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NOTICING THE BRUSH STROKES: LITERARY MARKERS IN HEBREW HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

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by

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Abstract

As the people who set out to write, edit, and form the Bible may have used embellishments to enhance their narratives, could they also have left literary markers to help the reader chart a course between the historical and the enhanced? The purpose of this thesis is to find these literary markers. Exposing any potential grammatical or syntactical signpost can help the reader understand how they should view a given Biblical story and help reveal the messages the authors behind the scripture were sharing. The book of Jonah will be used as a case study to both discover and elaborate how these literary markers help a trained reader to better align their interpretation of a passage with the intention of the original author. This examination will reveal the seven markers used in historical narratives to lead the audience to the correct conclusions: story beats, repeating words, intertextuality, irony, names, numbers, and wordplay. To support both the hypothesis that these markers are found in other historical narratives as well as illustrate how authors embedded deliberate clues to guide their readers, the book of Ruth will be discussed. Literary markers reveal the brushstrokes behind the portraits the writers of Scripture have painted. Revealing these fingerprints both elucidates the artistry of the Bible and illuminates the theological messages behind the texts.

Introduction

Why Write?

Statement of the Problem

Jacques-Louis David creates a compelling scene in his painting, The Death of Socrates. Socrates, courageous to the end, gives a final speech to his students while reaching for the cup that holds his death. At the foot of the bed, Plato, Socrates' dear friend, looks away in anguish, adrift in a sea of emotions. It is a moment of both defiance and defeat, with the two philosophers contrasted beautifully in their reaction to the event that was about to take place. Yet there is a problem, Plato wasn't at Socrates' death.[1] Is David trying to fool those who view his painting? No, placing Plato at the foot of the bed facing away from Socrates signifies to us both Plato's reaction to Socrates' death while portraying that Plato did not witness the end of his fellow philosopher.

This idea of how paintings depict historical events is reflected in Scripture. Dr. Carmen Imes uses the illustration of a painting when reading Biblical historical narrative.[2] A painting retells a story from a specific perspective, it doesn't show you everything, and not everything may be "historically accurate." Yet, as Imes points out, "To say that reading biblical narrative is like viewing a painting is not to suggest that it is unhistorical. A painting has the potential to accurately and powerfully depict a historical event, inspiring generations of viewers to reflect upon and remember what was most significant about that event."[3] Suppose this is how the ancient authors of the Scriptures wrote. In that case, it presents a problem to modern

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[1] Carmen Joy Imes, *Bearing God's Name: Why Sinai Still Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019) 95.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

navigators of the Bible who are separated by thousands of years: which parts were meant to be creative uses of their medium to create points that go beyond historical fact? When a historical narrative is making a truth claim, is it historical, theological, or both?

Long argues, "the Bible is not a history book."[4] As the people who set out to write, edit, and form the Bible may have used embellishments to enhance their narratives, could they also have left literary markers to help the reader chart a course between the historical and the enhanced? This entire issue has caused debates when it comes to Biblical studies and how people interpret passages. Nevertheless, as Brown states, "it does not appear that story and essential history as such must stand in opposition to one another."[5] If the Biblical authors structured their stories to guide the reader to learn more about the Lord, not just a historical sequence, we should seek to find those literary markers that are used by the writer to guide their reader. To summarize, are there literary markers that inform an interpreter that specific passages are making theological statements, not just historical ones?

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to find these literary markers. Exposing any potential grammatical or syntactical signpost can help the reader understand how they should view a given Biblical story and help reveal the messages the authors behind the scripture were sharing. While it would be best to be able to sit down with a particular author to discuss what they meant when they wrote a specific passage, modern readers of the Bible do not enjoy such conveniences. Instead, one must see what these writers left in the Hebrew grammar and

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[4] V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 5 (Leicester: Apollos, 1994), 27

[5] Derek J Brown, "Reformulating the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy in Light of Contemporary Developments," *Presbyterion* 48.1 (2022): 68.

syntax to find out what they may have been trying to tell their readers over the ages. With the discovery of any literary device used by Biblical authors, this thesis hopes to provide a solution to the problem of how to read a passage with the intention to hear the writer's purpose for writing.

Statement of Importance of the Problem

The problem of understanding Hebrew historical narrative and whether the author is trying to make a historical or theological point has been the source of various skirmishes. This problem shows up in the issue of the historicity of the Bible. The debate over the historicity of the Bible can often lead to taking extreme positions such as minimalism or maximalism.[6] Whether one discards all of Scripture regarding what happened in history or fights to prove every detail causes many theological points the authors are trying to put forth to become cast aside or ignored.

This fighting over historicity has other casualties. By only examining passages for their historical value, the amazing artistry of these ancient authors gets left high and dry. For instance, using puns in names plays a significant role in many narratives.[7] In the tale of Solomon and his brother Adonijah from 1 Kings, each name portrays the characters' roles as actors in a play.[8] This careful use of names subtly reflects YHWH's hand in these events, as the names almost give a sense of predestination, as if it was all planned out.[9]

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[6] Ehud Ben Zvi, "Maximalists', 'Minimalists', Method and Theory in History, and Social Memory Lenses," *Biblische Notizen* 193 (2022), 15.

[7] Moshe Garsiel, "Puns upon Names as a Literary Device in 1 Kings 1-2," *Biblica* 72.3 (1991): 380.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 386.

This argument also bleeds into the debate of inerrancy in the Bible. Any claim of fabricated facts could be seen as a fundamental flaw in the authority of Scripture. The battle of inerrancy has similar side effects as the battle over historicity as they are tightly interwoven. Some have claimed that for the Bible to be inerrant, historical narratives can not contain any elements that could be intentionally created by the authors of Scripture.[10] The Chicago Statement by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy was written to push back against theologians who started to point out historical errors in Scripture which some saw as a threat to the authority of Scripture.[11] The errors that the inerrents try to harmonize or those on the other side of the debate try to use to disprove inerrancy could be placed in narratives specifically by the author to tell us something about the one being whose revelation they are arguing over.

Statement of Position on the Problem

With careful analysis, several literary markers can be identified that would make it easy for anyone who studies the Bible to spot that there is further points being emphasized than a historical tale they happen to be reading. By revealing these beacons, an exegete can better understand the theological significance of a narrative. Just as historical criticism can help enhance one's understanding of a historical narrative, these markers can also reveal more profound truths that hide below the surface that the authors are trying to share.

The heartbeat behind this research is to see the church increase its biblical literacy. It is this author's strong belief that a proper understanding of Scripture is foundational to the

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[10] Derek J Brown, "Reformulating the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy in Light of Contemporary Developments," *Presbyterion* 48.1 (2022): 67.

[11] Wayne A Grudem, "Why Has the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy Had Such Wide Influence?: Reflections by a Participant," *Presbyterion* 48.1 (2022): 19. Nevertheless, even the Chicago Statement would state that the Bible contains embellishments in historical passages, see page 32 of Grudem's article.

Christian life and to see the church thrive. While this thesis is academic, the hope is that the results will be tools that any follower of Jesus could use to study and understand the Bible. Exposing a way to uncover the author's intentions for a passage provides a pathway for those who read the Bible be able to be drawn closer to their creator while also elevating their view of Scripture.

Limitations/Delimitations

While this research could be done for the entire Bible, this thesis focuses on narratives in the Old Testament. However, narrative is too broad a category. Since the focus is to find literary markers to help the reader understand when an author is trying to make a theological point through the retelling of history, historical narratives will be the focus. This still presents a vast number of possible passages to examine. Therefore, the scope is narrowed further to the book of Jonah first, followed by a study of Ruth. Various sources that discuss these books are utilized with an emphasis on sources that discuss the grammar and syntax. Commentaries will be used, but sections discussing genre and style are accentuated over sections commenting on historical points.

After performing a study on Jonah, the author identified the following literary markers: story beats, repeated words, intertextuality, irony, names, numbers, and wordplay. There are other literary devices found in various historical narratives that can perform the task of being a marker, and there may be others in Jonah. However, in line with the thesis and scope of this paper, only these various aspects will be examined.

While this thesis does share a connection with the debate over historicity, this thesis will be focused on finding literary markers. Nevertheless, a discussion on what is history or what makes a passage a historical narrative will be necessary. Historical reliability will be touched on, and the effect of these literary markers on historicity will be considered, however, it is not the goal to try to defend one side or the other. The sources used and

examined will therefore be focused not on the historicity of the Bible, but on how ancients wrote history. This paper does not need to establish that the Bible is historically true, this paper instead needs to establish how the ancients recorded history.

Likewise, while the debate over inerrancy will be discussed, it will not be focused on. It will be important to talk about how this research can affect whether one views the Bible as inerrent, but this focus will be limited in scope. Just as this paper is not trying to prove historical narratives found in the Old Testament as historical or not in a modern sense, this paper is also not trying to prove that these passages are inerrent or not by modern standards.

Methods

Research Methods

This thesis will be a study that will examine the Hebrew behind two narratives in an attempt to find any clues that could act as literary markers. This will require careful consideration of both word usage and structural analysis to find these grammatical and syntactical devices. To accomplish this, first, the thesis will submerge itself into the book of Jonah, and then the results of that study will be applied to Ruth.

The author of Jonah carefully crafted a tale full of colossal components, colorful characters, and copious cognates. The uniqueness of Jonah among its immediate context, the book of the twelve, and its larger context, the Hebrew Scriptures, has given the debate regarding its genre and historicity to be wide and varied.[12] The traditional view of both Jews and the Church has been that Jonah was telling a historical tale.[13] Jesus' quote in Matthew

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[12] T. D. Alexander, "Jonah and Genre," *TynBul* 36 (1985): 36–37.

[13] Douglas Judisch, "The Historicity of Jonah," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (April 1999) 154.

12:39-42 equates the men of Nineveh with the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-13), which many have seen as proof that Jonah has a historical anchor.[14] This author believes the book of Jonah is a story retelling a historical event to make a theological point. Upon this basis, an examination of Jonah for literary markers will be undertaken.

The thesis will establish that the genre and form of the book, as well as how the writers of scripture understood history, define Jonah as a historical narrative. With that established, discovering literary markers that demonstrate the author's intent will be observed. Once these are identified, the various elements, like grammar, word usage, etc., will be discussed.

In the end, a literary marker with an established set of rules to identify it as such will be created. Once all of the literary tags are fished out of Jonah, then Ruth will be examined to show if these markers exist in other historical narratives. If any are found in Ruth, it will be concluded that it may be a marker that could be used when examining any historical record to identify if the author has creatively retold the historical tale to make a more profound theological point.

Data Collection

The primary method for collecting the data needed will be a close examination of the Hebrew of Jonah and then Ruth. This will require careful consideration of grammar, words, sentence structure, and other elements to determine if any could be seen as a literary marker. To assist in this research, several commentaries and articles will be collected and examined to help uncover these intriguing elements.

To gather these needed research tools, online libraries and databases will be the main sources to be searched. Since the author is currently living overseas, access to physical

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[14] Douglas Judisch, "The Historicity of Jonah," 155.

libraries is restricted. Liberty's connections to online databases will be vital in finding the sources needed for the thesis. Since this expedition for data will happen mainly in the digital space, any attempt to find hidden sources can happen anywhere and anytime a solid internet connection can be found.

Data Analysis

Key features will be looked for when analyzing the data and information that was discovered. Repetition of words or elements will be noted. As Jonah uses details sparingly, any detail given will be examined, and any description will be scrutinized. While this thesis is not concerned with proving or disproving the historicity of historical narratives, any historical elements that are given will also be analyzed.

It should be noted that something supernatural or a miracle will not be immediately discounted as not historical. If a miracle alone were a literary marker, then that would mean any miracle must be seen not as a historical event but as added to make a theological point. That is not to say that miracles could be an element in a literary marker. Still, the thesis will not begin from the point of view that miracles or supernatural interactions are immediately historically untrue. As the Christian faith rests on the belief that a man who was God died and rose again from the dead, it would be hypocritical to say that miracles are a sign that a narrative is not making a historical point.

Overview of the Thesis

The thesis will feature five main chapters. The journey begins with a bird's eye view look at the discussion on history in the Bible. Moving on, an examination of Jonah and its relation to genre will take place. Having built a firm foundation, the center of the thesis will be to determine potential literary markers and how they help reveal the author's intentions. With these markers revealed an examination of their use in Ruth will be conducted. Finally,

the discussion on history will be revisited with an emphasis on what these markers could mean for the inerrancy and authority of scripture.

These divisions help create a clear flow so that the reader understands the problem, the solution being put forth by the thesis, and the research results. Each chapter builds on the other, attempting to, with only five chapters, change the view of how people have studied historical narrative. These divisions were also chosen to ensure each chapter had a singular focus. This is why the discussion on Jonah is two separate chapters. Trying to discuss Jonah's genre as one that shows it is a historical tale and attempting to illustrate literary markers would have created a single chapter whose length would extend far beyond all other sections of the thesis.

Summary of Each Chapter

The first chapter establishes the groundwork the rest of the thesis will be built upon. This discussion will start by showing how various scholars have viewed the historical sections of the Scriptures. The main goal will be to show that Biblical authors used creativity when recording history.[15] This is vital to the thesis because the core problem being addressed starts with the idea that those who wrote the Bible, specifically the historical narratives, shaped their stories to tell deeper theological truths. Without the possibility that historical narratives are nothing more than recording a series of events exactly as they happened, there is no reason to search for literary markers.

Chapter two will dive into the debate around Jonah's genre. This discussion is vital since genre signals whether a narrative is historical or fictional. Proposed arguments for both fictional and nonfictional genres will be scrutinized as well as some of the historical issues

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[15] Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, 69.

that Jonah faces. It is necessary to establish this point as it sets up the bridges to connect the point of the first chapter to the search for literary markers within Jonah itself.

Crossing these bridges the second chapter has built, the third chapter now starts searching for the solution to the problem that chapter one established, finding literary markers. This search will analyze two main areas, macro literary markers and micro literary markers. Macro markers deal with the overall structure of a narrative while micro markers deal with the details the author has used in their story. The goal is to demonstrate that these markers show that the author is making a deeper theological point beyond a historical one and to identify if there are identifiable rules that make the identification of these markers consistent. After discussing the various markers, they will be examined to see how they indicate the purposes of the writer.

The fourth chapter takes what was revealed in the third chapter and starts to see if these markers appear in other historical narratives. As there are many historical narratives in the Old Testament, this search will not be able to cover every single story. Instead, the thesis will search the reports in the book of Ruth. Each section of this chapter will mirror the divisions of the previous chapter.

The final chapter helps show how this journey is essential to future studies in Biblical narratives. First, it will discuss how these markers affect the conversation around inerrancy. Second, it will bring the discussion back to where it started by addressing historicity in light of these literary markers. If these literary markers are found and demonstrated, it should affect how the interpreter reads historical narratives. Finally, it will seek to aid the readers of Scripture to discover the portrait of the creator of the universe these Biblical authors were painting.

Results

The goal of the thesis is to leave the reader with tools to increase their understanding of historical narratives. The thesis will set out a clear set of literary markers. These literary markers will help the reader of Scripture to understand how to view history and the Bible.

With a focus beyond these arguments, the literary markers will help interpreters spot deeper meanings in passages that may be overlooked. Increasing our ability to become more biblically literate is a goal every Christian should strive for. While one must not fall into the fallacy of trying to read too much into a passage, an interpreter must also not overlook what is already there because they do not know how to recognize it. Most importantly, these literary markers help students of the Bible understand our creator more deeply and profoundly.

God's plan for those he has called is to be conformed to the image of His son (Rom. 8:29). To look like Jesus is to look like the Father (John 14:9-11). He is the one who was, is, and is to come (Rev. 1:8), so Christians should seek to understand who God is. If embedded in historical narratives are glimpses of who YHWH is, then creating ways to help His followers discover them is vital. If the Lord values the beings He has created in His image, should they not value Him back?

Chapter 1

What is History?

The term "history is written by the victors" is only partially true. A better view may be to see that history is written by those who currently are shouting the loudest. Columbus used to be taught as the man who in 1492 sailed the ocean blue and discovered America. Today, Columbus is seen in a less flattering light as dirty details about his doings have been dug up. In recording his histories of the Roman Republic, Livy played favorites. In his introduction, he says that outside of Rome…

> there has never existed any commonwealth greater in power, with a purer morality, or more fertile in good examples; or any state in which avarice and luxury have been so late in making their inroads, or poverty and frugality so highly and continuously honoured, showing so clearly that the less wealth men possessed the less they coveted.[1]

How history has been chronicled affects Scripture as well. Many modern debates focus on the historicity of the various stories the Bible tells us, especially those in the Old Testament. By taking time to examine what we call history and how it has been transmitted, we can better understand why the authors of the Hebrew narratives told the stories the way they did. By the end of this chapter, an understanding of historical narrative will be established which will give the foundation needed to start finding the literary markers that can help a reader find the meaning a writer has imbued into the text.

How do we know what Happened?

First, one must tackle a deviously simple question: what is history? Is it a genre, or a record of a series of events that actually happened? Is it the perspective of a person viewing

[1] Livy, *History of Rome*, trans. Rev. Canon Roberts (New York, New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1912), 2.

those series of events, or something else altogether? Long defines history as referring either "to the past or to the study of the past; or, to put it another way, history can denote both events in the past and verbal accounts of these events."[2] So, in other words, Long's answer to the previous set of questions is yes. For this paper, the definition of history will be the various incidents that have occurred anytime before this present moment. The writing of this paper is history as well as the action of reading it up to this point. As those actions are now a part of history, they have become historical. This view shows that history is not simple. As Greer points out "The common notion that history is simply 'what happened' is naive, to use no harsher word; 'what happened' in any single day in any small town, recorded in detail, would fill volumes."[3] Historical events are being added to history through innumerable experiences with every tick of the clock.

Yet, what one receives as history is not through the experiencing of the actual events but a retelling of those events by one who takes up the task of conveying them through a specific medium. Someone, acting as a mediator of sorts, has sorted through the infinite details to convey only the actions they determined best relay what had happened. This presents another question that must be addressed: what makes a narrative historical? Merrill gives a simple definition of a narrative as "a telling; that is, a story. 'History' and 'story' are obviously cognate, with the latter, as a derivative of the former, conveying the notion of a statement regarding the facts pertinent to a situation in question."[4] While Merrill's definition is simple, he caveats it quickly that a historical narrative is not the same as a fictional

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[2] V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 5 (Leicester: Apollos, 1994), 59.

[3] John Michael Greer, "Myth, History, and Pagan Origins," *The Pomegranate* 9 (1999): 46.

[4] Eugene H Merrill, "Must Stories Be 'Factual' to Do Theology?: Old Testament Narrative and Biblical Inerrancy," *Presbyterion* 46.1 (2020): 10.

narrative.[5] Bloomberg would agree with this idea as his definition of "a historical narrative recounts that which actually happened; it is the opposite of fiction; it does not contain numerous errors."[6] For these scholars, as well as others, when an author sets out to convey history through narrative, it can only be considered a historical narrative if the events and details are true. As Schlick shows, this is because fiction "has unlimited freedom to invent characters and narratives, whereas historical texts do not."[7] While a person who has read this paper has experienced the history of that action, if that person then were to recount this paper to another, their tale would be considered a historical narrative by Merrill, Bloomberg, and others as long as that recollection conveyed a relatively accurate account that stayed within the bounds of the experience itself.

This retelling, however, creates a wrinkle in the simple fact that it is a retelling. It is biased. This difficulty presents challenges when we examine closely how historical narratives have been told over the years. Often, having the classification of historical may cause one to assume they are about to encounter a dry report of historical events. Yet, this is not how narratives are told. Proven, Long, and Longman point this out when they state:

> Testimony-"storytelling"-is central to our quest to know the past. In fact, all historiography is story, whether ancient, medieval, or modern. Historiography is ideological narrative about the past that involves, among other things, the selection of material and its interpretation by authors who are intent on persuading themselves or their readership of certain truths about the past.[8]

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[5] Merrill, "Must Stories Be 'Factual' to Do Theology?" 10.

[6] Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Westmont, UNITED STATES: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 19.

[7] Yaël Schlick, *Metafiction* (London: Routledge, 2022), 100.

[8] Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville, KY, United States: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2003), 49l.

Halpern would take what Proven, Long, and Longman showed a step further when he states that "History is fictional and employs the devices of all narrative presentation."[9] The use of narrative to represent historical realities creates tension for those who are receiving these histories. On one side, there is a view of history as "scientific" seeking only to express history as a set of data points.[10] On the other hand, viewing historical narratives in light of the fact that they are stories means that the historians are more like artists conveying truth through creative mediums.[11] Our Western cultural foundations add to the tension. Modernism dominated Western culture for the last 500 years leading to an increased value of hard facts and objective truths.[12] However, the 1960s saw a cultural shift. The introduction of Post-Modern ideas with its prioritization of relative truth has affected several areas of studies as the value of the readers' interpretation has been raised over the intention of the author.[13] These various methodologies have also led to divisions over how people view the historical nature of the Bible. The division between "minimalists" and "maximilists" over whether there is no historicity found anywhere in the narratives in scripture to a view that all of the narratives are historical has given various scholars two significantly different lenses to use when it comes to viewing these various passages.[14] To add to the complexity of this issue is

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[9] Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians : The Hebrew Bible and History* (San Francisco : Harper & Row, 1988), 269.

[10] Ehud Ben Zvi, "Maximalists', 'Minimalists', Method and Theory in History, and Social Memory Lenses," *Biblische Notizen* 193 (2022), 17.

[11] Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, 65.

