

“I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY.” A NARRATIVE CRITICAL APPROACH TO  
THE GOSPELS OF MARK AND JOHN WITH ATTENTION GIVEN TO JOSEPH  
OF ARIMATHEA

by

JONATHAN RIKARD BROWN

(Under the Direction of Wayne Coppins)

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the field of Narrative Criticism and its application to Biblical Literature. It zeroes in on the application of this method as it is applied to *The Gospel of Mark* and *the Gospel of John*. This is be done by examining the field of narrative criticism outside of the Bible, and then focusing on the two pioneering works in this area, mainly *Mark as Story* by David M. Rhoads, and *The Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* by R. Alan Culpepper. This thesis attempts to show how the results of this type of study do not contradict historical studies, and can in some case work to compliments other types of Biblical Criticism. This is done by examining the literary function of Joseph of Arimathea.

INDEX WORDS: Narrative Criticism, Mark, John, Joseph of Arimathea  
David M. Rhoads, R. Alan Culpepper

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JONATHAN RIKARD BROWN

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by

JONATHAN RIKARD BROWN

Major Professor: Wayne Coppins

Committee: Carolyn Jones Medine  
David S. Williams

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso  
Dean of the Graduate School  
University of Georgia  
May 2011

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Ollie Pumpkin Brown who set beside me many hours during the completion of this work. Without the reassurance of your purring as we worked I would have never completed this project.

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## INTRODUCTION

Narrative criticism has arisen in the field of biblical scholarship. This innovative approach looks to apply newer methods to help us gain insight into ancient texts. In this work one looks to the scriptures as one looks to a work of prose story telling. We hope to gain insight into how the author is using their writing to impact the reader. While the questions of history and genre remain important, these types of studies rely more on the text themselves, and how the readers relate to them on a one-on-one level. The narrative critic also pays the closest attention to the implied reader. In this thesis we will be introduced to this new form of biblical critique, and its application to the *Gospels of Mark and John*.

As we move forward we must see how one applies narrative criticism to the New Testament. Narrative criticism examines scripture as if it were literature. When working in this field one examines the content of the scripture along with the rhetoric and structure. The critic plays close attention as these features weave together to construct an entire work. Narrative criticism, a fairly new form of critique, is a step away from traditional historical studies. That is to say, the Narrative critic is less concerned with the author's original audience and more focused on seeing what the work communicates as a whole. Narrative criticism

still pays attention to these early questions of audience, but the general focus is placed on the work as a finished literary product.<sup>1</sup>

In this thesis, as in other works of narrative criticism performed on biblical literature, we will use the similar tools one engages with the works of Shakespeare and other well-known creators of literature. This can also be seen as an offshoot of literary criticism. Both forms engage works as literary products. The difference we will see comes in regards to the question of genre. Literary criticism considers the question heavily and how it varies from work to work. Narrative criticism appears after the question of genre has been engaged, and the work is found to be a piece of prose. Narrative criticism is conducted as a form of literary criticism. This strategy may seem off-putting since the literature we are engaging is connected with many religious and personal belief systems. We perform this work because the text exhibits some of the qualities we find in novels, short stories, and other works of prose. Biblical literature is a rich tapestry that contains similar features found in other literature such as characters, rhetoric, style, syntax, plot, imagery, setting tone, point of view, narrators, and many others. By engaging in narrative criticism of the Bible we must question these features the way any scholar of literature would approach their secular text.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to note that our work does not look to replace historical studies and can instead enter into a symbiotic relationship that benefits both

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<sup>1</sup> Resseguie 2005, 18-19.

<sup>2</sup> Resseguie 2005, 19.

forms. “The student of ancient literature can never have enough information about the languages, history, literary conventions and genres of the culture concerned. But this indispensable spade work can lay a base for several modes of interpretation, and some of the different ways that interpreters read a work of art today may prove more suggestive for theological interpretation than a historical scholarship which is less interested in the aesthetic.”<sup>3</sup> As narrative critics, our goal is not to replace older forms of study but to heighten them by our insights. We must also allow other forms of Biblical criticism to add to our own illumination.

What questions do we encounter as we continue our progress? The initial question a narrative critic engages is that of shape and structure. How does the story start? How does it reach its conclusion? Are there patterns within the framework of the story? If these patterns occur how do they construct motifs or patterns? What reasons could one story differ from others that work with the same setting and characters?<sup>4</sup> These are the narrative critics’ first set of questions. As they engage these ideas in relation to the Biblical works they are encountering, they lay the foundation for a deeper reading experience.

With the foundational questions posed, the narrative critic also engages the people found in the story, or the characters. “Characters, like us, reveal who they are in what they say and do.”<sup>5</sup> The way these characters use speech and action gives us a glimpse into their concerns and values. One must also note

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<sup>3</sup> Morgan 1988, 203

<sup>4</sup> Resseguie 2005, 19-20

<sup>5</sup> Resseguie 2005, 20

how the characters develop and grow as people, with special attention paid to the spiritual ramifications. The events that cause the changes in our characters are the point of focus. Are there scenes in which the reader can actually track and follow the characters' development? Narrative criticism also demands that we track how the characters interact, and what their language and tone implies in the varied interactions.<sup>6</sup> While this is only the second set of questions we have engaged in our introduction to narrative criticism we see how the critic's task is to look at the work as a patchwork quilt. One can focus on one patch, examine it thoroughly, and then pull back and take it in with the whole. This allows us to see a variety of complicated parts that construct a complex and beautiful whole.

Now one must engage the person telling the story to the reader, the narrator. The narrator provides us with the details we must analyze. The narrator gives characters their titles and descriptions. If we pay attention to how the narrator does this, we gain insight into the narrator's view of the characters. An example we can draw from the Bible is the portrayal of the disciples in *Mark*. The narrator displays the disciples as thick headed and easily distracted religious leaders. This is shown the reader by examining them next to Jesus. The narrator is the one who constructs this parallel and shapes the reader's view of the characters. The narrator is the one who gives the information in which a character is to be judged and assessed in relation to value and morals. The narrator determines what scenes are displayed, how the characters act in a given scene, and how to depict characters interacting with each other. The narrative

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<sup>6</sup> Resseguie 2005, 20

critic's job when engaging the narrator is to ask why the narrator works in the way he or she does.<sup>7</sup>

As our understanding of narrative criticism grows, we must answer questions that arise by viewing the Bible as a work of literature. Is it possible that this type of study, which applies the same technique with which one examines the work of Michael Chabon to the Bible, waters down the religious significance of the work? In *Biblical Interpretation* by Robert Morgan with John Barton we find that this might not be the case. Morgan and Barton state, "Religious aims remain the underlying concern in most biblical interpretations, and the 'literary turn' in some recent biblical scholarship is rich in the potential for sustaining religious faith."<sup>8</sup> If we fully engage narrative criticism, and allow other modes of thought to permeate our study, we see how certain themes develop strong theological points in ways one might have missed without the tools provided by this form of criticism.

