre, p.105.

<sup>75</sup> Keener, p.606.

<sup>76</sup> Milne, p.85.

<sup>77</sup> Milne, p.84.

<sup>78</sup> Bruce, p.107.

<sup>79</sup> Keener, p.595.

<sup>80</sup> Keener, pp.594-595.

The recognition of Jesus as a prophet (4:19) is significant because the Samaritans did not accept the Jewish succession of prophets<sup>81</sup> and were expecting a prophet to follow Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18). The woman is exposing the prospect of Jesus as the Messianic figure of the final day<sup>82</sup> which Jesus subsequently affirms (4:26). A major difference between Samaritans and Jews was their place of worship based on different translations of Deuteronomy 12:5.<sup>83</sup> Jesus' response is that this dispute is outdated; the concern should not be where (4:20), but how (without hatred and alienation)<sup>84</sup> worship takes place (4:21)<sup>85</sup> and with knowledge of the one they worship (4:22).<sup>86</sup> Jesus explains that God is willing to receive worship from Jews and Samaritans (4:23)<sup>87</sup> and just as the prophets had said, the whole earth will be inhabited by the name and glory of God.<sup>88</sup> The barriers of place, 'past moral character, gender, and ethnic origin are not the final determinant of the kind of person God would seek'<sup>89</sup> but those who worship in the 'one inseparable concept'<sup>90</sup> of spirit and truth (4:24 NRSVA).

The woman realises Jesus could be the anticipated Messiah (4:25). The Sadducees were looking for a Priest from the tribe of Levi; Pharisees looked for a ruler from the line of David;<sup>91</sup> and the Samaritans expectation was for

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<sup>81</sup> Whitacre, p.105.

<sup>82</sup> Burge, p.145.

<sup>83</sup> Bruce, p.108.

<sup>84</sup> Whitacre, p.102.

<sup>85</sup> Michaels, p.72.

<sup>86</sup> Carson, p.223.

<sup>87</sup> Whitacre, p.113.

<sup>88</sup> Bruce, p.110.

<sup>89</sup> Keener, p.619.

<sup>90</sup> Burge, p.147.

<sup>91</sup> Gaster, p.61.

the Taleb or 'restorer'<sup>92</sup> who 'would be a second Moses, revealing the truth, restoring true belief and renewing true worship'.<sup>93</sup> At the climax of the dialogue Jesus acknowledges that he is the Messiah (4:26), with a possible reference to 'I AM'<sup>94</sup> providing clarity to the Samaritan but leaving ambiguity for the Jews (10:24).<sup>95</sup>

The disciples return (4:27); their shock reflecting social prejudices<sup>96</sup> but silence indicating trust, loyalty and honour for Jesus.<sup>97</sup> The woman leaves (4:28), abandoning her water jar yet arguably filled with the living water given by Jesus.<sup>98</sup> She leaves with a question (4:29)<sup>99</sup> 'could this be the Messiah?' The townspeople listen and respond to her call (4:30), thus her restoration in the community begins.

Having journeyed in conversation with the woman from corporeal concerns to divine revelation John demonstrates the different paradigms operating between the disciples and Jesus. The disciples having returned with food as planned (4:31) are confused (4:33) when Jesus claims clandestine provisions (4:32). Just as the woman initially misunderstood Jesus' metaphorical language so the disciples misunderstand his reference to food. Jesus' response to their questioning reflects Deuteronomy 8:3, that service of the Kingdom is like food; it sustains and fulfils.<sup>100</sup> The Jewish expectation

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<sup>92</sup> Bruce, p.111.

<sup>93</sup> Milne, p.85.

<sup>94</sup> Milne, p.85.

<sup>95</sup> Michaels, p.73.

<sup>96</sup> Milne, p.86.

<sup>97</sup> Keener, p.621.

<sup>98</sup> Bruce, p.112.

<sup>99</sup> Whitacre, p.108.

<sup>100</sup> Milne, p.86.

was of a Messiah for themselves, the Samaritan's represent the rest of the world and so the word 'finish' (4:34 NIV/ GNT/ NKJV) is significant as it indicates Jesus completing in full the will of God.<sup>101</sup>

Using what was probably a saying of the time (4:35)<sup>102</sup> Jesus encourages the disciples to become more aware of his task and God's will.

Commentators suggest the reference to a sower (4:36-37) could be to John the Baptist who had recently ministered in the area,<sup>103</sup> though it could be prophetic of Jesus and the disciples sowing in preparation for Philip's fruitful ministry in the area (Acts 8:4-8).<sup>104</sup> It is acceptable that the roles in the drama are not fixed but the simple metaphor has many applications.<sup>105</sup> The allegory points to Ecclesiastes 2:8-21, Jesus transforms the negative connotations found there<sup>106</sup> and suggests restoration (Amos 9:13) and rejoicing (Psalm 126:5-6; Isaiah 9:3). Jesus' lesson is that the disciples ministry is only possible because of those who precede them (4:38).<sup>107</sup>

Before the disciples begin telling others about Jesus<sup>108</sup> the woman's witness transforms the faith of an entire Samaritan village (4:39).<sup>109</sup> Whilst staying at their urging (4:40) Jesus confirms he is indeed the Messiah<sup>110</sup> causing more people to believe (4:41). John's use of the title 'Saviour of the World' (4:42) is

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<sup>101</sup> Whitacre, p.102.

<sup>102</sup> Milne, p.87.

<sup>103</sup> Milne, p.87.

<sup>104</sup> Carson, p.232.

<sup>105</sup> Michaels, p.75.

<sup>106</sup> Michaels, p.74.

<sup>107</sup> Carson, p.231.

<sup>108</sup> Beasley-Murray, p.64.

<sup>109</sup> Kathleen Fischer, *Women at the Well: Feminist Perspectives on Spiritual Direction* (London: SPCK, 1989), p.30.

<sup>110</sup> Burge, p.150.

only used on one other occasion in the New Testament (1 John 4:14) and was not a common term used for the expected Messiah by Samaritans or Jews, but a divine title saved for God.<sup>111</sup> John concludes the narrative demonstrating that the Samaritan believers recognise Jesus as a universal Saviour not confined by the boundaries of nationalism which have hitherto defined their identity.<sup>112</sup>

### **3.2 John 7:53-8:11**

As this passage was not found in the original manuscript it is not possible to give an accurate account of the actual events that took place prior to its occurrence. Since the encounter concerning Jesus and the Samaritan women, John's narrative has Jesus travelling back and forth between Galilee and Jerusalem (4:43; 5:1; 6:1; 7:14) though it is noted John 'took liberties with a chronological order'.<sup>113</sup> John's narrative explains how Jesus' actions and teaching were challenging cultural and religious norms leading to persecution (5:16) and threats to his life (5:18; 7:1; 7:30). Some placed their faith in him (6:68-69; 7:31; 7:41); others intended to raise him up as an earthly king (6:14). It is into this scenario of a people divided about who

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<sup>111</sup> Beasley-Murray, pp.64-65.

<sup>112</sup> Gail R. O'Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1989), p.89.

<sup>113</sup> Georges A. Barrois, *Jesus Christ and the Temple* (New York, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980). p.95.

Jesus is (7:44) and a desire of the chief priests and Pharisees to have him arrested (7:32, 45-7) that the passage rests.

