**Controlling Characters of Scripture**

**Eric Belz**

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Assignment: List the controlling **characters (spiritual and human)** that help communicate the metanarrative of the Sacred Storybook through each segment of your breakouts (Task 3), along with reasons for your selections.

**Characters**

1. God – The central character of the Sacred Storybook. The story opens and closes with Him. He is the prevailing authority, the one Being who is wholly “other” and above all creation. His Book is a revelation of Himself, His character, His will, His desire for and work toward a relationship with His creation, especially man as His highest creation.
2. Holy Spirit – Initially introduced in Gen.1:2, he remains in the background (appearing at various points briefly) until the book of Acts. At this point, …
3. Adam and Eve – Found in the opening pages of the story, their influence is acutely felt by humanity for the rest of time. Through these two, sin and death enter the world, as well as other consequences of sin.
4. Serpent / Satan – This created being becomes the archenemy of God and all who want to follow God. Beginning in Genesis 3, as he tempts Eve, we see his character of evil, lying and deceiving, bent on the destruction of man and all that is good, pouring all of himself into thwarting God’s good purposes, at eternal enmity with God. He continues to work evil, along with the influences of sin, the flesh and the world, until God forever banishes him to the lake of burning sulfur (Rev.20:10).
5. Cain and Abel – These characters appear briefly, contrasting evil and good, despair and faith, showing that sin and its consequences are passed on from generation to generation.
6. Noah – Noah is a significant character because he shows faith, hope and grace in the midst of terrible wickedness. He believes in God, obeys God and is saved by God amid global judgment for sin. Yet the story shows that he is not perfect. The human race begins again through this man and his family.
7. Abram / Abraham – Abram is a central character in the Sacred Storybook. He is a man of faith, a man fully devoted to the Lord, a man chosen by God (by God’s grace, not because of Abram’s merit) to become the father of God’s chose people, the nation of Israel. His faith in God becomes a model for all who will come after him, for through it he is credited as righteous. Again, the story reveals that he is not perfect, but he sets a standard for those who follow. God promises that in him, all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen.12:2-3). Later, we find out this refers to Christ, a descendant of Abram. Beginning in Genesis 12, the focus of the Sacred Storybook now shifts from all the earth to Abraham and his descendants, the nation of Israel.
8. Melchizedek in Gen.14 is introduced as an unusual character, being both a King and a priest. Abram tithes to him, but we don’t find out his significance until the writer of Hebrews shares that he is a type of Christ, for Christ was both King and priest.
9. Ishmael in Gen.16, 21 becomes an important character in the sense that he is descendant of Abram, and although he is not the heir of God’s chosen people, he becomes the father of a powerful people, many of whom are Islamic people today. Likewise Lot becomes the father of nations through his daughters, although these people are not controlling in the metanarrative.
10. The other patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, become important in the Grand Metanarrative, for it is through them that the Promise and Covenant are continued. Isaac in Gen. 22 becomes a picture of Christ as he is prepared to be sacrificed, willingly obeying the Father. God provides a ram in place of Isaac to be sacrificed. Abraham’s first love for the Lord is affirmed, and the covenant between him and God is reiterated. God’s covenant is reaffirmed again in Gen.26 (with Isaac) and 28 and 35 (with Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel).
11. Although not the son of Jacob’s through whom the Messiah would be born, yet Joseph becomes an important character whom God used to save the Jewish nation, moving them to Egypt and blessing them. Joseph is a picture of God’s grace through difficulty, and the call to remain faithful to God despite hardship and temptation. God uses this man to demonstrate His love and care for the Israelites.
12. There are several times in the Old Testament where we encounter an/the “angel of the Lord.” This is an important character who delivers messages for God, interacts with God’s people, and at times performs great wonders. It is often believed that many of these appearances are the pre-incarnate Son of God. Examples are Gen.16, 18, 22, 31, 32, 48, Exodus 3, Joshua 5, Judges 6, 2 Sam. 24, Zech.1, etc.
