

# The Art of Biblical Narrative

## Special Focus on Luke–Acts

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### THE CHALLENGE

#### A. Biblical Narrative is a Neglected Study

1. Modern Bible study techniques usually focus on one incident or a small section of text, making it hard to grasp the overall flow of the narrative.
2. Biblical narrative describes characters who act in positive, negative, and neutral terms, ethically speaking. It is sometimes difficult to discern what to do with the flawed nature of the characters.
3. Old Testament narrative themes often undergo a shift in meaning into the New Testament. It is often difficult to use themes consistently or responsibly.
4. We may find particular episodes significant because we find our social situation to be similar to that of a biblical character. This can be helpful but often carries the potential for inaccurate conclusions. For example, the New England Puritans read themselves into the story of Israel in Deuteronomy, making a covenant with God for the political nation.
5. Deconstructionists, especially in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, thought they could piece together the “original sources” of the final product, seeing the Scriptures as a political compromise to keep different factions together. For example, the Pentateuch was supposedly a patchwork of different factions in Israel; the New Testament was supposedly a patchwork of different followers of different apostles.
6. Jewish and then Christian literary scholars, responding to the deconstructionists, have re-understood biblical narrative and poetry as ancient Hebrew writing styles with specific characteristics. They may not be commonly understood today, but these understandings give us a very strong foundation for interpretation and understanding (see bibliography, below).

#### B. As a Result, Biblical Narrative is Poorly Taught

1. We offer historic details without modern day relevance  
e.g. “The northern kingdom of Israel was taken captive by Assyria in 721 B.C.”
2. We offer moral statements that are weak generalizations  
e.g. “God protected David, so He’ll protect you.”
3. We offer personality profiles  
e.g. David as a father, leader, etc. This type of study misses the intent of salvation history and the development of theology.

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## A STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

### AN ACRONYM: TEDS (Themes, Echoes, Disclosure, Structures)

A. **THEMES.** *The repetition of certain themes and patterns in the narrative determine the narrator's intention and message. In particular, the ending of each narrative is very important because it ties up various themes.*

#### 1. Repetition of Key/Parallel Words

A phrase, word or word-root that recurs significantly in a text to make the meaning revealed more striking.

Here is one example of repeated words in a movie:

- “You just can’t, Nemo!” In the movie *Finding Nemo*, the phrase “You think you can do these things but you just can’t, Nemo!” occurs twice and then once more in a variation. The first time is at the beginning of the movie. Nemo is at the edge of the ocean shelf where the reef ends and the deep ocean begins. Marlin scolds him for almost swimming out to the open sea, saying, “You think you can do these things but you just can’t, Nemo!” The second time occurs when Marlin and Dory are in the whale’s mouth. Dory claims she can speak whale. But Marlin, exasperated with Dory’s antics, exclaims the same thing, mistakenly saying Nemo’s name instead of Dory’s. The third time occurs when Marlin rejoins Nemo, and Nemo tries to save Dory and a huge school of fish. Marlin is tempted to say that Nemo can’t do it, but he lets go and says he can. Marlin realizes he can’t control everything, including his own son, and to keep trying to control him will just alienate them. The repetition of these words underscores the process Marlin goes through as a father.

Exercise: “Filled with rage”

The Nazareth synagogue-goers	The Pharisees
And all in the synagogue were <b>filled with rage</b> as they heard these things; and they rose up and cast him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw him down the cliff. (Lk.4:28 – 29)	But they themselves were <b>filled with rage</b> , and discussed together what they might do to Jesus. (Lk.6:11)

What does the repetition of this phrase mean? How do the Nazareth synagogue-goers compare with the Pharisees in their response to Jesus? What does this mean in the unfolding of the story?

## 2. Repetition of Key/Parallel Motifs

Themes are often made up of motifs. A motif is a concrete image, sensory quality, action, or object that recurs through a particular narrative that may be symbolic to that narrative.

Here are two examples of repeated motifs in movies:

- In the movie *Gladiator*, there is a scene that happens 3 times through the movie. It is the salute to Maximus scene. It first occurs at the beginning of the movie, when Maximus is a General, leading the Roman armies under Marcus Aurelius, the soldiers salute and say, “General, General, General.” Then it happens in the middle of the movie. When Maximus is leading the slave gladiators in the fighting pits, the men acknowledge him and say, “Spaniard, Spaniard, Spaniard.” And it happens at the end. When Maximus is leading the gladiators in Rome, he walks through the hall to the floor of the Coliseum, and his men salute him and say, “Maximus, Maximus, Maximus.” If you were to cut-and-paste those three scenes together, you’d have a good, concise summary of the movie. What is the movie about? Maximus’ leadership. The repetition of the scene does two things: (1) it ties the movie together and reminds you that you’re watching one coherent story unfold, and (2) it illustrates the main point of the movie, that of Maximus’ leadership.
- In the movie *Mi Familia*, the owl means bad luck. Where it shows up, someone is meant to die. The owl appears once at the beginning of the movie, when one of the sons – it is thought – should have died in the rapids of a river. The owl appears again in the middle when that same son – now a young man in trouble with gang violence – has been stabbed and is running from the police. The owl is a premonition of his death.

Exercise: Falling before Jesus

Simon Peter (Lk.5:1 – 11)	The leper (Lk.5:12 – 16)
<sup>5:8</sup> But when Simon Peter <b>saw</b> that, he <b>fell</b> down at Jesus’ feet, <b>saying</b> , “Go away from me <b>Lord</b> , for <b>I am a sinful man!</b> ”	<sup>5:12</sup> a man covered with leprosy; and when he <b>saw</b> Jesus, he <b>fell</b> on his face and implored him, <b>saying</b> , “ <b>Lord</b> , if you are willing, <b>you can make me clean.</b> ”

Luke invites us to compare these two men and how they fall before Jesus. How are Simon Peter and the leper alike? How are they not different? Consider their stories.

**The Holy Spirit and proclamation:** This is another motif that is repeated very often in Luke-Acts. It is one of the major themes running through Luke's entire narrative. Virtually every reference to the Holy Spirit in Luke – Acts refers to the Spirit's empowerment of God's people to *speak*.

