

Chapter 1

THE BIBLICAL STORY: GOD'S RULE IN THE CHRIST

*I love to tell the story of unseen things above
Of Jesus and His glory of Jesus and His love
I love to tell the story because I know tis' true
It satisfies my longings as nothing else can do*

*I love to tell the story
Twill' be my theme in glory
To tell the old, old, story
Of Jesus and His love*

- Katherine Hankey¹

“In the beginning, GOD . . . “

Genesis 1:1a

¹ Words by A. Katherine Hankey, 1866, music by William J. Fischer. Joyful Songs, Nos. 1 to 3 (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Methodist Episcopal Book Room, 1869).

The Story of the Bible: **The Rule of Man**

Story and Plot

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times²” begins the great British novel. And off to the future the author takes the reader, careening down a road on which he has never been, a rode of discovery, one with a new experience beyond the bend ahead. He continues to ride with the main character, through joys and sorrows, troubles and victories until things finally wind down in the final chapter.

Stories are plot. They move from a beginning to an end, with the situation changing as time elapses in what is called story. It is in the change of the story that the meaning or the message of the author is communicated. Almost everything changes with plot. The main character is never the same as he was in the beginning. This protagonist usually has learned something that he didn't know in the beginning, either through additional knowledge or experience. The circumstances are always different. Plot involves the elapse of time, but it is not time that carries the message but the change in circumstances. Typically by the end, the enemies he encountered are defeated and he is victorious.

The Story of the Bible involves Plot

If there is one thing that is not commonly understood in the interpretation of the Bible and of the narratives that form the parts, it is that it is one story, one plot. Within this Biblical story, things change. No longer does the reader fear eating the fruit from the center of the Garden of Eden. No one pilgrimages to Mount Sinai to wait for Moses to descend with the Law. No one looks for Jesus on the dusty roads of Galilee so they might talk with Him or hope to touch the hem of His garment and be healed. No one will travel to Jerusalem ever again to see Jesus hanging on a cross, nor be an eyewitness to His resurrection. No longer can one stand with Peter and watch as the first Gentile joins the body of Christ as recorded in Acts 10. And no one travels to Jerusalem to see the King, Jesus, sitting on the throne of Israel and the world, for that is still yet to come. The Bible is a story, a plot, and things and events come and go so as they play their individual, unique, part in the story. These events appear, contribute their portion, and leave. Story involves . . . plot involves . . . change.

Individual Stories Are Part of the Larger Biblical Plot

Yet the Bible is almost always taught with the individual stories having independent morality lessons as if they stood on their own apart from the overall plot. Proof texts are a way of life with most teachers and preachers. These verses and stories

² From “A Tale of Two Cities,” 1859, by Charles Dickens.

are not only used apart from their immediate context, but also apart from their place in the Biblical plot. While there may be things that can be drawn from the stories, accurate meaning cannot be ascertained apart from knowing the plot and only then can one find each story's place in the storyline. Thus the lessons of recorded Biblical history become unobtainable without understanding what part of the story the event occurred and how it contributed to the overall plot.

For instance, David and Goliath is a story that is all too frequently applied to an audience by saying the audience can, and should, imitate David. The way this is done is to make Goliath a symbol for some evil that those in the audience are confronting (e.g., "facing your giants of envy, lust, greed"). Yet to do that the interpreter must change the real historical killing of a man to simply eliminating some undesirable trait as envy, greed or lust. However, it's a long way from killing to suppression of one's unwanted personality traits. Taking a real giant and making him illustrate one's behaviors is reliant on the imagination of the interpreter and is not the author's intent. Very simply God did not put that story in the Bible to teach people about conquering their irritating problems and human frailties. To derive that meaning from the story is contextually wrong, it doesn't work, and it isn't God's word. While David did kill a giant, one cannot kill their envy, lust and greed. They keep hanging around. It makes a nice book that people buy thinking they have found a solution. But it isn't God's solution. It's the interpreter's.

