**Controlling Symbols of Scripture**

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

**Symbols**

1. To begin with, even the very names of God, such as God the Father (1 John 3:1, Rom.8:15-16, John 14:1-2, etc.) and God the Son (Is.9:6, 1 Cor.15:28, Matt.3:17, 1 John 4:10, etc.) are highly symbolic and not to be taken literally.
2. Other names for Jesus are symbolic as well, such as Logos (John 1:1-18), Lamb of God (John 1:29,36), Light of the world (John 8:12), Bread of life (John 6:35), Morning Star (Rev.22:16), Firstborn of every creature (Col.1:15), Alpha and Omega (Rev.1:8), Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev.5:5), etc. These and so many more communicate important truths about Christ.
3. God’s voice – He speaks and it is so. His word is His command and always happens. Later, God’s Word will be used as a symbol of Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh (John 1:14).
4. There are also many other anthropomorphisms that must not be taken literally when referring to God. For example, the arm of God (Ex.6:6), the hands of God (Is.41:10), the eyes of the Lord (2 Chron.16:9), the wings of God (Ps.57:1), etc. These and many others communicate in ways that humans can understand realities about God that are infinitely beyond us.
5. 7th Day – God rested on this day, and establishes it as holy. Later, this day becomes set aside as a symbol of worship to God, resting from work to prioritize worshiping God over all else we do.
6. Garden of Eden (except fruit of tree of knowledge of good and evil) becomes a symbol of God’s provision for man, a perfect dwelling place for man. Man is cast from this perfect dwelling place, and does not experience restoration to God’s perfect provision until the new heavens and the new earth at the end of the Sacred Storybook (Rev.21-22).
7. Tree of knowledge of good and evil (and its fruit) becomes a symbol of the freedom of man to choose rebellion against God, thereby receiving the consequences of his sin.
8. Adam and Eve are symbols for all human beings and the prototype man and woman. Their marriage is a symbol of all marriages to come, a lifelong bond of unique intimacy and oneness.
9. Adam becomes a symbol of the choice of man to rebel against God and thereby to bring sin and death to all people. Paul uses him in this way in contrast to Christ who brings righteousness to all who believe in Rom. 5:12-21.
10. Eve becomes a symbol of the mother of all who come, and also a symbol of a wife who is the helpmate for the husband (Gen.2:18).
11. The serpent in Gen.3 becomes a symbol of that which is evil, deceitful, luring into sin, and even of Satan himself.
12. The offerings of Cain and Abel in Gen.4:3-5 become symbols of worship (in faith vs. lacking faith). The offering theme will become very significant throughout the history of Israel as God gives the Law to Moses in how, what and why to offer sacrifices.
13. The Great Flood of Gen.6-9 becomes a symbol of judgment upon mankind for willful rebellion and global wickedness, the wrath of God unleashed upon all that lives. It also becomes a symbol in some of Paul’s writings for the cleansing from sin that is offered through faith in baptism.
14. The ark (and Noah) becomes a symbol of God’s grace and salvation through judgment.
15. The dove released by Noah becomes a symbol of hope for life and mercy from God, and a new life and restart for humanity.
16. The rainbow in Gen.9 becomes a visible symbol of God’s covenant with Noah and all people that he will not destroy the earth in this way ever again.
17. The tower of Babel becomes a symbol of man’s rebellion against God to fill the earth, because these people gather together to make a great name for themselves rather than making a great name for God. All the languages of the earth result from this event.
18. The altar with offerings to the Lord (for example that Noah built in Gen.8:20 and Abram built in Gen.12:8) is a symbol of worship and sacrifice to the Lord. Although not explicit at this point, it would later become clear that the shedding of blood of an animal would be symbolic of the death required for sin, and the One to come who would shed His blood as a sacrifice for the sins of all people.
19. God’s covenant promise with Abram to bless the descendants of Abraham with land, making them into a great nation, to be his God and they would be God’s people, becomes a symbol that flows throughout the history of Israel. We see this initially in Gen.12:2-3, then 13:14-17, 15:1-21, etc. The dust of the earth, the stars in the sky become symbols of the descendants of Abram.
20. Circumcision, introduced in Genesis 17, is a very significant symbol, identifying people as God’s covenant people. This symbol would be passed down through all the generations, setting apart the Jewish people as God’s people, affirming the covenant between them and God. Abram’s name is changed to Abraham, the covenant between him and God that he will be the father of many nations is reaffirmed. God is in a special relationship with this people, and circumcision is the outward manifestation of that covenant.
