

BIBLICAL STORY

1. The Ubiquity of Story.

- a. We all love stories.
 - (1) What's your favorite story? *Green Eggs and Ham? How the Grinch Stole Christmas? Cinderella? A Christmas Carol? Five Minute Stories?*
 - (2) What's your favorite movie? *Raiders of the Lost Ark? Star Wars? The Lord of the Rings* trilogy? *Lion King?*
- b. Stories are powerful because they are microcosms of the basic structure of the universe.¹
 - (1) "We are in suspense about the story in fiction because we are in suspense about another story far closer and more important to us—the story of our own life as we live it. We do not know how that story of our own life is going to come out. We do not know what it will mean. So, in that deepest suspense of life, which will be shadowed in the suspense we feel about the story in fiction, we turn to fiction for some slight hint about the story in the life we live."²

2. The Power of Story.

- a. Stories teach us informally, not formally.

3. Basic Plot Elements.

- a. Setting: initial harmony.
- b. Conflict: (1) man vs. man; (2) man vs. nature; (3) man vs. himself; or (4) man vs. the gods.
- c. Hero and villain.
- d. Struggle, including foreshadowing.
- e. Climax.
- f. Resolution: harmony restored, original goal accomplished, a change from the original setting.
- g. Lesson/message/moral/winning philosophy.
 - (1) The simplest plot type is that from which a difficulty comes to the hero in the story and then is overcome. It is in overcoming this difficulty that a lesson is learned. The characters usually have learned something they didn't know at the beginning. Stories teach us the "winning philosophy."³ These are dramatic plots where the movement reveals the message by seeing how the hero overcomes some difficulty. In both stories, the character (and the reader) learns something through the philosophy (perhaps changing philosophy) of the hero, and that is its primary message.
 - (a) Cinderella progresses from a scrub-sister to a princess. But the story is not simply a history of her movement through time, but a lesson in how she acted. In the words, what was the philosophy of life that allowed her to achieve the good outcome? Cinderella's philosophy (good-naturedness in the face of

¹ E. Potter, *3 Theories of Everything*, 4.

² Robert Penn Warren.

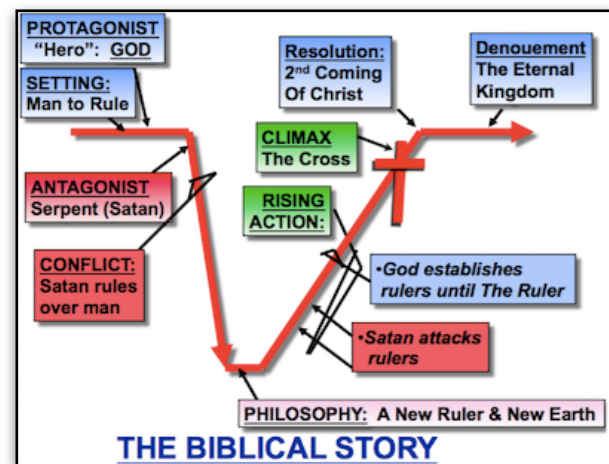
³ C. Baylis.

persecution) is a “winning” philosophy, and the reader gains insight by observing her winning ways.

- (b) Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* moves from a “scrooge,” despised by all, to a kindly man admired by all. The primary question is not the progress of events, but the philosophy that enabled him to change in order to “win.” In contrast to Cinderella, Scrooge is a “fallible man” whose philosophy changes from wrong to right. Because of the change, he wins in the end. The message is for the reader to adopt Scrooge’s winning philosophy and escape the error of Scrooge’s original bad philosophy.⁴
- h. Exercise: pass out children’s books to students and ask them to identify the setting, the conflict, the hero, the villain, the struggle, the climax, the resolution, and the message/moral/winning philosophy.

