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A Reappraisal of the Johannine Well Scene in Light of Recent Research

Abstract

Previously, Donald C. McIntyre has argued for a reappraisal of the typology of the Old Testament Well scenes contrary to popular interpretations espoused by Alter and Sailhamer.^[1] This reappraisal has implication for John 4:1-45 with the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. Evangelical theologians have typically failed to apply their understanding of the Old Testament well scenes consistently to the text of John 4:1-45 because of the implications that would have on Christ's marital desires. Other theologians, particularly feminist theologians, have been more consistent in their application of the type scenes of the Old Testament to the text of John 4, but have created other theological problems for the understanding of the marital status of Christ. It is this very tension which has necessitated a reappraisal of the well scenes in total. The similarities between the accounts of Old Testament well scenes and the well scene in Samaria are too apparent to be accidental; and therefore, one must assume a rhetorical purpose for John's inclusion of this story for his account. This article will seek to show that the understanding of well scenes as a hero-narrative, where the well scene identifies a deliverer of the Abrahamic line from imminent danger, best satisfies the textual evidence of John 4, while offering a consistent interpretive method for all of the well-scenes.

[1] For more on this see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), pp. 60-61; and John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 243.

Keywords

Well Scene, John 4, Samaritan woman, Verbal Aspect, Narrative Analysis

Cover Page Footnote

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Introduction

John's Gospel has garnered attention due to its marked differences from the synoptic accounts. This attention has led to multiple interpretive attempts to ascertain John's distinctive emphases in his selection of material in fulfilling his ultimate goal of showing "Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 20:31).¹ One such scene which is distinctive in the Johannine account is that of the woman at the well. This particular scene has been problematic for a variety of recent reading strategies, as will be detailed below. This analysis will offer an intertextually based interpretation of the well scene in John 4 which will reveal, against previous interpretive conclusions, that the use of a well scene is (1) a deliberate motif that identifies a deliverer of the Abrahamic progeny (whether Jew, Ishmaelite, or in this case, Samaritan), and (2) like the other well scenes, has a deliberate rhetorical effect of resolving a conflict of contemporary societal norms for the advancement of the Abrahamic promise.² Specifically, the well scene of John 4 seeks to present Jesus as the hero who protects the genealogical progeny of Abraham from eschatological judgment while intentionally undermining the Jewish boundary markers of devotion to the cultic system emphasizing hereditary and Spiritual Jewishness over cultural and cultic Jewishness.

Previous Interpretations of John 4:1-45

The Gospel of John has presented a unique set of interpretive problems. The Gospel's Christology, its seemingly anti-Jewish polemic, and its use of material otherwise unattested to in the Synoptics have led to intense feelings, scrupulous reflection, and constant debate. John 4:1-45 includes all three of these elements: a presentation of Christ as the omniscient Messiah, ambivalent relationships towards Judaism, and an account otherwise unattested. As such, this account has garnered much interest from exegetes which must be addressed. Köstenberger, in the *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, fails to note a typological association of this well scene in John four with previous well scenes of the Old Testament. Likewise, *The Women's Bible Commentary* and *Jesus Was a Feminist* fail to note the apparent typological relationship.³ As will be shown below, other exegetes have been apt to note the

¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 34

² Jan P. Fokkeman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1999), chap. #, Kindle ed..

³ Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, eds., *Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 521

close parallels. Robert Alter's groundbreaking work on Biblical narrative set a consistent pattern for "Betrothal type" scenes:

The betrothal type-scene, then, must take place with the future bridegroom, or his surrogate, having journeyed to a foreign land. There he encounters a girl—the term "na'arah" invariably occurs unless the maiden is identified as so-and-so's daughter— or girls at a well. Someone, either the man or the girl, then draws water from the well; afterward, the girl or girls rush to bring home the news of the strangers arrival (the verbs "hurry" and "run" are given recurrent emphasis at this junction of the type-scene); finally a betrothal is concluded between the stranger and the girl, in the majority of instances, only after he has been invited to a meal.⁴

The influence of this book has been inestimable for narrative biblical studies, and the relationship between the Old and New Testaments has inevitably led Christian scholars to consider the relationship between these stories and that in John 4. Michael Martin describes this process:

[A] number of NT scholars have observed an allusion to the betrothal type-scene in the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman in the Fourth Gospel. All five of the elements identified by Alter are noted by these scholars. (1) Jesus travels to a foreign territory, Samaria (4:4), where (2) he sits by a well and meets a woman who has come to draw water (4:6-7). (3) He asks the woman for a drink but, in a departure from the norm, is refused because he "is a Jew" and she is "a Samaritan woman" (4:9; he is the antithesis of a kinsman!). Hence, deliberate suppression of element 3 highlights a central theme of the text, the inclusion of the Samaritans. (6) The woman returns to the town and tells her kinspeople the news of Jesus' arrival. (8) Finally, there is an allusion to the last element, the betrothal in connection with [sic] the meal. Jesus is offered food to eat by his disciples but refuses it, saying that he has his food to eat about which they do not know. His food, he tells them, is "to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work" (4:31-37). The "betrothal" that occurs in connection with [sic] this meal is evident in the immediately preceding scene, when John calls Jesus the "bridegroom" and has in mind his status as Messiah: "I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice" (3:28-29). John's words anticipate the Samaritan woman's coming to faith in Jesus as the