That story was not written as a separate morality tale. It is an event in a plot and, very simply, does not contain enough information to be interpreted without knowing what preceded and what follows in the rest of the story. A tour through the Biblical story reveals that David is being equipped (i.e., trained) by God to be His unique ruler over Israel and the world. God is showing David that as the King, God would enable him to be victorious over the Philistines if he would simply trust God. So God conquers Goliath for David, which shows David that he can conquer real enemies of God in the future as king. This is not an example to be tried at home since the reader cannot be the king for God. David was that one. Now Jesus is that One. The reader isn't Jesus. The story of David and Goliath appeared following a list of events that prepared the way for David to appear. David then appears, plays his part, and disappears, thus laying the way for the ultimate King, who, in Revelation 19, will kill His enemies massively.

It is stories like this, lined up in order, which fit into an overall story that will reveal God's purpose, to establish the rule of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Type of Literature of The Bible

Thematic or Plot

First of all, to begin with, one must assume the Bible is inerrant and inspired by God³. Only as the reader continues on that basis will he see the beauty and quality of this symphony called the Bible. The text of Bible was ultimately from the hand of God and is without error in the form that God intended. If one does not determine that this is true historical narrative then the reader will become a judge over whether the story is accurate, which parts are accurate, and even more importantly whether the message is true.

Having that as a foundation the interpreter must determine the type of literature that is to be interpreted. Determining the type of literature is not simply additional information for the interpreter to add to his list of tools but is to be regarded as important as language and grammar. To not understand the type of literature and how it works is to negate the very form that the author chose to communicate his message. That form is unique and is chosen because it imparts meaning in a unique way. For instance, a parent will use a bedtime story to impart some moral lesson. The story is less direct than just giving a principle of life. A story illustrates the moral so it is more easily understood and gives an example of its use.

The Bible is story or narrative (“In the beginning . . .”). And since the author selected narrative it must be interpreted according to the rules of narrative. One must first answer whether it is simply a recording of historical events for documentation of what happened (e.g., a history of events in America), or is it a selection for a moral or ethical purpose? Once one decides that it is more than a documentation of history, the second question is; are the stories tied together loosely (thematically) or are they tied together in a purposeful sequence (plot) to demonstrate a meaning? These choices define the two types of narrative literature.

The first type of narrative is an “anthology” or “episodic plot” where stories are gathered together because they have a common theme, yet may be quite diverse. Typically each story stands separately and may individually demonstrate a morality tale. In other words each event contains all the information necessary to find a message or a “moral.”

The second type is called “dramatic plot” where the stories are tied together to demonstrate a progression (plot) to bring about a message or moral (of the story). In a progressive plot each story contributes its part to the overall story and does not carry a moral or ethical meaning apart from the whole story. In other words, the individual event’s major function is to contribute its part to the overall story and message. While

³ This is not to negate that inspiration and inerrancy has proof, just that for this book it will be assumed. If the Biblical Story is not inspired or inerrant then there is no historical narrative. For if any of the parts are false, they do not historically lead to Jesus, which is the proof that He alone was the One.

there may be individual lessons to be learned, they cannot be determined apart from the part that the event plays in the overall message.

An **Episodic Plot (anthology)**: This is a chronological structure, but consists of a series of loosely related incidents, usually of chapter length, tied together by a common theme.⁴

Progressive or Dramatic Plot: This is a chronological structure as well, but first establishes the setting and conflict, then follows the rising action through to a climax (the peak of the action and turning point), moves to the resolution and concludes with a denouement (tying up loose ends).⁵ Movement and change, particularly in a chronological progression to an ultimate purpose or victory, characterize it. But the most important thing to recognize is that all the parts contribute to a single message developed by knowing the whole of the changing plot.

The Biblical Story: A Collection of Stories (Episodic) or Plot (Dramatic)

By observation one can tell that the Bible's cohesiveness is a single story. It is a collection of stories that contribute to an overall story. In fact, there is nothing that is unrelated to the larger story. So, the next question is whether these stories are an anthology (i.e., episodic plot; a collection of diverse works⁶ with a common theme), or a collection that forms a progressive movement called "plot" or what is called dramatic plot. If one errantly thinks that it is an episodic plot instead of dramatic plot, the hermeneutical results will be disparate, and error then abounds.

Common Theme

⁴ http://www2.nkfust.edu.tw/~emchen/CLit/study_elements.htm (06.01.2008). *Children's Literature*, "The Study of Literature." Instructor: Chi-Fen Emily Chen, Ph.D. 陳其芬, Department of English, National Kaohsiung First University of Science and Technology, Taiwan

⁵ Chen, p. 2.

