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Makmor Tumin

Prostration (προσκυνέω) as a Definitive Sign of the Final Messenger in Jesus' Conversation with the Samaritan Woman (John 4:19-26)

Meryem Teke¹ and Okan Doğan²

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Abstract: This paper endeavors to show that Jesus' words in John 4:19-26 are best understood and fulfilled by the *ṣalāh* (prayer) bestowed on Prophet Muḥammad and his followers. In the passage, Jesus explains to a Samaritan woman that the ritual act of prostration, e.g., Greek προσκυνέω (*proskyneō*), in the future will not be limited to certain sacred sites like Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim. Although the meaning of *proskyneō* in Greek is "to prostrate," all Bibles that the authors consulted have translated the word into English as "worship." When the word *proskyneō* is translated as "prostrate," it becomes clear that it refers to the communal prayer of prostration, similar to the *ṣalāh* (prayer) practiced by Muslims. Qur'an 48:29 mentions that the similitude of the Muslim prayer of *ṣalāh* is mentioned in the Torah. The verse reads: "You see them bowing and prostrating [in *ṣalāh*], seeking bounty from God and [His] pleasure. Their sign is in their faces from the effect of prostration. That is their description in the Torah." The focus of this paper is interpreting Jesus' words (John 4:19-24) in light of Qur'an 48:29. We feel that the paper decisively demonstrates that the *ṣalāh*'s communal prostration is an unmistakable fulfillment of biblical expectations as expressed in the prophetic words of Jesus.

Keywords: Jesus's conversation, John 4, *proskyneō*, prostration, Samaritan woman

Introduction: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

In the 4th chapter of the Gospel of John, we are told Jesus travels into Samaria, which was considered a foreign territory. We are told that Jews have traditionally seen the Samaritans as heretics. The Samaritans appear to have accepted the Torah as revelatory, but nothing else. No other book of the Bible was seen as revelatory. Rejecting the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem as the site of rituals, they set up a rival temple on Mount Gerizim. Whereas the Jews have several expected personages, such as the prophets Moses and Elijah, and royal and priestly Messiahs, the Samaritans only waited for the prophet like Moses mentioned in the Torah. This person was called Taheb. "They spoke not of a Davidic messiah, nor actually much of an 'anointed' (messianic) agent per se, but of the 'Taheb,' the 'restorer,' a prophet like Moses" (Keener, 2003, p. 619). He would be from the descendants of Joseph³ and restore the teachings of Moses.

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³ The Samaritan belief of the Taheb, the Prophet like Moses, being from the lineage of Joseph should be taken as a typological prophecy, that is, some essential characteristics of Joseph and his life are expected to be mirrored in the future as a type. Based on this, we say that Prophet Muhammad typologically represents Joseph. There is an Islamic precedent for this in the life of Muhammad. In his peaceful conquest of Mecca Muhammad compared himself to Joseph, and the pagan Arabs of Mecca to Joseph's brothers. Just as Joseph's brothers rejected and persecuted him but finally accepted that he was chosen by God as his prophet, Muhammad's "brothers," the Meccans, rejected and persecuted him but finally accepted him as God's prophet. And just as Joseph forgave them, Muhammad forgave his Meccan brothers. However, as a typology, we feel there is still more to the Taheb prophecy. For example, typologically, Joseph's brothers, representing all the religions that have preceded Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc., will eventually put aside their resentment and

According to this position, the Samaritans neither believed in nor expected a future messianic figure. Although there were various messiahs in the Jewish conception, such as royal and priestly messiahs, it is generally claimed that Samaritans did not hold to the belief of any type of messiah, for they rejected the Davidic line and priesthood of the temple. These claims are surprising because the Samaritan woman says she is waiting for the Messiah: The woman said, “I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us” (John 4:25). This shows that the term “messiah” appears to have had different interpretations. For example, although she uses the term “messiah,” she obviously does not intend a person from the lineage of David.

The meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman occurs at Jacob’s well. The discussion revolves around living water alluding to faith, which permanently quenches one’s thirst. We will not focus on this part of the conversation. Our focus will be after she perceives Jesus to be a prophet (v. 19). Toward the end of their conversation, convinced he is a prophet, the Samaritan woman asks Jesus which mountain—Jerusalem or Mt. Gerizim—is the correct place to prostrate, e.g., προσκυνέω (*proskyneō*), which almost all Bible translations render “worship.” To get a feel for the passage, it is instructive to briefly read it. Note the underlined words “worship” are translations of the word προσκυνέω.

John 4:19-26.

19 The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and yet you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one must worship.” 21 Jesus said to her, “Believe Me, woman, that a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. 23 But a time is coming, and even now has arrived, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” 25 The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.” 26 Jesus said to her, “I am He, the One speaking to you.” (NASB)

The passage read with the word “worship” does not even hint at the discussion being about “prostration.” Thus, now one can argue that Jesus was discussing the spiritualisation of “worship,” as we will shortly see. However, it will be evident that when the word is translated as “prostrate,” the passage points to something substantially different. But first our methodology.

Methodology

This paper employs exegetical analysis using Greek and Hebrew lexicons. We will briefly look at the present leading Christian commentaries of the Johannine passage. Our analysis will show the inadequacy of understanding the passage when προσκυνέω (*proskyneō*) is translated as

jealously and acknowledge that Islam, representing the youngest religion, is the final culmination of God’s revelation. Recognising Islam as chosen by God, they will in the end embrace Islam as Joseph’s brothers eventually embraced Joseph. When will this happen? When the brothers of Muhammad appear, as in the life of Joseph. Joseph’s brothers acknowledge Joseph’s superiority and ask forgiveness from him after Benjamin comes of age. Similarly, the other religions, especially Judaism and Christianity, convinced of Islam’s veracity, will accept Islam and ask for forgiveness from the Muslims when the brothers of Muhammad appear. In a famous hadith, Prophet Muhammad says, “... I love to see my brothers.” They (the hearers) said, “Aren’t we your brothers, O Messenger of Allah?” He said, “You are my companions, and our brothers are those who have, so far, not come into the world...” (Muslim 249a). So, in our interpretation, the brothers of Muhammad typologically represent Benjamin, the brother of Joseph. In Islam this may be considered a type of Tafsir al-Ishari.

“worship.” Rather than “worship,” the word “prostrate” (the literal meaning of προσκυνέω), will be used to explore how the meaning of the passage is affected. By translating προσκυνέω as “prostrate,” we will see, that the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is best explained by a Qur’anic verse in Surah al-Fath and a saying of prophet Muhammad. Using content analysis, we will also provide inferential translations to some of the Greek words such as “spirit” and “truth” uttered by Jesus. Before concluding the paper, we will argue that the biblical expectation of “a house made without hands” is best explained with the *tawāf* of the Ka’bah.

