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Q&A#92 Responding to Criticisms of Echoes of Exodus

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Today's question: "Could you respond to some of the criticisms raised by this review of Echoes of Exodus? <http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/review/echoes-of-exodus-tracing-themes-of-redemption-through-scripture>."

This episode references 'Echoes of Exodus' (<https://amzn.to/2DomRI3>).

My new blog for my podcasts and videos is found here: <https://adversariapodcast.com/>.

If you have any questions, you can leave them on my Curious Cat account: <https://curiouscat.me/zugzwanged>.

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Transcript

Welcome back. It's been the better part of a month since I last posted a video, so here we go again. Today I'm going to be answering a question that was left on my Curious Cat account.

Could you respond to some of these criticisms that are raised by this review of Echoes of Exodus? And there's a link to a Thamelios review from the latest edition. And I'll respond to that now. But before I do so, I'd like to make sure that you're all aware of my new blog, which is devoted purely to my podcasts and videos.

My main blog has been cluttered up with podcasts and videos over the last while, making it very difficult to access my regular material. So, within the future, I'm hoping to

have all my material, podcast and video related, over on this other blog, which will enable it to be accessed easily without it cluttering up my main blog, where I'll focus more upon articles and links to things that I've been writing elsewhere on the internet. So, to the review.

A number of questions and challenges are raised by the review. I think one of the main concerns that the reviewer has, Jeffrey Harper, is that the connections that we draw are not justified by the text itself. They're a bit of a reach.

And when you actually examine the text, they don't have the strength that are proposed. So, here's one example. Other proposals, however, remain much more tenuous, like Israel's so-called birth in Exodus 12.

Israel steps out from the womb through a doorpost covered in blood and later emerges into new life from a narrow passage through waters, which then close behind them. So, there's a lot of things that could be said about this. At the outset, it's worth noting that I wrote over 150,000 words for this book, and that was just a sketch of things that I've explored in much more detail.

Some of it was just done from memory, material I've explored in considerable depth before, and other parts of it were just sketching out a picture that could be worked with for the actual text, which is only 40,000 words. So, a great deal that is within the book in a very sketchy form or limited form, or just excluded altogether, is within those original notes and is something that I've given thought to. So, for instance, come to the childbirth themes in Exodus.

When you read through the book of Exodus, what you notice is the story begins with women struggling in birth. It begins with the groaning of Israel and women struggling in birth. And these two things are related.

Israel is groaning in birth pangs, in travail, in its struggle, and it's multiplying in its children. And those children are being killed by Pharaoh, the baby boys. And so the story begins with the birth of the boys, the killing of the boys by Pharaoh, and by the rescue of Moses through the waters as Moses is drawn out of the waters.

It's a birth story. And the deliverance of Moses is connected with his birth. He's not named until after he's taken from the water.

And the events that surround that are significant, not least because Miriam is on the other side. There's drawing out of the water. That's how he gets his name.

And then there's a playing out of an Exodus pattern. Now, what this should teach us is that what happens to Moses later on happens to his people, that they are drawn out of the water. And as they are drawn out of the water, they are greeted by Miriam on the other side, singing and praising God.

And they are baptized into Moses, as Paul can talk about in 1 Corinthians 10. Now, what more can we say about this? If we look in Exodus chapter 4, there's an emphasis upon Israel as God's firstborn son. God is delivering his firstborn son in both senses of those terms.

When we get to the story of the Exodus, there's blood placed on the doorposts. There's significant emphasis upon the firstborn sons, that if God does not have his firstborn son left free by Pharaoh, then God will kill Pharaoh's firstborn son and the firstborn sons of the Egyptians. So the significance of the firstborn son is foregrounded.

Likewise, the doorposts elsewhere in scripture, we have the door connected with birth. And being the firstborn is the one that's first through the door. These are connections that we see in the story of Sarah having the announcement of Isaac's birth.

