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Reading Ten Questions

- 1) Beowulf has reigned for fifty years when the dragon comes. This is significant because Hrothgar had also reigned fifty years when Grendel came. They were both kings happily reigning over their kingdom like normal, when suddenly a monster comes in and plagues their kingdoms. The poet is leading us to notice that Beowulf would have to face the same type of trials that Hrothgar did, except no one is going to come rescue Beowulf from his problems, he's going to have to fix them himself.

When Grendel came, we were supposed to sympathize with Hrothgar for not fighting him, but Beowulf is just as old as Hrothgar was when the dragon comes and his first response is to fight.

- 2) Beowulf won't commit kin-killing. He's also been humble and didn't accept the offer to be king by Hygelac's wife Hygd. He's been loyal to Hygelac's family his whole life. He's clean of kin-killing and revenge.

We know that turning on your own people is the kin-killing sin of Cain, of Unferth, and of Heremond. Beowulf is so far away from this sin that even when he's offered the throne he refuses to take it until everyone with a rightful claim on it is dead. Hrothgar warned Beowulf against the pride that leads to treachery, and we see here that Beowulf stays away from that all his life.

- 3) This time, it's actually referring to a good king (Beowulf). All the other times this expression is used, it almost sounds sarcastic, but here it doesn't.

In this case, we are told that Beowulf is a good king right after he suits up to go fight a dragon. In Hrothgar's case, we're told he's a good king right after he comes back with a bunch of women after a night of not fighting Grendel. In Shield's case, we're told he's a good king right after we hear about how he ransacks and pillages and destroys places. In Beowulf's cases we are told that he is a good king right after he shows deference and loyalty, and is faithful to the vows he made to his ring-giver in the mead-hall. It seems that Beowulf is being held up for us as a contrast to earlier "good kings"—both of whom really were good kings in the Saxon estimation. But with the other two there was a twang of hypocrisy—with Beowulf we seem to have been given a picture of a truly "good king."

- 4) Tolkein is borrowing this entire story. A dragon who comes and takes over a giant hoard of treasure and sleeps on it for three hundred years... sounds like Smaug. A thief who sneaks into a dragon's lair and steals a cup... sounds like Bilbo Baggins. A king who leads his men to fight a dragon and retake his land... sounds like Thorin.

The dragon notices a singular missing cup and goes on a rampage searching for the burglar to burn and kill and murder and destroy and end him... sounds like Smaug and Bilbo.

Reading Eleven Questions

- 1) One way in which Beowulf appears as a Christ figure in this section is that, just as Jesus went willingly to Jerusalem despite the fact that he knew he would be killed by the Jews, Beowulf went willingly to the mountain knowing he would be killed by the dragon. Another similarity in these two men is that they were both abandoned. When Christ was

arrested and crucified, every one of his disciples left him and fled for their own selves. In the same way, all but one of Beowulf's men fled for their own lives when Beowulf went to fight. Even when left by their friends though, both Christ and Beowulf did not back down, but continued to determinedly do their task, because they knew what was right and had the strength to do it. The main difference is that Christ's strength was divine, whereas Beowulf's was not.

Another key similarity between Beowulf and Christ was that Beowulf was fighting a serpent, just like Christ fought Satan, a serpent. Beowulf also fights the serpent alone, just like Christ died his death alone with no one else helping Him pay the necessary price. Beowulf also had specifically twelve men (who all fled), just like Christ had twelve men (who all fled).

- 2) In both *Beowulf* and *The Hobbit*, the characters are fighting a dragon. There are also the same number of people fighting in both stories: one king, twelve men, and one thief. In both stories, they are fighting for their people. The dwarves are fighting the dragon to take back their people's land and treasure and fortress, and Beowulf and his men are fighting for the safety of their people.

More similarities in these stories would be that just like the devastation of the dragon in Beowulf, Smaug destroys Laketown. Also, Beowulf's sword is unable to pierce the dragon, like the arrows that the men of Laketwon use that simply bounce off of Smaug.

Reading Questions Twelve

- 1) The poet is connecting the themes of valor and treasure. He's showing that often valor leads to treasure. He is showing that those who don't give up and exert valor

will be awarded. The point of valor is to lead to treasure, and the point of treasure is to give it to others.

Treasure is used by ring-givers to secure valor. They use it to buy the loyalty of thanes. Heremond was the dragon king who hoarded his wealth, a good king gives it away. But that generosity will come back to him when he needs faithful warriors. On the other hand, how does a ring-giver acquire the treasure that he gives? Through valour. A good king would have been a loyal than once, and he would have given his valor and received treasure from his own ring-giver. After he is a king, he would acquire more treasure conquering other kingdoms (valor). Or, in Beowulf's case, he would use his valor to win back ancient treasures from the clutches of monsters. Either way, both valor and gold are meant to be given away, and when they are, both bring a rich harvest. In other words, the Saxons treated iron for gold and gold for iron.

- 2) The interesting twist here is that Beowulf has no blood-avenger. Pretty much every other character who dies in this poem is avenged, but here, Beowulf and his companion kill the dragon, and then Beowulf dies from the dragon bite.
Beowulf avenges himself by killing his killer. Vengeance is never satisfied, there is always another person who needs to die, but Beowulf killed the person who killed him, so no one else needed to die to pay his death's price.
- 3) The rest of the company came back alive when their ring-giver had died. Wiglaf came back alive too, but only because he had helped Beowulf kill the dragon. The rest of the company fled without even trying, for that reason, the cowards were

expelled from the mead-hall, and there were no ring-givers anywhere who would take them on.

Wiglaf tells them that they would be outcasts, they and their families would be exiled, their lands would be seized, and no mead-halls would ever take them in again.

- 4) Vengeance seems to be a key theme in both stories. In *Beowulf*, we see Beowulf fighting a dragon to avenge himself and his people. In *The Hobbit*, we see Thorin and co. fighting a great battle to avenge their forefathers. In *The Hobbit*, we also see treasure used as a form of bribery or payment, as it so often is used as in *Beowulf* when the ring-giver “buy” their thane's loyalty, we see the elves and men of Laketown using the arkenstone to try bribe Thorin into giving them treasure. *In this section, Thorin is becoming the dragon king that Hrothgar warned Beowulf of. Instead of using the treasure to get loyalty, Thorin hoards it and creates enemies.*