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Update and Jesus the Bridegroom in John and Revelation

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Transcript

It has been a while since I produced an update video over here. For the most part, my work over the last year has involved more travelling, more writing, and a lot more teaching, and so the time that I would usually have devoted to producing videos has been occupied with other activities. One of the things that Susanna and I have done in the past year is start a new sub-stack, and so every couple of weeks or so we post an update with lots of photos explaining the things that we've been doing, giving links to various things that we've written or the podcasts that we've released, and also sharing some lengthy thoughts on some subject that's been on our mind over that period.

We also give updates on the things that are on the horizon, the things that we're about to do in the next few weeks. Now, I thought I'd take the opportunity, just in giving this brief update, to share one of the posts from the – not the previous, but the post before that, because it's very much in keeping with a subject that I'm going to be teaching upon in the next Davenant course that I teach on John and Revelation. Within that course I'm going to be exploring, among other things, the close relationship between the books of

John and Revelation, the way in which they can be read as a unified witness to the risen Christ.

Now, one of the things that is part of this is the thematic unity between the two books in terms of marital themes and the way that they use Old Testament background, specifically in this case the book of the Song of Songs, to express that thematic unity. And so I want to read out this post that I wrote on the subject in our latest sub-stack. I'll give the link to that.

And also, if you want to look at some of my other material, you can follow my various podcasts on SoundCloud. And if you follow Adversaria podcast, you can also see all the different things that I've produced in various locations. But the best place to go to have an update on everything is the Anchored Argosy sub-stack.

It's free and it's going to be sent directly to your email address if you sign up. But here you go. Here are some thoughts on the subject of John and Revelation and the way that the Song of Songs plays in the background.

Marital themes are present in the other Gospels. In Matthew 9, verses 14-15, Jesus speaks of himself as the bridegroom, whose presence is attended by joy. Jesus likens the Kingdom of Heaven to a wedding feast in Matthew 22, verses 1-14, in a parable that explores several points of comparison.

In the parable of the virgins in Matthew 25, verses 1-13, the parousia of Christ is compared to the midnight advent of a bridegroom for a marriage feast. The breadth of such parabolical material, parabolic material, might imply that marital metaphors are root metaphors for Jesus' understanding of his mission in Matthew. James Bajon also suggests that the Song of Songs can be heard in the background in the use of the expression, daughters of Jerusalem, in Luke 23, verse 28.

Yet it is in John's Gospel that such marital themes find their fullest expression. In John's Gospel, Jesus' ministry begins at a wedding feast and it climaxes at a wedding feast at the end of Revelation. Jesus' encounters with women in John also often employ nuptial imagery.

For instance, Jesus meets a woman at a well in John chapter 4. Isaac, Jacob and Moses all found their wives at wells in Genesis and in the Book of Exodus. And women are associated with wells and springs elsewhere in Scripture, in places like Proverbs 5, verse 15 or Song of Songs 4, verse 15. The encounter with Mary Magdalene in the garden in John chapter 20 has a similar flavour to it.

Recalling Adam and Eve in the first garden, John the Baptist is characterised as the friend of the bridegroom in John chapter 3, verse 29. At the Feast of Cana, Jesus provides the wine as the bridegroom would in chapter 2, verses 9 to 10. Warren Gage has

explored the arresting parallels between John and Revelation.

He observes the ways that these develop nuptial themes in many places. For instance, he notes the surprising literary associations between the Samaritan woman of John chapter 4 and the female figure of Revelation chapter 17, for instance. Such parallels, he argues, disclose a deeper narrative playing out within both books.

The redemption of the unfaithful or outcast woman is also seen in places such as the story of the woman caught in adultery in John chapter 8, which Gage maintains is paralleled with the deliverance of the woman from the accusers in Revelation chapter 12. The woman of Revelation chapter 17 recalls Rahab, the harlot who was delivered from the city that was destroyed with the blast of seven trumpets in the Book of Joshua. John shares a lot of the imagery of the song.

The chief protagonist in both is a good shepherd in chapter 1, verse 7 of the song and John chapter 10, verses 1 to 16. There is wine and vine dressing. We can see that in the Song of Songs, verses 11 to 12 of chapter 8 and John chapter 15, verses 1 to 6. There is a repeated charge not to awaken love before its time in the song and that's not dissimilar to John's frequent reminder of the hour of Christ that is awaited but which has not yet come.

John speaks a lot about hearing the voice of Jesus as the voice of the bridegroom in John chapter 3, verse 29 or Revelation chapter 3, verse 20. In John, Jesus' voice is also the voice that gives life to the dead, chapter 5, verse 25. It's the voice to which the sheep respond in chapter 10, verses 3 to 5. And the voice of the beloved is also emphasised in the song, chapter 2, verse 8 or verse 14 of that chapter too.

John's allusions to the song, however, go beyond sharing broad motifs of marriage and the wedding and a similar general cluster of images. He develops and deploys more specific imagery from the song in his narrative. For instance, in Mary's anointing of Jesus in Bethany, John recalls the words of the song, portraying Jesus as the bridegroom king.

