

Chapter 1

THE GOSPELS AS STORY:

THE NECESSITY OF HERMENEUTICAL ACCURACY

*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 Hankey

PART I

The Gospels: A Unique Time

It is fairly typical to preach and teach the Gospel events by using the experience of the disciples, and others characters in the narrative, to illustrate some good or bad behavior for the purpose of improving the reader's life. The disciples and other minor characters are perceived to be examples of how to do something or not do something. For instance, the lad who gave his loaves and fishes to Jesus would become a lesson on how Jesus can multiply whatever you have, thus improving your life or perhaps success in ministry. Or frequently, the healings that Jesus gives can be yours if you only have enough faith, etc. Of course, there are always those who preach that the storm that Jesus stills (Matthew 8:23-27) means that Jesus can calm the storms of your life. Of course, it requires that the interpreter manipulate of the meaning of the word "storm" from the literal "storm" to a totally different meaning that makes "storms" figurative (i.e., play on words).¹ Of course, since it cannot be shown that the author intended the reader to understand the "storm" as figurative, it becomes the word of the interpreter and not the Word of God.²

One common story used in this way is the narrative of Peter getting out of the boat in Matthew 14:22-34. This is interpreted frequently to mean that we, as believers, should "get out of the boat." Now, no one actually advocates a literal "getting out the boat," but again the interpreter makes it a figure of speech, meaning one should be taking risks (hopefully for Jesus) or one should get out of their comfort zone (whatever that is defined as). The need for relevance to the audience drives the interpreter to change the literal meaning to some symbolic message. For example, if the search phrase "Get out of the boat" is used on one popular sermon web site, it lists 507 possible sermons. Some creative titles are, "Which boat are you in," "At least Peter got out of the boat," and "Will anyone get out of the boat when they see you."

Of course, creativity is absolutely not to be a part of the interpretation of the text. Creativity with interpretation is, by definition, from the mind of the interpreter, a violation of normal hermeneutics. The vast number of these creative sermons with multiple meanings belie the lack of an understanding of the what this story is doing in the inspired text. Because he can't advocate that his audience do what Peter did ("get out of the boat") he changes it to something that seems reasonable to him. So he changes the boat to symbolize one's false security (e.g., finances, family, health, etc.) and the water becomes what scares one from coming to Jesus, and Jesus, well . . . He's Jesus (but of course not the real life present Jesus). Now while these application seem all well and

¹ One place this is commonly done is in the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25 where the "talents" are money and the word is misused to preach about one's talents or gifts. That would be like someone telling about an elephant's trunk and the interpreter

² Refer to the author's blog for a more detailed discussion of this passage and the meaning in the context at: <http://thebiblicalstory.org/baylis/2015/01/26/storms-are-they-about-your-life-or-about-Jesus/>

good, the problem is that they aren't what the Scripture is saying. On that day in history, Peter really got out of a boat in the midst of a great storm and really walked on (and fell into) the water. Now the reason all the preachers feel obligated to change the story to fit their readers is one simple problem. If they tell the reader to get out of the boat . . . he'll drown. Why? Because Jesus was there! And Jesus isn't here!

Now this is a very important insight . . . no one can do what Peter did. The interpreter must recognize that simple fact. What happened to Peter cannot happen to anyone in today's audience . . . not even a little bit.³ What happened to Peter was unique and Peter realized how unique it was when he walked on water. When Peter came to shore did he extol others to learn some lesson on self-improvement (e.g., sell his fishing business and go into missions, although that may come as a result of this realization)? What he did realize, and this was his assessment of the meaning of the story, was that he had done something that few people get the opportunity to experience . . . He had looked into the eyes of God. That is non-duplicable. The reader today cannot look into the eyes of God . . . not even a little bit.

So, the relevant preacher wants to know, what is the application? Well, since the audience can't look into the eyes of God (i.e., Peter's experience is not duplicable), then what is there to learn from what Peter did? The Gospel writers do not leave the reader to make a guess at the application. It is actually right there in the story. Peter and the disciples, having experienced this event came to the shore and made a simple conclusion, "You most certainly are God's Son!"⁴

³ But the reader will object because Jesus is here in some sense through the Spirit. That is true. He is here through the Spirit. His bodily presence, however, is not here, but in heaven at the right hand of the Father. The effect of His presence through the Spirit must be defined by the Scriptures, since one cannot know Him through the senses (touch, hear, see . . . that is why it is through the Spirit). Through the Spirit is clearly not the same as His physical presence (i.e., you cannot verify anything about Jesus through your senses, since that required His presence.) For instance you cannot verify that He is resurrected except through the testimony of the apostles, who saw Him! See Acts 10:39-41 where Peter states, "We are (eye) witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, *that is*, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead." Thus, Cornelius had no way of knowing about Jesus, His appearance, and the promise that He had made while on earth in His body. Peter gave him those facts by testifying what He had said and done as seen and heard by Peter while Jesus was here.

⁴ Now there are many implications of this simple discovery, which may include risking your life for Christ, giving up materials to God, etc., but those are not part of this story and would need to come from the message of the story. The article will cover more about that later.

That's it! That's what readers are to glean from this story. What Matthew is trying to relate to the reader is Peter's experience of looking into the eyes of God, especially since Matthew's reader will not be able to do it. Jesus appeared on earth 2000 years ago and Peter experienced it. So it was absolutely necessary for Matthew to record Peter's experience, so his reader could hear for himself about Jesus while He was here. This Jesus will never be seen on this earth in the reader's lifetime. Matthew wants the reader to realize the reality of this Jesus, who is alive in heaven, but not here! But Matthew knows that no one can know this Jesus unless someone tells about Him. Matthew wants to do that. He will tell his reader what the apostles saw and heard as they walked and talked with Him . . . something no one can experience today . . . but something they need to know . . . and so they can do it through the eyes of one who was there . . . an apostle. It is their experience ("these (signs) are written . . ." John 20:31) by eyewitnesses (the apostles) so that the reader will be enabled to "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His Name."

Now this is very important! The Gospels are about Jesus when He was on earth. They are not about methodology (financial tips, ways of evangelism, how to have success in some area). Jesus did not teach some process of evangelism, nor some psychological principles that will help the reader have a better relationship with someone. They are not meant as examples of good or bad behavior that should change in the readers' life. They aren't there to find examples of how to have friends, or mentors, accountability or transparency. They are meant solely to introduce the reader to the God who became a Man and walked this earth. This is the God who had to become a Man to fulfill all that the Old Testament had spoken of; the One who would come and live among humanity. And He came to change everything. He did not come to give self-improvement seminars, or to urge men to do the same, nor to give men a standard of living to which they could attain in this fleshly body. He came so that his followers would die to those 21st Century, westernized, human wisdom concepts (and the arrogance that comes with self-progress) and live solely based on the absolutely new life that is given to believers by this unbelievable awesome loving God who became an unbelievable awesome loving Man . . . Jesus. If the readers don't get that when they are done with the Gospels and think they are a bunch of examples of how they should live . . . they will have missed the appearance of God on earth and His impact on them. They will have lowered the greatest announcement and appearance in the history of mankind to a common principle for the improvement of their worthless Adamic life. They will have exchanged that moment of experiencing Jesus through the eyes of Peter for some self-improvement principle that will be buried with them. This is about Jesus and Him only. Only knowing Him and what He alone will do for the believer will change their life . . . forever!

If anyone wants psychological principles, financial investment principles, processes for evangelism, risk management, or other helpful processes, then they can stop reading this article, because there is nothing else here but Jesus. Jesus is the Father's solution for everything. Man is not the solution, not even a little bit. His self-improvement won't further the kingdom one little bit . . . not at all.⁵ The kingdom is

⁵ Refer to 1 Timothy where Paul tells Timothy that "bodily discipline is of little value."

coming in its all its glory with or without any particular man or his accomplishments. It's coming because Jesus was on earth and did what He did and said what He said. It's coming because of Jesus . . . alone! In fact, man's self-effort (read self-righteousness) is only going to get in his own way of appreciating and enjoying the journey to the kingdom, provided by Jesus. So . . . the reader of the Gospels should just sit back and look through the eyes of Peter and John, listen to what they heard and come to the same conclusion they came to about Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (see John 20:31). That realization will then change the reader's life . . . forever.