It can be the story of Jephthah and his daughter, his firstborn daughter coming out the door first. These sorts of stories all connect the doorposts or the door and birth and the doors of the womb. When you come out, those doors are opened.

The first to come out is the firstborn. Now, what more is there that can strengthen these connections? The actual connections that we drew within the book itself, the doorposts covered in blood and then the narrow passage through waters and broken waters. Those are fairly weak connections in terms of the larger book.

The larger connections that justify those secondary connections are the connections between Israel's travel in birth, Israel's travel in Egypt and the experience of the women struggling in birth. And so those two themes held alongside each other are very important. They help us to understand that particular connection.

Then the doorposts, again, there's some connection there that's been explored in far more detail by James Jordan. And the details have been fleshed out a bit more. So it's not just an imaginary connection.

There is some more detail to that. I think that's in Law of the Covenant, one of the appendices where he reflects upon the relationship between the encounter with God at the night camp in Exodus chapter 4. The doors and the womb and the Passover celebration. So that can be explored in more depth there.

But why is it that we have the institution of the law of the firstborn immediately before Israel leaving Egypt and crossing the Red Sea? I don't think it's accidental. Israel has already been described as God's firstborn. And so the law of the firstborn, the one that opens the womb, is connected with the Passover and Israel being delivered through the Red Sea.

It is a birth event. And we see other symbolic birth events elsewhere in Scripture. For instance, Christ's death and resurrection is associated with birth.

The woman whose hour has come or the connection between the events of Jesus' initial birth and the new birth from the dead. So wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in a manger, presumably a stone container. And then later on, we have Christ wrapped in linen garments, laid in the tomb.

And then the announcement to shepherds, the angels, a Mary and a Joseph, all these events that connect those things together. And so this connection between childbirth and Exodus is not a stretch. We see these themes of childbirth more explicitly referenced in other parts of the Pentateuch.

The idea of Moses as a nursemaid and things like that. That these are themes that are at play there. And if you follow the breadcrumbs, it leads you back to this connection.

There's a lot more that can be said about that. But it is not just something that we pulled out of our hat. Haran in Genesis 31.

That's another connection that is questioned. So I'll read the section where it questions it here. The former is... For Roberts and Wilson, however, proposed connections are at times simply incorrect or slide towards the allegorical.

The former is exemplified on page 66, where the town of Haran is said to be named after Abraham's brother, even though the words are different. So. There is a genuine mistake here, and that was my fault, not Andrew's.

But when I looked back at my... I had a number of iterations of notes for this. When I look back at my original notes, it's not something that I missed then, although it was missed in the later connections. When I looked at my original notes, I pointed back to some texts that had recognized the original difference between those words, the difference between those words, but have said that we'd be... We'd be missing something if we didn't recognize that even though they aspirated differently, they are connected terms.

And this is something that we see as we look through the book of Genesis, that there is a constant playing upon terms. These terms are not exactly the same, but there's lots of punning. So, seer and the connection with Esau.

Esau and seer are connected in terms of goat themes because the word is similar. And in terms of hairiness, Esau is a hairy man. And so he's associated with seer.

And these punning terms are significant. We see the same thing in the names of the trees that are used to deceive Laban, to outwit Laban by Jacob. And we see the same with Laban's name with white and the connection of Laban with Lebanon.

We see the same with Esau and Edom. Edom playing off the name of Adam, playing off red and playing off the name of the actual place of the Edomites. And so these terms are significant.

We see a number of these occasions within the book of Genesis. And people who are just focusing upon the actual terms themselves in terms of some sort of strict etymology are missing things. So, for instance, if we get to Genesis chapter two and the play between the name of the she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of the man.

Those terms actually are not necessarily related to each other. But there is a pun. There is a connection between those two terms.

And if we miss those, we're missing something that the actual writer has flagged up for us, that these terms are supposed to be related. Even if strictly speaking, they are not related in the sense that some might think they are. We see this elsewhere in other parts of scripture.