	<b>At the Beginning of the Story</b>	<b>A Major Character</b>	<b>Quotes from the OT</b>	<b>To Summarize How the Spirit Will Empower Proclamation</b>	<b>And then it Happens!</b>
<b>Luke</b>	Luke 4	Jesus	Isaiah 61	“The <b>Spirit</b> of the Lord is upon me... <b>to preach...to proclaim...</b> ” (Luke 4:18 – 19)	Jesus preaches and proclaims. (Luke 4:20ff.)
<b>Acts</b>	Acts 2	Simon Peter	Joel 2	“And it shall be in the last days that I will pour forth of <b>My Spirit</b> on all mankind and your sons and daughters shall <b>prophesy</b> ...I will in those days pour forth of <b>My Spirit</b> and they shall <b>prophesy</b> .” (Acts 2:17 – 18)	The apostles and other leaders proclaim and prophesy. (Acts 2:19ff.)

**Jesus' meal scenes:** This is a motif that is repeated very often in Luke. It is one of the major themes running through Luke's narrative.

Jesus at the Big Reception	Luke 5:27 – 35
The Real Host	Luke 7:36 – 50
Jesus Serves Up the Abundant Meal	Luke 9:10 – 17
Loving God at the Table	Luke 10:38 – 42
True Cleansing at the Table	Luke 11:37 – 54
Living Out Jesus' Table Fellowship	Luke 14:1 – 33
The Three Joyful Homecoming Feasts	Luke 15:1 – 32
Celebrating With Zaccheus	Luke 18:15 – 19:10
The Food of the Table	Luke 22:14 – 20
Paradise Regained Around Jesus' Table	Luke 24:13 – 49
The Early Christians Practicing Table Fellowship	Acts 2:41 – 47; 4:31 – 37; 6:1 – 15

**Jesus' teaching on materialism and wealth:** Along with teaching against ethnocentrism, the warning against materialism is one of the strongest strands of ethical teaching in Luke.

Malachi's Warning	Luke 1:13 – 17
Mary's Praise and Restoration from Exile	Luke 1:46 – 55
John the Baptist Prepares Israel	Luke 3:10 – 14
Jesus' Kingdom Teaching: Sacrifice and Love	Luke 6:21 – 49
Jesus Prepares the Seventy	Luke 9:51 – 62
Jesus' Kingdom Teaching: Disinheritance and True Riches	Luke 12:13 – 34
It Takes Everything You've Got	Luke 14:1 – 33
A Lesson in Shrewdness	Luke 16:1 – 13
The Two Rich Men	Luke 18:15 – 19:10
Taking Away the Vineyard Land	Luke 20:9 – 16
The Impoverished Widow	Luke 21:1 – 4
Commissioned to Proclaim Repentance	Luke 24:45 – 47
How the Early Christians Used Wealth	Acts 2:41 – 47; 4:31 – 37; 6:1 – 15
Industries Challenged by the Gospel	Acts 19:11 – 41
Materialism and Spiritual Leadership	Acts 20:16 – 36

Exercise: **Jesus touching unclean people and things.** Every time Jesus encounters something unclean, he touches it (or almost touches it) or enters it. Read through these passages and see how the theme develops, noting what Jesus touches, the “stigma” associated with it, and what the impact is:

The leper (5:12 – 16)

The centurion’s house (7:1 – 10; notice Simon Peter’s comment about how entering Cornelius’ house was considered unclean in Acts 10:28)

The coffin of the widow’s son (7:11 – 17)

The territory of the Gentile demoniac with the unclean spirit (8:26 – 39)

The hemorrhaging woman and Jairus’ dead daughter (8:40 – 56)

3. *Repetition of Key/Parallel Events (see also Echo, below)*

a. *Key/Parallel Events: Prophecy – Fulfillment*

<b>John’s ministry is prophesied by Zacharias</b>	<b>John’s ministry starts</b>
For you will go on before the Lord to prepare his ways (Lk.1:76)	And he came into all the district around the Jordan...as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet. “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord.’” (Lk.3:4)

<b>Jesus’ enthronement prophesied</b>	<b>Jesus’ enthronement realized</b>
“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.” (Lk.1:32 – 33)	“And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” (Acts 1:9)  Substantiated by: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here...defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” (Acts 17:6 – 7)

b. *Key/Parallel Events: Events of Similar Significance*

“If two or more separate events were perceived to be similar to one another, ancient writers tend to give accounts of the events in parallel fashion. In the course of doing this, the narrator might put all the accounts in the same form. As he tells his story, he will select especially material that fits the formal, parallel pattern. For this reason the author of the Book of Kings, in summarizing the reigns of each king of Israel and Judah, tends to employ a number of formulas. He gives the date a king came into power, the length of his reign, an evaluation (“he did evil/good in the sight of the Lord”), a reference indicating where the reader can find more information, and a statement of the king’s death and burial. By employing this technique, he emphasizes the evil done by the kings by the frequent repetition of “and he did evil in the sight of the Lord.” A modern writer, even one with the same theological point to make, would never employ this technique. He would instead say, “The vast majority of the kings of Israel and Judah were evil,” and proceed to give specific examples.

“Employment of the technique of parallel accounts survived even into the Greco-Roman period, albeit in a less stylized format. Plutarch’s *Lives* sets the biographies of famous Greeks alongside those of famous Romans (for example, the life of Demosthenes is set in parallel to that of Cicero). **Luke’s account of the ministry of Peter to some degree parallels his account of the life of Paul.** The interest in parallel events and lives still continued, but in the earlier literature the technique is far more deliberate and formulaic (and thus more obvious). Simply put, the parallels between Genesis 12:10 – 20 and 20:1 – 18, when analyzed by ancient rather than modern literary standards, strongly indicate that the two accounts are from the same source.”<sup>2</sup>

4. *Repetition of a Type-Scene (see also Echo, below)*

An episode that occurs at an exciting moment in the career of the hero(ine), composed of a fixed sequence of motifs. The point being made is how the current episode deviates from the normal pattern to reveal the character of the people involved.

- A contemporary example would be the “American western” exemplified by movies like Wyatt Earp, Tombstone, and movies by Clint Eastwood and John Wayne. The typical scene at the end of an American western is that the villain, a fast hand with a gun, has a showdown with the sheriff, the fastest draw in town.

<sup>2</sup> Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), p.22 – 23.

Once a standard type-scene is established in an audience's mind, the effect is powerful because of the buildup of anticipation it provides culminating in a satisfying conclusion.

Elements of the type-scene can also be varied. Here is how a variation on a type-scene would work: If the sheriff was crippled in one arm and used a rifle, how would the story proceed and climax? You are already entertaining certain possibilities because it's a familiar type-scene. Hebrew narrative has many type-scenes that would have been familiar to an Israelite audience.