⁴ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011), 61

Messiah (4:29, 39), framing her conversion as betrothal to the bridegroom.⁵

These points of similarity are convincing at face value. Martin has used literary context to spiritualize the marital intention due to the preceding discussion between the Baptist and his disciple, citing a plethora of other scholars. One of the scholars Martin cites is John Bligh, who succinctly notes that "It need not be supposed that St John has any particular one of these Old Testament stories in mind . . . but his story conforms to the pattern, and marriage is not far from his thoughts. Shortly before, in 3:29, Jesus has been described, by John the Baptist, as 'the Bridegroom'; and he himself introduces the topic of marriage in 4:16."⁶ This same type of spiritualization leads Bligh to assert tentatively: "Probably John means his readers to recognize a sign of the universality of Christ's mission in contrast between the discourse to Nicodemus, a master in Israel, spoken in Jerusalem, by night, and the discourse to the uninstructed Samaritan woman, on the fringe of the Jewish world at mid-day. His mission is to Jew and Gentile, learned and simple."⁷ The contrast between light and darkness is emphatic in John's gospel, and there may be more to this idea contrasting the hesitancy of Nicodemus at night on behalf of the Jews; he represents the enthusiasm of the Samaritan woman at midday.

M. E. Boismard sees the influence of Genesis 24 as "certain" due to numerous parallel episodic details calling this scene "a Christian midrash which takes up the data of Gen., xxiv, 10 ss. He wants to present the conversion of Samaria as a new "marriage" between God and his people, according to a way of speaking common in the N.T."⁸ His emphasis is based on a questionable wordplay in Aramaic for the term husband *ba'al*, which could also be the name of the known Canaanite God whom the Samaritans may have been corrupted by during the exile, and posits that:

⁵ Martin, Michael W. "Betrothal Journey Narratives." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (2008): 505-523, *ProQuest*, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fbetrothal-journey-narratives%2Fdocview%2F220260939%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

⁶ John Bligh, "Jesus in Samaria," *The Heythrop Journal* 3, no. 4 (1962): 332, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.1962.tb00300.x>.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 333.

⁸ M. E. Boismard, "Aenon, Près De Salem (Jean 3:23)," *Revue Biblique* 80 (1973): 218-229, <https://doi.org/ISSN:0035-0907>.

The five "husbands" (*be'alim*) of the Samaritan woman symbolize the five "false gods" (*be'alim*) at the origin of the syncretism of the Samaritans.⁹ This play on words was already prepared by Hos., II, 18-19, which announced precisely the future conversion of the northern kingdom (Samaria) in these terms: "In that day, declares Yahweh, she will call me 'my husband,' she will no longer call me 'my Baal;' I will take all the names of the Baals out of her mouth, their names will no longer be spoken."¹⁰

Such reasoning has been standard fare among many conservatives seeking to explain the apparent similarities between well scenes in the OT and maintaining the lack of marital intention on the part of Christ; others find this line of reasoning to be an inconsistent application of typological interpretation leading them to posit other explanative theories.

Adele Reinhartz, writing from an ethnic and religiously Jewish perspective, does note the correlation between the well scenes and describes "Erotic subtexts" in John stating that:

The Samaritan woman and the Bethany sisters Mary and Martha. Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman recalls the stories in Genesis and Exodus in which biblical heroes meet the women they will marry at a well. . . The erotic allusions add depth to the rhetoric of searching and finding, and emotion to the desire for eternal life. They also attribute an all-consuming intensity to the relationship between Jesus and the believer, one whose dimensions extend far beyond the cognitive and even the emotive to include also the sensual."¹¹

Reinhartz eventually discredits the idea of marriage as an intention but likewise finds a "life-changing offer" for living water, contrasting her with Nicodemus.¹² Joann Brant argues that within the Gospel of John, "One finds characters, including Jesus, motivated by a form of love best described by the Greek word ἔρωϛ. The Samaritan woman. . . act[s] like women desirous of marriage and they

⁹ Ibid; however, there is a long running debate that the ICE Israelite community spoke Greek and not Aramaic and there is evidence of bi and tri-lingualism throughout the gospels; see arguments in G. Scott Gleaves, "Conclusion," in *Did Jesus speak Greek? : The Emerging Evidence of Greek Dominance in First-Century Palestine* (City: The Lutterworth Press, 2015), 182–86, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1cgf8g5.11>.

¹⁰ M. E. Boismard, "Aenon, Près De Salem (Jean 3:23)," #.

¹¹ Adele Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Academic), 39, Kindle ed.

¹² Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant*, 49.

see Jesus as a potential lover or mate. Moreover, their actions and perceptions are not unjustified within the context of the narrative."¹³

The lack of a physical marital consummation has been problematic for many interpreters, leaving their interpretations to spiritualize, repress, or ignore the marriage idea, which seems disingenuous. Those interpretations which ignore the marriage idea altogether (real or spiritualized) typically focus on the concept of sacred space, gender boundary removal, or evangelism—all of which are important themes in John's gospel.¹⁴ However, as the marriage adherents have stressed, the typology between John 4 and other well scenes seems too strong to dismiss for other options in pursuit of safety of consciousness. Instead, it seems best to review the Old Testament well scenes in depth and see if Robert Alter's narrative type scene is inadequate for explaining the well scenes. This paper will argue that the goal of the Old Testament type scenes was not in fact betrothal, but instead the identification of a deliverer/hero of the Abrahamic progeny, and this new paradigm for well scenes can adequately explain the text of John four in a way which maintains the intentional allusion to the Old Testament narratives and avoids spiritualizing or repressing the physical idea of marriage. In all cases of intertextual studies, it is important to examine the antecedent theology before progressing to the text in question.