21. 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.
22. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by God with fire 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 ten are righteous, and He ends up saving Lot and his daughters.
23. Moses is told he is standing on holy ground as he stands before the burning bush. Both the ground and the bush are symbolic of God’s holy presence (Ex.3). The holiness of God is also communicated through the Holy of Holies in the temple, and even our bodies are to be understood as holy, for they are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor.6). Along these lines, we are considered God’s temple also in 1 Cor.3 which is highly symbolic of where God’s presence dwells.
24. The tent of meeting, then the tabernacle and finally the temple are symbolic of God’s dwelling place as His glory fills these entities (2 Chron.5:14, Ezek.43, etc.). Jesus refers to his body as the temple of God (John 2:19-21).
25. The plagues became symbols of God’s power to deliver His people from the gods of other nations. His reputation spread far and wide to other nations through this, and the ensuing conquest of foreign peoples toward the Promised Land. The Passover (Lev.23, Num.9, etc), as the most graphic demonstration of God’s judgment, came to be an enduring symbol of God’s deliverance of His people, and set the stage for the Lord’s Supper in the New Testament, a memorial meal symbolizing a great reality of freedom through the shedding of blood and faith in the Lamb.
26. The pillar of fire and cloud (Ex.13) become symbols of God’s guidance of the Israelites through the wilderness.
27. Manna (and later quail in Num.11) becomes a symbol of God’s miraculous provision for His people.
28. The Ten Commandments (Ex.20, Deut.5) become a symbol of the entire Law, God’s commands, instructions and guidelines for His people, separating Israel from the other nations.
29. Other symbols which are introduced at this time as significant are the Ark of the Covenant (Ex.25, 2 Sam.6, 1 Chron.13-16), the Tabernacle (Ex.26ff), the Tent of Meeting (Ex.33), all of which communicate unique places where God’s presence is manifest, and where chosen ones from the nation can meet with God in order to conduct holy business. Extreme caution and fear of God are attached with these, for God is awesome and must be respected.
30. The Golden Calf of Ex.32 is a symbol of idolatrous rebellion against God.
31. The offerings of Leviticus, regulations of clean and unclean foods and other laws become significant symbols of segregated worship unto the Lord, separated from other nations, pure and holy people set apart for God.
32. Sacrifices which are killed symbolize the life of a creature which makes atonement for sins of people (Lev.17:11). Blood could also be considered a symbol of the life of a being, so the shedding of blood communicates sacrificing the life for sin, either of self or another. The animal sacrifice looks forward toward God’s sacrifice of His Son.
33. The Day of Atonement (Lev.16) was a symbol of the payment for sins of the people by the offering/sacrifice of a pure, undefiled animal who would point forward to the Lamb of God, pure and undefiled, whose blood would cover the sins of the world.
34. The Covenant God made with Israel (Lev.26, Deut.28-29), which involved blessing for obedience and punishment for disobedience, becomes a theme throughout the history of the nation of Israel. God was consistently faithful and just, even as the Israelites reaped what they sowed.
35. Mt. Sinai becomes a symbol for the meeting place with God, where the Law is given and Moses meets with God in a unique way, with God showing a bit of his power on the mountain.
36. Tithes of Deut.14 are symbols of God owning everything, and us returning back to him a portion of that with which He has entrusted us as stewards.
37. Perhaps Gideon’s fleece of Judges 6:36-40 is an important symbol of testing God’s will to determine if it is Him that is speaking. I would not suggest that this either shows faith on Gideon’s part or is a model for us to know God’s will today.
38. Another symbol which appears repeatedly at various points in the Storybook is oil, specifically used by Samuel and others for anointing Saul (1 Sam.9) and David (1 Sam.16) as the next king of Israel. This anointing seems to symbolize God’s pronouncement of blessing or authority upon a person, and may also symbolize the conferring of an extra measure of the Spirit of God upon them.
39. Perhaps there are some other symbols which could be mentioned, such as Moses staff, the Urim and Thummim, and others which are used as channels for God’s will to be discerned and communicated, but these are probably not “controlling symbols.”
40. Poetic literature is rich with symbolism and imagery. For example, the “mountain of God” (Ps.48), the dwelling place of God (Ps. 84), “God looks down from heaven on the sons of men…” (Ps.53:2), “he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.” (Ps.95:7) A book could be written about all the symbolism in the poetry books, but it is used to communicate deeper realities which those who read it will perceive.
