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

Welcome back. It’s been the better part of a month since I last posted a video so here we go again. Today I’m going to be answering a question that was left on my Curious Cat account. “Could you respond to some of these criticisms that are raised by this review of Echoes of Exodus?”. And there’s a link to a [Themelios review](http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/review/echoes-of-exodus-tracing-themes-of-redemption-through-scripture) from the latest edition.

I’ll respond to that now, but before I do so I would like to make sure that you’re all aware of [my new blog](https://adversariapodcast.com/), which is devoted purely to my podcasts and videos. My main blog has been cluttered up with podcasts and videos over the last while, making it very difficult to access my regular material, so within the future I’m hoping to have all my material—podcast and video related—over on this other blog, which will enable it to be accessed easily without it cluttering up my main blog, where I’ll be focused more upon articles and links to things that I’ve been writing elsewhere on the Internet.

So, to the review. A number of questions and challenges are raised by the review. I think one of the main concerns that the reviewer—Geoffrey Harper—has is that the connections that we draw are not justified by the text itself: they are a bit of a reach and when you actually examine the text they don’t have the strength with which they are proposed. Here’s one example:

Other proposals, however, remain much more tenuous—like Israel’s so-called “birth” in Exodus 12: ‘Israel steps out from the womb through doorposts covered in blood…and later emerges into new life from a narrow passage through waters, which then close behind them’.

There’s a lot of things that could be said about this. At the outset it’s worth noting that I wrote over 150,000 words for this book, and that was just a sketch of things that I’ve explored in much more detail. Some of it was just done from memory—material I’ve explored in considerable depth before—and other parts of it were just sketching out a picture that could be worked with for the actual text, which is only 40,000 words. So a great deal that is within the book, in a very sketchy form or limited form or just excluded altogether, is within those original notes and is something I’ve given thought to.

For instance, come to the childbirth themes in Exodus. When you read through the book of Exodus what you notice is the story begins with women struggling in birth. It begins with the groaning of Israel and women struggling in birth, and these two things are related. Israel is groaning in birth pangs—in travail—in its struggle and it’s multiplying its children, and those children are being killed by Pharaoh—the baby boys. And so, the story begins with the birth of the boys, the killing of the boys by Pharaoh, and with the rescue of Moses through the waters. As Moses is drawn out of the waters it is a birth story and the deliverance of Moses is connected with his birth. He’s not named until after he’s taken from the water and the events that surround that are significant, not least because Miriam is on the other side. There’s drawing out of the water—that’s how he gets his name—and then there’s a playing out of an exodus pattern.

Now what this should teach us is that what happens to Moses later on happens to his people: they are drawn out of the water and as they are drawn out of the water they are greeted by Miriam on the other side singing and praising God. They are ‘baptized into Moses’, as Paul can talk about it in 1 Corinthians 10.

Now what more can we say about this? If we look in Exodus chapter 4, there’s an emphasis upon Israel as God’s firstborn son. God is ‘delivering’ his firstborn son in both senses of that term. When we get to the story of the Exodus there’s blood placed on the doorpost, there’s significant emphasis upon the firstborn sons that if God does not have his firstborn son let free by Pharaoh then God will kill Pharaoh’s firstborn son and the firstborn sons of the Egyptians. So the significance of the firstborn son is foregrounded.

Likewise, the doorposts elsewhere in Scripture are connected with birth and the firstborn is the one that’s first through the door. These are connections that we see in the story of Sarah, having the announcement of Isaac’s birth. It can be the story of Jephthah and his daughter, his firstborn daughter coming out the door first. These sorts of stories all connect the doorposts with birth and the ‘doors’ of the womb. When you come out, those doors are opened. The first to come out is the firstborn.

Now, what more is there that can strengthen these connections. The actual connections that we drew within the book itself—the doorpost covered in blood and then the narrow passage through broken waters—those are relatively weak connections in terms of the larger book. The larger connections that justify those secondary connections are the connections between Israel’s travail in Egypt and the experience of the women struggling in birth. Those two themes held alongside each other are very important. They help us to understand that particular connection.

Then the doorposts: again, there’s some connection there. That has been explored in far more detail by James Jordan and the details have been fleshed out a bit more. It’s not just an imaginary connection. There is some more detail to that, I think that’s in [*Law of the Covenant*](https://www.garynorth.com/freebooks/docs/pdf/the_law_of_the_covenant.pdf) in one of the appendices where he reflects upon the relationship between the encounter with God at the night camp in Exodus 4 and the doors, the womb, and the Passover celebration, so that can be explored in more depth there.