[12] Alan J. Roxburgh and Martin Robinson, *Practices for the Refounding of God's People: The Missional Challenge of the West* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2018), 33.

[13] Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Meaning of Meaning," in *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 34.

[14] Ben Zvi, "Maximalists', 'Minimalists', Method and Theory in History, and Social Memory Lenses," 19. To add to this, being a "minimalist" doesn't mean that you think history is fiction and being a "maximalist" means that you think history is factual. In fact, Ben Zvi in his article points out Proven, Long, and Longman

the Bible itself. If as Christians we view "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16),[15] this belief will significantly impact how we read the historical narratives found in Scripture. As Merrill shows, we do not approach the Bible as just another text to be analyzed or even on equal footing, but as a piece of literature that has authority.[16]

While these debates can provide fertile ground to cultivate an understanding of the modern struggles with history, it does seem to transplant the argument away from the historical setting of the narratives in question. The elevation of history as science has removed the voice of the author in the pursuit to find the "true" history behind the story. This is not to say that there is no value in these studies. A proper understanding of the historical context is often taught as a key piece to any Bible student's hermeneutical approach. As Duval and Hays show, "God (the ultimate source) spoke through the human writers of Scripture (the immediate source) to address the real-life needs of people at a particular time in a particular culture."[17] This traditional "historical-critical" method seeks to determine what the author's original meaning was.[18] In light of this, one must step outside of the modern understandings of history to grasp how and why these ancient writers told their historical stories.

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would fall into the "maximalist" camp even though they argue for an understanding of history as more of a story telling endeavor.

[15] Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical quotations comes from the CSB.

[16] Merrill, "Must Stories Be 'Factual' to Do Theology?" 11.

[17] J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, Third Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 116. Various classes on Hermeneutics and Biblical Studies in Liberty University also use Kaiser's and Silva's *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, Blomberg's and Jennifer Markley's *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis*, and Stuart's *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors* that all convey this same priority to historical context.

[18] Ilona N Rashkow, "Current Trends in Academic Biblical Studies," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 50.2 (2022): 74.

History as found in History

Dionysius of Halicarnassus once summed up history as just philosophy teaching through examples.[19] Halpern points out that history and myth intermingled until the "Greeks begin to systemize genealogy and myth."[20] As literacy spread, detecting the apparent contradictions and effective rewriting of historical events started to become apparent and easily detectable.[21] While these ancient historians may have been building their narratives off of events that actually happened, they undertook this task with a purpose in mind. This purpose would lead them to arranging the details of the story to convey to the reader what they wanted the reader to take away. As Vogt demonstrates, in "the case of the biblical narratives, this communicative intention is usually a theological one, and the author understands the events described as having actually taken place."[22] Blaski shows that "many early Christian writers believed that while one finds meaning *through* the words of Scripture, meaning is not necessarily equivalent *to* the words of Scripture."[23] To demonstrate this, Blaski shows that Origen saw that "the primary error of Jewish interpretation is its insistence on taking the text at face value, or too literally."[24] One does not need to look further than the gospels to see this was also true of the writers of the Bible. Luke even explicitly lays out his purpose at the beginning of the book named after him:

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[19] Provan, Long, and Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 20.

[20] Halpern, *The First Historians*, 267.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Peter T. Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch: An Exegetical Handbook*, ed. David M. Howard Jr., Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009), 48–49.

[23] Andrew Blaski, "Myths about Patristics: What the Church Fathers Thought about Textual Variation," in *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. Elijah Hixson and Peter J. Gurry (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2019), 244–245.

[24] Ibid., 245.

> "Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us. So it also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed" (Luke 1:1-4).

Luke has taken up writing to make sure that his patron, Theophilus, "may know the certainty of the things" that he has been told. As Fitzmyer shows, the "prologue also makes it clear that Luke was not interested solely in recounting the "facts" of the Christian movement."[25] Luke will undergo taking the story of Jesus and retell it in a way to help elucidate Theophilus. This intro to Luke is very Hellenistic in its structure, but after this short prologue, Luke will tell his narrative in a way that reflects the style of Old Testament histories.[26]

While the gospels may demonstrate this purpose for historical narrative, what about the narratives of the Old Testament? One could argue that the writers of the gospels were influenced in their writing style, as shown by Luke above, by the authors of the Old Testament. Unfortunately, we do not have any single historical narrative with such a clear indication in its introduction of the purpose of writing. However, that does not mean that the stories found did not have intention behind them. Nehemiah does not give a direct purpose for his writing, yet one can be inferred from his closing statement, "Remember me, my God, with favor" (Neh. 13:31). The purpose for telling history will dictate how that history is told. This was not something exclusive to the Hebrews.

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[25] Joseph A. Fitzmyer , S. J., *The Gospel According to Luke (I–IX): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 1st ed., vol. 28, *The Anchor Yale Bible* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 289.

[26] Ibid., 290. This does not mean that Luke was an inaccurate historian, but that his choosing of what material to leave in or omit and the arrangement of the gospel reflects his purposes in writing. See also Robert A. Stein, *Luke: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, vol. 24 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1993), 30.

The purpose for writing affecting how the writing was done can be seen, in one aspect, by ancient Middle Eastern historians and their use of numbers. Fouts shows that "Quite often, large numbers were employed in a hyperbolic fashion in the historiographic literatures of Sumer, Akkad and Assyria, particularly in the royal inscriptional and annalistic genres."[27] Fouts research shows how royal decrees by both Sargon I of Akkad and his son Rimush used large numbers in their royal records of battles.[28] Shalmaneser I, an Assyrian king, talks about the "countless numbers" he slaughtered and how he destroyed 180 cities.[29] Tukulti-Ninurta I, the next king to follow Shalmaneser I, doubled the numbers of his predecessor on a memorial slab about his accession to the throne.[30] Not to be outdone, an inscription describing another Assyrian king, Adad-Nirari II, talks about all the amazing animals he hunted and killed including 120 lions.[31] An Ugaratic text describes an army of 3,000,000.[32] There is no doubt that these kings fought, won battles, or hunted great game, but it can also be seen that hyperbolic details were used to show the grandeur of the ones these short historical tales were depicting.

Therefore, with this understanding of how history was understood and transmitted during the time of the Old Testament, it can be seen that history in the Bible can not be viewed as a simple series of events.[33] Erickson supports this conclusion by showing that

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[27] David M Fouts, "A Defense of the Hyperbolic Interpretation of Large Numbers in the Old Testament," *JETS* 40.3 (1997): 383.

[28] Ibid., 384.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 385.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 386.

[33] Merrill, "Must Stories Be 'Factual' to Do Theology," 20.

"there is evidence that scholarly writers and readers of texts in Judah (Yehud) in the Persian period preferred books that had the capacity to produce multiple meanings."[34] If those who wrote the Scriptures shaped their narratives around the reason they wrote and recorded, does this mean that the historical narratives fail at being historical? Are they nothing more than myths? The simple answer is no. If the standard for historical accuracy was different among the ancients, then their success or failure should be judged by those standards. The longer answer has to deal with a better understanding of storytelling as a way to convey history and the realities that undergird myths.

Can Myths be True or is that just a Myth?

The dichotomy between history and myth is false. Myth has become synonymous with fiction today. To call something a myth, is to call it false.[35] Yet, this is an oversimplification that has occurred in our modern, "enlightened" times. Instead of seeing myth as equal to a made-up story, myth should be seen as a way to explain how the world works. Cho gives this definition, "Myth is a story about weighty matters involving deities, human beings, and other personalities that, in the understanding of its adherents, reveals something true about the real order of the world."[36] Myths are less about the events, whether real or fictional, behind the myth and more about what the truth the myth is trying to convey. Greer argues that Myths are not about "whether the thing happened, but whether it is - whether it goes beyond the merely

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[34] Amy Erickson, *Jonah: Introduction and Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021), 228.

[35] One of the textbooks Liberty uses for its textual criticism of the New Testament is titled *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism* showing how this misunderstanding of myth can be seen even in academia today.

[36] Paul K.-K. Cho, *Myth, History, and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 11-12.

factual into the realm of meaning and ultimate concern, of the deep patterns of interpretation through which people comprehend their experiences of the world."[37] There are myths that are completely made up, but there are also myths that are based on actual events. The myth that George Washington could not tell a lie is based on a real person who lived. While he may not have chopped down that cherry tree, the virtues that Washington held were true even if the story used to illustrate these virtues may be seen as fiction. Bouchelle talks about myth this way,

> When a myth presents itself as grounded in the literal historical events of our world, it is not important whether or not that claim is accurate for the myth to function as such. It will function as myth regardless of its historical validity, because its purpose was not so much to tell history as to reveal a deeper truth about reality.[38]

In fact, we can see elements that would be considered "mythic" alongside "normal" aspects in the Bible. Psalm 148 commands both "sea monsters" (Ps. 148:7)[39] and "mountains and hills" (Ps. 148:9) to "praise the LORD from the earth" (Ps. 148:7). Elisha is often given the title אִישׁ־הָאֱלֹהִים, "man of God," a title that is connected to how a holy man would be depicted in legends.[40]

This is not to argue that all historical narratives in the Bible are myths. Nevertheless, this is not to say that the term myth should be thrown out so quickly from the conversation because it is viewed as something that is false. Many of the historical narratives seek to

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[37] Greer, "Myth, History, and Pagan Origins," 45.

[38] Seth Bouchelle, *Lost Faith: A Practical Theology for Post-Christendom Ministry*, ed. Kendi Howells Douglas and Stephen Burris (Skyforest, CA: Urban Loft Publishers, 2020), 40.

[39] While some may argue this may just be talking about "monstrous" sea creatures, תַּנִּין is connected to Leviathan in Isaiah 27:1 and Ezekiel uses this term to describe Pharaoh as the "sea monster of the Nile" (Ezk. 29:3).

[40] Keith W. Whitelam, "Elisha (Person)," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary : D–G*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 472.

display a greater truth than just a mere series of historical events.[41] There are clear theological overtones all throughout the narratives of the Bible. As Youngblood points out, "it is our job to respect the inspired author's choice to suppress historical details for theological or rhetorical purposes without assuming that the author is composing fiction or falsifying history."[42] Some have argued that theology and history cannot be intermixed, but this is a false narrative.[43] If anything, it is through the telling of history that we have come to know any theology at all.

Finding the Key

Having a greater understanding of myths can help us understand the methods and techniques used by Biblical authors to tell their historical stories. This is because, as Long puts it, historians do not "simply reproduce their subjects."[44] So, what separates historical narratives from fiction for Biblical authors? It would appear that the purpose behind the writing is the key to distinguishing between the two.[45] Yet, this does present a challenge, because, as discussed above, there often is no clear purpose given by the authors when they wrote. It would be easier to discern between the two if there were clear markers of what narratives are historical and which are fictional, but Sternberg argues that there are "no

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[41] John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, Library of Biblical Interpretation (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 25.

[42] Kevin J. Youngblood, *Jonah*, ed. Daniel I. Block, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 32.

[43] Merrill, "Must Stories Be 'Factual' to Do Theology," 11.

[44] Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, 68.

[45] Ibid., 66

universals of historical vs. fictive form."[46] Instead, one must pay attention to the clues placed in the text to find out the purpose of the writing.[47]

Long in his book, *The Art of Biblical History*, spends a great deal of time discussing the artistic side of historical storytelling.[48] Here he equates the historian to the painter. When one views a painting, one must start by taking in the larger picture, and then one examines the individual parts which will lead to a greater appreciation for the entire piece. The opposite happens when reading a narrative, the reader first focuses on individual parts of the story and then afterward the entire picture of the narrative will be understood which leads to a greater appreciation of the individual parts.[49] Yet, both the writer and the painter must use the tools of their medium to illustrate the story they want their audience to take away. For Long, there is a distinction between fiction as a genre and fiction as a tool used to tell a story.[50] Fiction as a genre, by the rules of its structure, consists of fabricated events even if what is being depicted in the story feels real.[51] The historian when writing the story they wish to record will still use the tools of fiction so that those who will read their retelling of events will be able to understand what happened. Just like a painter, the historian chooses a subject, a vantage point, and a compositional arrangement in order to transfer the record of the historical events that exist inside his head to their audience in a way they will be able to receive it.[52] Just as a

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[46] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 31.

[47] Ibid., 30.

[48] Long spends most of his second chapter discussing various aspects of this.

[49] Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, 63.

[50] Ibid., 62.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., 69-70.

painter uses specific brushes, colors, and techniques, the historian must utilize character, plot, and structure. To drive this point home, Long looks to the painting classes put on by Karl Steele. He states that Steele would

> point out that a common mistake of beginners is to attempt to record the great mass of detail exhibited by the subject, whereas the best way to achieve a realistic representation is to be very selective, limiting the depiction of details to a suggestive few so as to allow the mind of the viewers to fill in the rest.[53]

Many people, especially in a modern context, may think that the "perfect" historian would be one who records every detail exactly how it happened when it happened. Yet, no such chronicler exists. Instead, a historian must help their audience understand why the events they are communicating have significance. As Axtell points out, the historian helps their audience by "discerning the larger patterns, structures and meanings behind particular events and facts which contemporaries were not able to see."[54] In fact, a simple chronicle of events would actually fall outside of what one may call a history as there is no structure to create cohesion among the pieces of data being listed.[55] Therefore, a historian will use the various functions of fiction to illustrate these greater points through historical narratives, but this still begs the question: where is the line that when crossed changes a historical narrative to one that is completely fictional?

The key difference for Long is whether the story or painting is "essentially representational (historiographical) and those that are not."[56] Historical narrative, by its own definition, is constrained to be historical. As Vogt notes, historical narratives "are a selective

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[53] Long, *The Art of Biblical History,* 72.

[54] James Axtell, "History as Imagination," *The Historian* 49.4 (1987): 457.

[55] Halpern, *The First Historians*, 6.

[56] Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, 65

record of events."[57] The author, editor, or redactor may have used artistry to rearrange them, highlight certain details, or remove specific aspects that did occur in history but ultimately they are confined by the events whose story they are trying to tell. Therefore, the critic who is examining specific passages or entire Biblical books in an attempt to prove whether they should be seen as historical or not must first examine whether that book or passage is trying to represent actual events.[58]

When discussing the David and Goliath narrative, Alter shows how that "narrative, though it may have certain folkloric embellishments (such as David's victory over Goliath), might actually be based on firm historical facts."[59] Yet the author of that story provides more than just a series of events: they create for the reader dialogue, they give insights into what certain characters were feeling, they give motivations for actions, and all of this is written down by a historian who could not have had documentary sources that would have given such details.[60] Of course, while Alter would argue that the authors of the historical narratives we have received in scripture could not have had access to such details, and thus they must have, in his view, been imagined by the writer, how one views the work of the Spirit within the writing process will greatly affect how one understands the type of imagination these

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[57] Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch*, 49.

[58] A helpful rubric, as Halpern would argue, is if the author appears to have been building their history off of sources and how romanticized is the work. For Halpern, once one goes beyond simply telling the narrative of the events to inventing details, the work goes beyond what he would call history. Shakespeare's plays may feature historical figures and events, but for Halpern they would no longer be history. Merrill gives a more generous interpretation by calling such a work as "historical novel." If the historian has invented dialogue, relationships, or insights into the thoughts of the people being depicted, it does not mean that the work is now considered historically unreliable. Halpern's rubric would cause many of the historical narratives found in the Bible to not be considered history while Merrill's view would make room for most if not all narratives to be viewed as history. The key question is which view would the authors of the Bible hold?

[59] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011), 52.

[60] Ibid., 52-54.

authors were using. If under divine inspiration, it would not be impossible for these ancient historians to have had knowledge beyond what they had access to. Yet, even if being under the inspiration of God did not mean they had divine insight, the goal of bringing a representation of something that had happened still guides them in their storytelling. Could some of the details been modified or manipulated by the author? Certainly, but that would not stop it from being history, at least by the way history was understood by ancient historians.

In a Hoop that Never Ends

Bringing it back full circle, Bloomberg is correct to say history and fiction are not the same thing, only if these terms are viewed as genres. In other words, a historical narrative does not mean a narrative with no fictional elements. It means it is a narrative that strives to tell events that did happen, often through the use of fictional techniques. Does a narrative with fictional elements mean that it is not historical? No, but it does mean that there may be non-historical elements added to the story so that an audience can better grasp the historical nature of the story and the point the author was trying to put forth. There must be an understanding of how the ancients viewed history and evaluated what was historical. Nonetheless, this line of thinking does pose two very large feats that one must overcome. First, what does this view of historical narrative mean for viewing the Bible as historical overall? Second, what does this view of historical narrative mean when it comes to the idea of inerrancy and the trustworthiness of our faith? This first question will be addressed now while the second will be addressed in chapter five of this paper.

Merrill, using a quotation from Edward Young's *Thy Word is Truth*, argues that if one were to view some of the historical narratives of the Bible in any way other than completely true, it would lead to all of the historical narratives being declared as never having

happened.[61] There is also an argument about why should some narratives be declared not historical since they contain miracles when the center of the Christian faith revolves around God becoming a man, dying, and rising back to life.[62] Long would also argue that "it can hardly be denied that [historical narratives in the Bible] presents many of its stories-and, more particularly, the central thread of its one Story-as reflecting a real, and not simply a fictive, past."[63] Should we then take every detail told to us in a historical narrative as historical? No, but this does not mean that there is no truth behind the narratives. As Halpern argues, to try and force every detail to be true, in the modern sense, "prohibits critical historical analysis of the Bible."[64] Instead, we must read it like the ancient audiences who would have received these narratives would. They knew that what they were reading or hearing read to them was intermingled with literal and less literal details.[65]

This still presents a challenge to the modern reader: how can one determine which details an ancient author intended to be taken literally or not? Can a method or system be developed to assist in this endeavor? This paper will seek to bridge this historical divide by seeking out the clues hidden in narratives that the writers left to help their readers understand how they understood the history behind the narratives. As has been shown, a historical narrative, by Biblical standards, was when the creator of the story intended to share about something that did happen, even if they use that tale to make a theological point. To understand how the writers of Scripture crafted their stories to be able to be a mix of history

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[61] Merrill, "Must Stories Be 'Factual' to Do Theology," 22.

[62] Ibid., 3.

[63] Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, 93.

[64] Halpern, *The First Historians*, 3.

[65] Ibid., 275.

and theology, this paper will attempt to pull apart Jonah to see if it is possible to find the fingerprints of the author's hand in the telling of the story. Before this can happen, one must seek to answer a different question, does Jonah make a claim to represent something that happened? In other words, is Jonah a historical narrative? To figure this out, an examination of Jonah's genre must be undertaken.

Chapter Two

Jonah's Genre

Jonah is a unique book. It sits amid the minor prophets, but stylistically stands out among its neighbors. Jonah openly defies God within the first three verses. Prose, not poetry, constitutes a majority of the writing. An unanswered question ends the tale, and the theme of the text, according to Stuart, is "don't be like Jonah."[1] These various aspects cause Youngblood to conclude that "it is best to read Jonah on its own terms and then relate its distinctive themes to the common motifs of the prophetic literature in general."[2]

Jonah's uniqueness has led to a debate on how it should be classified. The genres put forth for Jonah have been diverse such as history, allegory, parable, legend, satire, didactic fiction, and short story to name a few.[3] Indeed, Magonet shows how the "absence of consensus on an appropriate descriptive term reflects the difficulty of such an exercise given the limited amount of biblical and extra-biblical materials with which to compare it and the unique character of the book itself."[4] This chaotic confusion creates an opportunity. The wild brush strokes used to construct this story can reveal the techniques the ancient authors used in other writings that fall into the same category. Therefore, a clear picture of Jonah's genre must be established.

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[1] Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, vol. 31, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 434-435.

[2] Kevin J. Youngblood, *Jonah*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 28.

[3] T. D. Alexander, "Jonah and Genre," *TynBul* 36 (1985): 36–37.

[4] Jonathan Magonet, "Jonah, Book Of," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary: H-J* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1992), 940.

What is Genre?

Genre sets expectations. Collins gives a brief definition of genre when he writes, "By 'literary genre' we mean a group of written texts marked by distinctive recurring characteristics which constitute a recognizable and coherent type of writing."[5] Genre is important because it is, as Duvall and Hays put it, "a fixed agreement between author and reader about how to communicate."[6] The challenge is that the Bible, and often times a single book within it, is not just one genre.

The Hebrew Scriptures are often divided into narrative, law, poetry, prophecy, and wisdom[7] with narrative being the most common genre.[8] However, narrative as a category is too broad as it contains various genres within. Thus, the question when faced with a narrative is what type of narrative is it? Long shows that the various genres of narratives "are recognized on the basis of generic signals."[9] For example, a parable is a common form used within the gospels, but not every parable is labeled. This requires one to compare a passage with those clearly labeled as a parable for similar markers or style. Once identified, the reader can understand how best to interpret the story as Bloomberg shows when he states that "Parables, for example, must not be interpreted like straightforward history; although they are very lifelike in many ways, Jesus may have included some details in them simply to make the

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[5] John J. Collins, "Towards the Morphology of a Genre: Introduction," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1.

[6] J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, Third Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 151.

[7] Ibid., 150.

[8] Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "'I Will Remember the Deeds of the Lord': The Meaning of Narrative," in *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 122.

[9] V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 5 (Leicester: Apollos, 1994), 41.

stories lively and interesting."[10] Therefore if something is determined as a parable, then it would not be viewed as a historical narrative because the intention of the author would not be to represent something that actually happened.

Jonah does fall into narrative, but the type of narrative must be determined. Does it fit into a form where the author intends to represent something that actually happened? Or does it conform to a narrative form where the details are only there to convince and persuade like a parable? To determine which form of narrative Jonah falls among, respective genres that have been suggested by various scholars will be observed to see which best relays the intention of the author.