Influence of Antecedent Theology

Typology

Typology is pivotal to biblical interpretation.¹⁵ Walter C. Kaiser Jr. notes four distinct characteristics of a type: historical correspondence, escalation in antitype, divine intent, and prefiguration.¹⁶

The Old Testament Well Scenes Motif Implying a Heroic Deliverer

The *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* states, "A motif usually builds around a nuclear action sequence which can take different forms and cover

¹³ Jo-Ann A. Brant, "Husband Hunting: Characterization and Narrative Art in the Gospel of John." *Biblical Interpretation* 4, no. 2 (June 1996): 205-206.

¹⁴ Yohanna Katanacho, *Reading the Gospel of John through Palestinian Eyes* (Carlisle: Langham Preaching Resources, 2020), 27-28

¹⁵ Craig L. Blomberg and Jennifer Foutz Markley, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 191.

¹⁶ Walter C. Kaiser, *The Uses of The Old Testament in the New* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 106-110.

more than a single event."¹⁷ The well motif is a familiar theme in Pentateuchal studies.¹⁸ McIntyre has argued that previous treatments of well scenes have artificially limited their analyses to the location of the well and should be expanded to see these scenes as part of a larger travelogue which find their major conflict before the journey to the well and a secondary conflict upon arrival at the well, and includes resolutions to both of those conflicts.¹⁹ McIntyre has identified a plot sequence for the travelogue as being composed of four parts:

1. Journey Conflict—Conflict causes a character to journey. This conflict is typically related to a catastrophic threat to Abraham's progeny, jeopardizing the Abrahamic promise.
2. Arrival Conflict—The character arrives at a well where there is a separate, though sometimes related, conflict. These conflicts are of a secondary sort, serving as a rising action to the larger narrative that actually started with the flight from the previous locative setting.
3. Arrival Resolution—The conflict at the well is resolved. This resolution often has marital implications.
4. Journey Resolution—The conflict that caused the character to journey to the well is resolved. This resolution always requires a return journey to the original location where the journey conflict began and resolves the major issue which caused the protagonist to flee.²⁰

McIntyre goes on to argue for a sub-genre of heroic narrative for the well scenes asserting that "Hero stories are built around the life and exploits of a protagonist. Such stories spring from one of the most universal impulses of literature—the desire to embody accepted norms of behavior or representative struggles in the story of a character whose experience is typical of people in general."²¹ The well scenes of the Old Testament focus on the struggle of a primary character concerning proscribed social norms within their current societal context, citing Fokelman, who asserts that a quest and hero are essential to the plot within biblical narrative.²² McIntyre concludes that "The well scenes cannot

¹⁷ David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan, eds., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (London: Routledge, 2010), 322.

¹⁸ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011), pp. 60-61; and John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 243.

¹⁹ Donald C. McIntyre, "A Narrative Analysis of Pre-Sinaitic Well Scenes," *JMAT* 25, no. 2 (2021): 14-15.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 75.

²² Fokkelman, chap. #.

be taken independently of their journey, since it is here where the hero seeks to resolve their conflict. Any other conflict found (such as those that occur upon the arrival at the well) would be rising actions to the ultimate denouement."²³ If McIntyre's thesis is correct, and if John is seeking to employ the well-setting type scene in John 4:1-45, then there should be a correlation between these journey conflicts and arrival conflicts in John 4:1-45 as well.

New Testament Exegesis

Context

Historical

The book self attests that this book is written by "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20). Carson describes the debate concerning the author of the fourth Gospel from history, noting that "There was a time when the subject indicated by the above title [authorship] would have been considered superfluous; for the tradition was unquestioned that the Gospel was composed by the apostle John on the basis of his own memories, with no other assistance than the prompting of his friends and colleagues to set down in writing his recollections of Jesus."²⁴ Irenaeus (Polycarp's associate, who was John's disciple) attests to Apostolic Johannine authorship, and internal evidence implies that the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee was the disciple whom Jesus loved and, therefore, the author.²⁵

The date of John's writing, as attested by Irenaeus, was during John's time at Ephesus, which would have most likely predated his exile on Patmos; tradition, however, believes he returned to Ephesus after the death of Domitian in AD 98.²⁶ The question for dating becomes if John wrote this before his exile or afterward, but it has no tangible effects on this thesis. The evidence seems to place dating for John's gospel somewhere after A.D. 80, after the ministry of Timothy in Ephesus, and before John's exile to Patmos.²⁷ The gospel's narrative setting was predominantly Jerusalem, only in small parts of chapter two, the majority of chapter 4, and all of 6 take place outside of Jerusalem. The gospel's provenance has been historically attested as being composed in Diaspora Ephesus. The

²³ McIntyre, 6.

²⁴ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary 36 (Dallas: Word, 1999), xxxv.

²⁵ D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), chap. #, Kindle ed..

²⁶ Carson and Moo, chap. # and Beasley-Murray, xxxvii.

²⁷ Carson and Moo, chap. #.

priestly, Samaritan, and Qumran contacts within John seem to indicate an informed Jewish audience; however, the seeming gnostic polemic in John is also noteworthy since this is not typically a Jewish problem.²⁸ A broad diaspora audience is the most satisfying for the content emphases.²⁹ However, the question becomes which one?

