

*Lord of the Flies* as a Biblical Allegory

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## Abstract

*Lord of the Flies* is regarded as an English classic for its unique storyline and relevant societal themes. It is about a group of young boys stranded on an island when their plane crashes and their futile attempts to establish a civilized society. Over time, their inner sinful nature manifests, and they almost end up destroying the island and each other. While the story itself is exciting, it functions as much more than just an entertaining story; it also functions as a Christian allegory. The book's setting, characters, and themes are very similar to those in the Bible. The antagonist, Jack, resembles man's savage and power seeking instincts, while the protagonist, Ralph, symbolizes mankind's civilized and peaceful behavior. Throughout the story, author William Golding uses many biblical allusions and parallels to show the themes of the book. Thus, this book can relay its biblical influence to readers who might otherwise never hear the gospel. As a novel that has been and is still taught in many schools, it is widely known for these many biblical allusions and parallels to the Gospels.

*Lord of the Flies* as a Biblical Allegory

The novel *Lord of the Flies* is known as one of the greatest modern English books for its timeless themes and relevance to society. The story follows a group of young boys who have been stranded alone on an uninhabited island after their plane crashes. They attempt to establish a civilization and govern themselves, but come to catastrophic results. The book has been regarded as a modern classic and features many biblical allusions, such as its distinct similarities in setting, characters, and themes to those found in the Bible. As it is one of the best selling books in history and is still taught in many schools today, it also attracts a wide audience of readers, both religious and secular. Novels such as the *Lord of the Flies* serve as Biblical allegories that spread the Gospel to many people who may not have any contact with Christianity otherwise.

One of the book's most striking similarities to the Bible is its setting. The story begins with a plane crash on an island with only young boys surviving. This beautiful and pristine island filled with "acres of fruit trees" and "everywhere... the scent of ripeness" (Golding, 1954, p. 11) becomes corrupted and stained by the boys' sinful behavior. This description closely resembles the Garden of Eden, as Genesis says, "The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground — trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food" (Genesis 2:9, New International Version). The book goes on to describe the island with "an overflow of foliage hung down... and spilled lavishly around the forest. The air was thick with butterflies" (Golding, 1954, p. 28). The boys find that they have everything they could want and need on the island, just like Adam and Eve did in their Garden. Similar to the Garden of Eden in the Bible, the island in the story

begins as a pristine and pure sanctuary. The island's corruption by the emergence of evil and the boys' sins likewise continues the analogy.

Along with the setting, there are many other biblical allusions such as the book's title, antagonist, and themes. The title of the book, *Lord of the Flies*, is an allusion to Beelzebub, the "prince of demons" from the Bible and the novel's central symbol (Matthew 12:24). The title comes from the name the boys give the evil beast they fear in the story. The boys develop an overpowering terror towards this "beastie" because they believe there is a monster-like creature on the island. Their imaginations escalate their fears over time, and they create names and ideas of the so-called beast. However, the beast is not actually a physical monster, but a mental one. It is the savagery and sinful nature within the boys and symbolizes the devil. In the Bible, Beelzebub is another name for the devil and is also translated to "lord of the flies." It was "one of the most loathsome and repulsive of the false gods in the Old Testament" (Carter, 2010, para. 3). There are many verses in the Bible telling of "Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons" and how it was an alias for Satan (Luke 11:15). In addition to the title of the book, William Golding also showed his intentions to make the beast in the story representative of Satan by referring to the beast as a "snake." The boys call it a "snake-thing, ever so big" (Golding, 1954, p. 47). Not only does that term reinforce the claim that Golding used the beast and title of the book as a biblical allusion to Satan, but it also shows how the beastie specifically represents Satan in the Garden of Eden when he took the form of a snake, furthering the Garden of Eden parallel. From the beginning of Genesis, Satan was often called a snake or "that ancient serpent called the devil... who leads the whole world astray" (Revelation 12:9).