Is Jonah Fiction?

Several suggested solutions to the issue of Jonah's genre begin with the assumption of Jonah as a fictional tale. This is because, as Alexander points out, the "historical improbability of the events narrated in Jonah is frequently voiced as a strong argument for the fictitious nature of the entire book."[11] Another reason presented for Jonah being fictional is the didactic nature of the narrative.[12] Therefore, the genres that are suggested by those who hold this view define their narratives as fictional. These categories include parable, an allegory, or a parody.

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[10] Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 51.

[11] Ibid., 44.

[12] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 31.

A Certain Man Was…

Farrar gives a simplified definition of parable as "simply a comparison, a putting of one thing beside another to make a point."[13] A parable then can be seen as an extended analogy with the purpose of persuading the audience.[14] This is easily seen in the teachings of Jesus and how He used parables. For example, Jesus starts a parable in Matthew 13:24 with "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field," or in Mark 4:30 when He says, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use to describe it?" Even when this introductory phrase isn't used, it is still clear that Jesus' parable is meant to compare one thing with another.

What is sometimes overlooked is the way the Old Testament influenced Jesus' use of parables.[15] While some scholars disagree on exactly which passages in the Old Testament should be considered parables, Snodgrass identifies twelve passages that appear related to the parables that Jesus used.[16] Snodgrass demonstrates that parables in the Old Testament are "a tool of prophets in the conflict they have with Israel and her leaders."[17] But is Jonah a parable? Is Jonah a prophetic narrative that seeks to compare Israel and her leaders in a way that shows something is wrong with their hearts?

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[13] Robert Farrar Capon et al., *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment: Paradox, Outrage, and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus*, Combined ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2002), 8.

[14] Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, Second edition. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), chap. 1. sec. 2. Kindle.

[15] Ibid., chap. 2. sec. 1. Kindle.

[16] Ibid. These are the parable of the ewe lamb in 2 Samuel 12:1-14, the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7, the parable of the widow and the avenger in 2 Samuel 14:1-20, the parable of the fake injury in 1 Kings 20:35-42, two parables about trees in Judges 9:7-15 and 2 Kings 14:9-10, and six passages in Ezekiel including 16:1-54 (Jerusalem the prostitute), 17:2-24 (the eagle and the vine), 19:2-9 (the lioness and her cubs), 19:10-14 (the transplanted vine), 23:1-49 (the two sisters), and 24:3-14 (the cauldron).

[17] Ibid.

Since parables are so widely used in the Bible, many have started to look for the common generic markers that help identify them. One example of this is a phrase like "a certain man was…" as the prologue to the narrative in question. This line, or some kind of version of it, is seen with such ubiquity within parables that Bloomberg states that it "seems to correspond to the modern 'Once upon a time . . .' Just as people today recognize such a phrase as the opening of a fairy tale, so Jesus' audience would have been prepared by the start of a parable to recognize it as a fictitious narrative."[18] Jonah's introduction, however, does not follow this trope. Instead, Jonah begins very similar to other prophetic books, like Jeremiah which starts with "The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests living in Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. The word of the LORD came to him…" (Jer. 1:1-2).

In addition to a typical opening line or phrase, often parables have details that are more symbolic than literal. Some argue that the meaning of Jonah's name sets him up to be a stand-in for Israel.[19] Others, like Downs, connect Jonah being swallowed by the fish to represent Israel's exile by referencing Jeremiah 51:34.[20] Jonah may be symbolic of Israel but most parables have anonymous characters, meaning the fact that Jonah is named at all makes it not fit this convention.[21] Beyond just having a name, Jonah is also a historical person who is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25.

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[18] Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 52.

[19] Douglas Judisch, "The Historicity of Jonah," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 63.2 (1999): 146.

[20] David J Downs, "The Specter of Exile in the Story of Jonah," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 31.1 (2009): 35

[21] Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 436.

Another consideration for Jonah not being a parable is its length. As Judisch points out, "A parable, too, as already noted, is by nature quite brief and simple."[22] Jonah, while short relative to some other books of the Bible, still consists of 48 verses. The longest parable in the Bible is the parable of the prodigal son told by Jesus in Luke 15:11-32 which is 21 verses long. Also, in every parable, the same style is kept throughout whether it is prose or poetry. In Jonah, a reader will find both.

One last aspect to consider is that parables, especially in the Old Testament, are followed with a short explanation of the parable itself. After an unnamed prophet in disguise tells King Ahab about a fake prisoner he failed to guard to which Ahab condemns the prophet, the prophet revealed himself pointing out how Ahab had failed by releasing Ben-hadad (1 Kings 20:35-43). Jonah, conversely, ends abruptly with an unanswered question. As Sasson shows, the final verses "do not function as interpretive keys in the way that other conclusions to parables normally do."[23] Therefore, it appears that Jonah does not have the typical markers to make it a parable, but there are other fictional genres to deliberate.

Allegory

Stuart defines an allegory as "a kind of extended analogy, sometimes including extended metaphors in which the meaning of the story is not to be found in the concepts and actions presented, but in concepts and actions outside the story, to which the story points analogically."[24] Good points out that this was a typical view among scholars.[25] This has led to

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[22] Judisch, "The Historicity of Jonah," 149.

[23] Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretation*, vol. 24B, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2021), 336.

[24] Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 436.

[25] Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1965), 40.

speculation on the various elements of Jonah and what they could represent. Even the plant was seen as an allegory for Zerubbabel.[26] Indeed, it could be, as Good states, that Jonah as a character "represents all that the author of the book means to reject."[27]

Jonah also seems to be pulling from many parts of the Bible as Sasson illustrates when he gives the following list: "Jonah's sea narrative depends on Ezekiel 27; his prayer is a pastiche from Psalms; his involvement with Nineveh copies from the Elijah cycle; and his theological sentiments draw on Jeremiah and Joel."[28] In fact, the entire story of Jonah could be viewed as an illustration of Jeremiah 18. In that chapter, YHWH through Jeremiah confronts the Israelites who seem to want to be saved without changing their ways. Verses 7 and 8 especially stand out, "At one moment I might announce concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will uproot, tear down, and destroy it. However, if that nation about which I have made the announcement turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the disaster I had planned to do to it" (Jer. 18:7-8).

While there may be some element of truth to Jonah being used to confront the Israelites and correct their view of how a nation should respond to God's call for repentance, allegory also does not fit Jonah. Stuart points out that for allegories to be effective, the symbols need to be understood by the readers right away.[29] As Stuart shows, it "would be an unusual allegory indeed that waited to the end (the fourth chapter in the case of Jonah) to reveal the point of its hero's actions."[30]

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[26] Good, *Irony in the Old Testament,* 40.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Sasson, *Jonah,* 23.

[29] Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 436.

[30] Ibid.

Parody

One element of Jonah that many have pointed out is the humor that is found throughout the story.[31] Erickson goes so far as to state that Jonah as a character "is funny (read: pathetic)."[32] Miles details how humor in the Bible "should be understood against the general tendency of ancient humor to laugh at rather than laugh with."[33] Jonah actions which depict him as the least faithful prophet in the Bible is why Miles puts forth that Jonah is a parody.[34] Parody builds on many of the same principles as parable or allegory like stereotypes and analogies. The details are chosen not because they are historical but because they help show the absurdity of it all. As Miles points out, the "characters in the narrative--the prophet himself, the summoning deity, the wicked king in his wicked city-are stock characters. The scenes-the prophet's initial reluctance, his prediction of destruction, his grief at failure-are stock scenes."[35] While the use of tropes does not necessitate that Jonah is a parody, it does mean that Jonah meets the requirements for it to become a parody.[36]

Miles sees each chapter as parodying a specific form in Hebrew literature. The first chapter parodies prophetic tales.[37] Even Youngblood, who sees Jonah as historical, does state that the way Jonah is written can "be characterized as a gentle parody of the traditional

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[31] Amy Erickson, *Jonah: Introduction and Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021), 54.

[32] Ibid., 59.

[33] Ibid., 175

[34] John A Miles, "Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 65.3 (1975): 170.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., 171

prophetic account designed to challenge Judah's distorted notions of traditional prophetic themes such as divine justice and Israel's election."[38] The second chapter with its thanksgiving psalm is seen as a parody of psalms through its use of exaggerated imagery.[39] The third chapter is a parody of the stories of how typically the king rejects the prophet and his message.[40] Finally, the fourth chapter is a parody of the stories of prophets who cry out to YHWH in their distress and are comforted.[41]

It may appear that parody is the obvious choice, nevertheless, there are issues with selecting it as the genre of Jonah. For parody to work, the few historical details we are given, like the name of the prophet and the city he is sent to, would need to be viewed as only existing to help people know that this is a book about a prophet and that the city is indeed a known evil city. As Miles puts it, the "selection of Jonah as the prophet's name and Nineveh as the wicked city where he will preach may mean no more than the selection of Tex and Dodge City would mean in a parody of the western movie."[42] Would Jonah still work if any other prophet's name was inserted and any other city chosen? Possibly, but if the character of Jonah is just a parody of a prophet, why use a prophet who only appears in one verse in one other book? Parody also views Jonah as written simplistically and yet, as Erickson points out, "it quickly becomes apparent that the book is neither simple nor artless."[43] Instead, it appears that the author of Jonah used some parody techniques in his effort to present what happened.

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[38] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 37.

[39] Miles, "Laughing at the Bible," 174.

[40] Ibid., 175.

[41] Ibid., 177.

[42] Ibid., 171

[43] Erickson, *Jonah: Introduction and Commentary*, 38-39.

Even though Jonah does not fit into a fictional genre, it still must be shown that it was trying to depict events that are historical before it could be considered a historical narrative.

Jonah's Troubled History with History

If a historical narrative is defined by the historian trying to convey something that actually happened, then one of the first issues any historical narrative must overcome is whether the events being depicted are historical. Sometimes the creator of the narrative explicitly states the narrative they are about to share is based on literal historical events like the introduction of Luke, other times a narrative may state that it is representing something that happened when in truth the author knows that the events never did happen. The greatest clue to whether the author intends to represent a historical story or a completely fictional one will be to determine if there is any doubt that these events happened in the first place.

An argument that appears often to discredit Jonah is the big fish. The miracle of a man being able to survive multiple days in the belly of an aquatic creature becomes too fanciful and erases any historical possibility for the narrative for many. This is often the weakest argument for Jonah to be completely fictional. As Merrill points out correctly, if one believes that some miracles are historical, like those of Jesus, then miracles should no longer be the criteria for determining the historicity of a passage.[44] Of course, if the person who is critically examining Jonah does not come from a Christian worldview, it is understandable why miracles would quickly determine whether a narrative should be taken as historical or not. Some, like Halpern, will still point to this kind of event as something that falls outside of

[44] Merrill, "Must Stories Be 'Factual' to Do Theology?" 10.

history,[45] but miracles do not mean that the author was completely fabricating events. Also, Jonah handles this miracle and the miracle of the plant in chapter four, a miracle that for some reason is not as hard for people to accept, with little to no fanfare.[46] While other events are described in larger-than-life terms, the actual miracles in the book are described as events that just happened. Miracles may mean that a narrative is using a mythological framework, but that does not mean the events are completely fictitious.

As discussed before, myth does not mean fiction. In fact, as Cho shows, "biblical writers could and did use myth to describe the world in which they believed they lived or hoped to live."[47] For Cho, the writers of the Bible and the audience that received those writings would have had a more nuanced view of myth than we do today. A writer who uses myth to help tell a historical tale can easily still have the intention to represent something that did take place in history. Suffice to say, miraculous events in a narrative are not a sure sign that the author or historian is intending to create a fictional story. When it comes to Jonah, it is not the fish that creates historical issues that can cause one to question the intention of the author. Ironically, it is almost every other historical detail that rocks the boat of Jonah's historicity.

Location, Location, Location

Jonah is called by God in the second verse of the book to go to the city of Nineveh. A very popular assertion by those who teach Jonah is to point out how Nineveh is the capital of

[45] Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians : The Hebrew Bible and History* (San Francisco : Harper & Row, 1988), 269.

[46] Alexander, "Jonah and Genre," 49.

[47] Paul K.-K. Cho, *Myth, History, and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 8.

Assyria.[48] This leads to many speculating about how Jonah viewed the Assyrians and how that would have factored into how he responded to God's call. The issue is that Nineveh being the capital when Jonah was a prophet is simply not true.

While Nineveh would eventually become the capital of Assyria, it would not happen until at least forty-five years after Jonah's time.[49] Youngblood shows how the author writes in such a way that "the narrative seems to operate under the assumption that Nineveh is the capital of Assyria."[50] Lemanski, in an attempt to defend the use of Nineveh, shows "that the book of Jonah itself never claims that Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. In fact, the word 'Assyria' or 'Assyrian' never even occurs in the book."[51] The name of Assyria is missing from the text of Jonah, but it is very common for the writers of scripture to refer to nations by their capitals.[52] The ruler of Nineveh is identified as the "King of Nineveh" not the "King of Assyria," but Lawrence gives an explanation on how these two may have been one in the same by pointing out "The Assyrian kings of this period are Adad-niräri III (810-783) and Shalmaneser IV (782-772)."[53] Lawrance goes on to detail how Adad-niräri III was recorded to have built within Nineveh, including finishing a palace, meaning that it is likely that the kings of Assyria resided in Nineveh during this period, even if temporarily.[54]

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[48] For example, Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal Prophet: Jonah and the Mystery of God's Mercy* (New York, U.S.: Penguin Publishing Group, 2018), 12. The author of this paper has also made this same mistake when teaching through Jonah.

[49] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 30.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Jay Lemanski, "Jonah's Nineveh," 42.

[52] For example, Isaiah 10:10 uses Samaria and Jerusalem when talking about Israel and Judah or when Amos prophecies against Syria, he uses Damascus to represent all of its kingdom (Amos 1:3).

[53] Paul Lawrence, "Assyrian Nobles and the Book of Jonah," *Tyndale Bulletin* 37 (1986) 123.

[54] Lawrence, "Assyrian Nobles and the Book of Jonah," 130-131.

Historically, this was also a time when Assyria was seen as weak.[55] There were many rebellions throughout the kingdom,[56] and they faced pressure from outside nations.[57] This could have created an environment where Jonah's message would speak loudly. Even if the king of Assyria didn't reign at Nineveh at the time, the weakness of the monarchy allowed the major cities within the empire to have great freedom.[58] This has led some to speculate that even though Nineveh wasn't the capital of Assyria at the time, Nineveh may have been able to act independently from the rest of Assyria.[59] Finally, Lawrance takes note of the fact that the proclamation to repent came from "the king and his nobles" (Jon. 3:7). He goes on to argue that this supports the fact that during this period of Assyrian history, there were several powerful nobles whose power and influence rivaled that of the king.[60] While these all give historical possibilities to the events depicted in Jonah, there is still no known archeological evidence that the people of Nineveh had a sudden and complete conversion to become followers of YHWH, the God of the Israelites.[61]

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[55] Judisch, "The Historicity of Jonah," 154.

[56] Lemanski, "Jonah's Nineveh," 46.

[57] Judisch, "The Historicity of Jonah," 154.

[58] Lemanski, "Jonah's Nineveh," 46.

[59] Ibid., 48.

[60] Lawrence, "Assyrian Nobles and the Book of Jonah," 131.

[61] Magonet, "Jonah, Book Of," 984. The key here is no known evidence. Lemanski notes that if Nineveh had some form of independence, when Tiglath-pileser took the throne and once again brought all of Assyria under the rule of the monarch, any local religious reforms would have been overturned. This reversal of reforms is also likely even without Nineveh being independent. Lemanski, "Jonah's Nineveh," 47-48.

Creative Retelling.

The events of Jonah may have happened, but did they happen the way the author is telling them? Is the author trying to represent something that happened? Judisch argues that "the narrative itself, firstly, provides no evidence of any non-historical intention."[62] A surface reading may appear to support such a statement but as one digs into how Jonah is written and structured, it seems that the narrative does provide evidence of the intention behind the author. While these literary markers will be examined in the next chapter, some of the stylistic choices will be touched upon below.

A great example the author of Jonah has greater intentions then just telling a series of historical events is the book's location in the canon and how it is written. Being located among the minor prophets and with an opening that reflects many of the other prophetic books informs the reader to expect to encounter the same type of literature and style found in the other prophets. On the contrary, the reader finds a narrative written mostly in prose featuring a prophet who immediately disobeys God. The style immediately crashes against the expectations set up by the context of Jonah. These factors make it clear that the author intends that this book be seen as a book of prophecy while at the same time telling the reader that it should be viewed completely differently than any other prophetic book.

For example, an odd literary detail in Jonah is its ending. From a narrative perspective, it essentially does not have one. Instead, the book ends with a question that is never answered. This feature is also unique when compared to other narratives found in the scriptures. Joshua ends with the capture of the promised land. Esther ends with the Jews saved and Mordecai promoted. Even when an ending does not wrap everything up in a bow,

[62] Judisch, "The Historicity of Jonah," 153.

the main plot is concluded in some way. Jonah is distinct because instead of a conclusion to a plot, it ends in the middle of a conversation.

The specific language used by the author of Jonah is remarkable as well. Hyperbolic language is used throughout as everything seems to be “great.” Unusual language choices can be found interwoven into the text where it appears the writer specifically used words in unorthodox ways. Particular words are repeated causing the reader to compare how they are used and causing various parts of the story to be linked through shared language.

It is no wonder that Sherwood declares Jonah “is a biblical cartoon, an adventure in the fantastic, a series of boldly penned word-pictures ranging from the prophet in the belly of a fish and the divinely ordained belching to the bizarre pageant of repentance at Nineveh and the surrealist tableau of the plant and the worm.”[63] But do all of these point to the author of Jonah not trying to present something that actually happened and thus cause Jonah to no longer be considered a historical narrative? No, as Youngblood shows, “the book of Jonah relates historical events.”[64] Yet, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the ancient historians wrote with an intention behind how they presented history. A modern western reader should not impose what they determine as improbable or their view of history on an ancient writer. Alexander makes this point well when he states:

> …if we allow that an ancient writer might accept as probable events which we today would view with considerable scepticism, we must also allow for the possibility that the author of Jonah may have been mistaken in thinking that certain events actually occurred. Thus, even if we could demonstrate beyond all doubt that an event recorded in Jonah never took place, this, of itself, would not prove that the author himself did not view the event as historical.[65]

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[63] Yvonne Sherwood, “Cross-Currents in the Book of Jonah: Some Jewish and Cultural Midrashim on a Traditional Text,” *Biblical Interpretation* 6.1 (1998): 49.

[64] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 31.

[65] Alexander, “Jonah and Genre,” 46.

The main criteria to determine if a narrative is a historical narrative is the intention of the author. While some have viewed the events and the way Jonah was written as so fanciful that it could be nothing but fiction because of their own understanding, this does not mean the purpose of whoever wrote Jonah also intended to compose a completely fictional narrative. Instead, Jonah does fall into the category of historical narrative, but it is clear that the author means to do more than share a series of events.[66] These deeper goals show that while the genre may fall into the historical narrative category, the form of Jonah still needs to be determined.

Jonah as History

Genre and Jonah is a turbulent mixture. This led Elata-Alster and Salmon to say that Jonah's genre is intentionally vague and "the problem of generic uncertainty is, itself, the very heart and soul of the Book of Jonah."[67] Therefore Erickson's strategy when it came to Jonah was to examine each chapter to see which genre fits each episode that happens in Jonah instead of trying to give a single genre to the entire book.[68] While this method does work well, this paper will attempt to give a reasonable genre form to the entire book. The key to the form can be found in how Good describes the author's seeking to "expose absurdity by the irony of satire."[69]

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[66] Alexander, "Jonah and Genre," 31

[67] Gerda Elata-Alster and Rachel Salmon, "The Deconstruction of Genre in the Book of Jonah: Towards a Theological Discourse," *Literature and Theology* 3.1 (1989): 57.

[68] Erickson, *Jonah: Introduction and Commentary*, 55.

[69] Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 54.

Live From New York It's…

One of the most common forms put forward by scholars for Jonah is satire. Woodward defines satire as an author's intention to "debunk a protagonist through either bitter invective (the Juvenalian tradition) or tongue-in-cheek narration (associated with Horace)."[70] The word satire comes from the Romans.[71] It is signaled by the use of irony in a way that causes its target to be viewed in a humiliating fashion.[72] Satire can be very diverse as Miller points out:

> Satire presents in different forms. It may appear as a monologue, a parody of an existing work, a fictitious drama, a biography, or satire might present as history writing. It may be of any length, however, if it is long, it will (in most cases) be episodic. Thereby, a satire cannot be discerned purely by form, but must also be considered for content.[73]

Satire does not necessarily mean fiction. It does mean that if it is a historical event that is being used for satire, the events are being portrayed by the artist as something that did happen, but in a specific way. Will Ferrell's portrayal of George W. Bush when he debated Al Gore may have been a satire of that event, the jokes were still based on real points made by the competing candidates. As has been pointed out before in dealing with parables, allegory, and parody, the events of Jonah often involve a flipping of expectations. These ironic components are a central device used in satire. As Woodward points out, "Exaggeration, comic tone, fictional artifice, dissociation of protagonist from the historical Jonah (see 2 Kings 14:25)—these qualities build a compressed, forceful debunking of proud,

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[70] Branson L. Woodward Jr., "Jonah," in *The Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2010), 425.

[71] Virginia Miller, *A King and a Fool?* (Brill, 2019), 24.

[72] Ibid., 26.