We now return to our discussion of what the narrative critic engages in their work. This brings us to setting. By posing the question of the possible symbolic nature of the background in which a story takes place, illuminating points may be discovered. Narrative criticism also pays attention to how the progression of time works in the story.<sup>9</sup> An example of this is noting how the *Gospel of John* uses the festival of Passover as a chronological marker to give the reader information on the length of Jesus' ministry.

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<sup>7</sup> Resseguie 2005, 20-21

<sup>8</sup> Morgan 1988, 205

<sup>9</sup> Resseguie 2005, 21

This now brings us to how the narrative critic is to assess a story's conflict. The first question focuses on how the conflict developed, and this moves us to how the conflict is resolved. There are several different venues for conflict. In regards to the Gospels, the reader is often shown a conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. This in some instances develops into a conflict with society. To fully understand the conflict one must ask questions of points of view. While most times we understand the protagonist view, in this case Jesus, we must also ask questions that take us into the mind of the antagonist, the religious authorities. This gives a deeper understanding of the conflict portrayed and allows us to see the story we are engaging in a new light. This can sometime provide a more realistic view of the story. In our example if we try to identify with the religious authorities we can see why Jesus' teachings and actions could be seen as threatening. By engaging their point of view, the story takes on a new depth and can create a more realistic reading.<sup>10</sup>

Having engaged the tools of narrative criticism we can now ask is this approach helpful? A few examples have been provided to show how narrative critiques illuminate biblical text, but is there more this kind of work can provide? Several works that apply literary criticism to the Old Testament have produced fruitful pieces of scholarship. Some of these works are Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, Edwin M. Good's *Irony in the Old Testament*, and Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Poetry* and *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. These examples provide new frameworks with which to engage an Old Testament text. "It sharpens our sense

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<sup>10</sup> Resseguie 2005, 21

of their moral significance, and much of their religious value has always rested on that.”<sup>11</sup> If the Old Testament story can be illuminated by literary criticism, why should we not view the stories of Jesus as stories and apply narrative criticism. There is the possibility that our understanding and appreciation of the works will be heightened and deepened. This would most certainly be a worthy endeavor.

Before we engage a work from the Bible through the lens of narrative criticism we must first determine the strengths of this method and why we should use it. The first strength is the view of the work as a whole. This keeps us from compartmentalizing sections and allows us to see how the author developed them into a complete work. While this is not the route and form that the redaction critic would take, that does not mean we should dismiss this work entirely. The narrative critic seeks to understand the work in its final form.<sup>12</sup> This allows us to understand the impact on the reader to a fuller extent.

The next strength of narrative criticism as a method is how the text gains complexity by engaging it through a close reading. “The narrative critic attends to the nuance and interrelationships of texts: its structure, rhetorical strategies, character development, arresting imagery, setting, point of view, and symbolism to name a few.”<sup>13</sup> This does not however discount the notion of the implied reader. The narrative critic keeps thoughts about political and social situations the implied reader faced in the forefront. The narrative critic should be a student of different areas of criticism. This is because the narrative critic is expected to

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<sup>11</sup> Morgan 1988, 227

<sup>12</sup> Resseguie 2005 38-39.

<sup>13</sup> Resseguie 2005, 39.

take the journey of the implied reader. However, the narrative critic should be able to take this information from the text they are encountering with little help from outside sources.<sup>14</sup>

The final strength we will engage is the emphasis narrative criticism places on the reader. While engaging questions of point of view the narrative critic is enabled to gauge the reader's response to the text. By asking what point of view the narrator is placing upon the reader one can ascertain how a reader is to react. "Narrative point of view- especially ideological point of view- exists to persuade the reader to see the world in a different way, to adopt a new perspective, or to abandon an old point of view."<sup>15</sup> By challenging our own view the author is able to show us a new version of ourselves.<sup>16</sup> If we analyze scripture this way the knowledge that we accumulate can affect a variety of other forms of biblical criticisms.

We have now completed a brief introduction into Narrative Theory and touched on some of the tools it provides us with to perform Narrative Criticism. Before we can move forward we find ourselves still plagued by one question. Is this type of study relevant for Biblical Scholarship? Prose works of literature are a fairly modern occurrence and the Gospels predate the works we would apply these types of analysis to. We must also question whether or not these types of analytical tools are the right ones to perform analysis on texts that have certain amount of implied historicity embedded within them? In addressing these

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<sup>14</sup> Resseguie 2005, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Resseguie 2005, 40.

<sup>16</sup> Resseguie 2005, 40.

questions it is important to reiterate that Narrative Criticism examined in this essay does not look replace Historical or other valid forms of scholarship.<sup>17</sup> It looks to add tools that can enhance these types of study, and looks to be enhanced by them as well. By examining the Bible with a wide eye that tries to analyze it from many different angles we will be able to gain insight into the text that we might have missed if we had deployed only one type of tool from our toolbox.<sup>18</sup>

In this thesis we will study the pioneering works in Narrative Criticism. First we will study Narrative Theory in general. This will help us understand the method before we apply it to Biblical Works. We will then examine the work performed on the *Gospel of Mark*. It is here we will pay close attention to the book *Mark as Story* by David Rhoads. We will then move onto the *Gospel of John*. For this task we will look to *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* by R. Alan Culpepper. To demonstrate the value of this type of study I will also provide a case study for each Gospel. I will examine the function of the character Joseph of Arimathea in each piece of scripture.

Before moving on I would like to point out the reason for using Joseph of Arimathea to demonstrate the validity of Narrative Criticism. The first reason for making this choice is simply using a character that appears in both *Mark* and *John*. The next reason is that this figure appears in all four of the canonical Gospels. The fact that this character appears in each work helps support the possibility that these accounts are historical. However, it is not concrete proof

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<sup>17</sup> Culpepper 1983, 2-11.

<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that some do believe that Literary Critiques have rendered other approaches obsolete. For insight into this debate see Reinhartz 65-66. 2008.

that the events in the life of Joseph of Arimathea are historical. It is not the aim of this thesis to determine whether or not this event happened. It our goal to show how an event, that has a probability of historicity, can be affected by the narrative tool an author employs to communicate certain ideas about said event.

After this thesis is complete we will have a survey of the foundational works of Narrative Criticism. We will see how this type of criticism can complement other types of Biblical Scholarship. This thesis will also address that criticisms of this approach as unreliable in the face of historicity are false. In the end we will show how these types of study can work hand in hand to help illuminate scripture in a fuller ways.