Now that's the point of the Gospels. Of all the courses that I teach, I tell the students that I love the Gospels. Why? Because it's the only book that records the Savior on earth, walking the roads of Galilee, the streets of Jerusalem, talking to people. It never happened before. It will never happen again in the same way. Of all the times I wish I was alive . . . it's then. It's not only rare time . . . it is unique. Don't miss it.

Part II:

A Cataclysmic Change

Now that it is immensely clear that Jesus' appearance was a one-time event that cannot be duplicated either today or previously, the question must be asked as to what difference His appearance made? Probably one of the greatest miscues in answer to this question is to say that Jesus came as an example of how to live. It shows up in sentences like this, "Be like Jesus," "Do what Jesus did," "What would Jesus do?" Thus Jesus becomes a textbook example of what the reader should try to attain to in self-improvement or moral, ethical living.

Thus, the whole summary of this view is that Jesus came to show man how to live. Some even say that Jesus elevated the Law to a new level of perfect living.⁶ The difficulty of this statement is obvious, but somehow it is missed. If the Law was impossible to keep, then how is it that having the One who kept the Law in the flesh (i.e., Jesus, Matthew 5:17-18) is going to make it easier to follow . . . as an example? Dr. Haddon Robinson once said in a sermon at Dallas Seminary that to make Jesus an example for him to follow, mocks him.⁷ It does so because Dr. Robinson feels that he is so totally inept at doing anything to the level at which Jesus did it. Yet it continues as people are told to be like Jesus as if they could.⁸ Or in the same manner, people want to be called "Christ-like." Of course, in a practical nature, this is not only impossible, it is bringing Christ down to our level of accomplishment, which is exactly what the Pharisees did with the Law.⁹ It will become possible, just as "keeping the Law" will become possible, but only through imputation (see Romans 8:4).

⁶ This occurs most frequently in the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount where they would claim that Jesus moved the external requirement of the Law (e.g., "commit adultery") to a requirement of the heart ("look on a woman to covet her"). However, the Law required obedience from the heart and Jesus was just pointing that out (Deuteronomy 6:4-6).

⁷ "Have you heard about . . . the Businessman who Missed the Bottom Line," Dallas Theological Seminary Chapel, October 7, 2010. This statement occurs at 7:00 – 8:30 minutes in the video.

⁸ Now it should be noted that there is an element here where one is to "follow" Jesus. Jesus, as the elder brother (cf. Hebrews 2) has, as a human, cleared the way for us to follow Him into the kingdom. Thus we will suffer (as He did) and then enter into our glory (as He did). But none of these things that we do are on our own, but simply because we are following the path of our Elder Brother who has cleared the way for us. Thus, we do imitate Him in the area of loyalty in faith, suffering and entering into the reward, but it is only and always because He has enabled it.

⁹ This is probably sourced in a mistranslation of Romans 8:28 which many seem to interpret as if "being conformed to the image of His Son" is possible in this life. While the explanation of this verse is beyond the space allotted here, in short it refers to the

Of course, hypothetical hermeneutics (i.e., setting Jesus up as an example) don't really work if they don't actually reflect the Scripture. So, a tour through the Gospels actually reveals rather quickly that using Jesus as an example that we should duplicate is tough, impossible, sledding.

I often start my Gospels class out by walking through the Book of John and asking students to raise their hands when they can do what Jesus did. In fact, I make it easy on them by telling them to raise their hands when they can do even a little part of what Jesus did. So starting in John 1 . . . “In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us . . . behold the Lamb of God . . . you are the King of Israel, you are the Son of God.” “Any hands raised yet? I thought not.”

So now we go on to John 2 . . . “making water into wine, throwing the moneychangers out of the temple, claiming to be able to raise up your own body in three days? How about John 3 where the Son of Man must be lifted up as the serpent in the wilderness? How about John 4 where Jesus offers the Samaritan woman living water and she declares that she has met the Christ. How about John 5, healing the lame man, or John 6, multiplying the loaves and fishes, walking on water? Or John 9 and the healing of the blind man, or chapter 10 with the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep, or John 11 with the raising of Lazarus?” As far as I know no one has ever done a little part of that deed, not even raising an animal or even a vegetable from the dead. Life giving is within the bounds of only One, and that's God. No one else can do it, not even a little bit.

Now when one like this professor says that Jesus did not come primarily as an example, one must ask what did He come to do? Interestingly, the Christian world is so focused on itself, on doing things as a way of validating themselves¹⁰ (i.e., the flesh), or of painting themselves as victims in some relationship, that they frequently don't know what to do with the Gospels if there is not some practical, everyday, application for them in every story, something that can elevate their worth or self-focus on their victimization. This was exactly the problem of the Pharisees. They looked at the Law and saw

resurrection of the body (“that He might be the firstborn among many brethren”). Note that this verse is in the “glorification” or the “kingdom” context of the last half of Chapter 8.

¹⁰ This is the Western concept of success, the “dream big” philosophy. The success in our lives with respect to God is not measured by physical means, not by numbers, not by health, not by financial success, nor even by conversions, baptisms, or other. Thus, the motivation for measurable accomplishment is not of God. God's measure is whether one walks with Him through His Son, and reflects that in his daily life, his daily opportunities and problems. It is solely a character issue. And if one acts in the character of God given to him in Jesus Christ, the merciful deeds will follow.

themselves as being able to keep it, to be able to contribute something to God, doing something that gave them worth. They did not see God! They saw themselves as able. But the Gospels are there because the reader can't do anything (any more than he could justify himself by keeping the Law) and when he does he only hinders the Kingdom, not adds to it. (Now many readers at this point will find strong objection since they feel that they must do something or it shows they don't care about God, e.g., Lordship salvation). Yet that is the exact point of the Law, to render you helpless so that you will embrace the full gift of God in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:23). The Law was not to show you how to be worthy, but unworthy. Jesus didn't come to encourage you to do a better job of keeping the Law, but to show you that He alone would keep it, and you cannot. You, on the other hand deserve the pits of hell for your best efforts.¹¹

A word of explanation about effort needs to be made here. There are two kinds of efforts; those that are done as a self-identity (bad) and those that are done because of who we are in Christ (good). Matthew 6:1-18 is the guideline here. The Pharisees did their deeds to be seen of men (men noted and valued them as doing good). Believers are to do their deeds only to be seen of God (God notes them and values them) because the mercy from which one acts is totally given by God through Christ. So, I often tell students to strive to do your deeds totally unnoticed by anyone, and make sure you are thinking only of God and the gift of mercy through Christ when you are doing them.

Let me give you a "for-instance." I love to catch fish with my son (although we have a long history of failure, we still try). When we go fishing, I don't have to tell anyone what I've done. I don't want the pastor to hold me up in front of the church and tell people what a good father I am. We generally don't say anything to anyone. Why? It is simply because it's our character to love fishing. We do it because we enjoy it. The enjoyment of doing it is enough. That's what the character of Christ given to us is like. To show mercy to other believers is not something that we should want announced in church, or for others to say that we are spiritual, or even to confirm to people that we are truly saved. We don't care about such things. Why? It is simply because it's our new character. We do it because we want to. We do it because we are expressing the gift of our Father, God . . . His character of mercy and our love of Jesus.

Now interpreters will try to obligate their readers, to give them guilt, to say if they're a Christian then they have to do these things or it shows that they are not. They will use everything they can to get others to "do" something . . . everything but teaching about the gift of mercy given to believers in Jesus. But "doing something" is not the problem. The problem is that believers do not know that they have a character of mercy given to them and thus do not act on it. They must know who they are in Christ so they can respond out of a Godly desire. Thus, the character in Christ should be taught. The

¹¹ Now it must be stated here what part imperatives have in the life of a believer. All activities are a result of the new character that has been placed in one. Thus what the believer does is because he wants to, not because of an obligation or to prove anything. What he does is because of gratefulness for what he has become in Christ.

motivation must be known before one is motivated by it. It is the “renewing on one’s mind” (Romans 12:3). And that motivation is what God alone sees. All other external acts are seen by men and judged by their standard. God judges on the motivation of the heart (1 Corinthians 4:5).

⁵ Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men’s* hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. (1 Corinthians 4:5)

Jesus did not come to give His followers an improved sin nature. He came to give them a new life, a perfect life, and perfect behavior. Now that’s a change . . . a cataclysmic change. (Of course that should result in an improved life, but the point is a perfect life that He puts in you.)

