DRAMATIC LANGUAGE: THE UNDERAPPRECIATED GENRE OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

presented as the 87th Inaugural Lecture in the University of Jos Lecture Series, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria on 10th September 2018

Introduction

The main group of captives was deported from Jerusalem in 587 BC, after the destruction of the city by Nebuchadnezzar. To his dismay, Jeremiah was left behind with the people who were considered unfit for service in Babylon. These people came to him once and told him they wanted to go to Egypt and asked him to consult with the Lord to see if they would obtain God's favor. Jeremiah did so and brought back the answer that this trip was not approved by God. These rather obnoxious people did indeed go to Egypt and forced Jeremiah to go with them, against his will. While in Egypt the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah and told him God was going to punish the Israelites in Egypt. Here is the way Jeremiah described it:

- *Therefore this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am determined to bring disaster on you and to* ***destroy all Judah***. (Jeremiah 44:11).
- *I will take away the remnant of Judah who were determined to go to Egypt to settle there. They will* ***all perish*** *in Egypt; they will fall by the sword or die from famine.* ***From the least to the greatest, they will die*** *by sword or famine.* (44:12).
- ***None of the remnant of Judah*** *who have gone to live in Egypt will escape or survive to return to the land of Judah, to which they long to return and live* (44:14a).

This is an unambiguous way of saying that all the Israelites who went down to Egypt were going to be killed. Note the phrase *"destroy* ***all*** *Judah,"* and *"****all*** *perish,""from the least to the greatest,"* and *"****none*** *of the remnant of Judah."* Is there a more comprehensive way Jeremiah could have said that all of the Israelites in Egypt were going to be destroyed? However in the latter part of verse 14, Jeremiah says *"none will return* ***except a few***

***fugitives**."* How could all of these Israelites be destroyed and yet a few fugitives still return?

This is an example of non-literal language.[1] Though some try to explain this statement as a "later addition to the text,"[2] there is no textual evidence for that. This is typical Semitic idiom whereby a speaker or writer uses an absolute statement for a non-absolute fact. It is like hyperbole—a deliberate exaggeration to make a point. Both the speaker and the hearer know that non-literal language is being used and thus the communication of the real truth behind the idiom is communicated forcefully and effectively. This is only one of many figurative expressions found in the Bible that utilize non-literal language.

To understand this phenomenon, we will start by looking at communication in general. Then we will examine language, written communication, idioms and figures of speech in the Bible. Next, we will focus on the various kinds of dramatic language and conclude with some observations related to appreciating and interpreting Biblical dramatic language.

Communication

Communication is transferring information from one person to another. Communication is done in many different ways. Donald Smith identifies twelve different ways that we communicate with one another.[3] The three most common are:

1. **Verbal Communication.** This is communication that is created by the mouth, including the tongue, lips, vocal chords and lungs and is received through ears. It is by far the most common form of communication. About half of the gospels are the verbal communications of Jesus.
2. **Written Communication.** This is reducing words into a written form traditionally on "paper" but more recently in some electronic format. Even though Jesus gave his teachings orally, the only way that we know them is because they were written.

---

[1] J. Robertson McQuilken, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, (Chicago, Moody Press, 1983) p. 136

[2] Robert Davidson, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, Volume 2, in *The Daily Study Bible Series*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985) p. 150.

[3] Donald K. Smith, *Creating Understanding*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992) p. 144

3. **Kinesic Communication.** This is communication through bodily movements. This can include such simple things as smiling, frowning, or grimacing to more complex forms of bodily movement that include dancing and drama. When Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground (John 8:8), he was using kinesic communication.[4]

Language

For this lecture, I propose language can be divided into two general categories.

1. **Literal language.** Most of language, including most of the types of communication described above, fall into this category. Words are sounds or written symbols that represent specific thoughts. When these thoughts are joined together they provide coherent information. It is generally assumed that the meaning assigned to words is consistent in the information they present within a language. In other words, specific words consistently represent exactly the meaning the language has assigned to them. The English word "goat" means the same thing in the US, the UK, India and Nigeria.

[4] Other forms of communication identified by Donald Smith include:

1. Numeric Communication – communicating through numbers. Certain numbers have symbolic value. The number 13 is considered such an unlucky number that many tall buildings will not have a 13th floor.
2. Pictorial Communication – communicating through photographs, drawings, paintings, cartoons, and similar images. Pictorial communication can convey precise information and can generate powerful emotions.
3. Artifactual Communication – communicating through objects and symbols. A cross on a building communicates that this is a church building.
4. Audio Communication – communication through sound. This goes beyond verbal communication to include sounds like sirens, hand clapping and whistles in sports.
5. Optical Communication - communication using colors and light and darkness. Colors have different meanings in different cultures. In a traffic light, red means stop and green means go.
6. Tactile Communication – communication through touch. Shaking hands, hugging and kissing are non-verbal communications.
7. Temporal Communication – communication through the use of time. Being early or late for meetings communicates different things in different cultures. Pauses in speech or music also aid communication.
8. Spatial Communication – communication through spacing. Some cultures value closeness and others prefer more space between persons. The size of chairs, offices and vehicles also communicates things.
9. Olfactory Communication – communication through smell. Smells from the kitchen communicate what is being cooked. Certain smells also remind people of specific places or events.

2. **Non-literal language.** This is a word or combination of words that have a meaning other than the meaning normally assigned to them. In the sentence, "Uncle John kicked the bucket," the literal meaning would mean that a man identified as Uncle John used his foot to strike a round receptacle used to hold water. However, this sentence has become an idiom and the non-literal meaning of the sentence means that Uncle John died. "Kicking the bucket" has nothing to do with death in any literal sense but it has become a rather light-hearted way of saying a person has died.

To be able to understand the communication that uses non-literal language, one has to know the culture, the language and even the idioms and figures of speech within the language. Jan de Waard has written that "translating non-literal meanings of Biblical expressions have been insufficiently dealt with."[5] I agree with him and I would say that "insufficient" study of non-literal Biblical language provides the motivation for this study.

Written Communication

Although the Bible contains many verbal communications, all of these were written down, so the Bible and Christian theology primarily deals with written communication. There are many genres of literature in the Bible, some of which overlap at times. These include:

1. **Narrative.** The word narrative means story. Narrative therefore is simply describing things that happened or are happening or will happen. There are obviously hundreds of pages of narrative in the Bible, including books like Genesis and all the books from Joshua to Esther. Acts is the purest form of narrative in the New Testament.
2. **Law.** Laws are written statements that prohibit, restrict or demand certain activities in society. Practically all organizations have laws, whether they are national governments, churches, schools or clubs. Large parts of the Pentateuch, from Exodus to Deuteronomy, fall into the category of law. These were not just spiritual or religious laws. These sections contain the laws of the nation of Israel and deal with all aspects of life, including family, societal, political, criminal and religious laws.

[5]Jan de Waard, "Biblical Metaphors and Their Translation," *The Translator*, Vol. 25, Issue 1, p. 107. https://doi.org/10.1177/026009357402500102 Retrieved 15 August 2018

3. **Biography.** This is a story about a particular person's life. There are large biographical sections in the Bible that tell the stories of Abraham, Moses, David and others. The four gospels are biographical because they tell part of the story of Jesus.
4. **Autobiography.** An autobiography is a story written about oneself and normally is written with first person pronouns. The best example of this in the Bible is the book of Nehemiah. Moses likely wrote the story about himself but he did not use first person pronouns. There are also several autobiographical sections in the book of Acts.
5. **Poetry.** Poetry refers to sentences or phrases written in parallel lines in unique, creative and beautiful language. Such writings are designed to appeal to the aesthetic and emotional parts of our nature. There are three kinds of poetry in the Bible.[6]
   a. ***Lyric poetry*** is poetry designed to be accompanied by a lyre, a stringed instrument. This obviously refers to songs. The Book of Psalms is filled with lyric poetry. Many psalms are dramatic in the sense that they use highly figurative language to describe both real and hypothetical situations. Psalm 1:2 is a typical example of a dramatic language: *"For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart."*[7]
   b. ***Didactic poetry*** is poetry designed to teach a specific truth. The Book of Proverbs is full of didactic poetry. Proverbs are short, easy-to-remember statements that contain a capsule of knowledge or wisdom. Perhaps the majority of these are quite dramatic as well. For example Proverbs 28:28 says: *"When the wicked rise to power, people go into hiding, but when the wicked perish, the righteous thrive."* This proverb provides enough information to create a mental image of wicked rulers and how people respond to them. There are longer dramatic sections in Proverbs such as the vivid description of the allure of the adulteress (7:1-23) and the application of that mini-drama in 7:24-27.

[6] Danny McCain and Craig Keener, *Understanding and Applying Scriptures*, (Bukuru, Africa Christian Textbooks, 2013) pp. 273-274

[7] Psalm 91 describes the security God provides for his people with dramatic images of living in a fortress (1-2), being covered with the wings of God (3-4), being preserved in battle and sickness (5-7), being protected by angels (11-12) and being protected from wild animals (13).

c. ***Dramatic poetry*** is basically drama written in poetry. The books of Job and Song of Solomon are structured as ancient dramas.[8] There are many other examples of drama that will be explained later.