There are debates concerning the provenance of John, however, the historical record clearly asserts that John wrote from Ephesus. The failure to recognize Johannine authorship in the gospel or John's Ephesian ministry has had a corollary effect on important aspects of interpretation. If John, the Apostle, is writing from Ephesus, for the Ephesian church, at the behest of his disciples, after AD 70, then one can now begin to posit an opponent for John's gospel.

Ephesian provenance is the key to unraveling the historical context for John's use of οἱ ἰουδαῖοι, which has seemingly been largely neglected. Though Reinhartz takes the Ephesian audience seriously, she fails to take into account necessary church historical information about Ephesus.³⁰ Ephesus was a Pauline Church, entrusted to the care of Timothy (Acts 16; 1 Tim. 1). Paul had clear opposition in Ephesus from "Judaizers" causing Paul to flee and to entrust the care of the church to Timothy, who remained there from somewhere between 53-57 AD to 62 AD.³¹ Though we have no record of the terminus of Timothy's ministry, it does appear that John replaced Timothy as the head elder of the Ephesian church until his death.³² If this historical context is remembered, one can

²⁸ Carson and Moo, chap. #.

²⁹ Edward W. Klink, *John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 65.

³⁰ Adele Reinhartz, *Cast out of the Covenant: Jews and Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John* (Lanham, MD: Fortress Academic, 2018), 22.

³¹ For dating of Acts see Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 31, where Bock notes that "There is more agreement regarding dates right after the Jerusalem Council. The second journey is AD 50–52, but the third journey is variously dated again as we move away from the firm date of Gallio. Fitzmyer has the third journey in AD 54–57, whereas Witherington has it in AD 53–57 or 58. They also do not agree on the date of Paul's house arrest in Rome; Fitzmyer has this in AD 61–63, whereas Witherington has it in AD 60–62." For the dating of 1 Timothy, showing Timothy's continued ministry at Ephesus and the issues of Judaizers focusing on genealogies, myths, and desiring to be teachers of the law, see, George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 53.

³² Ignatius of Antioch, "The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians," in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 54, who notes that "The Christians of Ephesus, who have always had intercourse with the apostles by the power of Jesus Christ, with Paul, and John, and Timothy the most faithful." See also Irenaeus of Lyons, "Irenaeus against Heresies," in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 416, who states, "Then, again, the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them

see that John's supposed anti-Jewish rhetoric in the Gospel would not have been written as a response to expulsion but instead, to prevent intrusion by establishing new boundary markers for the Johannine Community.³³

John's stance towards Judaism is not uniformly negative but is at points ambiguous or ambivalent. John's biography is particularly helpful for sifting through this complex rhetoric. John was an ethnic and formerly religious Jew who spent his first 43 years of ministry in Israel, specifically within the Jerusalem temple. During those 43 years of Jewish ministry, John's relationship with the Jews was difficult. The intrusion of Jews focused on boundary makers and nationalism (as evinced in Pauline letters to Timothy, and independently argued as a Johannine goal by Haloka) would have been particularly emotional for the Apostle John. Though the Jewish execution of Jesus (note Jesus' and subsequently the narrator's assessment of the situation which minimizes Pilate's involvement in John 18:31, 35, 38, 19:6-7, 11-16) was now 4-5 decades past, Jesus was not the only relationship John lost to the Jews. John's brother James was killed by Herod with the approval of the Jews (Acts 12:1-3) a few years after Jesus' crucifixion. John himself had suffered persecution at the hands of the Jews (Acts 3:11-5:40). The martyrdom of Paul, John's predecessor at Ephesus, and James' martyrdom, John's co-pastor at Jerusalem for 30-35 years, at the hands of Jews occurred approximately 15 years prior to the writing of the Gospel. John the Baptist, Jesus, and James the Just were cousins to the Apostle John, and redundantly James the Son of Zebedee was John's brother. John had seen his closest friends and family persecuted at the hands of Jewish leadership and approved of by Jewish crowds. With this historical background, Jewish readings of John should practice a more empathetic reading of John. John is writing as an aging man who had lost most of his friends and family at the hands of Jews in service of the gospel of the man he identified as the promised Messiah. John is writing as an older minister who has spent his entire missionary career seeking to serve Jews while simultaneously being persecuted by Jewish leadership through intimidation, imprisonments, scourging, and other forms of ostracism, and was forced to flee his longtime home as the result of violent Jewish nationalism which incurred the wrath of Rome,

permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles." See also Carl Clemen, "The Sojourn of the Apostle John at Ephesus," *The American Journal of Theology* 9, no. 4 (October 1905): 643-676, <https://doi.org/10.1086/478566>, argues that it is at least feasible.

³³ Raimo Hakola, *Identity Matters: John, the Jews, and Jewishness* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 232-234, argues convincingly that John's gospel seeks to develop an autonomous Christian religion. However, by examining the historical context of the Ephesian heresies, combated in Paul and Timothy's ministry, it becomes at least plausible if not convincing, that the reason for self-identification was to draw new boundaries for the Christian community at Ephesus which had long been plagued by the Judaizers so common to Pauline studies, and that John was drawing a line to expel those who failed to accept the new boundaries which are established in this gospel.

destroying his beloved temple and place of ministry. The below reading of John will seek to interpret the story in light of this historical situation.