## CHAPTER 1

### *Basic Narrative Criticism*

The first question one engages is simply what is narrative criticism? For this answer we first turn to Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. We see that narrative theory, a branch of literary theory, seeks to understand the components of a story. By engaging notions of plot, narrator, narrator techniques, or simply what Culler calls the "poetics of the narrative" one gains understanding about how the story works and how it affects the one who is reading or listening to it.<sup>19</sup>

To see how Narrative Criticism became applicable to Biblical studies one must acknowledge that this is not solely an academic subject. A part of the human condition is the desire to hear and understand stories. We beg for them as children before we lay down to slumber, and still as children we understand when a story as been altered to hurry the arrival of the ending. So this helps us develop one of the first questions in Narrative Theory. What is intrinsic to a story that sets off the signals that either a story has reached a proper ending or that there is something lacking for it to reach completion? Culler then states, "The theory of narrative might, then, be conceived as an attempt to spell out, to make explicit, this narrative competence, just as the linguistics is an attempt to make

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<sup>19</sup> Culler 1997, 84.

explicit linguistic competence: what speakers of a language unconsciously know in knowing a language.”<sup>20</sup> So if we seek to understand how we react to a story we must look at the essential parts of a story to see how they affect us, the reader, when working with a particular narrative.

What is the first essential part of a story? For Aristotle this was simply the plot. He stated that a story must have a beginning, a middle, and finally a conclusion or end. This is due to the fact that we, as humans, enjoy the rhythmic ordering. To engage Narrative Criticism one must seek out why human beings look to order their stories this way. Different scholars and theorists have created varying answers to this question. This thesis cannot look to engage them all; however Culler does point out there appears to a central point in which many theories have been built upon. This is simply that a plot needs to record a transformation. We see that a narrative develops not just a sequence of events but a series of events around a central theme. The ending of the narrative must have some relation to the beginning.<sup>21</sup>

It is interesting to note that one's ability to understand a plot transcends language. While the general workings of a poem could be lost in translation, a universal plot can be pulled from varying languages.<sup>22</sup> So as we keep this in mind with the Gospel of John looming on the horizon, we see that it is possible for one to read the original Greek text and another to read a translation and identify the same plot. They might disagree on the central themes based on

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<sup>20</sup> Culler 1997, 84.

<sup>21</sup> Culler 1997, 85.

<sup>22</sup> Culler 1997, 85.

cultural differences but it would be possible to point to centralized portion of the story that is the plot.<sup>23</sup>

As noted above there is a large debate with many individuals working to explain how narratives function. To fully examine how Narrative Criticism crept into New Testament scholarship we will focus our attention on scholar, Seymour Chatman. His work *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* was a foundational work for Culpepper's work.<sup>24</sup> As I continue to develop the foundational understanding of Narrative Criticism I will engage Chatman's work to help light our way on the path to Narrative Criticism and their relation to the Gospels.

We have now seen that plot works is an essential part of narrative, but how does it work? Chatman discusses how plot can be seen as a story sequence of events. We are then shown that events can be broken down into actions and happenings. An action occurs when something or someone initiates a change of state upon a patient. If this action is important we see that the agent for change for the patient is a character.<sup>25</sup>

On the other side of the plot coin we find *happening*. Chatman states, "A happening entails a predication of which the character or other existent is the narrative object: for example, *The storm casts Peter adrift*." We see that the story logic takes precedent of the linguistic portrayal of the events. On shallow reading

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<sup>23</sup> It should be note that this not a claim that every reader will reach the same conclusion on the plot of a certain work. It is equally possible for different readers to understand and define the plot of the same work differently. An example of this in regards to the Gospel of John can be find by comparing Lincoln 2005, 3-14 to Culpepper, 1983, 80-98.

<sup>24</sup> Thatcher 2008, 18-26.

<sup>25</sup> Chatman 1978, 44-45.

of the example Chatman provides we see Peter as a subject going through an action, but if we look deeper into the story we understand him as a narrative object that is not affecting actions but receiving the happenings.<sup>26</sup> We have now pointed to another important portion of understanding Narrative Criticism, character. What is a character? How do stories or narrations use them to help the readers or hearers understand the plot and add depth to a story?

It is important we also understand that characters serve to help convey a plot but are more than simple plot devices. For Chatman a character is a reconstruction that the audience provides based on evidence they have found in the story they have engaged.<sup>27</sup> A character is not the actual person or thinking feeling animal/object the reader is reading about. The character is what the reader has put together based on the narrative they have engaged. They develop the character based on how they have related to actions or happenings of the story. It is from this experience that one develops opinions on the characters, but these might not be exactly accurate pictures. If I were to tell a story of how my friend Tom had helped a little old lady cross the street you, as the hearer of the story, would develop a character that saw Tom as a decent moral person. This could be an accurate characterization of Tom, or not. In crafting this story I could have left out the detail of Tom kicking a puppy earlier in the morning. If this is true we see the character that the reader has engaged is now actually quite different from the Tom of reality or the Tom the actual author has created in his own mind.

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<sup>26</sup> Chatman 1978, 45.

<sup>27</sup> Chatman 1978, 119.

There is a second camp of thought on what a character is. It is important that we examine this second camp because Culpepper will deploy it to develop his understanding of character in the *Gospel of John*. Some see characters as functionaries who progress the plot by completing certain preordained tasks or commissions.<sup>28</sup> It is essential that we understand character in both lights. If we return to our example mentioned above Tom, we can understand why both understandings are essential. We return now to Tom helping the little old lady across the street, and move forward. However we are going to follow the events of the little old lady. It turns out that due to Tom's assistance the little old lady has decided that human beings possess the ability to do good. As a result of this interaction the little old lady has decided to not commit suicide. Now let us analyze what role Tom has played in the story. He entered into the old lady's story at a crucial time and fulfilled the role given to him. His personality is of little importance because Tom in the hearer's mind has become a secondary character. He is somewhat flat because there is little interaction with him. This does not mean he is not an unimportant character. His actions have a big impact on the story, but all we have to understand him is actions - we have no personality trait to help us develop our picture of Tom. As we move forward we see how both types of characters progress a narrative, and how the secondary type are essential to the *Gospel of Mark* and *John*.

Before we can engage the *Gospel of Mark* and *John* we must first finish our basic introduction to *Narrative Criticism*. We have now seen how plot is conveyed by action and happenings performed or received by characters. We

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<sup>28</sup> Culpepper 1983, 102.

now move to portion of a narrative that conveys the plot to the reader, namely the narrator. Chatman develops the notion of both a covert narrator and an overt narrator. If we are engaging a covert narrator, "...we hear a voice speaking of events, characters, and setting, but its owner remains hidden in the discursive shadows."<sup>29</sup> If the events were just related, one could not use an indirect phrase. A non-narrative would have to be told to portray events without interpretation. i.e. Tom said "I did not kick the puppy." Here we see events related without interpretation. If a narrator were to portray the events to form a narrative they would be able to use indirect phrases and offer a more interpretive view. i.e. Tom said that he did not kick the puppy. Here we see there is no guarantee that Tom actually said these words, and we see the narrator interrupt events. It is here however we see very little in terms of how the narrator interprets the events.<sup>30</sup> A narrator may provide both overt and covert narration in varying degrees. The more interpretation the narrator gives the more overt they are,<sup>31</sup> i.e. though Tom said, "I did not kick the puppy," he is not very trustworthy. In this example we have seen how the narrator provided a little more insight into Tom's character, and gave a stronger interpretation of the events.

