

OpenTheo

January 7th: Genesis 7 & John 4:1-26

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Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Genesis chapter 7. I am the Lord of the earth, and I will make the earth clean. I will make the earth clean. I will make the earth clean.

I will make the earth clean. I will make the earth clean. 2 And two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah.

And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened, and rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights. On the very same day Noah and his sons Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark.

They and every beast according to its kind, and all the livestock according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth according to its kind, and every bird according to its kind, every winged creature. They went into the ark with Noah two and

two of all flesh, in which there was the breath of life. And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him.

And the Lord shut him in. The flood continued forty days on the earth. The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth.

The waters prevailed and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered. The waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep, and all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind.

Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth.

Only Noah was left and those who were with him in the ark. And the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days. Noah's ark, as we have seen in the previous chapter, has resemblances to the tabernacle.

It is the place where God is present with his people, but it is also the place where he preserves his people. And its dimensions are like a bringing together of the dimensions of the tabernacle courtyard, one hundred cubits by fifty cubits and the tabernacle itself, thirty cubits by ten cubits divided into twenty cubits by ten for the holy place and then the most holy place as ten by ten. The tabernacle is the only other construction described in this way in the Pentateuch.

Rabbi David Foreman has noted the parallels between Noah's ark and the ark of the covenant. It's important to notice that these aren't the same word ark in Hebrew as they are in English, but there are parallels nonetheless. In both cases, someone is called to construct a wooden object and to overlay it inside and out with something.

Pitch in the case of the ark of Noah and gold in the case of the ark of the covenant. We can also see maybe parallels with the ark in which the infant Moses is placed. Again, it's daubed outside with pitch and it is prepared in a way to preserve this young child from being drowned in the waters.

Noah has originally been told to take pairs of animals into the ark, but the instructions here are fleshed out further, where he is instructed to bring seven pairs of the birds and seven of each clean animal. There's an anticipation on the one hand of the birds flying out over the new creation as it's been released from the deep, and then the sacrifice of the clean animals in the future. We should notice that the story of the flood, as Gordon Wenham and others have pointed out, is a series of bookends around bookends.

It has an A, B, C, D, E, D, C, B, A structure. So we can think about the rising of the text and then the falling of the text like the waters themselves. This is what scholars have called a chiasm or a polystrophy.

It's a there and back again structure. So if you look at the days that are mentioned, you see seven days of waiting for the flood in chapter seven, verse four, seven days further of waiting for the flood, chapter seven, verse 10, 40 days of the flood itself, 150 days of water triumphing in seven, verse 24, 150 days of water waning in eight, verse three, and then 40 days of wait, eight, verse six, seven days of wait, eight, verse 10, and seven days of wait again, eight, verse 12. So you can see there's up and then a down.

There's going out and a coming back. Noah enters the ark at the age of 600. And again, we should note the significance of particular numbers, particularly round numbers and multiples of 60.

So this is 10 times 60. It's another round century, as we see in the case of the story of Adam. And we see that Noah begets his children around the age of 500.

These round numbers are important. Methuselah is born in the 65th year of Enoch's life, after which Enoch lives for 300 further years. Noah and Enoch both walk with God.

They both have these round numbers as part of their ages. The ark is the seed of a new world. It's a microcosm.

And God shuts Noah in. Maybe we could think of parallels with the events of the Exodus. There's a great pilgrimage of a large number for deliverance from judgment.

There's the shutting up of some within a realm of refuge, like the doors being closed around the houses of the Israelites while the Egyptians were judged. We can think about the judgment arriving upon those outside of the doors, deliverance and judgment through waters, as at the Red Sea, arrival at the mountain, as in the case of both Sinai and Ararat, and then the establishment of a covenant, the covenant with Noah and the covenant with Moses and the Israelites. Forty days and 40 nights are both significant numbers associated with the rising up of Moses to God's presence and also the rising up of the ark.

There are instructions to build a construction and there's obedience to those instructions. So maybe there's something to be explored here about some parallel between these events. The event of the flood involves a decreation and a return to the chaotic state at the very beginning of the creation.

Darkness over the face of the deep, the deep covering the whole earth, blanketing the creation and a return to the state of chaos. And this one small place within the creation that preserves order. And that's the realm of the ark.

That's the seed of a new creation that will later on be spread out upon the world. You can think about the importance of boats more generally. Boats can represent a home, a structure of order in a realm of chaos, in a realm where everything else is outside, is disordered and dangerous.

