

Literary Techniques and Authorship as a Biblical Parallel

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Abstract

Language and Legend deeply influence culture. Stories last lifetimes, and the author is merely an inspired artist who paints a picture with his words rather than with brushes. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but words can paint a thousand different pictures. Just as artists have specialized sets of techniques to paint their pictures, authors, too, have specific techniques to properly construct their stories. The story of Jesus is obviously a quintessential part of the Christian faith, but it is only one of many important stories in the ultimate storybook—the Bible. If looked at as simply a work of literature, the Bible can be analyzed for complex subtleties and literary techniques by readers. Writing is always intentional, so if a detail is included, it is important. By analyzing the Bible and examining all of its literary techniques woven into a complex portrait of our world, readers can learn an immense amount about its divine author. What better way to explore the image of God than by reading the God-breathed text of “the Living Word?”

Literary Techniques and Authorship as a Biblical Parallel

Words are powerful, whether they are thought, spoken, whispered, shouted, and written. Words are indicative of intelligence and cognition and therefore come from an intelligent source. Often times, words are strung together into magnificent pieces of literature. Words matter; they are quintessential vital life. “We’re word-ish people” (Piper & Taylor, 2009, p. 23). Most forms of communication use words to transmit their point. “What do words have to do with Christianity? Almost everything” (Piper & Taylor, 2009, p. 15). If something is critical to a life in general, it is important to the specifics as well. Words hold weight all the time. The first words ever spoken were spoken by God, not a human (Piper & Taylor, 2009). The Bible is the manifestation of the words of God. It is often called the Living Word. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1, English Standard Version). Not only are the Scriptures inspired by God, but they are, in and of themselves, the being of God himself. God has made himself clear through the scripture since the beginning. “At every stage in the redemptive history—from the time before time, to God’s creation, to man’s fall, to Christ’s redemption, and to the coming consummation— ‘God is there and he is not silent’” (Piper & Taylor, 2009, p. 15). Not only are words essential to us, they are central to God. He has never stopped communicating with us. He has continued to speak to us and has never left us. This is an important insight into the image of God.

Beyond words alone is the art of storytelling. The Bible, when looked at simply as a work of literature, can be analyzed for complex subtleties and literary techniques which not only give a more comprehensive understanding of the writing but also provide a greater view of the image of God. “Storytelling can be used to communicate research findings in novel and sightful ways” (Arter & Tregidaga, 2014, p. 8). Humans gravitate toward stories; hiding meaning in a story is an

effective way to ensure your message is heard. In other words, there is often more than meets the eye. “This practice is termed by the authors, Ivanaj, Poldner and Shrivastav, as aesthetic practice pedagogy. They argue the practice deepens understandings of sustainability and sustainable enterprise by connecting our hands, heart and heads—our feelings, our practices and our cognition. Thus they argue that aesthetic practice pedagogy is able to ‘evoke deep personal, emotional understanding and commitment to action’” (Arter & Tregidaga, 2014, p. 7). Analyzing literature allows for our whole being to be connected and affected by the message. We see new things, and our humanity is targeted. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Through the Bible, we experience Jesus. We understand the love of the Father and the presence of the Spirit.

“There are three types of rhetorical appeals, or persuasive strategies, used in arguments to support claims and respond to opposing arguments. A good argument will generally use a combination of all three appeals to make its case” (Stolley & Weida, 2013, para. 1). A good piece of literature is methodical yet implicit, leaving things for the reader to discover. The use of rhetorical strategies strengthens the writing and the persuasive nature of the work. “Logos or the appeal to reason relies on logic or reason. Logic often depends on the use of inductive or deductive reasoning” (Stolley & Weida, 2013, para. 2). For anything in life to be understood, there needs to be some sense of logic and reason to it. An argument must be easy to follow (Stolley & Weida, 2013, para. 45). If it does not make sense, the audience will become disengaged and, chances are, the reader will lose interest before the author makes his point. A purposeful yet underlying appeal to reason allows the reader to become the detective. The reader

will interpret the text; he will find meaning. This takes a universal work and allows for a personal message to be revealed.

