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The *Gospel of Philip* is a text that includes many unusual themes and topics. These include such things as seeing the name Jesus as a secret name to God being a man eater. One specific controversial topic was the bridal chamber and its meaning. It seemed that it wasn't only for marriage. There are many scholars that have attempted to interpret the significance of the bridal chamber. In the *Gospel of Philip* with the topic of the bridal chamber, one could argue that it represents the deep spiritual connection versus the traditional wedding ceremony.

The term "bridal chamber" is an extremely ambiguous one and has been defined multiple ways. One definition is, "It is a rite where the bride and bridegroom come together as a unity. However, the bride and bridegroom may be interpreted variously."¹ Another idea is that, "Depending on the interpretation of bride and bridegroom, the rite may be a vow of chastity, the acquisition of a garment of light, or a wedding rite following the example of Christ and Sophia."²

This term is similar to the view that the Valentinians had when it came to Sophia. Sophia was the center of their attention since she was seen as a holy figure or as the wife of Christ. So the bridal

¹Laurence Caruana, "The Gnostic Q: A Glossary of Gnostic Terms," A Novel of the Gnostic Christ The Hidden Passion Based on the Nag Hammadi Texts, <http://www.gnosticq.com/az.text/glos.af.html> (accessed April 15, 2014).

² Ibid. I thought that it was interesting that this definition brought up Sophia because before this term paper I had never heard of her. After looking her up I realized that she was supposedly the wife of God. This made me bring up a question of why they would put her in there and where they found her in the bible because I don't remember her at all. So I did some research and found out that she was written into wisdom books and that she was known as "Holy Sophia".

chamber is viewed as not only a vow to each other but as a vow to Christ. Yet another proposed theory asserts that the chamber is used as a union between the soul and spirit. “Since the soul is feminine and the spirit is masculine, then each person may unite these two aspects of him/herself in the Bridal Chamber.”³ This goes congruent with the argument presented on the meaning of the Bridal Chamber that is seen in the *Gospel of Philip*.

The text refers to Christ coming into being in the Bridal Chamber. “Is it all right to speak a mystery? The Father of all joined himself with the virgin who came down, and a fire[?] was burned for him that day. He appeared in the great Bridal Chamber. Therefore, his body came into being that day. He came out of the Bridal Chamber as one who came into being from the bridegroom and the bride. Thus, Jesus established all through these.”⁴ The text clearly puts Jesus and no one else in the chamber as if it was more of a spiritual ritual making him become one. This could also be viewed as the bridal chamber serving as a passage between earth and heaven. “It appears also that “bridal chamber” is a covering term for the whole initiation. Gifts or graces bestowed in certain stages of the initiation are also said to be given in the bridal chamber. The light in which one clothes oneself as a prophylactic against evil powers is usually associated with chrism, but is also connected with the bridal chamber.”⁵ This interpretation of the bridal chamber according to the text has a view that shows nothing to do with marriage. This summary of the context compared to the text itself shows that Isenberg also interpreted that the bridal chamber

³ Laurence Caruana, “The Gnostic Q: A Glossary of Gnostic Terms,” *A Novel of the Gnostic Christ The Hidden Passion Based on the Nag Hammadi Texts*, <http://www.gnosticq.com/az.text/glos.af.html> (accessed April 15, 2014).

⁴ *Gospel of Philip* translated by Bart Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 43.

⁵ Bentley Layton and Wesley Isenberg, *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 136.

was used in a spiritual reference in the *Gospel of Philip*. Another way of looking at the text is that the bridal chamber is a way of becoming closer to Christ and a way to remove all the sins in your life. “The restoration of the soul is achieved by baptism and marriage to Christ, her true bridegroom.”⁶ This statement could be viewed in two different ways. One way to look at it compared to the *Gospel of Philip* is that by putting Jesus into the bridal chamber it allowed him to reconnect with the holy spirit which is the “her” in this representation. Another is that this ritual represents how any human can step into the chamber to become closer with the holy spirit. That they use this “sanctuary” to become less flesh and more spiritual. Meaning it is a way to be less human and have a new sinless lifestyle.

When the topic was brought up to different theorists about the *Gospel of Philip's* version of the Bridal Chamber, they all had their own beliefs and ideas. The first group is known as the Valentinians. “Valentinians believed that God is incomprehensible and cannot be known directly.”⁷ It is seen by them that it is a destiny of spirituals. “This, the Valentinians, said is the bridegroom and the bride mentioned in the New Testament; the “bridechamber” is the whole Pleroma (of aeons) above. The destiny of “spirituals” is the same as that of their mother.”⁸ It is already put in their terms that when a woman goes into that bridal chamber that it would be a spiritual experience. It continues saying, “Their souls are the equivalent of “wedding garments””; they go to the wedding banquet, where the master of ceremonies and the friend of the bride-

⁶ Hugo Lundhaug, *Images of rebirth: cognitive poetics and transformational soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the exegesis on the soul* (BRILL, 2010): 107.