For instance, the name that's given to Samuel is explained with an explanation that would fit more to the name given to Saul. Now, why is that? Well, the author of first Samuel knows what he's doing. He's wanting us to recognise certain connections that would otherwise be missed when we're talking about the name of Haran and the name of the person and the name of the place.

Those two things are connected. We read in Genesis chapter 30, Genesis chapter 11, verse 31. Or 27.

This is the genealogy of terror. Terror begot Abram, Nahor and Haran. Haran begot Lot.

And Haran died before his father, Terah, in his native land in Ur of the Chaldeans. And then later on, and Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife. And they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan.

And they came to Haran and dwelt there. So the days of terror were 205 years. And Terah died in Haran.

Now, the connection between these two figures is interesting. I mean, why do we find Haran and this place name Haran in the same place, in the same small section of the text? Is it just something that's a pure coincidence? No, it isn't. And a number of people have pointed out that even if these things are not strictly connected, there should be recognised, a connection should be recognised.

There are Jewish scholars who have pointed this out. Julius Wellhausen points this out. And a number of others have highlighted this, that there is a, in all likelihood, there is a connection to be drawn.

Now, they do that for various reasons. The connections that they want to draw are not necessarily the same connections that I will be highlighting. But there is a connection between these terms in all likelihood, just as there is a connection between the word

plays that we have upon Esau's name and the colour of red, Adam, or in the case of Seir, his being hairy and the theme of the goats.

And so in all these cases, what we see is the author of Genesis doing subtle things with words. And when we see Haran appear later in the text, it is connected with the descendants of Haran through Milca. It's associated with Bethuel and Laban.

It's associated with Nahor as well in various ways, because those two lines of Abraham's family through Terah, his relations through Terah. And as we explore this, I think it will help us to understand why there is a connection between these two names. There is a lot more that could be said on that.

I don't want to get into that rabbit hole now. If people want me to explore that more depth, leave a question and I can answer that one. Other things, the reference to Goliath.

So Goliath is pictured as a villainous snake covered in scaly armour. And this is seen as allegorical. End up with a bruised head.

Now, is this really the case? I don't think it is allegorical. Why do we have these details given to us? Why are we twice told that he is dressed in bronze or has bronze things? It plays on the word for bronze, plays on the word for serpent. Now, this would be just something small by itself, perhaps, if it were not for the fact that David has just been anointed.

And then there's this person standing against Israel for 40 days who then gets his head crushed. Now, this is a familiar theme. It's the serpent theme that we see later on in Christ.

In the case of Christ, Christ is anointed by the spirit, goes into the wilderness, 40 days of testing in the wilderness, of fasting and then defeating the serpent. And so these are themes that are picked up within the New Testament. But within the Old Testament itself, there are other themes there too.

When Saul is set apart as the leader of the people, his first test is Nahash, the Ammonite. And Nahash means serpent. These are connected themes.

And so as we look through the text, it should not surprise us that David's first test after he is anointed is a serpent figure. The scales are associated with fish scales, he argues, Jeffrey Harper argues. And yes, they are associated with fish scales.

There's no reason why here they can't be associated with land serpent scales. Or more importantly, that the serpent isn't connected with the sea serpent too. We see the sea serpent in the case of Pharaoh and the sea serpent imagery is explored within the book of Psalms and elsewhere and the book of Isaiah.

So these serpent things mutate. The serpent becomes a sea serpent. It becomes a dragon within the book of Revelation and elsewhere.

So we need to pay attention to these things because they're there. Now, he says, moreover, this strained connection obscures the more obvious intertextuality. Goliath falling over and losing his head as divine judgment resembles the fates of Dagon and Saul, not Pharaoh.

Yes, it connects to that too. And those are connections that I've written on in a discussion of Samson and Good Friday. I can give the link to that below.

There's a lot of connections that are drawn in any single passage. If we're reading this passage, we can also connect it with the story of Joseph. Joseph sent to his brothers and we can read it, connect it with a number of different parts of the Old Testament that are alluded to.