The characters in the *Lord of the Flies* are all young boys ranging from eight to thirteen years old, and Golding uses their young ages to exaggerate and emphasize the theme of good vs. evil throughout the story. One of the main characters, Jack, is the antagonist of the story and represents the evil, savage, and barbaric instincts of mankind. From the beginning, he wants control and power over the others. He realizes that he can use the boys' fears to lead them with immorality and corruption and is the "novel's prime representative of the instinct of savagery and violence" (Wu, 2009, p.12). He appeals to the boys' inner savage instincts and uses this to manipulate them into becoming bloodthirsty hunters.

On the other hand, the book's protagonist is Ralph, who represents the good throughout the story. From the beginning, his goodness and purity is shown when he removes his clothes and bathes in the water when he first arrives on the island. His actions show his innocence with nudity at the beginning, and his bathing in the water is similar to being baptized. Ralph symbolizes order, peace, and civilization as he attempts to keep the boys in line and focused on survival until they are rescued. At first, the other boys follow his lead and listen to his advice on building shelters, finding food, and maintaining peace. He sets rules that will keep everyone productive and safe. However, Jack's barbaric and savage ways of hunting and having fun attract the boys, and they start to follow him instead. Jack is able to get their loyalty and support by claiming that he is actually helping them by providing promises of food, friendship, and safety from the beast. He enlists a few other corrupt and morally evil boys, such as a boy named Roger, to hypocritically use his following to gain power and control. Jack and his posse portray themselves as responsible, all-knowing leaders. Taking advantage of the other boys' greed, weaknesses, and fears, they are able to manipulate the others to follow them, similar to the

Pharisees in the Bible. Jack and his tribe try to keep the “beastie” away by performing bestial sacrificial rituals and idolizing it. Their immoral and evil behavior parallels that of the corrupt and hypocritical behavior of the Pharisees, while Jack and his one loyal friend, Piggy, represent the good fighting back. The constant struggle between Jack and Ralph represents the ongoing war of good vs. evil, which is a prevalent theme also found in many stories in the Bible and within mankind.

While much of the book is fairly dark and cynical, one of the more positive and uplifting parts is the character Simon. From the start, Simon has a quiet, introspective and wise personality, greatly differing from the other boys. He “represents saintliness and a kind of innate, spiritual human goodness deeply connected with nature” (Wu, 2009, p.16). While all the other boys focus on getting food, shelter, and having fun, Simon spends his time meditating and thinking. He is the most religious character in the book and reflects the most of Christ’s teachings and behaviors. At the start of the story, he cared for the younger boys and “found for them the fruit they could not reach... and passed them back down” (Golding, 1954, p.61). Simon’s placing of ripe fruit into the hands of the children clearly alludes to the nurturing and proselytizing roles of Christ’s apostles (Kruger, 1999). Many of his actions and even his name parallel specifically to the apostle Simon Peter, whom Jesus told to care for and feed his lambs (John 21:15). Just like Peter tended to the sheep, Simon in *Lord of the Flies* helped the others and provided prophetic advice to Ralph. He is also the most symbolic character that represents a religious, articulate, and sensitive prophet or seer (Telgen, 1997).

Simon was the only boy who knew that the “beast” the rest feared was not a physical monster, but actually the evil and sinful nature in mankind and the boys’ imaginations. His

wisdom and seeming clairvoyance set him apart from the others, and he spent much of his time in the forest. At one point in the story, he confronts the “Lord of the Flies” in a symbolic mental conversation he has with the devil. He knew that the “beast” was really just the inner savagery and immorality in each of the boys, and refused to succumb to the devil’s temptations. In their confrontation, the beast in his head says to him, “You knew, didn’t you? I’m part of you?... I’m the reason why things are what they are” (Golding, 1954, p. 146). However, before Simon can explain his knowledge to the others, he is killed by the rest of the boys when they crazily mistake him for the beast. In their frenzied post-hunt ritual, they savagely beat him to death in a way “similar to that of many of the apostles, who were murdered by mobs” (Kruger, 1999, p. 168). His death could also be seen with fragments of likeliness to resurrection. The book described his “bright body” being swept into the ocean as a “silver shape beneath the steadfast constellation” in a supernatural and otherworldly way (Golding, 1954, p. 170). Although Simon falls short of Christ’s perfection, he still remains a witness to the higher reaches of the human spirit and provides the book with a much needed spiritual, savior-like figure (Kruger, 1999). His saintly, self-sacrificial behavior exemplified all that is good and holy in human life in the story.