Part III:

THE LAST DAYS . . . ARE HERE!

The Old Testament prophesied a day when the failure of man would be ended. Of course it would surely come about in the kingdom after the bodily resurrection (Daniel 12:2), but the part about the renewal of the character of man was to come about in Messiah's appearance. Thus were the "last days." These were the days when God's fullness would become known and realized on earth . . . through His Messiah. The final return of Israel was forecast for these "last days" in Deuteronomy 4:30-31.

³⁰ "When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice. ³¹ "For the LORD your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them.

DEUTERONOMY 30:6: THE CIRCUMCISION OF HEART

As God moves through the Book of Deuteronomy He describes these last days when Israel returns to Him (30:1-6). He explains that when they return, since they need a new heart, He will give them His own heart so that they will obey Him and never have to be judged again (30:6). This is not a prophecy of an improved heart, or a better ability to obey. It is no less than the righteous character (desires) of God. This character **MUST** keep the Law since it is the very character that Jesus demonstrated on earth. So if the reader wants to be like Jesus, this is the only way . . . to receive the heart of God, one given by God through belief (John 1:12-13).

Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.

The Gospels and the epistles overwhelmingly document that this new heart has come. Paul states it in Colossians 2:11 and Romans 2:28-29.

“. . . and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ . . . “

“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. ²⁹ But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.”

The point is that when Jesus arrived He possessed this circumcision of heart and gave it to the believer of this age. Thus this "new heart," the righteous character of God, is the actual possession of the believer. That is a massive change, as different as night

and day.

GENESIS 3:14-24: THE NEW LIFE (“ETERNAL LIFE”)

Now this new heart, this new character, had been forecast to come when the “Seed of the Woman” would appear (Genesis 3:15). This was referred to by Adam as “Life,” something anticipated that would replace the “death” that he had passed on to his progeny. So when Messiah appeared He brought this “Life” with Him, this new character, the righteous character of God, which is in Him, would be given to man. This “eternal life” would be given to man at the appearance of the Messiah. This has been demonstrated in the life and resurrection of Christ in the Gospels, to be given to man through the Spirit following His resurrection.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. ²⁵ "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; (John 5:21-26).

That this “eternal life” is the possession of the believer (new character) is confirmed by John in his epistle in 5:13. A radical change has happened to the believer from the Old Testament in the coming of Messiah.

“These things are written to you who believe in the Name of the Son of God that you might know that you have eternal life.”

JEREMIAH 31:31-34: FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND A NEW HEART

Jeremiah prophesied during one of the lowest points of Israel’s history. Israel had rejected YHWH and His Law and was proceeding into exile in Babylon. The long history of Israel was failure. Of course this failure was prophesied in Deuteronomy 32, based on the fact, stated in Deuteronomy 29, that they never had been given a heart to obey.

⁴ "Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear. (Deuteronomy 29:4).

So finally in their hopeless last gasp in the land, God prophesied their hope would come in the Messiah who would give them a new heart, the heart of the Law, the character of God. Then they would obey totally without sin.

³¹ "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new

covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. ³³ "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Yet while they would have a heart that totally obeyed God, they still had the old heart that was guilty of violating the Law, of forsaking God. This required death. This death would be taken care of by Messiah as well (Isaiah 53), and it would be through His death that they would receive the “forgiveness of sins” according to Jeremiah 31:34b.

"for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Recorded in all the synoptic gospels is the event in which Jesus raises the man who has been lowered through the ceiling by his friends. As they were watching Him, He surprised them by, not healing him, but forgiving his sins. The reaction of the Pharisees was simple but stark. Recalling Jeremiah 31:34 they knew that He was claiming nothing less than being the Messiah of God, implementing the forgiveness of sins, which was to come in the Christ (Luke 5:21).

“The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this *man* who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?”

Jesus also stated this allusion to Jeremiah 31:31-34 at the last supper when He declared, “for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). The point is that this “forgiveness of sins” was not available in reality in the Old Covenant. Romans 3:25-26 also points this out.

“This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;” ²⁶ for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Jeremiah 31:34a stated that the relationship with God would be fully effective as it stated that believers would “know the Lord” and thus would not have to teach the signs and symbols of the Old Testament that were external and only pictured the ultimate Messiah. Now the believer would have God’s character as his own and thus would “know the Lord” fully. This is seen clearly when Jeremiah 31:34 is placed against John 17:3 and 1 John 2:27.

“They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the

greatest of them," declares the LORD, (Jeremiah 31:34)

"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (John 17:3).

²⁷ As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. (1 John 2:27).

EZEKIEL 36:25-27: CLEANSING FROM SIN AND A HEART TO "KEEP THE STATUTES"

The Prophet Ezekiel prophesied following his, and the nation's, exile into Babylon. He looked forward to the day when Israel would receive the new character so they would not come into judgment, and exile, again. This new character would be able to "keep the commands" fully, unlike the Adamic character, which could never do it and ultimately was what brought their judgment into exile.

Ezekiel talked of the forgiveness of sins and the cleansing, as does 1 John, who states it has come to pass.

"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; ***I will cleanse you from all your filthiness*** and from all your idols." (Ezekiel 36:25)

" . . . the blood of Jesus His Son ***cleanses us from all sin.***" (1 John 1:7)

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to ***cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***" (1 John 1:9)

Then Ezekiel discussed the new heart that would come in the believer through the work of the Spirit. 1 John also speaks of this as coming to pass.

Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ "I will put My Spirit within you and ***cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.*** (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

³ By this we know that we have come to know Him, if ***we keep His commandments.*** (1 John 2:3)

SUMMARY: THE CATAclysmic CHANGE IN THE BELIEVER

- **“Eternal Life”** This is the righteous character of the Father that is placed in believers. It is a quantifiable substance that reflects the exact character of God (perfection, holiness). Adam’s mortal life had to be replaced by God’s life (character). This character (called “eternal life”) is given to man when he has the new birth through belief in Jesus (1:1-3; 5:11-13). This not only includes the character but the bodily resurrection (see Daniel 12:2 for the allusion for this phrase).
- **“forgiveness of sins:”** Man still has the problem of the identity with his old Adamic self. This self is corrupted, being condemned to death, and must be paid for before the identity can be solely that of the New Adam and the new family of God. Thus, through the Messiah’s death the old Adamic self is judged and paid for. It is thus rendered moot. While it is still alive practically, it is judicially dead. Thus it can do nothing to effectively reject God (i.e., sin) since it is forgiven. Therefore the only life that the believer possesses as a real identity is the new life that cannot sin and must please God because it is His character.

When Jesus entered this earth as a baby, everything was about to change. The Law was about to be fulfilled and the keeping of the Law in Jesus imputed into the believer so that he could be righteous. Jesus would die on the cross, which would bring about the full forgiveness of sins, rendering the Adamic nature judicially moot. In Christ’s resurrection came the assurance of the presence of the new character in the believer, and the guarantee of the believer’s bodily resurrection into the kingdom. Thus, Jesus’ appearance brought the full guarantee of the kingdom through resurrection. The believer would be able to give up his mortal life for the gospel knowing his reward would not be now, but in the kingdom to come in a resurrected body with the One whom the apostles met and whose presence was recorded in, the Gospels.

PART IV

THE NATURE OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVE (THE GOSPELS)

Before one begins the interpretation of the gospels, one must understand the nature of the genre that the author has chosen to impart his message. The nature of this story is what is known as “historical narrative.” Now the answer as to why this genre was used is quite simple. Historical narrative is used to reflect a plot scheme that occurred in the past, in history, for the purpose of establishing a message to the reader. Now the various messages that may be imparted to the reader are the following:

- To recall an event(s) that will relate a learning philosophy through which the reader will learn a lesson, that is, to use the philosophy that was successful (comedy) or reject the philosophy that was unsuccessful (tragedy). (e.g., George Washington chopping down the cherry tree).
- To recall an event(s) that establishes a foundational basis in history to give knowledge to the reader so that he can act on that historical basis. (e.g., the book “1776” which establishes the foundational basis on which freedom was gained so that the reader appreciates the nation which he now enjoys).

Now it is not infrequent for some historical narratives to include both aspects. That is because the behavior (philosophy) that established the foundation on which the reader stands is frequently the same behavior that continues that foundational philosophy in the reader, although they will be acted out differently due to a different (i.e., post-foundational) scenario.

