

Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh,
Truth is Stranger Than It Used To Be
Chapter Five: "The Biblical Metanarrative"

1. What is the goal of the authors in this chapter? 87

To tell the biblical story, esp. answering the questions about evil and salvation, and how the biblical story has inherent ethical thrusts and inbuilt anti-totalizing potential.

The biblical story works against totalization, especially because of two factors in the story itself (which is no guarantee that it won't be used that way):

1. Radical sensitivity to suffering.
2. God's overarching creational intent that delegitimizes a narrow, partisan use of the story.

2. Why do the authors begin with the story of the exodus rather than with creation or with Jesus?87

Two reasons along with a motivation:

1. The exodus provides the essential background for understanding the historical mission of Jesus, his life, death, and resurrection.
2. Because Israel's first decisive, historical encounter with God was the exodus. It is the central event in the OT according to both Jews and Christians.

Motivation: At the exodus, God graciously intervened in a hopeless, no exit situation to provide for his people a way out.

3. What are the details of the story of the exodus and how does it answer the two worldview questions: What's gone wrong, and What's the remedy? 89ff

Details of the story on page 89-92

What's gone wrong: human suffering caused by injustice, esp. at the hand of an imperial regime.

What's the remedy: The only hope is God's intervention in history to break the bonds of slavery and lead his people out to a land where they can live in freedom and justice.

4. What is the relationship between the story of the exodus and the ethical requirements imposed on Israel by God? How do story and ethics relate? 93

The 10 commandments are guidelines for living that come from God who has a history with this people; they are not out of the blue absolute principles. This is shown in Exod. 20 and Deut. 6.

For Israel, the question: what am I to do? flows directly out of the answer to the question: of what story am I a part? (so A. MacIntyre).

5. What sort of ethical action is formed by Israel's narrative?93

Israel's ethical consciousness was formed by the crucible of oppressive suffering and liberation in to justice. The memory of suffering and its relief formed Israel's ethical ethos.

6. How is this ethical ethos of the memory of suffering and its relief kept alive in Israel?93

Psalms of lament: the Hebrews agonized lament of suffering in Egypt found a settled home in the genre of the lament psalms that constitute 1/3 of the Psalter.

The contemporary tradition of the Jewish Passover celebration:

Motivational clauses in the Book of the Covenant: justice for aliens, widows, orphans on the basis that Israel was once an alien and God will certainly hear their cry.

The whole purpose of the exodus Sinai event was for God to form a community with an ethical pattern of life that was the clear antonym and answer to the oppression and injustice of Egypt (so N. K. Gottwald). Hence, Israel was to be a community that fostered justice and compassion toward the marginal. THIS IS THE MOST COUNTER IDEOLOGICAL ASPECT OF THE OT STORY.

This trajectory of the biblical texts has been called the "embrace of pain" focusing on the absence of God, justice, shalom. It is also the 'prophetic imagination' in operation since the prophets in Israel's later history gave voice to the suffering of the people, even God (W. Brueggemann).

7. What is the royal or imperial trajectory that runs counter to the prophetic one?
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The royal or imperial trajectory was the oppression placed by Israel's kings on the people in an unjust manner thus returning Israel to a renewed Egyptian captivity, esp. illustrated in Solomon, 1 Kings 3-11.

The oppressive rule of the Israelite kings constitutes a fundamental contradiction of Israel's identity and ethical pattern of life which derive from the founding story.

8. What did the rise of the unjust, oppressive monarchy contribute to the plot conflict of Israel's story?96

Just as Israel's Egyptian captivity required plot resolution in the form of deliverance, so the royal oppression leading to the abuse of the marginal required a resolution as well. It came in the form of the warnings of the prophets, and in the promise of Babylonian captivity. Their message was based on the original Egypt story, namely, since they disobeyed the meaning of that story in how they oppressed their own, they would be captured.

The "all is well prophets" used the same story to tell Israel that since she was God's people, she would not go into captivity. Same story, different conclusion. **THEY EMPLOYED THE NARRATIVE FOR IDEOLOGICAL SELF JUSTIFICATION.** Once Israel was taken captive, however, they underwent a major world view crisis. In this situation, how should they live?