Prior to the meeting with the Samaritan woman Jesus encountered a Pharisee (and member of the Jewish ruling council) named Nicodemus (3:1-21) who comes to him under the cover of night. Nicodemus returns to the narrative and in contrast to his previous quizzing of Jesus questions the motive and understanding of his fellow Pharisees (7:50-51). The meeting of Nicodemus was late in the day, possibly again under the cover of darkness as the people had gone home (8:53) with Jesus retreating to the Mount of Olives until dawn (8:2). The Mount is a place at which David passed over, weeping after his son Absalom's insurrection (2 Samuel 15:30) and is described as a place 'where people used to worship God'.<sup>114</sup> It continued to hold ritual significance as the Mount was used for the rare sacrifice of burning of the red cow<sup>115</sup> and from it the high priest could look directly through the Susa gate of the temple 'into the entrance of the sanctuary'.<sup>116</sup> The Mount of Olives is referenced by the prophet Zechariah<sup>117</sup> as a place on which the LORD will stand with the Mount splitting from East to West. The prophetic picture creates a route for God to enter Jerusalem, 'a royal processional way'<sup>118</sup> for God to come into the midst of his people.

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<sup>114</sup> 2 Samuel 15:32.

<sup>115</sup> Nicole J. Ruane, *Sacrifice and Gender in Biblical Law* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.107.

<sup>116</sup> William Sanford LaSor, 'Temple' in *The Oxford Guide to People and Places of the Bible*, ed. by Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 305-309 (pp.308-309).

<sup>117</sup> Zechariah 14:4.

<sup>118</sup> Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nahum – Malachi*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1986), p.165.

The outer courts of the temple were a location used by many scribes to teach and expound the law.<sup>119</sup> Jesus returning to the temple courts at dawn (8:2 NIV) presents a symbolic transformation; the time of turning from darkness to light is when Jesus' teaching shines new light on the scriptures.

The Pharisees (3:3) and Teachers of the Law (NIV, GNT) or scribes (NRSVA, KNJV) are often mentioned together in the Synoptic Gospels but not in *John*. The scribes (recognised as students and expositors of the Law of Moses) will have held the same principals as the Pharisees and in the first century represented the roles of lawyers, ethicists, theologians, catechists and jurists.<sup>120</sup> The Pharisees first appear during the Intertestamental period, though their origin is unclear.<sup>121</sup> They have an 'ominous presence' in John; competing with Jesus for influence and having significant control of the synagogue,<sup>122</sup> but they were not the only or the chief religious movement.<sup>123</sup> Two distinctive features of Pharisaism are the law and resurrection.<sup>124</sup> The Pharisees understood the Law of Moses relating to worship and purity as applying broadly to all daily life not limited to the temple<sup>125</sup> and their belief in resurrection and life after death set them apart from the Sadducees who believed that the body and soul perished together.<sup>126</sup> Pharisees were

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<sup>119</sup> Carson, p.334.

<sup>120</sup> Carson, p.334.

<sup>121</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, 'Pharisees', in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary Volume 5*, ed. by David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 289-303 (289).

<sup>122</sup> Saldarini, p.297.

<sup>123</sup> Patrick J. Mullen, *Dining with Pharisees* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), p.61.

<sup>124</sup> Irving M. Zeitlin, *Jesus and the Judaism of His Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), p.16.

<sup>125</sup> Calvin J. Roetzel, *The World that Shaped the New Testament* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1985), pp.26-27.

<sup>126</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews – Book XVIII* in *Josephus: The Complete Works*, trans. by William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library) pp.957-958.

believed when they spoke and were able to persuade people, they were more popular than Sadducees so public worship was conducted according to their guidance (*Ant.* 18.15).<sup>127</sup>

That the woman was 'caught' (8:3; 8:4) in adultery means the accusers were making a legal claim and were required by the law to have evidence if she were to be convicted. Such a claim would have required two witnesses observing identical events at the same time, suggesting a trap had been set for this woman. This also indicates the witnesses had not followed the law; failing in their own moral duty to stop the adultery taking place.<sup>128</sup> To commit adultery required a man to have been involved, yet there is no mention of the male with whom the woman was caught. It is possible that the man escaped or that the accusers were 'sufficiently chauvinistic to focus exclusively on the woman'.<sup>129</sup> There was belief amongst the Israelites that the community would be punished by God if they failed to punish all who broke the law.<sup>130</sup> The Ten Commandments are framed in second-person masculine singular indicating that it is the male who is responsible under the law to refrain from adultery, doubling the injustice upon the woman as the accusers appear to be seeking the full punishment be taken by her for something the absent man is commanded against.<sup>131</sup> First century Judaism stereotyped women as instigators whenever sexual sins were committed, allowances could be made

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<sup>127</sup> Mullen, p.48.

<sup>128</sup> Burge, p.242.

<sup>129</sup> Carson, p.334.

<sup>130</sup> C. Welton Gaddy, *Adultery & Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), p.107.

<sup>131</sup> Deborah W. Rooke, 'Wayward Women and Broken Promises: Marriage, Adultery and Mercy in Old and New Testaments' in *Ciphers in the Sand: Interpretations of the Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7.53-8.11)* ed by Larry J. Kreitzer and Deborah W. Rooke (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 17-52 (pp.44-45).

for men but not women. A woman who committed sexual sin was 'marked' but a man was not.<sup>132</sup> 'Some women were reportedly executed (albeit illegally, from the standpoint of the Roman administration) in Jewish Palestine, and the charge was most often adultery.'<sup>133</sup>

It was possible for a man who suspected his wife of adultery to bring her before the priest (Numbers 5:11-31) but no such parallel framework for a woman suspicious of her husband existed.<sup>134</sup> Given the accused woman was 'caught' and not 'suspected' indicates this prerogative does not apply. The only biblical occurrence of stoning being approved as a punishment for a woman who is sexually unfaithful (as called for by the accusers (8:5)) is if she is a betrothed virgin (Deuteronomy 22:23-24) and then it is both sexual partners who are to be punished.<sup>135</sup> Other passages prescribe death for a woman who commits adultery (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22) but there is no specification that it must occur by stoning,<sup>136</sup> adding credibility to the idea that the situation was instigated to trap Jesus (3:6). There are three relevant passages of legislation in Deuteronomy (22:13-29; 24:1-4; 25:5-10) and on each occasion the gravity of transgression is weighed according to the offended male (betrayed husband or woman's father).<sup>137</sup> The Mishnah (*Sanhedrin* 7:4) makes the distinction between an unfaithful fiancé who is to

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<sup>132</sup> Burge, p.246.

<sup>133</sup> Keener, p.736.

<sup>134</sup> Rooke, p.21.

<sup>135</sup> Carson, p.335.

<sup>136</sup> Carson, p.335.

<sup>137</sup> Rooke, p.18.

be stoned, and an unfaithful wife who is to be strangled; suggesting the accused woman brought to Jesus is betrothed but not yet married.<sup>138</sup>

Although there is little evidence of stoning being a common punishment for adultery in first century Palestine it would have been an offence for Jesus to dismiss the law and unpopular if he adhered in the manner presented by the accusers. If Jesus did pronounce a death sentence he would have infringed the right of the Roman prefect to impose capital punishment.<sup>139</sup> Whatever Jesus then wrote with his finger on the ground (3:6) is not clear.<sup>140</sup> The words of Jeremiah 17:13 have long been offered as a possibility of Jesus' writing.<sup>141</sup> Suggestions include Jesus imitating a Roman magistrate writing then reading out a ruling; that he wrote part of Exodus 23:1 or 23:7,<sup>142</sup> chastising the Pharisees for being malicious witnesses; or that there is an allusion to God writing with his finger (Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 9:10).<sup>143</sup>

Jesus' writing is not cited but as the questions continue (8:7) his words are clear, he is not flippant with the law and essentially gives permission for the stoning to begin if the moral conditions are met.<sup>144</sup> According to the law (Deuteronomy 13:9, 17:7; Leviticus 24:14) it is the witness of the crime who must throw the first stone and must not have committed this same transgression.<sup>145</sup> Satisfying the law with his response Jesus is relieved of

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<sup>138</sup> Carson, p.335.