This is the case in the Gospels. Primarily the Gospels are to establish the foundation in time on which the church will act. Thus Jesus appears and changes things so that the church can walk on a different basis than had occurred before. Yet because the Gospels occur in the Biblical Story, they reflect a continual Hero (“God”) who has one message throughout His story (i.e., enthronement of the Christ, Psalm 2) and one response for the reader (i.e., faith in that Christ). That single response is to have faith in the “Seed of the Woman” (Genesis 3:15), the Messiah to come (Psalm 2), Jesus (the Gospels), who is to come again and establish His kingdom on earth (Revelation). Thus the Gospels play a foundational part in what is to come.

As God moves in history (recorded in historical narrative), there are three basic characters of concern. Two of them are in the narrative itself and offer the contrasting alternatives, God or Satan. The third character is outside of the historical narrative and is the reader who has an opportunity to respond to God or Satan. While the situations in the Biblical story change and are not repeatable, they form a foundation for the reader to understand. And while the reader does not have Christ present in front of him like the apostles, his faith must be the same apostolic faith that they had (Refer to 2 Peter 1:1 where one is instructed to have the same faith as the apostles who saw Jesus).

“Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, “to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ . . .”)

Thus the Gospels are about the appearance of God in human form, Jesus. He will come and be observed by unique men, apostles. They will affirm Jesus in His unique appearance so that the readers can observe and hear through their eyes and ears. (see 1 John 1:1-4). The conclusion of the Gospels is that men might believe on the One who was eye-witnessed by the apostles. The readers are not apostles (or disciples) and cannot duplicate their feat as eye-witnesses. They do not have the same situation. They cannot repeat what they did. They, however, can come to the same conclusions that the apostles had based on what they saw and heard. They will not have their power, nor be inspired as they were. They will be the beneficiaries of these gospel writers. This is what John tells his readers in 1 John 1:1-4. The apostles eye-witnessed Jesus so that the readers might listen to them and believe.

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life--² and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us--³ what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.⁴ These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

Thus, what is the conclusion that the reader should make after reading Matthew’s recalling of Peter’s experience with walking on water? It is the same conclusion that Peter made . . . “You are most certainly God’s Son!” It is not to take risks determined by some preacher or interpreter based on some contemporary perception of one’s audience. Nor is it to try to construct some similar presence of Jesus in your life, that is, to assume that Jesus is, or wants to be, talking to you audibly (or inaudibly)¹². Nor is it to pretend Jesus is really there, speaking to you, telling you to do things. It is simply to . . . believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that what He has done for you is foundational for your life, i.e., “eternal life.”

IMPLICATIONS

One of my PhD students once said regarding the Bible, “Remember . . . “you” is never “you!” His point was that the entire Bible is written about people other than the

¹² This is the current “God speaks today” movement where people are urged to try to get God to speak to them, or in other terms, to be trained to listen to God who wants to communicate with them. This is simply an effort to bring what happened in the Gospels or in Acts to their own reality. However, one must recognize that historical narrative is not normative. Only the philosophy developed by the historical narrative is normative.

reader. It is thus important to realize that all this literature is historical.¹³ That is the nature of historical, grammatical, normal interpretation. Thus, the disciples, Jesus, or the Pharisees in the gospels . . . are not you. While there are similarities, they common bond is in philosophy. That is, we share either the philosophy of the Pharisees (Satanic, fleshly) or we share the philosophy of Jesus (Godly, revelation of Messiah). But there is very little other than that which we share in this historical narrative. Mostly the reason we don't share it is because Jesus was there! And He is not here (in the same way) now!

Thus the function of the apostles is to eyewitness Jesus in His appearance so that we can believe (illumination) what they say (inspiration) about what they saw and heard. So while there will be things that the disciples do from which we may learn, it is all in the nature of faith toward God in His Messiah. It is NOT processes, insights into psychology, how to have small groups, large groups, leadership, etc. The only application is that of having faith in this Messiah whom they eye-witnessed.

What you will learn in the Gospels is about a real God who came to earth as a real human and died for our sins and was resurrected to show He and we will appear in the Kingdom. Thus it is His resurrection that drives us now, not a process, not a technique, not gathering 12 men around us, not praying with some special (i.e., superstitious) technique. One is only trust in this Messiah who the apostles eye-witnessed. That is what we will derive. What should we trust Messiah to do . . . whatever He said He would do for us in this age and the next.

You can't get out of the boat. You can't watch your bread be multiplied. You can't watch your Savior being crucified on a Roman cross, nor will you see the resurrected Christ. But you can, based on the testimony of these apostles, exclaim with Peter after walking on water that He is the Christ of God; with the multitude who saw the bread multiplied that He is the Greater Prophet than Moses, with Thomas when He saw the resurrected Christ, "My Lord and My God." And you can listen to John retell the signs and believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have eternal life.

So, what shall I do? ("What's the application?") Live like you are a child of God, paid and bought for by the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, headed for a kingdom on earth that has no end. Show and give the mercy Jesus has given you as fast as you can and as much as you can. And one day you will look God in the eyes and proclaim, "You certainly are the Son of God!" Oh, yes, and what will you do because He is the Christ and has promised you eternal life in His kingdom? Abandon everything that you hold as valuable in this mortal life and live for Him and His value . . . eternal life.

¹³ Within the historical literature, however, there may be prophecy, which may or may not apply to the future reader.

PART V

An Introductory Illustration for Gospel Narrative

Matthew 10:5-6

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "**Do not go in *the way of the Gentiles***, and do not enter *any* city of the Samaritans; ⁶ but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

(Mat 10:5-6)

Application

These verses occur in the Gospel of Matthew, 10:5-6. Here is what Jesus is saying by way of reading the imperatives.

- Do not go to the Gentiles
- Do not go to the Samaritans
- Go only to Israel

If you were preaching this verse and needed to apply it to your audience, what would you say? You couldn't tell your audience to go to the Gentile nations, since that is clearly restricted by this verse. In fact, if these imperatives are for the audience, they are restricted from taking the gospel to anyone but Jews.

So, this verse is seldom preached and most move instead to Matthew 28:19.

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶ But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee . . . ¹⁸ And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying . . . ¹⁹ "Go therefore and **make disciples of all the Gentiles** (i.e., "nations") . . ."

(Mat 28:16-20)

In general this is what the imperatives instruct.

- Make disciples of the Gentiles (i.e., "nations"). Note that when the word for "Gentiles" or "nations" is used in the plural in Matthew it always excludes Jews. Jews are designated by the use of the singular, i.e., "nation." Thus this command would be only to go to the Gentiles and exclude the Jews.

Summary

The question is; why does Jesus say **not** to go to the Gentiles one time (10:6) and then later in the book say to go exclusively to the Gentiles (28:19)? On what basis does the church (or you) use Matthew 28:19 instead of Matthew 10:5-6? How do you explain the difference in use? You cannot just pick and choose. The text itself must determine the application, not the reader, based on his present perception of what works.

Frequently interpretation of the gospels simply takes what Jesus says or does and applies it to ourselves, negating the things that don't seem applicable and accepting the things that seem to be good to do. Because of this some assume that God is speaking to us like He did to Jesus, we can do miracles like Jesus, etc. Of course, by doing that one incurs a difficulty to one's orthodoxy, since if one assumes they are the ones who are to make disciples in Matthew 28:19 then their ministry excludes the Jews.

Solution

It is important to notice that both commands are in a historical story or historical narrative. In other words, they tell something that happened in the past. Obviously the author does not mean that everything in a historical narrative is to be duplicated by the reader in his own situation. Thus, neither command of Jesus is, by itself, an indication that the reader should obey it! This is obvious since many commands by Jesus to the disciples are clearly not to be obeyed (e.g., "Go . . . find a donkey . . . and a colt . . . bring them to Me." (Matthew 21:1-2))

How one applies Gospel narrative is only found by learning how the author seeks to communicate a message to the reader, and from that message how the author wants to alter the reader's behavior (i.e., application). After learning how an author constructs narrative to impart meaning, only then may the reader know what the author wants the reader to do. Note the following command by Jesus to two disciples that no one thinks about applying in their own case.