Popular Christian Bible Commentators

In this section, we will cover the views on John 4:19-26 of a number of Christian Bible scholars. Besides teaching the Bible at prestigious Christian seminaries, they are the authors of popular commentaries on the Gospel of John.

Craig Keener

Regarded as a reliable resource in understanding John’s content, Keener, in his commentary on the conversation between the Samaritan woman and Jesus, continually refers to the idea of “worship.” He takes the word *proskyneō* in this passage, which is repeated more than seven times by Jesus, as “worship.” Notwithstanding, citing numerous references from the Book of Revelation and admittedly stating “worship often included prostration (Rev 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4; cf. 3:9; 19:10; 22:8)” (Keener, 2003, p. 616), he keeps using the generic term “worship.” Although Keener literally writes, “John’s ‘worship in the Spirit’ is a foretaste of the eschatological worship around God’s throne depicted in Revelation” (Keener, 2003, p. 617), he never entertains the idea that “worship in the Spirit” entails “prostration to God.” It is clear that the eschatological significance of “worship” around the throne of God in Revelation entails the physical act of “falling down and prostrating” to God. However, according to Keener, Jesus focused on revealing the worship in the Spirit, not in the flesh. “Ultimately, fleshly (i.e., merely human) worship... is to be rejected...” (Keener, 2003, p. 618). But one asks, “Couldn’t Jesus be emphasising the performance in the Spirit of a physical ritual at a sacred site?” Keener does allude to this idea: “This is not to deny that some could emphasise both the Spirit and sacred geography...” (Keener, 2003, p. 617). But feels the thrust in Jesus’ words is about worshipping in the Spirit: “Merely fleshly worship ... is inadequate” (Keener, 2003, p. 619).

Edward W. Klink III

Like Keener, Klink, in his *Exegetical commentary on the New Testament: John*, conveys the discussion between the Samaritan woman and Jesus to revolve around proper worship. It’s quite surprising, but not once does he refer to the ritual of “prostration.” Reading his commentary on 4:22 you anticipate he will delve into the Greek term “*proskyneō*” for he writes that Jesus reveals the nature and origin of true worship. “Focusing more directly on the topic of worship, Jesus gives definition to the nature and origin of true worship” (Klink, 2016, p. 243). But regrettably, he cannot escape looking at the conversation from a post-crucifixion perspective. He writes, “By restating the connection of worship to the “hour” (ώρα), Jesus is making the cross the central component of worship” (Klink, 2016, p. 244). We even find the Trinitarian doctrine of the fourth century intrudes into the text. Referring to the implications of “worshipping the Father” spoken by Jesus in v. 23, he writes, “And the more the Father is made central, the more Jesus becomes central. Such are the unifying distinctions of the

Trinitarian God” (Klink, 2016, p. 244). This is clearly not the correct *sitz im leben* of the conversation. So, Klink’s commentary does not touch upon the idea of prostration as an act of worship.

Donald A. Carson

The whole premise of Carson’s commentary, i.e., *The Gospel according to John*, is about the nature of “worship.” He does allude to a particular worship at Jerusalem: sacrifices. Referring to Solomon’s Temple, he writes, “There sacrifice was divinely sanctioned...” (Carson, 1991, p. 222). He writes that sacrifices were also practiced by Samaritans on Mt. Gerizim. They believed that Abraham built an altar—a structure to sacrifice animals—on Shechem overlooking Mt. Gerizim. He notes that in time a temple was built there on which certain sacrifices and “other rites” were performed even after John Hyrcanus destroyed the temple: “[T]he Samaritans continued to perform their sacrifices and *other rites* (emphasis added) on this mountain” (Carson, 1991, p. 222). However, he does not identify what those “*other rites*” were. He never once considers to probe the Greek term *proskyneō* which is repeated seven times by Jesus (John 4:21-4). He discusses the historical background of the Samaritans and their commonalities and differences with the Jews. “Both Jews and Samaritans recognized that God had commanded their forefathers to ‘seek the place the Lord your God [would] choose from among all [their] tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling’ (Dt. 12:5)” (Carson, 1991, p. 222). But like other commentaries, he feels Jesus’ focus was on freeing worship from sacred places. “But under the eschatological conditions of the dawning hour, the true worshippers cannot be identified by their attachment to a particular shrine, but by their worship of the Father in the spirit and truth” (Carson, 1991, p. 225). Although Carson mentions other rites practiced at Jerusalem, he never clarifies what these rites were. The driving force of his arguments is on spiritualising the “worship” performed at these two locations.

Herman N. Ridderbos

In his *The Gospel according to John: A theological commentary*, Ridderbos uses the word “worship” when commenting on the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Not once does he investigate the Greek term *proskyneō*. He starts by explaining the background of the Samaritans and their schism with the Jews. He notes that, even though it was adulterated with idolatry, they did worship Yahweh, as did the Jews at the temple of Jerusalem. “From of old the Samaritans had worshipped Yahweh alongside their idols (2 Kg. 17:26f, 32, 41)” (Ridderbos, 1997, p. 161). Again, comparing the two rituals performed at the two temples, he says, “This is not to say that Jesus made no distinctions between the two existing places of worship. He describes the worship of Samaritans as based on ignorance of what they are doing” (Ridderbos, 1997, p. 162). However, what forms did the worship take at both temples? He never broaches that question. He only mentions “sacrifices.” “In distinction from the Jews who, according to Dt. 27:4 (Masoretic text), brought their sacrifices to Mount Ebal, the Samaritans, in their Pentateuch, gave this significance to Mount Gerizim, which was situated adjacent to Jacob’s well...” (Ridderbos, 1997, p. 161). The author is not interested in the patterns of worship at the temples. It’s irrelevant because, in his words, “...in Christ the way to the Father is being opened in a totally new manner (14:6), the limits of the old pattern of worship are being broken through and the true worshippers are being brought together in a single fellowship” (Ridderbos, 1997, p. 164).

Summary

We see two essential problems with the authors' approach to the Johannine passage. First, everywhere the word *proskyneō* is mentioned, it is translated as "worship," rather than "prostrate," i.e., a specific form of worship. This prevents the reader from thinking of a particular form of worship, avoiding any imagery of prostration. Second, the authors look at the discussion between Jesus and the Samaritan woman through the lens of Trinitarian doctrine. This is a problem because the doctrine of the Trinity did not exist in the time of Jesus and developed after three centuries. This approach hinders understanding the meaning behind Jesus' words. Now, let's take a look at the Qur'an and a relevant saying of Muhammad.