⁶ Leland Ryken in his work "The Literary Study Bible" (Leland Ryken and Philip Graham Ryken, 2007, Crossway Books) holds Genesis as a collection of diverse works. By diverse it is taken to mean that they are not in the form of a plot, but have some common connection. Thus Dr. Ryken's interpretation of individual stories is subject to a lack of information (since he discounts the progression of the narrative). For instance, he sees "Cain and Abel" as an illustration of psychological sibling rivalry disconnected from anything prior or following, which requires the input of the interpreter's perception (his cultural understanding) and results in errant interpretations.

That the events of Bible have at least a common theme is also obvious. The fact that the story deals with a single genealogical line from Adam and Eve through the twelve sons of Jacob to the Davidic Kings, ultimately ending in the Davidic Son, Jesus, must be admitted by all.

If the Bible is Episodic Plot (i.e., anthology) then stories as Cain and Abel, Noah and the Ark, Judah and Tamar, Samson, David and Goliath, are to be interpreted on their own, only loosely (thematically) connected to the rest of the Bible. Yet the story of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38), if left to its own, provides a quandary for the reader. God kills Tamar's husband for some (?) reason. Her brother-in-law is then ordered to provide children for her for some reason (?). He avoids this task and is stricken by God (again for some reason (?)). Judah promises to give her the last brother-in-law (for some reason), but doesn't really intend to. Tamar, now denied seed by Judah, her father-in-law, and obviously denied the youngest, pursues the father-in-law's seed through deception (dressed as a temple prostitute). Yet, for some reason (?), Judah complements her for this deceptive action ("she is more righteous than I" (Genesis 38:26.) This is a difficult story to tell to one's young daughters if the story is left to itself assuming a separate moral or ethic. In fact, if Tamar were not honored in the rest of the Bible (particularly Ruth 4), most would not hold her up as good. Thus, it becomes obvious that more information is needed than just the story found in Genesis 38. That information is found earlier in the story in the philosophy (particularly Genesis 2:24 and 3:15). Tamar then plays out this philosophy of God in such a way that her uniqueness, and her righteousness ("rightness" before God) become clear. However, the solution to how Tamar and Judah fit into this plot will be dealt with later in the book.

Another story is the story of David and Goliath. This story has all the trappings of an individually interpretable narrative (e.g., individual morality tale). But when one analyzes it closely, one finds that much has to be inserted to make this palatable to the average reader as a simple morality tale (1 Samuel 17).

David as a young lad determines on his own to go against a nine and one-half foot giant and kill him. He is victorious even though the much larger king and all the soldiers fear this enemy. Then David cuts off his head and carries it off as a spoil of war. Now while preachers try to change things and make the giant a symbol of some evil that those in his audience are encountering (e.g., lust, envy, etc.), the literal meaning (i.e., killing other humans in war) is hard to escape. This type of action occurs not infrequently throughout the Old Testament where, on behalf of God, the leader killed His enemies along with their families and even their animals. Thus unless the preacher adds a lot of reader imagination and creativity (e.g., errant reader perception), the story becomes difficult to apply to an audience. The obvious difficulty is that today no one advocates the killing of an unbeliever and cutting of their head, which is what David did.

By seeing these two examples it becomes clear that if one chooses these as isolated individual morality tales (episodic plot) then errant interpretation will be the case. That is true because not enough information is available and the interpreter must bring too much of his own theology to the text and the story. If one does that the Bible only tells him what he wants it to tell him (and he really didn't need the Bible story since he knew his conclusion before he came to the text). Thus, one can see that if the reader mistakenly considers a story as part of an episodic plot (an isolated morality tale) when it is actually a part of a dramatic plot then he will incur errant interpretations.

Dramatic (or Progressive) Plot

Dramatic plot is a planned sequence whereby things change purposefully from a beginning to some sort of resolution at the end. In other words, things are learned by a character(s) through the movement of events from a beginning to an end as he struggles to overcome opposition (conflict).

Now the simplest of plots is the type where a difficulty (conflict) confronts the protagonist in the early parts of the story and then is overcome during the progress of the story. It is in overcoming this difficulty that a lesson is learned.