6. **Prophecy.** Prophecy is speaking on behalf of God. A prophet is one to whom and through whom God speaks. At times prophecy included speaking about the future but most prophecies were messages from God for the contemporary times in which the prophet lived. Interestingly, many of the prophetic writers are written in poetry.[9]
7. **Parables.** A parable is a story designed to illustrate a truth. Jesus was the master user of parables though they are found all through the Bible.
8. **Epistles.** These are letters written to teach important truths. They are written to real people or groups and convey information in a warm and personal manner. There are 21 epistles in the New Testament and they make up 38 percent of its content.
9. **Apocalyptic Literature.** This is literature that normally describes the future in rather strange and mystical terms and is filled with symbolic spiritual beings and images. The word 'apocalyptic' means "unveiling" and is the first word in the book of Revelation.[10] Most apocalyptic literature is non-canonical but early examples of it came be found in Daniel, Isaiah (24-27), Ezekiel (38, 39), Joel (3:9ff.), Zechariah (9-14), and Mark (13).[11] More will be said about this genre of literature later.

These types of communications are used in most languages. They make language rich and gratifying. They also demonstrate that which is still recognized even in secular society, that the Bible is a valuable literary treasure.[12]

---

[8] For more information about poetic literature in the Bible, see McCain and Keener, pp. 273-274.

[9]The Bible contains 17 books that are made up of prophecy, including five books called major prophets and 12 books that are considered minor prophets. All of these prophets, with the possible exception of Haggai, contain poetry. In addition, there are prophetic sections in other portions of the Bible.

[10] G. E. Ladd, "Apocalyptic" *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, editor: Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984) p. 62

[11] John B. Taylor, "Apocalyptic Literature," *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, editor: J. D. Douglas, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974) p. 52. Examples of apocalyptic literature in the Bible are determined to some extent by the definition of apocalyptic literature.

[12] There have been abundant resources produced that address the literary nature of the Bible. See as a sample Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (editors), *The Literary Guide to the Bible*

Idioms and Figures of Speech

Much of the non-literal language found in communication falls into the category of idioms and figures of speech. An idiom is a word picture that has become so deeply imbedded in the language that it is often no longer viewed as a figure of speech. The words themselves have taken on new meaning and are easily understood by capable speakers of the language. The words in an idiom may have little or nothing to do with words that are used to describe the actual truth it is conveying. For example, C. S. Lewis describes idioms associated with understanding. Someone may say "I see your point." However, understanding has nothing to do with a pointed object coming into the visual field of a person. To try to explain in another way, one might say "I follow you," but that does not mean that a person is walking behind someone on a road.[13]

Nigeria has its share of English idioms. Nigerians say "I am coming" when they are going. They say "I will follow you" when they really mean that they will go along with you.

There was one Nigerian idiom I really struggled with in my early days of living in Nigeria.

> When I first came to Nigeria, I would often preach a sermon in church. Someone would come up to me afterwards and say, "Oga, you really tried-o!" I would give a lecture, and my students would also tell me I had really tried. In American English, "to try," means to make an attempt, which may not have been successful. Usually when one of our students fails an examination, we will call him and inform him he failed the exam but we will conclude the discussion by saying, "But don't worry. You tried. Try harder next time." In other words, he made a good effort even though his effort was not successful. So when people kept telling me that I had tried, I was confused. I was wondering what I would have to do to really preach a good sermon. One day one of my students asked to give a testimony in one of my classes. I gave him permission. He was a

---

(Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987) https://books.google.com.ng/books?hl=en&lr=&id=O4hYlvzWui8C&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=related:e3IHClcuw0gJ:scholar.google.com/&ots=xUHtgEGV0F&sig=v-MSk4UL3tV094KNEEJIQ73jwOE&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false Retrieved 16 August 2018

[13] C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: MacMillan, 1947) pp. 88-89. For 50 of the most common English idioms see http://www.smart-words.org/quotes-sayings/idioms-meaning.html. Retrieved 6 August 2018.

> businessman who owned a shop in the market. Unfortunately, the market had caught on fire the day before and burned. Though my student was not present, the man who owned the shop next to his had broken down the door of his shop and packed all of his things to safety. As he stood in front of the class and tried to find words to express his thanks to God, he finally said, "You know, God really tried." From that time onwards, I figured if God could try, it was all right for me to try.[14]

The Bible is filled with idioms. If we attempt to interpret them literally, we will be confused. If we understand them properly, our knowledge of the Bible will be enriched.

Figures of speech are very similar to idioms but are easier to spot. A figure of speech is an expression that compares one object or statement with another to enlighten or illustrate an idea being communicated.[15] In our book on hermeneutics, co-authored with Craig Keener, we identified 12 figures of speech used in the Bible.[16] A sample includes:

1. **Simile**. A comparison using "like" or "as." David wrote, *"That* (blessed) *person is like a tree planted by streams of water . . . Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away"* (Ps 1:3-4).
2. **Metaphor**. A comparison without using like or as. John the Baptist called the religious leaders a *"brood of vipers"* (Matthew 3:7). Jesus referred to Herod as a fox (Luke 13:32). All of the *"I am"* statements that Jesus gave are metaphors.
3. **Hyperbole.** A deliberate overstatement or exaggeration for effect. Judges 7:12 reads, *"The Midianites, the Amalekites and all other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand of the seashore."* That would be a lot of camels if it were a literal statement.
4. **Irony.** Saying the opposite of what one means in order to better get the attention of the hearer or reader. In 2 Samuel 6:20, David's wife speaks after he had danced in the street: *"How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of*

[14] McCain and Keener, p. 209

[15] Merriam-Webster defines a figure of speech as follows: "a form of expression (such as a simile or metaphor) used to convey meaning or heighten effect often by comparing or identifying one thing with another that has a meaning or connotation familiar to the reader or listener." https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/figure%20of%20speech. Retrieved 17 August 2018

[16] McCain and Keener, pp. 210-215

his servants as any vulgar fellow would!" This sounds like a complement but she was actually speaking sarcastically.

5. **Anthropomorphism.** Attributing individual human characteristics to God. Psalm 34:15 says, *"The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous."* Isaiah 52:10 declares, *"The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations*."[17]

Figurative language makes language more interesting and colorful and sometimes makes a point better than straightforward narrative.

Dramatic Language

The common way the phrase "dramatic language" is used today is portray someone who is describing something in an exciting or oratorical manner. One might say, "Brother Gbile Akanni used very dramatic language in describing the consequences of those who reject Christ" or "the correspondent used dramatic language in describing the scene of the suicide bombing." In those cases, one would mean that these speakers used highly charged, highly descriptive and highly emotional language.

However, in this lecture, I am using the phrase in a more narrow way. Dramatic language is simply language used to create drama-like images or mini-dramas in the mind.[18] When Paul said, *"Fight the good fight of the faith"* (1 Timothy 6:12), he was using dramatic language to create a mental image in those hearing or reading this sentence. That mental image would

---

[17] Other examples of figures of speech found in *Understanding and Applying Scripture* include:

1. ***Metonymy*** is an idea used to refer to an associated idea.
2. ***Personification*** isattributing human qualities to inanimate objects.
3. ***Synecdoche***is using a part for a whole or a whole for a part.
4. ***Apostrophe*** is when a speaker or writer addresses directly persons or objects that are either absent or imaginary.
5. ***Interrogation*** (***Rhetorical Question***) is asking a question whose answer is obvious and which is not intended to be answered by the hearer or reader.
6. ***Euphemism***is substituting a more pleasant expression for a harsh or blunt statement.
7. ***Litotes***is stressing a certain point by denying the opposite.
8. ***Pleonasm*** is the superfluous or unnecessary use of words.

[18] One of the lectures I have given the most throughout my teaching career is entitled "The Drama of Redemption." In this lecture, I present the whole Bible as a drama with various acts and scenes. This drama does create mental images that facilitate understanding the Bible as a whole. I am not the only person to do this. See Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004) p. 13; www.bakeracademic.com. Retrieved 15 August, 2018

likely be about two people literally fighting with their hands or weapons or it could also be an image of two armies fighting. That mental image would then generate a spiritual or moral or instructional parallel thought. In this passage the parallel thought would be something like: "You must use your greatest energy and commitment in living out your faith; you must overcome every obstacle that would try to trip you up; you must persevere in your Christian faith." That parallel point is the real truth being communicated not the fighting imagery.

Physical drama is a communication done through facial and bodily motions. Most of the time it is accompanied by dialogue or music but silent drama can also be effective. Dramas can also be done using only verbal communication. Nigerian radio stations often have radio dramas, which by their very nature, are oral rather than visual dramas. Drama has been one of the major forms of communication in Africa and other traditional societies, including the ancient Hebrew culture. However, ancient dramas tended to use more verbal communication than physical actions. There was more speaking than acting.

Drama can be both realistic and fictional. In other words, dramas can be created to communicate about historical events where the various parts of the play follow the historical events very closely. However, even in historical dramas, there are often fictional bridges to move the drama from one scene to the next. Dramas can also be entirely fictional. Drama not only communicates to the mind but it appeals to the emotions as well so even fictional dramas can communicate very powerful messages.

One of the key characteristics of drama is, like parables and other instructional stories, the main point is in the whole drama not the individual parts. In other words, if the drama is set in a farming community, the point of the drama is not normally to teach about agriculture; it is to teach the moral principles and other life truths the story is illustrating.