The Similitude of Muslims in the Torah

One of the prophetic descriptions of the followers of Muhammad in the Torah appears to be the prostration of the Muslim community. Qur'an 48:29 informs its audience that the followers of Muhammad have been mentioned in the Torah. It provides a depiction of them, which appears to be communal prostration.

Qur'an 48:29 Thou canst see them bowing down [*rukka'an*], prostrating [*sujjadan*] themselves [in prayer], seeking favour with God and [His] goodly acceptance: their marks are on their faces, traced by prostration [*simāhum fī wujūhihim min athar al-sujūd*]. This is their parable in the Torah... (Muhammad Asad)

The Qur'an informs the reader that the frequent communal prostration to God of Muhammad and his followers is a fulfillment of a prophetic example revealed in the Torah. The reference that this is openly visible to the People of the Book suggests that this prayer was not confined to particular locations in houses of worship but rather performed outside wherever Muslims may be. This is confirmed by Prophet Muhammad. In a hadith mentioned in Bukhari, Prophet Muhammad explicitly singles out that the whole earth has been made a masjid (lit. a place of prostration) for him.

Bukhari 438 Narrated Jābir bin 'Abd Allah: Allah's Messenger said, "I have been given five things which were not given to any amongst the prophets before me.... The earth has been made for me (and for my followers) **a place for prostration [*masjidan*]** and a thing to perform *tayammum*. Therefore, my followers can pray wherever the time of a prayer is due. ...

In this hadith, Muhammad explicitly mentions that the earth has been made "a place of prostration" for him, and thus, for his followers. This may imply that the whole earth was not a place of prostration prior to the prophethood of Muhammad, and that prostration may have been restricted to certain localities, like temples and monasteries. However, with the coming of Muhammad, this requirement of prostration has been delocalised, e.g., it can and must be performed anywhere on earth at certain specific times.

Prostration in Ancient Israel

The Qur'an and Hadith indicate that prostration in the past was confined to certain locations prior to Muhammad's arrival. Do we have affirmation of this? The Bible says, "Exalt the LORD our God and worship (הִתְפָּלֵל) at his holy mountain, for the LORD our God is holy" (Psalm 99:9).

The word for worship, הִתְפָּלֵל, in this verse is in Hithpael form and in the imperative mood, that is, God is commanding the Israelites to "prostrate" in Jerusalem. They are required to

perform this act, but in Jerusalem. However, strangely enough almost all Bible translators have rendered the word “worship.” The exceptions are “bow yourself” (LSV, YLT) and “bow down” (NAB). But Harris et al. inform us that הִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת in the form *hishtaḥăwâ* (which it is in Psalm 99:9) means “to prostrate”: “The commonly occurring form *hishtaḥăwâ* “to prostrate oneself” (Harris, 1997, p. 915). Rabbi Lockshin writes, “God-fearing Israelites prostrate themselves before the deity over a hundred times in the Bible” (Lockshin, 2024). He provides two verses to support his position.

Then He said to Moses, “Come up to YHWH, with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel, and *prostrate* yourself from afar.” (Ex. 24:1)

“Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil which You, O YHWH, have given me.”
You shall leave it before YHWH your God, and *prostrate* yourself before YHWH your God.
(De. 26:10)

In both verses, the word for “prostrate” (*hishtaḥăwâ*) is in the imperative. Bowen informs us that “Septuagint (LXX), a translation of the Hebrew Bible made by and for Greek-speaking Jews (and used by the New Testament writers), renders *hištaḥăwâ* with *proskyneō* almost uniformly. All these translators identified Israelite *hištaḥăwâ* with Greek *proskynesis*...” (Bowen, 2013, p. 65). Thus, the Gospel writers were also aware of the requirement of this specific act of worship, *prostration*, through the Greek Septuagint. This was a specific act of worship that God demanded of the Israelites. Lockshin quotes Uri Ehrlich, professor at Ben-Gurion University, “During the biblical period, prostration constituted the preeminent, most ritualized physical gesture in the sacrificial and prayer services.... During the Second Temple period as well, we find widespread evidence for the continued practice of prostration in prayer and in the Temple” (Lockshin, 2024). Blidstein, in his article “Prostration and Mosaics in Talmudic Law,” analyses the Rabbinic tradition and observes that prostration was restricted to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Our *baraita*⁴ is, perhaps, a component of the rabbinic policy that distinguishes synagogue from Temple. Prostration, as a response to the presence of God, was restricted to the now ruined Temple. Indeed, it is not improbable that while the Temple stood Jews prostrated themselves in its courts only; and there alone was God so fully present that prostration was a normal response.... (Blidstein, 1974, p. 23)

So, it appears that the discussion between the Samaritan woman and Jesus revolved around this particular form of worship in Jerusalem and Mt. Gerizim: *prostration*.

Fulfillment of the Expectation of Prostration in the Coming of Muhammad

It is abundantly clear that the discussion between Jesus and the Samaritan woman points to the universalisation of the prayer of prostration, which has come to pass with the coming of Muhammad. However, Andrew Smith, writing about the ritual worship of prostration in the New Testament, feels that although the Samaritan woman’s question was about prostration, Jesus’s focus was on distancing it from “physical location and physical posture.”

The discussion between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4 is of distinct interest since it presents an instance of prostration as more devoted (or being more prescriptively defined in Jesus’s prophecy of a coming time) to an internal motivation, unencumbered by physical location or (perhaps) by physical posture (John 4:23–24). (Smith, 2019, p. 577)

⁴ A *baraita* is an interpretation of Jewish tradition that is not included in the Mishnah.

Smith claims that what Jesus was stressing was the spiritualisation of prostration, which for him entailed doing away with the physical location and physical posture of prostration. He is not alone. Greeven asserts the same. He writes, "The conversation of Jesus with the Samaritan woman in Jn 4:20-24 leaves an initial impression that προσκυνεῖν is used here in a wholly figurative sense, since Jesus speaks of προσκυνεῖν in spirit and in truth. But if prostrating oneself no longer plays any definite role, the reference in the statement and answer is to the place of worship" (Kittel & Friedrich, 1968, p. 764).

It is argued that the phrase "worship (prostrate) in the Spirit" (Jn. 4:24) uttered by Jesus entails this. But does it? Keener says that in the Book of Revelation the phrase points to the worship of the angels and elders around the throne of God. "John's 'worship in the Spirit is a foretaste of the eschatological worship around God's throne depicted in Revelation" (Keener, 2003, p. 617). What was the form of the worship around God's throne in Revelation? It is none other than prostration. Unfortunately, as in John 4:19-24, almost all English translations translate the Greek προσκυνέω in the passages of Revelation as "worship." Many passages in the Book of Revelation present prostration as the particular form of worship around God's throne: Rev. 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4. Looking at some of these passages is instructive. The word "prostrated" will be used in place of "worshipped."