We don't necessarily have to choose between one set of connections. There are usually a number of these things. So we see Exodus themes playing out.

We see themes of Joseph and his brothers. We see themes of Jacob. I've written on some of those Jacob themes recently with the relationship between Jacob and Laban and David and Nabal, whose name is a reversal of Laban.

And so these word plays are significant. If you pay attention, there's a lot of things going on there. Then the review goes on to say the more fundamental issue concerns authorial intent.

While intertextual theory accommodates reader-centered, synchronic approaches in which connections remain in the eye of the beholder, these must necessarily jettison original intent. Not only that's the case, if we read through 1 Samuel, we can see all these things taking place there. There's the Exodus theme playing out within the original story of the capture of the Ark.

There's the themes of the serpent that play out on a number of occasions. And there are these other themes that play out in the case of Saul that are explored elsewhere within the book. These themes that connect Saul with Pharaoh, that connect Saul with themes from the book of Genesis, that connect David with the themes from the book of Genesis.

And these have been noted by various authors. Generally one by one, not recognizing how they all fit together, but they are there if you look closely. And so, for instance, David Dorbe, who's written at length on the Exodus theme, he connects the events of the capture of the Ark with the story of Jacob in the house of Laban, and then also with the story of the Exodus.

Those themes can then be developed further. It's not as if the author of 1 Samuel did not

have these themes in his mind. He knows what he's doing.

And so when he's describing a figure like Goliath, and he's mentioning he's dressed in scaly armor, that he's dressed in bronze and playing upon the term for serpent, we should maybe look a bit further before we put a lot of weight on that. And as I've argued on many other occasions, when we're doing typology, we'll put different weight on different things. When we read those sorts of details, we'll think, hmm, there might be something there.

And then we'll look a bit further and we'll think, oh, 40 days. That's interesting. Immediately after an anointing.

That's interesting too. Crushed. His head is crushed.

Again, very interesting. And it becomes more interesting as time goes on, as we see, for instance, that the author of 1 Samuel has already spoken about Nahash the Ammonite, the serpent figure who challenges Saul. So could there be something in his head? Quite probably there is.

I don't think that this is just an eye of the beholder thing. When you actually look at these texts, there is a lot of subtle things going on and they are playing with themes of Genesis. And as you read through the book of 1 Samuel, these things are seen by many scholars.

As you look closely, you'll see the Jacob story or the Joseph story or the story of the serpent and the woman. These things are playing in the background. They know what's going on.

Now, stepping back a bit from all of this, what can we say about the deeper principles about how we read the text? Well, when we wrote this book, one of our concerns was to give to the average person in the pew a sense of some of the things that take place in scripture. One of my frustrations has always been that when you read these approaches to intertextuality that focus so much upon methodology, what you have is this long waste of this desert of methodology that you must wander through this wilderness until you reach the promised land. And then you just dip your feet into the promised land and you can't actually explore it much because you just can't justify each one of these readings with the full methodological approach that is expected.

Now, we used the motif of music and in part for a reason, because music is something you have to hear. You have to hear the connections. And those connections can't necessarily be argued for in a full sense.

You should make arguments for them. And many of these are positions that we can, these connections that we drew, we can make arguments for. But our intent was not to present this methodological rigorous, methodologically rigorous 1000 page book that

outlines exactly how we arrived at every one of these conclusions.

Maybe one day I'll write one of those. But what we wanted was for people to see something that we've seen that's beautiful. And as you look at this, there will be a lot of gaps, a lot of gaps that need to be filled in with some reasoning, some things which will be errors, some things that will be mistakes, which are only half mistakes.

In the case of Huran, that is a half mistake. It's something I had originally given attention to and then forgot. Unfortunately, there's a lot of things I've forgotten that I've researched in the past.

And being curious about that, having looked through my notes again, I realised that I had given this attention and there is a connection and there can be an argument made for it. And as in many of these cases, we need to pay attention to the words in front of us. When we have these two terms placed in close proximity that are so similar, we'd be blind not to recognise the connection.