Literary

Dualism has been widely noted in Johannine studies.³⁴ This dualistic framework seems to imply some type of polemical effect so that Tenney could write, "This Gospel was probably written at a time when the church was composed of second-and third-generation Christians who needed more detailed instruction about Jesus and new defenses for the apologetic problems raised by apostasy within the church and by growing opposition from without."³⁵ Using Johannine epistles for context, Tenney implies an opponent when he states, "The doctrinal digressions implied by the counsel given in these Epistles indicate that the church was being imperiled, if not actually deceived, by false teachers who came in the guise of itinerant preachers."³⁶ Throughout the first three chapters of John, this dualism is evinced and will serve as an important literary context for interpreting John 4.

In the first chapter, there is a prologue that introduces Christ as the *λόγος* and John the Baptist. The narrative continues with a summary of John the Baptist's testimony and concludes with John the Baptist being challenged by Jewish authorities and John's *apologia* for his ministry, which shows a dichotomy between spirit baptism and water baptism, pointing to the *λόγος* which he was asserts as being superior to his own testimony and ministry.

Chapter 2 of John gives the first sign in what is commonly known as "The book of Signs," where Jesus turns water into wine. Katancho has argued convincingly that the issue at stake was Jesus' lordship over purity.³⁷ As such, there seems to be a dichotomy whereby Jesus emphasizes celebration over ceremonial cleanliness. The second chapter closes with a discussion with the Jews regarding the inadequacy of the temple and sets the fundamental conflict between Christ and the Jews after Christ cleanses the temple. In this section, there is a choice between two temples, one which has been corrupted by the establishment and one which will replace it. The dichotomy in the second half of the second chapter is the superiority of Jesus' body over the Jewish building. Within this, it becomes evident that Jesus was going to come into conflict with the Jews from a desire to reform the cult of the Jews.³⁸

³⁴ Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary 36, cxvi.

³⁵ Merrill C. Tenney, "John," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 4.

³⁶ Tenney, "John," 10-11.

³⁷ Katancho, 21-22.

³⁸ Hakola, 93-94.

In the third chapter, there are two discussions: the first begins with the approach of Nicodemus, an ambivalent character in John's Gospel. Nicodemus' conversation shows the general Jewish antipathy towards Jesus but leaves hope for Jesus' reception by Pharisees if they are willing to learn from Jesus and submit themselves to a new spiritual movement. The dichotomy in this section clearly emphasizes spiritual birth over physical birth. John the Baptist then has a discussion with his disciples, whom John would have been one of prior to John 1, where John the Baptist shows a priority of Jesus the bridegroom over John the Baptist.

This brief thematic summary shows some very clear points of contention with Jewish boundary markers. Immediately, the author shows Jesus as the divine word of God in preexistent form. This would not have been a problem in Judaism until v. 14 with the incarnation, as Eli Lizorkin-Eyzeberg has pointed out.³⁹ With the visible form of God becoming a tangible man, clothed in flesh and mortal, the foremost Jewish boundary of monotheism, as they understood it, is immediately challenged and becomes the foundational basis of subsequent conflicts with the Jews. However, this conflict is not evinced until the second chapter. Instead, John uses narrative artistry to foreshadow the subsequent conflict with the Jews through a variety of means. John asserts Jesus' identity as the divine λόγος and immediately shows that Jewish leaders fail to recognize divine authority outside of established leadership structures through their hostility towards the ministry of John the Baptist. Narratively, this hostility towards John implies a future hostility towards the λόγος. The Baptist, as the "forerunner," gives testimony to the light, and his authority is challenged by the Jewish authorities. Though his role as a prophet would be much more palatable than that of the one He precedes who claims to be God, the Baptist's ministry is still an unwanted development by the Jewish establishment. Through *qal wa homer*, if the Jewish leadership rejects the authority of John the Baptist, questioning the Baptist's divine commission, how much more will they reject the authority of the λόγος? John warns the Jewish leadership that the one coming after him has more authority and honor than he does, and that he is coming for eschatological judgment. With this, the narrative stage is set for the unfolding dilemma. Under this analysis, the first chapter of John is an introduction that orients the reader to the impending conflict between the agents of God's eschatological work and the current agents of the Jewish establishment. The second and third chapters then describe the conflict in a thematic presentation moving from issues of external purity (chapter 2) to matters of internal purity (chapter 3). With the literary context preceding John 4, the reader should expect that there will become a dichotomous situation to follow which addresses Jewish boundary markers in some way which would be

³⁹ Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, *The Jewish Gospel of John: Discovering Jesus, King of All Israel* (CreateSpace, 2015), 1-2.

antithetical to the socio-political norms of the Jewish society. This socio-political conflict is integral to McIntyre's earlier analyses of well setting type-scenes.

Narrative Analysis with Application of Heroic Deliverer Motif to John 4

Journey Conflict

"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. And he had to pass through Samaria" (John 4:1-4, ESV)

The third chapter concludes with an extended monologue of John the Baptist describing his role in relationship to Jesus. The Baptist is prompted to speak after one of the disciples informs John of Jesus' rising popularity. The narration of verse 25 seems extraneous to the narrative, and for this reason, it may hold some important interpretive key for the author's intent. If one were to skip verse 25, no micro-narrative value would seemingly be lost. Verse 25, however, initiates the discussion with the Baptist by describing an intensification of the hostility between a Jew and some of the Baptist's disciples over purification. However, this verse has two important narrative functions; the first shows an escalation of conflict/opposition between the Jews and the Baptist's disciples from the initial opposition between the Jews and the Baptist described in chapter 1. The Baptist's disciples, due to increased hostility from Jewish opposition, seemingly feel threatened by Jesus' growing popularity as well.⁴⁰ It has been widely documented that Judaism lacked an orthodox uniformity in the second temple period and the literature seems to describe a persistent jockeying for influence among Jewish leaders.⁴¹ The Baptist fails to indulge in this competition, relegating his ministry to the sovereignty of God, and announcing the Supremacy of the Son and the wrath of God upon those who fail to submit to the Son's Lordship. The popularity of Jesus may not have caused concern for the Baptist, but in chapter four, it seems that it may have been a concern for Jesus.