13. Moses becomes an enormously significant character in the Grand Metanarrative as he is used by God to deliver the Israelites from captivity in Egypt, demonstrating God’s power over foreign gods through the Plagues, the Passover symbolizing redemption and salvation through faith in God and deliverance even through the Red Sea. The pillar of fire and cloud (Ex.13) become symbols of God’s guidance of the Israelites through the wilderness. Manna (and later quail) becomes a symbol of God’s miraculous provision for His people. The rebellion of the Israelites, complaining against God and Moses, is a recurring theme throughout the Old Testament, as they quickly forget God’s grace and goodness and return to idolatry, complaining and sin. In addition, Moses is a central figure for God communicated the Law to him and he then passed it on to the nation of Israel. God used him to write the first five books of the Old Testament where the fundamentals of the Jewish faith are all communicated. The Ten Commandments (Ex.20, Deut.5) become a symbol of the entire Law, God’s commands, instructions and guidelines for His people.
14. The Levites, who appear at many points throughout the First Testament, are central characters as God’s chosen priests, mediators between God and men, even as the prophets where spokesmen from the Lord to the people. The perform important ceremonies such as sacrifices and offerings, bridging the gap between God and men. Jesus has the role of High Priest as one of his “offices” and in the Second Testament all believers are considered a “kingdom of priests” who now have access directly to God through the blood of Christ.
15. Joshua becomes an important character as he inherits leadership of Israel from Moses after his death, and Joshua is used by God to conquer the Promised Land and take it from foreign nations, showing God’s power and glory over all other nations and gods. Joshua is faithful to follow God’s instructions, and tries to help Israel to follow God. There are many great victories and some painful defeats, but God eventually establishes the twelve tribes in the land, showing Himself faithful to His promises. Although there are some important judges (Gideon, Samson, etc.), none of them seem to be controlling characters vital for understanding the Grand Narrative.
16. Some may consider Rahab a controlling character, because she is a foreigner (Gentile) who through her faith in God becomes an ancestor of Christ. Likewise Ruth is a Moabitess (Gentile), but has deep commitment to her mother-in-law and faith in God, and this is a delightful story with a fairy-tale happy ending as she gets married to a very good man (Boaz) and becomes the great-grandmother of David.
17. Although difficult to place on the timeline, the story of Job is significant in proclaiming the need for faith in God despite terrible suffering and lack of understanding God’s purposes.
18. Samuel certainly is a vital character in the Sacred Storybook, for he ties together the transition of Israel from theocracy to monarchy. He is the last of the judges, and also serves as the prophet and priest in Israel, through whom God speaks powerfully, who offers sacrifices for the people, and who is absolutely committed to God’s ways. He ends up anointing the first two kings of Israel, while warning Israel they are heading away from God toward destruction.
19. Saul is an important character, but mainly as a backdrop to the best known king of Israel, David. Saul begins well but before long he wanders from the Lord, losing faith and losing the blessing of God. He is at enmity with God’s chosen successor, David, although his son Jonathan is best friends with David.
20. In contrast with Saul, David is a man after God’s own heart who is passionate for the glory and worship of God. Although certainly not perfect, David is perhaps the most important Old Testament character, among other reasons, because he points us forward through his writing and person to the person of Christ. David’s humble heart for the Lord and faith in God are powerfully communicated in his life and the songs he writes as he proclaims God’s glory and his faith in the Lord above all. He further establishes the nation of Israel and the capital city of the unified nation, Jerusalem as God demonstrates covenant faithfulness to David in establishing his house, throne and kingdom forever (2 Sam.7). Related stories of David and Goliath, David and Jonathan, David’s military conquests, David and Bathsheba, David and Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth, and many others help create a “larger than life” character who points us toward the ultimate King of Israel, the Messiah. Each of these stories communicates lessons about God, for example Mephibosheth in 2 Sam.9 is an example of grace, and Goliath in 1 Sam.17 is an example of trust in God’s ability to save in the face of impossible odds. David is certainly not free of fault, and his family bears the consequences of his sin through familial betrayal, murder, deceit and treachery. Yet through it all, David remains faithful to the Lord. He is the Lord’s anointed, the “messiah,” who points us to the fulfillment of God’s salvific plan with the arrival of Messiah, Jesus Christ. God prohibits him from building the temple, so he prepares everything for his son, Solomon, to do so. He is a man of war, a man who is referenced throughout the Storybook, a man who becomes identified as the greatest king of Israel, anticipating the ultimate King of Israel. David’s story is recorded at length in 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles.