When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "**Go** into the village opposite you, and immediately you will **find** a donkey tied *there* and a colt with her; **untie** them and **bring** them to Me.

(Mat 21:1-2)

Why is it obvious to the reader that he is not to duplicate this imperative(s)?

- The reader is not approaching Jerusalem
- The reader is not with the historical Jesus in that situation and thus getting a donkey for Him would have no purpose
- Should the reader attempt to obey the command to search for the donkey he would not likely find one, and if he did it is unlikely that the owner would

agree for him to take it, and further even if he did and the owner consented, Jesus would not be waiting to use it.

The point is that it is an historical situation, a one-time incident that cannot be duplicated by the reader. In other words, the event/story is included in the historical narrative for some other purpose than direct application! So the question is, how does one apply (or not apply) these passages in both Matthew 10:5-6 and 28:19, especially since the same historical issues are present?

- The reader is not in Israel where Jesus will send the disciples in 10:5-6
- The reader is not one of the 11 (or 12) disciples to whom Jesus historically issues both commands
- If the reader did go throughout Israel with the message of Messiah, he would not be able to heal every disease and every kind of sickness as the disciples could, according to 10:1.

Thus, what is the justification to choose one imperative over another?

It is thus important to proceed to learn about historical narrative and how it makes its message plain. Only through an objective process can one determine what the action is (application) that the author wants the reader to apply. The answer to the whole conundrum is the nature of narrative, the nature of plot. Plot is story and story changes from the beginning to the end. Story is non-normative. It is not written for the reader to imitate the parts. Story changes! It is only the overall message (philosophy) of the book that will apply to the reader, and then only as it contributes to the larger Biblical story.

Story and Plot¹⁴

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times¹⁵” 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. He continues to ride with the main character, through his 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 plot. It is in the change of the story that the meaning or the message of the author is communicated. By the end of the story almost everything changes from what it was at the beginning. The main character frequently is not the same as he was in the beginning. At minimum, this protagonist (normally the main character) usually has learned something that he didn't know in the beginning, either through additional knowledge or experience. The circumstances are always different in the end from those in the beginning. Typically by the end, the enemies of the hero protagonist 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 its parts, is that it is one story, one plot. Within this Biblical story, things must, by nature, 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 to see Jesus hanging on a cross, nor witness His resurrection. No longer can one stand with Peter and watch as the first Gentile joins the body of Christ 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 yet to come. The Bible is a story, a plot, and things and events come and go so as to play their individual, unique, part in the story. These events appear, contribute their segment, and leave. Story involves . . . plot involves . . . change.

¹⁴ When the term “plot” is used by itself in this writing it assumes a “dramatic plot” where the individual events move from setting through conflict through rising action to a resolution and a denouement. It does not mean “episodic plot” or anthology where the events are linked only by common theme and, while they may move in consecutive order, do not move through the above progressive plot sequence. The Bible frequently is interpreted (very commonly) as episodic plot or anthology and thus introduces considerable error since these episodes do not have enough information in them to interpret properly. Thus the interpreter includes his own perceptions into the interpretation and introduces error.

¹⁵ From “A Tale of Two Cities,” by Charles Dickens.

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 the only way of life with many teachers and preachers, and are taught, not only apart from their immediate context, but also apart from their place in the Biblical plot. It is interesting that there appears to be **no** story in the Bible that can be interpreted on its own without knowing the preceding events and philosophies, and frequently, what is to follow. Thus the lessons of past Biblical historical narrative **become unobtainable** without understanding what part of the story the event occurred and how that part 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 killing of a man into someone simply fighting off his or her envy, greed or lust. It’s a long way from killing a real man to the suppression of one’s self-centeredness. If David and Goliath is an example for the reader then why doesn’t the reader do what David did? . . . because David isn’t there as an example of how the reader should act. And so the interpreter changes the giant to symbolize something like one’s envy. This is solely an invention of the interpreter. Very simply God did not put that story in the Bible to teach people about conquering evils in their personality. To derive that meaning from the story is, not only absolutely wrong, it doesn’t work in real life. While David did kill a giant, one cannot kill their envy, lust and greed. As much as one tries, and hopefully we do, envy, lust and greed just keep hanging around. They are much bigger than that. They will hang around as part of our being until one’s body (and their evil character) finally lies down in the dust.

The story of David and Goliath was not written as a separate morality tale. It is an event in a plot and by itself it does not contain enough information to be interpreted correctly (e.g., who are these Canaanites, who is this David, what gives the Israelites the right to take the land from its occupants, or to kill every man, woman and child of the cities it conquers?). One cannot know its meaning without knowing what preceded it and what follows it. As one tours through the Biblical story it will be seen that David is being equipped by God to be His unique Anointed One to rule over Israel and the world on behalf of God. God is showing David that as God’s King, David will be enabled to conquer Canaanites if he trusts God. So God conquers Goliath to show David that he can do anything if he trusts in the God that established him as king. Now that David has accomplished that great feat, David knows experientially that he can conquer all the enemies of God.

Now since there is only one Anointed One of God (i.e., the Davidic king) the reader cannot be Him. David was that one. Today Jesus is that One. The reader is not David, neither is the reader Jesus. The reader is not God's Christ. The Bible is not about the reader. It is about the Christ, the One who will conquer all for God. Could the reader have accomplished the actions that were uniquely for the Christ, then he would not have needed the Christ to save him from the enemies of God and put him in the Kingdom.

It is stories like this, lined up in order, which fit into the 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 God. As the reader continues he will see the beauty and quality of this book. 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. If the reader does not determine that this is inspired historical narrative then the reader will piece things together based on his perception of what is right and ends up with a book that reflects the reader's theology, a theology the Bible was written to contradict, not affirm.

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 might use a bedtime story to impart some moral lesson. A parent uses story to communicate a lesson, even though it is less direct than just giving a principle of life. For instance, a bedtime fairy tale is simply an illustration so the moral is more easily understood by giving an example of its use.

Historical narrative may be illustrative, but frequently it is foundational.

Several years ago the book, "1776" came out. It is the historical narrative of America's founding retelling the stories from the siege of Boston through to the victories of George Washington that founded our country. When one emerges from reading this book, one does not attempt to duplicate the great feat of Washington's crossing of the Delaware River. In fact, there is very little that one can duplicate from the book. The events of that book list the establishment details of this country. When reading it I understood deeply the blood that was given so

that I could have my freedom. And it urged me to a greater sense of patriotism. In other words, it detailed for the reader the foundation on which he stood in America so that he could continue to defend its freedoms, standing on a foundation already established by these brave men.

The Gospels do the very same thing. As historical narrative, we as the reader see the foundation established by Jesus Christ on which we stand and from which we continue. We do not attempt to duplicate the stories in our own life since they cannot be duplicated. Jesus entered the world in Bethlehem born of a virgin as prophesied. Jesus was tempted by Satan like the first Adam and emerged without sin. Jesus went to the cross as a perfect Lamb of God, died and was resurrected because of His own righteousness. He ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father to fulfill Psalm 110. Now that He has accomplished those one-time non-duplicable feats, I now can walk in His perfect imputed righteousness. This is the prime meaning of the Gospels, the historical record of the appearance of Jesus, the Christ of Psalm 2, so that I can affirm who I am and on what basis I walk.

Episodic or Dramatic Plot?

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 or is it a selection for a moral or ethical purpose? Once one decides that this is more than a documentation of history, the second question is; are the stories tied together loosely (thematically, and to be interpreted separately) or are they tied together in a purposeful sequence (plot) to demonstrate a meaning? These choices define the two types of narrative literature.

Note well: One must decide which type of literature the Bible is, since to choose wrong will introduce error into his/her interpretation. If one chooses “dramatic plot” and it is “episodic plot,” error will ensue. Should he choose “episodic” instead of “dramatic” plot, then again error will ensue. Events are interpreted as part of one or the other. It cannot be both!

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. While the stories are normally in a consecutive sequence, typically each story stands separately and individually demonstrates a morality tale.

Situation comedies are typically “episodic plot.” The old show “The Beverly Hillbillies” was typical of this type. While each episode shared a common theme of right and wrong (hillbilly justice) and they roughly moved chronologically (from the discovery of oil), they could be watched out of sequence and individually to determine the lesson from each episode.