Not everyone agrees there was formal drama in the Old Testament period[19] but I personally believe the Bible is filled with dramatic language and

[19] J. E. McFadyen, "The Bible as Literature," *The Biblical World*, Vol. 16, No. 6 (Dec., 1900), pp. 441, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3136951. Retrieved 8 August 2018

literature.[20] I share Rudy Neville's conviction that "no student can fail to see the brilliant dramatic elements of Hebrew literature."[21]

Dramatic Books

There are at least two books in the Bible that were written in a dramatic format. The first is the book of Job. There is much discussion in theological circles about whether Job is a fictional or historical character. Since dramas can be written about both fictional and historical events, that discussion is not relevant to this lecture. However, when one looks closely at the flow of the book of Job, it seems obvious that the book is configured into a dramatic format. It is not so much of a drama of action as "dramatic dialogue."[22] The following outline illustrates the dramatic format of Job:[23]

1. **Prologue:**1:2-5; A paragraph is read by someone on the stage to give the audience the essential background details to understand the drama. Job is presented as a righteous and wealthy man.
2. **Act I:** Dialogues Between God and Satan; 1-2
   a. Scene 1; Satan's accusation to God; 1:6-12
   b. Scene 2; Destruction of Job's property and family; 1:13-22
   c. Scene 3; Second conversation in heaven; 2:1-6
3. **Act II:** Debates with Job's Three Friends; 2:11-27
   a. Scene 1; First cycle of speeches between Job, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar
   b. Scene 2; Second cycle of speeches between the same persons
   c. Scene 3; Third cycle of speeches between Job, Eliphaz and Bildad
4. **Interlude:**The narrator comes back out on the stage and reads the poem in Job 28
5. **Act III:** Monologues by Job and Elihu
   a. Scene 1; Monologue by Job; 29-31
   b. Scene 2; Monologue by Elihu; 32-37

---

[20] I completed my PhD in New Testament studies in 1982. The single most important thing I have learned about interpreting the Bible since that time is the importance of identifying and interpreting the figurative language and drama found in the Bible. The more I study the Bible, the more of this I see.

[21] Ruby B. Neville, "Dramatic Elements in Hebrew Literature," *Christian Education*, Vol. 4, No. 2, The Association of Biblical Instructors in American Colleges and Secondary Schools (November, 1920), p. 40. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41174306. Retrieved 8 August 2018

[22] Ernst R. Wendland, *Language, Society, and Bible Translation* (Cape Town: Bible Society of Africa, 1985) p. 90

[23] Danny McCain, *Notes on Old Testament Introduction* (Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2002) pp. 211-212

6. **Act IV**
   a. Scene 1; God's speeches; 38-41
   b. Scene 2; Job's repentance; 42:1-6
   c. God's Verdict; 42:7-9
7. **Epilogue:**Job's restoration; 42:10-16; the narrator returns to the stage and concludes the story.

From this outline, it is obvious, whether intentional or not, the book of Job follows closely a recognized drama format.

The second biblical book that appears to be a drama is the Song of Solomon (KJV), also called the Son of Songs (NIV, NLT).[24] It is written in poetic language and contains a fascinating love story. It appears to be a drama that was sung and possibly acted perhaps for one of Solomon's weddings. Robert Lowth, as far back as 1878 in his lecture entitled "Dramatic Poetry," declared the Song of Solomon was not "normal poetry" but an *epithalamium*[25]which is a song or poem in honor of a bride and bridegroom.[26] This fits into the general category he called "dramatic poetry." Though not all scholars agree that this book is a drama, it seems to fit the dramatic format very well.

Drama is a common means of communication in most societies, certainly in Africa. Thus it is not surprising to see two books of the Bible written using the genre of drama.

Short Dramatic Visions

The prophets contain many short dramatic stories all designed to impart some important truth in an interesting and unique manner. These fall into two categories.

Dramatic Acts

During the reign of Zedekiah, the Lord told Jeremiah, *"Make a yoke out of straps and crossbars and put it on your neck"* (Jeremiah 27:2). He was then

[24] Both names come from the first five words in Job, literally translated *"The song of songs belonging to Solomon."*
[25] Robert Lowth, "Of Dramatic Poetry (Lecture XXX)" *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews,* Translated from Latin by G. Gregory, (Andover: for Crocker and Bruster [Boston] and J. Leavitt [New York] 1829) p. 249. ihttps://books.google.com.ng/books?redir_esc=y&id=hdYMAAAAIAAJ&q=epithalamium#v=snippet&q=epithalamium&f=false. Retrieved 6 August 2018
[26]"Epithalamium." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Accessed 6 August 2018.

to present himself before the king and send messages to the other nations in the area that they were to submit themselves to Nebuchadnezzar. If they refused there would be trouble. If they submitted they would eventually be brought back to their land (27:1-22). Jeremiah performed this dramatic act and delivered the message. A message delivered from a man with a yoke around his neck would certainly get the attention of the one who received the message.

We see several stories in the book of Ezekiel where the prophet performed dramatic acts. For example, Ezekiel was directed to build a miniature city of Jerusalem out of clay. He was also to surround the city with miniature siege ramps and other weapons. He was then to put an iron pan between himself and the city. He was to lie on his left side 390 days as if he were besieging the city. This represented the number of years the city had been rebelling against God. After that he was to lie on his right side 40 more days. This represented the number of years the nation would be in captivity in Babylon, being punished for their sins (Ezekiel 4:1-6). In addition to these dramatic actions, Ezekiel was to prophesy against the city (4:7-8). This was only the first of several dramatic prophecies Ezekiel was required to enact.[27] A message from God delivered in such a dramatic fashion by a highly respected prophet of God would not be easily forgotten or taken lightly.

Dramatic Visions

The prophets also contain a number of smaller dramatic visions. Zechariah was a prophet who received several of these prophetic visions. He is quite precise in explaining when he received these prophecies. On the 24th day of the 11th month of Darius' reign, Zechariah saw a vision of a man riding a red horse standing among myrtle trees in a ravine. In the area, there were also red, brown and white horses. It was during this vision that Zechariah received information about what God was going to do in the future (1: 7-17). Later, Zechariah saw a dramatic vision of four horns representing the forces that scattered Judah and Israel (2:18-19), four craftsmen who were to drive away those who were scattering the nations (2:20-21), a man with a measuring line who was measuring Jerusalem (2:1-11), a flying scroll (5:1-

[27] Ezekiel was required to shave his hair and divide it into different portions and burn some, scatter some to the wind and store some (5:1-4). Ezekiel was also to pack his belongings as for a long journey, and also dig through a wall (12:3-8). The death of Ezekiel's wife and his subsequent lack of public mourning was an object lesson in what Israel would be required to do in captivity (24:15-27).

5), and a woman in a basket (5:5-11). There was even a dramatic vision the Lord showed Zechariah of the high priest Joshua, in dirty clothes being confronted by Satan. Fortunately, the Lord rebuked Satan and instructed the high priest to put on clean clothes. At the end of this scene, Zechariah says: *"Listen, O high priest, Joshua and your associates seated for you, who are men* ***symbolic of things to come*** *. . ."* (3:8). This statement clearly shows that God was giving prophetic messages to Zechariah through dramatic and symbolic means so that he could pass along these messages to his people.

Dramatic Longer Visions

In addition to these smaller visions, there are much longer biblical passages that describe fascinating scenes filled with strange characters. I will briefly mention three examples.

Visions in Daniel

The latter half of the book of Daniel is filled with very dramatic scenes that describe creatures and activities that we do not normally see on this earth. During the first year of Belshazzar's reign in Babylon, Daniel had a vision of *"four winds of heaven churning up the great sea"* (Daniel 7:2). He then saw four strange creatures: a lion with wings, a bear with three ribs in its mouth, and a beast that looked like a leopard with four wings and four heads. The fourth beast was the most terrifying of all: It was *"terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns"* (7:7). After that Daniel saw *"another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully"* (7:8). He then saw what he described as the *"Ancient of Days"* in white clothing and white hair sitting on a brilliant throne with blazing wheels around him and a river of fire flowing from him and tens of thousands of attendants. This was actually a court scene. The books were opened. The boastful horn apparently was condemned and then executed and his body was thrown into a blazing fire. After that, Daniel saw the *"son of man"* coming with the clouds of heaven. He came into the presence of the Ancient of Days. *"He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed"* (7:14).

Daniel was obviously troubled about this vision. He said, *"I approached one of those standing there and asked him* ***the meaning of all this****"* (7:16). The fact that this vision needed interpretation implied that this was not normal communication. It was not something that Daniel would have understood from his personal experiences or with the natural knowledge he possessed. It was a dramatic vision that required interpretation. The one standing there, apparently an angel, explained to him the meaning of this heavenly drama. In the third year of King Belshazzar's reign, Daniel saw a vision of a ram with two horns (8:3). In the third year of the reign of Cyrus, king of Persian, after a period of mourning and fasting, Daniel saw a vision of a strange man *"dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude"* (10:5-6). This man had a message for Daniel about the future (10:14).

In this lecture, we are not so much concerned about the theology of this part of the book as the dramatic means of communication. Drama implies that the actors and activities are not the real message. They are simple vehicles for conveying a message in an effective and powerful manner. Fortunately, in Daniel, the interpretations of the dramas are given. After the first vision of the four horses and the Ancient of Days, Daniel said that he asked one of the creatures who was presented when he received the vision and ***"asked him the true meaning*** *of all things."* The verse continues *"so he told me and* ***gave me the interpretation*** *of these things"* 7:16).[28] Unfortunately, these dramatic visions are not always explained.

Visions in Revelation

Revelation, the final book in the Bible, is another book that contains many dramatic visions that are roughly strung together into a lengthy apocalyptic drama. Many of these visions are similar to the dramatic visions found in the book of Daniel. John was given visions of throne scenes in heaven, seven seals, multitudes in white clothing, angels with trumpets, a mighty angel and a small scroll. He also saw in this drama two powerful witnesses who ministered for 1260 days, a pregnant woman, a dragon with seven heads, and a beast that came up out of the sea with 10 horns. The drama continued to include another beast with two horns, seven angels with seven

[28] Daniel also received interpretations of visions in 7:23, 8:15-16 and 10:14.

plagues, a rider on a white horse, the destruction of Satan, a judgment scene, and the New Jerusalem with all of its splendor and beauty.