<sup>139</sup> Carson, p.335.

<sup>140</sup> Carson, p.336.

<sup>141</sup> Beasley-Murray, p.146.

<sup>142</sup> Carson, p.335-6.

<sup>143</sup> Keener, p.737.

<sup>144</sup> Milne, p.125.

<sup>145</sup> Carson, p.336.

having to instigate the stoning, causes the accusers to reflect and ensures the stoning does not occur.<sup>146</sup> Jesus refuses to disadvantage the woman in the absence of the man who should also stand accused, highlighting the chauvinism of the situation.<sup>147</sup>

There is a suggestion that older crowd members recognised their own sinfulness more readily but equally plausible is that the crowd deferred to the elders for their reply to Jesus.<sup>148</sup> Pharisees were respectful of elders (*Ant.* 18.12)<sup>149</sup> so it is rational for their response of withdrawing (8:9) to be adopted by the crowd. For a prosecution to occur there needed to be accusers, the departure of accusers leads to the woman's acquittal.<sup>150</sup> Jesus being alone with the woman accentuates the point he is the only one who is 'without sin' (8:7).<sup>151</sup>

That Jesus 'straightens up' (*ἀνακύπτω*) (8:10) is indicative of standing and putting himself face to face with the woman. Jesus is respectful addressing the woman (8:10).<sup>152</sup> The Greek term (*γυνή*) is the same used when Jesus addressed his mother (2:4).<sup>153</sup> Jesus' questions do not imply innocence,<sup>154</sup> he does not ask about her guilt, focussing instead on whether anyone

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<sup>146</sup> Whitacre, p.208.

<sup>147</sup> Milne, p.125.

<sup>148</sup> Whitacre, p.208.

<sup>149</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities: Books XVIII-XX and Index, with English translation by Louis H. Feldman* (London: Heinemann, 1965), p.11.

<sup>150</sup> Keener, p.736.

<sup>151</sup> Edward W. Klink III, *John*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament, 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), p.395.

<sup>152</sup> Carson, p.338.

<sup>153</sup> Klink III, p.395.

<sup>154</sup> Burge, p.243.

condemns her,<sup>155</sup> highlighting his authority to deliver a judgement.<sup>156</sup> The response of the woman (8:11) demonstrates considerable deference for Jesus<sup>157</sup> as she refers to him as 'Sir' (NIV, NRSVA, GNT) or 'Lord' (NKJV) (κύριος).

Opposing the moral authority of the Pharisees Jesus graciously offers hope<sup>158</sup> and transforms the woman from being an 'object' and 'point of law' to a person with status.<sup>159</sup> Jesus does not convict the woman but offers liberty;<sup>160</sup> pardoning rather than acquitting, and demonstrating his mercy and righteousness he called the woman to new life.<sup>161</sup> The woman was not habitually promiscuous as implied by the phrase 'life of sin' (8:11 NIV)<sup>162</sup> yet the new life of freedom she is sent into is not without qualification. The woman is instructed to 'sin no more' (NKJV) or as one commentator offers 'Go and don't hurt yourself anymore'<sup>163</sup>.

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<sup>155</sup> Carson, p.336.

<sup>156</sup> Klink III, p.396.

<sup>157</sup> Burge, p.243.

<sup>158</sup> Gaddy, p.155.

<sup>159</sup> Elizabeth E. Green, 'Making the Case and Reading it Too: Feminist Readings of the Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery' in *Ciphers in the Sand*, ed. by Larry J. Kreitzer and Deborah W. Rooke (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 240-267 (pp.259-260).

<sup>160</sup> Beasley-Murray, p.147.

<sup>161</sup> Whitacre, p.209.

<sup>162</sup> Whitacre, p.209.

<sup>163</sup> Father Carlos, in 'Then Jesus stood up again... [sic]' by Kenneth Tanner, [Facebook post], 30 April 2016

<<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10208915863911222&set=a.2253573056187.137248.1154125675&type=3&theater>> [Accessed: 9 November 2016].

## **4 Contemporary Parallels**

Having examined the context of Jesus life and ministry in the first century Middle East this thesis seeks to identify parallels in twenty-first century Britain. The comparison cannot be an exact replica, seeking instead to consider where and with whom Jesus may engage if he were incarnate today.

The author is a white, male, British Christian, raised in the evangelical tradition with experience of ministry and mission in a number of denominational settings within the United Kingdom and overseas, currently residing in London. It is into this context that parallels of Jesus' life and ministry will be sought.

### **4.1 People**

#### **4.1.1 Woman at the Well**

The Israelites and Samaritans share variations of the same initial scriptures (Pentateuch). Samaritans believe the Israelites made changes to the original text and do not consider the Hebrew Bible in its entirety to be canonical.<sup>164</sup> Similarly the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Islam and Christianity share aspects of the same roots. Islam recognises many of the same prophets as

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<sup>164</sup> Reinhard Plummer, *The Samaritans: A Profile* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), pp.195-202.

Christianity and considers Jesus to be an important prophet who will one day return.<sup>165</sup> Muslims, however, do not believe Jesus to be God incarnate.<sup>166</sup> Both the Israelites and Samaritans were anticipating the coming of a prophet, Taheb (returning one), Messiah, or Saviour of the same disposition as Moses.<sup>167</sup> Christians believe that Jesus is this Messiah and in addition to the Hebrew Bible have added the account of Jesus' life, ministry and the early church (New Testament) to their canon.<sup>168</sup> Orthodox Jews continue to wait for the promised Messiah<sup>169</sup> whilst Christians await Jesus' return. The relationship between Israelites and Samaritans offer both Judaism and Islam as contenders for comparison with Christianity for the purposes of generating a contemporary, contextual portrayal of events. It is the more direct association of the shared scripture yet denial of later canons for which the relationship between Christianity and Judaism is offered as a contemporary parallel of the relationship between the Israelites and Samaritans.

Just as there was friction between the Israelites and Samaritans there is history of discord between Christianity and Judaism.<sup>170</sup> The New Testament is often considered anti-Jewish,<sup>171</sup> with John's Gospel most unforgiving in

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<sup>165</sup> Ergun Mehmet Caner and Emir Fethi Caner, *Unveiling Islam: An Insider's Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2002), p.221.

<sup>166</sup> John Azumah, *My Neighbour's Faith: Islam Explained for Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Hippobooks, 2008), p.102.

<sup>167</sup> Plummer, pp.295-296.

<sup>168</sup> Hans Von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, trans. by John Austin Baker (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1972), pp.208-909.

<sup>169</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, 'Jesus' in *A Dictionary of Judaism and Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1991), pp.81-82.

<sup>170</sup> Richard Harries, *After the Evil: Christianity and Judasim in the Shadow of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.167.

<sup>171</sup> Clark M. Williamson and Ronald J. Allen, *Interpreting Difficult Texts: Anti-Judaism and Christian Preaching* (London: SCM Press, 1989), p.28.

this regard.<sup>172</sup> Verses such as John 8:44 have been used by Christians since the early church to deride and demonise Jews.<sup>173</sup> In 2016 a record number of anti-Semitic incidents were reported across the United Kingdom.<sup>174</sup> Whilst these incidents are not attributed to Christians it demonstrates something of the ongoing derision that Jews currently experience within the United Kingdom and Christianity is by no means free from anti-Jewish rhetoric. The Samaritans made up a relatively small percentage of the population of first century Palestine and likewise Jews (across six denominational groups) equate to 0.5% of the total population in twenty-first century Britain.<sup>175</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Marriage Status

The circumstances of the woman having had five husbands and being with a man who is not her husband would possibly be frowned upon in contemporary British society but not entirely unusual. Perhaps the most unexpected element is the number of marriages, whereas if it were sexual partners the number could be considered low. One report indicates ten

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<sup>172</sup> Williamson and Allen, p.49.