41. Jonah’s time in the belly of the fish is used by Jesus as a symbol or sign of his own time in the earth following his death before rising from the dead.
42. The Assyrian and Babylonian armies are symbols (and real entities) used by God to communicate judgment upon His wayward, rebellious people. Babylon becomes an apocalyptic symbol of ultimate rebellion against God, a people rising up against the rule of God, used by the enemies of God, to usher in the end times.
43. There are several symbols associated with Jesus’ birth. The poor conditions in which Jesus is born (stable, manger) communicate humility in His arrival. The visit from the Magi bearing gifts symbolize the kingliness of Christ, worthy of all that is precious. The announcement by the angels to the shepherds symbolizes the greatest news in the world, and the joyful proclamation of that news to the world.
44. The LOGOS, the Word become Flesh, is another symbol, found in John’s Gospel, pointing people to the union of the Father and the Son, with the Son being the incarnate physical manifestation of God, revealing who God is.
45. John the Baptist proclaims that Jesus is “the Lamb of God,” sent by God as the sacrifice that would take away the sins of the world. This picture takes us all the way back to the Day of Atonement and the scapegoat lamb upon which the sins of the people were placed, which was sacrificed pointing toward their forgiveness.
46. Jesus states that he is the bread of life, a symbol that communicates that Jesus is able to satisfy our deepest needs (John 6).
47. Jesus also says that he is the good shepherd (John 10) who has a relationship with his sheep, they trust him and he protects them.
48. Through Jesus’ preaching, he frequently used symbols or earthly realities to communicate deeper spiritual realities. For example, he uses seed sown on four types of ground to communicate receptivity (or lack thereof) to the Gospel message (Matt.13, Luke 8), a story of a good Samaritan, a wayward son and a lost sheep to communicate eternal truths about God’s relationship with us and how we should treat others, and a narrow door to communicate the exclusivity of following Christ (Luke 13).
49. Jesus washing the disciples’ feet in John 13 becomes a symbol of humble service in the kingdom of God which is to be practiced by all followers of Christ.
50. Another symbol that is extremely significant is the bread and wine which Jesus used at the Last Supper to symbolize his broken body and shed blood, given for the forgiveness of sins of all who believe. This symbol will be used regularly in the church throughout the millennia to remind people of Christ’s death which he voluntarily offered for the sins of all people (1 Cor.11).
51. Jesus is the vine and his followers are the branches (John 15) symbolizing the integral relationship between the two and the need for us to “abide in Christ.”
52. A significant symbol is the cross of Christ, which was a symbol of death but also a sign of God’s rejection of a person who was undergoing judgment for sins (Gal.3:13). This execution tool became a sign also of the payment Christ made for sins, satisfying God’s righteous wrath for the rebellion of all people, from Adam through all time.
53. The empty tomb is a symbol of the victory of Christ over death, that the tomb could not hold him, and he is now alive forevermore.
54. In the book of Acts, at Pentecost we encounter some symbols such as rushing wind, tongues of fire, ability to speak in foreign languages, all of which communicate the movement of the Spirit among believers.
55. In the Epistles, there is much teaching that seems to be more propositional, didactic, and theological leading to teaching that is practical and applicable in how to live as a believer. There are not as many symbols in these books as we find earlier, unless you consider theological doctrines like the Gospel, God’s wrath against sin, righteousness, faith, justification, sanctification, etc. to be symbols.
56. Abraham in Romans 4 becomes a symbol of those who believe in God and are credited as righteous.
57. In Romans 5, Christ and Adam are symbols of sin and death being passed on to all people (through Adam) followed by God’s grace and justification and righteousness are passed on to all who believe through Christ.
58. Slavery to sin vs. slavery to righteousness becomes a symbol of the life of the unbeliever vs. believer in Romans 6.
59. Baptism becomes an enormously significant symbol for believers of new life in Christ. By being identified with Christ and the body of believers in baptism, the Christian is welcomed into God’s family. This act is not only done in obedience to Jesus’ command, but it is a picture of our union with Christ, going under the water as Jesus died for our sins, and coming out of the water as Jesus raised to new life (Romans 6:3-4, Col.2, etc.).
60. Marriage is uses as an illustration by Paul in Rom.7 of man being bound to the Law until that partner dies, and then they are free to marry another, in this case the new covenant of grace through Christ.
61. It is possible that the war that rages between the flesh and the Spirit is a symbol for spiritual realities, although those are the spiritual realities in themselves. The picture of warfare in the spiritual realm is certainly an image and symbol of the spiritual conflict we face.