[73] Ibid., 25.

bigoted Hebrews who thought Gentiles beyond the reach of divine mercy and love."[74] Satire does appear to fit Jonah well, but is there a genre that both fits Jonah and comes from Biblical times? Woodward offers an answer to this question by presenting an option, Hebrew tragedy.

What a Tragedy

Hebrew tragedy, according to Woodward, is defined as having "reliable narrators, historical purpose, and factual details."[75] There is also a formula that tragedy follows: dilemma, choice, catastrophe, suffering, perception or realization of one's error, and death.[76] The central character of a Hebrew tragedy has been appointed by God or has some kind of aspect that makes them seem greater than others.[77]

Jonah fits these patterns well. While there is humor throughout the book, Jonah remains a stubbornly serious figure until the end. As a prophet, Jonah has been appointed by God for a task. Jonah's dilemma is right at the beginning of his story, will he go to Nineveh or not? What follows is the unfolding of the five other elements through the first chapter except Jonah offers a twist, it doesn't end with him dying. Instead, Jonah gets a second chance only for him to fall into the same pattern again. Jonah may not die by the end of the book, but he is seeking death.

Making a Choice

Genre can help determine the intention of the author by helping show whether they meant to tell a fictional tale or not. Some have taken the fantastical nature of Jonah to mean

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[74] Woodward, "Jonah," 426.

[75] Ibid., 427.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid., 432.

that it must be fiction and thus sought to categorize Jonah to a form of genre that indicates a fictional narrative. While Jonah does contain some elements that may make it be seen as a parable, allegory, or parody, none of these genres completely work. Nevertheless, while Jonah's historical details can be questioned, it does appear that the intention of the author is to retell events that did happen. This means that it is a historical narrative, but the question became, what kind of historical narrative? This paper would argue Jonah should be seen as a satiric Hebrew tragedy. Viewing Jonah through the lens of this genre then helps one gain insight into the intention of the author because one of the key points of this form is that it is a historical tale.

Jonah may be seen as standing next to other historical narratives of the Old Testament, however, Jonah still stands apart from its peers. This uniqueness is a blessing, not a curse, as it causes the literary techniques used by ancient authors to rise to the surface. These literary markers will help reveal the intentions behind the writing, uncovering the embedded clues left by the writer for the reader so that one can know why the historical narrative was written. With each literary marker decoded, a better understanding of how history is handled in Biblical historical narratives will be developed. In the end, these literary markers can give readers of the Bible the tools needed to see the brush strokes of the paintings the authors of historical narratives used to create their tales.

Chapter 3

The Literary Markers of Jonah

There are many techniques used by artists of different mediums to help their audiences understand the message they are trying to share. Ancient writers were no different as they had methods to help shape their narratives to aid their reader discover connotations in the text. Long shows that “an increased appreciation of the literary mechanisms of a text--how a story is told often becomes the avenue of greater insight into the theological, religious and even historical significance of the text--what the story means.”[1] In this chapter, with Jonah established as a historical narrative in the form of a satirical Hebrew tragedy, the core work can now take place: examining Jonah for literary markers that point to the theological message behind the historical tale followed by an examination of Jonah to see if these literary markers can help the interpreter discern how the historical events were manipulated for the sake of that message.

Uncovering the Tools

For the writers of historical narratives, the key weapon in their arsenal was the art of story. As Alter points out, “an essential aim of the innovative technique of fiction worked out by the ancient Hebrew writers was to produce a certain indeterminacy of meaning, especially in regard to motive, moral character, and psychology.”[2] The authors of Scripture embraced the medium of narrative to communicate their dynamic stories, masterfully using these

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[1] V. Philips Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence*, vol. 118, Society of Biblical Literature (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 14.

[2] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, NY.: Basic Books, 2011), 25

literary brushstrokes to paint a picture that would enthrall the observer. Some narratives are subtle in their use of these techniques, and then there is Jonah.

Jonah boldly uses literary techniques to tell its story. That does not mean the book is not artfully created, but that it is a narrative that paints with bold colors and broad strokes. These elements assist in creating the world of the narrative while encoding deeper meanings into the various levels within the narrative.[3] Jonah's overt use of these practices makes it an ideal candidate for this case study looking for literary markers. The markers that have been surveyed fall into two large areas, macro and micro. Macro markers deal with the work as a whole, while micro markers deal with specific details placed within. Both markers, once exposed, will help build a bridge over time so that as modern readers, one may begin to understand the intentions of the author as if they were part of the original audience.

Don't Miss the Forest

To tell a narrative, there needs to be a structure in place. The ancient writers of Scripture used macro markers in their writings to shape their narratives as Sailhaimer shows when he writes the "most influential yet subtle feature of an author's work in relating historical events is the overall framework within which he arranges his account."[4] Jonah is no exception. It is through its ability to shape the historical tale that the book of Jonah leaves an impact on those who interact with it.

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[3] Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "'I Will Remember the Deeds of the Lord'" in *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 122.

[4] John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, Library of Biblical Interpretation (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 25.

The events that happen in history rarely follow a typical narrative structure.[5] Those who write history often must choose how they will take these historical happenings and present them to their audience. Jonah sorts which happenings it includes by specifically employing several elements to create a structure for its events. Each of these markers comes together to reshape a simple set of actions detailing how God commissioned a prophet to go to a specific city into a compelling narrative that still leaves an impression on people today. This thesis has identified four major categories of macro markers in Jonah: story beats, repeated words, intertextuality, and irony.

The Heartbeat of the Story

In Hebrew writing, one of the clearest macro markers is story beats. A story beat is a single event in the story that moves the plot forward. A story beat can be an action a character takes or an event that affects the characters in some way causing them to react. A group of story beats creates a scene, and a group of scenes creates an episode. When Jonah runs from God that is a story beat, when Jonah is swallowed by the great fish, that is also a story beat. The collection of actions and events that happen on the boat in the first chapter form a scene. The group of scenes that show God calling Jonah, his running away, and the boat in the storm forms an episode. Story beats, therefore, are used by the author to structure the plot of the narrative.

When structuring their stories, often the authors of the Old Testament wanted their readers to see links between various parts of the account. By placing these elements in parallel, the writer is using a method that consists of linking various elements of a story to

[5] V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 5 (Leicester: Apollos, 1994), 69.

cause the reader to compare and contrast each part with the others. Jonah uses this to great effect as Erickson notes when she states, “the simple narrative structure belies a puzzling set of pieces that can be joined and interlocked in a number of ways, yielding an array of meanings.”[6] To aid a reader in understanding what is meant to be seen in parallel, an author can structure the story beats in intentional ways.

When it comes to Jonah, the author has used the story beats of the narrative to create four distinct episodes that happen over the account, one for each chapter of the book. Each of the episode’s story beats share similarities. For example, both the first and third episodes start with God calling Jonah to go and feature Jonah interacting with Gentiles, whereas the second and fourth episodes focus on Jonah praying to God while reflecting on the previous episodes. Suffice it to say, it appears that the arrangement of the story beats of these chapters becomes a clear macro marker in that they should be seen in parallel with each other. These connections built into the structure and plot of the narrative act as macro markers to establish which episodes, scenes, characters, or even details should be examined.

To see this in Jonah, the initial story beats from the first and third episodes can be used as an example. Each episode has two main story beats: the call and Jonah’s reaction, and the consequences that result from this action. During the first scene in both episodes, we are given almost identical depictions of YHWH coming to Jonah to instruct him on what he needs to do. Therefore, the explicit nature of its similarities should force the reader to notice what is the same and what is different. For example, in the first verse of chapter three, the word “again” is added. While this may seem like a simple addition, it should stand out to a reader of scripture because as Youngblood demonstrates, “Jonah is unique among the

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[6] Amy Erickson, *Jonah: Introduction and Commentary,* Illuminations (Chicago, IL: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021), 38.

prophets in his receiving a second chance to obey YHWH's command."[7] A key theme for Jonah is God's divine freedom in saving people, so by adding this simple word, "again," into this verse, the author uses the structure of his story to enforce this point.

The second part of this scene explores Jonah's reaction to that call. In chapter one, Jonah flees to Joppa and purchases a ride to Tarshish away from Nineveh. In chapter three, Jonah goes to Nineveh and proclaims his message. The details of how Jonah either moves away from or toward Nineveh become a place where the author gives us insight into Jonah's character. In the first chapter, he flees swiftly. Even his hiring of a ship may exemplify this as Erickson argues that the wording of Jonah's cost "suggests that Jonah makes a payment to hire the entire ship along with its whole crew— an extravagant fee for an extravagant ship."[8] Whereas in chapter three, Jonah appears to go to Nineveh with very little enthusiasm. The author tells the reader that Jonah goes to the city "because of what YHWH said" (Jon. 3:3)[9] The city of Nineveh is described as a "journey of three days" (Jon. 3:4) but Jonah only travels a single day into the city before giving his message. These minor story beats help the readers gain insight into Jonah's character through the comparison of these two episodes.

Identifying similar plot points has the possibility of being a subjective practice. To help establish objective conclusions on what story beats should be compared, the writers of Scripture left pointers for the reader. One of the fundamental ways to determine a story beat is through the use of discourse markers.[10] Campbell gives a simple definition of discourse by

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[7] Kevin J. Youngblood, *Jonah: God's Scandalous Mercy*, vol. 28, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2013), 125.

[8] Erickson, *Jonah*, 216.

[9] Unless otherwise stated, all references from Jonah are the author's translation.

[10] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 42.

saying that the "simplest way to think of discourse analysis is that it deals with text beyond the level of the sentence—the pericope, paragraph, wider units, and the text as a whole."[11] Chisholm notes that there are three main elements to Hebrew discourse: "(1) the framework, (2) nonstandard constructions that deviate from or interrupt the normal pattern of the narrative framework, and (3) quotations and dialogues embedded in the narrative."[12] When it comes to story beats and structure, the main discourse markers that the reader needs to discover are those that make up the framework of the narrative.

An important discourse marker in Jonah is the Hebrew word, וַיְהִי or *wayĕhî*. The BDB defines *wayĕhî* as "fall out, come to pass, become, be."[13] This word often marks the beginning of a new Hebrew narrative, as can be seen in Joshua, Judges, and Samuel.[14] Youngblood shows that this "verb often serves as a discourse marker that introduces new information at the beginning of an episode."[15] This verb construction begins both the first and third episodes. In fact, this marker also signals the change from the first episode of Jonah into the second one where Jonah prays to God from the belly of the whale.

To identify the next discourse marker in Jonah, one must first understand the most basic indicator of a story beat in Hebrew. The construction of a waw-consecutive with the short prefixed form or preterite verb is noted by many grammars as the basic verbal pattern in

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[11] Constantine R. Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek: New Insights for Reading the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 149.

[12] Robert B. Chisholm, *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 119.

[13] Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 224.

[14] Chisholm, *From Exegesis to Exposition*, 120.

[15] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 43.

narratives.[16] Often called a *wayyiqtol*, these mark the various story beats throughout a narrative. Because these are used in various ways to forward a narrative, they will often signal the minor story beats. This does not mean that they never mark a major story beat, for instance, this construction helps begin the final episode of Jonah at the beginning of chapter four. Nevertheless, these are important markers to pay attention to as a reader because it is when different constructions disrupt the flow established by the *wayyiqtol* construction that a major story beat is frequently discovered.[17]

In Jonah, one of the key interrupters is when the waw is connected to a noun, what Chisholm calls a disjunctive clause.[18] For example, 1:4 begins with וַיהוָ֗ה, a disjunctive clause created by having the waw combine with the covenant name of God meaning "but YHWH." This construction marks the beginning of the scene of the storm on the boat. Also, in the middle of 3:3, we find וְנִֽינְוֵ֗ה, the waw combined with the name of the city meaning "now Nineveh," which starts the events showing the results of Jonah's decision to obey YHWH and go to Nineveh.

Two other interrupters to the narrative flow to consider from Jonah are redundancy and shift in focus. At the end of chapter three, there is a small tag that concludes verse ten, וְלֹ֥א עָשָֽׂה, "and He didn't do it." What stands out about this tag is how unnecessary it is.[19] The writer of Jonah has already informed the reader that God "relented of the evil which he said he was going to do to them" (Jon. 3:10), which makes "and He didn't do it" (Jon. 3:10)

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[16] Chisholm, *From Exegesis to Exposition*, 120.

[17] Ibid., 123.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 43.

redundant.[20] This interruption is not used to mark the beginning of a scene but as a summary statement to end the scene.[21] It is paired with a shift in focus to mark the transition from the third main episode into the fourth. At the beginning of chapter four, the spotlight is shifted back to Jonah. While grammatically it does not present an interruption because it is a *wayyiqtol* construction, it is the reintroduction of Jonah that interrupts the flow of the narrative. All these factors help the reader identify the overarching shape of the narrative's structure, which is important as often this shape will act as a macro marker helping the reader identify the themes of the narrative.

Repeated Words being Repeated

It is no secret that the author of Jonah used a smaller list of vocabulary causing many words to be repeated throughout the narrative. By repeating a word, the author is able to highlight the themes of the book as Erickson notes, "repeated key thematic words have different shades of meaning."[22] By using repeated words, it also creates another category for readers to compare and contrast as they work with story beats to structure a narrative.[23] As Magonet shows, "the repetition of the words associated with Jonah's 'call' provide a method for comparing the two sections of the book, or, in terms of the narrative itself, comparing the

[20] This redundancy is not based on a grammatical construction but the writer simply repeating himself. For example, in 1:13, a similar construction is found but the clause it forms is providing a result to the first clause. In 3:10, the redundant clause is not providing any additional information but restating what was already said, acting like a summary statement.

[21] Redundancy can be used in Hebrew narrative in other ways, like emphasizing a point.

[22] Erickson, *Jonah*, 38.

[23] Suzanna Smith, "Old Testament Rhetorical and Narrative Criticism," in *Literary Approaches to the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mangum and Douglas Estes, Lexham Methods Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 65.

consequences of Jonah's disobedience and ultimate obedience to God's word."[24] Youngblood also marks the use of repeated words as a way the author of Jonah connects the various episodes or emphasizes the various themes of the narrative.[25] There are several examples to examine to show how repeated words can be a macro marker to signal the meaning the author is trying to get across.

One word that is used throughout the entire tale is רָעָה or *ra'ah*. *Ra'ah* means "evil, misery, distress, injury."[26] Since this word is used throughout the entire story, the writer forces the reader to compare and contrast how *ra'ah* is being used in various contexts.[27] As Youngblood points out the "author brilliantly exploits the word's broad range of meanings in order to draw a close connection between Nineveh's evil, Jonah's evil/displeasure, and YHWH's threat of punishment against both Jonah and Nineveh."[28] This repeated word becomes a catalyst for the reader to examine how they understand the idea of evil, what they may consider evil, and how their own actions could bring evil on themselves and others. While *ra'ah* is an example of how the author used a repeated word to point out a theme, other repeated words are there to build out the narrative world being created in the story.

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[24] Jonathan Magonet, "Jonah, Book Of," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary: H-J* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1992), 938.

[25] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 39.

[26] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 949.

[27] In chapter one, YHWH declares that the *ra'ah* of Nineveh has come before. Yet, in his fleeing on the boat, Jonah's actions become a *ra'ah* causing God to send a terrible storm. The sailors, not Jonah, realize that a divine being has sent *ra'ah* on them and eventually find out that it is caused by Jonah. Ironically, the *ra'ah* that Jonah wants to see happen to Nineveh is now directed at him. In chapter three, God relents from the *ra'ah* He had declared against Nineveh. Finally, chapter four brings this examination of *ra'ah* to a head as Jonah at first declares YHWH's mercy towards the Ninevites is a great *ra'ah*. Here we see how the author uses this word to illustrate how Jonah has defined *ra'ah* differently than how God has. Jonah's anger is felt as he declares YHWH as a being that relents from sending *ra'ah*. In the end, YHWH sends a plant in order to remove Jonah's *ra'ah*. By repeating this word, Jonah forces the reader to examine how they understand *ra'ah*.

[28] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 40.

Appearing thirteen times throughout the book of Jonah is גָּדוֹל or *gādôl*. *Gādôl* is a Hebrew adjective meaning "great."[29] In Jonah, everything is great: Nineveh is a great city (1:2, 3:2, 3, 4:11), YHWH hurls a great wind causing a great storm (1:4, 12), the sailors fear a great fear that will eventually be centered on YHWH (1:10, 16), Jonah is swallowed by a great fish (2:1), the greatest people in Nineveh help the king declare a fast (3:5, 7), Jonah's anger at Nineveh being spared was great (4:1), and Jonah's pleasure with the plant was great (4:6). Magonet explains that this excessive use of the adjective is strange when one "remembers that biblical Hebrew uses adjectives very sparingly and that this repetition is quite obtrusive."[30] Some see this excessive use of the adjective as the author trying to create a "larger than life" story.[31] While this simple explanation may be true, the use of the word is more intentional than just enlarging the events. For example, Nineveh being declared as great, even very great in Jonah 3:3, does help create an image of a grand and expansive city in the mind of the reader, but it also helps support the final question God asks Jonah at the end of the story in 4:10-11, "And YHWH said, "You cared about the plant you did not work for or cause to grow, which was here one night and gone the next. And should I not care about Nineveh, that great city, which has in it more than a hundred twenty thousand people who do not know my laws and many cattle?" When examining the story of the sailors in the boat, *gādôl* is connected to another repeated word, יָרֵא or *yārēʾ* which means "fear."[32] Here, the adjective is used to show how the sailors go on a spiritual journey from being afraid because of the storm, to being greatly afraid because they are told of its divine origin, to now

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[29] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 152.

[30] Magonet, "Jonah, Book Of," 938.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 431.

directing their great fear towards YHWH.[33] Finally, the use of *gādôl* demonstrates God's divine power over creation by showing how he commands great forces of nature. מָנָה or *mānâ*, a Hebrew word that means "assign,"[34] is another repeated word that demonstrates God's sovereignty as it shows how God appoints the fish (1:17), the plant (4:6), the worm (4:7), and the East wind (4:8). While words that are repeated throughout the narrative reveal the themes of the book, words that are repeated only within a single episode also perform this action.

After God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh at the beginning of the narrative, the reader is informed that Jonah יָרַד to Tarshish. יָרַד or *yārad* means "come or go down, descend."[35] Here the author uses a repeated word to not only tell the reader that Jonah was moving in the opposite direction than the one YHWH wanted but by repeating this word sets Jonah in a spiritual direction. Jonah's flight from the word of the Lord not only caused him to physically head away from God but it shows how with each step, Jonah heads towards death. This culminates in chapter two during Jonah's prayer when he states how he had descended down to the realm of the dead. Repeating a word throughout the tale or an episode becomes a macro marker to have the reader meditate on a theme, but this marker does not have to consist of only a single word being repeated.

In Jonah, there are three ways the author refers to God: יְהוָה or YHWH, His covenant name, אֱלֹהִים or *ʾĕlōhîm*, the generic term for God, and יְהוָה־אֱלֹהִים or YHWH *ʾĕlōhîm*, a combination of the two. This interchanging of references has been a source of confusion as

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[33] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 84.

[34] Ibid., 584.

[35] Youngblood, *Jonah,* 432.

scholars try to find the reasoning for why the author switches the way God is presented. Sasson argues the "only hypothesis that makes sense is one that acknowledges the lack of any recognizable overall pattern."[36] Nevertheless, the author uses each of these terms in strategic ways. YHWH is the only way the author refers to God until chapter three.[37] There is a very clear shift that happens at this point in the story as the focus leaves Jonah temporarily and the people of Nineveh take the literary spotlight. As Youngblood shows, "the author refers to God as YHWH, unless God's interaction with Gentiles is in view."[38] This switching of titles is used by the author to put forward the theme of God's sovereignty over all nations.[39] This use of names comes to a climax in chapter four when the author switches between the two titles as a way to enforce that the same YHWH who saved Jonah is the same God who cares for the people of Nineveh. When the combined name is used in chapter four verse six, it is when God appointed the plant to "take away his evil." The idea that God cares deeply for both the individual as well as the group is clearly put forward by the author by using these repeated words as a macro marker.

Another pair of repeated words that are there to cause us to compare Jonah and the Gentiles are קָרָא and פָּלַל.[40] First, קָרָא or *qārāʾ* means "call, proclaim, read."[41] פָּלַל or *pālal* means "to pray."[42] Both of these verbs are used by the characters to talk to God, but specific

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[36] Sasson, *Jonah*, 30.

[37] Before this, *ʾĕlōhîm* is used in its generic sense like the sailors crying out to their gods (1:5) or Jonah declaring YHWH is his God (1:9).

[38] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 131.

[39] Ibid., 131.

[40] Erickson, *Jonah*, 37.

[41] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 894.

[42] Ibid., 813.

characters use specific verbs. When the Gentiles petition YHWH, they *qārāʾ* to the Lord.[43] On the other hand, when Jonah talks to God, he offers up a *pālal*. These contrasting ways of communication are used by the author to cause the reader to compare how Jonah relates to YHWH versus how the gentile groups around him plead with God. The crying out of the Gentiles shows humility and a recognition of God's divine status. The praying of Jonah shows an elevation of self while questioning YHWH's ability to justly rule. Again, these macro markers cause the reader to go beyond just a historical tale to a deeper theological meaning.