...the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and *prostrated to* (worshipped) him who lives for ever and ever. (Rev. 4:10)

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and *prostrated to* (worshipped) God...

And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and prostrated to (worshipped) God...

If Keener is correct, in that the "worship in the Spirit" mentioned by Jesus "is a foretaste of the eschatological worship around God's throne depicted in Revelation" (Keener, 2003, p. 617), then in place of removing the physical posture of prostration, we should expect it to become universalised. Rather than *spiritualising prostration* (whatever that means?), eschatological expectation would have been that this prayer would not be confined to elders and angels around the throne but would extend to include all of humanity. This idea is not so strange to rabbinic thinking. Keener notes a Jewish tradition that anticipates an expansion of the temple of Jerusalem. "According to some later traditions, in the world to come, Jerusalem would be the size of Eretz Israel, and Israel the size of the current world" (Keener, 2003, p. 614). We argue that this expectation has been realised in the coming of Muhammad, where the Ka'bah has become the Qibla—the direction to turn during the prayer of prostration—from everywhere on earth and beyond. Figuratively, this would signify the expansion of the walls of the Ka'bah to include the whole earth. When the Greek word προσκυνέω in John 4 is translated as "prostrate" rather than "worship," this will become clear.

19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. 20 Our fathers *prostrated* on this mountain, and yet you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one must *prostrate*." 21 Jesus said to her, "Believe Me, woman, that a time is coming when you will *prostrate* to the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans *prostrate* to what you do not know; we *prostrate* to what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. 23 But a time is coming, and even now has arrived, when the true *prostrators* will *prostrate* to the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His *prostrators*. 24 God is spirit, and those who *prostrate* to Him must *prostrate* in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." 26 Jesus said to her, "I am He, the One speaking to you."

Therefore, as the Qur'an and the hadith explicate, the communal practice of the prayer of prostration, called *ṣalāh*, instituted by Muhammad is the fulfillment of this expectation. Christians, unfortunately, cannot be the fulfillment of this expectation, for they sadly do not practice prostration anymore. Thus, Jesus cannot be the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Addressing Objections

This section will be brief. We will not provide an in-depth analysis in support of the arguments. We leave this to future researchers to perform.

First objection. The spiritualisation of the prostration is inferred by Jesus' statement that the Father seeks people to prostrate to him "in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:23). "The conversation of Jesus with the Samaritan woman in Jn 4:20-24 leaves an initial impression that προσκυνεῖν is used here in a wholly figurative sense, since Jesus speaks of προσκυνεῖν in spirit and in truth. But if prostrating oneself no longer plays any definite role, the reference in the statement and answer is to the place of worship" (Kittel & Friedrich, 1968, p. 764). So, the phrase "in spirit and in truth" alludes to the spiritualisation of worship, which entails the elimination of physical worship or prostration.

Our response: Since it is believed that Jesus spoke Aramaic, we suggest the biblical Hebrew equivalents to the Greek words for "spirit" (πνεῦμα) and "truth" (ἀλήθεια) should be consulted, for Hebrew is a sister language of Aramaic. [Aramaic should be consulted as well in a future, more in-depth study.] When we look at the Hebrew equivalents of the Greek terms "spirit" and "truth" they are רוּחַ (*rûah*) and אֱמֶת (*'emet*). *Rûah* (spirit) in Hebrew has many meanings and connotations.

Concerning רוּחַ (spirit), we feel that in John 4 the connotations of "spirit" include *spaciousness*, e.g., *it expands one's consciousness and comprehension*. It is also plausible that the word uttered by Jesus in this context may have been רָחַב (*rāwah*) (be wide, spacious) (Harris, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 837). The words *rûah* and *rāwah*, besides sounding the same, are actually spelled the same in Hebrew: רוח. Without diacritical marks, the word could be pronounced *rûah* or *rāwah*. The counterpart in Arabic is رُوح (*rūh*) and رَوْح (*rauḥ*). And just like רוח, without diacritical marks, روح could very well be pronounced as *rûh* and *rauḥ*. In fact, Abdullah Yusuf Ali writes in his commentary to Qur'an 12:87 that some translators of the Qur'an have mistakenly read روح as *rûh*. "The word is *rauḥ*, not *rûh*, as some translators have mistakenly construed it. *Rauḥ* includes the idea of a Mercy that stills or calms our distracted state, and is particularly appropriate here in the mouth of Jacob."⁵ In any case some Bible scholars believe that the word *rûah* is derived from *rāwah* (to be wide, spacious). For example, Harris et al. tell us that some biblical scholars derive *rûah* "from *rāwah*, 'to be spacious, be refreshed'" (Harris, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 836) as in I Sam 16:23 and Job 32:20. Besides signifying "being wide and spacious" Harris et al. inform us that *rāwah* also signifies "relief" as in Ester 4:14. The NIV translates *rāwah* in Ester 4:14 as "relief," but NASB translates the word as "liberation." Both meanings, relief and liberation, are appropriate for Jn. 4:19-24 and the practice of the prayer of prostration in Islam. For example, with the coming of Muhammad people have been *liberated* from the requirement of traveling to a certain location to prostrate to God which is a hardship. Before modern times, travel was quite dangerous. There were many bandits and robbers who would attack caravans. Jesus himself stresses this point in his famous story of the Good Samaritan. A certain Israelite man, traveling from Jerusalem to Jerico, was attacked by

⁵ "The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary." Trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, (King Fahd Printing Complex), p. 659, footnote 1762. <https://archive.org/details/quran-english-translation-and-commentary-by-yusuf-ali/page/658/mode/2up>

robbers, who beat him, stripped him of his clothes, and left him half dead (Lk 25:27). The earth's being made a place of prostration to Muhammad and his followers is clearly a relief to people as some have chosen to translate the word in Ester 4:14. Worshipers can prostrate to God wherever they may be.