A typical dramatic story in Revelation is as follows: A woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and a crown on her head was pregnant. An enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns came and stood in front of the woman waiting for her to deliver so he could eat the child. The woman gave birth to a male child who would rule the nations with an iron scepter. To protect the baby, God snatched up the child to his throne. The woman then fled into the desert to a place that had been prepared for her by God and remained 1260 days. There was war in heaven between Michael and the dragon who was actually Satan. He was thrown out of heaven to the earth. He then pursued the woman who had given birth but she was given wings like an eagle. With these she was able to fly away to a place in the desert that had been prepared for her. The serpent tried to destroy the woman by spewing vast amounts of water onto the desert that he hoped would drown her. However, the earth opened and swallowed the water. The serpent, also called a dragon, then went off to wage war against the rest of the woman's offspring (Revelation 12:1-17).

This is obviously a very dramatic story which should be interpreted like other dramas. Dramas tell stories that illustrate moral principles and teach eternal truths. This story, like parables, should be interpreted as a whole and no attempt should be made to identify every part of the story as illustrative of some person, place or event. The main point in the story is that God takes care of his own people and even uses supernatural means to do so at times. To go beyond that and identify this as a specific event in the future probably goes beyond what was intended by the original author in his use of apocalyptic drama. I believe that all of the dramatic scenes in Revelation should be interpreted in a similar way. They primarily offer hope and comfort to people who were suffering under the cruel boot of Roman persecution and should not primarily be seen as a detailed blueprint of eschatological events.[29]

These larger dramatic visions or groups of visions threaded together in Daniel and Revelation are what might be called expanded hyperbolic

[29] The main points being made by the various dramatic visions in the book of Revelation are: 1) Life is not easy; 2) God is in control; 3) The enemies of God will be appropriately judged; 4) The followers of Christ will be rewarded beyond imagination in the future life. The dramatic scenes in Revelation all support those points.

metaphor. They are "metaphor" because the stories represent something other than what is communicated by the details of the story. They are "hyperbolic" in the sense that they include large-scale exaggerated events featuring enormous terrifying creatures. They are "expanded" because these visions are normally strung together to form a rather disjoined narrative that teaches or illustrates specific truths and principles and aids memory in recalling them.

Apocalyptic Visions

Much of the information in Daniel and Revelation fit into what is called apocalyptic literature, one of the most unique genres of Biblical literature. The Greek word *apokalupsis* is the first word found in the book of Revelation though it is not clear whether the word describes a special category of literature or is simply used for revelation in general.[30]

The word basically means a revelation or disclosure[31] or unveiling.[32] It is generally thought that these kinds of futuristic writings were fully developed between 200 BC and AD 100 in non-canonical literature. However, Daniel and Zechariah, which were written in the canonical period 200 years before this, exhibit many of the characteristics of apocalyptic literature. The common focus of those who study apocalyptic literature is on the eschatology, but my focus is on the characteristics of the genre.

Apocalyptic literature is essentially drama. It is not human drama though it might include humans. It is drama found in these visions and dreams and takes place in the spiritual world. The intended communication in drama is not the entertaining value of the strange stories that are told but what those stories teach or illustrate. And, like other stories in the Bible, the focus of apocalyptic literature is not on the details but on the big concept the vision is explaining.[33]

---

[30] J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature:* Third edition. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2016) Electronic version; np http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/ZTAwMHh3d19fMTIyOTUxMV9fQU41?sid=cc0e1592-56d6-4a7f-bb6c-db0d521a4632@sessionmgr101&vid=2&format=EK&rid=1 Retrieved 8 August 2018.

[31] William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967) p. 91

[32] Ladd, p. 62

[33] It is not my intention in this lecture to focus on the theology of apocalyptic literature such as is found in the book of Revelation. However, it does greatly simplify the interpretation of the book when one understands that the major points of Revelation can be summarized in

Dramatic Stories

There are least three kinds of stories found in the Bible that are non-literal in nature.

Fable

A fable is a story in which animals and other inanimate objects are attributed human characteristics and activities. In other words, animals speak and act like humans. Unlike most religions which are rich in fables, the Bible contains only two true fables. After Abimelech had killed his brothers and then attempted to crown himself king, Jotham, the only surviving brother, shouted down to them from a nearby hill a story about the trees getting together to select a king. They offered the position to the olive tree, the fig tree and the grape vine and they all rejected it. Finally they persuaded the thorn bush to be their king. Jotham then made a comparison about the way the Shecabites had treated the family of Jerub-Baal's family (Judges 9:1-20).[34] Fables are obviously fictional but can communicate very effective messages, as is demonstrated by these two fables.

Allegory

This is c. Ezekiel gives an allegory about a mighty eagle that broke off the top of a cedar tree and carried it to a foreign country and planted it (17:1-14). This represented Nebuchadnezzar carrying away the king of Judah to Babylon. Paul also gives a rather complicated allegory in which Sarah and Hagar are the two main characters. Sarah represents the city of Jerusalem that is above or spiritual freedom, whereas Hagar represents Mount Sinai and the Law and the current Jerusalem which was characterized by bondage.[35] As with other dramatic language, the message of the allegory is in the specific points of comparison that are explained.

---

four simple statements referred to in an earlier footnote. Such points would have been as useful for the people in John's day as they are for readers today.

[34] The other fable is about King Amaziah who sent a message to King Jehoash of Israel inviting him to a meeting. Jehoash replied back by telling a story about a thistle in Lebanon who sent a message to the cedar to give his daughter in marriage to the thistle's son but a wild beast came along and trampled the thistle underfoot. This was a warning to King Amaziah not to try to fight against him (2 Kings 14:8-10).

[35] At least one of Jesus' parables functions more like an allegory than a true parable. Normally parables make one point and that point is based upon the overall story. However, the Parable of the Tares describes various kinds of soil on which the seeds fell. This

Parable

A parable is a story that is used to illustrate a moral principle or truth.[36] A parable is true-to-life in the sense that the story could have happened but is not necessarily a true story. They "give concrete form to abstract truths" and also "turn truths into images so that the hearers are able to picture them and remember them clearly."[37] Jesus was the master of parable usage but he was not the first person to use them. Nathan told David a parable about a rich man who took his poor neighbor's lamb and used it to prepare a feast for his rich visitor (2 Samuel 12:1-13). This story opened the eyes of David and caused him to repent. Jesus told stories about farming, fishing, business, weddings, treasures, masters and servants, rich people, food and other topics. Most of these stories illustrate the kingdom of God which was characterized by love, perseverance, faith, watchfulness, compassion and other qualities.

Parables are dramatic not necessarily in the sense that they are exciting or sensational. They are dramatic in the sense that they use oral drama to create pictures in the mind of the hearers. The most important characteristic of a parable is that, unlike the allegory, which makes comparative points at multiple points in the story, the point a parable illustrates comes from the whole story. For example, the story of the Parable of the Ten Virgins takes up 13 verses (Mathew 25:1-13). However, the point that is being made is not related to who or what the groom and the oil and the virgins represent. The point of the story is explained by Jesus in verse 13: *"Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."* One of the key contributions of the study of parables is that they provide a method of interpretation that is parallel to the way dramatic language should be interpreted. Do not worry about the details. Focus on the big picture.

---

illustrates the various ways that people respond to the gospel (Matthew 13:2-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:5-15).

[36] The word "parable" comes from two Greek words *para*, meaning beside or alongside of and *ballo*, which means to cast or throw. By joining those two words, a parable is a story that is thrown alongside of another point a person is making. For example when Jesus was talking about the way the kingdom would grow he threw alongside of his general teaching about kingdom growth a story about the mustard seed and another story about the yeast being put in a lump of dough. These "thrown beside" stories help to teach that the kingdom would grow slowly but eventually the kingdom would become very large.

[37] Joe Kapolyo, "Matthew," *Africa Bible Commentary*, General Editor: Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers, 2006) p. 1136

The Less Appreciated Dramatic Language

Most of the examples of dramatic language I have presented so far are generally recognized and have generated a reasonable amount of literature among Biblical scholars. However, the four types of dramatic language below have not received as much attention. It is these types of dramatic language that have generated the title of this lecture: "Dramatic Language: The Underappreciated Genre of Biblical Literature." This lecture is designed to point out issues related to lesser known examples of dramatic language and stimulate more research.

Dramatic Events

There are a number of historical events that are described in dramatic language. For example, Micah 3:12 makes this statement: *"Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they look for the LORD's support and say, 'Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us.'"* This is not figurative language. It is a straightforward description of corruption that was common in the land at that time. However, the next statement is a dramatic statement: *"Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets"* (3: 12). This is not a literal statement that Jerusalem will become a farm that will be plowed. Mount Zion, where Jerusalem is located is a stony hill, and would basically be useless for agriculture. This statement is simply a warning that there is going to be massive destruction to the city of Jerusalem. Whether it will have a farm planted over the temple site is an incidental issue arising from the dramatic language and is irrelevant. The main point is the total destruction of the city. This is an example of the general use of dramatic language in the description of a historic or prophetic event.

A more extended illustration is the fall of the king of Babylon which is described in Isaiah 14:3-23. Because of certain phrases in this prophecy, it sounds like a typical view of the fall of Satan. Note these phrases:

- *The realm of the dead below is all astir to meet you at your coming; it rouses the spirits of the departed to greet you—all those who were leaders in the world; it makes them rise from their thrones—all those who were kings over the nations. They will all respond, they will say*

to you, "You also have become weak, as we are; you have become like us." (14:9-10).

- *"How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations!"* (14:12).
- *"You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'"* (14:13-14).