To analyze a narrator we find ourselves asking certain questions to fully grasp how a particular narrator operates. One of the most essential questions is where does the narrators voice come from? Or simply what is the point of view? R. Alan Culpepper works with the ideas on voice put forth by Gerard Genette and

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<sup>29</sup> Chatman 1978, 197.

<sup>30</sup> Chatman 1978, 197.

<sup>31</sup> Culpepper 1983, 16.

Boris Upensky.<sup>32</sup> Using a chart that Genette adapts from others, Culpepper introduces these four points of view. The first type we see is where the narrator is the main character of a story and relates the events to the reader. The second type we see is somewhat like the first, due to the fact the narrator also takes part in the events that he/she is relating. The key difference is that this narrator is a minor character and acts as more of an observer. The third and fourth types of narrators we examine relate the story from the outside. The third type of narrator is an omniscient observer who can give insights into characters' thoughts and feelings. While the fourth is a limited outsider that mainly relates the events to the reader, they will rarely know the feelings and thoughts of the characters outside of the focal character.<sup>33</sup> When we return to analyze the *Gospel of John* we will investigate which type of narrator the work uses and what affect that has on the reader or hearer of the story.

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<sup>32</sup> Culpepper 1983, 15-18.

<sup>33</sup> Culpepper 1983, 20.

## CHAPTER 2

### APPLICATION OF NARRATIVE CRITICISM TO MARK

We now have the foundation laid in our understanding narrative criticism of the Bible. This will allow us to move forward and this type of critique in action. It is here we will turn our attention to the narrative criticism that has been applied to the *Gospel of Mark*. To understand what new insights this kind of criticism brings we must also look at what has come before, in relation to the study of *Mark*. This will lead us into the development of narrative criticism of *Mark*.

Early Markan scholarship was primarily focused on form-criticism. This tradition originated in Germany. That is to say the popular opinion was that the author of *Mark* had acted primarily as a compiler of traditions. This view point has taken for granted that the author of *Mark* did not insert any theological insight into his work. This does not appear to be a haphazard or ill thought out move; this appears to be the product of scholars acknowledging the traits they believed defined the genre of Gospel.<sup>34</sup>

In the latter half of the twentieth-century scholarly opinion has shifted away from the form-criticism consensus. This has allowed a variety of opinion and methods to develop and flourish. This trend has also led away from uniform opinion scholarly circles, and no viewpoint has taken center stage that form-criticism once held. There are several reasons for this divide. Questions of

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<sup>34</sup> Riches 1993, 150

authorship have opened new doors in biblical scholarship. The emerging viewpoint of the Bible as literature is also one that has its foundation in this split. There have also been new ideas put forth on the author of *Mark* and their relation to the source material. The reliability of scholarly opinion on the Synoptic problem has also been called into question. All of these viewpoints have been met with praise and further debate, thus adding to complexity of Markan scholarship.<sup>35</sup> It is in the dissolution of popular opinion that narrative criticism has been able make its voice heard in relation to *Mark*.

The book *Mark as Story* by David Rhoads and Donald Mitchie was one of the first to introduce narrative criticism to the *Gospel of Mark*. The book was first published in 1982. This work viewed *Mark* as a literary whole. Mitchie and Rhoades do not concern themselves with authorial intent but address the aforementioned questions of rhetoric, setting, plot, and characters. This is done by holding to the idea that the work was meant to be engaged as a whole, and does not address questions of possible sectioning of the text.<sup>36</sup>

We are now able to examine *Mark* through the lens of narrative criticism. We will rely on the second edition of *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* by David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey and Donald Mitchie to aid us in this endeavor. We will study their work and then engage some of the criticism that has arisen from their approach. It is by assessing five key points of narrative criticism Rhoads and company present *Mark* in a new light. In doing this, the goal is to remove the notion that a story is just for communicating a

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<sup>35</sup> Riches 1993, 150

<sup>36</sup> Riches 1993, 163

thought, and once the thought is attained the story can be removed and forgotten. By doing this they hope the reader will be able to view *Mark* as story and have a better appreciation for the whole of the work. "For it is only in the reading and the hearing of the story itself that we experience its magic and capacity to change us."<sup>37</sup> If we unpack *Mark* as a story we see how the story is supposed to unpack and reorganize the reader.

The first point *Mark as Story* addresses, after providing a new translation of the Gospel, is narrator. The narrator of the Gospel is not presented as a character, and works from the third person perspective. The story accomplishes two things by keeping the narrator's identity from the reader. One, it allows the narrator to gain a sense of authority. If the narrator is removed from the story often the reader views them as third party recounting events. This allows the narrator to gain trust from the reader. The second action accomplished is that the reader is allowed to enter into the story himself. The reader is not watching from one perspective of an event but is seeing through the eyes of an omniscient story teller. This story teller has the ability to open up an entire world not just one view point.<sup>38</sup>

It is important to note that when a narrator is omniscient and not taking part in the story they are presenting, the reader often assumes they are impartial. In the *Gospel of Mark* the narrator is not neutral. To fully understand this, Rhoads points to the portrayal of the religious authorities in the Gospel. One thinks about how the story would be if a sympathetic light was cast on the Pharisees. The

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<sup>37</sup> Rhoads 1999, 7

<sup>38</sup> Rhoads 1999, 40-41

story itself could follow the same events and still be a very different tale. This notion would present the Pharisees as heroes, and could possibly skew our view into seeing Jesus as a false-prophet and blasphemer. If we keep this in mind, we see how the narrator shapes our view of Jesus, and does not present a neutral opinion in the story he tells. The narrator, through description, is able to persuade the reader that the authorities are actually ill informed. It is Jesus and his disciples who really understand how the world works and are the ones in the moral right. This allows the reader to trust Jesus, because the narrator has illustrated him as a trustworthy figure.<sup>39</sup>

*Mark as Story* concludes its section on the narrator by summarizing the work of the narrator. A reader of *Mark* encounters a suspenseful story filled with puzzles, characters facing amazing events, cases of irony, and hints of ambiguity that if the reader can understand shows that the characters are often left in the dark. The story ends with an open note, and the reader is left to project possible outcomes upon the text.<sup>40</sup> This is done by the author so the reader will rethink existence, and gain courage to live life in a new way through the belief in Jesus as Christ. "It is not obvious to the world that those who follow Jesus are on God's side. For the narrator life is paradoxical ambiguous, ironic, open, uncertain."<sup>41</sup> By applying narrative criticism to *Mark*, Rhoads presents the possibility of the challenge placed on the reader by the author through the narrator.