“It has been claimed that the modern mind is ‘haunted by the belief that the only meaningful concepts are those capable of mathematical elucidation’” (Arter & Tregidaga, 2014, p. 6). As a society, when it comes to proving something, we prefer empirical facts. Often times, this is erroneously perceived as an obstacle to the acceptance of faith in the scientific community because they claim that there is no substantial evidence. Before individuals accept something, they want indisputable evidence. In the same way, conclusions or inferences must be drawn only after the presentation and analysis of evidence. “Deductive reasoning begins with a generalization and then applies it to a specific case. The generalization you start with must have been based on a sufficient amount of reliable evidence” (Stolley & Weida, 2013, para. 6). Deductive reasoning is often coupled with inductive reasoning. “Inductive reasoning takes a specific representative case of facts and then draws generalizations or conclusions from them” (Stolley & Weida, 2013, para. 3). The difference between deductive and inductive reasoning is origin; both require evidence and involve generalizations and specifics, but the information which you are initially given will dictate the direction of logic. The ability to reason is a particularly needed skill when it comes to literary analysis. Without reasoning, things would be taken at face value and the deeper meanings of writing would be missed. For instance, Proverbs 15:4 says, “A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.” Later, in Proverbs 16:23, it states, “The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips.” In another verse, Proverbs 18:21, it says, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.” If one simply reads these as three separate sentences, he did not use his ability to reason. When one uses these three pieces of

evidence, however, he can draw a conclusion. “The book of Proverbs is, in ways, a treatise on talk” (Piper & Taylor, 2009, p. 24).

Logos and reasoning—both inductive and deductive—help the reader scan the work for greater meaning. For one, it can help reveal general themes. It can also help separate a complex and dense piece into sections so that one can better understand the whole. Sometimes examining the parts of the whole gives a more comprehensive view of the whole itself. Gothic artist, Flannery O’Connor, applied this to her work. “Though not a theologian, O’Connor sought in her art to embody the crisis of meaning in the twentieth century while simultaneously confronting, and perhaps embracing, the contours of a medieval Catholic vision of life” (Bosco, 2009, p. 42). This concept of a “crisis of meaning” is interesting as it brings attention to the difficulty yet quintessential nature of finding meaning. O’Connor did apply the Catholic outlook to her work. “O’Connor imbibed the mysticism and synthesis of this medieval Catholicism, a philosophical and theological approach that saw reason and faith not as adversaries but as collaborators in the production of knowledge and the arts (Bosco, 2009, p. 41). Reason and faith do not have to oppose each other. In fact, in Matthew 22:37, God calls us to use both. They can—and do—go together. When one acknowledges this, even if he simply entertains the idea, he can begin to really use analysis to draw parallels between the Bible, books, life, and Jesus.

Beyond logos is ethos and pathos. Both help establish a direct connection to the audience as they play to the humanity of an individual. “Ethos or the ethical appeal is based on the character, credibility, or reliability of the writer” (Stolley & Weida, 2013, para. 40). Thus, ethos taps into morals. “Pathos, or emotional appeal, appeals to an audience’s needs, values, and emotional sensibilities” (Stolley & Weida, 2013, para. 47). Thus, pathos taps into feelings. Both immediately affect the reader and can be used specifically to better a work by engaging the

reader in a visceral way with the subject at hand. “Establish common ground with your audience. Most of the time, this can be done by acknowledging values and beliefs shared by those on both sides of the argument” (Stolley & Weida, 2013, para. 43). Writers and readers are both human. Even if humanity is all they share, that connection can be the basis for much comparison. Biblical authors thought of their audience. “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence” (2 Peter 1:3). At first, one may miss the intentionality of the diction in this verse. Peter did something specific, though. “Why does Peter use two words—life and godliness? I think Peter uses two words because he knows his audience” (Piper & Taylor, 2009, p. 41). Moreover, he directly connects to his reader by his choice of an inclusive pronoun, *us*. Peter joins himself in with the reader. He connects by finding common ground—their shared humanity.