<sup>173</sup> Eric W. Gritsch, *Toxic Spirituality: Four Enduring Temptations of Christian Faith* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009) p.16.

<sup>174</sup> Community Security Trust, *Antisemitic Incidents Report 2016* (London: Community Security Trust, 2016), p.4, <<https://cst.org.uk/data/file/b/e/Incidents%20Report%202016.1486376547.pdf>> [Accessed 20 February 2017].

<sup>175</sup> Emma White, *Religion in England and Wales 2011* (London: ONS, 2012), p.3 <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/religioninenglandandwales2011/2012-12-11>> [Accessed 6 February 2017].

lovers is the 'ideal' number to have before settling down,<sup>176</sup> and other statistics show an increase in the number of people cohabiting without marrying.<sup>177</sup> If the contemporary parallel for the Samaritan woman is a Jewish woman the idea of five marriages becomes all the more challenging if she is to have been divorced each time due to the need for a Get (a Jewish divorce granted by the husband).<sup>178</sup> Jesus speaking to such a woman is unlikely to cause much controversy in contemporary Britain. If the current partner were transcribed as female the situation would become increasingly scandalous. Although same-sex marriage was introduced by the UK Government in the *Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act*, 2013, the Christian community continues to wrestle with how to respond. The Evangelical Alliance opposes same-sex marriage<sup>179</sup> and promotes ten 'Affirmations' which includes a declaration that marriage is for 'one man and one woman' in 'an exclusive relationship for life'.<sup>180</sup> The Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) Council urges churches to respectfully refrain from conducting

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<sup>176</sup> Mark Molloy, 'Is there an 'ideal number' of sexual partners to have? 'Goldilocks' answer revealed', *The Telegraph*, 21 January 2016

<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/12112876/Revealed-The-goldilocks-average-number-of-sexual-partners-to-have.html>> [Accessed 20 February 2017].

<sup>177</sup> Emily Knipe, *Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales: 2002 to 2015* (London: ONS, 2016), p.1.

<<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesbymaritalstatusandlivingarrangements/2002to2015>> [Accessed 20 February 2017].

<sup>178</sup> Cambridge Family Law Practice, *Jewish Divorce and the English Courts* [online blog] (2013), para. 3 <<http://www.cflp.co.uk/jewish-divorce-and-the-english-courts/>> [Accessed 20 February 2017].

<sup>179</sup> Evangelical Alliance, *Christians must model real marriage to society* (London: Evangelical Alliance, 2013) <<http://www.eauk.org/current-affairs/politics/christians-must-model-real-marriage-to-society.cfm>> [Accessed 20 February 2017].

<sup>180</sup> Evangelical Alliance, *Resources for church leaders – Biblical and pastoral responses to homosexuality* (London: Evangelical Alliance, 2012), para.3, <<http://www.eauk.org/church/resources/theological-articles/resources-for-church-leaders-biblical-and-pastoral-responses-to-homosexuality.cfm>> [Accessed 20 February 2017].

same-sex marriages.<sup>181</sup> And, in 2017 the Church of England voted “not to take note” of a report from the House of Bishops<sup>182</sup> seeking to establish a ‘fresh tone and culture’<sup>183</sup> leading to a letter calling for ‘a radical new Christian inclusion in the church’.<sup>184</sup> Not all Christians oppose same-sex marriage with organisations such as Diverse Church<sup>185</sup> and OneBodyOneFaith<sup>186</sup> offering support for all people regardless of gender and sexuality.

The reason for the Samaritan woman having had five husbands is subject to speculation. Although there are parallels relating to the controversy by framing the woman as a lesbian, such a transposition is unsatisfactory. The term “partner” lends a sense of ambiguity to the description of the relationship mirroring the elusiveness of the original passage and offering the modern reader liberty to muse.

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<sup>181</sup> Baptist Union of Great Britain, *Council Statement on the Registration of Buildings for Sam-Sex Marriage*, (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2016), para.5, <[http://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/273782/Same\\_Sex\\_Marriage.aspx](http://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/273782/Same_Sex_Marriage.aspx)> [Accessed: 20 February 2017].

<sup>182</sup> Church of England, *Result of the vote on the House of Bishops’ Report*, (London: Church of England, 2017), para.1, <<https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2017/02/result-of-the-vote-on-the-house-of-bishops-report.aspx>> [Accessed: 20 February 2017].

<sup>183</sup> House of Bishops, *Marriage and Same Sex Relationships after the Shared Conversations*, (London: Church of England, 2016), para.30, <<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/3863472/gs-2055-marriage-and-same-sex-relationships-after-the-shared-conversations-report-from-the-house-of-bishops.pdf>> [Accessed: 20 February 2017].

<sup>184</sup> Justin Welby and John Smentamu, (Online Letter, 16 February 2017), para.4, <<https://staging.churchofengland.org/media/3878263/abc-and-aby-joint-letter.pdf>> [Accessed: 20 February 2017].

<sup>185</sup> Diverse Church, (Website) <<http://diversechurch.website/>> [Accessed: 20 February 2017].

<sup>186</sup> OneBodyOneFaith (Website) <<http://www.onebodyonefaith.org.uk/>> [Accessed: 20 February 2017].

### 4.1.3 Accused Woman

There is debate about the marriage status of the woman accused of adultery and questions about why her sexual partner was not brought before Jesus. The indication is that the behaviour of the Pharisees was sexist. The crowd bringing the woman before Jesus were not doing so primarily because of the woman's actions but as a means of trapping Jesus. Contemporary situations of unsavoury crimes being committed (such as child abuse) and a mob seeking vengeance<sup>187</sup> do not hold weight as honest parallels. In twenty-first century Britain gender bias persists,<sup>188</sup> there are different sexual standards for men and women and policing of women's sexuality is pervasive.<sup>189</sup> Men with multiple sexual partners experience a gain in reputation whilst women experience disdain.<sup>190</sup> There is no reason to alter the accusation of adultery against an anonymous woman in transcribing the events for a contemporary setting.

### 4.1.4 Pharisees

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<sup>187</sup> Nick Foley, 'Paedophile's Home Mobbed', *Independent*, 12 December 2006, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/paedophiles-home-mobbed-428081.html>> [Accessed 20 March 2017].

<sup>188</sup> Hannah Taafe, *Sounds Familiar?* (London: Fawcett Society, 2017), p.4, <<https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Sounds-Familiar-Report.pdf>> [Accessed 20 March 2017].

<sup>189</sup> Julia Carter, *The Sexual Double Standard* (Research Report: University of Bradford, 2012), p.21, <<https://create.canterbury.ac.uk/10962/1/The-sexual-double-standard---Languages-of-inequality.pdf>> [Accessed 20 March 2017].

<sup>190</sup> Carter, p.7.

The two distinctive features of the Pharisees were their application of the Law of Moses relating to worship and purity to daily life, and beliefs regarding resurrection. Contemporary parallels with the author lie in Christian praxis. Catholicism heeds the authority of tradition, realised in the ecclesiastical office of the Pope and passed on through generations. Authority for Protestants is recognised as the Bible.<sup>191</sup> Both devout Catholics and Anglicans profess the application of faith to daily living; the church with the clergy playing a specific role in purification and worship. Nonconformist denominations, such as Baptists, emphasise the local congregation<sup>192</sup> with the role of clergy less significant; each believer having equal responsibility for their conduct and accountability to God and the Christian community.<sup>193</sup>

Evangelicalism is not limited to a single denomination and 'few Protestant denominations are untouched by its influence'.<sup>194</sup> It is a 'coalition of theologies, churches and ecclesial cultures'.<sup>195</sup> In America evangelicalism has developed into the 'folk religion'<sup>196</sup> and in Britain the Evangelical Alliance became a significant movement, claiming to represent one million evangelicals and consulted by the Government and media.<sup>197</sup> Evangelicals recognise there are different Christian doctrines yet some claim 'we believe that ultimately the evangelical faith is the only true expression in doctrine of

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<sup>191</sup> Gritsch, p.4.

