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Q&A#112 Is the Samaritan Woman Like Hagar and Other Such Questions

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Alastair Roberts

Today's question: "The story of Hagar found in Genesis 16 reminds me of the Samaritan woman in John 4. Both accounts involve a woman who is (in some sense) cast out from the Abrahamic community. She is met by God in visible form at a spring/well, and responds by praising his seeing/knowledge about her life. Has anyone else commented on this parallel before, or is it a bit too "fanciful" to be helpful?"

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, the story of Hagar found in Genesis 16 reminds me of the Samaritan Woman in John 4. Both accounts involve a woman who is, in some sense, cast out from the Abrahamic community. She is met by God in visible form at a spring or well, and responds by praising his seeing or knowledge about her life.

Has anyone else commented on this parallel before, or is it a bit too fanciful to be helpful? This is an important question to ask, and as we look through such accounts in scripture, we'll often see parallels that may or may not be there. If we're looking at the

story of Hagar, we can see certain points where there would seem to be connections, and other points where it's not so clear. Here, the questioner has given us a number of parallels that could be suggested, and those parallels really present us with a route for exploration.

So is there anything more that could back up this particular connection that's being drawn, or is this a cold lead? Another thing to bear in mind is the way that we approach these sorts of questions. So what is sufficient to establish the existence of a parallel? Well, first of all, it helps to step back a bit and think, how much weight are we putting upon this parallel? Does it need to be established with full strength? Is it something that could be a possible parallel, something that has an 80% degree of likelihood, for instance, or some other degree of strength that doesn't have to be 100% with everything resting upon it? When we're looking through scripture, I think this is generally the way to go. I've given the illustration in the past of reading scripture and thinking about these parallels as thinking about a tree.

Within a tree, you have the trunk, and then you have a number of big branches, and then smaller branches, and then skinny branches, and then the leaves upon those things. We might think of the leaves as specific verbal or other parallels that we can see between accounts. We could think about the branches, the smaller branches, as these slight parallels like the ones mentioned here.

And then we could think about the larger branches as things such as the great big branches like the Exodus theme running throughout the Bible. We don't have to establish every single instance of that for us to recognize there's a big branch there and that it bears a lot of weight. And that itself is born by the trunk, which is even greater still.

If we're looking through these texts, then we don't have to put all of our weight upon every single one of these skinny branches. We can recognize their presence without having to force everything down upon it. So how would we approach a text like this? It might be helpful to step away from the specific parallels and focus instead upon a more general type scene.

So Robert Alter has talked about, for instance, the type scene of a woman being met at a well and a woman who will often go on to become the wife of the person who meets her there. We have this in the story of Rebecca and Abraham's servant who goes to look for a wife for Isaac. And then as a sign, he prays that the person who comes and offers him water and then water for his camels as well would be the person who would be the true wife for Isaac.

Later on, we see Jacob meeting Rachel at a well and he removes the stone on the top of the wells that Rachel can get water for her flocks. Again, we see it in the story of Moses as Moses drives away the shepherds who are harassing the daughters of Jethro and

enables them to get water from the well. And he goes on again to marry one of those daughters.

Likewise, in the stories of Genesis, we see a number of occasions of wells being dug and wells in these occasions being associated with women, with wombs, with these sorts of deeper symbolism. Now, what does this mean when we come to the passage of John 4? In John 4, we see another similar account, a woman being met at a well and there are themes of matrimony. There are themes of matrimony running throughout the book of John's Gospel.

So John presents himself, John the Baptist presents himself as the friend of the bridegroom who's announcing the bridegroom who's to come. Christ begins his ministry at a wedding ceremony and his mother, his significant presence there, and his presence as the one who provides the wine, which is typically the job of the bridegroom. This is significant.

Elsewhere in the Gospel, we see Christ presented as the one who meets the woman in the garden. He's the one who's preparing the wedding. He's the one who is the bridegroom who's come onto the scene.