62. In Rom.9-11, deep spiritual truths are communicated through symbols or images such as Jacob and Esau, Pharaoh, and Israel, in how God works in the world.
63. In Romans 12, the image of a living sacrifice communicates the believer’s life in Christ, dying to self and living to Christ.
64. The weaker and stronger brothers of Rom.14 symbolized those who are stronger and weaker in their faith. Eating food sacrificed to idols and related issues become symbols of entrapment to pagan practices vs. our freedom in Christ (1 Cor.8,10).
65. This leads us to a very significant set of symbols representing the Christian church. In various epistles we read about the church being like a family of believers (Eph.2, Titus 2), the body of Christ (1 Cor.12, Eph.1-4, etc.), the people of God (a holy nation, 1 Pet.2), the kingdom of God, the flock of God (1 Pet.5), vine branches with Christ as the vine (John 15), the temple of God the Holy Spirit with Christ as the Cornerstone (Eph.2, 1 Cor.6, 1 Pet.2), and the bride of Christ (Eph.5). Each of these symbols is significant and communicates important truths about how we are to related to each other, to Christ and to the world.
66. Christ’s resurrected body (1 Cor.15) becomes a symbol of our hope of resurrection to new life following our death. Because Christ rose, we can have certainty we too will rise to new life.
67. Milk of the Word of God which we are to crave (1 Pet.2:2) and spiritual meat (1 Cor.3:1-3) which is deeper truths.
68. There are many, many more symbols used throughout the epistles which will not all be referenced here, such as treasures in jars of clay (2 Cor.4 – glory of Christ in our weak bodies), yoking together with unbelievers (2 Cor.6), generosity in giving (sowing and reaping, 2 Cor.8-9), the “thorn” in Paul’s flesh (2 Cor.12), life by the spirit or according to the flesh or under the law (Galatians), life in Christ vs. death apart from Christ (Eph.2), children of light vs. darkness (Eph.4), leaving an aroma of Christ (Eph.5), the prize for which Paul presses on toward (Phil.3, cf. fight, race, etc.), the tongue like the rudder of a ship or a spark of a fire all picturing the power of words (James 3), walking in the light (1 John 1), testing “spirits” meaning various teachings (1 John 4, Jude), etc.
69. The picture of marriage between husband and wife as a symbol of relationship between Christ and the church is significant in many ways (Eph.5). Not only are we taught how to be married by looking at the Trinity, but in how we treat each other, it is a picture of how Christ and the church are to relate.
70. Another picture worth mentioning separately is the spiritual armor of Ephesians 6, and our spiritual battle against forces of darkness mentioned many times in Scripture (2 Cor. 10:3-6, Col.1-2, 1 Pet.5:8, 1 Jn 4:4, Revelation, etc.)
71. The symbols in Hebrews for many areas are important. These include Jesus being greater then Moses (New Covenant greater than Old), man’s dignity and Christ’s supremacy (Hebr.1,2), Sabbath rest of God’s people only found in Christ (Hebr.4), Jesus as our great High Priest who makes intercession (Hebr.4-5, 8), warnings against apostasy (tasting and then falling away, Hebr.6), Jesus like Melchizedek (Hebr.7), perseverance of the saints in the “Hall of Faith” (Hebr.11), God’s discipline for us like a father with kids (Hebr.12).
72. The animals found in Is.11:6-9 that also are picked up in Revelation which will lie down together in the eschaton symbolize a transformed animal world, which also applies to the entire new creation, in which there is peace and harmony instead of fighting, struggle and death.
73. Finally, there are MANY pictures and symbols and images for various realities in the last days. 1 Thess 4-5 speak of the rapture and being ready like a thief in the night. 2 Pet.3 speaks of the day of the Lord in a similar way. The angels of the seven churches, the seven golden lampstands and seven stars are the seven churches (Rev.1-3). There is heavy symbolism in Rev.4-5 speaking of the throne room of God and the scroll opened by the Lamb ushering in God’s will. The seals, 144,000 sealed from Israel, the multitudes in white robes, the trumpets and time periods of witnesses and tribulation (Rev.6-8), the woman and the dragon of Rev.12 followed by the beast, plagues, bowls of judgment, the woman and the beast and the fall of Babylon (Rev.15-18). All of this is highly symbolic and significant in meaning, although very concealed. 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, there is the great white throne judgment and the new heavens and new earth and new Jerusalem are revealed while the old is removed. Amazing imagery of eternally significant realities! Maranatha!