A final pairing that clearly demonstrates a deeper theological message is the combination of *ra'ah* with טוֹב, *ṭôḇ*, which means "good."[44] In chapter four, Jonah argues that it was evil for God to save Nineveh and it would be good for Jonah to die. God asks Jonah twice in verses four and nine if what he understands to be good is actually good. What the author has done has brought up a central theme of the Bible that started in Genesis 3, man redefining good and evil for themselves. It is no coincidence that the tree Adam and Eve are told not to eat from is the tree of the knowledge of *ṭôḇ* and *ra'ah*. By using these words repeatedly, the author illustrates how this is one of the key issues Jonah has while also using a bit of intertextuality, which will be discussed shortly, to connect Jonah to Genesis 3.

I Understand that Reference

Youngblood gives this definition for intertextuality, "Intertextuality simply refers to the pervasive influence of prior texts through direct quotation, literary allusion, or subtle echoes

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[43] The sailors do this in 1:14. The people of Nineveh do this in 3:8.

[44] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 373.

detectable in words, phrases, or images that call prior texts to mind."[45] The key is the last phrase in this description, when an author uses intertextuality as a marker, they are signaling the reader to recall other texts. This causes one to compare and contrast the current passage they are reading with the passage the writer is alluding to. Through the examination of these two separate writings, a theme or point is brought out in the current literature while also commenting on the previous text. There are many examples of this in Jonah.

When reading Jonah, Genesis 1-11 appears to have been in the mind of the author. Youngblood shows that "From its description of Nineveh as a "great metropolis" (Jonah 1:2; cf. Gen 10:10–12) to Jonah's use of the compound divine name, YHWH-God (yhwh-ʾĕlōhîm, cf. Gen 2–3), the book of Jonah displays marked and deliberate dependence on the first eleven chapters of Genesis."[46] Jonah also appears to have a close affinity with several elements from the flood narrative.[47] This connection can be seen, for example, in how the author of Jonah uses a similar motif or object in how God uses wind in Genesis to stop the flood but in Jonah to cause the storm[48] This intertextuality is used by the author to tie to the theme of God's sovereignty over all creation as well as Israel's special role as a family chosen by God to bring the rest of the nations back to him.[49] While this portion of Genesis may have had an influence on the overall story and meaning, the various episodes Jonah goes through also allude to other episodes in Scripture.

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[45] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 41.

[46] Youngblood, *Jonah,* 41.

[47] Hyun Chul Paul Kim, "Jonah Read Intertextually," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126.3 (2007): 500.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 41.

Jonah's boat adventure in chapter one is almost an exact retelling of Psalm 107:25-32. Psalm 107:2 states, "Let the redeemed of the LORD proclaim that he has redeemed them from the power of the foe." The rest of the Psalm shows how God saves these various "redeemed of the LORD" from various situations. Thus, those being saved by YHWH in the various situations in Psalm 107 are pictured to be Israelites.[50] Stone therefore states that the "intertextual resonances with Ps 107:23-32 confirm the conclusions of those contending that Jonah is a figure of Israel in exile."[51] However, the reader should notice that in the narrative of Jonah, it is the sailors who match the actions of those who are being saved in Psalm 107. Once again, the intertextuality aspect of this episode in Jonah forwards the theme of God offering salvation to all mankind and Israel's understanding of how other nations could be saved.

Jonah's story has allusions to other famous prophets. Youngblood gives two clear examples by comparing Jonah to Moses who was willing to die to save Israel or Elijah who journeyed into the desert wanting to die after Israel did not repent. [52] Another example is how in Jeremiah 26, Jeremiah is commissioned by YHWH to confront the people of Israel over their *ra'ah*. The people in response want to put Jeremiah to death but Jeremiah warns them against having innocent blood on their hands. In Jonah, the prophet has brought *ra'ah* onto the sailors and tells the sailors to throw him overboard. When the sailors finally agree to do what Jonah says, they first plead with YHWH not to put innocent blood on their hands. Yates

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[50] Timothy J Stone, "Following the Church Fathers: An Intertextual Path from Psalm 107 to Isaiah, Jonah and Matthew 8:23-27," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 7.1 (2013): 44.

[51] Stone, "Following the Church Fathers," 46.

[52] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 42.

notes that the "intertextual connections between Jonah 1 and Jeremiah 26 appear to highlight the surprising nature of the sailors' response to Yahweh."[53]

Isn't that Ironic?

Jonah is full of reversals from what the reader would normally expect. One of the greatest reversals is the behavior of the messenger of God the book is named after. As Youngblood shows, "the exemplary behavior in the book is displayed not by the prophet Jonah, but by the idolatrous Gentile mariners and the wicked people of Nineveh, who, in contrast to Jonah, respond properly to YHWH's word and mercy."[54] Other reversals include how Jonah is given a second chance, a rather uncommon opportunity given to prophets who fail to obey, as well as Jonah's prayer being one of thanksgiving instead of repentance in chapter 2. These inversions of expectations exist as macro markers to help the reader understand the deeper meaning behind the historical tale.

A close relative to irony is exaggeration. Often, hyperbolic language enhances the irony of a situation. In Jonah, this can be clearly seen in the response of Nineveh to the prophet's proclamation. While it is already ironic that the people of a violent and enemy nation like those in Nineveh would turn from their ways at the minimum effort Jonah puts into giving them YHWH's message, how they respond only enhances the irony of the situation. The language in chapter three indicates that every single person in the city repented, as well as every animal participating in the mourning rituals. This creates a hyperbolic picture of repentance, a type of response that no other group of people even gets

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[53] Gary Yates, "The 'Weeping Prophet' and 'Pouting Prophet' in Dialogue: Intertextual Connections Between Jeremiah and Jonah," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59.2 (2016): 227.

[54] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 37.

close to in any other narrative found in scripture. This highlights the theme of repentance and forces the reader to ponder how they respond to God's correction in their life.

God is in the Details

With a structure in place, an author now adds details to fill out the narrative. What are the names of the characters? What is the location? What is the dialogue? What are the specific words that will be used? These micro markers can have large implications and reveal great insights into the intentions of an author. The term micro is simply to indicate that these deal with specific details found in the narrative that may only appear once. Just as there were several different types of macro markers, a variety of micro markers will be studied that were found in Jonah: names, numbers, and wordplay.

What's In a Name?

In every narrative, one of the most important ways to identify and differentiate between the characters is by their names. When it comes to the main character, often the name chosen will have a special meaning. Of course, with historical narratives, the names will be constrained by the historical characters the author is writing about. Even so, names can and are still used to shape the narrative in such a way that they reveal underlying themes and messages in the plot. As the author of Jonah used names sparingly, the ones that are given should be examined by the reader to see if they are micro markers of the writer's intent.

The very first name the reader is given, YHWH, has been discussed above in relation to how the author switches between this covenant name and the Hebrew word *ʾĕlōhîm*. This shows that a literary marker used by the author can be both micro, the detail of using the name of God, and macro, the repeating as well as pairing of this name. The next name that a reader comes across is Jonah's. Identifying the prophet as Jonah son of Amittai is a influential indicator in several different ways.

First, this identification gives the reader a little background on the character as it reveals that this is the prophet Jonah who appears in 2 Kings 14:25. While it is possible that this may be a different Jonah, the fact that the book identifies him with his father's name, as Sasson shows, "forces us to assume that Scripture knowingly chose to link the respective narratives."[55] This bit of intertextuality is important as it is the only insight into Jonah the reader has outside of the book of Jonah. In 2 Kings, one finds out that Jonah had prophesied that King Jeroboam would restore the border of Israel. While Jonah's appearance is brief in 2 Kings, it can help illustrate his thinking and actions in the narrative named after him. Jonah appeared not to have any problem prophesying something positive about Israel. Also, his prophecy was the result of God showing mercy to the people of Israel even though they were not following him. With these points in view, Jonah's anger over Nineveh being saved becomes a point of comparison forwarding the theme of God's divine freedom in offering salvation to all.

Second, the name Jonah means "dove." This meaning has led to various allusions as Erickson shows by asking, "Did this suggest that he was fearful or powerless (Hos 11:11; Ps 55:6), or even senseless (Hos 7:11)? Or that he was beloved (Song 1:15; 2:14, etc.) by YHWH (?) or a bearer of good tidings (Gen 8:11– 12)? The book and its history of interpretation would seem to present all of these as viable options."[56] Others see this as a clear marker that the author is using Jonah as a stand-in for Israel.[57] This paper sees that the author is using the meaning in two ways. Like many of the other elements in the story,

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[55] Sasson, *Jonah*, 342.

[56] Erickson, *Jonah*, 53.

[57] Sasson, *Jonah*, 69.

Jonah's name being a reminder of something that brought good news, like in the flood narrative of Genesis 8, is used ironically as Jonah only brings destruction or the threat of destruction wherever he goes. Since one of the main themes discussed is what a proper response to God looks like and His desire to bring salvation to all, Jonah's name allowing him to symbolically represent all of Israel helps support the author's efforts to share the messages they were trying to convey.

The only other human name we are given is Jonah's father's name, Amittai. The name appears to be a combination of the Hebrew word אֱמֶת, ʾěmet, which means "truth or faithful" with a shortened form of YHWH rendering its meaning to be "YHWH is faithful/true."[58] This name reflects an aspect that Jonah will later question. In chapter four, Jonah quotes Exodus 34:6, "You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love" (Jon. 4:2 CSB). There is a minor discrepancy in how Jonah quotes the Exodus passage. Exodus 34:6 states "The LORD—the LORD is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth." Jonah leaves out the final characteristic of YHWH, truth. The author has cleverly used the name of Jonah's father to also signal one of the main themes the book wants the reader to meditate on, is God still considered truthful if he saves people that the reader would feel does not deserve to be saved?

While none of the other characters receive names, there are a few locations named. First is the city of Nineveh. Nineveh as a location helps with the intertextuality of connecting Jonah to Genesis 1-11 as it is the first city built after the flood.[59] Just as the meaning of the names of Jonah and Amittai helps enhance the narrative, so does Nineveh's. Merrill details

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[58] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 53.

[59] Sasson, *Jonah*, 70.

the background of the name by showing that the "name from earliest times was formed of the composite Sumerian logogram NINUA (=NINA), the interior sign of which is KUg or, in Akkadian, nünu, 'fish.'"[60] Thus, Nineveh means "fish town."[61] The reason for this meaning becomes clear when one understands that the main deity worshipped at Nineveh would have been Nanshe who is a fish-goddess.[62] To have a man who just spent time in the belly of a great fish come into "fish town" which worships a fish-goddess may explain why the Ninevites were so quick to listen.[63] These connections may also explain why the author chose to use the city of Nineveh even though it causes the historical issues discussed last chapter. Either way, the name Nineveh helps enhance the narrative as the reader follows Jonah as he leaves one great fish only to enter a different one.

The next location named is Tarshish. Tarshish as a location serves a few purposes within the story. First, Tarshish was the furthest known place in the opposite direction of Nineveh. The exact location has been debated by many scholars but the main point is that it is far away from where Jonah was told to go.[64] As Youngblood points out, "According to 2 Chr 9:21, a round trip to Tarshish required three years. It was considered well worth the time and trouble, however, because of Tarshish's precious metals and exotica."[65] Its selection as Jonah's destination highlights the lengths the prophet was willing to go to get out of his

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[60] Eugene H Merrill, "The Sign of Jonah," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23.1 (1980): 26.

[61] Ibid., 27.

[62] Ibid., 26.

[63] Ibid., 29.

[64] Sasson, *Jonah*, 79.

[65] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 56–57.

calling. According to Isaiah 66:19, Tarshish was a place where they "have not heard about me or seen my glory." For a prophet trying to run away from YHWH, it would be a great place to go. There is also a connection to Psalm 48, which in verse eight states, "as you wrecked the ships of Tarshish with the east wind." This bit of intertextuality does support the book of Jonah's central message as the sons of Korah in Psalm 48 sing about God's sovereignty over all nations and contemplate his faithful love, two of the themes that the author of Jonah wants the readers of this narrative to meditate on.

The final name given is Joppa, the port city that Jonah goes to in order to flee to Tarshish. While Joppa may not seem like a strange detail on a surface reading, this city being the point of departure was an intentional detail left in by the author. Joppa was historically not under the control of the Hebrews making it an ideal place for a prophet on the run.[66] It also has a link to ancient myths as it is identified as the place where Perseus defeated the sea monster, a tale that could have been circulated orally far earlier than the fourth century BC.[67] One other aspect that makes Joppa an interesting choice is that it is located close to Jerusalem.[68] According to 2 Kings 14, Jonah lived in Israel in the North meaning that this is not the closest port for him to run to. Joppa's location gives the sense that Jonah may have been in Jerusalem at the temple when he received the call. This idea is strengthened by Jonah's prayer as he focuses on the temple when he states, "When my life was at its end, I remembered YHWH, My prayer came to you, to your holy temple" (Jon. 2:7) and "I myself, With a voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you" (Jon. 2:9). Remember that Jonah ran in

[66] Sasson, *Jonah*, 80.

[67] Ibid., 233.

[68] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 58.

order "to get away from YHWH" (Jon. 1:3).[69] Handy presents a potential historical wrinkle when he argues that Joppa would not be a port that ships heading to Tarshish would depart from, instead putting forth the idea that Joppa would have been seen as a "portal" to foreign lands in the minds of Jonah's audience.[70] Nevertheless, by using the port of Joppa, the author creates a strong image of a prophet not only fleeing his calling but running away from the place where God's glory dwelt to get on a boat that can go to a place that has not seen or heard of God's glory.

Power in Numbers

A specific detail that the writer of Jonah uses that sometimes gets misconstrued is numbers. Powers points out in his study on sacred numbers that "Numbers not only have the capacity to connect important configurations of thought, but they frequently provide a frame within which these fundamental ideas continue for long periods of time."[71] In the Bible, numbers can have symbolic meanings as well. The author of Jonah only uses numbers in three specific instances: the length of days Jonah was in the fish, the breadth of Nineveh as well as how far into the city Jonah went, and the amount of time the Ninevites had before their city would be overturned.

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[69] Joppa being a Gentile port by itself also illustrates Jonah trying to leave God's presence as he has left the land of his people.

[70] Lowell K. Handy, *Jonah's World: Social Science and the Reading of Prophetic Story* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 25-27. Handy presents a historical argument that the ports that dealt with Joppa would have only been as distant as Northern Egypt and Sidonia. He writes that only those that ships who would sail long distances would originate in these Egyptian or Sidonian ports. As a journey to Tarshish took a long time as shown in 2 Chronicles, it is possible that while a ship may not sail directly from Joppa to Tarshish as Handy argues, the ship may first go from Joppa to another port before moving on. Therefore, it is possible that Jonah may have found a boat that would eventually reach Tarshish after stopping at other ports.

[71] William K Powers, "Counting Your Blessings: Sacred Numbers and the Structure of Reality," *Zygon* 21.1 (1986): 81.

The first number to examine is the number three. Jonah 2:1 in the Hebrew or 1:17 in English shows the reader that Jonah spent "three days and three nights" in the belly of the fish. This may be the author simply stating the amount of time Jonah was in the fish, but the number three and this phrase have more nuance than that. Some scholars have suggested that three days may have been understood as the limit a human could endure.[72] The number also is often tied to stories of journeys within the Old Testament.[73] In myths of that area in ancient times when it came to death, the phrase "three days and three nights" has significance.[74] Bauckman points out that "this phrase in the Descent of Inanna shows that it was the time it took to travel from the earth to the underworld."[75] It is not hard to assume that the author of Jonah would have known this myth as there is evidence that various tales in the Old Testament echo other myths from neighboring nations.[76] These connections between three and various stories lead this paper to agree with Youngblood who argues that in the Hebrew scriptures "the time period 'three days' or 'three days and three nights' relates particularly to the time required for one to journey from the realm of life to Sheol or vice versa."[77] This idea of the number three representing traveling from the land of the living to the land of the dead is supported by the imagery used by Jonah in his prayer in chapter two. This can be clearly

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[72] Jo-Marí Schäder, "The Symbolic Meaning of the Number of Days Mentioned in the Book of Jonah.," *HTS Theological Studies* 76.4 (2020): 2.

[73] George M. Landes, "The 'Three Days and Three Nights' Motif in Jonah 2:1," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86.4 (1967): 448.

[74] Schäder, "The Symbolic Meaning of the Number of Days Mentioned in the Book of Jonah," 1.

[75] Richard Bauckham, "Descent to the Underworld," In *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary: D–G*, edited by David Noel Freedman, 145–159 (Doubleday: Yale University Press, 1992), 148.

[76] Paul K.-K. Cho, *Myth, History, and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 8.

[77] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 102.

seen in verse seven located roughly in the middle of the psalm, “To the bottom of the mountains, I descended, down to the land of death, its gates shut me in forever. And yet you brought my life up out of the grave, YHWH my God.” The author wants to make it clear that Jonah has traveled to a place of death, but even there YHWH could save him. This detail serves as a marker to help show this theological point, nevertheless, it is not the only three one finds.

In chapter three, when describing the size of the city of Nineveh, the author states it is “a journey of three days.” A typical day’s journey in ancient times would be roughly 20 miles.[78] Therefore, Nineveh would have been 60 miles in diameter if taken literally. Some scholars suggest that this was the time it took to walk throughout the city or around its parameter,[79] others assume that this referenced not just Nineveh but the area around it.[80] Sasson gives the simplest explanation for describing Nineveh in this way by stating that a “‘three-day walk’ sets up an obvious contrast with the ‘one-day walk’ of the next” verse.”[81] Jonah only traveling one day into a city that should have taken three days creates a picture of Jonah doing the minimum needed to fulfill the calling God gave Him.[82] Nineveh’s name was linked to the Assyrian fish god[83] which from a narrative sense creates a sense that Jonah has left one giant fish to enter another. The use of three also can be viewed as related to the separation between life and death, like when Youngblood suggests that “Nineveh

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[78] Erickson, *Jonah*, 315.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Sasson, *Jonah*, 230.

[81] Ibid., 231.

[82] Schäder, “The Symbolic Meaning of the Number of Days Mentioned in the Book of Jonah,” 3.

[83] Merrill, “The Sign of Jonah,” 27.

symbolically bordered on the netherworld because of the unrestrained cruelty of her people."[84] All of these points show that this number goes beyond simply giving a historical detail to becoming a marker of the themes and messages the author has implanted into the narrative.

The other number in Jonah is forty. In the 3:4, Jonah proclaims, "In 40 days, Nineveh overturns!" Forty is a number that appears in many stories throughout the Bible.[85] There is a clear pattern that shows how forty is a symbolic time period as Schäder shows, forty is "a conventional number to indicate a major change" and "denotes periods of trial or waiting."[86] This idea of forty signaling a test or trial is also seen in Jonah. The Ninevites have forty days before their city is overturned, and they choose wisely to humble themselves before God in order to be saved.

This does present a question, should every instance where a number with symbolic significance is used be viewed as non-historic and as a literary marker? No. Of course, there will be instances where something does take three days to journey or forty is the actual number of years, but it does mean that these numbers need to be viewed in context to see if they are being used as markers. As Schäder points out, "numbers one, three and 40 are… numbers that typically have symbolic value."[87] Hebrew narratives traditionally are light on

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[84] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 132.

[85] In Genesis 7, God causes it to rain forty days and nights in order to flood the earth. Noah waits forty days after the flood waters start to recede in order to check if the waters have dried up in Genesis 8. Moses spent forty days with God at the top of the mountain as described in Exodus 34. The spies in Numbers 13 spent forty days examining the promised land, their bad report caused the Israelites to wander in the desert for 40 years which is proclaimed by God in Numbers 14. Judges 3, 5, and 8 all state that the people of Israel enjoyed peace for 40 years because of the judge God had sent. David and Solomon both reigned for 40 years. Elijah walks for forty days to get to the mountain of God in 1 Kings 19. Ezekiel's prophecies in 4:6 and 29:11-3 dealing with Judah and Egypt state how they will suffer for forty years.

[86] Schäder, "The Symbolic Meaning of the Number of Days Mentioned in the Book of Jonah.," 3-4.

[87] Ibid., 1.

details, which means every detail that is added needs to be carefully examined to see why it was included.[88] Numbers may present a representation of something that actually happened, but that does not mean an author could not use them to present a deeper meaning to a reader.

Words at Play

Many have noticed some of the strange words and constructions that the author of Jonah uses. Sasson notes that Jonah contains a "distribution of unique or rare conjugations."[89] After examining Jonah, Erickson concludes that while the vocabulary may seem simple, the book is artfully crafted and full of wordplay.[90] While some appear to be just literary flare, others are used to help the reader pick up on the greater message of the story.

The first episode has several instances where words are used in strategic ways to help the reader gain insights into the author's intentions. One early example is how YHWH commands Jonah to הָלַךְ or *hālak*, "go,"[91] to Nineveh, and instead Jonah finds a ship that is בּוֹא or *bôʾ*, "come,"[92] to Tarshish. While both of these Hebrew words have similar meanings, they are used in opposite ways like how "go" and "come" are similar but have different implications.[93] This enforces through word choice how Jonah's actions were the complete opposite of what God wanted. Later, when describing how bad the storm is, the verb חָשַׁב or *ḥāšab* is used when describing the boat. This stands out as Youngblood shows that normally

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[88] Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 336.

[89] Sasson, *Jonah*, 20.

[90] Erickson, *Jonah*, 38.

[91] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 229.

[92] Ibid., 97.

[93] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 58–59.

this verb “takes only conscious beings as grammatical subject.”[94] The author of Jonah instead uses this verb to personify the boat to show that it also becomes an accomplice in stopping Jonah from fleeing. Another explanation for using this specific verb in a unique way is that when read out loud with the other words around it, the sound of waves crashing against the side of a ship is created.[95]

The author also enjoys using cognate constructions throughout the book to emphasize specific actions. For example, after YHWH calms the storm, the sailors “began to fear YHWH with a great fear. As soon as possible they sacrificed sacrifices and vowed vows to YHWH” (Jon 1:16).[96] Later, in Jonah 3:2, Jonah is told to “Quickly get up! Go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the proclamation which I will tell to you.” Before in 1:2, Jonah was to go cry out against the city, now Jonah is told to go proclaim God’s proclamation. This subtle shift highlights the action of proclaiming.