*a. Announcement of the birth of a hero to a barren mother*

Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, Manoah's wife → **Elizabeth (Luke 1)**

*b. Betrothal scene at a well*

Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samson, Ruth, Saul, Jesus (John 4)

Man (or messenger) travels to foreign land

Meets woman or women by a well

Someone draws water (a symbol of fertility)

Woman or women rush home to announce stranger's arrival (verbs "to hurry")

Betrothal arranged after a meal

*c. Danger in the desert, discovery of a well or sustenance*

Hagar (2 times), Moses and Israel (3 times), Elijah (1 time in 1 Kings 17), **Jesus (Luke 4)**

*d. Initiatory trial*

Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Israel as a whole, David, **Jesus (Luke 4)**

*e. Testament of a dying hero*

Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, **Jesus (Luke 22)**, Paul

**B. ECHOES. Parallels to, or quotations of, previous biblical literature or history help reinforce expectations or provide emotional charge.**

Here are five examples of “echo” in contemporary art and history.

- When the west coast rapper Notorious B.I.G. was killed, his friend, producer, and fellow rapper Puff Daddy wrote a song called *I’ll Be Missing You*. He took an older song by The Police called *Every Breath You Take* and put his own layer on it. Puff Daddy’s song was not about a stalker stalking his target; obviously that’s how the two songs were different. But by keeping the beat and melody of the earlier song, he captured the emotional connotations already associated with *Every Breath You Take*, which were twofold: (1) “I’m always thinking about you,” and (2) “We will meet one day.” Puff Daddy reworked that theme so that his song communicated a new message: (1) I’m always thinking about my slain friend; (2) we will meet again one day. The biblical narrators used similar methods of echo.
- In the movie *Shakespeare in Love*, there are many allusions to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Twelfth Night*. The whole movie is in some sense a fusion of the two stories. A woman dresses up as a man to be near the man she loves (as did Viola); two individuals defy social convention to be lovers (as did Romeo and Juliet), etc. One can enjoy the movie without knowing the storylines of those two Shakespearean works, but it certainly deepens your experience of the movie to hear the echoes. Likewise, one can enjoy biblical narrative without knowing the intertextual references, but it certainly deepens your enjoyment of the story to hear the echoes.
- Similarly, in the musical version of *Les Miserables*, a melody from one song is re-used in another with a corresponding theme. For instance, in the song, “Valjean Forgiven,” Jean Valjean experiences mercy at the hands of the bishop. Valjean sings about the wonder and mystery of this forgiveness and the transforming effect it has on him. Later, in “Javert’s Suicide,” when Inspector Javert experiences mercy at the hands of Jean Valjean, he sings about the mystery of this forgiveness and the tormenting effect this has on him using the same melody. Although there is a difference in the way the two men receive their respective pardons, since mercy gave Jean Valjean hope and new life, whereas it extinguished Javert’s zeal for law and in fact Javert’s own life, the fact that the same melody is used in both songs serves to underscore the dramatic transformation both men must experience when they are pardoned, down to the strategic mention of the word “knife.” Valjean said, “I feel my shame inside me like a knife,” then received the bishop’s love. But Javert said, “All it would take was a flick of his knife,” and refused Valjean’s.
- During World War II, Winston Churchill referred to the battle of Thermopylae because of the historic parallels. Xerxes of Persia was campaigning against Greece. He had a massive army and navy, and the Greek city-states were not yet organized together. Thermopylae was the path into Greece, and 300 Spartan warriors took a heroic last stand and lost. But that battle needed to happen for the Greek city-states to rally together at the battle of Salamis and repel Persia. Churchill’s reference to Thermopylae evoked heroism and courage in British soldiers because every British school boy had been educated in Greek history and made the parallel.
- J.R.R. Tolkien echoed the poem *Beowulf*.<sup>3</sup> In *The Hobbit*, Tolkien writes, “Bilbo had heard tell and sing of dragon-hoards before... He grasped a great two-handed cup, as heavy as he could carry, and cast one fearful eye upwards. Smaug stirred a wing, opened a claw, the rumble of his snoring changed its note.”<sup>4</sup> (The Hobbit, page) He seems to have been making a literary echo to the early medieval Anglo-Saxon poem, *Beowulf*. “And then in the dark night, a dragon to rule, he who in a high house watched over hoard, a stark stone barrow, the path below lay unknown to men. There went inside a man... and he groped near the heathen hoard, his hands wrapped around an ornamental bauble... and he who was sleeping had been tricked by thief’s cunning... and he was enraged [for] he was not at all in control of the... worm-hoard...”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Tim Hickson for pointing this out. See Tim Hickson, “How Lord of the Rings Changed Fantasy,” *Hello Future Me*, November 23, 2019; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gu0kVaRnrQg&t=786s>; 0:20 – 1:30.

<sup>4</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit or There And Back Again* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1937/1997, p.194)

<sup>5</sup> *Beowulf*, 2211 – 2220

**Jesus the Prophet in Luke 4:14 – 30:** Jesus’ action the wilderness, his crossing of the Jordan, his reading of Isaiah 61 in the Nazareth synagogue, and his references to Naaman and the widow of Zarephath strategically echo key episodes of Israel’s history. He set off a vibrant web of echoes already established between Moses-Joshua and Elijah-Elisha and now applies them to himself.

<b>Motif</b>	<b>Moses – Joshua</b>	<b>Elijah – Elisha</b>	<b>John – Jesus</b>
Great prophet summons Israel to a covenant with God	Moses inaugurates the era of the Mosaic Law	Elijah is sent to the Northern Kingdom of Israel to protest the sin of the northern kings	John the Baptist warns that being part of the Abrahamic family is not simply genealogical
Dies before the final stage of ministry (conquest) truly begins	Moses dies on the mountaintop outside the land (Dt.34)	Elijah taken up by chariots outside the land (2 Ki.1)	John thrown into prison and later killed before the resurrection (Lk.3:19 – 20, 7:18 – 35)
Prepares a successor	Joshua	Elisha	Jesus
Who is “baptized” in the Jordan	Joshua parts the waters of the Jordan to cross it (Jos.3:14 – 17)	Elisha parts the waters of the Jordan to cross it (2 Ki.2:14)	Jesus is baptized in the Jordan (Lk.3:21 – 22)
Successor marches into the promised land from the wilderness	Joshua spent 40 years in the wilderness and then led Israel into the land	Elisha returns after Elijah is taken up (2 Ki.2:14)	Jesus spends 40 days in the wilderness and then enters the land (Lk.4:14)
And proclaims God’s judgment on the pagan inhabitants, who will be destroyed	The Canaanites	The Northern Israelites (!)	The whole nation Israel (!!!)
And rescues a faithful remnant	Rahab and her household spared	Widow of Zarephath receives provision and witnesses the resuscitation of her son; Naaman the Syrian is cleansed of leprosy	The disciples

We are not looking for an exact one-for-one correspondence but the amplification and application of various motifs. In going into the wilderness and crossing the Jordan, Jesus was identifying himself with Joshua conquering the promised land full of pagans. He was also aligning himself with Elisha, who entered the apostate northern kingdom using the same symbolism. Jesus was therefore saying implicitly that the nation Israel during his day was apostate and pagan; he was on a God-sent mission to conquer it. His quotation of Naaman and the widow of Zarephath were offensive to his listeners not merely because they were racially prejudiced. They were enraged because Jesus, whose appearance presumably testified to his time in the wilderness, had just triggered a complex matrix of echoes that made them out to be pagans.