For instance, in fiction, Cinderella progresses from a scrub-sister to a princess. However, the story is not simply a history of her movement through time, but a lesson in "how" she acted; i.e., what was her philosophy of life (or changing philosophy) that she held that allowed her to achieve success? Another example is Ebenezer Scrooge in "A Christmas Carol." He moved from a "scrooge," despised by all, to a benevolent and kindly man who was admired by all. The question again is not what the progress of events was, or the situations in which they occurred, but what philosophy that enabled him, through the progress of the story, to "win?" These are progressive or dramatic plots where the movement clearly reveals a message by seeing how the protagonist overcame some difficulty. In both stories, the character(s), and subsequently the reader(s), learned something through the change wrought in the story. The change was reflected in the philosophy of a major character and that is where the message lies. In Cinderella, the heroine's original philosophy (conscientiousness in the face of persecution) is what ultimately brings her the victory as the prince's bride. Thus her philosophy wins and the reader gains insight to her winning ways. Scrooge, on the other hand, is the "fallible man" character whose philosophy changes from wrong to right. Because of that he wins in the end. Thus the reader is able to adopt Scrooge's winning philosophy and escape the error of his original evil philosophy.

Dramatic or Progressive Plot in the whole

That the Bible is dramatic (or progressive) plot would seem to be obvious. The Protagonist Hero and the serenity of His creation, found in Genesis 1—2, is destroyed by the serpent (Satan) in Genesis 3. The story then progresses until the creation is restored in victory at the end when the “serpent of old” (Satan) is chained in Revelation 20:1-2 and placed in the Lake of Fire in Revelation 20:10. In other words, the Bible has three obvious, progressive parts; the serenity of the setting (Genesis 1—2), the change from the serenity to destruction and death, (Genesis 3) and the progressive response to correct the change (Genesis 4 through Revelation 19) and restore the original desire of the Hero. The final resolution, the re-establishment of God’s 1000-year kingdom on earth (Revelation 19—20), is followed by the denouement of the everlasting kingdom on earth in Revelation 21—22. This explains why the kingdom in Revelation 21 is described in the same terms used for creation in Genesis 1—2. It is clear that the serenity of the beginning has been restored in the end. The Hero Protagonist, God, is victorious in re-establishing His original goal. This is dramatic, or progressive, plot. Very simply then, the reader’s desire must be to determine the “philosophy” of this God so that he may benefit from it personally.

Finding “Plot” in The Bible

The first question is whether there is a progression of plot. Specifically does the setting (Genesis 1—2), and the failure or conflict (Genesis 3), impact the rest of the Bible? Put another way, does the rest of the Bible describe the reaction to, or is it a result of, Genesis 1—3? Is there a moral or ethical change that takes place as a result of the conflict in Genesis 3? If that is the case then this is a dramatic plot and must follow the rules of such.

The Main Character or Hero

Determining the Main Character of the Book is essential to determining if there is a dramatic plot. Typically if there is one main character throughout the story, then a dramatic plot becomes more likely. If the stories are about Adam, then Cain, then Abraham, then Jacob and Joseph, then it is more likely that these are anthologies since the continuity may become limited to each person’s individual story and their success or failure based on the individual conflict that they overcome.

There are two types of main characters or protagonists. There is the “hero” and there is the “fallible man” protagonist. The hero does not change, but overcomes the conflict due to his unwavering rightness that becomes apparent by his victory over evil in the end. The reader will observe the right philosophy of the hero and adopt it for himself. Thus the message is in the hero’s winning philosophy or in the content of his “rightness.” In the case of the fallible man protagonist, he advocates some philosophy to overcome the conflict and it typically fails due to a weakness of his character. But as the plot proceeds he revises his failing philosophy so that he can succeed. Finally, he discovers a philosophy that enables him to succeed in the end. The reader then will learn the same

lesson as the main character by riding through his conflicts, as well as the resultant failures and solutions. Hopefully the reader will learn the lesson from the story and will be able to use the main character's winning philosophy in his own life and avoiding the failing philosophies.