<sup>192</sup> Bryan Haymes, 'Baptist Churches' in *Christianity: The Complete Guide* ed. by John Bowden (London: Continuum, 2005) 110-114 (p.110).

<sup>193</sup> Nigel G. Wright, *Leadership in the Local Church*, Baptist Basics, 8 (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2009), p.2.

<sup>194</sup> Mark Smith, 'Introduction' in *British Evangelical Identities Past and Present (Volume 1)*, ed. by Mark Smith (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 1-17 (1).

<sup>195</sup> Nigel G. Wright, *The Radical Evangelical* (London: SPCK, 1996), p.3.

<sup>196</sup> Randall Balmer, *The Making of Evangelicalism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), p.9.

<sup>197</sup> Derek J. Tidball, *Who Are the Evangelicals?* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994), p.8.

the Christian faith itself'.<sup>198</sup> Evangelicals derive authority from the Bible (Biblicism), believe in salvation through the cross (Crucicentrism),<sup>199</sup> and are driven by the Holy Spirit (Activism) to share the gospel (Conversionism). Evangelicals are recognised for the prominence given to the Bible with plain, natural interpretation.<sup>200</sup> They are associated with strict moral codes along with a desire for people to convert to their manifestation of the Christian faith.<sup>201</sup> Within evangelicalism there is diversity; conservative evangelicals look back towards the tarnishing of God's creation and seek to instil and maintain order whilst radical evangelicals look forward to the coming Kingdom of God, eager to enact reform.<sup>202</sup> Much like the Pharisees strict adherence to the Laws of Moses for daily life evangelicals hold a 'deep respect for the authority of the Bible' and 'emphasize [sic] integrating religious beliefs and social conduct'.<sup>203</sup> The popular portrayal of the Pharisees as legalistic does not do justice to their 'religion centred in a gracious, loving and forgiving God'.<sup>204</sup> Similarly evangelicals are often pigeonholed as synonymous with fundamentalists without due consideration of the full breadth of expression.<sup>205</sup> Tidball contemplates whether Jesus would be an evangelical today and contends that in some respects the view

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<sup>198</sup> D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), p.17.

<sup>199</sup> John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity and Faithfulness* (Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press: 2003), p.34.

<sup>200</sup> Tidball, p.80.

<sup>201</sup> Matthew Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture* (Milton Keynes: Paternosters, 2007), p.1.

<sup>202</sup> Nigel G. Wright, *The Radical Evangelical*, pp.118-119.

<sup>203</sup> J. Christopher Soper, *Evangelical Christianity in the United States and Great Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), p.38.

<sup>204</sup> Williamson and Allen, pp.28-29.

<sup>205</sup> Stephen R Holmes, 'Evangelicals, Fundamentalism, and Theology' in *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in the United Kingdom during the Twentieth Century*, ed. by David Bebbington and David Ceri Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 348-365 (pp.348-352).

of Jesus as an evangelical could be affirmed. He recommends caution in making this claim and identifies Jesus' candid criticism of the Pharisees echoing in criticisms of contemporary evangelicalism.<sup>206</sup>

## **4.2 Locations**

Within contemporary society travel between different areas and countries is relatively easy and commonplace; present-day parallels for Judea, Galilee and Samaria could almost be anywhere. Given the aim to consider a British context settings will be limited to the United Kingdom.

### **4.2.1 Jacob's Well**

There are a number of locations within the United Kingdom known as Jacob's Well including a village,<sup>207</sup> a pub,<sup>208</sup> and an ancient monument in Bristol.<sup>209</sup> The monument is a well, fed by a spring of flowing water and although there is uncertainty as to whether it was originally a Mikveh or Bet Tohorah it is undoubtedly of Jewish origin.<sup>210</sup> Despite the parallels with the

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<sup>206</sup> Tidball, p.239.

<sup>207</sup> Google Maps, *Jacobs Well*, [Online Map] (2017)  
<<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/place/Jacobs+Well,+Guildford/@51.2696729,-0.5845699,14z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x4875d75190c5828f:0xa0eae304dbf8730!8m2!3d51.26629!4d-0.569155>> [Accessed 6 February 2017].

<sup>208</sup> *Welcome to the Jacobs Well* (Holmfirth: The Jacobs Well, 2017),  
<<http://www.jacobswellpub.co.uk/>> [Accessed 6 February 2017].

<sup>209</sup> Joe Hillaby and Richard Sermon, 'Jacob's Well, Bristol: *Mikveh* or *Bet Tohorah*' in *Transaction*, 122 (Bristol: Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 2004), 127-152 (127) <[http://www.bgas.org.uk/tbgas\\_bg/v122/bg122127.pdf](http://www.bgas.org.uk/tbgas_bg/v122/bg122127.pdf)> [Accessed: 2 March 2017].

<sup>210</sup> Hillaby and Sermon, p.127.

well at which Jesus met the Samaritan women, in regards to its ancient purpose the Bristol well no longer functions in the same way and individuals no longer come to draw water or rest during a journey. Water from the well was bottled in the 1980's and more recently an application has been made for a license to revive this operation.<sup>211</sup> A legitimate contemporary parallel of Jesus asking the women to draw water could be requesting a bottle of water.

Jacob's Well represented a place for the woman to gather supplies for her family as well as resting place for Jesus. Supermarkets are the common places to obtain groceries for the family home with coffee shops, cafés, pubs and fast-food restaurants providing convenient eateries and places to refresh. A modern supermarket can fulfil both functions and for a stranger to ask for a drink of water in this setting offers parallels for a scene that could be interpreted as unusual and counter-cultural, or flirtatious.

#### **4.2.2 Sychar**

None of the British locations identified as Jacob's Well are presently associated with significant active Jewish communities. Jesus met the women at the well in an area populated with Samaritans, as such the contemporary reframing of the story requires an area populated with Jews. The 2011 census indicates that the local authorities with the highest proportion of

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<sup>211</sup> BBC, 'Bristol Firm Applies for Historic Well License', *BBC Online*, 14 February 2011, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-12446588>> [Accessed: 2 March 2017].

people identifying as Jewish are Barnet (15.2%) and Hertsmere (14.3%).<sup>212</sup> It is therefore this area of North West London that forms a contemporary setting for the retelling of the story. As Jesus and the disciples were travelling northward on their journey this should follow in the retelling. Travelling on the Thameslink train route<sup>213</sup> takes passengers north from London and passes through Elstree and Borehamwood, home to Britain's largest Jewish community.<sup>214</sup> Stopping off during a journey on Thameslink when travelling elsewhere would be unusual unless there was a specific reason to visit Borehamwood, paralleling the arguably unusual journey Jesus took through Samaria.

#### 4.2.3 Temple Courts

The Jerusalem Temple was the central Jewish institution.<sup>215</sup> The temple represented religious beliefs but was also a place of social, political and economic significance.<sup>216</sup> In ancient Israel the priests played a role of judges<sup>217</sup> and throughout the Roman Empire temples were utilised for

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<sup>212</sup> Emma White, 'Table 1, Local Authorities with the highest proportions of main minority religious groups, 2011' in *Religion in England and Wales 2011* (London: ONS, 2010), <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/religioninenglandandwales2011/2012-12-11>> [Accessed: 2 March 2017].