The second type is called “dramatic (or “progressive”) plot” where the stories are tied together to demonstrate a dramatic progression (plot) to bring about a message or moral (of the story). In progressive plot each story only contributes its part to the overall story and does not carry a moral or ethical meaning apart from the movement of the larger story. In other words, the individual event’s major function is to contribute its part to the overall story and message. While there may be individual lessons to be learned they cannot be determined apart from the part that the event plays in aiding the understanding of the overall message.

An example of dramatic plot is a play. If one enters the play during Act II, Scene 1, and attempts to interpret that scene solely on what happens there, they will likely err. The reason is that the scene is based on what has gone before, and may not be understood completely without knowing what comes later. In other words, entering in that late scene does not give the reader enough information to interpret the scene and achieve the moral lesson of the play. An example of a difficult to interpret scene is “flashback,” or an “aside.” Since these are scenes that move apart from the chronological timeline, they must have the sequential plot that came before and after in order to understand how they fit and contribute to the meaning.

This is probably best illustrated by how movies are to be watched. If you and your family were to watch a movie, you would insist that everyone sit down at the very beginning. Why? Because they would miss out on the information that was given in the setting (first few minutes) and then would not be able to figure out the rest of the movie if they missed it.

The two basic types of plots, as mentioned, are anthology or episodic plot, or progressive or dramatic plot.

An Episodic Plot (anthology): This is generally in a chronological structure, but it consists of a series of loosely related incidents, usually of chapter length, tied together by a common theme.¹⁶

Progressive or Dramatic Plot: This is generally 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).¹⁷ Movement and change,

¹⁶ 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

¹⁷ Chen, p. 2.

particularly in a chronological progression to an ultimate purpose, characterize it. But the most important thing to recognize is that all the parts contribute to a single message developed by knowing the whole 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 works¹⁸ with a common theme), or a collection that forms a progressive movement called "plot" or what is called dramatic plot.

The question of David and Goliath and its interpretation is dependent on whether one sees the Book of Samuel (and the Bible) as being episodic or dramatic with respect to plot. If Samuel is episodic then the story can be interpreted on its own with only a loose connection to the overall recording of individual events. If it is dramatic, then it cannot be interpreted without knowing the precise part that it plays within the plot of Samuel (and the Bible). Of course, the fact that it begins with a Judge, involves a conflict under Saul, and ends with David on the throne with the Davidic Covenant in hand demonstrates that it is not an anthology, but dramatic plot.

Common Theme

That the events of Bible have at least a common theme is also obvious. The fact that this 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 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 connected to the rest of the Bible. Yet the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar (Genesis 38), if left to its own, provides quite a quandary for the reader. God killed Tamar's husband, Judah's eldest son, for some (?) seemingly unstated reason. Judah then ordered his second eldest son to provide children for Tamar for some seemingly unstated reason (?). The son avoids this

¹⁸ 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 dramatic plot, but have some common connection. This leads Dr. Ryken to misunderstand the interpretation of individual stories. For instance, he sees "Cain and Abel" as an illustration of psychological sibling rivalry disconnected from anything prior or following.

task and is stricken by God (again for some seemingly unstated reason (?)). Judah promises to give her the last son (for some reason) but doesn't really intend to. Tamar, now denied the youngest son, then pursued the father-in-law's seed through deception (dressed as a temple prostitute). Yet, for some reason (?) in the conclusion Judah complements her for this deceptive action ("you are more righteous than I.") This is a difficult story to tell to one's young daughter if is isolated as an individual morality story. 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) becomes clear. However, the solution to how Tamar and Judah fit into this plot must be dealt with in depth during a study in Genesis as "dramatic plot."

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.

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 his king, who is much larger than David, 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 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 unbelievers (or their families and animals like Joshua), which is exactly what David did. It was the very reason all the observers in the story praised him and even made up a song to celebrate this mass killing.¹⁹

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

¹⁹ Interpreters of this sort are in essence trying to make the story palatable by changing the application to something less than killing. Yet, since many of them are literalists, they avoid the very interpretive issue of what justified David in killing another man, when they do not advocate that today. In order to interpret the passage, one must initially determine on what basis David could justify killing a giant. Yet that determination must include information from earlier in 1 Samuel, and indeed, earlier in the Biblical story.

bring too much of his own theology to the text and the story. If that happens, then the Bible only tells the reader 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 bring 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 from which a difficulty (conflict) comes to the protagonist in the story and then is overcome in 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 allowed her to achieve that 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 enabled him to change in order to “win?” These are progressive (or dramatic) plots where the movement clearly reveals the 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. But the change was reflected by 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) brings her to the resolution as the prince's bride. Thus her philosophy was a “winning” philosophy, and the reader gains insight by observing 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 Scrooge's (and the reader's own) original evil philosophy.

Dramatic or Progressive Plot in the whole

That the Bible is dramatic (or progressive) plot would seem to be obvious. The serenity found in Genesis 1—2 destroyed by the serpent is never recovered until the victory at the end of the story when the “serpent of old” 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 response to rectify the change (Genesis 4 through Revelation 19). The final resolution in the re-establishment of God's 1000-year kingdom on earth in 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 returned in the end. The Hero, God, is victorious in re-establishing His original goal. This is dramatic plot. Very simply then, the reader wants to determine the “philosophy” of this God so that he may adopt it for his own.

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 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 possible that these are anthologies since the continuity may become limited to one person's 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. But as the plot proceeds he alters 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, and 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 philosophy in his own life avoiding the philosophies that didn't work.

The Bible has a main character who has His purpose stated early the book. This Main Character is God. He never changes since He is the Hero and but continues His

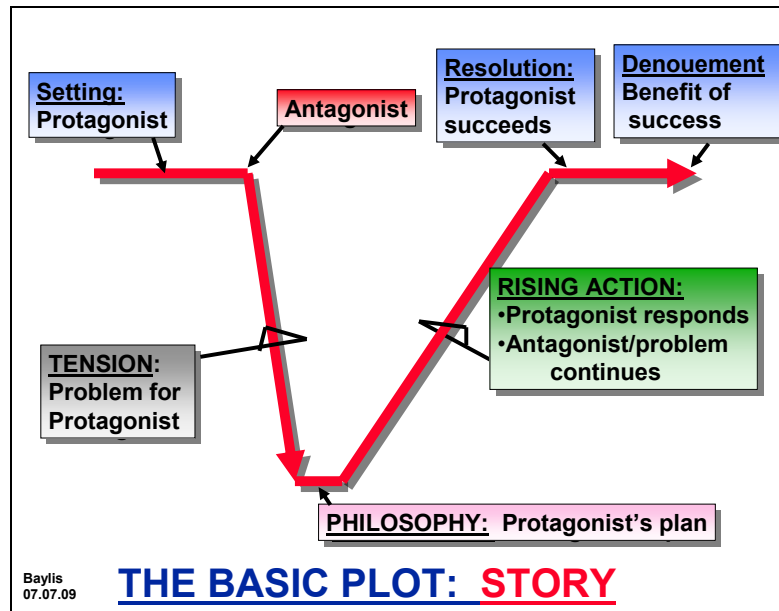
right purpose throughout the book. It is obvious that He continues to work with His images (representatives), mankind, in order to bring them to His right moral or ethical purpose. Thus the Bible is a progressive (dramatic) plot wherein the Hero, God, continues through the failure of his images in an 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 “Seed” in Genesis 3:15 is clearly followed through Seth. Then the promise of the Hero is expanded in Genesis 12 with Abraham as a nation that is, at least in a small way, developed in the 12 sons of Jacob by the end of Genesis. That Seed is once again picked up in 1 Samuel when David appears and then he is promised that his Seed will occupy the throne of Israel forever. That Seed is then traced through Kings and Chronicles. The seed line of Adam, Abraham and David is picked up in Matthew 1²⁰ and Luke 3 where it is traced to Jesus. From the point of the appearance of this fulfillment of the Seed in Jesus the Bible follows Him until He sits on the eternal throne in Revelation 21, delivering the rule of the earth back to the Hero, God the Father. Thus the progression in events with the success and failure of the potential representatives is seen until Jesus comes. Then God brings resolution through this perfect representative of the Hero, Jesus the Christ. Again, this 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.