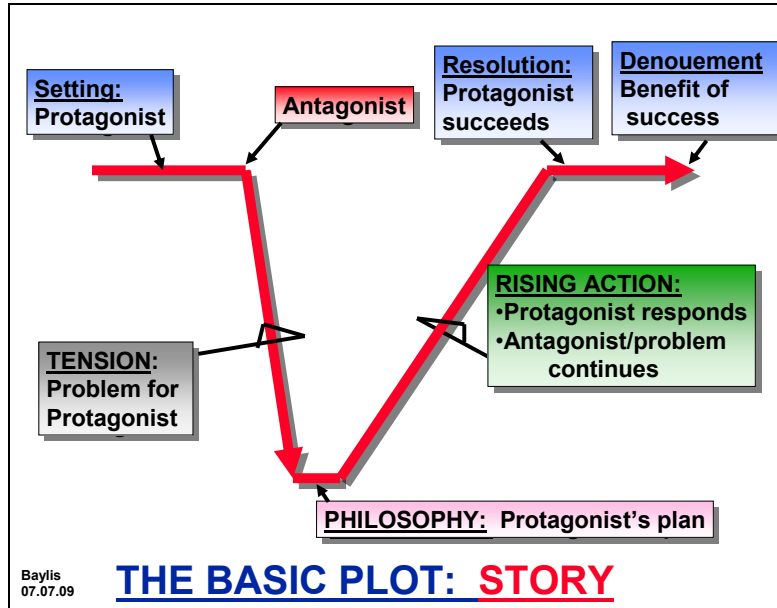
The Bible has a main character whose purpose is stated early the book. This Main Character is God. He never changes since He is the Hero, but continues His right purpose, unwavering, throughout the book. It is obvious that He continues to work to bring His images (man), in order to bring them to His right moral or ethical purpose. Thus the Bible is a progressive (dramatic) plot wherein the Hero, God, continues through the repeated failure of his images in an attempt to achieve His purpose in His successful Image, Jesus the Christ.

Whatever the Hero is doing it is very clear that it is a progression in plot. The promise by the Hero, God, of the "Seed" (i.e., a new Adam) in Genesis 3:15 is clearly followed through Seth, Enoch and Noah. It continues into Genesis 12 with Abraham. The Seed develops into the 12 sons of Jacob by the end of Genesis, but isolates the coming One to Judah. That Seed is once again found in 1 Samuel when David appears and is promised that the Seed which occupies the eternal throne will come from him. That Seed is then traced through Kings and Chronicles. The seed line of Adam, Abraham and David is fulfilled in Matthew 1⁷ and Luke 3 where it is traced to Jesus. From the point of the appearance of this fulfillment of the Seed in the appearance of Jesus in Bethlehem, the Bible follows Him as He ascends to heaven waiting there until He returns to sit on the eternal throne of the new earth in Revelation 21, returning the rule of the earth back to the Hero, God, the Father. Thus the progression in events, through one failing man after another, ends finally with the perfect Man, Jesus. This progression in the physical seed through many failures to the successful One, validates the Bible as a dramatic (or progressive) plot.

The Story of the Bible

The parts of the story, the setting, conflict and rising action are clear as well as the resolution.

⁷ The line in Matthew 1 is the Davidic King line that Jesus inherits. The line in Luke 3 is the seed line that traces Jesus' actual physical inheritance back to David through Nathan back to Adam.