Now, if we're talking purely in terms of methodology and explanations for these things, it can be like explaining a joke. It has a deflationary effect. When you try and explain a joke, you cannot explain everything.

Any attempt to articulate the basis for one's reading in words will end up losing something. Because the reasons for your reading are grounded upon often a deeper sense of the text, what the author is doing, some of the things that are going on. And often it's a connection that is weaker.

And so I've compared this in the past to a tree that you have the central trunk and then you have the large branches that go out and then the smaller, thinner branches and then the leaves. And the leaves might be a particular verbal connection. So the connection between Haran and the name of the son of Terah and then Terah and the name of the place.

Now, that's a weak connection, but we could drop that leaf from the tree and the tree would still stand strong. But I don't think that there is a complete lack of connection there. Actually, I think there is an important connection there.

And the text is working with that. But when we get to big connections, things like the Exodus theme itself, that's a big branch of the tree and that's not going to be dropped anytime soon. But yet it is upon that branch.

There are a lot of thinner branches and leaves that flesh that out, that fill it out, that give it weight and substance. And as you explore those, some of those will be stronger than others. Others, I mean, I'm not going to put the entirety of my weight upon some of these connections.

So, for instance, the connection between Goliath and the serpent, that's something I can put quite a bit of weight on, but I'm not going to put all my weight on that. There's no reason to. There are a lot of other connections that bear the sort of weight that we want to bear.

But yet, if we miss the way that these branches and the other things that arise out from that give shape to the biblical narrative and help us to recognise its integrity, its interconnected character and its beauty, then we won't be making as much of the text as we should be. And so the approach that we took within this book was to give a fuller picture, to try and show the branches and the smaller branches and the leaves that are upon this tree of scripture. And so certain things may not always have the weight that some people might want to place upon them, but they are there.

And if you look more carefully, there's a lot more besides. These are not connections that we just scraped off the bottom of some barrel as if there's not a lot more where those came from. These are just examples of huge themes.

And so, for instance, when we do mention the themes of childbirth and Exodus, these themes are not just based upon two different details within the text. Upon crossing the Red Sea and going through the doors of the Passover, of the doors that were bloodied in the Passover. It's based upon deep thematic connections within the book itself.

It's based upon the institution of the law of the firstborn. It's based upon later references within other books of the Pentateuch. And so what we give is something of the final proof or the final result.

Some of the connections that further down those branches. We don't actually give the full branches that led us to that point. But those connections are there.

And as you begin to see the leaves, as you begin to see some of the smaller branches, it will help you to recognize the shape of that big branch. That big branch of Exodus that is going throughout. There's a difference between a technical book and one written for a general audience.

And the frustration that so much of great typology is placed out of the reach of people in the pew is one of the things that motivates our writing of a book like this. That if you want to write a technical book, you can write a technical book, but you're not going to get the layperson reading that book. And also you'll end up losing the beauty.

You'll be explaining the joke in such detail that the joke won't be able to stand by itself. You need to get it. And getting it is part of what typology is.

It's something that you can't fully explain a joke without it. A joke is deflated by its explanation. The methodology and the technical articulation of how everything fits together within the joke to the point that it becomes funny.

You cannot reach the point of humor by the explanation. And in the same way, typology is a lot of that is about getting it. It's about having your ear to the text and recognizing when there is something that connects.

And so the standard of proof is also another issue here. The standard of proof for these methodologically focused approaches are far higher than the text itself observes. The text gives us all sorts of connections that will not stand the test of these rigorous methodological proofs.

So Paul will tell us about the way that Sarah and Hagar are connected with the unbelieving Jews in the church. And then he will say Sarah is connected with Jerusalem and Mount Zion and Hagar with Sinai. And wait, what? What's that connection about? He doesn't explain how those things fit together.

But if you pay attention, they do fit together. There are connections there. But he gives you the results.