One of Golding’s main themes is that all mankind has a sinful nature, and it manifests more easily in the absence of societal comfort. In the *Lord of the Flies*, he used young boys to represent mankind and the adult guardian figure to represent God. Without any sort of guidance or help from adults, the boys end up destroying the island and each other. Although they attempt to maintain civilized and orderly lifestyles at first, they quickly abandon this attempt, leading to catastrophic results. Golding uses the story to show that humanity is sinful by nature, and man is lost and self-destructive when lacking a relationship with God. Even though the boys try very

hard to establish rules and be good, almost all of them give in to their savage instincts. Ralph, Piggy, and Simon are the only characters that do not end up following Jack, and they represent the goodness of humanity and faith in the story. The book's idea that man is sinful is also paralleled in the Bible, which says, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned" showing that mankind is born sinful (Romans 5:12). The story uses the downfall of the boys and their destruction on the island to show the reader that all men are innately sinful. Golding also utilizes the setting in which the boys are alone with no parental guidance to enhance the idea that without the restraints of civilization taking effect, evil reveals its true face in the boys' behaviors and thoughts (Wu, 2009). The boys left alone on the island represent man when he is without God or a relationship with Christ, and that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the toughest of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5, English Standard Version). At the climax of the story, Jack and his followers have already savagely murdered Piggy and are trying to kill Ralph by setting the island on fire. The boys are then rescued by an adult who saw the smoke emitted from the flames. The adult figure symbolizes Jesus's relentless care and protection over man even when he least deserves it. When the adult comes to the island to save the remaining boys, he is saddened by the destruction and scarring they caused to the once perfect island. Without trusting and loving God, man is naturally sinful and lost.

While many agree that the obvious biblical allusions and parallels found in *Lord of the Flies* are intended and purposeful, others believe that all the novel's biblical similarities are purely ironic and unintentional by the author. Many secular readers claim Golding's allusions are inadvertent or coincidental. Others argue that although the book could contain biblical



similarities purposely written in by Golding, he did so to mock religion and sees it in a negative light. However, there is much information to show that Golding truly intended *Lord of the Flies* to spread religious ideas to his readers and wanted them to interpret it with Biblical meanings. Not only was Golding a Christian himself, but there are some biblical allusions in the book so obviously referring to the Bible that it could not be ironic or coincidence, such as the title and the beast in the story. Golding said himself, “Woe unto me if I don’t speak of the things of God” (Van Vuurenn, 2004, p. 1). He was a Christian and had an “overt Christian faith” that is shown in much of his writing (Kruger, 1999, p.168). He is known for using many biblical symbols and parallels in his works. Many who have read the *Lord of the Flies* say the story’s symbolic narrative spans Judeo-Christian salvation history and echoes many biblical themes (Van Vuurenn, 2004). Golding’s writing in the *Lord of the Flies* and many of his other works contain so many biblical allusions, symbols, and similarities that it would be impossible for them to be accidental. His Christian background and ways this influenced his writing makes readers “feel the overwhelming presence of a creator elsewhere” (Van Vuurenn, 2004, p.1). His way of spreading the Gospel and making disciples was done through his writing.

The *Lord of the Flies* is widely read and discussed by many people both religious and secular. It is taught in many schools around the country and promotes debates over the abundance of biblical allusions and similarities found in the story. Golding used these biblical themes to enhance his story and convey his point that mankind is sinful and needs a relationship with God to be whole and good. The story’s characters, setting, themes, and references all develop the basis of the book on the fall of man, the problem of evil, and the ramifications of original sin (Green, 2010). Many readers are led to research much of the book’s biblical allusions

and are then introduced to the Gospels, spreading the story of Christ to nonbelievers and enhancing religious readers who want to learn more.

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