One other wordplay the author enjoys employing is puns. Hendel defines a pun as “a literary technique of distortion of spoken or written texts to impart relevant secondary meaning.”[97] Some examples of a pun in Jonah are the fact that Jonah goes to Nineveh, “fish town,” after spending time in a giant fish, while at the end of the book, Youngblood shows that the “infinitive ‘to be more than’ (harbēh) launches a series of puns on words derived from the root r-b-b, meaning ‘to be many, to multiply.’ It is followed by ribbô (10,000) and

[94] Ibid., 73.

[95] Ibid.

[96] There are three pairs of cognates: וַיִּירְאוּ or wayyîrəʾû and יִרְאָה or yirʾâ, וַיִּזְבְּחוּ or wayyizbəḥû and זֶבַח or zebaḥ, and וַיִּדְּרוּ or wayyiddərû and נְדָרִים or nədārîm.

[97] Russell Jay Hendel, “Biblical Puns,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 34.3 (2006): 190.

the final word of the book, 'many' (rabbâ).[98] Lastly, Jonah proclaims that Nineveh will be הָפַךְ or *hāpak* meaning "turn" or "overturn."[99] This word can imply total destruction as it is used to describe what God does to Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. It can also mean something to be changed, like when Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about letting the Israelites go in Exodus 14. The selection of this word works perfectly with the themes of the book, Jonah wants to see the Ninevites destroyed, but God wants to see the Ninevites changed.

Markers and History

As this chapter has shown, Jonah is bursting with literary markers used by the author to help construct the narrative in a way that will help the reader pick up on the themes and messages the writer intended to share. By understanding these various brush strokes, the interpreter can better understand the painting, how it was crafted, and what it is trying to say. Literary markers reveal how certain parts of the narrative were enhanced, highlighted, omitted, or possibly even added in. While literary markers like the ones discussed may appear in any narrative, historical or fictional, they play a vital role within the historical narrative genre to help the reader go beyond the historical events being depicted to consider why this story was told in the first place. The closer one can ascertain the intention of the author, the better one will be able to understand how to view the historical parts of a historical narrative. An examination of Jonah through the lens of these literary markers can be used as an example of how one may notice the literary machinations of the author.

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[98] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 173.

[99] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 245.

To find the intention of an author, the interpreter should begin with the foundation of the narrative, the structure. The way a story is presented will give clear indications of how the author handled the historical events the narrative is based on. If the episodes are overtly connected, then it is easy to identify that the author has been careful to arrange the story in a specific way. As has been discussed, through its use of story beats and repeated words, Jonah is written in a way that almost every aspect of the narrative is set in comparison with each other. Whether it is episode versus episode, scene versus scene, Jonah versus God, Jonah versus Gentiles, or the plant versus Nineveh, the author is explicit in his use of literary markers to create a structure that would force the reader to consider these parallels and what they mean in a theological sense. By using an overt structure, the writer of Jonah is showing that his intention for sharing the story has little to do with historical accuracy and more to do with proving a point.

Another consideration is the reliance on intertextuality. Not only is Jonah rife with allusions to various parts of scripture, but its explicit connection to the prophetic books can also give great insight into the intention of the author. By introducing the book in a similar way to a text that falls into the category of prophet, the author is signaling that while Jonah is a narrative, it serves a similar purpose to the other prophetic books of sharing a message from God. Thus, again, the intention of the author is heavily focused on sharing a message.

Understanding Jonah as historiography means that the author had to work within the events that happened. Therefore, it would be hard pressed for one to stay with this historical view of Jonah and not accept that the prophet Jonah was called by God to go to Nineveh, preached in the city and people there repented.[100] From this foundation, the author uses his

[100] Some may add in his running, the storm, Jonah going outside of the city, or some other event. This paper would argue that one could recreate a very basic, skeletal structure of events of Jonah without them. One could also argue that since Jesus references the fish in the gospels, it should be seen as part of the core structure.

creativity to arrange the events, the details that happen in them, and how they are presented in a way to serve his intention of writing. This is not to say that any of the details not listed above should by default be seen as fictional, but that the author has room to craft a narrative that has a historical foundation but a theological purpose.

In depicting Jonah's fleeing, the author's hand in portraying the events can be clearly seen. From the specific word choice, the potential implication of Jonah paying for the entire boat,[101] and the choice to include the names of Joppa and Tarshish,[102] the writer used all of these elements to emphasize Jonah's desire to depart from the presence of YHWH. The scene on the boat also is ripe with markers of the author's hand, the intertextuality, repeated words, and wordplay all show that the representation of Jonah's boat ride was presented to forward the themes at play. The fish also serves the purposes of the author's intention by being another demonstration of God's sovereignty over nature and demonstrating his ability to save anyone no matter the situation while also being a willing participant in God's plan, unlike Jonah. The detail of three days, whether it should be taken literally or not, is used by the author to symbolically show Jonah's travel from the land of the dead to the land of the living. Jonah's prayer is already scrutinized as not historical by scholars because many view it as a

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This paper is attempting to only use the signals included in the text by the author and thus left out the fish for this purpose. It is worth noting that Jesus' mention of Jonah has been seen by some scholars as definitive proof of Jonah's historicity. This sentiment is expressed by Judisch, "The testimony, above all, of Jesus Christ is clearly expressed and should be decisive for anyone who believes in His divinity and, consequently, His infallibility even according to His assumed human nature." Judisch, "The Historicity of Jonah," 155.

[101] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 59.

[102] This does not mean that they were not the historical destinations Jonah used to flee. If they were or not, it is still clear that the author intentionally included them because of how they worked within the narrative.

later addition to the narrative.[103] It too, through its many allusions to other psalms[104], and its strategic placement so that its conclusion lines up with the center of the chiasm of Jonah, shows that this prayer at a minimum was manipulated by the author to fit his purpose. While Nineveh was likely included because it was the historical destination of Jonah, the author uses literary flourishes and embellishments to paint a grand picture of the city in the mind of the reader.[105] The repentance of the people is crucial to the plot of the story as Ehud Ben Zvi shows how the "plot of the book of Jonah collapses without the salvation of Nineveh."[106] The author does not depict a simple act of humility by the people of Nineveh, he describes a repentance that affected every single human and also found the animals wearing sackcloth as well. The final episode acts almost as a commentary of the previous episodes. It is as if the author is showing his hand to make sure the reader does not finish without understanding the message the narrative is trying to share. Again, all of these details are not proven false because of the literary markers tied to them. Instead, they are clear signs of where the author flexed their creative muscles in order to shape a narrative that reflected their intentions on why they composed the piece of literature.

Exposing the numerous ways the author of Jonah used literary markers in his representation of what happened to Jonah reveals a writer who prioritized a message over an exact retelling of history. While these markers do not designate a specific point or element as

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[103] Youngblood, *Jonah*, 92.

[104] Jonah's psalm is rich with intertextuality as it appears to borrow from Psalm 18:3-6, 31:7-8, 42:8, 103:4, 119:55, and 120:1

[105] Nineveh is always called "great" in Jonah, in 3:3 it is called a "great city to God" or "great city to the gods" which both phrases emphasizes its importance and size. 3:3 also gives the description of it being a "three days journey" that no matter how one interprets this phrase, it must be recognized that it highlights the size of the city. In 4:11, God also emphasizes its size by noting it contained 120,000 people and many animals.

[106] Ehud Ben Zvi, *The Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2009), 14.

being fictional, they do allow an interpreter to read this narrative in a way that aligns with the purpose of the author. There is no doubt that a skilled storyteller could use literary makers to recount a historical event in a way that is both gripping while accurately representing the events that happened. However, as more literary markers are employed, the focus of the author appears to move towards the message, not the historical record.[107] It may be more fruitful to instead imagine a spectrum with completely fictional occupying one end and entirely historical on the other. Literary markers in themselves do not mark whether something is historical but their presence and quantity may allow one to place a narrative at an appropriate spot along such a line. Also, if a specific aspect, scene, or even an episode can be seen to have been manipulated by the author, while it is not definitive proof that this element was created by the author, it does show the reader should be examining it for its theological purposes and not its historical value.

The Tell Tale Signs

Over this chapter, the book of Jonah has been examined to see how the author used literary markers to create a narrative that did more than just convey historical events. These additions, exaggerations, and omissions do not mean that the author told a fictional story. Instead, while the markers do show that the intention of the author was theological first, historical constraints placed upon the narrative show that the story was attempting to represent events that did happen. Markers don't always mean that an element has been added by the author, but they do help give readers insights into the world the author is trying to

[107] This issue of the number of literary markers affecting the "historicalness" of a narrative can be seen when comparing the number of markers in Jonah to the number found in Ruth which will be examined in the next chapter. This variance can explain why a certain narrative's historicity, like Jonah, is often debated where a different narrative, like Ruth, has its historicity accepted easier.

show. With these markers in view, the next question to tackle is if they can be found in other historical narratives in the Hebrew scriptures.

Chapter 4

Ruthlessly Looking for Markers

Now that Jonah has been examined and various literary markers identified, the question remains: do these literary markers show up in other historical narratives? To test this theory, another historical narrative will be closely observed to find if these same markers are found within. If a literary marker appears in multiple narratives, then it helps enforce its status as a type of "brush stroke" used by the Old Testament writers when it comes to historical narratives. When considering which of the other historical narrative passages to examine, each of these accounts was weighed in light of Jonah. As a result, Ruth was chosen to be studied.

This is the Story of a Girl

One may wonder, why Ruth? First, Ruth shares the same genre as Jonah. It is a historical narrative that depicts events that did take place as Block argues when he states that Ruth "describes real experiences of real people in real time at real places."[1] On the other hand, Schipper writes that the "book of Ruth is ancient Israelite literature in that it assumes many figures, idioms, and customs from ancient Israel's written and/ or possibly oral traditions. How accurately these traditions reflect the historical reality of ancient Israel remains uncertain."[2] Nevertheless, even in this critical view, the author's intent still can be seen to reflect a story that did happen.[3]

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[1] Daniel Isaac Block, *Ruth: The King is Coming*, vol. 8, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 37.

[2] Jeremy Schipper, *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7D, The Anchor Yale Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2016), 13.

[3] Edward F. Campbell Jr., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, vol. 7, The Anchor Yale Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 10.

Ruth also shares Jonah's desire to focus on theological themes. For a relatively small book, Ruth imparts several messages to its readers through its detailed and creatively written tale. Over four short chapters, the author of Ruth presents a story that comments on God's sovereignty and how He responds to those who seek him as well as community aspects like caring for the foreigner and the widow.[4] Another purpose of the narrative is creating a chronological bridge from the time period of Judges to the rule of King David. [5] This leads Evans to point out how Ruth, like Jonah, appears simple on its surface with some referring to it "in terms such as 'a beautiful idyll', 'a lovely romantic story' or 'ideal material for a women's conference', none of these does justice to the story we are presented with, which is much more complex than at first appears."[6] By highlighting how the author uses literary markers, this complex tale becomes easier to see.

Ruth's Macro Markers

The first step is to identify the macro markers that deal with the structure of the narrative. In the last chapter, four categories were identified: story beats, repeated words, intertextuality, and irony. Scrutinizing Ruth reveals that these same markers are used throughout the narrative. As will be shown, the author has artfully employed these various elements to present a narrative in a way that aligns with his intention of writing.

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[4] Mary J. Evans, *Judges and Ruth: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 220-21.

[5] Block, *Ruth*, 40.

[6] Ibid., 212.

Story beats

An analysis of Ruth's story beats reveals a four-episode structure. Each episode begins with someone or a group leaving a location, spending time seeking provision in a different location, and then returning to the original location. The similarity of the story beats within the four episodes creates a clear indicator for the reader to view each episode in parallel with each other. One must wonder what kind of provision is sought, how the characters sought that provision, and why did some succeed in their seeking where others failed. One does not have to guess at the answers to these questions, the author clearly reveals the solutions through his use of structure.

Discerning the arrangement of the story beats shows that each episode follows a chiastic structure. Some have argued the entire book of Ruth follows a chiastic structure.[7] While this may or may not be true, each of the episodes are chiastic when they are broken down by their scenes. For example, episode one consists of (A) Elimelech leaving Bethlehem to find provision, (B) Naomi trying to provide for her sons, (C) Naomi leaving Moab because provision is back in Bethlehem, (B') Naomi attempts to provide for her daughter-in-laws, (A') and Naomi returning to Bethlehem "empty." A variation of the A B C B' A' structure appears in all the episodes and each of the centers highlights God's sovereignty.[8]

To discern the story beats that create the structure of Ruth, the same criteria found in Jonah were employed: discourse markers, disjunctive clauses, redundancy, and shifts in

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[7] Evans, *Judges and Ruth,*222.

[8] Elimelech led his family away from Judah and yet Naomi returns because she finds out that YHWH was providing for his people (1:6). Ruth is able to gather much thanks to Boaz who seeks to bless her because of her faithfulness to her mother-in-law as well as YHWH (2:11-12). Boaz sets his mind to redeem Ruth because of her noble character and again her faithfulness (3:10-11). After Boaz redeems Ruth and Naomi legally, he is able to truly continue his relative's line when Ruth becomes pregnant which the text explicitly says was allowed by the Lord (4:13).

focus. Like Jonah, *Wayĕhî* appears at the very beginning of the narrative, but it is also used to mark the transition in every episode to the scene that comments on the result of the character's attempt for provision.[9] There is another discourse marker that Ruth uses that Jonah did not use which is הִנֵּה or *hinnē*. *Hinnē* means "behold"[10] and is used to denote a shift in a scene as something new is being perceived.[11] For example, in 2:4 *hinnē* is used to introduce Boaz's entrance and transitions to a new scene. *Hinnē* is also used to mark Boaz's recognition that there was now a woman at his feet in 3:8 causing it to combine with *wayĕhî*, as well as a shift in focus, to enforce that a new scene had started.

Ruth also employs disjunctive clauses to signal deviations in scenes and episodes. In the first chapter, we see this with וְרוּת, "but Ruth," which accentuates Ruth's reaction to Naomi telling her daughter-in-laws to leave her. The way the narrative brings Ruth's response into the spotlight also disrupts the chiastic structure which should signal the reader that what Ruth says is key to the message of the book. The second episode's beginning is marked with וּֽלְנָעֳמִ֞י, "But to Naomi," which marks a clear transition from the previous episode. In the same way, וּבֹ֙עַז, "But Boaz," marks the beginning of the final episode. At the end of episode four, וְאֵ֙לֶּה֙, "and these," marks a change away from the typical prose of the narrative to a genealogical list.

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[9] *Wayĕhî* is used in 1:19 to mark the return of Naomi to Bethlehem and how she has nothing. In 2:17 *wayĕhî* marks the abundance that Ruth had gathered and brought back to Naomi. *Wayĕhî* also appears in 3:8 marking when Boaz wakes up to find Ruth in his bed leading to his commitment to redeem her and Naomi. Lastly, 4:12 has *wayĕhî* marking the transition from the negotiations to the birth of children.

[10] Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 243.

[11] Burke O. Long, "Reports of Visions among the Prophets," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95.3 (1976): 356.

Redundancy and shifts in focus make an appearance in the structure of Ruth as well. For example, at the end of episode one, even though the author already clarified that Naomi and Ruth had returned to Bethlehem, it is restated to conclude the episode. Shifts in focus can easily be detected by either the focus changing from one character to another, a change in the setting, or a change from dialogue to action. For example, in chapter two, the first scene and second scene's border is marked by a change from dialogue between Naomi and Ruth to Ruth now taking action as she goes to gather, and a third scene is clearly marked as started when the narrative switches to focus on Boaz.[12]

Repeated Words

In the same way Jonah used a specific set of vocabulary, the writer of Ruth also used repeated words throughout the narrative to help illustrate the point of the story. As Schipper points out, "the vocabulary in Ruth is very repetitive."[13] This does not mean that the author of Ruth was not creative. It becomes clear that this selected ensemble of words has been directed by the writer to aid the reader in understanding the structure and the themes of the narrative.

One of the largest themes that appear from an examination of the words used in Ruth is the idea of movement. As shown with the story beats of Ruth, various characters go on some kind of journey, whether to another nation (1:1), to the nearby fields (2:3), to the threshing floor (3:5), or to the main meeting place of the town (4:1). Numerous "journey" words are utilized by the writer to demonstrate this theme. By repeating these "journey" words, the

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[12] Note that a new scene does not require a switch in location, only a switch in focus. While a majority of the second chapter happens in Boaz's field, there are several small scenes that each have their own focus or purpose. This is important to note as it affects how one understands the chiastic structure of the episode.

[13] Schipper, *Ruth*, 9.

reader is shown by the author to compare how or why people leave, how or why people come, how or why people return, and how or why people dwell.

In the very first verse, we are told that a "man left Bethlehem." The verb for leaving is הָלַךְ or *hālak*. While its repeated use could result from this term being a common verb, a survey of how it is used in Ruth will show that it was explicitly chosen by the author to shape the narrative. By using the same verb at the beginning of episodes one and two, it creates an explicit connection between them.[14] Throughout the first episode, *hālak* looks to be connected to faithlessness, until Ruth's declaration.[15] When Ruth *hālak* with Naomi, she shows a tremendous amount of faithful love for her mother-in-law and this aspect continues into the second episode.[16] The final appearance is in 3:10 where Boaz blesses Ruth on account she did not *hālak* to go after younger men. This repeated use illustrates for the reader that one can *hālak* in ways that would illustrate their faithlessness or faithfulness.

Whereas *hālak* is about leaving or going, בּוֹא or *bôʾ* is about coming or entering. While *hālak* seems to comment on the aspect of being faithful, *bôʾ* is used more to mark a change in location.[17] However, there are two instances, both in the fourth episode, where it is not used

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[14] In 1:1, Elimelech *hālak* from Bethlehem, in 2:3 Ruth *hālak* from Naomi.

[15] In the first chapter, Elimelech *hālak* from Bethlehem (1:1). Naomi, after a period of time, *hālak* from Moab (1:7). On the way towards Judah, Naomi tells her daughters to *hālak* her (1:8, 11-12) and while Orpah does, Ruth declares she will not *hālak* Naomi (1:16, 18). The two then continue to *hālak* Moab (1:19) and eventually return to Bethlehem where Naomi laments about how she *hālak* from Bethlehem full but returned empty.

[16] Ruth asks Naomi to allow her to *hālak* so she can gather food for them (2:2-3). Boaz tells Ruth not to *hālak* from his field (2:8-9) and explains that it was how Ruth chose to *hālak* with Naomi as the reason for his generosity (2:11).

[17] Elimelech's family *bôʾ* into Moab at the beginning of episode 1 (1:2) and Naomi and Ruth *bôʾ* into Bethlehem at the end of the episode (1:19, 22). Ruth *bôʾ* into the fields (2:3) and later Boaz *bôʾ* into the same fields (2:4) in episode 2 and that episode also ends with Ruth *bôʾ* back to Naomi (2:18). The third episode has Boaz and Ruth *bôʾ* the inner chamber (3:7) while it ends with Boaz or Ruth *bôʾ* into town (3:14) then Ruth *bôʾ* back to Naomi again (3:15). This is not to say that *hālak* does not imply a change in location, but *bôʾ* is almost always used in a structural way to mark the beginning of a scene in a new location.

in this way. First, when the people confirm themselves as witnesses to Boaz redeeming Naomi and Ruth, they bless Ruth by saying "May the LORD make the woman who is *bôʾ* your house like Rachel and Leah" (Ruth 4:11). Second, it describes Boaz and Ruth consummating their marriage (4:13) which leads to their child being born. This final use of *bôʾ* shows how the author intentionally used this word to mark the progression of the story throughout the narrative. By using *bôʾ* at the beginning of the final scene for all four episodes shows how Naomi and Ruth return empty, then they have food, then a promise of redemption, and finally they are redeemed as the family line is continued. Having *bôʾ* become a structural marker for the narrative, helps the reader observe that these four episodes should be viewed in parallel.

Next, שׁוּב or *šûb* which means "turn back, return"[18] is primarily used in the first episode, often in connection with *hālak*.[19] This repeated used of *šûb* in the first episode connects the idea of returning to loss. Naomi returns after the death and loss of the men in her family while Orpah returns after being convinced that she has a better chance at building a future in Moab. It is only through Ruth's insistence to return with Naomi that the reader is shown that there can be hope in *šûb*. This idea can be seen in episode two and the beginning of episode four where *šûb* is used to remind the reader of Ruth's faithfulness. The final use of *šûb* in 4:15 completes this journey as this verb is used to show how through Ruth, the Lord has returned to Naomi the hope she had lost in the first episode.

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[18] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 996.

[19] Naomi leaves Moab to *šûb* to Bethlehem (1:6-7). Naomi tells Orpah and Ruth to *šûb* to Moab (1:8) which leads to a debate where *šûb* appears five times over six verses where Naomi makes to argument that returning with her will bring no benefit to them leading Orpah to *šûb* but Ruth to stay. The way *šûb* appears at the end of the first episode in 1:21-22 emphasizes Naomi's emotional state where she states how she has returned empty.

