**Controlling Stories of Scripture**

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

**Stories**

1. Creation of the world is perfect. (Gen.1-2)
   1. God creates the heaven and the earth, showing His authority over all creation.
   2. God creates his most special creation, man and woman, in a special way with special instructions, showing the uniqueness of man in creation and a special relationship that man and woman have with God.
2. Sin enters the world and spreads bringing judgement, but God’s grace is present. (Gen.3-11)
   1. Adam and Eve rebel against God’s plan, showing their independence and propensity to rebel against the goodness and authority of God.
   2. Sin and death enter the world along with curses as a result of sin. All of this shows consequences for sin, a theme that will be repeated over and over.
   3. God’s will, perfect creation and image in man are distorted. For the rest of time until Christ returns, this distortion remains and is acutely felt both by mankind and all creation.
   4. Cain and Abel show that sin and death are passed on to future generations.
   5. The Flood and Tower of Babel show that sin and wickedness increases, and so does God’s righteous judgment. However, we also see that God’s grace is present and active as well (Gen.3:15, Noah and family are saved, people of Babel are set again on fulfillment of God’s command to fill the earth through the creation of different languages.)
3. God selects a man around whom He will build a nation, His chosen people, Israel. (Gen.12-50)
   1. God calls Abram to leave his country, people and family to a promised land and will make him a blessing. This story is the backdrop setting the stage for the birth of the nation Israel who will become a blessing to all people through the Messiah. The covenant God makes with Abram is passed on to Isaac and Jacob, and throughout the nation of Israel God remains faithful to His promise.
   2. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by God with fire (Gen.19) becomes a symbol of divine judgment against sin and rebellion. God is a just, vengeful God, although his grace is shown in considering their pardon if 10 are righteous, and He ends up saving Lot and his daughters.
   3. 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, another symbol of blood shed for forgiveness of sins and worship to God. Abraham’s first love for the Lord is affirmed, and the covenant between him and God is reiterated. That covenant is later reaffirmed with Isaac and Jacob.
   4. In Gen.37-50, Joseph becomes an important character whom God uses 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.
4. God separates His nation from other nations, for they are His chosen people. (Exodus-Ruth)
5. Moses and the story of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt becomes very significant in the history of Israel as Moses 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. God shows His care, provision, guidance and covenant faithfulness to His people over and over through the pillar of fire and cloud (Ex.13), manna (and later quail), and the giving of the Law. In contrast, 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. God’s Law becomes a primary way God instructs His people they are to be separated from other nations and set apart for God. Deliverance of Israel from Egypt is a picture of God delivering us from the kingdom of darkness in miraculous ways through the blood of the Lamb, and into the Promised Land.
6. In the latter part of Exodus, it is significant that there is construction of special places and objects where God’s presence dwells and is manifest, and this theme of God dwelling with His people continues throughout God’s Story.
7. In Numbers 13-14, spies are sent into the Promised Land, but their lack of faith (except for Caleb and Joshua) causes judgment from God and they are forces to wander in the wilderness for 40 yrs. Wandering due to lack of faith becomes a theme in the history of Israel.
8. The giving of the Law to Israel, specifically Moses, is a very important theme, for God communicates His specific will to His people in the books of Moses.
9. The conquest of the Promised Land by Joshua as God performs miraculous victories over heathen nations is significant in proclaiming God’s power and glory over all other nations. 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.
10. The story of the Judges is significant as God selects certain men (and a woman) who will be used by Him to lead the nation into victory. However, the cycle is a repetitive one where there is rebellion by Israel, punishment by God in the form of captivity by a foreign nation, crying out to the Lord, a judge/deliverer is sent who brings about victory for Israel, they praise God, and then eventually wander from Him back into rebellion.
11. 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.
12. God works in the nation of Israel to demonstrate His covenant faithfulness and love and grace, even though they are oftentimes unfaithful to Him. (1 Sam. – Malachi)
    1. The period of the Judges draws to a close with perhaps one of the greatest men of faith, Samuel, who serves as Judge, Prophet and Priest. Israel is demanding a king, so they can be like the other nations (big problem) and God allows this, as they transition from a theocracy into a monarchy. This introduces a whole new era in the history of Israel, as Samuel anoints Saul and later David to be king of Israel.
    2. The story of King David, Israel’s greatest king, who built the nation as a unified, powerful world-renowned entity, helped further the glory of God like none other. God uses David to lead the nation of Israel into an unparalleled time of progress, military advancement, fruitfulness and worship of God. 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. Of great significance in this story is the Lord’s covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7. Here God promises David a great name, a place for His people, Israel, and that He would establish David’s house and throne and kingdom forever, so that David would be in a unique relationship with God. Through One from David, the kingdom of God would be fulfilled, which looks to the One who would come from David’s line, the Messiah, Jesus Christ.
    3. Solomon’s wisdom, wealth, building of the temple, rule of the unified nation of Israel, all are the stuff of legends. Although his wives led his away from the Lord, God remained close to Solomon and blessed him and Israel for the sake of his father, David. 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.
    4. 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).
    5. 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).
    6. Years later, God works through a young woman named Esther to save His people, demonstrating covenant faithfulness and care for the Jews.