The Pharisees had challenged the Baptist's authority in John 1:24-25, while the Jews had challenged Jesus' authority in John 2:18. In John 3, these antagonists are reversed, with the Jews challenging the Baptist, and the Pharisees challenging Christ due to his popularity. Jesus seems to have had all the conflict

⁴⁰ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 210, who states, "Apparently the debate with the Jew fostered further reflections amongst some of John's disciples over the durability of their master's ministry, especially in light of the rising popularity of Jesus."

⁴¹ Hakola, 30.

he cared to partake in during the temple cleansing and chooses to avoid any further conflict in Jerusalem, so he departs Jerusalem and heads up to Galilee. However, there is the important deictic marker noting that "he had to pass through Samaria" (4:4). Commentators have been prone to ask why Jesus "had" to pass through Samaria, whether positing a divine appointment, urgent matters in Galilee, or some other option.⁴² There seem to be two options for the journey conflict: either Jesus is attempting to alleviate any extra tension for the Baptist, or Jesus may have expected the Pharisees to turn their attention to Him since His popularity was surpassing that of John, who was their original concern.

Regardless of which two conflicts one identifies, Christ chooses to vacate the area and pass through Samaria, which the Pharisees were least likely to travel if they were looking for a conflict with Jesus and the quickest way out of town if Christ was seeking to alleviate tension for the Baptist.⁴³ This article will assume that Christ was seeking to alleviate his own conflict with religious leaders which began with the purging of the temple (John 2:13-21). The Pharisees had been dispatched to the Baptist for interrogation (John 1:19), and it can be reasonably expected that they would do the same for Jesus. By taking this route, Jesus ensures that the Pharisees will not overtake him on the journey. The journey conflict, then, is the undue attention of the Pharisees. The intended resolution will be the arrival of Jesus and the disciples in Galilee. Well scenes are part of a travelogue or quest narrative requiring the resolution of the journey conflict in addition to the localized conflict of the well.

Arrival Conflict

Most studies on the well scenes have focused exclusively on the conflict that arises upon the arrival at the well scene, and John 4 is no different. What is the conflict? Scholars have taken diverse views on the conflict of this narrative. Some scholars have argued that Jesus' physical state of weariness is the conflict in need of resolution based on the narration of vs. 6, "Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour." While this seems reasonable, Robert Alter has shown in the narrative that direct speech is "the chief instrument for revealing the varied and at times nuanced relations of the personages to the actions in which they are implicated."⁴⁴ However, this particular scene is filled with direct speech, second only to Rebekah's well scene in Genesis 24, and needs something more objective to sort out the most important elements

⁴² Morris, 226, describes both traveling in a hurry before opting for the necessity of Mission.

⁴³ Ibid., who states, "Strict Jews, like the Pharisees, disliked the Samaritans so intensely that they avoided their territory as much as possible."

⁴⁴ Alter, 181.

of the speech acts. For this, it seems reasonable to apply discourse analysis to identify which statements are backgrounded, foregrounded, or "super foregrounded."⁴⁵ By these means, there is an objective method to assess what Jesus saw as the main points of emphasis of his direct speech.

Those who suggest that Jesus' state of exhaustion is the conflict are seemingly mistaken since Jesus' request for a drink is backgrounded as an aorist tense verb *διτος*. The conflict between Jesus asking for a drink (*αἰτέω*) as a Jew to a Samaritan is foregrounded and, while important, is only of secondary importance for the narrative. Jesus' reply to the woman's shock is made prominent through a pluperfect tense verb found in the conditional statement. Ἔδεις, a front-grounded verb, is found in the protasis, "If you knew the gift of God," with all remaining verbal forms in the rest of the conditional being backgrounded. The rest of the direct speech is filled with future, aorist, and present tense forms. Though these forms could each be identified and ordered, there are two more front-grounded verbs. Jesus asks the woman to go bring her husband, and she replies that she has no husband. Jesus agrees with her, recounting her past of five husbands and that she lives with another man, all of which are subservient to the final remark when he states, τοῦτο ἴαληθές ἔειρηκας.⁴⁶ Jesus foregrounds that the woman speaks truth, and the content of her speech is subjugated to the truthfulness of her testimony.

A new discourse cycle continues, and the woman responds by acknowledging Christ as a prophet and asking about worship. Christ corrects her worship, preceded with the foregrounded "believe me," and informs her that the discussion on the place of worship is in vain since the hour is coming and that such scruples of worship will be irrelevant. Curiously, the woman now asserts οἶδα ὅτι Μεσσίας ἔρχεται, which is front-grounded.⁴⁷ This is the only front-grounded verb in the Samaritan woman's direct speech to Jesus. Jesus informs her, foregrounded, that he is the Messiah. At this point, the disciples return, the conversations wrap up in narration (not through direct speech), and the Samaritan woman leaves to invite her community to meet Christ. Again, no front-grounded verbs are found until Christ's direct speech to his disciples, where he chastises the disciples, saying that he has food to eat (foregrounded), which they do not know about ἦν ὑμεῖς οὐκ οἶδατε (front grounded).⁴⁸ The next series of front-grounded verbs are found in the Christ's exhortation to labor in the fields where

⁴⁵ Constantine R. Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek: New Insights for Reading the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 126.