9. How did Israel seek to live in the midst of Babylonian captivity?97

They continued to live out their narrative. They recalled the exodus story and longed for deliverance from their new captors as in Psa. 106.

10. What was the role of the prophets in the context of captivity? 98

They called Israel to a new exodus. Yes. But much more. They called Israel back to her original vocation for which she was delivered from Egypt in the first place: **TO BE THE BEARER OF GOD'S COSMIC METANARRATIVE, THE STORY OF GOD'S INTENT TO BRING PEACE AND JUSTICE AND HEALING TO ALL THE NATIONS, AND EVEN TO THE WORLD ITSELF. TO RESTORE THE WORLD AND THE NATIONS TO GOD.** After all, God is the creator of the whole world and as such is concerned about all peoples. This is the second counter ideological principle that is a part of the metanarrative. The exodus sensitizes to suffering and the understanding of God as the creator who desires to

redeem prevents nationalistic, partisan, interpretation of the story in an imperialistic manner.

11. What are the canonical implications of the recognition of God as creator? 99

1. The torah ends with Deut. not Josh and the possession of the land, as if to say that the possession of the land is a secondary character of Israel and her national identity. She can live out her story on or off the land.

2. That the torah begins with creation of the heavens and earth as do the recitals of Israel's history in captivity (Jer. 32; Neh. 9). And this shows not only that God has to do with the whole world, but also that the fundamental problem for man is not just captivity, but sin. So we have creation intentions, sin, and the call of Abraham as the answer via Israel.

12. What then is the larger metanarrative of which Israel is a part? 100

Creation, fall, redemption via Israel. Their call was a call to service, the means of mediating the story of creation and redemption to the nations.

13. Are the two counter ideological features united? 101

Yes, in Psalm 146. God as creator as such the oppressed have a court of appeal in him. His purpose is an alternative to the oppressive systems which he condemns. Rather he desires to bring healing to such for the purpose of shalom.

It is BECAUSE God is universal creator and judge that the marginal and suffering have a court of appeal against all injustice.

14. In what ways is Jesus message and mission seen by the authors as "antitotalizing?" 102

1. He mounted a scathing critique of the religious and political center on behalf of the excluded other. He avoided the concept of holiness by which others were excluded, and saw Israel's vocation as one of reconciliation, and he taught mercy, not hate for one's enemies.

2. He restored the nation to its "creational covenantal monotheism" and rejecting its "covenantal monotheism" which had been used to marginalize others, even Jews. God as universal creator was the basis for this assertion.

JESUS WAS PROFOUNDLY AWARE OF THE CONTOURS AND INTENT OF THE CANONICAL METANARRATIVE.

15. What is the significance of the temple cleansing in this understanding of Jesus? 103f

The temple had become a symbol of Jewish exclusivism which alienated the gentile and unclean Jew. His cleansing of the temple was designed to restore it to its universal and cosmic purposes as a house of prayer for all the nations.

16. How is Jesus' death symbolic of the central thrust of Israel's metanarrative? 104

Jesus discerned the anti-ideological thrust of Israel's story and yet was crucified on the cross by Romans and Jews because of their own self serving ideological concerns. He suffers literally for the sins of the Jewish and Gentile worlds.

Jesus recapitulates in himself the suffering of the rejected prophets and exilic Israel and thus embodies the central biblical trajectory of the embrace of pain and marginality--a death on behalf of both the margins and the center, bearing the sins of the whole world.

17. How does Paul tell the Jesus story in such a way that makes it the resolution of the plot of the biblical metanarrative? 105f

By showing how Jesus is the center of the story and its denouement and climax. His death atones for sin; his resurrection is his exodus out of death. The conflict introduced by sin has now, in part, been resolved, awaiting final resolution at the second coming.

18. Does this metanarrative include the whole world? 106f

Absolutely. Rom. 8 indicates the cosmic scope of the story as our story. It 'untangles' the dead end plot of their stories by incorporating them into this grand design.