21. Solomon, David’s son, is another key character, gifted by God with unparalleled wisdom and insight, writer of Proverbs, Eccl. and Song of Solomon. He also had massive wealth and an unimaginable collection of wives and concubines, which sadly led his heart from full devotion to the Lord. He built the great temple for God, truly one of the most magnificent structures in ancient times (2 Chron.3ff et al). His prayer of dedication in 1 Kings 8 and 2 Chron.6 proclaims God’s global glory and kingdom mindset, and God reaffirms his covenant with Solomon in 2 Chron.7. His story is found in 1 Kings 2-11 and 2 Chron.1-9, and it is under his foolish son Rehoboam’s rule that the kingdom of Israel is divided.
22. From here on, the historical record documents a grievous decline in the leadership of both Judah in the south (although there are very occasional good, godly kings) and especially the northern tribes of Israel, who decline into idolatry, rebellion and wickedness. Good kings such as Jehoshaphat (2 Chron.17ff), Hezekiah (2 Kings 18ff., 2 Chron.29ff.) and Josiah (2 Kings 22ff., 2 Chron.34ff.) stand out as notable exceptions in the decline of Israel/Judah. Therefore, God’s justice is meted out, and the northern kingdom is decimated by the Assyrian Empire in 722BC (2 Kings 17), and God uses the Babylonian Empire in 586BC to destroy Jerusalem and take the best Jews into captivity for 70 yrs. in Babylon (2 Kings 25).
23. Even in exile, God works through a national leader and prophet, Daniel, calling people to serve the Lord, demonstrating from his own life one who is unequivocally committed to God, no matter what. Ezekiel is likewise a spokesman and prophet for God during these difficult years, but offers hope of the regathering of Israel, cleansing with a new heart, and a unique outpouring of God’s Spirit upon people (Ezek.36).
24. Years later, God works through a young woman named Esther to save His people, demonstrating covenant faithfulness and care for the Jews.
25. Priest Ezra and governor Nehemiah are used by God to return the people to worship of YHWH as the Word is read and taught in Israel and the city of Jerusalem and nation of Judah is modestly rebuilt.
26. Along the way, there are some notable prophets who arise in Israel or Judah, communicating God’s will, calling people to repentance, doing amazing miracles, warning of God’s impending judgment and wrath, judging the nation, leaders or other nations for their wickedness, etc. Elijah beginning in 1 Kings 18 is one such example, demonstrating God’s greatness on Mt. Carmel, but whose life is constantly in jeopardy by King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. The mantle of prophecy passes to Elisha, who continues the pattern of miraculous deeds and speaking God’s truth to God’s people. Isaiah calls people back to the Lord, and points them forward to the Messiah who would save people through His own sacrifice. Jeremiah has the sad job of pronouncing judgment upon people who are hardened against God, but announces a new covenant is coming written on people’s hearts communicating a new relationship with God (Jer.31:31-34). There are several other prophets who pronounce judgement, call to repentance and point people to look forward to the One who would come to fulfill the prophecies, saving God’s people and establishing His kingdom. Tragically, the prophets were largely ignored or persecuted.