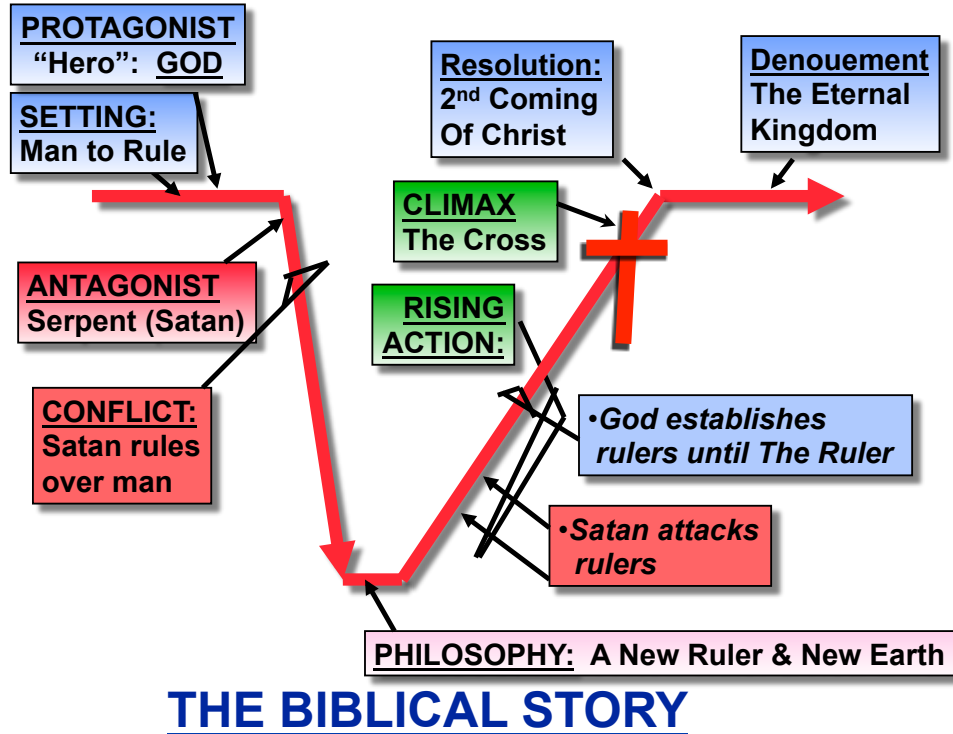
²⁰ The line in Matthew 1 is the Davidic King line that Jesus inherits. The line in Luke 3 is the seed line that traces Jesus’ actual physical inheritance back to David through Nathan back to Adam.



- 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. Also the antagonist will also be introduced. 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 interrupts the setting by the introduction of the antagonistic action toward the protagonist or his situation.
- Rising Action:** This is the movement of the protagonist to rectify the conflict and deal with the antagonistic activity. While there may be one conflict introduced by the antagonist, it may be that the conflict continues as the antagonist appears repeatedly to oppose the hero.
- Resolution:** This is where the antagonistic action is destroyed by the victory over the conflict.
- Denouement:** This is the bookend to the setting, the results of the victory that re-establish the purpose of the protagonist. Frequently this is defined as the “tying up of strings.”

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

The Conflict

The antagonist 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 Representative (new Adam) and a new creation that will represent Him fully.

The Rising Action (Activity)

The Protagonist will then move to enact this philosophy 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. But the antagonist, Satan, through his representative, the Pharisees, will execute Him. 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 and rule God's kingdom on the created earth.

The Resolution (Anticipatory of the Ultimate Resolution)

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

The Overriding Plot (God's purpose, Satan's purpose)

It is important thusly to note the purpose of God that threads through every event, proverb, psalm, epistle, and then culminates in Revelation. It is also important to note the opposition to the Hero's purpose in the ongoing threat of the antagonist.

God's Purpose:

God's ongoing single purpose is to establish His Character through His Son on the Throne of the Universe.

In the Old Testament it is the hope of the Seed of the Woman that delivers and that Seed and message are to be carried by Israel to the Gentiles. In the New Testament it is the arrival of the Seed of the Woman in the Second Person of the Trinity, as He arrives, offers Himself to Israel who rejects, delays His judgment, and then returns to establish God's Character on the earth.

The Serpent's Purpose:

The purpose of the serpent is to oppose God's establishment of His kingdom (His character) on earth through His Son, through the deceit of man and, failing that, the killing of man.

The purpose of the serpent from the beginning is to oppose God's purpose by deceiving those who carry the Seed and the message (Israel) in the Old Testament. In the New Testament he will try to deceive the Son, and failing that to kill Him. Failing that, he will try to deceive the world, the followers of the Son, and continue deceiving Israel. In lieu of his failure to deceive he will kill the followers and Israel as martyrs.

The Purpose and Opposition in the Old Testament

Of course, Satan was successful at deceiving Adam and ruining the first creation. But following that God's purpose was to bring forth the Son (the New Adam) through the Seed. Israel was to be the carrier of this message but was deceived by the serpent and would not receive it themselves, and thus not take it. Therefore the whole of the Old Testament is to/about Israel who continually rejected the message for themselves and for those to whom they were to carry it, the Gentiles. This message is exemplified in Jonah who was deceived by the serpent and would not receive the message of mercy and refused to carry it to the Gentiles.

The Purpose and Opposition in the New Testament

The message arrives in the Son in the New Testament and is offered to Israel who is still deceived by the serpent and rejects the message in the Christ. The Christ then appoints 12 apostles to carry the message (Him) to the Gentiles in lieu of Israel's rejection. During this period of time (the church age), Satan continues to deceive the world and the followers of the Christ. If he cannot deceive then he moves to kill them through the opposition.

Matthew (the Gospels) as its Part in the Overall Plot

Thus the Seed of the Woman appears in the flesh (God's character itself) and offers Himself as the fullness of the message to Israel (Matthew 10—12) so they might embrace it and carry it to the Gentiles. Matthew 10:1-6 demonstrates this message going to them and by Matthew 12 they have rejected it, calling Him of Satan.

Thus the Message becomes the Messenger as well in lieu of Israel's rejection and appoints 12 apostles to carry this message to the Gentiles in the place of Israel (Jesus as the perfect Israelite). Thus the Abrahamic Covenant becomes fulfilled in Jesus apart from the fullness of Israel's participation. (Matthew 13—23).

But there is a delay before the Kingdom, as Israel must turn to Christ to fulfill the extent of the Abrahamic Covenant (seed as the stars of the heavens, the sand of the seashore). They will return in the 144,000 (Revelation 7) in the second one-half of the tribulation and minister for the Christ they rejected. It is then that the Christ will return and embrace His nation physically as He saves them and takes them into the kingdom. (Matthew 24—25).

Finally in the eternal state of the universe, Israel will fully play their function out as the Gentiles stream to the City of Jerusalem (Israel) to worship the King of the Jews (and the universe); the Son of God on the Throne of the universe. (Revelation 21:1—22:5).

Matthew (as representative of the Gospels) as Plot

Having seen the overall place of Matthew in the Biblical Story, it is important to see how the narrative of the story of Matthew itself plays out. Now as one proceeds to study the Book of Matthew they must determine whether it is anthology (Episodic Plot) as a collection of stories as separate morality tales, or whether it is Dramatic Plot where the story is a complete movement from beginning to end and each event plays only its separate part in building and contributing to the message of the plot as a whole.

Episodic or Dramatic Plot

The question is whether Matthew changes from beginning to end, i.e., progressive or dramatic plot. The answer is yes. Jesus, as a baby, is introduced as the Christ, and He appears on earth. By the end, He is dead, risen, and in heaven. Has anything else changed according to the author? The answer must be an absolute, “Yes!” The forgiveness of sins has occurred fully in the death of The Christ and Jesus has the very authority of God on earth (Psalm 2).