Exercise: Compare Jesus’ time in the wilderness in Luke 4:1 – 13 to what you know of other biblical characters’ time alone. How are they similar? Different? Think specifically of Israel as a whole in the wilderness in Numbers – Deuteronomy. Since Jesus quotes three times from Deuteronomy, he seems to be reflecting on Israel’s experience in the wilderness.

Exercise: Read Lk.4:14 – 30 and draw up your own table for the echo from the prophetic team of Elijah – Elisha to the prophetic team of John the Baptist – Jesus.

**Jesus the King:** Of particular importance is Luke's use of Isaiah's prophecy.

<b>Luke's Writings: Luke's Gospel</b>	<b>Isaiah's Prophecy</b>
Zacharias prophecies by the Spirit about John the Baptist. 1:67 – 79	Quotes "to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death" from Isa.9:2
Simeon in the Temple prophecies by the Spirit about Jesus. 2:28 – 32	Quotes "a light of revelation to the Gentiles" from Isa.49:6
Anna is looking for "the redemption of Jerusalem." 2:38	Isa.52:9 concerns the redemption of Jerusalem
John the Baptist begins his ministry and is "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" from Isa.40:3 – 5. 3:1 – 6	This is the beginning of Isaiah's vision of the "return from exile" and the "redemption of Jerusalem" starting from Isa.40.
Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee. 4:14 – 9:50	Isaiah's saw the Messiah ministering in Galilee first, bringing light into darkness. Isa. 8:22 – 9:1
Jesus begins his ministry and quotes from Isaiah's Servant Song from Isa.61:1 – 2 and Isa.42:1 – 9. 4:16 – 19	Isaiah's vision of the Messiah reaching the Gentiles and vindicating Jerusalem becomes Jesus' mission statement.
Jesus forgives sins. 5:17 – 24, 7:36 – 50, etc.	Echoes Isaiah's Servant Song from Isa.53
Jesus calls a remnant in Israel, making an analogy to new wine. 5:29 – 39	Remnant preserved, analogy to new wine. Isa.65:8 – 9
Jesus looks ahead to when he, as the bridegroom, "is taken away from them."	This is probably a quotation from Isa.53:8, "By oppression and judgment he was taken away"
Jesus pronounces beatitudes on his disciples. 6:20 – 26	Isaiah distinguishes between the faithful remnant and the remainder of Israel in the same terms. Isa.65:13 – 15
Jesus heals the centurion's slave and praises the centurion for his faith. 7:1 – 10	Isaiah foresaw a time when foreigners would be fully welcomed into the covenant people's worship, contrary to the Mosaic Law. Contrast Isa.56:1 – 8 with Dt.23:1 – 6
Jesus clarifies his identity to John the Baptist. 7:22	By quoting Isaiah's Servant Songs. Isa.61:1 – 2 and Isa.42:1 – 9
Jesus offers "peace" to the sinful woman. 7:50	Probably thinking about the "peace" God gives to the righteous; Isaiah said that there is no peace for the wicked. Isa.48:22; 57:20 – 21
Jesus teaches the parable of the soils. 8:4 – 15	Using "restoration from exile" motifs from Isa.55 (seed, rain, thorns, word)
Jesus says that the precedent for parables is given by Isaiah 6:10	"Seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand" Isa.6:10
Jesus shepherds and feeds people in the wilderness. 9:10 – 17	Feeding in a wilderness was described in Isa.55:1 – 3 and 65:10 – 12
Jesus is frustrated with the Pharisees for their holier-than-thou attitude. 11:37 – 52	Frustration over Israel's holier than thou attitude prophesied in Isa.65:2 – 5
Jesus announces a long-delayed day of judgment on that attitude. 11:50 – 51	Prophesied in Isa.65:6 – 7
Jesus prophecies against Jerusalem. 12:41 – 13:9; 13:31 – 35	Isaiah prophesied against Jerusalem in Isa.1; 29:1 – 4 ; 65:11ff.
Jesus speaks of entering the kingdom of God in terms of a banquet. 14:7 – 24	Isaiah portrayed the kingdom/restoration in terms of a banquet in Isa.55:1 – 2
Jesus describes his ministry of restoration from exile in three parables. 15:1 – 32	Isaiah 40 – 55 is eminently concerned about restoration from exile
Jesus challenges Israel's historic relation to material wealth. 16:1 – 13	Isaiah foresaw a time of expanding Israel's traditional land boundaries in Isa.54:2
Jesus heals ten lepers, only one of which, a foreign Samaritan, turns back and gives glory to God. 17:11 – 19	Isaiah foresaw a time when foreigners would be fully welcomed into the covenant people's worship, contrary to the Mosaic Law. Contrast Isa.56:1 – 8 with Dt.23:1 – 6
Jesus challenges Israel's leadership using the parable of the vineyard. 20:9 – 16	Isaiah challenged Israel's leadership using a parable of the vineyard in Isa.5:1 – 8
Jesus contrasts the Temple's importance (unfavorably) with a widow. 20:45 – 21:4	Isaiah contrasted the Temple's importance (unfavorably) with the lowly and humble in Isa.66:1 – 2
Jesus prophecies Jerusalem's destruction. 21:5 – 36	Isaiah prophesied Jerusalem's destruction in Isa.1; 29:1 – 4; 65:11ff.
Jesus' crucifixion is paralleled to the Suffering Servant, restoring humans to paradise. 22:37ff	Isaiah's Suffering Servant restores Israel (and the nations) from exile in Isa.53 (see below)
Jesus' resurrection inaugurates a "new covenant" where forgiveness of sins is offered to all nations.	Isaiah prophesied about "new things" surrounding the Servant's teaching going out to the Gentile coastlands in