<sup>213</sup> FWT, 'Thameslink Route Map', *Thameslink*, 21 January 2016 <<http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/your-journey/planning/map/>> [Accessed: 2 March 2017].

<sup>214</sup> Jewish News, 'Borehamwood overtakes Stanmore as UK's biggest Jewish community', *Jewish News Online*, 17 December 2015, <<http://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/borehamwood-overtakes-stanmore-as-uks-biggest-jewish-community/>> [Accessed: 2 March 2017].

<sup>215</sup> Kåre Sigvald Fuglseth, *Johannine Sectarianism in Perspective*, Novum Testamentum Supplements, 119 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p.117.

<sup>216</sup> Carol Meyers, 'Temple, Jerusalem' in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 6 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 350-369 (p.361).

<sup>217</sup> Samuel Greengus, 'Law' in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 4 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 242-252 (p.244).

Senate meetings and trials of the law courts in addition to storing treasures, making sacrifices and conducting ceremonies.<sup>218</sup> In contemporary Britain the area around Parliament Square, London (surrounded by the Palace of Westminster, Westminster Abbey, The Supreme Court and the government departments of the Treasury and HM Revenue and Customs)<sup>219</sup> offers significant contextual associations. Parliament Square is a prominent venue for protests but is not recognised as a place for teaching. John 8:2 does not refer to Jesus going to the temple to teach rather that he comes to the temple courts where a crowd gather around him; in response he begins to teach them. A similar situation is plausible in central London and with the nature of present-day celebrity culture, live-streaming,<sup>220</sup> social media, paparazzi and 24-hour news cycles it would not take long for a crowd to assemble (physically and online) around a controversial character such as Jesus.

#### 4.2.4 Mount of Olives

The Mount of Olives is to the east of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Within the context of the exegeted passages the significance of the Mount is limited. Further analysis of Jesus life and ministry would determine whether the

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<sup>218</sup> Susan Guettel Cole, 'Greco-Roman Temples' in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 6 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 380-382 (p.380).

<sup>219</sup> Google Maps, *Parliament Square*, [Online Map] (2017)  
 <<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/place/Parliament+Square,+Westminster,+London+SW1P+3JX/@51.5004055,-0.127561,18z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x487604c4ed80e753:0xc5e245185be41f37!8m2!3d51.5002452!4d-0.1269709>> [Accessed 20 March 2017].

<sup>220</sup> Transmitting a live video feed over the internet.

location holds any greater connotations. Given the location to the east Greenwich Park<sup>221</sup> provides a geographic appropriateness in relation to the chosen venue of Parliament Square for the scene to unfold.

### **4.3 Time of Day**

Jesus met the Samaritan woman around noon (4:6) and explorations of this are suggestive of the woman's status. Arguably she was avoiding the other women of the town or returning to the well for a second time in the day for more water. A woman attempting to avoid people today may choose to shop during unsociable hours or online. If that woman is unemployed she is less likely to be able to access the internet<sup>222</sup> and visiting the store becomes a more probable scenario. Of course if someone is unemployed grocery shopping at noon is more feasible than for many in employment, and maintains the social isolation of the narrative.<sup>223</sup>

The portrayal of the woman caught in adultery is suggestive that she had been brought straight from the bed to be presented before Jesus. Jesus

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<sup>221</sup> Google Maps, *Greenwich Park*, [Online Map] (2017)  
<<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/place/Greenwich+Park/@51.48931,-0.0619646,13z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x487602849e18e569:0xe0b4893b3675cd0!8m2!3d51.4769095!4d0.0014643>> [Accessed 20 March 2017].

<sup>222</sup> Steven Armstrong and Maruxa Ruiz del Arbol, 'Unconnected and out of work: the vicious circle of having no internet', *The Guardian*, 9 April 2015  
<<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/apr/09/unconnected-and-out-of-work-the-vicious-circle-of-having-no-internet>> [Accessed 20 March 2017].

<sup>223</sup> Jenny de Jong, Gierveld, Theo G. van Tilburg and Pearl A. Dykstra, 'Loneliness and Social Isolation' in *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships*, 2nd edn, ed. by Anita Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) (Forthcoming), 1-30 (p.8). <<https://repub.eur.nl/pub/93235/deJong-Gierveld-et-al-CHPR-author-version.pdf>> [Accessed 20 March 2017].

teaching at dawn (8:2 NIV) means the adulterous act had been an early morning encounter or an all night affair.

For both scenarios there is no need to change the time of day in developing a contemporary retelling of events.

## 5 Implications

The reframing of the stories (Appendix 1) does not generate a perfect reflection of the biblical text and each could be reframed with alternative parallels dependent on the starting point of the translator. The initial exegesis of each passage highlights the significance of Jesus' engagement with Samaritans, women, Pharisees, how he approached worship, the law and social norms, and the places he travelled and ministered. The reframed settings echo these significant factors. In relation to Jesus' engagement with women (for example), the stories have not altered; in the biblical and contemporary settings of each passage Jesus 'elevates [the woman] as a person – and in the process all women with her'.<sup>224</sup> The contemporary rendering of the passages raises new themes including Christian-Jewish relations, Jesus' associations with evangelical Christians, the communities he encountered, and his response to sexuality and gender.

### 5.1 *Christian-Jewish Dialogue*

In the earliest days of the Church, Jews who believed in Jesus as the Messiah remained Jewish, though it was not long before both the Synagogue and Church began to stop identifying Jewish believers in Jesus as Jews but rather converts to Christianity.<sup>225</sup> When Jesus met the woman at the well it

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<sup>224</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern eyes* (London: SPCK, 2008), p.211.

<sup>225</sup> Richard Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2009) p.xi.

was she who questioned how a Jew could ask a Samaritan for a drink (4:9). It was her own understanding of the cultural norms, but lack of understanding of the nature of God that informed the question. Should a contemporary evangelical Christian have contact with Jews they may not understand the reasons for depth of division between the two faiths because of a lack of understanding of Judaism. On a popular level, there are Jews for whom knowing and affirming Judaism is not Christian is all that is required, therefore their knowledge of both faiths is minimal.<sup>226</sup> Such a way of thinking highlights something of the depth of negative feeling towards Christianity amongst Jews. 'Jesus was regarded as an apostate, a false messiah who had led people astray. After centuries of persecution Jews had good reason to dislike Christianity.'<sup>227</sup> Popular theological understanding amongst Christians is that Christianity supersedes Judaism; the old covenant between God and the people of Israel has been replaced by a new covenant between God and followers of Jesus.<sup>228</sup> Some Christian theologians have now renounced supersessionism opening up the possibility for dialogue with Jewish theologians who in turn are forced to address anti-Christian theology.<sup>229</sup> This thesis does not attempt to address issues of supersessionism, but framing Jesus from a Christian perspective and having him meet with a Jewish woman raises questions about Christian-Jewish relations and how Christian's could take the initiative in crossing social, cultural, ethnic, gender and theological boundaries. If the Church is to be

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<sup>226</sup> David Novak, *Talking With Christians: Musing of a Jewish Theologian* (London: SCM Press, 2006), p.9.

<sup>227</sup> Harries, p.167.

<sup>228</sup> Gritsch, p.18.

<sup>229</sup> Novak, pp.10-11.

conformed to the likeness of Christ<sup>230</sup> then there is a need for a greater understanding of Judaism (both historical and contemporary) and a willingness to challenge prejudice and misunderstanding through taking what may be considered a diversion into the Jewish world. If 'Messianic Judaism is a contextual Christian theology'<sup>231</sup> there is an opportunity for the wider Christian Church to support their ministry amongst Jews. This is not an excuse for only Messianic Jews to minister to Jews; there is a broader imperative upon the Church to challenge social norms and historic divisions.