The meaning “to be *spacious*” of the word *rāwah* is also significant. Identifying God as *rāwah* (spacious) would refer to God's being الواسع (*al-wāsi'*), “to be spacious, signifying generosity,” that is, his mercy embraces all things, including all humans, irrespective of ethnicity. In the past, God, being الواسع (Arabic) or *rāwah* (Hebrew), gave each ethnic group particular sharia with specific decrees that were easy for them to carry out. For example, it would be quite easy for Aborigines of Australia to travel to a site close to where they live, but it would be incredibly difficult for them to travel to Jerusalem in order to prostrate to God. So, God, in his generosity, decreed certain places of worship for the sharia of each ethnic group. As a side note, we believe that the idea of multiple sharia given by God to different peoples is expressed figuratively by Jesus as well when he says, “In My Father's house (*dīn*) are many rooms (sharia);” (John 14:2). So, when the decree was given to the Israelites to travel to Jerusalem to perform the prayer of prostration, the Israelites were a close-knit ethnic community living cohesively together. However, as the Israelites moved further away from their original tribal lands due to Assyrian and Babylonian invasions and deportations, and unrighteousness increased in the land, it became quite difficult and dangerous to travel to Jerusalem to perform this sacred duty. The same could be said of God's decrees that were given to other ethnic groups throughout the world. Thus, Jesus reveals to the Samaritan woman, that God, being *rāwah*, and foreknowing that the world is moving to a pluralistic society, will bring forth ease and relief to people to prostrate to him. Further, the simplicity of the *tayammum*—ablution with soil in the absent of water—compared to regular *wuḍū'* (ablution) is another aspect of this easiness introduced by Muhammad to the obligation of the prostration prayer. The use of the earth to wipe the face and hands is considerably much easier than the requirement of finding water in the desert to take ablution in order to perform the prayer of prostration.

There is another dimension to *prostrating* in *rāwah*. For example, when Jesus says you must “prostrate in *rāwah*,” that is, “prostrate in spaciousness,” he intends to say that Samaritans and Israelites must prostrate with the same generosity and love God shows all peoples, that is, embrace others as their brothers and sisters, rather than with an attitude of ethnocentric bias and exclusivity. Biblical historians inform us that there was a lot of animosity between Samaritans and Jews. Klink writes, “...it is worth noting that there was a high level of hatred and distrust between the two people groups” (Klink, 2016, p. 235). He goes on to note, “...by the first century there had been around two centuries of conflict and strife between the groups, with both sides committing violent crimes against the other” (Klink, 2016, p. 235). Thus, in John 4, Jesus is saying both groups will put aside their animosity. Keener's observation alludes to this idea as well. He writes, “In its most dramatic divergence from traditional Jewish expectations, however, this context speaks of a worship in the Spirit that ultimately transcends ethnic allegiances just like the worship in Revelation (Rev. 5:9-14; 7:9-10)” (Keener, 2003, p. 617).⁶ More than just transcending ethnic allegiances, it appears Jesus is speaking about transcending ethnic sharia, that is, the universalisation of the sharia which has come to pass with the coming of Muhammad.

Concerning the Greek word “ἀλήθεια” (truth) we feel the Hebrew counterpart is אָמֵן (*‘emet*). [Aramaic should be consulted as well.] אָמֵן is a derivative of אָמַן (*‘aman*) meaning “to confirm, support, uphold, to be established, be faithful, to be certain, i.e., to believe in” (Harris,

⁶ Keener's connecting the future *worship* spoken of by Jesus to transcending ethnic allegiance to the acts of prostration in Revelation is spot on, but it is strange that he does not consider that the *worship* of the angels and elders in Rev. 5:9-14 and 7:9-10 is *physical prostration*, e.g., προσκυνέω.

1980, Vol. 1, pp. 251-3). Scott tells us אֱמֶת means “*truth, faithfulness, verity*” (Harris, 1980, Vol. 1, pp. 252-3). He writes, “...it is frequently applied to God as a characteristic of his nature” (Harris, 1980, Vol. 1, p. 252). He goes on to state “[A]s a characteristic of God revealed to men, it therefore becomes the means by which men know and serve God as their savior (Josh 24:14; I Kgs 2:4; Ps 26:3; 86:11; Ps 91:4; Isa 38:3), and then as a characteristic to be found in those who have indeed come to God (Ex 18:21; Neh 7:2; Ps 15:2; Zech 8:16)” (Harris, 1980, Vol. 1, pp. 252-3). So, these “men of *’emet*” come to “know and serve” God by means of this attribute of God. We contend that there is no one better than the *ṣaḥābah*, the companions of the Prophet, who served Allah and his messenger with the spirit of *’emet*. Scott tells us that this word “is often coupled with another attribute of God related to our salvation ‘mercy’ or ‘love’ (*ḥesed*, Gen 24:27...)” (Harris, 1980, Vol. 1, p. 53). Although *’emet* has often been coupled with *ḥesed* (love) in the Hebrew Bible, it has been coupled with *rûaḥ* (spirit) in both John 4:23 and Jn. 4:24. Paired with the word *rûaḥ* (spirit), the expression inadvertently brings to mind “the Spirit of Truth” phrase in John 14:17; 15:26; and 16:13. We argue that the characteristic of *’emet* stressed by Jesus was embodied by no one to the degree embodied by Muhammad. He was called *al-Amīn* (אֱמִין in Hebrew), “the truthful, trustworthy one,” even before his prophethood. This is not a quality he acquired later in life. He was the *spirit of truthfulness* spoken of by Jesus in John 14:17; 15:26; and 16:13. We are not alone in seeing “the Spirit of Truth” as a prophecy of the coming of Muhammad. Ian Mevorach, a Christian theologian, in his paper titled “Did Jesus Predict Muhammad? A Biblical Portal Between Christianity and Islam” admits that “There is no better candidate than Muhammad, no one in fact that comes even close, in terms of fulfilling Jesus’s promise of the *Spirit of Truth* (emphasis added) who would bring forth a new revelation from God” (Ian Mevorach, 2017).

Lastly, Christian commentaries seem to be united on the meaning of “spiritualization of worship (prostration)” that it entails the elimination of physical worship whatever form it may have taken in the Temple of Solomon. However, this does not follow. To elucidate this with an analogy: As the spiritualisation of charity in no way entails the elimination of physical charity, the spiritualisation of prostration in no way entails the elimination of physical prostration. Therefore, performing prostration “in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4), rather than pointing to the elimination of the physical act of prostration, seems to indicate its liberation from its confinement to a particular location like Jerusalem.