24:47	Isa.42:6 and 49:6
Jesus' message begins from Jerusalem and is offered to the world. 24:47	Isaiah prophesied that the law would go forth from Zion in Isa.2:1 – 4
<b>Luke's Writings: Acts</b>	<b>Isaiah's Prophecy</b>
The apostles are aware that their responsibility is to the ends of the earth, to those who are afar off. Acts 1:8; 2:39	In fulfillment of Isaiah's vision of the word of the Messiah going forth from Zion from Isa.2, 42, etc.
Jesus sends his disciples into the world testifying to his enthronement	Isaiah saw the Servant addressing the nations from the standpoint of being ascended and enthroned. This is why Isa.52:13 – 53:12 is in the "past tense," but also why the other Servant Songs assume an enthroned Messiah. Isa.42, 49, 50.
The disciples speak in tongues at Pentecost. 2:1 – 13	Isaiah foresaw that God would bear witness to Israel through many tongues. Isa.28:11 – 16
The disciples call Jesus God's "Servant" 3:26	Isaiah (out of all the prophets) primarily used the title "Servant" for the Messiah
The disciples call Jesus "the stone that the builders rejected, the cornerstone." 4:11	Isaiah used these terms for the Messiah in Isa.8:14 – 15 and 28:16, as did Psalm 118
Stephen gives the longest speech in Acts, emphasizing Jesus as ruler and judge of Israel, critiquing the Temple in 7:49 – 50	He quotes Isaiah 66:1 – 2.
Philip witnesses to the Ethiopian eunuch who was reading Isaiah 53 in 8:32 – 35	He quotes Isaiah 53:7 – 8 because the eunuch didn't know to whom it referred
Paul responds to the rejection of diaspora Jews in Pisdian Antioch by turning to the Gentiles in 13:47	He quotes Isaiah 49:6 as applying not only to Jesus (as did Simeon in Lk.2) but to himself and his mission
Paul says in Athens that God does not live in temples made with hands. 17:24	This is probably an echo of Isa.66:1 – 2, as Stephen quoted
Paul comes to Jerusalem with a financial collection from the Gentiles for the famine-stricken believers in Jerusalem and Judea. 21:17ff., 24:17	This is probably a manifestation of the gifts from the nations that were to stream into Jerusalem in Isa.60:3 – 22. See also Paul's comments about the collection in Romans 15:8 – 28 and the references to Isaiah there.
Paul in Rome tells the Roman Jews that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles. 28:26 – 27	He quotes from Isaiah 6:10, since Isaiah's prophecy concerned a remnant of Jews and an outreach to the Gentile world, which was being fulfilled

The following chart compares Luke's narration of Jesus' death and resurrection with Isaiah's vision.

<b>Jesus' Crucifixion According to Luke</b>	<b>The Suffering Servant According to Isaiah</b>
Jesus quotes Isa.53:12 in Lk.22:37, "and he was numbered with transgressors," showing his awareness of being the Suffering Servant. This refers first to the sword-bearing disciples, who will be mistaken for revolutionaries, and later to the two criminals. It marks off the beginning of the crucifixion narrative.	And was numbered with the transgressors (Isa.53:12)
I find no guilt in this man. (23:4) I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against him. (23:14) No, nor has Herod, for he sent him back to us, and behold nothing deserving of death has been done by him. (23:15) Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in him no guilt demanding death. I will therefore punish him and release him. (23:22) Certainly this man was innocent (23:47)	He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in his mouth (Isa.53:9)
And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing him vehemently. (23:10) The people stood by, looking on, and even the rulers were sneering at him. (23:35) The soldiers also mocked him. (23:36) And one of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at him. (23:39)	Yet we ourselves esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted (Isa.53:4)
And he questioned him at some length, but he answered him nothing. (24:9)	Like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so he did not open his mouth (Isa.53:7)
And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified	He was pierced for our

<p>him and the criminals. (23:33)          But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (23:34)          Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in paradise. (23:43)          The two Emmaus road disciples walk with Jesus and their eyes are opened – a scene that comes from Genesis and the Fall where two people walk with God and their eyes are opened, only this time it is used to describe the return to paradise. Jesus tells his disciples to proclaim the forgiveness of sins (24:47)</p>	<p>transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our peace fell upon him, and by his scourging we are healed (Isa.53:5, 11 – 12)</p>
<p>And two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with him. (23:32)          And behold, a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man...and he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. (24:50 – 53)</p>	<p>His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet he was with a rich man in his death (Isa.53:9)</p>
<p>Jesus’ atonement extends forgiveness to all nations (24:47)</p>	<p>Thus he will sprinkle <i>many nations</i>, kings will shut their mouths on account of him, for what had not been told them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand (Isa.52:13)</p>
<p>Jesus’ resurrection inaugurates a new creation (24:13 – 34), a return to the Edenic paradise (23:43)</p>	<p>Isaiah foresaw a new creation (Isa.65:17ff.)</p>
<p>Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26 – 40)</p>	<p>Because the eunuch was reading Isa.53:7 – 8 in his chariot and didn’t understand to whom it referred</p>

Luke does not “proof-text” from Isaiah to quote material about the Messiah. Rather, *the very backbone of Luke is Isaiah*. This is evident not only in the fact that Luke quotes Isaiah more than any other Old Testament book, but in the fact that Isaiah’s themes are Luke’s themes: sight and blindness, the Messiah reigning from Jerusalem, Israel and the nations, restoration from exile, and new creation.

Exercise: Try to identify an “echo” in a movie, song, or speech that you’re familiar with. Compare that to how Luke “echoes” Isaiah in the concept of the Messiah’s global evangelistic mission. Select one or two passages above and make some observations about how Luke is drawing from Isaiah.

C. **DISCLOSURE.** *There is a subtle but significant difference between the textual world and the historical world from which it draws. Sometimes biblical narrative is like a silent movie, where we don't hear the dialogue between characters and/or internal dialogue within a character. At other times it is like a movie that picks up only certain scenes in the overall sweep of the story. The level of disclosed information shared by the narrator at any given moment affects us, as readers.*

- The movie *Shawshank Redemption* contains a very important disclosure of information about the innocence of Andy Dufrane. For about two thirds of the movie, we don't know whether Andy was guilty of murdering his wife and her lover. Only towards the end, at a very important turning point do we realize that Andy was innocent. This serves to get us to sympathize with Red as the narrator, first, because it's his perspective that we have. Another important disclosure of information happens at the end, regarding what Andy was doing to get his way out of prison. This occurs at the end of the movie, as Red as the narrator discloses how Andy was digging through the walls and finding his way around at night, dumping clods of rock out of his pants in the prison courtyard during the day.
- The movie *Entrapment* contains two important disclosures of information relating the characters and the audience. In the middle, we discover what Jen (Catherine Zeta-Jones) has known, that she was the thief who stole the painting. So we disassociate from Jen because we realize she's had the upper hand over us in terms of knowledge. Then Mac (Sean Connery) reveals that he was the one who retrieved the painting. Then we disassociate with Mac and associate with Jen because we are as surprised as she is. So our perspectives and feelings towards the characters radically flip-flop as we suddenly discover what the characters have known all along. In the end, we discover what Mac knows: that he's been working for the government trying to trap Jen.