⁴⁶ Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), Jn 4:18.

⁴⁷ Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed, Jn 4:25.

⁴⁸ Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed., Jn 4:32.

κεκοπιάκατε and εἰσεληλύθατε are emphasized so that mission does seem to take the stage for the discussion between Jesus and the disciples.

The key terms which are super foregrounded are verbs of knowing and verbs of labor. The Samaritan woman needs to know the Messiah as Jesus Christ, and Jesus wants her to know him as such, and for the woman to speak honestly and the disciples to labor that the remaining Samaritans would know Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus' predominant conflict, as made evident by verbal aspect and discourse analysis upon his arrival at the well, was that the woman did not know who he was.

Arrival Resolution

Upon the Samaritan community's meeting with Christ, they ask him to stay, and as a result of the woman's testimony and the words of Jesus, many believe in the Messiahship of Jesus. The last front-grounded verb is when the community speaks to the woman, "Now we οἶδαμεν that this is indeed the savior of the world" (John 4:41).

Journey Resolution

"⁴³ After the two days he departed for Galilee. ⁴⁴ (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) ⁴⁵ So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast." (John 4:43–45, ESV)

The Journey resolution is found in vv. 43-45, whereby Jesus departs from Samaria and enters Galilee unhindered to a warm welcome. The parenthetical narration of v. 44 seems out of place considering what is found in v. 44 and seems to be a forward-pointing device of some sort to a conflict yet in the future. The concluding sentence of v. 45, "For they too had gone to the feast" points backward to the feast that Jesus was attending in 2:23, which was the setting for the conflict in chapter 3. The narrative well scene is thus concluded with an ominous overtone that informs the reader that Jesus' conflict with the Jews is not yet finally resolved and that this is only a temporary respite.

Type Scene Synthesis

Since John 4 begins with a type scene, some things must be synthesized from previous material. The well scenes of Genesis and Exodus all begin with a character who is forced to journey due to some type of conflict where the descendants of Abraham are threatened in some way. In John 2, a conflict with the Jews has been initiated, which Christ predicts, and the narrator foreshadows,

will result in Christ's death at the hands of the Jews. When Christ's popularity rises, Jesus attempts to avoid any future conflict with the Pharisees since it is reasonable to assume that they would begin to harass Jesus as they did the Baptist in John 1, so he is understandably in some type of danger.

The second aspect of the well scene type is the conflict at the well whereby the seed of Abraham is threatened in some manner. At Jesus' arrival, Jesus is famished, and would like water; however, his speech betrays that the seed of Abraham who are in danger are the Samaritans who await a Messiah whom they do not know how to find from a God they do not know how to worship. Jesus then reveals himself to a woman whose honesty makes her a reliable, albeit sociologically unlikely, witness that remedies this conflict (the third aspect of the OT well scenes) through her testimony to her hometown. However, found within the well-scenes of the Old Testament is a sub-category of betrothal narrative.⁴⁹ Though the Old Testament material typically deals with the literal progeny of a chosen line, this well scene in John 4 is different since there is no proposal, no wedding, and no physical progeny. However, John 3:25-36, immediately preceding the well scene invokes marriage as a metaphor whereby Christ is equated with the bridegroom who possesses the bride (John 3:28-29). The metaphorical imagery of John 3 serves a discourse function of training the reader to process the successive narrative of the well scene. Since John is using wedding language metaphorically, then the following type scene should be viewed metaphorically. In this case, Jesus, as the Christ, is taking possession of His bride.⁵⁰ In Old Testament literature, the two nations of Israel and Judah are often regarded as the twin brides of God who are reunited with God after a time of exile (Ezek 23; Jer 3; Hos 1). This section of the narrative then fulfills two functions. First, the threat of judgment upon Samaria is averted as they come to faith in Jesus through his teaching ministry. Secondly, through this belief, the city is joined to the bridegroom, resulting in spiritual progeny as many are born again (John 3:16).

The final aspect of the Old Testament well scene is the journey resolution when the narrative resolves the journey conflict. The section ends with Jesus departing for Galilee after two days and being welcomed because the people had seen his signs during the feast (4:43-45). There is no mention of further conflict with the Jews or Pharisees until John 5 when Jesus returns to Jerusalem for a new feast.

⁴⁹ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 60;

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 63-66.