Before literature aims to make the reader critically think, it must first connect to the reader. It is key for an author to keep the audience in mind when writing a piece. In the same way that a work that lacks logic will lose the reader early on, a work that cannot connect to the audience will have a similar outcome. Furthermore, it is important to have a direct message: a message to which they can directly relate. The versatility of the Bible is truly magnificent. Because it was so specifically ordained for the people, it is relatable to all people at all times and in all situations. “It is important to pay attention to silent voices, consider things from different perspectives, and look for meaning which are not necessarily those which we take for granted” (Arter & Tregidaga, 2014, p. 7). Everyone is going through a different experience at any given moment, but because the Bible has such a direct yet multifaceted message, it can be interpreted and reinterpreted many different ways. Everyone will get something a little different; each

individual will receive what he individually needs at the moment. Similarly, it is this very nature of the Bible that allows it to be reread yet never lacking new lessons. “While we suspect each reader will interpret the papers in different ways, with some resonating positively and other not so, what is common to all the papers is a desire to engage the reader in a novel, interesting and memorable way” (Arter & Tregidaga, 2014, p. 7). A single parable has endless potential in regards to application, and as a result the Bible is never irrelevant.

Style is also very important. There is not one specific template that must be followed for a piece of literature (Arter & Tregidaga, 2014). Various forms evoke and emphasize different things, but the principle of style is notable. John Calvin specifically highlights the pure eloquence of Isaiah and the impact it has on faith (Piper & Taylor, 2009). The focus on eloquence is significant. “The poet John Donne said: ‘the Holy ghost in penning the Scriptures delights himself, not only with a propriety, but with a delicacy, and harmony, and melody of language; with height of metaphors, and other figures, which may work greater impressions upon the readers’” (Piper & Taylor, 2009, p. 68). Again, intentionality concerning audience is of explicit value. Moreover, there are clearly certain tones and moods incorporated into the writing which serve to connect to the reader and cause them to ruminate on the message longer. “In other words, Donne is saying that there is eloquence of language in the Bible, and some of the impact of the text on readers is owing in some way to that eloquence” (Piper & Taylor, 2009, p. 68). Eloquent writing is potent, and in this way, the persuasiveness of the writing amplifies.

In every piece of literature, there is a definite level of intentionality. Words, as previously established, hold weight. “You have never spoken a neutral word in your life” (Piper & Taylor, 2009, p. 24). Each word, sentence, paragraph, page, and book have been specifically written. Words are the medium used to convey a message. “Words have direction to them” (Piper &

Taylor, 2009, p. 24). As a writer, one is writing to entertain, explain, describe, inform, or influence. No matter the genre of the work, the words have a purpose. “We think that words are not that important because we think of words as little utilitarian tools for making out life easier and more efficient, when they are actually a powerful gift given by a communication God for his divine purpose” (Piper & Taylor, 2009, p. 24). God doesn’t accidentally utter words. God’s voice commands attention as it falls upon listening ears.

Specific diction is often used to evoke a certain feeling or to draw emphasis within the text. By performing word studies, for example, we can uncover more of the story. 2 Peter 1:3-4 says, “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.” One can hone in on a particular phrase and learn from it. The 2 Peter phrase, *His divine power has granted*, has a past perfect verb which means the action of the past continues to impact the future, so as God’s child, what is promised is already present (Piper & Taylor, 2009). These hidden features are often over looked, but they do provide an extreme amount of information.

The Bible is a unique piece of literature in that it is made up of multiple books with many authors. The Bible is an anthology with a unique interconnectedness that points beyond human authorship to the Divine. The many authors of the Bible compile a concordant account of times before and after Jesus. There is no doubt that the structure of the Bible is complex. Nor is the Bible set up chronologically. That doesn’t discredit it though. There are multiple ways to have an organized piece of literature, despite a lack of chronological order. “Organize your argument in a logical, easy to follow manner. You can use the Toulmin method of logic or a

simple pattern such as chronological order, most general to most detailed example, earliest to most recent example, etc.” (Stolley & Weida, 2013, para. 45). The Toulmin method suggests a system of coherent writing. The complicated layout of the Bible is not an insurmountable obstacle. Once one has acknowledged the logical structure of the Bible, he must simply take the time to break it apart with the purpose of understanding the deeper meaning.