4. The Bible as Story.

- a. The Bible is not a list of propositions, like a logic textbook, but a story. Propositions are contained within it, and the story can be explained propositionally (i.e., systematic theology), but its form is a story
- b. The Bible has all the necessary plot elements.
- (1) Setting: Ge 1-2.
 - (2) Conflict: Ge 3.
 - (3) Hero and villain: Ge 3:15.
 - (4) Struggle: Ge 3:15; Ge 4-Re 20.
 - (5) Climax.
 - (a) Jesus’ first advent, especially his death and resurrection (the Gospels).
 - (b) Jesus’ second advent (Re 19).
 - (c) Final defeat of Satan (Re 20).
 - (6) Resolution (Re 21-22).
 - (7) Message, moral, lesson, winning philosophy (Ps 2:10-12).
- c. There is a great need when teaching the Bible to help people see the Bible’s grand metanarrative.
- d. The Bible presents a grand metanarrative that is true to reality. We must believe it.



5. The Four Chapters of the Biblical Story.

Plot Movements	Relationship with God	Relationship with Self	Spirituality	Morality	Rationality	Creativity	Relationship with Others	Relationship with Nature
Creation	Very good	Very good					Very good	Very good
Fall	Broken	Broken					Broken	Broken
Redemption	Redeemed Healed	Redeemed Healed					Redeemed Healed	Redeemed Healed

⁴ Dr. Charles Baylis, Dallas Theological Seminary.

Plot Movements	Relationship with God	Relationship with Self	Spirituality	Morality	Rationality	Creativity	Relationship with Others	Relationship with Nature
Restoration	Extraordinarily good	Extraordinarily good					Extraordinarily good	Extraordinarily good

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6. Amazing Observations about the Biblical Story.

- a. The biblical story was written by 30 human authors over a period of 2000 years.
- b. There are no unnecessary details in the biblical story. Every detail is there for a reason.
 - (1) “The biblical story is incredibly tight. There is nothing in the biblical story that shouldn’t be there, and there is nothing left out of the biblical story that should be there.”⁵
- c. The description of the setting and resolution is remarkably similar. See *Bookends of the Bible*.
- d. The hero’s arrival is set up through the failure of other would-be heroes:
 - (1) Adam’s failure.
 - (2) Failure of the eldest sons.
 - (3) Failure of Israel.
 - (4) Failure of Israel’s leaders.
- e. The purpose of the Old Testament is to set the stage for the hero’s first arrival.
 - (1) More precise details about the hero are revealed progressively over time.
 - (2) Consider the endings of *Nehemiah* and *Malachi*.
- f. The purpose of the New Testament is to set the stage for the hero’s second arrival (Re 22:20).
- g. The resolution comes in three stages, not one.
 - (1) Jesus’ first advent, especially his death and resurrection (the Gospels).
 - (2) Jesus’ second advent (Re 19).
 - (3) Final defeat of Satan (Re 20).

7. How to Read the Biblical Story.

- a. Understand the central plot first.
 - (1) “Get the whole Bible in your mind first in one grand broad view, see it in its dispensational relations, and then you can study it by chapters, or by topics or in any other way to your heart’s content, and with increasing profit to yourself and others. Begin any other way and you will live and die wishing you had begun the right way.”⁶
- b. Then look for the small, medium, and big subplots with the Bible. Interpret all subplots in light of the central plot.
 - (1) We don’t really understand a passage of Scripture until we see how it fits in view of the whole story.

⁵ Dr. Charles Baylis, Dallas Theological Seminary.

⁶ J. M. Gray.

- c. Master the biblical covenants and dispensations.
 - (1) See *Covenants*.
 - (2) See *Dispensations*.
 - (a) The seven dispensations are the seven major chapters of the story. They are like the seven acts in a seven-act play.
 - (b) When reading a particular book, remember which dispensation you're in. The various dispensation play by slightly different rules.
- d. When a prop is done being used, it may be set aside for the remainder of the play.
 - (1) Tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
 - (2) Ark of the covenant.
 - (3) Law of Moses.
 - (4) Temple.
- e. Much of the Bible is not directly applicational.
 - (1) "Historical narrative is foundational, not applicational."⁷
- f. We never really understand the Bible until we commit to the biblical story.
 - (1) "You have to commit to the biblical story. Otherwise, you will keep going outside the story, and the search will never end."⁸
- g. People become more enthusiastic for Bible study once they glimpse its overall coherence and unity.
 - (1) "Get people to see for themselves what the Bible is in the large, and then they will have a desire to see it in detail."⁹