27. Now we enter the Second Testament, the portion of God’s Storybook where His chosen and anointed Messiah, Jesus Christ, is revealed. Mary and Joseph are the first characters we encounter, being selected by God to be the “father” and mother of Jesus. They are fully devoted to the Lord, and in obedience to Him perform the roles God has called them to.
28. Concurrent with this is the story of John the Baptist, who serves as the forerunner, announcing the Messiah, the Anointed One. An odd character, John has an important role of the last (and greatest?) of the prophets who would point people toward the Messiah. As the story continues, we see John preaching a message of judgment for those who do not perceive who Christ is, a message of repentance for those who seek Jesus and desire forgiveness of sins, and a message of self-reduction and Jesus-exaltation. To fulfill all righteousness, John baptizes Jesus (Matt.3, Luke 3) as he is baptizing many repentant sinners in the Jordan. John serves to tie together the Old Testament and New Testament, bridging the gap between the two.
29. Early in all four Gospels we are introduced to the central character of the Scriptures and off all time and history, Jesus Christ. Everything in the Old Testament is looking forward to Christ, and everything in the New Testament looks back at Him. He is the pivotal character in ending the old Covenant and inaugurating the New Covenant. He is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. God is incarnate in the person of Christ. For a fuller treatment of His story, you can see the other assignment on controlling stories in Scripture. But in brief, through his preaching He proclaims the kingdom of God, through his miracles and signs he validates his message and person, through his example we have a model we are to follow of perfect, sinless grace and truth, the character of God in man. He gives us a model for ministry in how he works with his disciples, teaching them and training them to carry on his message. Jesus demonstrates a close relationship with the Father from which he gains power and direction for all he does. Through repeated predictions, he foretells that he will be betrayed, suffer, be crucified and rise from the dead (Mark 8:31-32), so that when it all happened just as he said, they would know that it was all according to God’s plan.
30. As the story continues of this central character, we sense the inevitable march toward the true purpose of His life, his death and resurrection. In fulfillment of prophecy, everything happens in Jesus’ final days just as foretold. Following predicting all final events, and instituting Communion, Jesus has a final powerful prayer time in the Garden of Gethsemane and is then betrayed by Judas, abandoned by his disciples, arrested by the Jewish guard, led through several Jewish and Roman trials, was denied by Peter, mocked and abused by soldiers, crucified on Golgatha outside Jerusalem between two criminals, and finally was buried in a borrowed tomb. There were cosmic events surrounding Jesus’ death, and all that happened was in complete fulfillment of prophecy. God the Father Himself turned away from the Son as Jesus was bearing the sins of the world upon Himself. In the death of Christ, the central point off all the Bible and all history, a cataclysmic shift happened, ending the Old Covenant and initiating the New, ushering in an age of grace rather than Law, and providing salvation and forgiveness of sins for all who look to Christ in faith.
31. Following the three days prophesied in Scripture and predicted by Jesus, he rose from the dead, showing himself to many over the next 40 days as proof. In his resurrection, Jesus shows that death and sin are conquered, Satan’s power is broken, and Christ is victorious. He is the “firstfruits” of those who will rise from the dead, offering hope for eternal life to all who believe in Him (1 Cor.15).
32. Near the end of Jesus’ life, knowing his departure is approaching, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit as a Helper and Counselor who will aid the followers of Christ in the work they will do following His departure (John 14, 16). The Holy Spirit becomes the dominant member of the Trinity to work in the early Christian church as He convicts, regenerates, fills, illuminates, empowers and guides believers, establishing and growing the church of God in the world.
33. Some might consider Nicodemus in John 3 to be an important character, for he represents the old religious order, but is changed through Christ’s message to become a sincere follower of Jesus.
