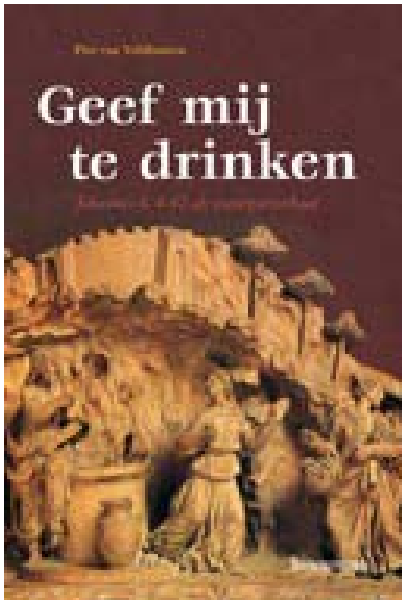


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Veldhuizen, Piet van

Geef mij te drinken: Johannes 4, 4–42 als waterputverhaal

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Riemer Roukema
Kampen Theological University
Kampen, The Netherlands 8261-JX

Originally this Dutch book (with an English summary) was a doctoral thesis supervised by professor Maarten M. J. Menken and defended at the Catholic Theological University in Utrecht (The Netherlands). Its central research question concerns the extent to which it is appropriate to interpret the narration of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:4–42) as a "well story." The first chapter deals with the history of exegesis of John 4:4–42. Van Veldhuizen considers R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), to be a turning point for the interpretation of this text, although this book does not deal with the Johannine story at all. Alter, who was inspired by R. C. Culley, *Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narrative* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), analyzed the narrative pattern of, as he called it, the "betrothal type-scene" of Old Testament well stories (mainly Gen 24; 29:1–30; Exod 2:15–21). Van Veldhuizen demonstrates that since the publication of Alter's book many exegetes have interpreted John 4 in terms of this "betrothal type-scene." He intends, however, to argue that this pattern does not fully apply to the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman.

Before elaborating the agreements and the differences, in chapter 2 van Veldhuizen first gives a structural analysis of John 4:4–42. He concludes that the story in its present shape constitutes a meaningful unity and does not need to be read as a well story in order to establish its internal coherence. Chapter 3 deals with the Jacob traditions to which John 4

refers, especially with Jacob's well, and with the relationship between Samaritans and Jews. The author argues that the Jacob traditions constitute an integrating element in the narrative and are a bridge between Samaritans and Jews.

Chapter 4 investigates the meaning of springs and wells in biblical and early Jewish literature and emphasizes the difference between the two concepts, a spring being a natural phenomenon that may symbolize God's gift of life, whereas a well, being a man-made access to water, is a cultural phenomenon. Chapter 5 gives an interesting analysis of Old Testament and Jewish well stories; it deals with Philo, Flavius Josephus, the Targumim and several midrashim. Van Veldhuizen underlines the targumic and midrashic traditions of abundant water that miraculously rises up and traditions of the contrast between the just man and his bride, on the one hand, and the unreliable and religiously impure family of the bride, on the other. Here he sees a resemblance to John 4, which speaks of the gift of rising water and of Jesus' disciples failing to take part in the joy. Van Veldhuizen suggests that the Evangelist may have consciously inverted the expectations aroused by such well stories, since in John 4 it is not the woman's townspeople who are suspicious of the relationship between Jesus and the woman but Jesus' disciples, who represent the bridegroom's circle. Chapter 6 presents a number of comparable and interesting well stories in Jewish literature, Greco-Roman antiquity, and from India, China, Japan, and Ireland. This collection also includes the story of Mary carrying a jar at the moment of the annunciation, narrated in the *Protevangelium of James*. The purpose of this collection of stories is to get a sharper image of the typical qualities of the biblical well stories.

The conclusions of this investigation are formulated in chapter 7. A common feature of the well stories is that the encounter of a man and a girl at a well is usually followed by the arrangement of a marriage in the girl's family. As for John 4, van Veldhuizen considers it an important element that in the Gospel the "relationship" between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is discussed not only by the woman's community but also by the circle of Jesus' disciples. He thinks that this is a meaningful variation on the pattern of the well stories. In comparison with the Old Testament well stories, van Veldhuizen notes as the most striking difference that the Samaritan woman is not a marriageable virgin but a woman who would not be a proper candidate for an encounter at a well. His interpretation of this element is that the conditions for this encounter are specified not by the human past but by God's future, which has arrived in Jesus. Only after discussing these differences from other well stories does van Veldhuizen pay attention to what should be called, in my opinion, the most striking difference, namely, that in John 4 there is no arrangement of a marriage of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at all. However, for this theme van Veldhuizen refers first to John 3:29, where John the Baptist calls Jesus the bridegroom and those who come to Jesus the bride and then—less convincingly—to John

4:46, which recalls the story of the wedding at Cana in John 2:1–11. According to van Veldhuizen, it is in line with John 3:29 that it is not the bride's family who withdraws in order to clear the way for the new couple, as in other well stories, but that it is the woman who withdraws now that Jesus and her townspeople have found each other. This implies that Jesus is the bridegroom of a collective bride, to wit, the people who declare faith in him. Van Veldhuizen suggests that this story might reflect the feelings of Christian communities founded by the apostles toward other Christian groups with a different origin. Like other exegetes, van Veldhuizen refers to Philip's mission to the Samaritans that is narrated in Acts 8:4–25.

As a whole, this book is well-documented and well-written. Although the author initially distances himself from other exegetes who found that Alter's "betrothal type-scene" is a useful pattern for the interpretation of John 4, in the end he confirms the impression that this pattern is also his point of reference. However, it is not always clear how his own analysis of the variations on this pattern relates to the interpretation of other authors.

A relatively new element is that he gives an interesting collection of well stories both from Jewish and Christian contexts and from other cultures than the ones shaped by the biblical stories. To be sure, some of these stories have been related to John 4 for a long time (especially the story of the encounter of Ananda, a disciple of Buddha, and a girl at a well), but van Veldhuizen's original research in this field is a valuable contribution to the *religionsgeschichtlich* interpretation of this story.