Noah and his family enter the ark in the 600th year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the 17th day of the month. Now, it's an interestingly precise figure. Why not just say he entered in the 600th year and came out in his 600th and first year? But it's very specific, as are a number of the other dates in the narrative.

This, it might be noted, is 47 days into the year, which is 40 plus 7, which both being numbers that we see at the beginning and the end of the event of the flood, already known to be significant for the author, the flood ends exactly one year and 11 days later. When we consider that the solar year is 11 days longer than the lunar year, it might seem to be intentional here. The specificity of the dates does invite reflection.

And maybe we should see some connection with feast days or something like that. I would strongly recommend that people look further into this, see if there's anything that they dig up. The world is drowned, but Noah and those in the ark are not just preserved through the waters, but they're lifted up by the waters.

They are raised up. One final question. Can you see any of the possible significance to the dates of the flood narrative and to the numbers of the days devoted to specific events? Now, when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John, although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples, he left Judea and departed again for Galilee.

He had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there.

So Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came to draw water.

Jesus said to her, give me a drink. For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, how is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria? For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

Jesus answered her, if you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, give me a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water. The woman said to him, sir, you have nothing to draw water with and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.

Jesus said to her, everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will

give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

The woman said to him, sir, give me this water so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water. Jesus said to her, go, call your husband and come here. The woman answered him, I have no husband.

Jesus said to her, you are right in saying I have no husband. For you have had five husbands and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.

The woman said to him, sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship. Jesus said to her, woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the father.

You worship what you do not know. We worship what we know for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming and is now here when the true worshippers will worship the father in spirit and truth.

For the father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. The woman said to him, I know that Messiah is coming, he who is called Christ.

When he comes, he will tell us all things. Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am he. When we read through John's gospel, it's important to recognise that there are depths to the stories that John's gospel tells.

Depths that may only be recognised by more observant and patient readers that take their time over the text. The story of the Samaritan woman at the well is one such story. To recognise the depth of these sorts of stories, it's important to pay close attention to the ways in which they are told.

To the shape of the stories, to key themes, to familiar features or to peculiar details. Each one of these might help to tip us off to something more that is taking place. So for instance, the story of a man meeting a woman at a well is one that we find on several occasions elsewhere in scripture, especially in the Pentateuch.

It's what Robert Alter has called a type scene. When we see a woman and a man meeting at a well in the Bible, we should almost be able to hear the wedding bells in the distance. This is an event that we see in the story of Isaac and Rebecca, in the story of Jacob and Rachel and in the story of Moses meeting his wife.

All of these women are first met at wells. And so Jesus' encounter with the woman here is charged with all of this biblical memory and all of these marital themes. Another thing to note here is the continuation of themes of water.

Themes of water will continue to play out in the Gospel of John for quite some time. But we've already seen it in the baptism of John. We've seen it in the turning of the water into wine.

We've seen it in the conversation with Nicodemus. We've seen it with the baptism of John again at the end of chapter 3. And now we see it again with the water from the well. Water is an important part of the picture.

And John wants us to see the different ways in which water represents something beyond itself. Another thing to observe is that as in the case of Jesus' mother Mary, John does not name the woman of Samaria. She is simply a woman or the woman.

Jesus has significant encounters or interactions with his mother at the wedding of Cana and at the cross, with the woman of Samaria and with Mary Magdalene, all at charged moments or locations. A wedding, a well, his death and in a garden. And he addresses each one of them as woman, suggesting that each one of them stands for something greater than a mere individual.

There is a further woman that we meet in chapter 16 verse 21. A woman who gives birth to a man when her hour has come. And Jesus gives this as an illustration for his own death and resurrection.

In each one of the particular women in John's gospel, we are also encountering the archetypal woman. The woman who's going to give birth to the son who will be the one who rules over the nations. We should also observe the remembrance of Jacob, the field that Jacob gave Joseph.

Jacob's well, the woman's question of whether Jesus is greater than Jacob, who dug the well and drank from it with his sons and livestock. Jesus is being presented here as the true Jacob. The one who is going to open up a greater well, the well of the spirit.

He's the true Israel. Note that it's about the sixth hour. The theme of the hour is one that goes throughout the gospel of John.

And the detail may seem by itself to be somewhat extraneous. Just a detail of the scene to give us more of a scenic image of what's taking place. However, there is then a reference to an hour that is coming in verse 23.

Six hours plus another hour is the seventh hour. In John's gospel, the language of the coming hour is often used. My hour has not yet come in chapter two.