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<sup>39</sup> Rhoads 1999, 43-44

<sup>40</sup> This is based on accepting shorter ending of *Mark*. The translation provided by Rhoads, Dewey, and Mitchie accepts the ending found in *Mark* 16:8.

<sup>41</sup> Rhoads 1999, 61-62

One must also note there is a flipside to the coin. Under the uncertainty and ambiguity lie purposefully laid patterns that take the reader on a complex journey to understand Jesus as Christ. There are glimpse into other works found of ancient Judean writing such as prophecy. These ancient scriptures are a taken and then built upon to demonstrate their fulfillment in Christ. The narrator directs this in brilliant fashion and is able to create order in what would seem to be chaos. Rhoads demonstrates that the patterns the narrator weaves into the *Gospel of Mark* will impact further portions in this narrative critique.<sup>42</sup>

Now that we understand a little of how the narrator works, we drive forward into the next portion of narrative criticism in relation to *Mark*. This brings us to setting. In *Mark as Narrative* one finds three over-arching settings to which we are to pay attention. There are several subsets, but this thesis will focus on the main three and how they impact our understanding of *Mark*. The first we engage is the Cosmic Setting. Jesus' story in *Mark* takes place in God's creation. There is a hierarchy established in this setting. God is above all creation, and a flat earth resides below. In the center of this cosmology is Israel, and Israel is surrounded by the nations of the Gentiles. The earth not only holds humans and animals, but also plays host to Satan, demons and angels. In *Mark's* story world, creation has fallen askew, and humans are not in their intended place. Humans are supposed to be above creation, below God, but appear to be at the whims of the other occupants. Humans have become sick and subject to nature. The demons have taken humans as their hosts. The humans who once followed laws to keep them in God's good graces have become faithless and wild. Israel has

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<sup>42</sup> Rhoads 1999, 62

fallen from the center of creation.<sup>43</sup> The setting of this story cries out for God to act. By examining this setting we see how the reader comes to expect God to intervene and right the world that has fallen into chaos from its intended cosmology.

God takes action to adjust this setting by sending Jesus. Jesus brings about the Rule of God on Earth. The people are healed from sickness and demons are cast out, the course of the world is righted. God's rule breaks down the barriers nations have set up and establishes itself over the entire world. After Jesus' death and resurrection the task is not complete.<sup>44</sup> The followers, as well as the reader, are encouraged to continue the trends Jesus began so that God's rule can truly cover the earth.

Cosmic time is also changed in these events as well. The author of Mark does not keep time in terms of hours, days, weeks, and years. He does this by marking important moments. Jesus arrival brings the world into a new age.<sup>45</sup> This is time filled with opportunity for the reader. Jesus laying the foundation for God's rule means evil is crushed and those who accept his story are living in a miraculous time.

We now descend from the cosmic setting so we can magnify and focus in on the political-cultural setting. God's rule issues out from the nation of Israel. In the story the country finds itself the subject of Roman rule. Herod Antipas is shown to be the appointed king, while Pilate is shown to be voice of the Roman government. The high priest Caiaphas acts as a Judean authority but his power

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<sup>43</sup> Rhoads 1999, 64

<sup>44</sup> Rhoads 1999, 65

<sup>45</sup> Rhoads 1999, 65

is granted and managed by Rome. Other Judean authorities appear in the text such as unnamed high priests and “Sanhedrin” council. The society depicted in *Mark* is an accurate portrayal of Antiquity. “In Mark’s narrative world the Pharisees and legal experts (scribes) are retainers of the elite... These leaders of Israel- by neglect and by exploitation- have not produced the ‘fruits of the vineyard’ on behalf of the populace, as God demands.”<sup>46</sup> The narrator uses the political setting to encourage his reader to take a sympathetic view of Jesus. This is done through language that shows the political system oppressing the majority, while a corrupt minority lives in luxury.

The journey is the final setting we will encounter in this thesis. The journey of Jesus and his disciples provide a framework for the entire narrative. The first portion of the story sets their travel in Galilee. It is here our group encounters Gentiles as they travel through out the region. The second portion of the journey depicts the final journey to Jerusalem. This portion can be broken into three stages. The first is the trek or pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The second stage centers on Jesus actions and teachings while in the temple. The final stage is the path that leads to Jesus’ time on the cross, and ends with the mystery of the empty tomb. This journey represents Jesus bringing the “Way of God” into Israel. This can only occur through Jesus crucifixion. The narrator strengthens this point by making Jerusalem the final stop on Jesus’ tour. This shows us there is only one path for the rule of God to occur on Earth. After the crucifixion the story pulls back again and enters a larger world due to the possibility of a risen Lord.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Rhoads 65, 1999

<sup>47</sup> Rhoads 66, 1999

The next focus of our criticism is plot. What are the events and conflicts that drive the story found in *Mark*? The plot of this story is unified and flows throughout the work. In *Mark* we watch Jesus face opposition and obstacles so he can establish God's rule on earth. The plot can be broken into three points each dealing with Jesus' interaction with other characters. One plot point deals with Jesus interaction with non-human forces. The next invites the readers to watch how Jesus' encounters his own disciples. The final thread involves the obstacles and challenges Jesus faces when dealing with authority figures. There are now break downs into unrelated subplots as each point serves the purpose of the narrative. While some issues are left open for various reasons, most points introduced in the text are closed by the end of the story.<sup>48</sup>

God plays a major role in the plot of *Mark's* gospel. God is the force that generates conflict. God is depicted as being in action since the dawn of creation. We have seen him share words with Isaiah that point to Jesus. John the Baptizer has acted as God's messenger to announce the coming of God's plan and chosen one. God sends the spirit upon Jesus, and is the one whose rule will come about through Jesus' return. The reader is shown God's activities through a variety of methods found in *Mark*. His actions and words are recorded in the work. We see citations from other writing pointing to the prophecies sent by God. The values found throughout the story are viewed as ordained actions by God. "On the basis of these clues, God's overall role in the story goes like this: God created the world, established a law for the people in writing, and revealed a plan through future prophets." The parable of the vineyard demonstrates this point if

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<sup>48</sup> Rhoads 73, 1999

one accepts the allegorical roles of God as the owner, Israel as the vineyard, the authorities of Israel as the leasers, and the prophets who are killed represent the prophets.<sup>49</sup> God moves the plot forward by upsetting the natural, yet chaotic, state the world has fallen into. God pushes Jesus to bring about his rule, and this produces the plot of the Gospel.