Second objection. The prostration in spirit and in truth which the Father seeks cannot be Muhammad because Jesus told the Samaritan woman that he is the fulfillment of the one who will explain all this. When she asked him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

Our response: When we look at this section of Jesus and the Samaritan woman’s conversation, there are some obscurities. For example, it is held that the Samaritans did not believe in any prophet other than Moses. However, she says, she sees Jesus as a prophet in v. 19. Again, many believe that the Samaritans did not believe in a Messiah figure. Ridderbos writes, “Just what kind of Messiah was this woman looking for? And in what respect did Jesus identify with her expectations. She refers to ‘Messiah,’ but the eschatological figure expected by the Samaritans was called Taheb, not Messiah” (Ridderbos, 1997, p. 164). The fact is there is no universally agreed upon messianic expectation. Some believed in a savior⁷ Messiah, others in a

⁷ There are many Messiahs/Christs mentioned in the Bible. Prophet Muhammad can easily be considered the greatest of the Davidic or Savior Messiahs for he is responsible for not only saving the Jewish people but made it possible for them to flourish. David J. Wasserstein (2012), professor of Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University writes that Islam saved Jewry: “Islam saved Jewry. This is an unpopular, discomforting claim in the modern world. But it is a historical truth. The argument for it is double. First, in 570 CE, when the Prophet Mohammad was born, the Jews and Judaism were on the way to oblivion. And second, the coming of Islam saved them, providing a new context in which they not only survived,

priestly Messiah, and then others in a prophet Messiah. The Taheb of the Samaritans, it is believed, must have been the personage spoken of in Deut. 18:15, 18, that is, the prophet like Moses, for they did not accept any other book of the Bible other than the Pentateuch. "[O]ne will also in any case have to consider the Pentateuch held in honor by the Samaritans and the prophetic figure predicted there: "I will raise up ... a prophet like you ... I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him" (Dt. 18:18)" (Ridderbos, 1997, p. 165). In John 1:19-27 we discover the Temple position on eschatological expectations were three: Elijah, the Messiah, and the Prophet like Moses. Thus, it is likely that she was aware of the expectations of the Temple officials. Ridderbos informs us that there were scholars, like Bultmann, who supposed that she had actually used the word Taheb, instead of Messiah (Ridderbos, 1997, p. 164). Therefore, either way, whether she used the word Messiah or Taheb, in v. 25 she was most likely referring to the Prophet like Moses of Deut. 18:18. We feel replacing "Messiah" with "Taheb" can clarify the thrust of the discussion.

25 The woman said, "I know that Taheb (called Messiah [by the Jews]) is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us."

In the verse above "Messiah" is replaced with the word "Taheb." It is believed that Jesus said he was this person, e.g., Jesus answered, "I who speak to you am (*he*)" (Jn 4:26). However, this translation is problematic for a number of reasons. First, Jesus' response seems unnecessary and wordy. If Jesus meant himself, he would have just said, "I am (*he*)."¹ One should note the masculine pronoun "he" is not in the Greek text. We feel the following understanding or translation fits the context of John better. We present our translation by modifying the Interlinear Bible translation. Note that Jesus' statement does not have the pronoun "he".

John 4:26: Interlinear Bible

I am [He] the [One] speaking to you.

John 26: Our Rendering

I am the [One] speaking to you [of him].

In the Interlinear Bible translation, the phrase "the [One] speaking to you" is awkward and wordy. For example, if you are a doctor and your name is Michael, and someone says that they are looking for Dr. Michael, you would not respond, "I am he the One who is speaking to you." You would just say, "I'm he," or "I am Dr. Michael," but you would not say, "I am Dr. Michael the one speaking to you." Thus, the expression "the one speaking to you," as generally understood, is awkward and really serves no purpose. However, in our rendering, what the expression means is that one of Jesus' tasks was to speak and explain clearly the characteristics of the coming person who will explain all things. This dovetails with the Qur'an stating that one aspect of Jesus' mission was to reveal the characteristic of the messenger to come after him called Ahmad.

but flourished, laying foundations for subsequent Jewish cultural prosperity - also in Christendom - through the medieval period into the modern world." The Messianic title "Son of David" can also refer to Muhammad *typologically*. The term "son of David" was created by some to mean one who establishes "Righteous Rule" like David. This would be termed *khalīfah* in Arabic. The Qur'an singles out David as being made a *khalīfah* on earth. "O David! We did indeed make thee a *vicegerent* (خليفة) on earth" (Qur'an 38:26). The only person to establish the *khilāfah* on earth like David was Prophet Muhammad. It was this *khilāfah*, established by Muhammad that saved the Jews as Wasserstein asserts. So, typologically Prophet Muhammad would be considered "the son of David," i.e., the son of the خليفة, that is, the one like David to establish the *khilāfah* on earth. There appears to have been a dilemma of how the Messiah (referring to one like Moses) was the "son" of David when he was not from his lineage. (See Matt 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44). The dilemma is explained away when the expression "son of David" is taken typologically. This is what Jesus in the Gospels was trying to explain to his audience, that the sonship of the Messiah like Moses to David is not to be taken biologically but typologically, that is, the one like David to establish the *khilāfah* on earth.

And remember when Jesus, son of Mary, said, “O children of Israel! I am truly Allah’s messenger to you, confirming the Torah which came before me, and giving good news of a messenger after me whose name will be Aḥmad.” (Qur’an 61:6)

This explains why Jesus is the only person in the Qur’an singled out as being *al-Masīḥ*. The word *masīḥ*, being active participle (*ism ‘al-fā’il*) points to Jesus as *the Anointer*, more than the Anointed. He was singled out with this characteristic because, although all prophets mentioned the coming of Muhammad, Jesus revealed detailed information about the coming of the final prophet to the degree that he even mentioned his name, i.e., Ahmad. Adnan Rashid et al. provide examples of scholars in support of the Greek word *parakletos* in John 16 as meaning “in excess of praise,” which is the meaning of “Ahmad” (Rashid et al., 2024, pp. 300-6). For example, “Professor Gregory Nagy, a specialist in archaic Greek poetry, wrote that the active and mediopassive forms of the verb [kleo] are usually translated as ‘praise’ and ‘be praised,’ and “Hesychius of Alexandria was a fifth- or sixth-century grammarian who compiled the richest surviving lexicon of Greek words. He also defined the noun for ‘kleos’ in terms of ‘glory’ and ‘praise’” (Rashid et al., 2024, p. 305). Thus, with this unambiguous prophecy of the coming prophet, Jesus *anointed* his followers so they would be able to recognise and accept the coming of Muhammad. Jesus’ explanation of “the Spirit of Truth” is another example of this anointing. And of course, the topic of this paper (Jn 4:19-26), that is, Jesus’ clarification to the Samaritan woman and to his followers, the universalisation of prostration that will be accomplished with the coming of the Taheb, the messenger like Moses (Dt. 18:18) is a clear sign of Jesus’ anointing his followers with indubitable prophecies of the coming of Muhammad.

Furthermore, the Samaritan woman uses a key term about this future personage. She says that he will ἀναγγελεῖ (proclaim) all things to us. The author of John’s Gospel seems to stress this word as a characteristic trait of “the Spirit of Truth,” for it is not used⁸ anywhere else in the Gospel but in John 4:25 and 16:13, 14, 15. Also, the expressions “proclaim all things to us” (John 4:25) and “guide you into all truth” (John 16:13) are quite similar. Note the uncanny similarities between the Spirit of Truth and the Taheb expected by the Samaritan woman.