⁷ David Brons to The Gnostic Society Library online forum, Brief Summary of Valentinians Theology, http://gnosis.org/library/valentinus/Brief_Summary_Theology.htm.

⁸ Robert Grant, "The Mystery of Marriage in The Gospel of Philip ," *Vigiliae Christianae*. 11 (1961): 131-132.

groom are present. After they put off their souls and become intelligent or pure spirits, they will be given as brides to the angels about the Savior.”⁹ Their description of the bridal chamber scene in the *Gospel of Philip* seems more like a bridal ceremony by having garments and candles in a humanistic way as if they are getting married. “In the Gospel of Philip, the sacral marriage has multiple symbolic referents. The fundamental mythical motif of the restoration of the broken unity of Adam is still present (NHC II,3: 68,22-26, 70,9-22), but, as in the introductory quote from Irenaeus, the biblical legend is now overshadowed by theogonic myths of the Valentinian school. The sacramental union in the Bridal Chamber has its archetype in the union of the Savior with the previously barren Sophia. According to 71,3-15, the body of Jesus the Savior was produced in the pleromatic bridal chamber from the union of the Father of the All with the "virgin who came down," presumably the higher Sophia before her fall from the Pleroma; from this origin, it descended to establish this union of bride and bridegroom as the way for his true disciples to enter into his pleromatic rest.”¹⁰ The interpretation of Jesus’ presence in the bridal chamber as an example for his disciples is extremely profound. The reason this view is brought up is that in all of the other research and based on reading the *Gospel of Philip* it doesn’t make sense because the disciples weren’t there and there is no proof if they were there or not. Another statement that was seen in this article it is that Jesus was created in the bridal chamber which goes against all previous notions of his origin. The last thought they point out is that, “Literally, the gospels say that

⁹ Ibid., 132.

¹⁰ *Gos. Phil.* 63,30-32: cf. Irenaeus Adv. Haer. I 1-8 ; *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 43-65; H.-M. Schenke [and Johannes Leipoldt], "Koptisch-gnostische Schriften aus den Papyrus-Codices von Nag-Hammadi," *Theologische Forschung*, 20 [Hamburg-Bergstadt: Reich, 1960], 35-38. This is the web pages personal footnote.
John D. Turner, "Ritual in Gnosticism" *SBL Book of Seminar Papers (1994)*: 136-181.

there is no marrying in heaven, but the Valentinians understood that being like or equal to angels was really marriage.”¹¹ This statement represents a view that Valentinians had on marriage and how human marriage was nothing if it didn’t have a spiritual aspect in the relationship. In this article it also talks about a view from Irenaeus a bishop from France who says, “that some of them constructed a “bridechamber” and performed a mystical initiation, using special formulas; the rite consisted of a “spiritual marriage after the likeness of the unions above”.”¹² The last idea is one that is relation to Jerusalem. “It has been suggested that the *Gospel of Philip* offers two differing sequential patterns of initiation involving the bridal chamber. In the first of these typological descriptions, comparisons is based on the progression into the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple. Describing the three buildings or areas of the temple the author states, ‘baptism is the holy building; redemption is the Holy of the Holy; the Holy of Holies is the bridal chamber.’”¹³ The Valentinians have seen to have many opinions on what happened in the Gospel of Philip with the bridal chamber. Even though one could question any of their accusations, their standpoint does not agree with the original argument presented in the fact that based on the textual evidence on the bridal chamber it does not reference garments and Sophia. However, one thing that does go along with what original argument is that they also see the bridal chamber as the “Holy of Holies” or a place where spiritual ceremonies are taken place.

¹¹Robert Grant, "The Mystery of Marriage in The Gospel of Philip," *Vigiliae Christianae* 11(1961): 132.

¹² Ibid., 132.

¹³ Paul Foster, "The Gospel of Philip," *The Expository Times* 118, 9 (2007): 421. In this passage he is talking about two different ways of the bridal chamber and its superiority. One is based off of the typological description and the other is off of the soteriological rituals.