8. The Hero of the Biblical Story.

- a. We are to believe on and worship the hero of the story, Jesus.
- b. The primary application of the Gospels is to be in awe of Jesus. There are other applications, but they are all secondary.¹⁰
- c. We are to appreciate Jesus. Sit back and watch him.¹¹

9. Our Role in the Biblical Story.

- a. We are living characters in the greatest story ever told.
- b. We know the end of the story, and yet we are living in the story. In other words, we are living in a story in which we know how it will end.
 - (1) "There is nothing but the biblical story. That's it. Everything we do is part of the story. The second climax of the story is yet to come. We are all on the same trail headed to the same destination."¹²
- c. God allows us to exercise our free will within the story. The general plot is already known. The part we will play in the general plot is up to us.

⁷ Dr. Charles Baylis, Dallas Theological Seminary.

⁸ Dr. Charles Baylis, Dallas Theological Seminary.

⁹ J. M. Gray.

¹⁰ Dr. Charles Baylis, Dallas Theological Seminary.

¹¹ Dr. Charles Baylis, Dallas Theological Seminary.

¹² Dr. Charles Baylis, Dallas Theological Seminary.

- d. Our personal story is one of billions of subplot in God's grand story.

10. The Superiority of the Biblical Story.

- a. The Bible is the greatest story ever told.
- b. The Bible is a masterpiece.
 - (1) It is good.
 - (2) It is true.
 - (3) It is beautiful.
- c. The biblical story is strange enough to be true.
 - (1) "The Big Story, the story we need, is the old and ongoing story of the Bible. The Bible is a collection of ancient manuscripts written over fifteen hundred years by forty different authors that tells one big story about God and people. It's a strange story. It's a good story. It's a complicated and challenging story. It's a thrilling story. It's a story that's still moving, a story in which you play an important part. It, I think, is the only story big enough to make sense out of everything you've been through and everything you and the people you love will face."¹³
 - (2) "Reality, in fact, is usually something you could not have guessed. That is one of the reasons I believe Christianity. It is a religion you could not have guessed. If it offered us just the kind of universe we had always expected, I should feel we were making it up. But, in fact, it is not the sort of thing anyone would have made up. It has just that queer twist about it that real things have. So let us leave behind all these boys' philosophies—these over-simple answers. The problem is not simple and the answer is not going to be simple either."¹⁴

11. The Biblical Story and Evangelism.

- a. Believing on Jesus, the gospel, only makes sense in the context of the biblical story of creation, fall, redemption, restoration.

12. Four Chapters, Four Relationships, Four Truths, Four Questions.¹⁵

- a. The following framework of Four Chapters, Four Relationships, Four Truths, and Four Questions provides guidance on where we are in the story, who we are made to be, the hope we can cling to, and what to do with the time we've been given.
- b. The four chapters of the biblical story are: (1) creation (Genesis 1:1-2, 26-31); (2) fall (Genesis 3:1-24); (3) redemption (Romans 5:12-17); and (4) restoration (Revelation 22:1-5).
- c. The four relationships that define us are: (1) our upward relationship with God; (2) our inward relationship with ourselves; (3) our outward relationship with others, and (4) our downward relationship with creation.
- d. Four truths to hold fast to as we navigate history and our relationships are that: (1) Jesus is risen; (2) he is Lord; (3) he is making all things new; and (4) he has chosen us to be in this particular time and place.

¹³ Justin Buzzard, *The Big Story: How The Bible Makes Sense Out of Life*.

¹⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 41-42.

¹⁵ John Stonestreet, Colson Center.

- e. Four questions that can help us identify our calling in the biblical story are: (1) What is good that we can celebrate and protect? (2) What is missing that we can contribute? (3) What is evil that we can oppose and resist? and (4) What is broken that we can restore?

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Online Courses

Charles Baylis, [The Biblical Story](#).

Hillsdale College, [The Genesis Story: Reading Biblical Narratives](#).

Mark Yarbrough, [The Story of Scripture](#), Dallas Theological Seminary Online Courses.

Videos