John 4:25 (personal rendering)

The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah [Taheb], is coming” (who is called Messiah [by the Jews]). “When he comes, he will proclaim (ἀναγγελεῖ) all things to us.”

John 16:13 But when he, **the Spirit of Truth**, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell (ἀναγγελεῖ) you what is yet to come.

John 16:14 He [The Spirit of Truth] will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare (ἀναγγελεῖ) it to you.

John 16:15 All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare (ἀναγγελεῖ) it to you.

The affinity of the terminology of the expected Taheb of the Samaritan with that of the Spirit of Truth spoken of by Jesus in chapter 16 clearly demonstrates that the author of John was identifying the Samaritan Taheb with the “Spirit of Truth.”

⁸ Someone may point out that this word has been used for the healed blind man in John 5:15. However, the manuscript evidence is not unanimous. There are ancient manuscripts that use a different word in place of ἀναγγελεῖ, the word ἀπαγγελεῖ. (See Nestle-Aland, footnote to John 5:15).

Supplemental: “House Built Without Hands”

There is an expectation in the Bible of a house or temple of God not built with hands to be established in the future. We believe this refers to none other than the Ka’bah, as we will explain below. This expectation is connected to, or is part of, the expectation of the universalisation of prostration spoken of in John 4:19-24. Jesus seems to have preached about this. However, his words have been distorted and misrepresented. In the Gospel of Mark, false witnesses testify that Jesus said that he would destroy the Temple of Solomon and build another “not made with hands.”

Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’” (Mark 14:58)

The fact that the charge levied against Jesus was connected to “a house not made with hands” shows the seriousness of this idea.⁹ However, how can a house be built without hands? This seems to have been a problem early on. Paul interprets the “house built without hands” as referring to “heavenly bodies.” He writes,

For we know that if the earthly *tent* we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this *tent* we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling - if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. (2 Co. 5:1-3)

The writer of Hebrews also refers to a tent built without hands in heaven. “But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be, passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation...” (Hebrews, 9:11). We believe the house in Heaven spoken of by Paul (2 Co. 5:1-3) and the writer of Hebrews (9:11) is *Bayt al-Ma’mūr* mentioned in the Qur’an 52:4. According to Islamic tradition, this is a masjid in heaven where angels prostrate toward it and make *ṭawāf* around it. However, Paul interprets it figuratively and says it is the heavenly bodies prepared for Christians in heaven. Rather than focusing on Paul’s interpretation, what should be noted is Paul’s mentioning certain characteristics connected with this “house not made with hands.” They are:

1. a tent/building from God
2. a house not made with hands,
3. a house in heaven
4. a future expectation connected with this house

The “spiritualisation” that has occurred to the prayer of prostration in John 4:19-24 has happened to the expectation of “the house built without hands.” The author of John has a vision where he mentions the temple of God in the New Jerusalem descending from heaven.

If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the *temple of my God*; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that *comes down* from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. (Rev. 3:12)

⁹ In John, Jesus does make a reference to the Temple being destroyed and rebuilt. However, there is no reference to “a house built with or without hands.” “Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’” (John 2:19).

One has to remember that the description of the *descending* city of God in the Book of Revelation is a vision. It should not be taken literally. The “new Jerusalem in which is the temple of God” descending from heaven would refer to a new center of worship that will be established by God on earth. This is the city of Mecca, Dār al-Salām, in which the Ka’bah resides. How is the Ka’bah, like *Bayt al-Ma’mur*, made without hands? The expression “built without hands” refers to *ṭawāf* of millions of people around the Ka’bah. *Ṭawāf* is the reenactment of Adam, and later, Abraham and Ishmael’s building of the Ka’bah. Building of the Ka’bah entails laying stones on the ground in a straight line. When one side of the Ka’bah’s wall is laid, a person would continue laying the stones perpendicular to the stones just laid down. As you continue doing this you go around and arrive to the point where you have started. Then you will lay the stones on the stones which you have already laid down. By doing this you begin to raise the walls of the Ka’bah. This is how the Ka’bah was initially built: laying the stones as you go around the walls. Thus, *ṭawāf* is the ritual reenactment of the building of the Ka’bah which was also later performed by Adam and Abraham after they physically built the Ka’bah. The rituals of Hajj and Umrah (lesser pilgrimage) are all reenactments. For example, the *sa’ī* (running lightly) between Safa and Marwa is the reenactment of our mother Hajar’s search for water. The *ramy al-jamarāt* (throwing stones) is the reenactment of Abraham’s stoning of the devil. The standing *du‘ā* (pray) at Arafah is a reenactment of the standing *du‘ā* of Adam, etc. Thus, every pilgrim that goes to Hajj or Umrah participates in the building of the Ka’bah without hands as they make *ṭawāf*, that is, emulate Adam, Abraham, and Ishmael’s building of the Ka’bah. Furthermore, the Kiswah (cover cloth) of the Ka’bah mirrors the reference to the temple in heaven being referenced as a Tabernacle, that is, a Tent (Hebrews 9:11).

The meaning of ṭawāf, i.e., building the house of God without hands

In ancient times, “house” meant dominion and rule. For example, Genghis Khan (House of Genghis) refers to the dominion and rule of Genghis. We are told that the word “Pharaoh” meant “great house.” The Greek usage of house (*oikos*) in the following words shows the nuance of the word “house” in ancient times: “ecosystem” (house system), “economy” (house rule), and “ecology” (study of house). The words “ecology” and “ecosystem” show that the word “house” refers to the intricate interconnected relationships of elements in the natural environment. The word “domesticate” literally means to subject to house (rule). “Dome” means house in Latin. Thus, prostrating toward the House of God (*Baytullah*) means submitting to God’s will and rule, which is the meaning of Islam, i.e., submission to God’s will. Making *tawaf* around the house of God, that is, building the house of God without hands, means contributing to establishing God’s will and rule, i.e., *dīn* and sharia, on earth in one’s life. The Hajj ritual of sacrificing a domesticated animal strengthens this argument. Sacrificing a *domesticated* animal like a sheep during Hajj means you will not come under the rule and dominion of the social constructs of human societies, as this sheep has come under the rule of human beings. This is why wild animals are not sacrificed during Hajj, but only domesticated animals, for their natural *fiṭrah* has been altered by human beings. This act demonstrates that you are on the *fiṭrah* Allah has created you, not on the social constructs of human societies. Thus, by referring to the “house made without hands,” Jesus appears to have referred to the coming abrogation of the Jerusalem *qiblah* (direction of prayer) with the *qiblah* of the Ka’bah,¹⁰ the house not built

¹⁰ The book of Revelation portrays the angels and elders *around* (circled) the throne of God standing and prostrating. For example, “Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They *encircled* the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ... The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped (prostrated)” (Rev. 5:11; 14, NIV). Obviously, this is uncannily similar to how Muslims worship at the Ka’bah. During Salah, Muslims exclaim in unison, “Amen,” and shortly thereafter, prostrate to God. Thus, the depiction in Revelation of the angels and elders prostrating to God is mirrored by Muslim prostration at the Ka’bah more than the worship at Solomon’s Temple, because worship at Solomon’s Temple did not involve people encircling the temple. See also Rev. 5:11. The angels and other beings appear to be in a formal structure around the throne, for protocol in the presence of the King demanded formal behavior. Thus, there was no crowd around the throne. One cannot expect a crowd of people to prostrate due to the lack of required

with hands. This brought him into direct conflict with the Temple priests, and they rejected him. Something similar happened with Muhammad: the Jews of Medina had accepted Muhammad as a prophet of God until the *qiblah* was changed from the Temple of Jerusalem to the Ka'bah of Mecca.