The final "journey" word that is used by the author is ישב or *yāšab*. *Yāšab* means "sit, remain, dwell."[20] There is an element of community implicit in this term. For instance, Naomi *yāšab* in Moab for 10 years with her family (1:4). Yet upon Naomi's return with Ruth, it does not say they *yāšab* presenting the question to the reader if they will be accepted and be able to *yāšab* in Bethlehem. This question is answered when Boaz accepts Ruth. After this incident, Ruth is able to *yāšab* with Boaz's workers (2:14) and *yāšab* with Naomi (2:23). Nevertheless, this acceptance is only among Boaz's people, to complete Ruth's dwelling in Bethlehem, Boaz goes to *yāšab* at the gate of the city (4:1) with the elders of the city (4:2, 4) in order to redeem Ruth. This focus on acceptance connects to another major theme the author is presenting in this narrative, how the community treats the widow and the foreigner. As Evans shows, the reader is "encouraged to consider what attitudes and behaviour are appropriate when relating to foreigners, and how far can and should those foreigners who identify themselves with God's covenant community be acknowledged as full members of that community."[21]

While these movement verbs connect the various episodes and enforce the theme of God's sovereignty, faithfulness, and care for the needy, there are several other repeated words that also are used strategically to enforce the message of the book. One word that creates a close tie with the first two episodes is שָׂדֶה or *śāde* which means "open field, country, pasture-land"[22] In the first episode, the reader is constantly reminded that the family had departed to go to the *śāde* of Moab to find provision from the famine but instead find

[20] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 442.

[21] Evans, *Judges and Ruth,* 228.

[22] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 961.

death. In the second episode, Ruth finds many provisions in the *śāde* of Boaz.[23] Another is how the title הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה or *hammōwʾăbiyyâ*, "the Moabitess," is attached to Ruth six times throughout the story. Its use highlights Ruth as a foreigner among the Israelites living in Bethlehem.[24] This accentuates Boaz's acts of kindness towards Ruth as the lack of action by the rest of the town may also be a comment on the state of Israel during the time of Judges.

Intertextuality

While Jonah was soaked in references and allusions to other passages of the Old Testament, Ruth is more reserved, using specific connections to help create context as well as anticipation in the reader. For example, the very first verse states that the narrative takes place "During the time of the judges…" (Ruth 1:1). The end of Ruth also creates context for the narrative taking place during the events of Judges through the genealogy the concludes the book. Hannah shows that by placing the story during this era of Israel's history, the book "highlights the Lord's mercy to advance his salvation purposes even when his people seem to be in moral freefall."[25] This environment sets an expectation in the reader as they judge the character's actions to perceive if they did "whatever seemed right to [them]" (Judges 21:25).

Judges is not the only intertextual marker found in the first verse, the idea of a man taking his family to a foreign country associates this story with that of the patriarchs. As Schipper points out, "Genesis 12:10 and 26:1 use the exact same formula to introduce the

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[23] The final three uses of *śāde* are during the negotiations between Boaz and the kinsman redeemer in the fourth episode. In 4:3, a comparison is once again presented when Boaz talks about how Naomi returned from the *śāde* of Moab and is now selling the *śāde* of Elimelech. The final use of *śāde* adds the twist that now the *śāde* of Elimelech includes Ruth which causes the kinsman redeemer to refuse to perform his duty as a redeemer.

[24] When Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem it is pointed out (1:22). Throughout the second episode, the reader is reminded of Ruth's nationality (2:2, 6, 21). Boaz makes it clear that Ruth is a foreigner when he is doing his legal deal at the gate of the city (4:5, 10).

[25] Hannah, "Ruth," 917.

stories of Abram and Isaac's temporary residences as aliens in Egypt and the Philistine city of Gerar, respectively."[26] A comparison of each account paints a picture of how these journeys result in disaster. Abraham is sent away from Egypt with much except what he received will later become a source of division,[27] Isaac does not gain anything but instead starts to have conflict with the local people, and Elimelech dies while Naomi returns with nothing.

One final reference in 1:1 is Moab. There are several earlier narratives in the Scriptures that would cause the reader to be suspicious of Moab.[28] Moses even declared that "No… Moabite may enter the LORD's assembly" (Deut. 23:3). Ruth's actions throughout the book break all of the stereotypes associated with the Moabite women. She gives up her gods to follow YHWH. Her intentions show her faithfulness to her new family. The one time where her actions may have appeared to align with these previous tales is in the third episode when she sneaks into the inner chamber with Boaz. Nevertheless, even in this situation, she does not appear to be trying to trick Boaz into sleeping with her but is simply following the instructions given to her by Naomi. Here we see a similarity between the books of Jonah and Ruth. Jonah used its gentile characters to comment on how Jonah, a prophet of YHWH, appeared to be worse at following YHWH than the pagans around him. Ruth's nationality is used to show how this foreigner was more faithful than the people around her.

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[26] Schipper, *Ruth*, 14. Genesis 12:10 states that there "was a famine in the land, so Abram went down to Egypt." Later, in Genesis 26:1, there "was another famine in the land in addition to the one that had occurred in Abraham's time. And Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, at Gerar."

[27] For example, Hagar, the mother of Ishmael, only becomes Sarah's maidservant because of this episode in Egypt.

[28] Genesis 19:30-38 depicts how Lot's daughters tricked him into sleeping with them which led to the birth of Moab, the father of the Moabites. Before crossing into the promised land, Numbers 22-25 depicts Israel's dealing with Moab. The king of Moab first hires Balaam to curse Israel and later, on the advice of Balaam, causes Israel to become unfaithful through their women.

A sequence of names at the end of Ruth constructs an intertextuality with several chronicles from Genesis. The first two names are located in a blessing pronounced by the people of Bethlehem, "May the LORD make the woman who is entering your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built the house of Israel" (Ruth 4:11). The people give the impression to be praying for the couple to have many children[29] while also heralding Ruth's entrance into the family of Israel.[30] The next three names emerge when the people extol Ruth and Boaz to become like "the house of Perez, the son Tamar bore to Judah" (Ruth 4:12).[31] A story that features a nontypical type of union in order for Perez to be born, highlighting the uniqueness of Boaz and Ruth as a couple while also connecting Ruth to the tribe of Judah.[32] These bits of intertextuality connect the story of Ruth to those of other women who helped forward the line that would eventually bring around David and later, Jesus. A connection that comments on how even non-Israelites were used by God in his plan for redemption.

Finally, Ruth has several allusions to various aspects of the law. For example, when Boaz tells his harvesters to leave bundles for Ruth, he uses the Hebrew verb עָזַב or *ʿāzab* which is the same verb used to describe how people should leave the edges of their field for the poor in Leviticus 23:22.[33] One of the main story threads is about finding a kinsman redeemer for Naomi and Ruth, a law found in Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 25. During the negotiations in the fourth episode, the relative who refuses to become a kinsman redeemer

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[29] Evans, *Judges and Ruth,* 214

[30] Schipper, *Ruth*, 176.

[31] A story from Genesis 38 where another woman, who is also a foreigner, prolongs a family line through her actions and is declared to have acted righteously.

[32] Evans, *Judges and Ruth*, 258.

[33] Schipper, *Ruth*, 15.

removes his sandal to mark that he is passing on his responsibility which comes from Deuteronomy 25:9-10. The sandal scene comments on the state of Israel, because Deuteronomy casts shame on the one who removes their sandal, but in Ruth, it simply happens to be a way of declining an opportunity.[34]

Irony

There are a few ironic elements that can be found within the narrative. One of the largest ironies is the name Bethlehem which means "house of bread." The irony is that Elimelech took his family from the house of bread to find bread. Also, centering the narrative around two women causes it to stand apart from other narratives where the main characters are almost exclusively male. In this case, it is not the men of the town but two widows that cause others to fulfill the commandments of the law.

Ruth's Details

Like Jonah, the author is careful in how each aspect of the story is described. The careful selection of which details were included and which omitted illustrate the intentions of the author. In chapter three, this paper discovered three main categories for these micro markers: names, numbers, and wordplay. These micro markers work with the macro markers to point the reader towards the message or the why of the narrative.

Hi, My Name is…

Before examining the names that are given, there is one name that the author explicitly marks as being absent, the potential kinsman redeemer. When Boaz sees the man at the

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[34] Evans, *Judges and Ruth,* 257.

beginning of episode four, he calls him פְּלֹנִי אַלְמֹנִי which means "a certain one."[35] Schipper translates this as "So and So" seeing it as an idiom similar to saying "meet me at such and such a place."[36] The Septuagint translates the phrase with the word κρύφιος which means "hidden; concealed; secret."[37] This idea of something hidden is reflected in the NET when they translate it as "John Doe." While not every side character gets named,[38] it appears that the author is explicitly pointing out the fact that this man is not granted a name in this narrative. It could be the detail was lost to time, but it appears that this is a micro marker to comment on the faithfulness of the characters. This man's refusal to redeem Ruth leads to the author's refusal to give his name.

The first set of names we are given come from Elimelech and his family. Elimelech means "my god is king."[39] Naomi means "kindness of YHWH."[40] These names appear to be a bit ironic in that the first thing we find out about them is how they are leaving the land God gave their people to seek relief from the famine somewhere else. Mahlon's name is connected to the idea of sickness, death, or sterility, and Chilion's name comes from the Hebrew wood for annihilation.[41] Both of the names for the sons relate to the results of the travel to Moab, as death sweeps through the men of the family before any of them could have a child threatening to annihilate their line.

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[35] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 48, 811.

[36] Schipper, *Ruth*, 163. This can also be seen in 2 Kings 6:8.

[37] *The Lexham Analytical Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012).

[38] For example, the main harvester for Boaz is never named.

[39] Schipper, *Ruth*, 81.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 82.

Following the family, we are told the names of the two daughter-in-laws: Orpah and Ruth. Rabbinic traditions state that Orpah was related to the Hebrew word for the back of the neck and is connected to how Orpah turned her back on Naomi.[42] Ruth's name means "refreshment."[43] Here the names again reflect the character's actions throughout the story. Orpah, while at first willing to go, eventually returns to Moab leaving Naomi. Ruth, on the other hand, seeks to stay with Naomi and eventually is used by the Lord to refresh Naomi's spirit.

At the beginning of the second episode, we are introduced to Boaz. The exact meaning of Boaz's name is uncertain but it appears connected to strength or worth.[44] This meaning fits with the description given as having been "a prominent man of noble character" (Ruth 2:1). Boaz is described as a גִּבּוֹר חַיִל, or *gibbôr ḥayil*, a title given often to warriors but also can imply wealth.[45] Boaz shows both strength of character in his efforts to take care of the widows of his kin as well as wealth in his generosity towards both Ruth and Naomi. There a several names that appear at the end of the book but these, as discussed before, appear to be used for their intertextual quality than their individual meanings.

The final names to evaluate relate to locations in the narrative. Bethlehem becomes both the central location for the narrative as well as an ironic device as mentioned before. Moab's name, too, appears to be used both for the physical location Ruth is from and for the

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[42] Schipper, *Ruth,* 83-84.

[43] Ibid., 84.

[44] Ibid., 113

[45] This title can cause the reader to at first be suspicious of Boaz since the context of Ruth is Judges and the only two Judges to receive this title was Gideon who is marked by his cowardice and eventual leading of Israel to worship a false Idol, and Jephthah, an outcast and bandit who is best known for sacrificing his daughter. In essence, this title could be seen as an ironic device as Boaz's actions are the reverse of what one may expect from someone who is called this.

intertextuality it brings to the narrative. One other location is named at the beginning of the first chapter, Judah. By repeating this name in both verses one and two, there is a strong emphasis not on just the town this Jewish family is from but the tribe as well. The blessing of the people in the final chapter, as well as genealogy at the end of the book, also highlights this tribal aspect serving the goal of emphasizing which tribe King David came from.

Let Me Count the Ways

Ruth does share Jonah's scarce use of numbers. The author does not give a length of time for the journey to or from Moab. There is no detail given for how long a gap exists between the first three episodes. Where Jonah used the numbers three and forty in symbolic ways that enhanced the story, the numbers in the book of Ruth appear to be used to specify certain details. Nevertheless, this scarcity is an indicator of the intentionality of their use by the author.

The only number situated outside of someone's speech is ten. In 1:4, it says that they "lived in Moab about ten years," and later in 4:2 it says that "Boaz took ten men of the town's elders." The number ten, like three and forty, does have symbolic value within Scripture, particularly as a reminder of the sovereignty of God. There are several tens in the Bible. The most famous ten would be the Ten Commandments which show that God is sovereign in that He sets the rules for people to follow. Also, God sent ten plagues against Egypt, which many see as God demonstrating his power over the gods of that land,[46] and the Passover lamb is chosen on the tenth day of the first month (Ex. 12:3). During creation, God speaks ten times. One of the main themes of Ruth is YHWH's control over all things and He

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[46] Ira Friedman, "'And Upon All the Gods of Egypt I Will Execute Judgment': The Egyptian Deity in the Ten Plagues," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 48.1 (2015): 8.

being the one who provides. The ten years in Moab led to death only to find out that the Lord had provided for his people back in Bethlehem. The ten elders would seal the deal that allowed Boaz to redeem Ruth whose actions are used by God to bless these two widows.[47]

Wordplay

Much of the wordplay used in Ruth comes from the play on a name's meaning by the author. Much of this has already been commented on before, but one example can be seen with the name Boaz. The author uses Boaz's name to create a wordplay as shown by Schipper when he writes that "both bʻz and ʻzb occur in the context of the disclosure of Boaz's identity. After Ruth mentions him by name, Naomi replies, 'Blessed is he who has not abandoned ʻzb his kindness'"[48]

There is a cognate used at the beginning of the narrative, שְׁפֹ֣ט הַשֹּׁפְטִ֔ים or šəpōṭ haššōpəṭîm, "the judging of the judges." Evans notes this construction is "deliberately proposing that the writer is interested in concepts relating to justice and/or leadership."[49] The reader then is pushed towards not only considering what life was like during Judges but also how Israel's leaders led the people. The characters who are in leadership positions within the book of Ruth are therefore established to be evaluated.

The writer of Ruth does use puns throughout the book, frequently in the names of the characters. Elimelech leads his family away from Bethlehem, the "house of bread," in order

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[47] The other number that appears in Ruth is seven in the blessing the women pronounce over Naomi. Ruth 4:15 states, "your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons." Schipper notes that seven "represent[s] an ideal number of sons."[47] This is also the first time the people of Bethlehem explicitly, outside of Boaz and Naomi, recognize Ruth as Naomi's daughter-in-law. Seven then is used to elevate Ruth, a foreigner, both as a member of Israel but also as an example of the ideal daughter-in-law. See Schipper, *Ruth*, 180.

[48] Schipper, *Ruth*, 113.

[49] Evans, *Ruth*, 232.

to find bread. The sons who die have names related to death. Naomi, whose name means "kindness of YHWH," tells the people of Bethlehem how YHWH has not been kind to her causing her to request others to refer to her as "bitterness."

Finding Historical Ruth

With the literary markers highlighted, what can one learn about the intentions of the author of Ruth? The narrative's structure provides clear indications that the author purposely presented the story in a precise pattern. Each episode of Ruth follows a uniform design and has chiastic characteristics. The connections between episodes and their focus on journeys force the reader to compare each one to discover the purpose of the book. This manipulation by the author illustrates that while constrained by the historical details of the event, his focus, like Jonah's, was to present a clear message using history rather than giving a comprehensive retelling of history.

How the details of the narrative have been utilized by the author to accomplish his purposes are disclosed through literary markers. For example, when we are introduced to the family, brush strokes start to appear. Both the parents' names are used by the author to reflect the messages of the book.[50] Mahlon's and Chilion's names may or may not have been created by the author, but, nevertheless, their names are used by the book as they describe what happens to them in the story and it is very atypical for a name to have such dark meanings.[51] This also applies to Orpah whose name almost comments on her action of turning her back

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[50] Elimelech's name points to the theme of God's sovereignty. Naomi's is integrated into the themes of the book, especially as her character goes on a journey from feeling as if the Lord has taken everything from her to once again seeing a hopeful future.

[51] In Genesis 35:18 we see how Jacob changes the name that Rachel was going to give Benjamin from something dark. Hosea does name his children names that have dark themes but this is done under the direction of the Lord.

on Naomi. This is not to say that these names were not their real names or that these characters were made up by the author, but that they are clearly used by the writer to enhance the narrative. Naomi telling the women at Bethlehem to call her Mara fits into this category as well.

Other markers that reveal the author's hand in the creation of the narrative include the use of Moab not only as the historical location but also for its intertextual properties and comparisons between the fields of Moab and the fields of Bethlehem.[52] Specifying the length of time in Moab, as well as the number of elders in chapter four, is another brush stroke used by the author to both specify as well as import potential symbolic meaning. When it comes to dialogue, whether it was created by the author or from a source the author used, its use throughout the narrative both enhances the story and emphasizes the themes.[53] The writer also uses various character's actions and exchanges to connect to numerous laws found in the Torah. Removing the kinsman redeemer's name explicitly goes beyond the notion of the name merely having been "lost" to time and exposing its removal as a deliberate choice by the author. Accentuating the fact that the Lord was the one that allowed Ruth to become pregnant leads the reader to contemplate who controls all aspects of the world, even the pregnancy of a woman. Naomi being called a mother again wraps up the narrative in a neat

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[52] Some have argued the first audience of the book of Ruth is the post-exiles during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah who were debating about marriage to foreign women, with Moab being specified by name adding another level of intentionality behind its inclusion. Evans, *Judges and Ruth*, 225.

[53] When Ruth declares that she will stay with Naomi, her speech enforces the theme of faithfulness. Naomi crying out to the women in Bethlehem to call her Mara is a wonderful literary construction that turns Naomi's name into a pun but also points towards the theme of God's sovereignty. Boaz and Ruth's exchanges highlight both of these themes as well as how foreigners and widows should be taken care of. The negotiation between Boaz and the kinsman redeemer highlights how the general populace had failed in their duty to take care of those less fortunate among them.

bow. The final genealogy connects the narrative to a historical setting while at the same time reflecting the theme of foreigners among the people of Israel by connecting Ruth, a Moabite, to the most famous Israelite king.

What Now?

This study of literary markers used in historical narratives has shown how the authors of scriptures left clear signs for their audiences to discover their intention behind sharing these stories. Starting with Jonah, several markers were examined and discussed. This examination divulged how markers enhanced the historical tale in a way that made the reader contemplate God's divine freedom to save any who turn to him, what repentance looks like, what a follower of YHWH should not do, and comment on Israel's view of salvation coming to other nations. In Ruth, the same markers were discovered, with their use in Ruth reflecting their use in Jonah. Their presence in multiple historical narratives may show that these literary markers are the brush techniques that were used by ancient authors to paint portraits of the various events that happened throughout Israel's history.

Old Testament historical narratives did not duplicate exactly what happened in the past but depicted what happened.[54] It was not that they created history or made up history, but used history in order to reveal a deeper truth about the world. This led to emphasizing certain details, omitting others, and even exaggerating or fabricating some elements with the drive of conveying the message they wished to share. This leads to a final question that needs to be answered, how does the idea of literary markers affect the reliability of scripture? If ancient authors did create parts of their stories or manipulated them to make a point, can we trust the

[54] Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2003), 85.

Bible? What about inerrancy? These topics will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

Chapter Five

A Trustworthy Story

In his book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Alter examines the story of Ehud.[1] He comments on several aspects of the tale noting that "the writer has given his historical material a forceful thematic shape through a skillful manipulation of the prose narrative medium."[2] Eglon, the Moabite king who was reigning over Israel, has a name whose meaning invokes the image of a fattened calf ready for slaughter.[3] This oppressor is nothing more than a sacrificial lamb in the face of God's chosen liberator for Israel. Soon after Ehud kills the king, he rallies the troops and defeats the army of Moab. The author uses the same verb that described Ehud sinking his blade into the obese body of Eglon to describe Ehud calling Israel to battle.[4] After examining this story, Alter makes this conclusion,

> In all this, as I have said, it is quite possible that the writer faithfully represents the historical data without addition or substantive embellishment. The organization of the narrative, however, its lexical and syntactic choices, its small shifts in point of view, its brief but strategic uses of dialogue, produce an imaginative reenactment of the historical event, conferring upon it a strong attitudinal definition and discovering in it a pattern of meaning. It is perhaps less historicized fiction than fictionalized history—history in which the feeling and the meaning of events are concretely realized through the technical resources of prose fiction.[5]

Throughout this paper, it has been argued that history was used by ancient historians to illustrate a deeper truth. What Evans calls a "preached history," where the author arranges

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[1] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, U.S.: Basic Books, 2011), 55-59.

[2] Ibid., 57.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 59.

[5] Ibid.

their material and presents it in a way to direct a reader to a particular conclusion.[6] For example, the way the author or editor of Judges put together its various stories shows, as Brown writes, “it is not an objective account of historical occurrences, however, but rather a historical account filtered through a series of very thick theological lenses.”[7] This presents a challenge, did these authors, in their effort to illustrate theological truths, add or create parts of their narrative? If they did, what does this mean for the idea of inerrancy or how we use the Bible to do theology? Through this chapter, these questions will be evaluated. In the end, the results will show that understanding the use of literary markers does not detract from the authority of Scripture but creates a fiercer foundation for faith as one is drawn closer to a God whose preeminent tool to assist humans in understanding him is story.

Inerrant Story Tellers

The discussion on the idea of the inerrancy of the Bible in modern times has been prevalent since the middle of the 20th century. The core belief of inerrancy, as Beale elaborates, is “that since God is true and without error and, therefore, his oral word is true and without error, consequently, his word in Scripture is true and without error.”[8] However, there are those who argue that the idea of inerrancy is not found in the Bible and it

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[6] Mary J. Evans, *Judges and Ruth: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7 of *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 226.