34. Each of Jesus’ disciples in some way is a controlling character, because through them and their faithful preaching of the Gospel message of Christ the kingdom of God advances. Through them we learn the Gospel and the will and plan of God as Jesus teaches them. Certainly, Jesus’ three closest disciples are controlling characters as he works with Peter, James and John in nurturing them and exposing them to his heart and purpose. Beyond this, the Twelve receive more attention from Christ than do the crowds of His followers. This is significant, for the church will be built upon the preaching and message these men proclaim as they point all people to Christ. The disciples themselves are notably not anyone special or unique, not very quick or perceptive or rich or intelligent or spiritual or holy, but they are used by God in tremendous ways, as God’s Storybook will reveal. Just before ascending back into heaven, Jesus commissions his followers to make disciples of all nations, based in Christ’s authority, as they teach and baptize and are used by the Spirit to grow the kingdom of God (Matt.28:16-20, Luke 24:45-49, Acts 1:8).
35. The Holy Spirit is obviously active by moving in the lives of believers on Pentecost (Acts 2) and thereafter in the preaching of the Word, in miraculous signs done be believers, in heretofore unknown languages spoken be believers, and in the growth of the Gospel far and wide.
36. Ananias and Sapphira are significant in that they show the consequences of trying to lie to the Holy Spirit in order to hoard money and be well thought of by others (Acts 5).
37. Stephen in Acts 7 is significant as the first Christian martyr, at the hands of Saul. He will set the stage for thousands down through the ages who have willingly given up their lives rather than retracting their profession of faith in Christ. Philip is briefly mentioned as an evangelistic deacon who shares with an Ethiopian leading to the Gospel spreading to Africa.
38. Although previously introduced to the radical Christian-persecutor Saul, in Acts 9 Jesus intervenes in a miraculous way, leading to the conversion of Saul and his name changes to Paul, arguably the greatest missionary and theologian in the history of Christianity. Saul becomes the focal point of Acts from this point on, and through him the Gospel spreads beyond the Jewish boarders to many other nations of Gentiles. Paul writes thirteen letters in the New Testament where much of the theology we believe today is spelled out. His unwavering commitment to the Lord, to taking the Gospel to the Gentiles, and to purity in doctrine and action lead to him being one of the foundational pillars of the church of Christ.
39. The missionary journeys of Paul are very significant as the message of the Gospel continues to spread to Gentile lands and foreign cities. Paul preaches in synagogues but when faced with persecution leaves and goes to other places that will receive his message. Initially sent out by the church in Antioch, the pattern is followed even today in churches sending out missionaries. Paul’s life was frequently sought by his opponents, being imprisoned, beaten, shipwrecked, accused, etc. yet he continued to be used by the Holy Spirit to guide the early church (Acts 15 – Jerusalem Council, taking the Gospel into Macedonia – Acts 16, launching new churches in places such as Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth and eventually to Rome.)
40. Barnabas is a great supporting character as he partners with Paul in his initial missionary journeys, encouraging believers wherever he goes. Other partners with Paul are Timothy, Silas, John Mark, Titus, etc.
41. There were several opponents to the Gospel from Jesus’ birth on. For example, Herod tried to kill baby Jesus, Jewish leaders continually opposed Jesus, the Sanhedrin and others worked to kill him, Pilate and Herod tried him with Pilate handing him over to the soldiers to be crucified. Later in Paul’s life, Felix, Festus, Herod Agrippa and finally Caesar are opposed to his preaching the Gospel and he ends up being beheaded.
42. Finally, there are several important characters communicated in Revelation, such as the angel who communicates God’s truth to John, the elders and creatures around the throne in Rev.4 and the Lamb of Rev.5, the 144,000 sealed from Israel, the multitudes in white robes, the woman and beast of Rev.12, and other such characters. At the end of all this, in Rev.19 Christ, the Rider on the White Horse, brings victory with a sword from His mouth, the Word of God, wreaking havoc on the armies of the earth. Satan is bound for 1000 years while Christ reigns, then is eternally judged and thrown into lake of burning sulfur with false prophet and beast, leading to final judgement, new heavens and earth and Jerusalem, and the eternal blessed state in the presence of God and the Lamb. Glory, Hallelujah!