The plot of *Mark* works to get the reader to ask questions about power and how one perceives it. Two types of power are demonstrated in the text. The power that exudes from God brings about wholeness for the individual who encounter it. The other type is demonstrated as a more destructive force. This power is animated by humans being selfish and yearning to protect what they have accumulated. Rhoads classifies this power as, “dominating or patriarchal.” *Mark’s* conflicts center on how these two powers clash. It teaches the reader that to accept God’s rule is to lose one’s own power and honor. The work also demonstrates how difficult this task can be.<sup>50</sup> Through the plot the reader is given examples of both right and wrong choices. These choices help educate the reader on how to make moral decisions based on the values the Gospel is trying to communicate.

This moves us into analysis of characterization. We do this because the study of characters goes hand and hand with our understanding of the plot. The plot can center around on characters actions, and the conflicts in the story help reveal certain facts about the characters. This is done through the narrator. They are the one who introduces the reader to the characters. This is achieved by

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<sup>49</sup> Rhoads 1999, 78

<sup>50</sup> Rhoads 1999, 96-97

displaying their actions, words, and by sharing other characters reaction to one another. Characterization in the *Gospel of Mark* is usually provided through dialogue and action. *Mark's* characters are portrayed and developed differently than the ones found in modern works of literature. "Rather, Mark presents rich characterization by being minimally suggestive. The narrator reveals these characters in a gradual process, guiding what the reader knows and when they know it."<sup>51</sup> As the reader is introduced to these characters, it is key to understand how they react to the rule of God. By viewing the varying response the reader must reflect on their own response in contrast. This helps push the theological values the author wants to impart on to the reader.

Understanding Jesus as a character is key in understanding the work that appears in *Mark as Story*. Rhoads demonstrates that Jesus is a complex character. Jesus' actions display the authority he receives from God while the sayings help reveal him as an agent of God and what tasks have been set before him. God has tasked Jesus with the bringing about of God's rule on earth. Jesus presents an invitation for all to enter into this rule; even the ones who are hostile to Jesus. The reader is also shown what a unique character Jesus is in contrast with the world he is facing. He speaks and acts in ways that are shown to be outside of the box for the ancient society from which he comes. While isolated from others he receives strength from God to remain unique. Jesus is constantly tested through out *Mark*. His own Disciples, the authorities, and Satan test him. Every time he is able to remain loyal to God's will. While he faces anxiety about

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<sup>51</sup> Rhoads 1999, 99

his approaching death, he still continues forward as a divine agent of God. He acts in complete faithfulness to God's will.<sup>52</sup>

Rhoads points to the empty grave as God's seal of approval of Jesus' life. Jesus' resurrection appears to be a reward for a person who has lived a righteous life in *Mark as Story*. The work does acknowledge that *Mark* builds to the confession of Jesus as the Son of God through the character of the Roman Century present at Jesus' death.<sup>53</sup> However, it does not engage the "Son of Man" references in *Mark* and does not acknowledge possible connections to the development of Jesus as a character. Rhoads' words appear to take a very low Christological stance on Jesus, which is a matter of debate for *Mark* scholars. It is important to note that this is not essential in applying the method of narrative criticism to the *Gospel of Mark*.

*Mark as Story* concludes by examining the effects of *Mark's* rhetoric on the readers. The first step in this process is defining the ideal reader. Rhoads states, "The ideal reader is the mirror image of the narrator. The ideal reader is the reader that the author creates (has in mind to shape) in the course of telling the story- an imaginary reader with all the ideal responses *implied* by the narrative itself."<sup>54</sup> The conclusion of the work found in *Mark as Story* is that the ideal reader is developed by the Gospel to accept the Rule of God. This is done in faith and is to give the reader strength to follow Jesus no matter where that path leads. Finally the reader is to accept the challenge presented by the open ended of *Mark*. The reader along with the women finds the tomb empty and news

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<sup>52</sup> Rhoads 1999, 104-105

<sup>53</sup> Rhoads 1999, 115

<sup>54</sup> Rhoads 1999, 138

of Jesus' resurrection delivered from above. They, the women and the reader, have been instructed to go and tell the disciples where Jesus is going and where to meet him. The women fall silent because of fear and the reader is left alone with this news. The reader is therefore challenged to take on the role of disciple and begin to spread the Rule of God with courage.<sup>55</sup> In this conclusion one can see that narrative criticism does not water down scripture and remove theological concerns. It can serve to heighten them and stimulate new thoughts and ways to interpret these points. We must note that not all accept the ending accepted in *Mark as Story*. There is debate at which point the original author concluded his work and others continued on. This is due to vary lengths of manuscripts.

As we have shown *Mark as Story* has provided interesting and thought provoking insight into the *Gospel of Mark*. However, the work has not been received without criticism. John K. Riches' *A Century of New Testament Study* points out how the authors do not provide other interpretations of passages to demonstrate how they support their reading of the events in *Mark*.<sup>56</sup> That argument is well thought out and does demonstrate a weakness in Rhoads work. In an earlier portion of this thesis this was demonstrated by engaging the analysis of Jesus as a character. The authors state Jesus portrayal in a very clear cut way and offer little in the terms of how they came to their view that *Mark* has a low Christology. If they had entered into that debate, their analysis of Jesus would have had a better foundation and would have strengthened the entire

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<sup>55</sup> Rhoads 1999, 138-142

<sup>56</sup> Riches, 1993, 164

work. While the method is not flawless, the work does provide a strong foundation to build upon. By challenging conventional thought, we see that the *Gospel of Mark* is ripe for other types of study. There are amazing possibilities waiting to be found in the text itself, if one is willing to look through the lens provided by narrative criticism. This is the challenge of future *Markan* narrative critics.

While *Mark as Story* serves as the premier narrative critique of *Mark*, it is not alone in this study.<sup>57</sup> There many emerging works challenging notions on the nature of the Gospel. The field of biblical narrative criticism is growing and challenging conventional thinking about the words so many revere. This is an opportunity not to throw out old thought processes but to incorporate new ones to enliven old approaches. Both historical and theological approaches can gain insight by examining the possibilities the text sought to develop itself in order to capture readers. In this thesis we have only scratched the surface of this fascinating work. The biblical critics are gaining new lens to view their text, and the results will prove exciting. The future for ancient texts looks brighter as long as we are not afraid to enter into dialogue with new approaches and ideas.

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<sup>57</sup> Malbon 2008, 29-58

## CHAPTER 3

### JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA IN MARK'S STORY

We have completed our survey of Narrative Criticism in respect to *The Gospel of Mark* we will now move onto our own Narrative Critique. In this chapter and chapter six we shall examine the character of Joseph of Arimathea in *Mark* and *John*. In these chapters I hope to determine role and reason the character holds in each work. Then, in my conclusion, I will compare and contrast the function of this character in each Gospel as well as drawing out the significance of the thesis as a whole. In this way, I will seek to show how Narrative Criticism can enlighten ones reading of the Gospel and help fuel dialogue between these two works that are often believed to construct different views of similar figures.

