

How to Study Biblical Narrative

With a Special Focus on Luke's Gospel

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Two Complementary Ways of Studying a Narrative Passage

1. **Micro, Character-Focused:** By relating to a character, you participate in the emotional and spiritual aspects of the story
2. **Macro, Literary-Focused:** By identifying the literary devices of the larger storyline (the literary techniques of the author), you participate in the unfolding of the storyline.

Micro Aspects of the Story

Bible Story	Your Story
1. Entrance: How does the character enter the story? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Who are the characters? b. Where does the story take place? c. How do they come to Jesus? d. What do they believe, want, or do? 	How are YOU entering the encounter with Jesus?
2. Encounter: What happens to the character? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. How do they interact with Jesus? b. What kind of words or phrases seem to be repeated or emphasized? Why? c. What obstacles (internal or external) do they overcome in order to meet with Jesus? d. What obstacles has Jesus overcome to meet with the character? How does Jesus reach out to them? Does he make it hard or easy for the person to believe? Why? e. What does Jesus do for them, or to them? f. Does the character choose to believe in him or not? What are their inner choices? g. What kinds of emotions might the character be feeling in their encounter with Jesus? They could have multiple feelings... h. What do we learn about Jesus' character or God's character? 	What is being brought up in you as you read the story and engage with it? What words stand out to you, or seem to have 'depth'? What hopes, fears, memories, or experiences might God be bringing up for you? In what way is Jesus attractive? Challenging? * If you are a believer and therefore have the Spirit of Jesus in you, how do you sense Jesus working in you? * If you are not a believer, how do you sense Jesus approaching you? What could Jesus do for you? To you? What would it mean to choose towards Jesus? What are your next steps? How does that feel for you? What have you learned about Jesus' character or God's character?
3. Exit: How does the character leave the story? How do their lives reflect a change?	If they are healed, what does their healing represent in your life? If they are changed, how does their change represent a possibility for you?

Text	Micro Aspects
Lk.24:13 And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place.	Why are they disappointed with Jesus? Are there ways you can relate?
15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself approached and began traveling with them. 16 But their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.	Who approaches who? Can Jesus walk alongside us without us knowing it?
17 And he said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" 19 And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, 20 and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. 21 But we were hoping that it was he who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. 22 But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and did not find his body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but him they did not see."	What is their version of the story? How do they interact with Jesus? Can you interact with Jesus without knowing it? Can prayer happen without you knowing it?
25 And he said to them, "O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, he explained to them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures.	What should they have known, according to Jesus?
28 And they approached the village where they were going, and he acted as though he were going farther. 29 But they urged him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he had reclined at the table with them, he took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, he began giving it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was speaking to us on the road, while he was explaining the Scriptures to us?" 33 And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, 34 saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 They began to relate their experiences on the road and how he was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread.	Why do they recognize Jesus here? What must this experience have been like? What gets them excited? How do they leave the story? How are you encouraged by this?

Application: So what does Jesus do to discouraged disciples?

He walks alongside them. He hears them even though they don't think they're praying, listening to their story even though he knows better than them what's going on.	He walks alongside us. Hears us even when we don't think he's listening. Reassures us even when we don't know it's him.
And he opens their hearts and minds to understand him from the Scriptures.	He opens our hearts and minds to understand him from the Scriptures.
For them, when they do recognize him, they could see how he had been with them even though they hadn't recognized him.	When we do recognize him, we can see how he has been with us even though we haven't recognized him.

Macro, Literary Aspects of the Story

ECHO. Do you hear an **Echo**¹?

1. Do you hear any Old Testament passages being quoted here? **‘And their eyes were opened.’**

- Gen.3:6 And she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then their eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked... (Septuagint version)

Are there other **Echoes**?

2. Discuss the **echo** between the Fall and the Restoration. What’s going on here?

Creation and Fall	The Restoration
Had been commanded to spread over the earth to proclaim their rule over it	
Two people, a couple	Two people, possibly a couple (Disclosure ² : we don’t know the gender of the other disciple on the Emmaus Road – could be Cleopas’ wife Mary)
Walking with God	Walking with Jesus
Knowing Him	Not recognizing him
Eat what was forbidden	Eat what Jesus encouraged them to eat
They disobeyed God’s word and ‘gained wisdom’	They are told God’s Word, they understood and gained true knowledge
Their eyes were opened	Their eyes were opened
They focused on themselves	They focused on Jesus
Fell into separation from God	Reunited with God
Recognized they were naked, then they clothe themselves	Clothed with power from on high
Could not eat with God as freely as before	Are encouraged to have table fellowship with God and eat with God often (communion)
Lost their ability to proclaim their rule over the earth	Commanded to spread over the earth to proclaim Jesus’ rule over it

¹ **Echoes:** What parallels to previous biblical literature or historical events help reinforce expectations or provide emotional charge? Example: In the movie *Shakespeare In Love*, there are many allusions to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Twelfth Night*. The whole movie is in some sense a delightful fusion of the two. A woman dresses up as a man to be near the man she loves (as did Viola); two individuals defy social convention to be lovers (as did Romeo and Juliet), etc. One can enjoy the movie without knowing the storylines of those two Shakespearean works, but it certainly deepens your experience of the movie to hear the echoes. Likewise, one can enjoy biblical narrative without knowing the intertextual references, but it certainly deepens your enjoyment of the story to hear the echoes.

² **Disclosure:** What has the author told you and what has he not told you? Sometimes biblical narrative is like a silent movie, where we don’t get told things in order to keep us guessing. There is a subtle but significant difference between the textual world of the narrative and the historical world from which it draws.