The Bible is the ultimate storybook, but it is not fiction. “It has been argued that narrative is a key device through which humans attempt ‘to find meaning in an overwhelmingly crowded and disordered chronologically reality’” (Arter & Tregidaga, 2014, p. 5). Examining the Bible as a narrative piece can provide readers a better understanding of the seemingly mismatched text. The text actually goes together perfectly to tell the story of the Trinity. There is distinct continuity throughout all the books of the Bible. Humans author each book, and each human has a different view of life, and yet one author’s words serve to support another’s. This is not to say that there is absolutely never any discrepancy, but if everything was perfectly and exactly the same, it would seem that there was previous conspiring by the authors (Strobel, 1998). The small differences actually add legitimacy to the text. “Once you allow for the elements... of paraphrase, of abridgement, of explanatory additions, of selection, of omission—the gospels are extremely consistent with each other by ancient standards, which are the only standards by which it’s fair to judge them” (Strobel, 1998, p. 45). This consistency is seen through the parallelism within the Bible. Parallelism is noted from book to book in regards to facts, details, quotations, stories, themes, and time. “James 3:1-12 contains the single most sustained discussion in the New Testament on the use of the tongue” (Piper & Taylor, 2009, p. 46). As previously stated, Proverbs is also full of verses about the tongue and words of the mouth. “Both the book of Proverbs and our Lord Jesus spoke with searching clarity about the

nature and use of the tongue. James walk in their footprints” (Piper & Taylor, 2009, p. 46). Not only do Proverbs and James focus on talk, but Jesus himself spoke on the topic. “I take the author of this little book to have been James, the half-brother of our Lord Jesus” (Piper & Taylor, 2009, p. 46). It makes sense that James and Jesus would talk about the same topics; they were, after all, brothers. “It is clear that he is steeped in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament Scriptures and also in the teaching of the Lord Jesus, to which his own teaching has many parallels” (Piper & Taylor, 2009, p. 46). The multiple authors don’t make things worse; they make things better and more reliable. The fact that the books relate and agree in such an amazing extent points to one ultimate muse.

For Christianity in general and the Bible specifically to be false, both would make up the greatest deception ever pulled on mankind. It would have had to have been so detailed and meticulously planned to last thousands of years. Moreover, if it was all a lie, the life of Jesus was a lie of the apostles, not of Jesus himself, because the New Testament manuscripts were written after his death. In this case, the apostles would have left out their flaws; they would have made themselves seem perfect. “When people testify about events they saw, they will often try to protect themselves or others by conveniently forgetting to mention details that are embarrassing or hard to explain” (Strobel, 1998, p. 49). Nobody goes out of their way to make themselves seem foolish. One tries to present himself in the best light. This is not the case of the Biblical writers. “Mark’s perspective of Peter is pretty consistently unflattering” (Strobel, 1998, p. 50). If all of this was a lie and the authors conspired before writing, they would have left out each other’s flaws. Furthermore, the gospel of John concludes with a statement regarding how some things had to be left out, as one could not write about every single thing that Jesus did, so the writers had a prime opportunity to leave out the negative things about themselves, but they kept

them in (Strobel, 1998). This adds reliability because it doesn't fit the regularities of a lie.

"There's very strong evidence for the trustworthiness of the gospel accounts" (Strobel, 1998, p. 52).

Analyzing the Bible as a piece of literature gives one a better view into who God really is. The authors of the Bible wrote specifically to reveal to the reader a beautiful picture of God. The Bible is the greatest work of all time, and it has managed to remain a best-seller for hundreds of years. Few people would be willing to endure persecution for a piece of literature, especially if it was full of lies. Through the use of rhetorical strategies and by examining the legitimacy of the authors and the manuscripts, the Bible's message is disclosed, and its significance is realized.

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