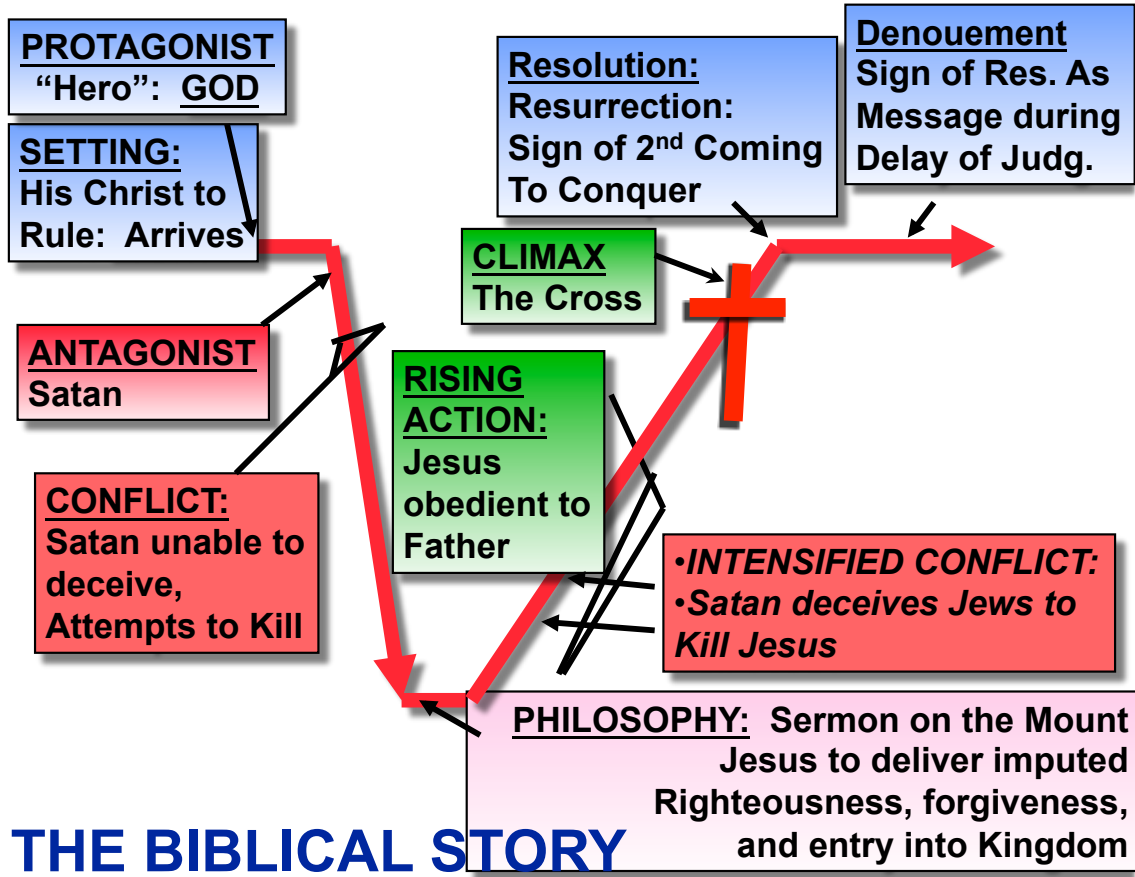
Conflict. Is there a place at which an evil character obstructs the pathway of the Hero, i.e., conflict? Again the answer is yes, at Jesus’ temptation by Satan in Matthew 4.

Climax. Is there a place where the entire success of the Hero is at risk, i.e., climax? Again the answer is yes, at the cross.

Resolution. Is there a place at which victory by the Hero is clearly demonstrated, i.e., the resolution or validation? Again, the answer is yes, at the resurrection.

Denouement. Is there a place at the end of the story where the benefits of the resolution (victory) are enjoyed as a result of that event? The answer again is yes! The disciples are sent to the Gentiles to give the resurrection-validated gospel.

The Gospel of Matthew as story is thus in the form of dramatic or progressive plot, with all the parts of narrative present.



The Setting

The setting goes from Matthew 1--3 until the conflict enters brought by the antagonist. During the setting, the Hero's Representative, the Christ, Jesus, is introduced along with His desires (good). God's desires reflected in the Old Testament were to create a physical universe in which His Christ will rule over it on His behalf through the Nation, Israel.

The Conflict

The antagonist enters the picture in Matthew 4 and brings about the conflict by trying to once again cause the failure of the Representative of God, the Christ. Jesus will pass the test, being faithful to the Father, and will continue to proceed to demonstrate His obedience reflected in His words with His life as He goes to the cross.

The Rising Action (Philosophy)

The Protagonist then responds with His plan (philosophy) in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5—7 as Jesus reflects fully the philosophy of God revealed in the Old Testament, fulfilled in Himself. He is going to, very simply, telling people to reject the old dead creation, and their leader, Satan. He then offers them the new life, prophesied in the Old Testament to come in Him.

The Rising Action (Activity)

The Protagonist will then move to enact this philosophy by bringing being the One obedient to the Father and being the sacrifice for sins as predicted so that He can impute the righteousness of the Father (and Himself) to others.

God's action promised in the philosophy will be implemented as His Representative, the Christ, appears in the Gospels. But the antagonist, Satan, through his representative, the Pharisees, will execute Him. He will have died as a substitute for the sins of the old creation.

The Resolution (Anticipatory of the Ultimate Resolution)

God will then resurrect Him (victory over Satan's death threat) so He can return and rule God's kingdom on the created earth. Ultimately, resurrection is the sign that this Ruler will then return to execute Satan and establish the rule of God in the earthly Kingdom.

The Denouement

Based on the resurrection guarantee, the disciples will proceed to deliver the message of the Sermon on the Mount to the Gentiles, as Israel as been set aside for a time.

Conclusion

The difference between Matthew 10:5-6 and 28:19 becomes clear on how it will be solved. Matthew is plot! And as a dramatic plot, things, of necessity, change. Therefore what is a meaningful imperative early in the story may not be appropriate later in the book. In fact, since Matthew itself is part of a story, one must be careful to pronounce any imperative in the book as applicable without analyzing the narrative of Matthew and its part in the larger narrative of the Bible.

The command of Matthew 10:5-6 was there because Jesus, as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Promise, was sending the disciples only to Israel because they were to be the priests to the Gentiles (Genesis 12:1-3) by delivering that message of Messiah as the

forgiveness of sins. Israel was to accept it and take it to the Gentiles. However, Israel rejects (Matthew 12) and Jesus prepares 12 Jewish disciples to take that message to the Gentiles in lieu of Israel during the age to come (church age). That is the message of Matthew 28:19.

Later (Matthew 24-25) Israel will repent and take that message to the Gentiles as well and thus the nation will take its proper place in the Abrahamic Covenant. Until then the message will go to the Gentiles in the Apostolic Doctrine.

The Explanation of Matthew 10:6

One of the first things to notice is that the Bible, in general, is not about Gentiles. While there are Gentiles (Job, Ninevah), the historical literature, the Pentateuch, the prophets are, in the majority, about Israel. The next thing to notice is that the Gospels are the same!! While they do have Gentiles in them (the Samaritan woman, the centurion), they are few and far between. The Gospels are about Israel!

The Abrahamic Covenant: The Gospel to the “Families of the Earth”

When one reads Genesis 12:1-3 and the promise to Abraham, it is not uncommon to pass over the phrase, “in you (Abram) shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” The question must be asked as to how Abram (Israel) would bless all the Gentiles? Would it be in prosperity? That is, would they benefit physically by Israel giving them “things?” The answer is an unqualified, “No!” It was by giving them God’s word, and that word was the message of deliverance through the “Seed of the Woman” in the Old Testament and the reality of the appearance of the Christ in the New Testament.

Israel, in the Old Testament, had to receive that message and obey before they could transfer the message to the Gentiles (as Abram did in Genesis 15:6). Jonah was the perfect illustration of this problem as he took the message of mercy to the Gentiles, but rejected the very message he was taking. Israel rejected the very message they were given as well, the message of the coming “Seed of the Woman.”

The Gospels as the Message of the Christ to Israel

Thus, the Gospels are the record of the appearance of the Seed of the Woman and the presentation to Israel so that they can take Him to the Gentiles. Thus in Matthew 10, Jesus tells the disciples to take the message of His appearance to the “lost sheep of the House of Israel.” This is so that they can receive it for themselves and then take it to the Gentiles. But in Matthew 12 Israel rejects this Christ. In Matthew 13 Jesus turns to 12 disciples whom He trains to take the message in light

of Israel's rejection. So, following His payment for the sins of the world and His resurrection, Jesus authorizes 11 Jewish apostles to take the message of the appearing Christ to the Gentiles to fulfill the promise made to Abraham. Thus the message goes to the Jews (and continues) in Matthew 10 and then through the 12 apostles (apostolic doctrine) goes to the Gentiles. So now the message of the crucified and risen Christ will now move to the world.