THEMES. Do you see broader **Themes³** in the story?

New Creation

- What did Jesus promise the thief on the Cross? Paradise (Lk.23:43). Hmm... What was Jesus doing on the Cross? Opening paradise, making it available to sinful humanity. Note: Only Luke records this saying of Jesus from the Cross! Unique material always increases the significance of the material. Is this the same theme as what we studied in the Emmaus Road? (Lk.24:13ff.) Yes! What happens to people after Jesus' Resurrection? They really do experience paradise again. They experience an undoing, in some sense, of the fall. The poetic significance of the Cross-Resurrection event is big. Jesus alone ushers us back into paradise, back into God's presence!!! (Corroborate with Paul in 2 Cor.5:17, "If anyone is in Christ, new creation!")
- Application: So what does Jesus do to these discouraged disciples? Aside from reassuring them of his presence, etc., he connects their story to the greatest story of all, the story of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms. In fact, their experience with him becomes the symbolic prototype of the deep reality of him restoring all who believe in him back into the greatest story of all.

The Scriptures

- What happens if we look more carefully at the ending of Luke's Gospel? We find the same motif of Jesus opening the Scriptures.

<p>Lk.24:36 While they were telling these things, he himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." 37 But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. 38 And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; touch me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement [negative term in Luke], he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of a broiled fish; 43 and he took it and ate it before them.</p>	<p>The eleven: Why do they still have a mixed reaction? Joy and doubt?</p>
<p>44 Now he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending forth the promise of my Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." 50 And he led them as far out as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. 51 And it came about that while he was blessing them, he parted from them. 52 And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the Temple praising God.</p>	<p>Why do they now have 'great joy' as opposed to a mixed 'joy and amazement'? Because they had the Scriptures opened to them. Seeing Jesus' physical body is not enough to dispel doubt and not determinative for joy; understanding God's story in the Scriptures is.</p>

- The theme of the Scriptures being fulfilled and opened (properly understood) is a major theme in Luke. It continues in Acts, primarily through the major speeches of Peter, Stephen, and Paul.
- Application: Your understanding of the Scriptures intensifies your joy and overcomes your doubts. It forms the basis for your understanding of and experience with Jesus.

³ **Themes:** What themes and patterns are repeated in the narrative? In particular, the ending of each narrative is very important because it ties up various themes. Example: In the movie *Gladiator*, leadership is a powerful theme running through the story. One scene, the salute to Maximus scene, occurs three times. When Maximus is leading the Roman armies under Marcus Aurelius, the soldiers salute and say, "General, General, General." When Maximus is leading the slave gladiators in the fighting pits, the men acknowledge him and say, "Spaniard, Spaniard, Spaniard." And when Maximus is leading the gladiators in Rome, they defer to his leadership and say, "Maximus, Maximus, Maximus." This repetition of this scene makes up a theme. The theme (1) illustrates the main point of the movie, that of Maximus' leadership; and (2) gives a concise summary of the movie (if you were to cut-and-paste only the three scenes together).

STRUCTURE: Can you find a **Literary Structure**⁴ here?

Outline of Luke's Crucifixion-Resurrection Narrative: Luke 22:39 – 24:53

1. Come out of Jerusalem; Jesus prays for disciples; disciples have sorrow. 22:39-46
2. Prophecies fulfilled: Judas and Simon Peter betray Jesus. 22:47-62
3. Jesus reveals himself obliquely as the Son of God. 22:63-71
4. Two people (Herod and Pilate) stuck in **sin**, not understanding Jesus' identity. 23:1-25
5. Simon of Cyrene witnesses and shoulders the Cross. 23:23-26
6. Women, the daughters of Jerusalem, signifying Israel's despair. 23:27-31
7. Jesus crucified. 23:32-34
8. Unbelieving Jews: The rulers of the Jews sneered at Jesus. 23:35
9. Unbelieving Gentiles: The soldiers mock Jesus. 23:36-38
10. Unbelieving Criminal: Criminal hurls curses at Jesus. 23:39
- 10'. Believing Criminal: Criminal believes Jesus, receives paradise. 23:40-43
- 9'. Believing Gentiles: The centurion praised God. 23:44-49
- 8'. Believing Jews: Joseph, a member of the council, cares for Jesus' body. 23:50-52
- 7'. Jesus buried. 23:53-54
- 6'. Women, who had followed Jesus, signifying the church's hope. 23:55-24:11
- 5'. Simon Peter witnesses the empty tomb. 24:12
- 4'. Two people experience **paradise/new creation**, understand Jesus' identity. 24:13-35
- 3'. Jesus reveals himself as the risen Messiah. 24:36-43
- 2'. Prophecies fulfilled: Moses, Prophets, Psalms testify to Messiah. 24:44-49
- 1'. Come out of Jerusalem; Jesus blesses the disciples; disciples have great joy. 24:50-53

This is a *Hebrew chiasm*. Luke's structural arrangement of the material is strategic. The division that Jesus said he would bring about on earth (Lk. 12:) reaches a final and ultimate contrast when he hangs on the Cross. Jesus divides Jews, Gentiles, and criminals. People are divided at the Cross based on their response to it. And the stakes are high. The Cross of Jesus separates those who experience paradise and those who remain in sin.

Closing: The Bible is an Amazing Book

Clearly, the Bible is an amazing book. On artistic level, it is astounding. The deeper you dig, the more amazed you'll be. The more you'll find for yourself. So study this book! And base your life on it!

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⁴ **Structure:** Literary pattern giving shape to the narrative. Examples include: inverted chiasms, parallels and pairings, repetition.

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