"Every Biblical narrator is of course omniscient, but in contrast, for example, to the narrator of the Homeric poems, who makes his characters beautifully perspicuous even (as in the *Iliad*) when he is dealing with the most darkly irrational impulses of the human heart, the ancient Hebrew narrator displays his omniscience with a drastic selectivity. He may on occasion choose to privilege us with the knowledge of what God thinks of a particular character or action – omniscient narration can go no higher – but as a rule, because of his understanding of the nature of his human subjects, he leads us through varying darknesses which are lit up by intense but narrow means, phantasmal glimmerings, sudden strobic flashes."<sup>6</sup>

Varying degrees of information leads to multiple perspectives in the story: one character's perspective, another character's perspective, God's perspective, and our perspective as readers. Biblical narratives contain strategically different levels of explicitness and uncertainty to evoke a desired response (or range of responses) from the reader.

Though some studies of biblical narrative seek to make the audience identify with the characters, this may not always be the narrator's intent. Sometimes the narrator forces us to simultaneously consider different alternatives about the characters' motivations, feelings, or levels of knowledge. Or sometimes the narrator forces us to disassociate with a certain character altogether. Identifying with a character is often NOT the narrator's intent. This is most prominent in Samuel and Mark. For example, in 1 & 2 Samuel, Saul's inner life (thoughts, feelings, motives) is carefully hidden from us throughout most of the narrative, except at times where he is said to be angry and jealous, where he is distasteful as a character. This leads us to dissociate with him. Why? What is the impact of this narrative strategy? What impression do we get of the depth of Saul's inner life? How is this use of information similar or different in comparison with episodes in David's life?

For the purpose of preaching and storytelling, this gives us a helpful tool. When a reader's perspective (level of information) coincides with the character's perspective (level of information), the reader is led to identify with the character. Conversely, when a reader's perspective is different from the character's perspective, the reader is led to dis-identify with the character. It is fun to engage other people on how much information they think they have at various points in the narrative and how close or distant they feel to the characters.

How does the biblical author convey information regarding motives, attitudes, or the inner nature of someone's moral character? In ascending order of explicitness (see below). Because of Luke's emphasis on clarity and

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1981), p.126

understanding, he is more often explicit than not. He does do this in a few places, mostly in the earlier part of his narrative, where Jesus obscures himself to some degree.

### *1. Character hidden*

Sometimes when you might expect to get some glimpse of how a character feels or thinks, the biblical narrator withholds that information.

Levi the tax collector: “And after that he went out, and noticed a tax-gatherer named Levi, sitting in the tax office, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he left everything behind, and rose and began to follow him.” (Lk.5:27 – 28) Why did Levi decide to follow Jesus? Why or how deeply was he unsatisfied with his previous life as a tax-collector? These types of questions go unanswered by staying within this sub-story, but because of the parallel between the paralytic and Levi (both “rose” at Jesus’ command), we can make a link between the two: Levi was “stuck” in his place like the paralytic was “stuck.”

### *2. Character revealed through actions, which can meet, disappoint or confuse our expectations*

Roman centurion: “And when he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking him to come and save the life of his slave.” (Lk.7:3) We are unclear why the Roman centurion sends the Jewish elders. Does he send surrogates because he thinks he can treat others as subordinates? Does the centurion believe that the Jewish elders have authority over Jesus? Only later, through the centurion’s own disclosure through his friends, do his real motives and understanding of Jesus become clear.

Sinful woman: “And behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner, and when she learned that he was reclining at the table in the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing his feet, and anointing them with the perfume.” (Lk.7:37 – 38) The sinful woman, of course, reveals her thankfulness and emotions for Jesus by her actions. She never speaks in the story, but her character is shown through her actions.

Zaccheus: “And he ran on ahead and climbed into a sycamore tree in order to see him.” (Lk.19:4) Zaccheus demonstrates a willingness to do something childish, for only children climb trees. It is an expression that he no longer clings to his adultish dignity and is willing to humble himself for Jesus. Zaccheus has become like the “babies” (Lk.18:15) contrasted favorably with the rich ruler (Lk.18:18 – 30). Zaccheus is the rich ruler who does repent.

### *3. Character revealed through gestures, appearances, or costume*

Rich man: “Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day.” (Lk.16:19) Purple was extremely rare and expensive, as was linen. Hence, this is a rich man who is exceedingly wealthy.

### *4. Character revealed through another character’s comments regarding her/him*

Roman centurion: “And when they had come to Jesus, they earnestly entreated him, saying, ‘He is worthy for you to grant this to him; for he loves our nation, and it was he who built us our synagogue.’” (Lk.7:4 – 5) Here we learn that the centurion was friendly towards the nation Israel. We are unsure of his devotion to Israel’s God, but respect is indicated.

### *5. Character revealed through direct speech of the individual*

Speech may be an open door or a drawn shutter to their real character, depending on whether the character is telling the truth.

- *Saving Private Ryan* contains an epiphanic insight into a character’s life. During an episode where some soldiers are threatening to defect, Hanks suddenly shares about his identity as a

schoolteacher. The sudden reminder, hope, or glimmer of peacetime life in the midst of war done in the form of a personal self-disclosure is powerful because it is the first time we get an insight into the character's real self and inner life. It is from that point that we really understand how Hanks' character interprets the war around him and the mission he's on; we sympathize with him more. (Steven Spielberg does this quite often in his movies.)

Roman centurion: "Now Jesus started on his way with them; and when he was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, 'Lord, do not trouble yourself further, for I am not worthy for you to come under my roof; for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I, too, am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes; and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it.'" (Lk.7:6 – 8) Although technically the centurion's friends give this speech, it is in the first person, a recitation of what the centurion actually says to Jesus, so we will treat it as his direct speech. Finally, we hear why the centurion has approached Jesus in this way. It is not because he believes Jesus is subordinate to the Jewish elders, nor because he has a high view of himself. Precisely the opposite: he regards himself as not worthy to come to Jesus, nor to entertain Jesus in his own home. He has an incredibly high view of Jesus' authority.

#### 6. *Character revealed through inward speech*

Simon the Pharisee: "Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet he would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching him, that she is a sinner.'" (Lk.7:39) This statement reveals the Pharisee, since we have already been told about the woman.