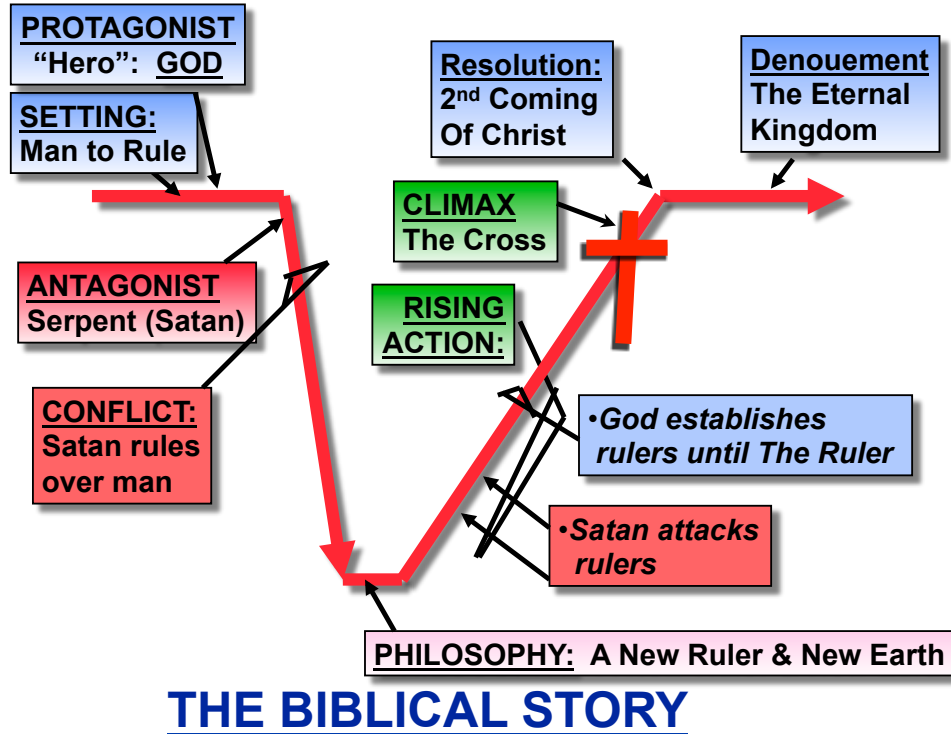


- Setting:** The situation at the beginning of the plot which sets forth the “set-up” from which the conflict will emerge. Typically this introduces the Protagonist (or “hero”), his desires, as well as the contrasting antagonist. The identification of these two diametrically opposed characters is very important as it defines precisely the issues (good vs. evil) of the story.
- Conflict:** This problem interrupts the setting by the introduction of the antagonistic action toward the protagonist or his situation. It is always meant to destroy the revealed desires of the hero protagonist. While the conflict has one point at which it is initiated, it may be a one time conflict with lasting effects, or may continue to attack throughout the story.
- Rising Action:** This is the response of the protagonist to rectify the conflict and deal with the antagonistic activity. It may be accompanied by a continual attack of the antagonist in various forms.
- Resolution:** This is the point at which the victory of the protagonist hero is effective.
- Denouement:** This is the bookend⁸ to the setting, the results of the victory that re-establish the purpose of the protagonist, partially achieved at the beginning. Frequently this is referenced as the “tying up of strings.”

⁸ Note that this final bookend resembles the setting because the protagonist achieves the very goals that he had begun. Sometimes this is referenced errantly as chiasm because of the similarity of the end to the beginning. To label it as such misses the point that the ending resembles the beginning because of the accomplishment (progressive rising action) of the protagonist throughout the plot. The ending is not the same as the beginning because of the change in plot and the accompanying accomplishments of the protagonist.

The Biblical Story Plot

The Biblical story is thus in the form of a plot, with all the parts of narrative present.



The Setting

The setting goes through Genesis 1—2 until the conflict enters brought by the antagonist in Genesis 3. During the setting, the Hero, God, is introduced along with His desires (good). God desires to create a physical universe in which man will rule over it, representing God's character throughout.

The Conflict

The antagonist, diametrically opposed to God the Hero, enters the picture in 3:1-6 and brings about the conflict by causing the failure of the representative of God, man. Now the man, who was the representative of God, now represents Satan. Thus all of creation now has been turned over to the rule of the evil antagonist, Satan.

The Rising Action (Philosophy)

The Protagonist then responds with His plan (philosophy) in Genesis 3:15, and more generally in 3:14-24. He is going to, very simply, destroy the old dead creation and everyone in it, including their leader, Satan. He will then bring forth a new Man and a new creation that will, unlike the old man, represent Him fully.

The Rising Action (Activity)

Following the issuing of His philosophy (i.e., plan), The Protagonist will then move to enact this by bringing forth seed (Seth, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah) until One comes who will ultimately be the One Ruler who will rule obediently.

God's action, promised in the philosophy, will be implemented as His Representative, the Christ, appears in the Gospels. The antagonist, Satan, will try to deceive this New Man like he did the old man. Failing that, he will, through his representatives the Pharisees, execute Him to stop Him from ruling. But in that unjust execution He will have died as a substitute for the sins of the old creation. God will then resurrect Him (victory over Satan's death threat) so He can return to rule.

The Resolution (Anticipatory of the Ultimate Resolution)

This Ruler will then return to execute Satan and all his followers, and establish the rule of God in the earthly Kingdom.