[7] Meredith Brown, “The Problematic Absence of YHWH in Judges 11:29-40,” *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa* 36, no. 1 (Spr 2012): 20.

[8] Gregory K. Beale, “Can the Bible Be Completely Inspired by God and yet Still Contain Errors?: A Response to Some Recent ‘evangelical’ Proposals,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 73.1 (2011): 1.

underplays the significance of the human authors in the work of writing scripture.[9] Instead, they argue that the Bible is divinely inspired but is not without error.[10]

In 1978, about three hundred individuals gathered to discuss and present on the topic of inerrancy resulting in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI).[11] Within the statement, it addresses the question of determining an error by stating "Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed."[12] Williams presents what he calls an error by showing how archeology claims the detail that 12,000 people were killed at Ai in Joshua 8 is false.[13] As was shown in chapter one, hyperbole, especially when it comes to numbers, was used throughout the ancient Middle Eastern world. The CSBI makes room for this in Article XIII when it states that inerrancy is not negated by "the use of hyperbole and round numbers."[14] This presents the core issue: if the author intentionally included a detail, does that detail need to be historically accurate or is it an error?

The issue comes from holding ancient historical writings to modern historical viewpoints. If a modern historical textbook listed inaccurate numbers, exaggerated descriptions, or had contradictions within itself, one would be correct in saying that it was

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[9] Beale, "Can the Bible Be Completely Inspired by God and yet Still Contain Errors?," 2.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Derek J Brown, "Reformulating the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy in Light of Contemporary Developments," *Presbyterion* 48.1 (2022): 60.

[12] Wayne A Grudem, "Why Has the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy Had Such Wide Influence?: Reflections by a Participant," *Presbyterion* 48.1 (2022): 35.

[13] Joel Stephen Williams, "The Error of Inerrancy," *Encounter* 57.1 (1996): 52.

[14] Grudem, "Why Has the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy Had Such Wide Influence?" 32.

full of errors. The problem is that the same mindset seems to be applied to the Scriptures. Even those who support the CSBI can take issue with the idea that the ancient authors manipulated the historical details to create their narratives.[15] On reflecting on the need to update the CSBI, Brown writes about how one place the statement needs revision is the recognition that the Bible uses stories to tell its history.[16] He notes how "it is not unreasonable to assert that the Bible is both story and history; or, more accurately: that the Bible is true story."[17] Yet, in his proposed article to be added to the CSBI, while affirming the use of story in the Bible, he denies that "the biblical narratives contain untrue, mythical, or fabricated elements."[18] This seems to contradict what has already been established by the CSBI that the Bible does use elements that could be seen as untrue or fabricated. There are also clear allusions to other mythological ideas from other ancient Middle Eastern cultures.[19] There is a need for a proper understanding of what would be considered an error for an ancient text in its context.

This issue over what is an error causes issues for those who argue against inerrancy. An example of an error that is commonly discussed would be the discrepancy between Samuel and Chronicles. As Williams points out, "The numbers in the book of Chronicles when compared with earlier historical books which were sources for the Chronicler provide

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[15] Ironic since as shown before, the CSBI Article XIII leaves room for hyperbole, exaggeration, and even the reporting of falsehoods meaning that it recognizes that the authors, through the inspiration of the spirit, may have changed certain details intentionally to tell their story.

[16] Brown, "Reformulating the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy in Light of Contemporary Developments," 66.

[17] Ibid., 68.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Paul K.-K. Cho, *Myth, History, and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 2. Cho specifically traces the use of sea myths throughout the Bible. This also again shows a misunderstanding of what myth is because it equates myth to fiction.

us numerous examples of errors."[20] How does one answer this simple but effective point? Do these differences show errors in these historical narratives? Long shows that if "both texts are given a flat reading, as if they were verbatim transcripts of the event, then the answer would have to be yes."[21] When one instead views both of these texts through the understanding that those who crafted them did so with intentional purposes, then, as Long points out, "the differences between them can be better explained on the basis of their distinct purposes and audiences."[22] Even Williams after pointing out the errors that exist between the two works admits that these errors do not mean that Chronicles is fiction but that the Chronicler "is sermonizing and does not always concern himself with precise details."[23] Indeed, as Long shows, it appears that much of how one understands these narratives depends on "the models of reality held by different scholars and with their consequent preference for certain types of methods, or approaches."[24] The issue is not inerrancy then, but a criteria imposed onto the text that the original authors never intended to meet.

Therefore, understanding the Bible as inerrant is not a foolish endeavor. It is the historical position of the church as Allison shows when he writes "The church has historically acknowledged that Scripture in its original manuscripts and properly interpreted is completely true and without any error in everything that it affirms, whether that has to do

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[20] Williams, "The Error of Inerrancy,", 61.

[21] V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 5 (Leicester: Apollos, 1994), 85.

[22] Ibid., 87.

[23] Williams, "The Error of Inerrancy," 62.

[24] Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, 167.

with doctrine, moral conduct, or matters of history, cosmology, geography, and the like."[25] The key to what Allison said is "properly interpreted." As literary analysis of the Bible continues to grow, the apparent "errors" in the Bible can be seen as intentional choices by the authors to convey the themes and messages they want the reader to understand. It is not an error for a historical narrative to omit certain details, enhance others, or add in details as the purpose of the story is both accomplished and the truth claim is still upheld. If one is to evaluate the history recorded in the Bible by modern Western criteria, then of course a document written thousands of years ago by a foreign culture will fail.[26] Instead, we can trust that what has been passed down through the ages is true and reliable when understood in its proper context. However, even with this understanding, there is another challenge that must be wrestled with, do literary markers weaken the historical reliability or authority of the Old Testament?

Authoritative Literature

For some, if certain details may have been created by an ancient writer in a specific text, then the historical narrative, and furthermore the entire Bible, can not be trusted. As Merrill puts it, "Can the precious contents of truth and salvation be contained and carried very far with leaky pails? I think not."[27] Indeed, a literary critical view of Scripture does walk a fine line between admiration of the artistic creativity displayed by those who assembled

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[25] Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Zondervan Academic, 2011), 99.

[26] Eugene H Merrill, "Must Stories Be 'Factual' to Do Theology?: Old Testament Narrative and Biblical Inerrancy," *Presbyterion* 46.1 (2020): 14.

[27] Ibid., 23.

what is called the Old Testament and an enervating of the historical foundation that makes up the narratives found within it.

Wright, while discussing what he calls the mythicizing of Scripture, shows that without a historical foundation "we must discard [Scripture] as an outworn primitivism and discover its real meaning in an existential psychology, or we must read it solely as poetry."[28] Wright, though, does go on to argue that "everything depends upon whether the central events actually occurred" which according to him are the "Exodus, that the nation was established at Mount Sinai, that it did obtain the land, that it did lose it subsequently, that Jesus did live, that he did die on a cross, and that he did appear subsequently to a large number of independent witnesses."[29] This presents a middle-of-the-road argument that seeks to build a bridge between those who would see the entire Old Testament as fiction and those who argue that every event must be historically true. Even those who would call themselves minimalists when it comes to the historical value of scriptures admit that the Biblical authors did not make up everything and wrote with the use of sources that contained genuine historical truth.[30] Is this good enough though? If Wright's central events are all proven to be historically true, does it matter if the other events happened at all? Or perhaps it is better to ask does theology require every narrative in Scripture to be historically true?

Power of the Text

Fiction does have the ability to affect those who encounter it. When Jaws was released to theaters in 1975, it changed the way people viewed sharks leading to increased attention on

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[28] Wright, *God Who Acts*, 126.

[29] Ibid., 126-127.

[30] Lester L Grabbe, "How the Minimalists Won!: A Discussion of Historical Method in Biblical Studies," *Biblische Notizen* 193 (2022): 11.

these man-eaters which saw a rapid increase in shark hunters leading to a decline in shark populations.[31] If one visits Oxford, one will find no shortage of tours describing places used to film Harry Potter or stores selling memorabilia. This effect of fiction can even be seen in the Bible. Jesus famously used parables to convey spiritual truths about the Kingdom of God,[32] but he was not the only or first person in the Bible to use parables.

The most famous parable in the Hebrew Scriptures may be Nathan's tale of a rich man and a poor man in 2 Samuel 12:1-4. This story of a man using his position to take advantage of someone less fortunate caused David to respond "the man who did this deserves to die!" (2 Sam. 12:5) When Nathan famously responds, "You are the man!" (2 Sam. 12:7), David can say nothing but "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Sam. 12:13). The power of these fictional tales is the ability to bring the audience into the world of the story, not just to hear or read it, but to experience it. Thus, one may find that the narrative that they just interacted with can cause them to experience an emotional response or even change the way they view the world. This power that stories hold has led to increased interest in the reader-response critical analysis of scripture.

The reader-response view is one that, as Cooper defines it, sees "Meaning is not an objective property which inheres in a text, but a product of interaction between the reader and the text."[33] Cooper, who promotes this view in his article, explains that the focus is no longer on the historical world that the text came from but on the world that the text allows his

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[31] Beryl Francis, "Before and After 'Jaws': Changing Representations of Shark Attacks," *The Great Circle* 34.2 (2012): 47.

[32] A genre that by its definition are fictional tales as discussed in chapter two.

[33] Alan Cooper, "The Act of Reading the Bible," *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, vol. ח (1981): 63.

imagination to create.[34] For those who align themselves with this way of handling the Bible, or any literature, they would argue that the truth is found in the text itself, thus they are free to find what Scripture is trying to tell them without worry of historical accuracy. In this way, the meaning they find in the historical narrative shapes their lives more than the events depicted in them. This hermeneutical expression is a dangerous road for one to walk when talking about Scripture as it can ignore the author's intention in writing.[35] As has been shown in this study of literary markers, the author, inspired by God, intentionally created the narratives with specific purposes in mind. Nevertheless, this view does illustrate that meaning can be found in the way a passage is presented, it must simply be tempered through the fact that these authors crafted their tales in a way to help their readers find that meaning, it is not something that can be completely created by the reader alone.

Confidence in the Midst of Mystery

There will always be a natural tension when it comes to Scripture, especially when it comes to the narratives. Without an explicit statement from the author, the interpreter is left to wonder what the purpose for writing was. Instead, we are left to look for answers within the text itself to see if those intentions can be seen. As Long shows, the truth of the matter is "we are simply not sure whether, or to what precise degree, a biblical story means to be taken as a historical account."[36] It seems the best course would be to join Capon and "come to Scripture with as few stipulations as possible."[37]

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[34] Cooper, "The Act of Reading the Bible," 64.

[35] Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Meaning of Meaning," in *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 34.

[36] Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, 170.

[37] Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment*, 4.

The core issue is that when it comes to narratives, the very form signals to the reader that they are about to interact with a work that is supposed to engage them, not just tell them a series of facts. As Snodgrass warns, when it comes to "reading a story we, at least temporarily, inhabit that world. If we bring too much of ourselves into that world, we reshape it and rearrange its landscape."[38] These narratives that have been passed down to us serve a purpose. The hope of literary markers is that some of these purposes can be discovered through literary strategies that were common among the various narratives given. A work's purpose is often deeply connected to the time and place of its creation.[39] Kaiser shows that "History is essential to contextualizing the biblical narrative and seeing it as the continuing story of God's word in space and time."[40] The search for literary markers can work hand in hand with other ways of studying to help create a greater picture of what these ancient writers were trying to say.

This does not erase the tension, but instead embraces it. As Williams concludes, even if one proves the Bible is full of errors, it is still "able to makes[sic] us wise for salvation through faith in Christ."[41] Jesus' ministry and work are built on what has been written in the

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[38] Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, Second edition. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), chap. 1. sec. 8. Kindle..

[39] John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, Library of Biblical Interpretation (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 31. Though debates on when any of the Old Testament books were written happen frequently, one point of criteria that scholars often use is to see how a book would fit within the context of a specific time period. For instance, Knoppers discusses Chronicles and how the understanding among scholars is that it was written after the exile. Yet, different scholars place it in different eras of post-exilic Israel depending on the purpose they see in the book. For more see Gary N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed. (Doubleday, 2003), 104 - 105.

[40] Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Why Get Entangled with Historical Interpretation?: The Role of History," in *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 106.

[41] Williams, "The Error of Inerrancy," 72.

Old Testament.[42] Long argues it would be an error to take the fact that there is some uncertainty about certain passages and extend it to the entire Bible.[43] This leaves a final question, while it may be impossible to definitively show what the intentions of the author were without a clear statement by the author and therefore determine if a book or passage is claiming to represent historical events, is it possible to make an educated argument for what one believes the author was intending when a passage was written? As has been shown through this paper, it is possible and literary markers play a key role in the discovery of such an intention.

Bringing it all Together

At the end of his book about history and the Bible, Long concludes with a method for finding the historical intentions through a process that is "the twofold need to listen carefully and competently to the biblical texts so as to detect their truth claims and to test the truth value of whatever historical claims are made."[44] Literary markers can be of great help in both parts of this method. The first part of this method, listening carefully, deals greatly with being able to hear what the authors of Scripture are trying to say. Literary markers can assist in one moving away from their cultural perspectives to improve their listening. The discovery of story beats, intertextuality, use of names, etc. are all reliant on signals positioned into the text by the authors themselves. These are not arbitrary elements introduced into a passage by a reader.

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[42] This can be seen in the many references to Old Testament passages in the gospels. Luke explicitly links the Hebrew Scriptures to Jesus in Luke 24:27. When Paul summarizes the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, he says that what Jesus did was "according to the Scriptures" referencing the Old Testament.

[43] Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, 170.

[44] Ibid., 199.

For the second part of Long's method, testing the truth value of the historical claim, Long suggests starting with a literary examination of the text.[45] One of the main goals of this literary process is to determine internal consistency.[46] Long gives the example of 1 Samuel 9. At the beginning of the chapter, Saul is looking for his father's donkeys who have wandered off. Upon the advice of a family servant, Saul decides to go see a "man of God" (1 Sam. 9:6-11). In verse 14 it is revealed that this "man of God" is none other than Samuel himself. Some scholars have used the fact that Samuel's name not being used till verse 14 as a sign that this story comes from two different sources, an anonymous "man of God" source and a "Samuel" source that were combined by the author of Samuel.[47] Long, instead, shows how this was a literary strategy to "allow the reader to share in Saul's process of discovery."[48] The literary marker of names also helps signal an internal consistency of the narrative as it has been shown that not naming a character can be a strong signal to help convey ideas to the audience of the story. In this case, Saul's superior physical appearance is being compared to his lack of spiritual awareness. Samuel has been established by this point as the judge and spiritual leader of Israel and yet Saul not only doesn't recognize him (1 Sam. 9:18) but appears to have little to no knowledge of Samuel at all. This idea of spiritual versus physical aptitude will again be highlighted when Samuel goes to anoint David, as God tells him "Do not look at his appearance or his stature because I have rejected him. Humans do not see what the LORD sees, for humans see what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

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[45] Long, *The Art of Biblical History,* 186.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 188.

[48] Ibid.

While internal consistency alone does not prove the historicity of a text, it is a necessary condition.[49]

Literary markers alone may not show that a text is making a historical claim, but it can help the interpreter determine the intention of why a passage was written. When this intention has been discovered, the truth claims of the passage may be easier to uncover. Literary markers do not allow one to view a passage removed from its historical context or allow a reader to create a meaning that is independent of the author. Instead, they help the reader of Scripture be able to view the paintings being created by the historical narratives of the Old Testament with a trained eye. One can walk into a gallery and appreciate a painting, but a person who has learned about how various techniques that artists use to combine color, structure, symbolism, and perspective to create their work will be able to better understand why a painting was made and why it was done in a specific style. The Scriptures paint the most important portrait, one of the creator of the universe and His desire for His creation. Literary markers do not undermine the authority of the Bible but enhance it. The errors instead are transformed into embedded signals that point toward YHWH, not away. Indeed, with a proper understanding of literary markers, one can stand with the hymnist and proclaim, "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand!"

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[49] Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, 188.

Conclusion

The historical narratives of the Old Testament were artistic endeavors by master storytellers. Weaving together threads of structure, plot, and character, they created captivating depictions of events while conveying deep theological messages. These ancient authors did not create history but creatively manipulated history for their purposes. To accomplish this feat, they employed literary markers, leaving traces of their processes in the text. A trail of breadcrumbs for the trained reader to follow. This thesis sought to bring some of the literary markers into the light to make them plain to see for any interpreter. Through the writing and research, several conclusions were made.

Understanding History Matters

A foundational point for this paper has been that ancient authors wrote historical narratives with the purpose of sharing larger truths about the world. Chapter One explored what is history and the differences between modern and antique understandings. For those who wrote historical narratives long ago, history was a vehicle to be used to spread a message. This did not mean that these historians of old fabricated history. In fact, as was shown, for a text to be considered a historical narrative it must be created with the intention to depict events that the author understood as having happened. Therefore, the criteria for determining if a narrative is historical is found in the purpose of the author for writing. Unfortunately, this presents a problem as no narrative in the Old Testament has a clearly stated introduction explaining why that passage or book was produced. This tension is where literary markers step in to provide a framework to assist in determining the reasons behind the writing.

The Literary Markers of Historical Narratives

After a discussion on Jonah's genre, the book of Jonah was studied to see what literary markers may have been left in the text by the author to indicate his intentions. After Jonah was surveyed, Ruth was then examined to determine if these same markers appeared in the same ways. The markers that were discovered fell into two categories, macro and micro.

The macro markers included story beats, repeated words, intertextuality, and irony. Story beats are used by a writer to form the structure of a narrative. They can be found through the use of discourse analysis looking for specific discourse markers like *wayĕhî*. Paying attention to the *wayyiqtol* verb sequence utilized by Hebrew writers was also essential as interruptions to this flow, whether by disjunctive clauses, shifts in focus, or redundancy, often marked significant story beats that signaled a scene or episode was about to begin or end. Understanding the story beats was an essential first step as it revealed how the narrative was being presented and whether the author was using techniques like chiasm to guide the reader to a certain theme or point they were making. Story beats also created connections through various story elements, scenes, and episodes that would inform the reader that they should be compared.

Repeated words often worked with story beats to create a complete picture of the structure and which parts of the narrative are to be seen in parallel. Finding repeated words requires a close examination of the Hebrew, paying attention to which words reappear consistently in the story. Intertextuality takes the required focus a step further as now the reader must not only pay attention to the text in front of them but also have a knowledge of other texts in the Old Testament. Authors may use similar story beats, words, phrases, or direct allusions to create a link between the narrative and another passage. Irony adds a final level of observation as now the reader must be familiar with typical patterns to be able to

perceive when they are being used in ironic ways, with exaggeration sometimes being a marker for irony.

The micro markers consisted of names, numbers, and wordplay. While the author of a historical narrative may have been constrained to naming their characters specific names, the ancient writers often utilized the meaning of the names for the purpose of their narratives. A name may signal that the character is a representative figure of Israel like Jonah or describe their fate like Naomi's two sons. A reader should spend the time to identify all the names given and their meanings, this would include names of locations. Nevertheless, if a character is not named, the reader should investigate why this was done so as it too may be a marker used by the author to portray their message. Since Hebrew narratives stylistically are known to limit their use of details, any time a number is used to specify an aspect of the story that is being discussed, that number should be noted. Various numbers hold symbolic value within Hebrew understanding and the author may be importing this meaning into the narrative. This is not to say that all numbers are merely symbolic, only that their inclusion was an intentional choice on the side of the writer and so should not be ignored quickly. Finally, wordplay is often used by an author to mark out themes. These unusual uses of the lexicon may be just literary flourishes, but unique constructions or abstract verbiage are markers utilized by the creators in their effort to portray their purposes.

When a narrative is examined through the lens of literary markers, the author's intention behind writing may come into view. If a narrative, like Jonah's for instance, shows clear signs of manipulation by the writer in how it is structured and presented, the purpose for writing the book would appear to be focused on the message and less on the historical aspect of the tale. This does not mean that the author created a fictional tale that feels historical, only that the goal of depicting a historical event was secondary to the theological message attempting to be told. Understanding what the author is claiming about their narrative can

help the modern interpreter have a correct view on how to handle the historical aspects of a story. This may prevent those who study the Bible in this day and age from falling into the trap Lemanski describes of trying to "impose greater burdens upon the text (and faith) than are necessary."[1]

Where to Next?

While this study attempted to point out potential literary markers and prove their viability by exposing their use in two historical narratives, there is much work to be done. For instance, while showing the common use in two narratives creates the possibility that these specific markers could be found in other historical narratives, not until every narrative is examined will a definitive list be able to be defined. There is also a deeper study of how these markers, with their implication of manipulation of the historical data, affect the understanding of the Bible's historical foundation that could be undertaken. As Chapter Five showed, these literary markers do not erase the historical foundation or cause a correct view of inerrancy to fall flat, but a survey of how literary markers may illuminate the various errors that have been presented could also be beneficial for modern Biblical studies.

In conclusion, literary markers are likely real and used by the ancient authors in their construction of historical narratives. A proper understanding of these markers will train the reader of the Bible to be like one trained to understand the intricacies of a painting. Through a skilled eye, the brush strokes of the artist become clear as the skilled interpreter understands how and why a portrait was created. As the God who created all things is the ultimate artist, and since humans bear his image and are imbued with his creative spirit, it only makes sense

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[1] Jay Lemanski, "Jonah's Nineveh," *Concordia Journal* 18.1 (1992): 49.

that the revelation he has given us would be so carefully and intricately put together. Literary markers not only show the work of a human author, but the fingerprints of the divine.

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