

## New Testament and the People of God

### Chapter 8: Story, Symbol, and Praxis

#### Outline

1. Introduction: Despite the diversity of the Jewish people as outlined in chapter 7, a common worldview united the majority.
2. Stories
  1. Introduction: Stories must be understood in order to understand the worldview of a culture
  2. The Basic Story: creation and election, exodus and monarchy, exile and return—“concerned the creator god and the world and focused upon Israel’s place as the covenant people of the former placed in the midst of the latter” (p. 216)
    - i. Abraham: answer to the problem of Adam
    - ii. Moses: slavery in Egypt, rescue under his leadership, liberation—climax of story...so why is everything not yet perfect?
    - iii. Conquest of the Land, period of the judges
    - iv. Monarchy and House of David: the new Abraham and Moses
      1. successors were “a bad lot”
      2. prophets unheeded
      3. Judah went into exile
    - v. New Beginnings under Zerubbabel, Joshua, Ezra, and Nehemiah
  - vi. Story still needs an ending!
    1. Psalm 105: retells the story of the patriarchs and the exodus; Israel must praise YHWH and keep his commandments
    2. Psalm 106: Canaan and the Exodus were times of disobedience, but god remembered the covenant—still the story is not complete
    3. Ending must incorporate the full liberation and redemption of Israel
    4. Ending must correspond to the rest of the story
    5. Israel must live appropriately while waiting for the ending to come
    6. Other stories
      1. Josephus’ Antiquities
      2. Sirach 44-50
      3. Maccabees
      4. Jubilees
      5. Wisdom of Solomon
      6. Book of Pseudo-Philo
      7. Various apocalyptic writings
3. Smaller Sub-Unit Stories: a small part of the larger story or stories parallel to the larger story
  - i. Explicit tellings of one small part of the larger stories—extensively elaborated; used as examples of the general principle from the main story

1. Joseph and Aseneth: marriage of Joseph to daughter of pagan Egyptian priest Potiphera
  1. Israel and pagans are distinct
  2. Message of covenant loyalty and hope
2. Targumim: Aramaic paraphrases of Hebrew Bible
- ii. Stories that form little or no part of the larger story, but are loosely attached and gain their importance from their narrative structure and meaning
  1. apocryphal book of Susannah
    1. Jews under threat will be vindicated against their enemies
    2. Enemies are not pagans; they are elders of Israel—reinforces the worldview of a Jewish sect or party
4. Conclusion: those who are faithful to the covenant god and his Torah will be rescued from their enemies—this can appear in different ways
  - i. “Israel is the people of the creator god, in exile, awaiting release; Israel’s god must become king, and rule or judge the nations; at that time, those who remain faithful to this god and his Torah will be vindicated.”
  - ii. The world will be brought into subjection to the divine rule; Israel is the means of this; when YHWH becomes king, Israel will be his right-hand man
  - iii. Basically, the story is this: “The creator has called Israel to be his people. She is at present suffering, but must hold fast to his covenant code, and he will rescue her. There will come a time when, in a final recapitulation of the smaller stories, Israel will arrive at the conclusion of the larger one.”

### 3. Symbols

1. Introduction: represent the worldview
2. Temple: focal point; represented whole universe; where YHWH ruled and lived
  - i. Seat of religion, national figure head, and place of government.
  - ii. Controversy: Hasmonean priesthood; built by Herod
3. Land: how YHWH blessed his covenant people
  - i. “New Eden, garden of YHWH, home of true humanity”
  - ii. Being laid waste; under pagan influence and Roman rule
  - iii. Needed to be held firm, with clear boundary-markers, against assimilation
4. Torah: “Temple and Torah formed an unbreakable whole: Torah sanctioned and regulated what happened in the Temple, and the Temple...was the practical focal point for the observance of Torah...” (p. 228)
  - i. Exile: No Temple? Torah became the movable Temple
  - ii. This increased the importance of the Torah—all who kept it with rigor were seen in some ways as priests in the Temple
  - iii. No animal sacrifices: alms, prayer, studying Torah, or fasting instead
  - iv. Torah must be kept: details must be debated and decided upon—thus, the Mishnah was created
5. Racial Identity: after release from Babylon, the need to find out who was actually a pure-bred Jew arose, thus the long genealogies of 1 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, etc.
  - i. Intermarriage=slide into paganism; the remnant would become polluted
  - ii. “Jews must set a good example to the world, but at the same time must remain clearly distinct.” (p. 232)

6. Conclusion: “Stories and symbols must be integrated into the praxis which brought them alive.” (p. 232)

4. Praxis

1. Introduction: What one ought to do is an important question in Judaism

2. Worship and Festivals

i. Sabbath Services (Shema, eighteen benedictions)

ii. Pilgrimages

iii. Major Festivals

1. Passover

2. Pentecost

3. Tabernacles

4. Hannukah

5. Purim

iv. Monthly New Moon Festivals

v. Fasts

3. Study and Learning: Feelings expressed in Psalm 19

i. Supreme vocation

ii. Revered activity

4. Torah in Practice:

i. Not just for outward ritual and ceremony, nor to earn salvation-concerned for divine Torah

ii. Helped them be distinct from pagan nations

iii. Coming liberation might be hastened by (or postponed by failure of) following these three laws:

1. Circumcision

2. Keeping Sabbath

3. Kosher Laws

5. According to the Scriptures: The Anchor of the Worldview

i. Dictated daily activities

ii. Gave hope for future

6. Conclusion: Israel’s Worldview (from p. 243)

i. Who are we?: Israel; chosen people

ii. Where are we?: holy land, yet still in exile

iii. What is wrong?: wrong rulers—pagans, compromised Jews, or Herod and his family

iv. What is the solution?: god must rule again; Israel must be faithful

***Discussion Questions:***

1. What stories form our 21<sup>st</sup>- century Christian worldview?

2. What symbols do we hold dear?
  
3. How do we practice our faith?
  
4. What is our worldview?
  
5. How does what we have learned about these three components relate to our study of the New Testament?