These verses state that the king will be welcomed in the realm of the dead by those kings who have preceded him in death. The king thought he was so mighty that he was the ruler of heaven but he has fallen from heaven. The proper interpretation of this passage is that this is a dramatic description of the fall of the King of Babylon. The previously dead kings did not literally welcome him to the place of the dead. He had not literally been cast down from heaven. There may have been a sense in which his downfall was considered similar to that of Satan[38] but this downfall is simply dramatic language used to describe the fall of this powerful man. It is a verbal drama created to give a graphic description of the disgraceful fall of this powerful king.[39]

Mini-Dramatic Prophecies

In addition to brief historical statements we also find dramatic language used in prophecy. We have already looked at a number of scriptures that are prophetic or predictive in nature. However, the following are brief statements that predict some event in the future that are so brief that their dramatic nature could easily be overlooked.

---

[38] E. Price, *Isaiah*, in *Beacon Bible Commentary, The Major Prophets*, Volume IV (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1969) p. 75. Price says "at best it is only typically satanic."

[39] There is an equally dramatic prophecy against the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28:11-19 which many also believe is a description of the fall of Satan. This person is described as a *"model of perfection"* (28:12), *"in Eden the garden of God"* (28:13), *"anointed as a guardian cherub"* (28:14), *"I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God"* (28:16), and *"I threw you to the earth"* (28:17). This does have many characteristics of Satan and sounds like the common view of Satan's fall. On closer analysis, it can be demonstrated that this is simply a dramatic description of the fall of the king of Tyre which occurred not too many years before this time.

Zephaniah was a prophet who ministered to several kings of Judah around 660 BC, well before the Babylonian Captivity. He quoted the Lord as saying in 3:7 that he was going to cut off the nations of the world and the cities of the world are going to be destroyed and *"no one will be left—no one at all."* In 3:8 he says *"The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger."* And then the Lord says in the next verse: *"Then will I purify the lips of the people, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder."* This appears to be a contradiction. How would it be possible for the whole world to be destroyed and then the Lord purify the lips of the people? If all are destroyed, whose lips are going to be purified?

However, when one views these sentences as a mini-drama, it is understandable. A drama does not have to be logical nor have all the parts fit together in a nice realistic package. It simply creates an image which produces the main point of the drama. In this case, the Lord is simply saying that he is going to use all that the people of Israel and Judah will go through to purify and make them a better people.

Jeremiah gives us another example of a dramatic prophecy when he declares at one point:

> *For this is what the LORD says: "David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of Israel, nor will the Levitical priests ever fail to have a man to stand before me continually to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to present sacrifices."* (33:17-18).

This is a simple statement affirming that there will always be a son of David on the throne in Jerusalem. There is now no king in Israel. There has not been a king in Israel for over 2000 years. Even during the intertestamental period, there were hundreds of years when there was no king on the throne in Jerusalem. In addition, there has been no sacrificial system in operation since Titus destroyed the temple in AD 70. So how could this prophecy be true of a descendant of David always being on the throne and a priest always being in Jerusalem to make offerings? These things do not appear to be factually true.

There are four fairly common ways of interpreting this difficult passage.[40] However, I will only focus on the dramatic interpretation. These positive

[40] The first three interpretations are: 1) Jeremiah made a mistake in this prophecy. This is not acceptable to evangelicals and others who have a high view of inspiration. 2) This was a

statements about Israel's future and particularly about having a son of David on the throne are all dramatic language. This was a mini-drama. It was like all other dramas we have been examined, in that the truth is not in the dramatic language but in the overall truth being portrayed in the drama. This taught that God was with them and would always take care of them.

The context prefers this interpretation. Jeremiah gave this prophecy shortly before Nebuchadnezzar defeated Judah and took away most of the people to Babylon. The early verses of this chapter, particularly verses 4-5 are clearly talking about the battle for Jerusalem that preceded the Babylonian Captivity. Verse 7 says *"I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and will rebuild them as they were before."* There is a declaration that positive city sounds will be heard in Jerusalem again (33:10-11). In the immediate preceding context, there does appear to be a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah (33:15-16). However, that is just a continuation of the prophecy declaring that there will always be a king on the throne and priests in the temple. In fact, Jeremiah quotes the Lord as saying that this promise to always have a son of David on the throne is as strong as God's covenant with day and night (33:20-22, 25-26). Therefore, the specific words here about David always having a descendant on the throne and priests functioning in the temple, should not be interpreted literally, as specific declarations of God about the throne of Israel or the temple in Jerusalem. They should be viewed as if they are words in a drama that are designed to support the general overall point of the drama. In this case, the overall point Jeremiah is making here is that although the people of Judah are going to suffer and be taken into captivity, they should not worry. God is going to restore them to their land and things are going to return to normal.[41]

Dramatic Exhortations

The Biblical writers also use dramatic language to encourage and exhort people. In fact, that seems to be one of the major reasons for using dramatic

---

conditional statement even though the condition is not found in the immediate context. The prophecy would have been understood to be conditioned upon their repentance and loyalty to the Lord. 3) This is an eschatological statement. Some time in the future, there will be a period when the kingdom will begin again and the sacrificial system will restart and from that time forward, there will be a king on the throne and the sacrificial system will continue.

[41]There are many other examples of these kinds of mini-dramas that contain serious interpretive problems if taken literally. See: Isaiah 45:17, Jeremiah 25:15-32, Zechariah 8, Zephaniah 1:2-3, and Micah 1:3-4, 4:4.

language. For example, Isaiah, writing to people in Jerusalem who were facing an uncertain future, says *"The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days, when the LORD binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted"* (30:26). Is this a literal prediction that there will be a time when the moon is as bright as the sun and the sun will be as bright as the normal sunshine combined from seven days? This is unlikely, even in an eschatological sense. This was most likely given to the people in winter, when the weather was very cold and such a bright moon and warm sun would have been very attractive. However, this statement was not intended to be a literal prophecy of an astronomical phenomenon. It was simply a dramatic statement designed to encourage people that God was with them and that God was going to take care of them.

Micah, who prophesied primarily to Judah but also to Israel and Samaria, makes a very brief exhortation in 1:13: *"You who live in Lachish, harness fast horses to the chariot"* (1:13). Lachish was a town in Judah near the Philistine border. Micah tells them that they had been instrumental in leading Jerusalem away from the Lord. Therefore, they were to get ready to lead the way of repentance back to God. The statement *"harness fast horses to the chariot"* is a dramatic way of urging them to get ready to repent. When one was harnessing up the horses to a chariot, they were preparing to go somewhere. Now, Micah is simply telling them, in a dramatic way, to prepare to repent.

A similar illustration of this is found in a statement Jesus made in Luke 22:36. Near the end of his ministry, when Jesus was preparing his disciples for the persecution they were going to face, he said *"But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one."* (Luke 22:36). On the surface, it appears that Jesus was urging his disciples to buy a sword, which would imply his approval of the use of violence. However, when Peter later produced a sword and struck the high priest's servant, Jesus rebuked him, saying, *"Put your sword back in its place . . . for all who draw the sword will die by the sword"* (Matthew 26:52). The statement about buying a sword was a dramatic statement. The point of this mini-drama was not to tell them to buy a sword. That was drama. The real point was that they should prepare to face violence in the

future.[42] And Jesus had already told them how to face violence (Matthew 5:38-41, 43-47; Luke 6:35).

These examples demonstrate that the biblical writers certainly used dramatic language in their exhortations and other communications.

Dramatic Sentences

I have attempted to demonstrate that the Bible is filled with various kinds of drama ranging from long complicated apocalyptic visions to small stories that function as oral dramas. The smallest version of dramatic language in the Bible is the dramatic sentence. This is a one-sentence statement that creates a mental drama in the mind of the hearer. Such sentences may be fictional or literal. As with all other drama, the truth that is being communicated is not in the details of the dramatic language but in the truth such language is trying to illustrate.

A good example is Isaiah 52:7: *"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"* This is clearly a mini-drama or dramatic statement. The point is not the shape or size or attractiveness of the feet of the actual proclaimers of good news. This is just a dramatic way of saying that it is a very good and noble and even a beautiful thing, to take good news to people. This clear example of a dramatic sentence should help interpret other dramatic sentences.

Because of his personality and in light of the circumstances it is quite easy to get the point Jeremiah is making, even with the dramatic language, when he says, *"Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people"* (9:1). Jeremiah is often known as the "weeping prophet." However, a few verses later, Jeremiah quotes God as saying, *"I will weep and wail for the mountains and take up a lament concerning the wilderness grasslands"* (9:10). It is unlikely God was sitting on his throne, literally weeping over this situation. This is an anthropomorphical way of saying God was disappointed or grieved over the conditions he was seeing. The dramatic lamenting and weeping paints a graphic picture of God being disappointed

[42] This interpretation is further supported by the fact that after this event, there was no record in the Bible of any of the disciples or followers of Jesus ever possessing a sword or using any other form of violence. However, there are abundant records of them facing violence and never responding to violence with violence.

in such a way that Jeremiah's readers could easily identify with it. Such dramatic language communicates in a much more emotional and forceful manner than if God had simply said, "I am disappointed in you."