    7. 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.
    8. 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). Zechariah 9 and 14 is an example of looking forward to the day of the Lord. 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.
13. God sends His Son, Jesus Christ, in fulfillment of the Promise, as the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Jesus is born humbly, lives perfectly, ministers powerfully in word and deed to people’s physical and spiritual needs, dies a substitutionary death in our place, and rises from the dead victorious over sin, death and the devil. He commissions His followers to spread the Word as they are empowered by the Spirit. Undoubtedly and undeniably, Jesus is the central character, the apex, climax and zenith, of the Sacred Storybook. All that comes before is looking forward toward Him, and all that comes after looks back on Him.
    1. The first story we encounter in the second part of the Sacred Storybook is the birth of Jesus. In fulfillment of prophecy, all transpires exactly as God foretold through His prophets. Matt. and Luke record the details. God becoming man (John 1) is of paramount importance in the Sacred Storybook, for God redeems His people in this way. This separates Christianity from all other religions, offering a relationship with God through the person of Christ.
    2. 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.
    3. Jesus then begins to preach his Gospel message, calling people to repent and believe in Him, for the kingdom of God is near (Mark 1:14-15). This is a message which he will preach throughout his ministry. The preaching of Jesus is so significant for not only does he preach truth, but he preaches with the very authority of God. In his preaching, he proclaims the kingdom of God, calling people into relationship with himself, calling them to leave old religious patterns behind and embrace the New Covenant (Matt.12, Luke 11, etc.). Jesus’ Sermon on Mount is significant because it is preached to Old Covenant believers pointing toward New Covenant realities. Much of Jesus’ preaching is done through the medium of parables and stories which help the people of the day understand an eternal truth through a common picture. Jesus calls people to costly discipleship in what it means to follow Him (Matt.8, Luke 9-10)
    4. While preaching, he calls his first disciples. 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. Peter, James and John become an inner triad closes to Jesus, and the 12 are with him frequently as he prioritizes them over the crowds of followers.
    5. We also repeatedly see Jesus withdrawing from crowds to spend time in prayer with His Father, prioritizing His relationship with God above all else (Mark 1:35ff). This is a pattern we see emphasized throughout the biblical record.
    6. Another key part of the Sacred Storybook in the account of Jesus’ life and ministry is the miracles and signs Jesus’ does that affirm his message and identity, and also show his heart of compassion for those who are suffering (Mark 1:32-34, Luke 4:40). He heals the sick, he forgives sins, he drives out evil spirits, he shows power over natural forces such as calming storms and walking on water, he feeds the hungry, and he raises the dead. All of these point to His authority over all creation and desire to conquer the evils of this world. In fulfillment of prophecy, Luke 4:18-19 shares how Jesus proclaims that his preaching and miraculous actions are essential for validating His person and work. In Matt.17, we hear about Jesus being transfigured before some of His disciples, showing just a portion of the true glory of His person which is mostly concealed throughout his life. The greatest miracle of Jesus life is his resurrection from the dead, of course.
    7. 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.
    8. 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 Golgotha 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.
    9. 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).
    10. 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).
14. The Spirit anoints and empowers early believers such as Peter and Paul and many others to spread the Gospel message to Jews and Gentiles from every tongue and tribe and nation. Letters are written teaching early believers how to live out the Gospel of Christ, anticipating the return of King Jesus.
    1. The Sacred Storybook now turns its attention in the book of Acts to the establishment of the early Christian church. The arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2 initiates in a new age. Along with the Spirit, there is a great wind, flames of fire appearing on disciples, intelligent languages spoken by disciples, and Peter addressing the crowd in a rousing and convicting sermon that leads to 3000 being saved. The early believers shared everything in common as they worshiped God and encouraged each other (Acts 2:42-47).
    2. Although there is persecution of believers, most notably by a zealous Pharisee named Saul, yet the Gospel continues to spread. Peter and John and others continue to preach the Gospel despite imprisonments, and the Spirit continues to do miracles through them. 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).
    3. In Acts 6, a team of deacons is selected, which sets a pattern for a second group of leaders who assist with handling the needs of the body of believers. Two of these notable deacons, Stephen and Philip, have significant ministries, albeit brief in Stephen’s case, laying an example for all Christian martyrs to come.
    4. The story of Cornelius and Peter in Acts 10-11 is significant for barriers to the Gospel being limited to Jews are abolished as Peter realizes and then preaches that the Gospel is for Gentiles like Cornelius and others.
    5. 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, 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.)
    6. From this point on in the Sacred Storybook, the genre changes to more didactic or epistolary material where Paul and other writers offer teaching on Christian beliefs, areas of theology, Christian practice, and how to live the Christian life in word and deed. Romans is a particularly theologically-driven book that helps to build the belief system for the church.
    7. The final story is the account of the end of the world. Rich with imagery and symbolism, some new characters are introduced, and God’s will is revealed as His wrath is unleashed against all ungodliness. It is not a pretty picture, and I wrote about it more in the symbols assignment. But in the end, Christ is shown to be victorious, all enemies are sent into fiery punishment forever, and God’s people are freed from all pain or sorrow, to dwell with the Lord in the new heavens and new earth and new Jerusalem forever and ever, to the glory and praise of God! Amen!