You're supposed to recognize these things, to see the beauty and to think, hmm, that's interesting. How does he arrive at that? Ideally, you're supposed to be the sort of person who hears that and thinks, yeah, I recognize that. He's not.

I can see where he's got this from. But for many of us, we'll need to work it out and see how he arrived at it and then get the joke. But if we're reading through scripture, merely thinking in terms of rigorously proving every single connection before we can ever claim it.

If we're thinking about this approach where you must lay out all your working before you ever actually state a conclusion, you put these things out of reach of people in the pews. And you also miss a great deal of what scripture says itself. Scripture says a lot of things in the way of typology that aren't given rigorous explanation and could not be explained fully in a way that would be absolutely certain.

I mean, the connection between Christ and the priesthood, according to Melchizedek. Why that connection? I mean, there are a lot of details that need to fill the gap there. And the author never gives them to us.

We're supposed to recognize this. We're supposed to see the connections. Or if we don't see them, to explore and to discover them.

And so many of these connections that we draw are ones that are supposed to invite you deeper into the text. That's why we leave questions at the end of each chapter. Each question has three review questions and three questions that are intended to get you to look a bit deeper.

Because we're just skimming the surface within these chapters. When we talk about

these themes of birth in Exodus, these themes of birth are repeated in various other parts of scripture, connected with great deliverances of God. These themes of birth are fleshed out considerably within the Exodus story in ways that we just do not mention.

The connection between place names and persons within the book of Genesis and the nameplate and the playing of the punning upon those different names and the ways that events are connected together within that. This is something that we could present a very rigorous, detailed case for. But we just give you some of the details that we arrive at the end of our explorations and some of the connections between names that are found there.

But there is a lot more beneath the bonnet, as it were. And so we'd like for people to look beneath the bonnet. It's great to be asked these questions and to have the challenge to say, how did you actually arrive at this conclusion? But ideally, what we want is for people to see the beauty of the text.

Even if they do not see exactly how we arrived at it, we want people to see some of these connections and to be curious, to think, how could I see some of these connections myself? What are some of the things that are going on within the text? Methodology is important. And presenting rigorous exegetical arguments, recognizing controls upon arguments. What is a good reading? What is a bad reading? How do we become skilled readers of the text so that we hear things within the text and those things that we hear in the text are not just voices in our heads? These are all important things.

And these are things that we have given attention to. But we don't lay out fully within the book because there is a time and a place. There is a time for a rigorous academic book like Brian Estelle's book on Echoes of Exodus, which I highly recommend.

There's a lot of rigorous work in there upon the methodology that is very helpful. Whereas in our book, we weren't attempting to give a methodological treatment. We were attempting to give a sense of the beauty and the music of the text.

And as in the case of music, you need to hear it. You need to hear these connections. And then when you hear these connections, you may be tempted to go into musical theory to explain why you are hearing these connections.

Are these connections really what you think they are? Or are they illusory? And musical theory and other things like that can help with that. As you study the music in a more academic level, you can understand it, not just how it sounds, but some of the deeper ways in which the music is structured. And that in many ways is what hermeneutics and the study of methodology and these sorts of things can give you.

But you're supposed to listen to the music. You're supposed to enjoy the music as it's presented to you. That music is presented without the need for this extensive

methodology that lies between you and the text.

And the methodology can end up being a large tract of wilderness that prevents people from entering into the beauty of the text. We didn't want it to be that. And so hopefully when you read Echoes of Exodus, you will have a sense of the beauty of the destination.

Ideally, what we're giving is a report from a land that we have been exploring, a good report of a good land, and maybe encourage you to take the journey there yourself, to look a bit deeper into scripture, to look into some of these questions of methodology and hermeneutics. And by following that good report to arrive at that destination in a fuller way yourself. Thank you very much for listening.

If you have any further questions, please leave them in my Curious Cat account. If you would like to follow this and other videos, please do so using my new blog. And the link for that is below.

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God bless.