Characterization

Within the text of John 4, a clear character of Jesus shows up, which is consistent with John's main and secondary concerns. John's main concern in writing was to show that Jesus was the Christ so that you may believe (a semantic domain of knowing).⁵¹ The front-grounded verbs of the discourse analysis emphasize that Jesus was ultimately concerned with people knowing His identity as the Christ, which He self-attested to. Secondary concerns for John include, if Hakola is correct, setting a new identity for the Johannine community from the Jews by undermining the boundary markers of the ethnic-religious Jews, particularly temple worship, ceremonial purity, and the emphasis on Abraham as progenitor. Within this text, Jesus shows himself as viewing the temple at best as a passing institution. Jesus views ceremonial purity outside of accepted Jewish norms so that he is not afraid to drink Samaritan water, lodge in Samaritan houses, and speak with Samaritan women. Though the Samaritans, like the Jews, view Abraham as an important boundary marker because of his role as a progenitor, Jesus elevates himself above the Patriarchs by establishing himself as greater than Jacob because he is able to give living water—capable of giving life and purifying all who partake of it. All verbs dealing with these secondary emphases are either backgrounded or are in a simple foreground. In this case, Jesus is a man who is under pressure from the Pharisees because of his interactions in the temple precincts and looks for relief via the path of least resistance which led him through Samaria. Jesus shows that he views the Samaritans as rightful children of Abraham who are mistaken concerning the proper modes of worship. As children of Israel, they too are worthy of Jesus' ministry as the Jewish Messiah because the Samaritans were also awaiting the ministry of the Messiah. Jesus was concerned with finding a reliable witness to his Messiahship and was willing to overlook socio-cultural norms to find such a valuable witness who could speak truthfully. Ultimately, this concern for the children of Israel in Samaria was more important than any other taboo which may have distracted others. Finally, Jesus finds this work of sharing his identity with the disenfranchised to be fulfilling in a way that no worldly means of nourishment could compare to. The Jesus of John four is a singularly focused Messiah,

⁵¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996) 333, who notes that, "The meanings in Domain 28 *Know* are rarely expressed or represented by figurative lexical items, since expressions for 'know, known, make known' are fundamentally semantic primitives. In some languages, however, the 'eye' is regarded as the organ of knowledge, and to know something may be literally 'to hold in the eye.' A few languages also employ a term for 'liver' in idiomatic expressions relating to knowing and knowledge."

concerned with the welfare of the ostracized Israelite community seeking to reconcile them to the Father through the revelation of his Messianic identity.

Conclusion

Now that the narrative has been dissected, one must seek to put it back together in light of the research which has been done. The Apostle John writes a gospel at the end of his life at the behest of his congregation at Ephesus. John's ministry has predominantly been with the Jews of Jerusalem until Jewish nationalism led to the sacking of the city and destruction of the temple by Titus, removing John from his ancestral home, and the church which he co-founded with Peter at Pentecost.⁵² Since that time, John had seen his closest friends, family, and associates suffer death and martyrdom at the hand of Jewish opposition. Now, in Ephesus, he is battling Judaizers who are focusing on things like genealogies, purity, sabbath, and circumcision, which he surely wishes Paul and Timothy would have put to rest since Ephesus has been a hotbed of Judaizing false teachers for decades by this point. John constructs his Gospel in such a way as to eliminate any future infiltration by Judaizers through showing Jesus' loosening of the law through various means.

As the Λόγος, Jesus is coeternal with the Father and has all divine prerogatives which the Father has. However, the world has loved the darkness over life, and eschatological judgment is coming on those who love the darkness. God has made his intentions of a new work evident through the arrival of John the Baptist, who seeks to initiate a final ritual purification through water baptism, which is inferior to the baptism and ministry that Jesus, of whom the Baptist testifies, will inaugurate. Upon Jesus' initiation of the public ministry, he assembled disciples and began to distinguish between "true Israelites" and those with guile within them. Jesus will begin to expand Israel through purification which begins by eliminating external purification rights and moves towards internal purification through a right relationship with him. Jesus, as God, has a purifying effect, so that ritual washings are no longer necessary, and the celebration of the messianic presence can begin in earnest, as seen in Cana. In chapter 3, Jesus is approached by the religious leaders and questioned concerning his ministry, though in private, at which time his emphasis on internal change through spiritual rebirth is emphasized so that genealogical descent and Jewish boundary markers are minimized. This emphasis is continued as the Samaritans, of questionable genealogical records and deviant worship method, are invited to know Jesus as the Christ, and the true Israelite disciples are invited to participate in the labor for the souls of the Samaritans so that they too can be reconciled to

⁵² Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, ch. #.

true Israel. This mission is successful through the truthful testimony of the woman at the well, as well as the self-testimony of Jesus.

Immediately after the well scene, the readers of John's gospel would expect another dichotomous example as John has made use of throughout his argument. What the reader encounters is some type of state official who receives a miracle of divine healing for his dying son after a general rebuke from Christ to those like that father who fails to believe unless they receive a sign. Jesus heals by spoken word as opposed to a personal visit, and this leads to the belief of the King's official and his entire house. As chapter four ends, the Jews, and particularly the Pharisees, stand condemned for their failure to believe, while Samaritans and scandalous political leaders are being reckoned as true Israel through their proper response to Jesus through believing and knowing, which is consistent with John's stated purpose for writing (20:31). The dichotomy which prevails through the fourth chapter of John is the supremacy of the new birth through belief in Jesus as the Christ compared to the physical birth of the Pharisees and Galileans who receive the condemnation for their failure to believe, within the continued prophetic theme of God's reconciling his spiritual marriage to the nations of Israel and Judah.⁵³

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⁵³ It is worthy of note that the Galileans are referenced as Galileans and not Jews, though other locations in John does refer to Galileans as Jews. The parenthetical narration of vs. 44 seems to imply that though the Galileans welcomed Jesus, Jesus was not honored by them as Jesus himself had testified. This tension will unfold through the rest of John's book as the Galileans move from welcoming intrigue to hostility, but it is probably that the failure to honor Christ was not in the actions of hospitality, which John said they did, but their failure to believe by acknowledging Jesus as the Christ as the Samaritans did, and as the official would in the subsequent canonical narrative.

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