#### 7. *Character revealed by the narrator explicitly in statements about attitudes, motives, etc.*

Specific descriptions made by the narrator are so rare, they are very important whenever they occur.

Zecharias and Elizabeth: "And they were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord." (Lk.1:6) When Luke introduces Zecharias and Elizabeth, he loads them up with superlatives. This builds our sense of expectation that God will work through them. It echoes other righteous couples in Scripture, particularly Abraham and Sarah. It also increases the irony when Zecharias does not believe the angel and is rendered mute.

Simeon: "And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout." (Lk.2:25) Simeon's role in the narrative is absolutely unique; he is the first to grasp and proclaim the scope of Jesus' impact, that Jesus will be a "light to the Gentiles" (2:32). It is not surprising, then, that Luke describes him as righteous and devout. Simeon's quote and interpretation of Isaiah's prophecy is essential to Luke's broader purpose.

Exercise: Think of the disclosure of a character in a movie where that is a significant motif. Study the disclosure of character and how it progresses in one of the following cases: (1) the centurion in Luke 7:1 – 10; (2) Simon the Pharisee in Luke 7:36 – 50; or if you're ambitious, (3) Judas Iscariot throughout the Gospel of Luke; or (4) Simon Peter throughout the Gospel of Luke and Acts. Compare the two.

**D. STRUCTURE. The literary structure of the narrative often helps make the point.**

*1. The Juxtaposition of Stories*

The Scriptures as like a tapestry where the individual colors of each story create a meaningful picture as they are placed next to other stories. Often, significant comparisons can be made between two back-to-back narrative events. Also, an entire book can be studied at once, considering especially the beginning and the end. On every level one consistently asks two questions:

1. How is this material similar to what has come before?
2. How is this material different from what has come before?

It is frequently on this discontinuity that the emphasis is made. *Luke in particular places people or events in pairs.* Here are some examples.

**The synagogues of Nazareth and Capernaum** (Lk.4:14 – 44) both misinterpret Jesus and contrast different responses of Israel to Jesus. This triggers Jesus’ recruitment of his own twelve disciples as a representation of a renewed Israel.

**Simon Peter and the leper** (Lk.5:1 – 16) both fall at Jesus’ feet but contrast different hopes about Jesus’ ability to be cleansed.

**The paralytic and Levi** (Lk.5:17 – 32) both are told by Jesus to “rise” from a seemingly impossible situation.

Exercise: Select one of the pairings above and describe the similarities and differences between the two people paired.

*2. The Narrative Tapestry:*

Many commentaries and study guides call Luke 5:1 – 9:50 simply “the Galilean ministry,” as distinct from “the road to Jerusalem” in 9:51 – 19:44. This observation, while accurate, contains little by way of pastoral significance. In this analysis, we highlight what Jesus was doing with his disciples, and what that means for us.

Scripture/ Theme	Jesus’ Word	Jesus’ ID & Authority	New Community	Forgive Sin	Heal & Complete People	Clean & Unclean	Faith	New and Old	We Bear Fruit (Life)	Life Out of Death	Kingdom of God
5:1 – 11	X	X	X	X							
5:12 – 16	X	X	X		X	X					
5:17 – 26	X	X		X	X		X				
5:27 – 32	X	X	X	X	X						
5:33 – 39		X						X			
6:1 – 11	X	X			X			X			
6:12 – 19	X		X					X			
6:20 – 42	X	X	X					X			
6:43 – 49	X	X	X					X	X		
7:1 – 10	X	X	X			X	X			X	
7:11 – 17	X	X	X			X				X	
7:18 – 35		X			X	X				X	
7:36 – 50	X	X		X			X				
8:1 – 21	X	X	X						X	X	
8:22 – 25	X	X					X			X	
8:26 – 39	X	X	X		X	X				X	
8:40 – 56	X	X	X		X	X	X			X	
9:1 – 9		X			X					X	X
9:10 – 17		X			X						X
9:18 – 50	X	X			X	X				X	X

We find major discipleship themes emerging in this narrative tapestry. First, Jesus trains his disciples in a spirituality and language of “life out of death.” Second, Jesus calls his disciples into a new community with new ethics. Third, Jesus transforms people by his word.

*3. The Unresolved Ending:*

Sometimes a biblical book or story ends without resolving a story, because it *asks the reader to make a judgment* on a character that boomerangs back on the reader.

- *A Few Good Men* contains a disclosure that reverses the viewers' feelings and judgments. At first we side with Tom Cruise as the lawyer finding out the truth about the murdered Santiago. But after Jack Nicholson's disclosure ("You can't handle the truth!"), we have mixed feelings towards Cruise and his efforts. Furthermore, we have to judge ourselves for enjoying the benefits of military actions we judge.
- The book *Lord of the Flies* has a boomeranging judgment, where you as the reader detest the savagery of the boys stranded on the island. But then the boys are "saved" by British sailors returning to their gunboats. We as readers thus recognize that the savagery of the boys on the island is parallel to the savagery of the men in the world. They are not "saved" at all, and thus we judge ourselves.

Nathan's parable to King David in 2 Samuel 12 invited David to make a judgment on the rich man, and that judgment came boomeranging back on David.

The book of Jonah invites the reader to make a judgment on Jonah, which comes boomeranging back on the reader.

**Jesus' parable of the two lost sons** in Luke 15:11 – 32 invites the Pharisees to judge the older brother, and therefore judge themselves. See below for further explanation.

**Acts** invites Roman Imperial officials, and probably even Caesar himself, to conclude that any attempt to thwart the spread of the Christian message is futile, even if they kill Paul.

#### 4. *The Inverted Parallel*<sup>7</sup>

The Nazareth synagogue story is arranged in an inverted parallel. Surprisingly, out of all the motifs of healing and reversal listed in Jesus' quotation, the one highlighted here seems to be "recovery of sight to the blind." We suggest that Luke's emphasis is: Jesus shows that the synagogue members are still blind; they fix their eyes on Jesus, but they fail to understand God's purpose through him as he speaks of God's grace to the Gentiles. They reveal themselves to be blind as they try to throw Jesus off a cliff.

1. Lk.4:16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom.

2. He stood up to read,

3. <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.

4. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

5. <sup>18</sup> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

6. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

**7. and recovery of sight to the blind,**

6'. to let the oppressed go free,

5'. <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

4'. <sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll,

3'. gave it back to the attendant,

2'. and sat down.

1'. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

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<sup>7</sup> The following examples come from Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, combined edition printed 1983), p.68 – 69 and 158 – 206.

Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (Lk.15:11 – 32) is arranged in the form of two inverted parallels. The emphasis of the younger son's story falls on the younger son's change of attitude that effects a complete change of relationship with the father. Structurally, the positive motifs in the latter half of the story are the inverse of the negative motifs in the first half.

1. There was a man who had two sons and the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of property that falls to me." And he divided his living between them.	A son is lost
2. Not many days later the younger son sold all he had, journeyed to a far country and wasted his property in loose living.	Goods wasted in loose living
3. And when he had spent everything a great famine arose in that country and he began to be in want.	Everything lost
4. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country and he sent him to his fields to feed pigs.	Clings to a stranger
5. And he would gladly have eaten the pods which the pigs ate and no one gave him anything.	Total rejection
6. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's servants have bread to spare but I perish here with hunger.	Self-recognition 1 I am perishing
6'. I will arise and go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you and am no more worthy to be called your son; make me a servant.'"	Self-recognition 2 I have sinned
5'. And he arose and came to his father. And while he was at a great distance his father saw him and had compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him.	Total acceptance
4'. And the son said to the father, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you and am no more worthy to be called your son."	Clings to his father
3' And the father said to the servants, "Bring the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hands and shoes on his feet.	Everything restored
2'. And bring the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and make merry	Goods used in celebration
1'. for this son of mine was dead and is alive, he was lost and is found." And they began to make merry.	A son is found

By contrast, the emphasis of the older son's story falls on the older son's resistance to changing his attitude. Structurally, the motifs in the latter half of the story are the same, if not amplifications, of the motifs in the first half. This constancy shows the effect of the older son's stubborn resistance to his father. He begins stubborn and he ends stubborn.

1. Now the elder son was in the fields, and as he came and drew near to the house he heard music and dancing and he called one of the boys and asked what this meant.	Older brother outside
2. And he said to him, "Your brother has come and your father has killed the fatted calf because he received him with peace."	Your brother safe A feast
3. But he was angry and refused to go in so his father came out and was entreating him.	Father entreats
4. But he answered his father, "Lo these many years I have served you and I have never disobeyed your commandments yet you never gave me a kid to make merry with my friends.	Complaint 1: You don't pay me
4'. But this son of yours came who has devoured your living with harlots you killed for him the fatted calf."	Complaint 2: You bless him
3'. And he said to him, "Beloved son, you are always with me and all that is mine is yours.	Father entreats
2'. It was fitting to make merry and be glad for this your brother was dead and is alive, he was lost and is found."	A feast Your brother safe
[1'. And he remained outside at the door of the house refusing the music and dancing and rejecting not only his brother, but his father as well.]	Older brother outside

As mentioned earlier, we believe Jesus intends for the Pharisees to provide the missing ending [1']. We believe [1'] is negative (the older brother continues to stand outside) because of the structure of the story; the fact that the older son does not change his attitude means that the elements in the latter half of the story also do not change. The Pharisees, as Jewish listeners familiar with the chiasmic rhythm of the story, would have *completed it in their minds*. By providing this ending, the Pharisees are in effect judging the older son for standing outside the celebration, and by extension, themselves for doing the same thing: standing outside the celebration Jesus is holding with the tax-collectors and sinners (Lk.15:1 – 2). In crafting his story in this way, Jesus continues to reach out to the Pharisees and press them to rejoice with him, even as the days draw near for his final entry into Jerusalem.

## SUMMARY OF THE METHODOLOGY

1. **Trace the THEMES in the Story, Especially to the End.** The repetition of certain themes and patterns in the narrative determine the narrator's intention and message. In particular, the ending of each narrative is very important because it ties up various themes.
2. **Identify Historic and/or Literary ECHOES.** Parallels to previous biblical literature or historical events help reinforce expectations or provide emotional charge.
3. **Follow the Play of DISCLOSURE, Information and Perspectives.** As readers, our involvement with the text's meaning is affected by the narrator's intended interaction between the reader and the characters, suggested by the level of information shared by the narrator at any given moment.
4. **Consider the Literary STRUCTURE.** The literary structure of the narrative often helps make the point.

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## APPENDIX A: Lyrics to Les Miserables' *Valjean Forgiven* and *Javert's Suicide*

### *Valjean Forgiven*

What have I done, sweet Jesus what have I done,  
Become a thief in the night, become a dog on the run?  
Have I fallen so far and is the hour so late that nothing remains but the cry of my hate?  
The cries in the dark that nobody hears, here where I stand at the turning of the years  
If there's another way to go, I missed it twenty long years ago  
My life was a war that could never be won, they gave me a number and murdered Valjean  
When they chained me and left me for dead, just for stealing a mouthful of bread  
Yet why did I allow that man to touch my soul and teach me love?  
He treated me like any other, he gave me his trust, he called me brother  
My life he claims for God above, can such things be?  
For I had come to hate the world, this world that always hated me  
Take an eye for an eye, turn your heart into stone  
This is all I have lived for, this is all I have known  
One word from him and I'd be back, beneath the lash upon the rack  
Instead he offers me my freedom, I feel my shame inside me like a knife  
He told me that I had a soul; how does he know?  
What spirit comes to move my life? Is there another way to go?  
I am reaching, but I fall, and the night is closing in  
And I stare into the void, to the whirlpool of my sin  
I'll escape now from the world, from the world of Jean Valjean  
Jean Valjean is nothing now, another story must begin...

### *Javert's Suicide*

Who is this man, what sort of devil is he?  
To have me caught in a trap, and choose to let me go free  
It was his hour at last to put a seal on my fate  
Wipe out the past, and watch me clean off the slate  
All it would take was a flick of his knife; vengeance was his, and he gave me back my life  
Damned if I'll live in the debt of a thief, damned if I'll yield at the end of a chase  
I am the law, and the law is not mocked, I'll spit his pity right back at his face  
There is nothing on earth that we share; it is either Valjean or Javert  
How can I now allow this man to hold dominion over me  
This desperate man whom I have hunted; he gave me my life, he gave me freedom  
I should have perished by his hand; it was his right  
It was my right to die as well; instead I live, but live in hell  
Can my thoughts fly apart? Can this man be relieved?  
Shall his sins be forgiven? Shall his crimes be reprieved?  
And must I now begin to doubt, who never doubted all these years  
My heart is stone and still it trembles; the world I have known is lost in shadows  
Is he from heaven or from hell, and does he know?  
That granting me my life today, this man has killed me even so  
I am reaching, but I fall, and the stars are black and cold  
As I stare into the void of a world that cannot hold  
I'll escape now from that world, from the world of Jean Valjean  
There is nowhere I can turn, there is nowhere to go on...