In this chapter our attention is centered on a Narrative analysis of character Joseph of Arimathea in *The Gospel of Mark*. Here I present the portion of *Mark* in which Joseph appears. This moves us to examining the amount of detail the author gives to the character, and to offer explanation on how the details help drive the plot on to its conclusion. We shall also see how these theories are supported by the placement of the character in the Gospel. Finally in this section I will demonstrate how looking to understand this character from a Narrative view point does not negate the possibility of the historicity of the character and his actions. After I have completed this portion of my work, we will

then be ready to turn our attention to the application of narrative criticism to the *Gospel of John*.

Joseph is presented very close to the end of the Gospel. The author places him in the limited space post crucifixion and pre-resurrection. He interacts with Pilate, the authority who has the final say in the death of Jesus. He makes his first and only appearance in *Mark 15:42-46*. The New Revised Standard renders the account in this way;

When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb,

This is the entirety of Joseph's appearance in the book of *Mark*. While he appears for a short time, in comparison to some of the other characters that are named, there is a lot of information we can glean from this section about this figure.

One of the most striking things about this passage is the amount of description we get about this character. Outside of disciples and the women

followers it is rare to find a figure named in the Gospel. In all of the miracle stories the figures that seek the miracle are usually regarded by gender. In the Jesus conflict with religious authorities these figures are usually designated by their party affiliation or occupations (i.e. scribes). So our question is now why in this section does the author give a named figure? It is also of interest to note the amount of detail that is laid upon Joseph. The reader is provided with his role in the council, how he is seen by his peers, and some of his own religious viewpoints. We are also shown that the character has a sense of bravery and honor as he approaches a political figure and makes a bold request for the body of a prisoner just put to death. Once again we must ask the text why. Why is there so much information about a character who appears for a brief time? As we continue I can now demonstrate that the amount of information supplied about Joseph of Arimathea holds a specific function in regard to understanding the narrative dynamic of *Mark*.

As I demonstrated earlier in this thesis a character is the construction of the reader based on the information supplied by the author. If I were to tell you my friend Will is a man. All I, as the author, have supplied is the name and the gender. You, as the reader, are free to construct a Will that looks and thinks anyway you choose. However, if I tell you Will is a large man with a beard and red hair, I have greatly limited the amount of detail the reader can supply to their construction of Will. The same can be said for the motivation of the character as well. I can tell the reader that Will is walking and simply leave them with that minute bit of information. Once again, I can also supply more information such as

Will is walking to the Library to return the books he used in completing his Master of Arts thesis. In this example I, the author, have greatly limited the amount of information you, the reader, can supply in your construction of Will. I have told you his job, how far along he is in his work, where is journeying to, and the objects he used in completing in his work. By supplying the reader with information the author holds a great deal of control on how the reader constructs the character. Either the author can allow the reader's imagination run to wild and let them construct a character at the reader's whim, by supplying little detail, or the author can limit the reader's role and supply them with all the information they will need to construct the character. We now see that while the character is a construction of the reader's interaction with a particular work, the author can work as foreman dictating the construction of the character.

Let us now ask how the author of *Mark* wants us to construct our Joseph of Arimathea. It is clear that the author cares little for physical description. The reader is told Joseph was a man. As the reader we can construct a Joseph that has any shape or form as long as he is a man. We would probably construct Joseph's appearance based on how much we have studied the local customs of Jesus' own time and place.

It would be false to deduce that the author cares very little in how his reader constructs Joseph from the lack of physical details. The author does lay out for his reader many details on the type of person Joseph is. One of the first important details *Mark's* author supplies us with is the character's name. In supplying this, the reader can no longer supply just generic of a man. This man

has to be separate; this man has to be Joseph of Arimathea. We are then told what Joseph's role in the community is, "... a respected member of the council."<sup>58</sup> The author also wants to show us that the character has expectations in the coming the Kingdom of God. This shows us that the author wants to limit our ability to fill in certain religious aspects of Joseph's life. The character then demonstrates a bit of affluence as he approaches high political authority and has the necessary items to prepare the body of Jesus. I have now demonstrated that the author has supplied the reader of the Gospel with many details to construct the inner qualities of Joseph of Arimathea. This now moves us into questions of motivation for supplying such details. In the coming portions of this work I will show how these details push the story found in *Mark*, and how these details can be illuminated through our understanding of Narrative criticism.

Before moving on it is important to note that this does not hamper or impact any questions of historicity. By performing this analysis we are not saying these events were constructed by the author, nor are we saying they were completely historical. Even in the retelling of historical events the author can limit the amount of information the reader supplies in their construction of a character. If the author of *Mark* was working to retell the events of Jesus' life as he saw them historically he could have rendered Joseph as simply the man who had authority that prepared and buried Jesus' body, but this is not how our author constructed the scene or the character of Joseph. Even if this event is historical the author wants to supply us with a good bit of information on Joseph to sway our thoughts. It is here that we can see how historical studies and narrative

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<sup>58</sup> *Mark* 15:43

studies can be mutual beneficial. If we can determine that Marcan community exists in history, we would then be able show that in his story telling the author wanted his community to think of the actual person of Joseph as he described him in his Gospel.<sup>59</sup>

As I have stated earlier the plot of *Mark* involves how Jesus seeks to bring about the rule of God on Earth and the challenges he encounters. One way our author drives this plot home is by placing Jesus in opposition to the religious authorities present in his day. The conflict begins very early in *Mark* as Jesus first appearing in chapter two. As one reads on, we see Jesus' conflict build with the authority, and it occupies most of chapter twelve. Finally this tension leads to Jesus being brought to trial and this leads to his death in chapter fifteen. The various forms of religious authorities, Pharisees, Sadducees, and various scribes, are for the most part the antagonists to our main character Jesus. In their final meeting with Jesus a group of these figures has convened in council and are trying Jesus.<sup>60</sup> While they do not have the final say in Jesus' execution these are the characters that bring us to the climax of the story, Jesus' death upon the cross. It is from here we will make interesting notes about the portrayal of Joseph of Arimathea.

Joseph is a member of the very council that sought Jesus' death. However, in our story he is the only one who is named, and he takes action after the death of Christ. While Joseph of Arimathea was not able to stop Jesus'

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<sup>59</sup> In *The Structure of 1 Maccabees* David S. Williams demonstrated that literary studies of *1 Maccabees* did not necessarily contradict historical studies, and that carefully attention to both types of study could be beneficial and bear fruit.