The early part of Joel describes a twin disaster, a locust plague along with a devastating drought. Several times after that, the Lord says in different ways that he is going to solve that problem. He is going to *"take pity on his people"* (2:18), promises to send them *"grain, new wind and oil"* (2:19), drive out the locusts (2:20), give them the *"autumn showers . . . and spring rains"* (2:23), and will repay them *"for the years the locusts have eaten"* (2:25). The Lord then says they will *"praise the name of the Lord your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed"* (2:26, 27). Joel prophesied in the ninth or eighth century BC. However, there are several times when Israel and Judah were said to have suffered shame after this, including shame because of God's judgment related to idolatry, detestable practices and unfaithfulness (Jeremiah 9:19; 46:12; Ezekiel 23:29; 44:13; Daniel 9:7), shame over an agricultural disaster similar to Joel's (Jeremiah 12:13), and shame because foreigners had entered the temple (51:51). There are also prophecies of shame coming upon God's people for rejecting God's word (Jeremiah 8:9), forsaking the Lord (17:13), engaging in detestable acts (Ezekiel 7:8, 18), practicing prostitution (23:29 – probably a figurative reference to idolatry), engaging in violence (Obadiah 1:10), and making people drunk in order to see their nakedness (Habakkuk 2:16). How do you explain such shame when Joel had quoted the Lord as saying they would never suffer shame again? Was Joel simply wrong in attributing these words to God? Was this a conditional statement? No, this statement is simply a typical use of verbal drama. It created a mental picture of God removing the shame of poverty and starvation from them. Thus, this is not a literal prediction about Israel suffering shame in the future but a general statement assuring the people in Joel's day that the shame associated with the locust plague and drought, was gone and God had no plans of reinstating it.

Zechariah makes a similar statement when he quotes the Lord as saying, *"I will defend my house against marauding forces. Never again will an oppressor overrun my people, for now I am keeping watch"* (9:8). The events in Zechariah 9 occurred after the completion of the rebuilding of the temple which took place in 516 BC. We have little historical material in the Old Testament to confirm this because there were few canonical documents written after this time. However, the nation of Israel was captured by

Alexander the Great in about 333 BC.[43] The nation was overrun again by Antiochus Epiphanes in about 165.[44] It was conquered without much violence again by Pompey in 63 BC[45] and it was finally overrun and completely destroyed in AD 70 by Titus.[46] What then does Zechariah's statement mean? Was Zechariah simply wrong in quoting the Lord making this statement? The better explanation is that that this was a verbal one-sentence drama—a picture of God driving away the enemies of his people and keeping them safe. The condition of Zechariah's people in the recent past had been traumatic and appalling. Thus this "never again" statement was a dramatic not a predictive declaration of God's care for his people in the future.

Malachi quotes God as saying, *"I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated"* (1:2 - later quoted by Paul in Romans 9:13). Did God really hate Esau in the sense we think of the word hate? There are other possible exegetical explanations for this shocking statement based upon linguistic and cultural factors. However, ultimately this was a dramatic statement, intended to stress the kind favors God did for Jacob but not intending to imply that God actually detested Esau. The truth is in the overall point not the specific implications of the dramatic sentence.

Jesus also used this kind of dramatic language. After a busy day in the temple, he and his disciples climbed the small Mount of Olives on their way to sleep in Bethany. The disciples had earlier asked Jesus some questions about the temple. Jesus then pointed to the temple directly across the Kidron Valley, shining in the beauty of the late afternoon sun and said, "*'Do you see all these great buildings?' replied Jesus. 'Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down'"* (Mark 13:2). Was there literally no single stone left upon another after the destruction of the temple in AD 70? There is evidence even today that there are still some stones on top of one another in the foundation of Herod's Temple. Jesus' statement created a little drama in the minds of his apostles about temple stones falling over one another that dramatically underscored the certain

[43]Isaac Broydé, Kaufmann Kohler, Israel Lévi, "Alexander the Great," *Jewish Encyclopedia*. http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1120-alexander-the-great. Retrieved 16 August 2018.
[44] R. D. Culver, "Abomination of Desolation," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, editor: Merrill Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) Pradis 2.0 np
[45] Danny McCain, *Notes on New Testament Introduction* (Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2005) p. 54
[46] Robert Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974) p. 21

destruction of the temple. It was not the hyperbolic language in the "not one stone" statement that was important but the bigger point that the temple was going to be completely destroyed.

Biblical scholars, especially those with a high view of inspiration, have struggled with such difficult statements and attempted to find honest ways to explain them. They sometimes viewed them as conditional statements, even if the condition is not specifically stated. More often, they have described them as eschatological in nature—to be fulfilled some later time in history. However, the interpretive theory that seems to best explain all of the evidence is that these sentences are dramatic statements that use bite-size oral dramas to offer hope and comfort and give direction and wisdom to people in a way that they would have easily understood and remembered.

Observations and Implications of the Study

Having identified and briefly described the numerous genres and dramatic passages that were mentioned above, I will now attempt to summarize this study by making some observations and outline some of its implications.

General Observations about Dramatic Language

There is more dramatic literature in the Bible than the average person believes.

Without identifying every dramatic statement, this lecture has demonstrated that there is much dramatic literature in the Bible, including books of drama, large and small visions of apocalyptic drama, dramatic figures of speech, dramatic prophecies and exhortations and even dramatic sentences. Once one's eyes are opened to the many different types of dramatic language found in the Bible, one can see it in many places. As Neville states, "Dramatic recitative in romance and in history, dramatic poems and dialogs (in the Bible), are everywhere."[47] The recognition and appreciation of the many examples of dramatic literature in the Bible is an important step in understanding the many messages found in the Bible.

Certain sections of the Bible use more dramatic language than others.

From the examples in this lecture, one can see that dramatic literature seems to be used more in poetic language though not exclusively. The prophets contain a lot of poetic literature, so it is not surprising to see more

[47] Neville, p. 40

examples of dramatic literature in the prophets. Though this requires more research, dramatic literature also appears to be used more in the Hebrew portions of the Bible than in the Greco-Roman portions. Paul and Luke are the primary examples of a more Greco-Roman way of thinking. Though reared in a Greco-Roman setting, Paul was a Jew and does use dramatic language. In fact Romans 9 – 11 have many examples of figurative and dramatic language. On the other hand, Luke was probably a Gentile. I have discovered no examples of dramatic language in his writings except those where he quotes someone else. For example, Luke preserves the shocking statement made by Jesus: *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple"* (Luke 14:26). This is a clear example of dramatic literature.[48]

An important characteristic of dramatic language is it seeks to surprise or shock and create wonder.

Most examples of dramatic language we have noted so far present images that are not normal. The response to such images ranges from mild surprise to shock. Surprise is a good tool for learning and memory.[49] Figurative language and drama specifically are a good way to get people's attention. And once you have captured their attention, they will listen and learn better. Thus, dramatic language is not a "problem" that must be solved in Biblical study but one of the positive teaching techniques of the ancient world.

Linked to the idea of surprise and shock is the related concept of wonder. Children are often characterized by imagination and fantasy. They enjoy thinking about a "make believe" world. One of the most important things drama does is to appeal to that sense of fantasy and wonder. Drama in the Bible gives the Bible student the chance to be children again—to think dramatic and preternatural thoughts that are outside of our normal reality but within the realm of that which entertains or gives pleasure.

---

[48] Interestingly this seems to be the same thought about which Matthew chose to use a dynamic equivalent translation rather than a literal translation when he wrote. *"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me"* (Matthew 10:37). Matthew, a Jew, chose to remove the dramatic language and Luke, a Gentile, chose to leave it in his translation. Luke probably chose the literal translation because he did not feel comfortable making such an interpretive decision with his limited or non-existent knowledge of Hebrew.

[49] See Daniela Fenker and Hartmut Schütze, "Learning by Surprise," in *Scientific American*. December 17, 2008, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/learning-by-surprise/ Retrieved 14 August 2018.

Dramatic language takes liberty with reality in order to make its point.

Drama often includes fiction. However, fictional stories go beyond just entertainment. They help underscore absolute moral values and life truths in powerful way. The story of the Good Samaritan was most likely a fictional story (Luke 10:30-37). However, it makes a challenging point about what it means to be a good neighbor. Even the most accurate historical dramas have to create fictional bridges from one known fact to the other. Therefore, one can seldom separate fiction from drama. Rather than trying to deny the fiction associated with drama, one should embrace it and use it like parables and other literary fictional genres.

The modern world is filled with science fiction literature and movies. This interest in the "other reality" gives writers a chance to use their imagination and creativity. Such creative media appeals to those who like such things.

Science fiction is not unique to the secular world. It has been used to teach Christian principles for centuries. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*,[50] first published in 1678, was an imaginary story outside the realm of reality. It was about a man named Christian who was on a journey to a heavenly city but encountered many strange creatures and events along the way. The things he experienced are parallel to many things Christians face in their Christian journey. *Pilgrim's Progress* is actually an effective discipleship tool written in a dramatic fashion. C. S. Lewis was also a master writer of dramatic fantasy stories. His *Chronicles of Narnia* is a seven-book series on the unique experiences children encountered in the very unreal world called Narnia. They are filled with fantasy that includes talking animals, strange creatures and the ability of children to enter Narnia through a closet in an old house. Narnia represents a fantasy land that presents a world of good and evil. By reading the books carefully, one can see Christian principles taught in them such as courage, obedience, overcoming temptation and perseverance.[51] Recently, the phenomenon of the "Left Behind" book and movie series co-authored by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins demonstrated how attractive this fantasy format is to the modern world. It dramatizes the

[50] John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to That Which is to Come,* (London: Nath. Ponder at the Peacock, 1678). https://books.google.com.ng/books?hl=en&lr=&id=-7U-AAAAYAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR1&dq=john+bunyan+pilgrim%27s+progress&ots=6hDg-sCKwT&sig=b1JJEug0GhM9r65Kexljba0Zpws&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=john%20bunyan%20pilgrim's%20progress&f=false Retrieved 17 August 2018.

[51] For more information on this, see the Chronicles of Narnia website at http://www.narnia.com/us/. Retrieved 16 August 2018.

apocalyptic events in the Bible and especially those in Revelation that relate to the future. They made a lot of money out of Christians' curiosity.[52]

Dramatic language overlaps with and utilizes the "story telling" genre.