Reassuring Christians

We recognise the difficulty for Christians to accept interpretations that seem to threaten their traditional understanding of the teachings of Jesus. We acknowledge that Christians may not be psychologically open to considering the universalisation of prostration practiced in Islam as the fulfillment spoken of by Jesus. Similar to us, Fachrizal Halim makes an observation about the difficulty for Jews to accept ecumenical readings of the Genesis story of Hagar and Sarah: "... rereading the biblical story of Sarah and Hagar through the lens of biblical criticism and ecumenical perspectives could pose a serious challenge to many Jews who view the story as foundational to their belief system" (Halim, 2024, p. 29). In both cases, Jews and Christians are encouraged to reread their scriptures in a way that is unfamiliar to them. To address the "serious challenge" of an interpretation which supports Islam and Muhammad, we invite Christians to consider the words of Ian Mevorach, a Christian theologian. In his article "Did Jesus Predict Muhammad?" in the *Huffington*. He acknowledges the psychological difficulty Christians face in accepting biblical interpretations in support of Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an.

Jesus knew it would be difficult for us to accept his guidance from another source. But he did not want our fear of the apparent otherness of the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an to separate us from the Way, the Truth, and the Life; that is, the Word of God. (Mevorach, 2017)

Mevorach assures Christians that there is nothing to fear in accepting the Qur'an as revelation. "Based on the promises of Jesus, Christians can encounter the Qur'an without fear, knowing that it is a revelation which glorifies Jesus and, in a spiritual sense, is from him" (Mevorach, 2017).

Conclusion

The author of the Gospel of John preserves an incident of a conversation between Jesus and a Samaritan woman (John 4). Witnessing prophetic signs in Jesus' speech, the Samaritan woman asks him about προσκυνέω (*proskyneō*) as performed by both Jews and Samaritans in their respective holy places – Jerusalem and Mt. Gerizim. Although, the Greek term refers to "prostrating," Bible translations have chosen to render it as "worship." The Christian commentaries that we consulted have also understood the word as "worship." Thus, they argue that the thrust of Jesus' argument was about "spiritualising worship." For the commentators this entails "worship of God" in the future will be free of the physical constraints of bodily worship. We argued that a major reason for the Christian

space to perform the prostration. People in the presence of a monarch would form rows in front of the king. However, revelation depicts the rows around the throne in heaven as concentric circles, not straight lines. This obviously resembles the form Muslims take around the Ka'bah when they are to perform the prayer of prostration. We feel this also indicates the fulfillment of an important aspect of Jesus' prayer, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10). God's will in heaven is that the angels, elders, and creatures all prostrate to him. We also see Jesus emphasise this in his conversation with the Samaritan woman, e.g., "...the true prostrators will prostrate to the Father in spirit and truth; for such people, the Father seeks to be His prostrators" (John 4:23). And in Islam, after the *shahādah*, God wills that all creatures prostrate to him. This is so important that it is the second pillar of Islam.

understanding of the passage, is due to translating the word προσκυνέω (*proskyneō*) into English as “worship.” We also demonstrated that there is ample evidence in the Bible that shows prostration to God was confined to the Temple in Jerusalem. Thus, when προσκυνέω (*proskyneō*) in John 4 is translated into English as “prostrate,” as it should be, the discussion clearly refers to the communal prostration prayer of *ṣalāh* practiced by Muslims as mentioned in Qur’an 48:29, not to the elimination of physical prostration referred to as “spiritualisation of worship.”

We anticipated two Christian objections: first, the phrase “worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24) refers to detaching worship from sacred sites, and second, Jesus’ indication that he was the fulfilment of this expectation. Our responses were, first, “worship in spirit and truth” is actually “prostrating in spirit and truth.” This is best understood as referring to “the universalisation of prostration,” that is, worshippers are freed from the constraints of prostration to God only at certain religious sites. This has been fulfilled with the coming of Muhammad where Muslims are required to perform the prayer of prostration, *ṣalāh*, daily from anywhere on earth. Second, we endeavoured to show understanding Jesus’ statement in John 4:26 as “I am [He] the [One] speaking to you” is wordy and unnatural, i.e., it does not conform to natural speech in society. We argued that translating John 4:26 as “I am the [One] speaking to you [of him]” makes more sense. With this statement Jesus points to, not himself, but another who will fulfill the expectation of prostrating in spirit and truth.

In line with the expectation of prostration being universalised, we drew the reader’s attention to another prophetic expectation, that of a house built without hands (Mark 14:58). We argued that the *ṭawāf*, encircling of the Ka’bah, is the fulfilment of this expectation, for *ṭawāf* is the reenactment of the building of the Ka’bah of Adam and Abraham. When all is said and done, we would like the reader to reconsider the words of Craig Keener about Jesus’s statement of “worshipping God in the Spirit” - that it refers to prostrating to God as depicted in the Book of Revelation. “John’s ‘worship in the Spirit’ is a foretaste of the *eschatological* (emphasis added) worship around God’s throne depicted in Revelation” (Keener, 2003, p. 617). Since, in Revelation, the eschatological worship, that is, future “worship” of the angels and elders is explicitly *prostration* (*proskyneō*) to God, e.g., Rev 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4, the eschatological fulfillment of this on earth would be universalisation of prostration to God on earth. This is what has happened with the coming of Muhammad, as mentioned in Qur’an 48:29 and the Hadith in Bukhari 438. We conclude our paper using the words of Ian Mevorach (2017) on Muhammad being the Spirit of Truth and the words of Jesus Christ: “There is no better candidate than Muhammad [and his *ummah*], no one in fact that comes even close, in terms of fulfilling Jesus’s promise that ‘[T]he true *prostrators* will *prostrate* to the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His *prostrators*” (John 4:23).

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