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

It is a birth event and we see other symbolic birth events elsewhere in Scripture. For instance, Christ’s death and resurrection is associated with birth, the ‘woman whose hour has come’, or the connection between the events of Jesus’ initial birth and the new birth from the dead. Wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in a manger—presumably a stone container—and then later on we have Christ wrapped in linen garments, laid in the tomb. And then the announcement to shepherds, the Angels, a Mary and a Joseph. All these events connect those things together. And so, this connection between childbirth and exodus is not a stretch.

We see these themes of childbirth more explicitly referenced in other parts of the Pentateuch—the idea of Moses as a nursemaid and things like that. These are themes that are in play there and if you follow the breadcrumbs it leads you back to this connection. There’s a lot more that can be said about that but it is not just something that we pulled out of our hat.

Haran, in Genesis 31, is another connection that is questioned so I’ll read the section where it questions it here:

For Roberts and Wilson, however, proposed connections are at times simply incorrect or slide towards the allegorical. The former is exemplified on page 66 where the town of Haran is said to be named after Abraham’s brother even though the words are different”.

So there is a problem. There is a genuine mistake here and that was my fault, not Andrew’s. But when I looked back—I had a number of iterations of notes for this—when I looked back at my original notes it was not something that I missed then, although it was missed in the later connections. When I looked at my original notes, I pointed back to some texts that had recognized the original difference between those words. But I had said that we would be missing something if we didn’t recognize that, even though they’re aspirated differently, they are connected terms.

This is something that we see as we look through the book of Genesis: that there is a constant playing upon terms. These terms are not exactly the same but there is lots of punning. So ‘Seir’ and the connection with Esau. Esau and Seir are connected with goat themes—because the word is similar—and with hairiness. Esau is a ‘hairy’ man and so he is associated with Seir. And these punning terms are significant. We see the same thing in the names of the trees that are used to outwit Laban by Jacob. And we see the same with Laban’s name and ‘white’, and the connection of Laban with Lebanon. We see the same with Esau and ‘Edom’, ‘Edom’ playing off the name of Adam, playing off ‘red’ and playing off the name of the actual place of the Edomites. And so these terms are significant.

We see a number of these occasions within the book of Genesis and people who are just focusing upon the actual terms themselves, in terms of a sort of strict etymology, are missing things. So, for instance, if we get to Genesis chapter 2 and the play between the name of the woman, “she shall be called woman because she was taken out of the man,” those terms actually are not necessarily related to each other [etymologically], but there is a pun, there is a connection between those two terms and if we miss those we’re missing something that the actual writer has flagged up for us—that these terms are supposed to be related. Even if, strictly speaking, they are not related in the sense that some might think they are.

We see this elsewhere, in other parts of Scripture. For instance, the name that’s given to Samuel is explained with an explanation that would fit more to the name given to Saul. Now, why is that? Well, the author of 1 Samuel knows what he’s doing. He’s wanting us to recognize certain connections that would otherwise be missed.

When we’re talking about the name of Haran, the name of the person and the name of the place, those two things are connected. We read in Genesis 11:27: “This is the genealogy of Terah. Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begat Lot, and Haran died before his father Terah, in his native land in Ur of the Chaldeans,” and then later on “And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram’s wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan and they came to Haran and dwelt there. So the days of Terah were 205 years and Terah died in Haran.”

The connection between these two figures is interesting. I mean, why do we find Haran and this place named ‘Haran’ in the same small section of the text? Is it just something that’s a pure coincidence? No, it isn’t, and a number of people have pointed out that, even if these things are not strictly connected, their connection should be recognized. There are Jewish scholars who have pointed this out. Julius Wellhausen pointed this out and a number of others have highlighted this: that there is in all likelihood a connection to be drawn.

Now, they do that for various reasons. The connections that they want to draw are not necessarily the same connections that I will be highlighting, but there is a connection between these terms in all likelihood, just as there is a connection between the word plays that we have upon Esau’s name and the color red, Adam, or, in the case of ‘Seir’, his being hairy, and the theme of the goats. And so, in all these cases, what we see is the author of Genesis doing subtle things with words, and when we see Haran appear later in the text it is connected with the descendants of Haran through Milcah. It’s associated with Bethuel and Laban, it’s associated with Nahor as well as in various ways. And as we explore this I think it will help us to understand *why* there is a connection between these two names. There is a lot more that could be said on that, but I don’t want to get into that rabbit hole. If people need to explore that in more depth, leave a question and I can answer that one.