The Samaritan woman shared with the people from the town that Jesus told her everything she had ever done (4:39) leading to other Samaritans meeting with Jesus and believing him to be the Saviour of the World (4:42). The Samaritans did not cease to be Samaritans (at least culturally); rather they became Samaritans who believe in Jesus' Messiahship. Jews consider conversion to Christianity both as a betrayal and loss of identity<sup>232</sup> and since the 1960's Messianic Judaism has developed as a diverse movement of Jews who accept the messiahship of Jesus.<sup>233</sup> There are reports of Muslims meeting in mosques, studying the Qu'ran and putting their faith in Jesus as Messiah, but of also rejecting the label "Christian" instead identifying as Messianic Muslim.<sup>234</sup> The narrative of Jesus and the woman at the well offers a framework for cross-cultural mission. The contemporary rendering of the story establishes the need for Christians to engage with Jews (and people of

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<sup>230</sup> Romans 8:29.

<sup>231</sup> Harvey, p.35.

<sup>232</sup> Harries, p.127.

<sup>233</sup> Harvey, p.xi.

<sup>234</sup> Mark Ord, *Is Allah the Same as God the Father?*, BMS International Mission Centre, 11 February 2016.

other faiths) not as a means of growing a specific local church, but countering prejudice and perceptively engaging in dialogue. 'It is only through understanding of each other's faith that ignorant prejudice between Christian and Jew and Jew and Christian will end.'<sup>235</sup> Bevans and Schroeder remark,

'In the coming decades of the twenty-first century, the church's promotion of interreligious dialogue may be one of its greatest missionary services in a world that may very well resort to confrontation and violence – quick fixes – rather than God's method of patient listening and gentle yet unmistakable commitment to truth.'<sup>236</sup>

The narrative of Jesus and the woman at the well emphasises the positive consequences of engaging in dialogue with those different to oneself, the contemporised narrative demonstrates the potential positive bearing Christian-Jewish (and more general interfaith) dialogue could achieve. Dialogue and mission lead to adventure, there are risks and surprises yet the Holy Spirit guides toward fuller understanding as Christians engage with the world as witnesses and ambassadors of Jesus.<sup>237</sup> The narrative tells of Jesus' humanity, in his exhaustion he requires the help of a foreign women;<sup>238</sup> the contemporary retelling maintains this humanity and encourages the Christian reader to engage relationally with Jews.

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<sup>235</sup> Sidney Brichto, 'Studying Theirs Strengthens Ours', *Jewish Chronicle*, 22 June 2001, p.25, <<https://www.thejc.com/archive/1.341436?highlight=Brichto>> [Accessed 28 March 2017].

<sup>236</sup> Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), p. 385.

<sup>237</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), pp.500-501.

<sup>238</sup> Bailey, p.215.

## 5.2 *Evangelical Pharisees*

The reframing of the Samaritans as Jews and Pharisees as evangelical Christians poses a challenge to Christian preaching and teaching. Preachers must use language considerately and there is a long history and continuing issue of anti-Judaism in Christian preaching.<sup>239</sup> Williamson and Allen observe that during Lent and Holy Week 'Christian preaching readily lapses into the accusatorial mode against Jews.'<sup>240</sup> Placing evangelical Christians into the narrative (especially in the story of the woman caught in adultery) should be a cause of Christian introspection. Rather than standing alongside Jesus as disciples, evangelicals find themselves accused of attempting to trick Jesus. For those who desire to be Jesus' disciples this is uncomfortable. Many biblical scholars now believe Jesus' positions closely resemble those of the Pharisees;<sup>241</sup> therefore understanding the Pharisees has the potential to deepen understanding of Jesus. Evangelical Christians should reflect upon Jesus' attitude and message to the Pharisees and the significance of such a message for themselves. This requires an improved understanding of the Pharisees who (in contrast to the depiction as archenemies of Jesus)<sup>242</sup> devoted their attention to love, loyalty and compassion with the desire to entrench these virtues in Jewish life.<sup>243</sup> This is not a common Christian portrayal of Pharisees or Judaism for which there is a 'long history of the

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<sup>239</sup> Williamson and Allen, p.27.

<sup>240</sup> Williamson and Allen, p.25.

<sup>241</sup> John T. Pawlikowshi, 'Jesus – A Pharisee and the Christ' in *Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations* ed. by Michael Shermis and Arthur E. Zannoni (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991), 174-201 (p.174).

<sup>242</sup> Pawlikowshi, p.183.

<sup>243</sup> Pawlikowshi, p.179.

teaching of contempt' and therefore 'the Christian Church is called to repent, that is to radically rethink its whole attitude to Judaism'.<sup>244</sup> Love, loyalty and compassion are primary concerns of the Christian Church so Jesus' challenge against exclusive and restrictive attitudes, practices and structures<sup>245</sup> is a message Christians need to hear. Lessons about Pharisees, Judaism, cultural context, repentance and reconciliation must come from the pulpit, and there is a need for Christian preachers to address issues of generalisation and stereotypes, prejudice, and misinformation.

### **5.3 Public Theology**

'Central to the biblical story are place, concrete land, and everyday experiences on that land'.<sup>246</sup> The ministry of Jesus in the selected passages takes place in the public arena with the contemporary portrayals placing his ministry conspicuously outside of a church building. The supermarket and Parliament Square are atypical venues for church pastors to be found conducting ministries of discipleship, teaching and pastoral care. The well and the supermarket in their respective contexts represent the needs of daily living, the place for refreshment and supplies for the family home. The temple and the area around Parliament Square represent politics, economics and law together with religion. Jesus' ministry is related and relevant to the people and society of the day both personally and publicly. The lesson from

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<sup>244</sup> Harries, p.127.

<sup>245</sup> Bosch, p.27.

<sup>246</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Borden, *Introducing the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), p.77.

the contemporary passages that speak to the Christian Church is one of developing its public theology; that is 'a theology which has at the core of its Christian identity a concern for the coming of God's Kingdom in the public world of human history'.<sup>247</sup> It has been claimed that public theology is evangelism in the form of a dialogue in which both persuasive speaking and attentive listening are invoked.<sup>248</sup>

Public theology 'has an obligation to seek commonalities out of which human beings, as both religious and social creatures, may strive to recognize [sic] a larger set of meanings in economy, culture, politics and society.'<sup>249</sup> This is not simply about Christians, and in particular clergy, conducting sermons in the streets. It is about engaging with the societal context in a meaningful way that relates to the issues and concerns of the community in and beyond the boundaries of Church. This is not a call to superficial contextualisation of the Church reflecting popular culture, but like Jesus penetrating presented issues and addressing the heart of the matter at the time and in the place it is put forward. Jesus' engagement in the two passages, particularly with the women, demonstrates his compassionate response to their situations. Both women were socially outcast and Jesus' response to each was in contrast to their own and societal expectation. Christians who, like Jesus, demonstrably love God and others are able to engage in dialogue within their

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<sup>247</sup> William F. Storrar and Andrew R. Moreton, 'Introduction' in *Public Theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. by William F. Storrar and Andrew R. Moreton (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 1-24 (p.1).

<sup>248</sup> Andrew R. Moreton, 'Duncan Forrester: A Public Theologian' in *Public Theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Essays in Honour of Duncan B. Forrester*, ed. by William F. Storrar and Andrew R. Moreton (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 25-36 (p.27).