And these themes help us to understand in this particular occasion some of the matrimonial themes that are playing out. So there's a woman who has had five husbands. The one who is now her husband is not her husband.

And then they talk about the man who is to come, Messiah, the seventh man. And he's the man who meets the woman, as it were, at the well. There's matrimonial themes here.

And he's the seventh man. He's the perfect man. He's the Messiah.

Elsewhere, we see, for instance, in chapter 11, I think it is, of John, you have a reference to a very subtle allusion with what's in John 12. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

And this is why Jesus was sitting at the table. And if we go back to Song of Songs, we see these sorts of themes there as well. In Song of Songs, 11, verse 12, we read, while the king is at his table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance.

So these are things that suggest that Christ is in the role of the bridegroom. He's the one who comes for the bride. And there are parallels here with other Johannine material.

So if you go to the Book of Revelation, you'll see some very interesting parallels. And juxtapositions. The woman at the well is juxtaposed with the woman who is the whore of Babylon.

There, it talks about the one who have been five kings. One now is and one is yet to come and will tarry for a short time. And Christ tarries for a short time after this.

And there's five, one who now is and then one who is to come. And so these are interesting juxtapositions. There's something going on there.

And that something going on might suggest that John is drawing some deeper themes about the woman here. Because in the end of Revelation, we have the woman who's the woman who's the adulterous woman, who's the whore of Babylon. But then we also have the spotless bride.

And those two figures are related in subtle ways. The spotless bride is formed of people who have come out of the city that is the adulterous, that is the whore of Babylon. So these two figures are not absolutely opposed.

Rather, it's like Rahab. Rahab is the prostitute in the city of Jericho, the seven trumpets blown against the city of Jericho. And she's brought out and she becomes part of Christ's line.

So what we're seeing here are some deeper themes of matrimony. We're seeing also connections with the Old Testament stories of women met at wells. Now, this helps us to relate it to a number of different stories within that cluster.

To recognize that what we have is a very firm connection with this cluster of stories, this type scene of women met at wells. And then we can start to explore the differences and the similarities between all the different stories within that cluster. So within a type scene, you have significance given to the similarities and the differences.

There's a set of family resemblances, but within those family resemblances, we see significant differences and also significant similarities. If we're looking at the story of Rachel, for instance, or Rachel, there was a stone rolled away from the tomb and from the well. And later on, I think that this could be related to the tomb.

Christ is the one who will bring forth living waters. The tomb at the very end is described in a way that suggests it's the Holy of Holies. Water flows out from the Holy of Holies in Old Testament prophecy to give life to the nations.

And so Christ is the one who removes the stone from the well. He's the one who's like Jacob. And this is Jacob's well that's spoken of in Sychar.

And then he gives water to everyone so that they can drink. He's the one who brings forth living water. And so Christ explicitly compares and contrasts his giving living water with the work of Jacob, who opened up the well at Sychar.

Now, this helps us to see that there are some significant themes playing throughout

these texts that relate them together. Other things, the story of Rebecca. Rebecca is met at the well.

And then Rebecca, in her story, the pitcher is given a great significance. The pitcher is mentioned again and again and again within the story. And we don't have pictures mentioned that much within the story of scripture.

We have it, for instance, mentioned in a few points in First Kings. We have, I think, the story of Gideon and in the book of John. And so these are rare references to a pitcher.

But within the story of Rachel or Rebecca at the well, we have a number of references. Now, the woman here leaves her pitcher and then goes to tell everyone, runs to tell everyone. And that's exactly what Rebecca does.

So that's another significant parallel. But there are differences as well. If we're looking at the story of Moses, we might connect it with shepherding themes.

That Moses is the shepherd of his people. He's marked out. He drives away the wicked shepherds at the well.

We don't have those themes explicitly here. But Christ is presented as the good shepherd within the book of John. So that might be playing very, very faintly in the background.

Extremely faintly. I wouldn't put much weight on it. But we can think about that within the broader cluster of these stories.