Other things: the reference to Goliath. Goliath is pictured as a villainous snake covered in scaly armor and ending up with a bruised head—this is seen as allegorical. Now, is this really the case? I don’t think it *is* allegorical. Why do we have these details given to us? Why are we twice told that he is dressed in bronze or has bronze things? Bronze plays on the word for serpent. Now this would be just something small by itself, perhaps, if it were not for the fact that David has just been anointed, and then there’s this person standing against Israel for 40 days who then gets his head crushed. Now this is a familiar theme. It’s the serpent theme that we see later on in the case of Christ. Christ is anointed by the Spirit, goes into the wilderness 40 days, being tested in the wilderness, fasting, and then defeating the serpent. And so these are themes that are picked up within the New Testament.

But within the Old Testament itself there are the themes too. When Saul is set apart as the leader of the people, his first test is Nahash the Ammonite: ‘nahash’ means serpent. These are connected themes and so as we look through the text it should not surprise us that David’s first test after he is anointed is a serpent figure. The scales are associated with fish as Geoffrey Harper argues, they are associated with fish scales. There’s no reason why here they can’t be associated with land serpent scales or, more importantly, that the serpent isn’t connected with the sea serpent. We see the sea serpent in the case of Pharaoh and the sea serpent imagery is explored within the book of Psalms and elsewhere, such as the book of Isaiah. These serpent themes mutate: the serpent becomes a sea serpent, it becomes a dragon within the book of Revelation and elsewhere. We need to pay attention to these things because they’re there.

He says: “Moreover, this strained connection obscures the more obvious intertextuality: Goliath falling over and losing his head as divine judgment resembles the fates of Dagon and Saul, not Pharaoh.” Yes and it connects to that too, and those are connections that I’ve written on in [a discussion of Samson and Good Friday](https://alastairadversaria.com/2013/03/29/samson-on-the-cross-a-good-friday-reflection/). There’s a lot of connections that are drawn in any single passage. If we’re reading these passages we can also connect it with the story of Joseph—Joseph sent to his brothers. And we can connect it with a number of different parts of the Old Testament that are alluded to. We don’t necessarily have to choose between one set of connections. There are usually a number of these things. So we see Exodus themes playing out, we see themes of Joseph and his brothers, we see themes of Jacob. [I have written on some of those Jacob themes recently](https://theopolisinstitute.com/article/yoram-hazony-and-the-deception-of-isaac) with the relationship between Jacob and Laban and David and Nabal, whose name is a reversal of Laban. Once again, these word plays are significant. If you pay attention there’s a lot of things going on there.

Then the review goes on to say: “The more fundamental issue concerns authorial intent. While intertextual theory accommodates reader-centered synchronic approaches in which connections remain in the eye-of-the-beholder, these must necessarily jettison original intent.” No, I don’t think that’s the case. If we read through 1 Samuel we can see all these things taking place there. There’s the exodus theme playing out within the original story of the capture of the Ark, there’s the themes of the serpent that play out on a number of occasions. And there are these other themes that play out in the case of Saul that are explored elsewhere within the book, themes that connect Saul with Pharaoh, that connect Saul with themes from the book of Genesis, that connect David with the themes from the book of Genesis.

And these have been noted by various authors, generally one by one, not recognizing how they all fit together, but they *are* there if you look closely. And so, for instance, David Daube, who’s written at length on the exodus theme—he connects the events of the capture of the Ark with the story of Jacob in the house of Laban, and then also with the story of the Exodus. Those themes can then be developed further. It’s not as if the author of Samuel did not have these themes in his mind. He knows what he’s doing when he’s describing a figure like Goliath and he’s mentioning he’s dressed in scaly armor, that he’s dressed in bronze, and playing upon the term for ‘serpent’.

We should maybe look a bit further before we put a *lot* of weight on that and, as I’ve argued on many other occasions. When we’re doing typology we’ll put different weight on different things. When we read those sorts of details we’ll think, ‘hmm, there might be something there’ and then we’ll look a bit further and we’ll think, ‘Oh, 40 days, that’s interesting … immediately after an anointing, that’s interesting too … his head is crushed, again, very interesting!’ And it becomes more interesting as time goes on. As we see, for instance, that the author of Samuel has already spoken about Nahash the Ammonite—this serpent figure who challenges Saul. So could there be something in his head? Quite probably there is. I don’t think that this is just an eye-of-the-beholder thing. When you actually look at these texts there are a lot of subtle things going on and they are playing with themes of Genesis, as you see through the book of 1 Samuel. These things are seen by many scholars. As you look closely you will see the Jacob story or the Joseph story or the story of the Serpent and the woman. These things are playing in the background. They know what’s going on.