<sup>249</sup> Scott R. Paeth, *Exodus Church and Civil Society: Public Theology and Social Theory in the Work of Jürgen Moltmann*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), p.3.

neighbourhoods and bring gospel perspective to different questions and circumstances; without empathy such efforts are ineffective.<sup>250</sup>

#### **5.4 Redeemed Sexual and Gender Identity**

In each passage (in both traditional and contemporary settings) Jesus challenges issues of gender and sexuality. Although there are proportionally fewer men in British churches, having been organised and controlled by men throughout history 'churches are not great places for many women to be either'.<sup>251</sup> Between traditional and contemporary accounts the places, races, religions and cultures are altered for contextualisation, however that there is no need to alter the gender or transgression is significant. The gender of the women is important, it is a substantial part of their identity, but Jesus demonstrates that this is not to be a cause for prejudice or patriarchal bias. Jesus' actions confront cultural gender inequalities and inconsistencies across societies and time. Fischer contends that 'women today are also like the Samaritan women in their experience of oppression and exclusion. In order to drink from their wells, they must challenge established cultural and religious beliefs.'<sup>252</sup> It is not just women who must challenge gender bias, but as Jesus demonstrated men must play an active role. It is unacceptable that churches remain places of inequality and oppression for women.

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<sup>250</sup> Roxburgh and Borden, p.111.

<sup>251</sup> Jenny Baker, *Equals* (London: SPCK, 2014), p.120.

<sup>252</sup> Fischer, p.31.

The contemporary retelling of the story of the women at the well hints at the possibility of same sex attraction but is not explicit or conclusive in this depiction. Stassen and Gushee do not accept same sex relationships as biblical but contend 'homosexual persons are precious, made in the image of God and bearers of all the dignity that God affords to all humanity'.<sup>253</sup> Whether a woman is homosexual or not, in a married relationship or not, is committing adultery or not, the primary issue is that it is only the woman's sexual relationships that are made public in both passages. Jesus acknowledges the adultery of the woman brought before him at the temple or Parliament Square, and the number of marriages of the woman at the well or the supermarket, yet he does not cause the women to feel under judgement for their sexuality. Rather, Jesus offers redemption to each of the women. All relationships and interactions are affected by our sexuality therefore 'redeemed sexuality is part of the reign of God'.<sup>254</sup>

Jesus' mission was inclusive; 'dissolving alienation and breaking down walls of hostility'.<sup>255</sup> Jesus acts against exclusivity through engagement and dialogue with the both Samaritan and Jewish women.<sup>256</sup> He demonstrates that all are equal members and participants in God's Kingdom and that 'no particular ethnic, sexual, or social class of believers has the intrinsic right to exercise spiritual authority over or assume spiritual responsibility for

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<sup>253</sup> Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), p.311.

<sup>254</sup> Stassen and Gushee, p.311.

<sup>255</sup> Bosch, p.28.

<sup>256</sup> Fischer, p.43.

believers outside the privileged class.'<sup>257</sup> The Church needs to acknowledge and learn today to emulate Jesus' example of inclusivity it is that:

'A spirituality of exclusion affects both personal and institutional wholeness. It creates thought and language based on us/them categories. We deny what we consider weakness in ourselves and project them onto others. Those we define as other – gay or lesbian persons, blacks, women, the poor – are excluded from participation and power. Such a spirituality of denial lies at the heart of racism, sexism, and anti-semitism [sic].'<sup>258</sup>

The contemporary reframing of the Gospel narratives should awaken Christians to inherent bias and exclusivity of the Church with a view to encouraging repentance, healing and seeking wholeness through redemption.

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<sup>257</sup> Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Good News for Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), p.35.

<sup>258</sup> Fischer, p.43.

## 6 Conclusions

Transposing the Gospel narrative from a first century Middle Eastern context to a twenty-first century British context is possible and the implications challenging. As a white, evangelical male the author has been challenged through the consideration of Jesus within the authors own context and the consequences for the Church, understanding God, and God's mission. In the introduction it was mentioned that we do not have a contemporary portrayal of Jesus that makes sense to this world. It is possible that the portrayal of Jesus presented in the contemporary retelling of the Gospel will make sense to the world but be more difficult for the Church to accept.

The contemporary reframing of the selected Bible passages bring to the forefront the same message and values of the events from first century Palestine and should cause Christians (in particular evangelicals) to look afresh at the outworking of the message. The initial work through this thesis has highlighted issues for the Church to address and a contemporary portrayal of Jesus' redeeming engagement with the world. Further study and exegesis of the *Gospel of John* and Synoptic Gospels would test and strengthen the twenty-first century parallels.

The challenge is to see where God could be incarnate in our context and to reflect honestly on our own position within the gospel narrative. The task is not easy because rather than identifying the positive attributes of the Christian Church and celebrating faithful disciples, the contemporary retelling

shines a light on issues of sexism, racism, anti-Semitism and the exclusivity of the Church. In response there will be a temptation to reject the criticisms, blame others or find excuses for building and maintaining social, religious and traditional barriers. Jesus' challenge in first century Palestine was to encourage a fresh and alternative look at the meaning of scripture as a witness to the inclusivity of the Kingdom of God. The challenge remains for followers of Christ to recognise and repent of prejudice and bias (whether conscious or unconscious) and to seek to engage afresh in God's mission; proclaiming what should be good news for all; the Kingdom of God is near.<sup>259</sup>

Developing a contemporary portrayal of the Gospel narrative promotes mission as dialogue; calls for preaching that is free of prejudicial generalisations; encourages the Church to publicly and compassionately bring gospel perspective to current societal concerns; and to develop a spirituality of inclusivity that redeems women and men into renewed wholeness through engagement with Jesus.

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<sup>259</sup> Mark 1:15 (GNT, NIV, NRSVA).

## ***Appendix 1***

### ***John 4:1-42 – A Contemporary Retelling***

(Based on the New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA))

Now when Jesus learned that the evangelical Christian's had heard, 'Jesus is making and baptising more followers than John'— although it was not Jesus himself but his apprentices who baptised— he left London and started heading north. But he had to go through North London. So he came to a town called Borehamwood, near the plot of ground that Pope Clement granted to the monastery and Abbey.<sup>260</sup> There was a supermarket there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the entrance. It was about noon.

A Jewish woman came to buy groceries, and Jesus said to her, 'Buy me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the store to buy food.) The Jewish woman said to him, 'How is it that you ask a drink of me?' Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no money, and bottled water is expensive. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob? Or the Pope who gave the land, and with the monks and their pigs consumed from it?'<sup>261</sup> Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks

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<sup>260</sup> 'Parishes: Elstree' in *A History of the County of Hertford: Volume 2*, ed. by William Page (London: Victoria County History, 1908), (349-351) para.10, in *British History Online*, <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/herts/vol2/pp349-351>> [accessed 20 March 2017].

<sup>261</sup> 'Parishes: Elstree', para.10.

bottled water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to buy water.’

Jesus said to her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come back.’ The woman answered him, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You are right in saying, “I have no husband”; for you have had five husbands, and now you have a partner but are not married. What you have said is true!’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped in the temple, but you say that the place where people must worship is in church.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither in a temple, a synagogue nor in church. You worship your God; we worship the Trinity, for salvation is made available to all. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’ The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am he, the one who is speaking to you.’

Just then his apprentices came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a Jewish woman, but no one said, ‘What do you want?’ or, ‘Why are you speaking with her?’ Then the woman left her purse and went out into the

town. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' They left what they were doing and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the apprentices were urging him, 'Teacher, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.'

Many Jews from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' So when the Jews came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.'

## ***John 7:53-8:11 – A Contemporary Retelling***

(Based on the New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA))

Then each of them went home, while Jesus went to the Greenwich Park. Early in the morning he came again to Parliament Square. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. Some evangelical Christian's brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them and streaming live online, they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they turn of their cameras and went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, sir.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.'

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