Scholars have expressed many ideas on what happens in the bridal chamber based on the verses in the *Gospel of Philip*. One concept that was introduced is one that agrees with the stance on Jesus using the bridal chamber as a spiritual ritual. “Previous scholarship has show that the Gospel of Philip presents Jesus’ virginal birth, incarnation, and baptism (among other events) as symbolic paradigms for the ritual of the bridal chamber in which the individual initiate is reunited with his/her spiritual double through practices of baptism, anointing kissing, and a Eucharist meal. By receiving spiritual rebirth as a child of the bridal chamber and becoming a Christ, the initiate realizes his/her incarnate role as a member of the Church, which is the preexistent body of Christ. The bridal chamber ritual thus undoes the believer’s separation from God (figured to the separation of Eve from Adam) and effects salvation by the spiritual union on the believer with his/her double (figured by analogy to heterosexual marriage).”¹⁴ The evaluation of the bridal chamber in this article recognized that many scholars have come to a conclusion that the bridal chamber has a spiritual representation that has an equal value to a baptism. One part that is brought up that is different to the stance of this topic is that they make it seem that it wasn’t just a spiritual place for Jesus but for any human that steps into the bridal chamber. It makes sense in this context because the scholars use the bridal chamber as a way to become a “Christ” and a way to break the barrier label of just being a member of the church.

Karen King’s thought’s on the bridal chamber in the *Gospel of Philip* was differed greatly from others that have studied this issue. She believed that the chamber was a place where Je-

¹⁴ Karen King, “The Place of the Gospel of Philip in the Context of Early Christian Claims about Jesus’ Marital Status,” *New Testament Studies* 59 (2013): 576. This journal article was very difficult to read so I tried my best to decipher the words to the best of my ability. Also in this paper she is responding to research in *Tertullian* if I read that correctly. This is also what I was talking about in the beginning of the paragraph when I said scholars I was referring to the research from *Tertullian*.

Jesus and Mary Magdalene got married spiritually and physically. “With regard to images and practices of marriage, the Gospel of Philip intricately overlays and inter-relates protology (the separation of Adam and Eve), historical events of salvation (Jesus’s acts collectively as a symbolic-paradigm, including his relation to Mary Magdalene as his spiritual partner), spiritually transformative ritual (baptism, anointing, exchange a kiss, and Eucharist, that is the ritual of the bridal chamber which effects purification and unification with one’s angelic double), and a moral-social ethos (including proper sexual relations in marriage that are pure because they occur according to a will directed to spiritual matters including the love of the Lord, and that are not polluted by improper desire and demonic influence).”¹⁵ This quote goes against the argument in the sense that Mary Magdalene was mentioned in the text however, based off of what was said in the bridal chamber in the Gospel of Philip her name is never mentioned and her presence in the chamber is never verified. “He appeared in the great Bridal Chamber. Therefore, his body came into being that day. He came out of the Bridal Chamber as one who came into being from the bridegroom and the bride. Thus, Jesus established all through these.”¹⁶ Even though her theory has valid points of Jesus being very close to Mary Magdalene it doesn’t mean that they were married. There has been many questions of Jesus being with Mary since she was the only female apostle which makes it easier to make assumptions of who she really was to Jesus. Placing her in the bridal chamber could make an accusation that she represented the holy spirit. This still doesn’t measure up to the fact that the *Gospel of Philip* only puts him in the bridal chamber and no one else.

¹⁵ Ibid., 582.

¹⁶ Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 43.

There are many ways of trying to break down the description of what is going on in the bridal chamber in the *Gospel of Philip* and this is one that is the closest to the argument at hand. “The resurrection comes about in the restoration of the unity of sexes through the sacrament of the bridal chamber. It is telling that the prerequisite for this sacrament is the image, i.e., the union of marriage.”¹⁷ It is first thought that this article sees the bridal chamber for what it is a location of marriage but then it says, “The “mirrored bridal-chamber” mentioned above is identical with worldly marriage, and, thus, earthly union seems to mark the first, required step before one may enter into the spiritual union.”¹⁸ This one opinion is so far from the others and it suggests by becoming married it is a step closer to a spiritual union, that it is a process or a parallel between heaven and earth. It makes sense in a way that by becoming one in the chamber is so spiritual that it brings you closer to Christ. However when one sees it in the view of the text it doesn't have it viewed this way in the fact that there is no marriage of a man and a woman in the chamber. So even though this argument is convincing it does not accurately describe what is happening in the *Gospel of Philip*.

The *Gospel of Philip* portrays the bridal chamber as a place where the union of a soul and spirit takes place. There have been countless arguments of what really happened in the bridal chamber according to the *Gospel of Philip*. The topics include Sophia, Mary Magdalene, wedding garments, Christ, and angels. However, when it comes down to the text only one man walks into that chamber, and that man is Jesus. He becomes one and that is the only thing that is mentioned in the text. There is are no angels or women so even though it is a bridal chamber there

¹⁷ Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley, "A cult-mystery in The Gospel of Philip," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99, 4 (1980): 572.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 572.

was no bride in the chamber. This ritual was more of a spiritual connection between him and Christ using the bridal chamber as a bridge to the everlasting heaven when it came to the terms of the *Gospel of Philip*.