In chapter 1, verse 12 of the Song of Songs, while the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance. And in chapter 12, verse 3 of the book of John, Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

We see something similar in the burial of Jesus. At the end of John, chapter 19, Jesus is laid in a bed in a new garden tomb, filled with an enormous quantity of spices, recalling the Song of Songs, chapter 6, verse 2. My beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke.

I sought him, but found him not. I called him, but he gave no answer. Song of Songs, chapter 5, verse 6. Finally, she finds him in the garden.

Chapter 6, verses 1 to 2. Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you? My beloved has gone down to his garden. Finding him, she does not want to let him go. Chapter 3, verse 4. Scarcely had I passed them when I found him whom my soul loves.

I held him and would not let him go. And then in John, chapter 20, verse 17, as if playing off that background, Jesus said to her, after Mary had found him, Do not cling to me. We should observe the ways in which John fuses temple imagery with song imagery.

The garden is the site of Jesus' tomb. It's the sanctuary. The place where Jesus was laid with the angels at the head and the foot recalls the Ark.

It's the lover's tristing place, but it's also the woman herself. The woman is a locked garden, a well of living water, as she's described in Song of Songs, chapter 4, verse 15. Jesus, the bridegroom, is going to come to his garden and open it, or her, up, releasing its living waters and its spiced air.

This, of course, is prominent imagery in John's Gospel and in Revelation. Jesus promises living water coming forth from within in John, chapter 4, verses 10-14 and in John, chapter 7, verses 37-39. This also alludes to the eschatological waters of Ezekiel's temple in Ezekiel, chapter 47, which lies behind John, chapter 21.

We are told this is in reference to the Spirit. It's about the Spirit, about the water coming forth from the temple, but it's also imagery of the song. The open garden is the opened woman.

Jesus connects his body to the temple in John, chapter 2. The temple is also the bridal church from which the Pentecostal Spirit flows. Song metaphors and motifs also appear in Revelation. Jesus is depicted with what are called wassifs, describing his various body parts in succession, like the bridegroom is described in places like the Song of Songs, chapter 5, verses 10-16.

This might be seen even in weird details, such as the description of Jesus as a male with breasts in Revelation, chapter 1, verse 13. Jesse Rainbow suggests that this could allude to the strange reference to the bridegroom's breasts in the Septuagint of Song of Songs, chapter 1, verse 2. The bridegroom, of course, knocks at the door and counsels his bride to clothe herself in Revelation, chapter 3, verses 18-20, which recalls Song of Songs, chapter 5, verses 1-3. Jesus' invitation to dine with his bride, if she will answer the door, should be understood Eucharistically.

We should also recognize the body as food is a powerful recurring image in the Song of Songs. Christ's gift of his body in the Eucharist is, among other things, nuptial communion, a true wedding feast. By the end of Revelation the bride is not just the open garden, but the open garden city, its living waters flowing forth.

The Song itself is filled with imagery that evokes the tabernacle or the temple, in chapter 3, verses 6-10, for instance. None of this should surprise us when we encounter it in the New Testament. The Book of Revelation ends in a similar place as the Song.

The fruits of a garden, representing the bride, are described, fruits brought forth by the love of David's son, Song of Songs, verses 11 of chapter 8. And both books conclude with a loving bride calling for her bridegroom to hurry to her. At the end of the Book of the Song of Songs, Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices. The very end of Revelation.

Come, Lord Jesus. If we can read these things allegorically and symbolically, appreciating the ways meanings move between levels of the text, without collapsing into each other, the power and the delight of such an approach to hearing the Song and its vision for piety should be very evident. The fact that neither the Song of Songs nor the books of John and Revelation terminate upon some consummation, so much as they conclude with renewed and redoubled longing, is also noteworthy.

The sort of hearing Scripture produces by this allegorical approach that John exemplifies doesn't merely lead to a flat, this-is-like-that comparison, collapsing a higher reality into images offered by a lower. Rather, the allegory of the Song and its playful metaphors maintain what we might call apophatic distances that are charged with and productive of longing. If you're interested in hearing more about the Song, you should listen to my series of commentaries upon the Song, which are available on YouTube.

Like the Song, John and Revelation present the Bridegroom as a lewding grasp, control and comprehension. However, not least through subtle literary artistry, John educates the desire of the hearers of his writings to long for, recall and to seek him. Thank you very much for listening.

That's a reading from one of the recent Substack posts that we produce. I'll give the link to the Substack in the show notes below. And also, if you'd be interested in signing up for my course on John and Revelation with the Davenant Institute, it's available on the Davenant Hall website.

I will post the link to that below as well. Within that course, we'll be exploring a vast range of material in John and Revelation. This is just a very small taste of the sort of thing that we'll be looking into.

We'll be looking into some of the deeper theological themes, for instance, how we can read the book of John and the book of Revelation and arrive at a fuller understanding of the triune God. That is the sort of thing that I want to explore, or to think about the ways that the books can be mapped onto each other. Now, if you would like to support my work in the Substack and other places, all of these things I try and offer free to anyone who wants to access them.

And so that work has to be supported in various other ways. If you would like to support me, you can do so using my Patreon account or my PayPal account. And the links to those are below too.

Thank you very much for listening. And Lord willing, I'll see you sooner than the time that it took for me to post this after the previous one. God bless.