This hour that is coming when the true worshippers will arrive. The hour had come when he serves his disciples and the hour of his death arriving. All of these references to the hour are charged with theological significance in John's gospel.

That should help us to recognize that there's something more going on here. The seventh hour brings completeness and this hour is coming. Note also that the woman has had five husbands and is currently with a man who is not her husband.

That makes six men. However, they go on to discuss the coming man, the Messiah, the seventh man. Jesus is the true husband.

He's the true Israelite. He's the true man who's going to take Israel and the people of Samaria as his own. He's going to form a new nation.

Warren Gage has remarked further upon the parallels between this story and stories in Revelation. This is an extended quote from him. But her meeting with Jesus transforms her so that she becomes like the bride of Christ at the end of Revelation.

We begin by noting the patterns of the correspondence between the Samaritan woman and the whore of Babylon. The gospel account begins with Jesus sitting upon the well. Chapter 4 verse 6. A posture that corresponds to the whore of Revelation who sits upon many waters.

17 verse 1. The Samaritan woman is thirsty and comes to the well with a water pot to draw in John chapter 4 verses 7 and 28. Similarly, the Babylonian whore is depicted with a cup in her hand. Satisfying her thirst with abominations and fornication in Revelation chapter 17 verse 4. When challenged by Jesus, the Samaritan woman lies about her marital status claiming that she has no husband.

In fact, Jesus tells her that she has had five husbands and that the one she is now living with is not her husband. In John chapter 4 verse 17 to 18. But when the Samaritan woman and the villagers receive Jesus, he remains among them two days.

Chapter 4 verse 40. Similarly, John tells us that the Babylonian whore also lies about her marital status claiming, I am not a widow. But in fact, Babylon has known five kings who have fallen and one is and the other has not yet come.

Revelation chapter 17 verse 10. When he comes, however, he will remain with her a little while. Revelation 17 verse 10.

Christ redeems the Samaritan woman in spite of her impure past and transforms her into the picture of the bride of Christ. Her thirst having been satisfied in John 4 verse 28, she leaves the one she loves at the well, going back into the village to share with everyone the love she has found without cost. And so she calls for the people, any who thirst for living water.

John chapter 4 verse 10. To come out of the city to meet Jesus who gives so freely by the well of waters. John chapter 4 verse 29 to 30.

In this, she conforms to the picture of the bride in Revelation who invites all who thirst to come out of the city. Revelation 18 verse 4. And partake of the water of life without cost. Revelation 22 verse 17.

The grace of Jesus expressed so tenderly to an immoral woman of Samaria surprises even the woman herself. In fact, she is shocked that Jesus would have anything to do with her. John chapter 4 verse 9. Likewise, the disciples marvel that Jesus speaks with her.

John chapter 4 verse 27. Similarly, in Revelation, the disciple John marvels when he sees the whore of Babylon. Revelation 17 verse 6. By such means, John recreates in the reader the astonished wonder of the disciples as we first become aware of the pattern whereby a harlot called out of the city of Babylon can become the bride of Christ.

As the reader begins to comprehend the full measure of the love of Jesus for the immoral woman of Samaria, he begins to share the very wonder of the disciples who returned to the well and saw Jesus speaking with a Samaritan woman. This woman with five marriages and an ongoing illicit relationship seems an unlikely antitype to the virginal Rachel whom the Samaritan woman replaces in John's retelling of the story of Jacob. To understand the full measure of this redemption is to marvel with the disciples.

As we move further in this passage, we see a reference to the true worshippers. As we go through John's gospel, references made to the true something on a number of occasions and to the truth. So in chapter 1 verse 9, we see the true light that's coming into the world.

In chapter 4 verse 23, the true worshippers. In chapter 6 verse 32, the true bread that comes from heaven. In chapter 15 verse 1, the true vine.

And in Christ, the point is the genuine article has arrived, the epitome, the culmination of all the things anticipated in the Old Testament. The true worshippers will worship the Father in the spirit and in the truth. Christ speaks of a new form of worship that will come, whose location isn't that mountain or the mountain of Jerusalem, but in the true temple of the spirit, the body of Christ.

Worship in spirit and in truth is more than really meaningful and heartfelt worship. It's a reference to a new manner of worshipping God, no longer geographically bound to the temple at Jerusalem, but occurring in the environment of the spirit. This new form of worship arrives through Christ's death and resurrection and exists because he is the true tabernacle and temple of God.

One final question to reflect upon. What are some of the ways in which the gift of the spirit is like the placing of a well or a spring within us?