Story-telling is one of the oldest communication techniques. Stories create interest; stories increase understanding; stories aid application; stories prolong memory; stories enhance identification with the lessons the story teaches. It can be argued that stories are the most natural teaching technique. Dramas are basically stories. Smaller dramatic sentences do not necessarily flesh out the details of the story. However, the brief words that make up the dramatic sentence create mental images in the mind of the hearer or reader. Therefore, we should interpret dramatic literature similar to the way we interpret the stories in the Bible

Advantages of Understanding Dramatic Language

The study of figurative language is not new to Biblical scholarship. However, there appears to be a dearth of research on the more subtle figurative language I have identified as dramatic language. There are several advantages to understanding this phenomenon.

Dramatic language aids the interpreter in focusing on the big picture of Biblical passages rather than incidental details.

Oral societies tend to use more words to make a point; in other words they tend to be "wordy." They take the necessary time to enhance their communication by describing them from several points of view and also using multiple illustrations. However, the main point is not what the illustration or the drama says but what it is pointing toward. What is important is the big picture—the overall point being made. If we fail to understand this, we will consistently focus on the image or figure and miss the main message. This is the same way we interpret parables and other didactic stories. The point of a parable is what the story as a whole teaches, the big picture, not what the individual details of the story explain.

Dramatic language helps solve many difficult interpretive problems.

Every Biblical student recognizes the Bible has a number of difficult interpretive questions. These include contradictions, incorrect facts, sequence issues and other interpretive problems.

[52] For more information on this series and other works by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins see the Left Behind website as http://www.leftbehind.com/. Retrieved 16 August 2018.

The extensive use of metaphors and dramatic language and the use of cultural linguistic patterns mean that much of the Bible that many Christians take as literal should not be viewed as such but as a figurative description of a specific truth. My research has convinced me that many things that some Christians see as prophecies or predictions of the future are not really predictive prophecies. They were statements written in a genre that was designed to instruct and encourage the faithful in the days they were written and the original recipients understood them very well.

For example, when Jesus was teaching about his second coming, he challenged his followers to learn the lesson of the fig tree. As soon as one sees the new leaves coming, they know that summer is near. He then says, *"Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened"* (Matthew 24:33-34). Although Craig Keener states that the *"all these things"* refers only to the "desolation of the temple,"[53] a more natural interpretation of the passage flowing from the preceding context suggests that *"all these things"* includes Jesus' second coming and all that it entails. However, it has been 2000 years and Jesus has still not returned. How do we explain this? William Barclay says "Few passages confront us with greater difficulties than this."[54] However, the answer is more easily understood by viewing this statement as dramatic language. The real message is not the precise meaning of the dramatic sentence which seems to outline a sequence of events related to the second coming of Jesus but a stress on the certainty of Jesus's return to the earth.

Jesus makes another startling statement in Luke 12:49-51: *"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! . . . Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division."* On the surface, it appears that Jesus was wanting to disrupt the peace on the earth by bringing some kind of destructive fire. The great French theologian Frederick Godet denies that this is the fire of the Holy Spirit as some of the fathers believed but sees it as "spiritual excitement."[55] However, when one

[53] Craig Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999) p. 589

[54] William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Revised Edition, Volume 2, in *The Daily Study Bible Series* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975) p. 314

[55] Fredrick L. Godet, *Gospel According to St. Luke*. Fourth Edition, Translated from the Second French Edition by E. W. Shalders (New York: Funk and Wagnalls 1890). Pradis 2.0 np

views this through lens of dramatic language, this is simply an example of Jesus urging people to be prepared for the trouble they are going to face in the future.

Recognizing dramatic language avoids the overly technical scrutiny of modern western precise thinking.

All languages are filled with figurative and dramatic language. However, I have observed that the western world tends to be more precise in its communications and less dependent upon dramatic language. Good theologians parse and conjugate Greek or Hebrew grammar to detect the slightest nuances of the language. They also stress order and sequence and logic. Thus they may see in a written document full of dramatic language more than it was intended to communicate. However, ancient literature and even many contemporary languages still have a much more general approach to language. In other words, language expresses the general will of the communicator and one must not be overly precise in trying to understand the fine shades of the communication. For example, in poetic and figurative and dramatic passages, one should not be looking for absolute rational and logical conformity. There are enough very clear non-dramatic passages that one should not be confused about the teachings of the Bible. As a theologian, I would never wish to undermine the importance of studying the original biblical language and paying attention to details of Greek and Hebrew grammar. A good understanding of the original language does provide great insight into the fine shades of Biblical exegesis. However, this research suggests that more attention should be paid to the bigger general truths of the Bible and less emphasis placed on the minute controversial issues arising from an overly literal interpretation.

Potential Problems with Dramatic Language

Like all good things, the recognition and careful interpretation of dramatic language in the Bible can be overused and abused. I will mention only three overlapping potential abuses.

Dramatic language can encourage greater subjectivity in Biblical interpretation.

The goal of interpreting the Bible should be to be as objective as possible. Interpretation does not depend upon a person's feelings or background. Though there are many applications, there is only one correct interpretation of any passage. With few exceptions the correction interpretation is what

was in the mind of the writer as he wrote and in the minds of the first readers as they read those documents. Drama tends to make subtle points and emphasizes truths that are buried in the dramatic language. Attempting to discern the truth behind a figure of speech or a dramatic statement is a subjective experience because seldom is the meaning of the dramatic language given. Therefore, there is much subjectivity in determining what the real point of the drama is. That means different interpreters often arrive at different interpretations.

For example, when Jesus was preparing his followers to face persecution, he said: *"You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. Everyone will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish"* (Luke 21:16-18). The language is quite straightforward when Jesus says that they will be betrayed by relatives and hated by many people. But then Jesus adds this rather dramatic phrase: *"But now a hair of your head will perish."* That is obviously not a literal statement. It is very possible that a few hairs may have fallen out during periods of persecution so the question is what was Jesus really teaching with this dramatic non-literal phrase? Since there is no interpretation of hairs falling out of the head given, the interpretation becomes subjective. Does Jesus mean that they will suffer no physical trauma? Do the hairs represent the body so that this means that they will not be killed? Does it mean that their faith will not be compromised? Interpreters must use all the interpretive skills at their disposal including their understanding of grammar, words, culture, context and theology to determine the meaning of that dramatic statement. However, even without examining this in Greek, it is quite easy to understand what this dramatic statement means. It simply means that though people are going to hate them, God is going to protect them.

Interpreting the Bible in a subjective manner is something one wants to avoid as much as possible. Most of the Bible is quite clear and easily understood. It is when a person strays into allegorizing the Bible or using other subjective interpretations that confusion arises. Conscientious Bible students must not allow the subjectivity required in interpreting dramatic language to influence their interpretation of more objective passages of Scripture.

Overusing the dramatic language genre can change Bible interpretation to whatever the reader wants.

By accepting that dramatic language is not focusing on the literal interpretation of that statement, one can use that principle to remove from the Bible practically anything that is difficult to understand or practice in our modern world. In other words, once a person starts down the road of denying the literal meaning of a passage, that is a slippery slope. That practice can open up the door for him or her to ignore other unpopular or convicting statements in the Bible and simply attribute them to "dramatic language." This temptation must be resisted. Most of the Bible is not written in dramatic or figurative language and should be interpreted literally. One should only attempt to use the guidelines for interpreting dramatic literature when there is clear evidence that a passage falls into that category.

The de-emphasis on literal interpretation of dramatic literature can be viewed as reducing Biblical authority.

There is an ideological battle between those who believe the Bible is true in all it affirms and other theologians who believe the Bible is simply a collection of religious writings, including myths and other ancient fictional beliefs. Many in the latter group believe the value of religious writings is not to teach about God so he can be worshipped but to understand the evolution of religion which has influenced the whole world. The discussion related to the use of dramatic language in the Bible should not be viewed in terms of these two approaches. Attempting to understanding dramatic language is a linguistic exercise and not an attempt to weaken the authority of the Scriptures. In fact, it is designed to strengthen the authority of the Bible by making sure that every word and every metaphor and every dramatic statement or act is understood correctly. And the more these things are understood, the better traditional orthodox interpreters can get to the truth that they respect so much.

In other words, an overuse or misuse of dramatic language may be used to undermine the authority of Scripture and the Christian faith. This must be avoided.

The African Connection

One thing that has helped me see and understand more clearly the dramatic language found in the Bible is living and teaching in Nigeria for thirty

years. Nigerians tend to use a lot of non-literal language as well. This language is used to teach moral and other life-building lessons. These are often found in proverbs, stories and dramatic statements which could all be considered dramatic language. I will give an example from each of these three categories.

Dramatic Proverb

An Ngas proverb says, "If your friend is a monkey, your stick will never get stuck in a tree."[56] This proverb paints a picture of a person throwing a stick into a mango tree only to see his stick jam in the tree's branches. However, if you have a monkey for a friend, the monkey can easily climb the tree and throw down your stick for you. The real point of the proverb is not to encourage people to get pet monkeys and train them but the value of friendship. The fact that dramatic and even fictional language is used in this proverb is inconsequential. The unchanging truth presented in that proverb is the value of friends.

Dramatic Story

One of the first African traditional stories I heard after coming to Nigeria was a story about a tortoise and some birds. I have only heard the story told in Pidgin English and it does not sound quite as authentic in proper English.