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

We used the motif of music in part because music is something you have to *hear*—the connections can’t necessarily all be argued for in a full sense. You should make arguments for them and many of these are positions—these connections that we drew—that we can make arguments for, but our intent was not to present this methodologically rigorous 1,000-page-book that outlines exactly how we arrived at every one of these conclusions. Maybe one day I’ll write one of those, but what we wanted was for people to see something that we’ve seen that’s beautiful. And as you look at this there will be a lot of gaps, a lot of gaps that need to be filled in with some reasoning, perhaps even a few things which will be errors—and some things that will be mistakes, which are only half-mistakes. In the case of Haran, that is a half-mistake: it’s something I had originally given attention to and then forgot.

And, as in many of these cases, we need to pay attention to the words in front of us. When we have two terms placed in close proximity that are so similar we’d be blind not to recognize a possible connection. If we’re talking purely in terms of methodology and explanations for these things, it can be like explaining a joke: it has a deflationary effect. When you try and explain a joke, you can’t explain everything. Any attempt to articulate the basis for one’s reading in words will end up losing something, because the reasons for your reading are often grounded upon a deeper sense of the text, what the author is doing, some of the things that are going on—and often it’s a connection that is weaker.

I’ve compared this in the past to a tree: you have the central trunk and then you have the large branches that go out, and then the smaller, thinner branches and then the leaves. The leaves might be a particular verbal connection, such as the connection between Haran (the name of the son of Terah) and then the name of the place. Now that’s a weak connection: we could drop that leaf from the tree and the tree would still stand strong, but I don’t think that there is a complete lack of connection there. Actually I think there is an important connection there and the text is working with that but when we get to big connections—things like the Exodus theme itself—that’s a big branch of the tree and that’s not going to be dropped anytime soon. But yet it is upon that branch that there are a lot of thinner branches and leaves that flesh that out, that fill it out, that give it weight and substance, and as you explore those some of those will be stronger than others.

I’m not going to put the entirety of my weight upon some of these connections. So, for instance, the connection between Goliath and the serpent, that’s something I can put quite a bit of weight upon but I’m not going to put all my weight on that—there’s no reason to. There are a lot of other connections that bear the sort of weight that we want to bear, but yet if we miss the way that these branches and the other things that arise out from that give shape to the biblical narrative and help us to recognize its integrity, its interconnected character, and its beauty then we won’t be making as much of the text as we should be.

And so the approach that we took within this book was to give a fuller picture, to try and show the branches and the smaller branches and the leaves that are upon this tree of Scripture. Certain things may not always have the weight that some people might want to place upon them, but they are there and if you look more carefully there’s a lot more besides. These are not connections that we just scraped off the bottom of some barrel, as if there’s not a lot more where those came from. These are just examples of huge themes and so, for instance, when we do mention the themes of childbirth and exodus, these themes are not just based upon two different details within the text—upon crossing the Red Sea and going through the bloodied doors of the Passover—it’s based upon deep thematic connections within the book itself. It’s based upon the institution of the law of the firstborn. It’s based upon later references within other books of the Pentateuch.

What we give is something of the final result, some of the connections that were further down those branches. We don’t actually give the full branches that led us to that point, but those connections *are* there and, as you begin to see the leaves, as you begin to see some of the smaller branches, it will help you to recognize the shape of that big branch of Exodus that is going throughout.

There’s a difference between a technical book and one written for a general audience. The frustration that so much great typology is placed out of the reach of people in the pews is one of the things that motivated our writing in a book like this. If you want to write a technical book, you can write a technical book, but you’re not going to get the layperson reading that book. You will also end up losing the beauty: you’ll be explaining the joke in such detail that the joke won’t be able to stand by itself. You need to ‘get it’ and ‘getting it’ is part of what typology is. It’s like the way that you can’t fully explain a joke—a joke is deflated by a methodological explanation and technical articulation of how everything fits together within the joke to the point that it becomes funny. You cannot reach the point of humour by the explanation and, in the same way, typology is a lot about ‘getting it’: it is about having your ear to the text and recognizing when there is something that connects.

The standard of proof is also another issue here. The standard of proof for these methodologically focused approaches are far higher than the text itself observes. The text gives us all sorts of connections that will not stand the test of these rigorous methodological proofs. Paul will tell us about the way that Sarah and Hagar are connected with the unbelieving Jews in the church and then he will say Sarah is connected with Jerusalem and Mount Zion and Hagar with Sinai and … ‘Wait, what?! What’s *that* connection?!’ But he doesn’t explain how those things fit together. However, if you pay attention they *do* fit together: there are connections there but he only gives you the results.