Likewise, the story of Hagar. The connections that are mentioned by the person who asked this question are very good ones. They're worth considering.

Now, we don't have to give an awful lot of weight to these, but we can recognise that there is something that happens within this cluster of type scenes connected with wells. That there is another event that has some similarities. So the main weight is being placed upon, as it were, the branch of this type scene.

Women met at wells. And then we can look out from there to one of the skinny branches, which is some of these specific connections and see where that goes. It may be stronger and bear more weight than we originally supposed.

Putting these things together, we can see that there is a picture of Christ presented within a context where there is an existing type scene. And this existing type scene enables us to recognise the salience of significant similarities and significant differences. So it's not just the similarities, it's also the differences.

It's the way that this event is set into a greater relief when it's placed against other events. And within this cluster of other events, we can see ways in which it is exploring

existing themes. Now, within the Book of John, we can also see that there are ways that this functions within its original context.

There's a lot of reference to water within the Book of John. Living water in John chapter 7 as well. For instance, there are healings connected with water.

We have the water churned into wine in the beginning of chapter 2. We have John the Baptist baptising in chapter 3 and being born of water and the spirit. And then we have in chapter 4, we have the woman met at the well. In chapter 5, we have the healing at the pool.

And so we have a series of these different events that are connected with each other by the theme of water. We also have two references within John's gospel to pitchers or pots and water pots. And this, I think, helps us to maybe connect this particular account.

She leaves her water pitcher and that connects with the water pots that have the water within them turned to wine. And that might help us to bring out some other themes. Some have argued that the story of John is a movement throughout the tabernacle.

So you start off with the introduction with Christ tabernacling among us. Christ is the Lamb of God. And then you have the movement to the water.

Then you have the movement to the bread and the bread of the presence. Twelve baskets gathered up and that connects with the bread of the presence. Then you have the movement into ever nearer stages of the tabernacle as you eat with God.

And then there's the ascension offering as Christ prays. And then the offering. And then we have the entrance into the Holy of Holies.

And then the tomb, the open tomb is presented as the Holy of Holies. There's an angel seated on one side in each side of the places where he was laying at the head and the foot. And that connects with the Ark of the Covenant with the angel on either side and this opened up box or chamber.

And so Christ is the one who opens the Holy of Holies. He's the one who opens the tomb. He's the one who opens the Ark of the Covenant and living water flows out.

And there are ways in which that can connect with the themes of John chapter 21. Putting all these things together, we can see that there is a great cluster of these different themes, types, type scenes, parallels and echoes that enable us to put our weight along a large range of different things. So our weight is fairly broadly distributed, which enables us to explore these particular connections with Hagar without having to put every bit of weight upon them.

And we can recognize, I think, some genuine connections here that these connections

occur within the context of a broader type scene and within a text that has a deep web of connections that is doing a lot of different things on a typological level. And it helps us to read this particular passage when we see it against these matrimonial themes, against women met, the themes of women met at wells, against the ways that these themes are being used in the Johanna literature more generally. Against the surrounding pattern of John's use of water imagery within these chapters and more generally against the background of the specific stories that are evoked.

The story of Jacob, the story of Jacob and meeting Rachel and then the story of Jacob creating as well. Putting all these things together, then I think what we have is a great network of themes of parallels that enable us to bring into a greater relief significant differences and similarities. And those differences and similarities, were there not these connections, would not be so clearly seen.

Because when you bring these two stories together, what you see is the overlap, but also the differences. And this is one of the things that type scenes do that enable us to understand the significance of any particular story. What they do is they bring two texts into conjunction with each other.

And as they bring them into conjunction, you start to notice features of each. You start to notice where they're the same and where they are different. And recognizing that enables you to put a lot of things together that you would not be able to do otherwise.

Thank you very much for listening. If you have any further questions, please leave them on my Curious Cat account. If you'd like to support this and other videos like it, please do so using my Patreon account or my PayPal account.

Thank you very much for listening and Lord willing, I'll be back again tomorrow. God bless.