One day Mr. Tortoise saw the birds flying up to heaven every day. When they returned they had full bellies because there was plenty food in heaven. Mr. Tortoise eventually convinced the birds to take him to heaven so he too could enjoy the food. When he got there he ate plenty of food and was so happy that he refused to go back home that night. When the birds flew back to heaven the next day, they discovered Mr. Tortoise had eaten all of the food. The story teller says "De bird dey vex well well." The tortoise was now ready to go back home so he asked the birds to take him back to the earth. The birds refused. Mr. Tortoise begged them but they still refused. Finally he asked them if they would go down to the earth and tell Madam Tortoise to put out the mattresses and pillows and other soft things into the compound. He would then jump down on them. The birds flew down to earth and told Madam Tortoise that Oga wanted her to put out all of the plows and hoes and stones and other heavy and dangerous objects into the compound. Madam did as she was told. Mr. Tortoise jumped out of heaven

[56] I received this proverb from Rev. Prof. Jotham Kangdim, a colleague in the Department of Religion and Philosophy, University of Jos.

and landed on all of these hard objects. The story teller then says, "Dis ting na scatter him back." So that is why the tortoise has a cracked back today.

The story is humorous and interesting and can be told many different ways. However, the dramatic story is only the vehicle for the truth. The point of the story is that greed and selfishness will lead to disastrous consequences. There is flexibility in the dramatic way the story is told but the permanent lesson of the story remains constant.

Dramatic Hyperbole

Nigerian public speakers are known for hyperbole and dramatic language and Nigerian audiences are accustomed to hearing and interpreting such. For example a preacher will say "No one will go from this church sick today. Everyone will be healed." In the western world, where language is more precise, the congregation would be appalled to see people limping from the service with their canes and rolling in their wheelchairs and even more shocked to see that the pastor still had a job the following week. From a western viewpoint, it appears the pastor in his declaration that all would be healed either deliberately lied or was guilty of false prophecy, both of which should disqualify him from spiritual service. However, the typical African Christian, upon hearing such statements, realizes the pastor is simply making a dramatic statement designed to encourage their faith. His absolute declaration is not a guaranteed prophecy but dramatic hyperbole.

These examples from African communication styles illustrate the point of this lecture—that dramatic language is sometimes fictional and hyperbolic. They also illustrate the fact that the various African worldviews are closer to the Hebrew worldview and thus Africans have greater ease in interpreting the Bible, especially the dramatic passages.

Research Review

Research Summary

The Hebrew people used non-literal language extensively. This is seen in the ordinary use of hyperbole and other metaphorical language in the Old Testament. It is also seen in the prophets' visions of strange creatures as well as dramatic actions like tying up the prophet with ropes or putting on rotten clothes or lying on one's side for months. One of the non-literal genres the prophets used was expanded hyperbole or what I have called dramatic language. They would tell these dramatic stories at times with

great details. Like parables, the details of these prophetic statements were designed to make the story interesting and teach general lessons not build theology. This genre reaches its climax in the book of Revelation where John explains what he saw and experienced, which was a very extensive drama, using visions, dramatic acts and dramatic language to convey the major teachings of the book. John's only way of passing those truths on was through writing which has led to the genre of literature we have discussed in this lecture. Though the dramatic language is inspired by God and completely trustworthy, it does not always mean what the words of the drama imply.

Research Contributions

This lecture has made some modest contributions to hermeneutics and Biblical literature in the following ways:

1. **Underscoring the Extent and Importance of the Dramatic Genre.** Every theologian and Bible student recognizes the Bible contains the genre of drama. However, this lecture has demonstrated that drama occupies a much greater place in Biblical literature than is often acknowledged and must have a greater emphasis in hermeneutics if the truths of the Bible are to be uncovered and understood.
2. **Identification of the Dramatic Sentence.** The dramatic sentence is the smallest example of dramatic language identified in this lecture. The dramatic sentence paints a small picture with its unusual language that illustrates the main point being made. This phenomenon of language has been recognized as hyperbole and other figures of speech earlier but not identified as drama.
3. **Stressing the Method of Interpreting Dramatic Literature.** This lecture has stressed that all dramatic language, including apocalyptic visions and even dramatic sentences, must be interpreted in a similar way. The model for interpreting drama is almost exactly the same as interpreting parables and other didactic stories. The interpreter should seek the major point being illustrated by the drama and not be misled or confused by the dramatic details.

Research Recommendations

This research has not resolved all the questions raised about non-literal dramatic language. The following are some additional areas of research recommended for this topic.

1. More research is necessary to determine which writers or which portions of the Bible have a greater tendency to use dramatic language.
2. More research is required to compare the extent dramatic language is used in poetic and prophetic literature compared to narrative literature.
3. More literature must be reviewed to determine what else has been written about the interpretation of that which I have called the dramatic sentence.
4. More research is required to look at dramatic literature within individual biblical authors like Isaiah or Zechariah or Paul.

Conclusion

It is the thesis of this lecture that dramatic language is no less truthful or authoritative than normal language. The truth is simply packaged in a more exciting and theatrical and perhaps non-western manner. To the extent Christians fail to understand the dramatic language of the Bible, to that extent they will continue to be confused and troubled by apparent contradictions, exaggerations and sequence anomalies and will continue to push difficult passages into an eschatological jumble of hopeful hermeneutics. To the extent biblical scholars and Christian theologians correctly understand the dramatic passages in the Bible, to that extent they will be able to understand the biblical truths that make up Christian theology. This will in turn help to confirm the Christian faith and offer assurance to Christians that their Bible is accurate and trustworthy and stylistically beautiful.

Works Cited

Alter, Robert and Frank Kermode (editors). *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987) https://books.google.com.ng/books?hl=en&lr=&id=O4hYlvzWui8C&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=related:e3IHClcuw0gJ:scholar.google.com/&ots=xUHtgEGV0F&sig=v-MSk4UL3tV094KNEEJIQ73jwOE&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false. Retrieved 16 August 2018

Arndt, William F. and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967)

Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Matthew*, Revised Edition, Volume 2, in *The Daily Study Bible Series* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press 1975)

Bartholomew, Craig G. and Michael W. Goheen. *The Drama of Scripture*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004). www.bakeracademic.com Retrieved 15 August, 2018

Broydé, Isaac, Kaufmann Kohler, Israel Lévi. "Alexander the Great," *Jewish Encyclopedia*. http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1120-alexander-the-great. Retrieved 16 August 2018

Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to That Which is to Come*, (London: Nath. Ponder at the Peacock, 1678) https://books.google.com.ng/books?hl=en&lr=&id=-7U-AAAAYAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR1&dq=john+bunyan+pilgrim%27s+progress&ots=6hDg-sCKwT&sig=b1JJEug0GhM9r65Kexljba0Zpws&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=john%20bunyan%20pilgrim's%20progress&f=false. Retrieved 17 August 2018

Collins, J. J. *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature:* Third edition. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2016) Electronic version http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/ZTAwMHh3d19fMTIyOTUxMV9fQU41?sid=cc0e1592-56d6-4a7f-bb6c-db0d521a4632@sessionmgr101&vid=2&format=EK&rid=1. Retrieved 8 August 2018

Culver, R. D. "Abomination of Desolation," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, editor: Merrill Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2002) Pradis 2.0

Davidson, Robert. *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, Volume 2, in *The Daily Study Bible Series*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985)

de Waard, Jan. "Biblical Metaphors and Their Translation," *The Translator*, Vol 25, Issue 1. https://doi.org/10.1177/026009357402500102. Retrieved 15 August 2018

Fenker, Daniela and Hartmut Schütze. "Learning by Surprise," *Scientific American*. December 17, 2008 https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/learning-by-surprise/. Retrieved 14 August 2018

Godet, Fredrick L. *Gospel According to St. Luke*. Fourth Edition, Translated from the Second French Edition by E. W. Shalders (New York: Funk and Wagnalls 1890) Pradis 2.0

Gromacki, Robert. *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1974)

Kapolyo, Joe. "Matthew," *Africa Bible Commentary*, General Editor: Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers, 2006)

Keener, Craig. *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999)

Ladd, G. E. "Apocalyptic" *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, editor: Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984)

Lewis, C. S. *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1947)

Lowth, Robert. "Of Dramatic Poetry (Lecture XXX)" *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, Translated from Latin by G. Gregory, (Andover: for Crocker and Bruster [Boston] and J. Leavitt [New York] 1829) https://books.google.com.ng/books?redir_esc=y&id=hdYMAAAAIAAJ&q=epithalamium#v=snippet&q=epithalamium&f=false. Retrieved 6 August 2018

McCain, Danny. *Notes on New Testament Introduction* (Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2005)

McCain, Danny. *Notes on Old Testament Introduction* (Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2002)

McCain, Danny and Craig Keener. *Understanding and Applying Scriptures*, (Bukuru, Africa Christian Textbooks, 2013)

McFadyen, J. E. "The Bible as Literature," *The Biblical World*, Vol. 16, No. 6 (Dec., 1900) https://www.jstor.org/stable/3136951. Retrieved 8 August 2018

McQuilken, J. Robertson. *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, (Chicago, Moody Press, 1983)

Neville, Ruby B. "Dramatic Elements in Hebrew Literature," *Christian Education*, Vol. 4, No. 2, The Association of Biblical Instructors in American Colleges and Secondary Schools (November, 1920), https://www.jstor.org/stable/41174306. Retrieved 8 August 2018

Merriam-Webster.com. n.d. https://www.merriam-webster.com/. Retrieved 16 August 2018

Price, E. Isaiah. *Beacon Bible Commentary, The Major Prophets*, Volume IV (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1969)

Smith, Donald K. *Creating Understanding*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992)

Taylor, John B. "Apocalyptic Literature," *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, editor: J. D. Douglas, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974)

Wendland, Ernst R. *Language, Society, and Bible Translation* (Cape Town: Bible Society of Africa, 1985)

www.leftbehind.com/. Retrieved 17 August 2018

www.narnia.com/us/. Retrieved 17 August 2018

www.smart-words.org/quotes-sayings/idioms-meaning.html. Retrieved 6 August 2018.