You’re supposed to recognize these things, to see the beauty, and to think, “Hmm, that’s interesting! How does he arrive at that?”. Ideally, you’re supposed to be the sort of person who hears that and thinks that ‘yeah, I’ve recognized where he’s got this from.’ But, for many of us, we’ll need to work it out and see how he arrived at it and then get the joke. But if we’re reading through Scripture merely thinking in terms of rigorously proving every single connection before we can ever claim it—if we’re thinking about this approach where you must lay out all your working before you ever actually state a conclusion—you put these things out of reach of people in the pews and you also miss a great deal of what Scripture says itself.

Scripture says a lot of things in the way of typology that aren’t given rigorous explanation and could not be explained fully in a way that would be absolutely certain. The connection between Christ and the priesthood according to Melchizedek! Why that connection? There are a lot of details that need to fill the gap there, and the author never gives them to us. We’re supposed to recognize this, we’re supposed to see the connections or, if we don’t see them, to explore and to discover them. And so many of these connections that we draw are ones that are supposed to invite you deeper into the text. That’s why we leave questions at the end of each chapter. Each chapter has three review questions and three questions that are intended to get you to look a bit deeper, because we’re just skimming the surface within these the chapters.

When we talk about these themes of birth in Exodus, these themes of birth are repeated in various other parts of scripture, connected with great deliverances of God. These themes of birth are fleshed out considerably within the Exodus story in ways that we just do not mention. The connection between place names and persons within the book of Genesis, and the playing and the punning upon those different names, and the ways that events are connected together within that: this is something that we could present a very rigorous and detailed case for but we just give you some of the details that we arrive at the end of our explorations and some of the connections between names that are found there. But there’s a lot more beneath the bonnet, as it were, and so we would like for people to look beneath the bonnet.

It’s great to be asked these questions and to be challenged, “How did you actually arrive at this conclusion?”. But ideally what we want is for people to see the beauty of the text, even if they do not always see exactly how we arrived at it. We want people to see some of these connections and to be curious, thinking, ‘How could I see some of these connections myself? What are some of the things that are going on within the text?’ Methodology is important and presenting rigorous exegetical arguments, recognizing controls upon arguments—what is a good reading? what is a bad reading? How do we become skilled readers of the text, so that we hear things within the text and those things that we hear in the text are not just voices in our heads?

These are all important things and these are things that we have given attention to, but we don’t lay them out fully within the book, because there’s a time and a place. There is a time for a rigorous academic book, like Brian Estelle’s *Echoes of Exodus*, which I highly recommend. There is a lot of rigorous work in there upon the methodology that is very helpful, whereas in our book we weren’t attempting to give a methodological treatment, we were attempting to give a sense of the beauty and the music of the text. And, as in the case of music, you need to *hear* it, you need to hear these connections and then, when you hear these connections you may be tempted to go into musical theory to explain *why* you are hearing these connections. Are these connections really what you think they are or are they illusory? And musical theory and other things like that can help answer those questions.

As you’ve studied music on a more academic level you can understand it—not just how it sounds but some of the deeper ways in which the music is structured. That, in many ways, is what hermeneutics and the study of methodology and these sorts of things can give you. But you’re supposed to *listen* to the music, you’re supposed to enjoy the music as it’s presented to you and that music is presented without the need for this extensive methodology that lies between you and the text. The methodology can end up being a large tract of wilderness that prevents people from entering into the beauty of the text.

We didn’t want it to be that way and so, hopefully, when you read *Echoes of Exodus* you will have a sense of the beauty of the destination. Ideally what we’re giving is a report from a land that we have been exploring, a good report of a good land, maybe encouraging you to take the journey there yourself, to look a bit deeper into scripture, to look into some of these questions of methodology and hermeneutics and, by following that good report, to arrive at that destination in a fuller way yourself.

Thank you very much for listening. If you have any further questions, please leave them in my Curious Cat account. If you would like to follow this and other videos, please do so using my new blog and the link for that is below. If you would like to support this and other videos please do so using [my Patreon account](https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged) or using [PayPal](https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_donations&business=40Bicycles%40gmail%2ecom&lc=GB&item_name=Alastair%27s%20Adversaria&currency_code=USD&bn=PP%2dDonationsBF%3abtn_donateCC_LG%2egif%3aNonHosted) and other donations. Thank you so much for your time and, Lord willing, I’ll be back again tomorrow. God bless.