<sup>60</sup> It is important to note that there are two Jewish leaders that are presented in a positive light Jairus who appears in Chapter 5 and the scribe who appears in 12:28-34.

death, and for all the reader knows did nothing to try and stop it, he helps demonstrate that Jesus' death is a game changing moment. We noted that Joseph has belief in a coming Messianic age and the author ties that belief into why he handled the body of Jesus' with such respect. Joseph shows the reader that now individual reaction to Jesus is important after this moment, and also allows the reader to see that after the death of Jesus the world is a very different place. Even one that once persecuted Jesus are now coming to have a respect for him after the cross.

It is also important to note that the author's placement of Joseph is also significant in this portion of narrative critique. If we accept the shortest ending of Mark<sup>61</sup>, Joseph's role is heightened due to placement. If this is our ending the Joseph of Arimathea is the last named male that encountered Jesus before the resurrection, and is the last earthly male we the reader encounter. Thus it is Joseph's handling of Jesus that the author wants to leave on the readers mind as they finish the Gospel. Throughout this story people like Joseph have persecuted Jesus, and their torment only ends at the cross. After this important moment the world itself is changing. In Jesus' death the rule of God is moving into a different stage, and even figures that once persecuted the messenger can come to respect the messenger as individuals.

This is why our character of Joseph of Arimathea is so important to the story found in *Mark*. He is a sign of change that is coming in the world. He symbolizes that Jesus' death begins a change that is going to impact many different types of people. Joseph tells the reader that people once thought to be

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<sup>61</sup> Hooker 1991, 382-387

enemies can become allies, and that Jesus' death is a game changer. It is with Joseph that we first see this change.

I have now completed my Narrative analysis of the character of Joseph of Arimathea and demonstrated that he helps drive the plot of the rule of the God home in the final moments of *Mark*. I will now move to perform the same type of analysis on the same character presented in *John*. We can now turn our attention to the *Gospel of John*

## CHAPTER 4

### APPLICATION OF NARRATIVE CRITICISM TO JOHN

To fully understand and appreciate what Narrative Criticism brings to the discussion in regards to *John* we will first exam the path that led to its application. We will do this to demonstrate how Narrative Criticism can work hand in hand with other types of study to give a deeper understanding of the Fourth Gospel.

The first place we will examine is Source Criticism. In contemporary Johannine scholarship Rudolf Bultmann's commentary on the *Gospel of John* is an important milestone, and though it was published in 1941 many still refer back to it. While the work does not provide a methodological outline one can see that the work relied heavily on Source Criticism. Bultmann rejected the notion that the *Gospel of John* could shed much light onto the historical figure of Jesus, and shifted his focus to how hypothetical sources and the theological concern of the author/authors and editor/editors meshed to create *John*. However, Bultmann's work did not complete a full Source Analysis. This work was picked up by Robert Fortna in his work *Gospel of Signs*. This was published in 1970 and reconstructed hypothetical sources by redacting the text found in the *Gospel of John*. The hypothetical source Fortna produced was entitled the *Signs Gospel*. This "Gospel" was believed to exist in the Johannine community and related to the signs and miracles of Jesus. Fortna believed that this work was absorbed fully by

the author/authors of *John* and reproduced verbatim into their *Gospel*. This was done to emphasize the creator's own theology. By isolating the *Signs Gospel* Forna gave other scholars a way to speculate on why the *Gospel of John* was created.<sup>62</sup>

While Bultmann and Forna's work was revolutionary in some areas it failed in others. This approach looks to dissect a text and examine portions of it to find meaning.<sup>63</sup> This work fails to examine the meaning of text construct as a whole. By examining these portions and their tension with supposed sources, this type of critique fails to acknowledge that the *Gospel of John* works as a whole. It is by using the tools we have found in Narrative Theory that we are able to examine the *Gospel* as a whole and see significant themes and theological points that would be lost in dissection.

We now continue our examination of Johannine Scholarship leading up to *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*. In the wake of Source Criticism the idea of a Johannine Community took predominant place in the minds of the academic community. J. Louis Martyn published *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* in 1968. By examining the story of the man born blind found in *John 9:1-38*, Martyn proposed that a split which occurred between the synagogue and the Christian church had already occurred before the *Gospel of John* was created. Martyn then developed a model and others quickly latched on. "Martyn's model allowed scholars to associate moments in the Johannine Tradition with major events in the reconstructed history of the Gospel of John." This allowed

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<sup>62</sup> Thatcher 2008, 4-6.

<sup>63</sup> Thatcher 2008, 6.

inconsistency that appeared in the text to be explained away, by the notion that Jesus was written to speak to modern situations that the community was facing since the Historical Jesus had been removed. Others rallied to this idea and the search for the voice of the Johannine community dominated many studies through the 1970's and the 1980's.<sup>64</sup>

Like Source Criticism the search for the voice of the Johannine Community left gas as well. While this kind of critique got individuals to think about the impact particular historical events had on the creation of the text, the methods could only speculate on hypothetical situations. These works placed heavy meaning on events that lay outside of the text and placed a large emphasis on events that may never have happened.<sup>65</sup> Once again we are left without a way to examine our text as a whole. By examining the notions of the Johannine Community we look for the text to shed meaning and take meaning from events outside of its own words. Does the text as a whole produce no meaning within itself? As most who read this would see this is a hard pill to swallow. I have now demonstrated the tools that Narrative Theory uses, and pointed out the holes in Biblical Scholarship at the time leading up to *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*. We will now examine the work Culpepper performed. By doing this we will see the value of such studies.

We will first examine the concept of plot. Culpepper starts off his section on plot with a simple question; does the *Gospel of John* contain a plot? The answer is yes, as do all the other Gospels. Each of the Evangelists selected and

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<sup>64</sup> Thatcher 2008, 6-8.

<sup>65</sup> Thatcher 2008, 8.

edited material. It appears they did this based on theological and social points they saw fit to emphasize. The evangelists used action and dialogue to bring out themes and motif. The narrator and characters work in the gospels to help the reader see the meaning in the story. As we know each Gospel tells, what is essentially the same story, the story of the life of Jesus. The key to understanding the differences is seeing the different plots that the each evangelist constructs. While each evangelist held their own creative vision, it is likely they tailored their own plots to social and religious demands from their own community. One of the best ways to get a picture of how each author worked different emphases into their plots is to examine the different ways each evangelist starts and concludes their work. *Mark* focuses on developing the revelation behind Jesus' secret Messianic identity. He does this by examining how Jesus' relationship with his disciples builds and declines. *Matthew* begins with Jesus genealogy. This is done to link Jesus to the important figures in the Jewish culture, mainly Abraham and David. The work then moves onto to depict Jesus birth. This narrative paints Jesus as the coming of Emmanuel. It then ends on similar notes stressing the authority of Jesus teachings, especially in a religion that accepts both Jewish and Gentile believers. On the other hand *Luke* begins with development of Judaism, and then moves to Jesus' life in Jerusalem. Through *Luke* we see how disciples plant the seed to opening the religion to the gentiles by preaching Jesus' good news to all. This story illuminates how the church can continue in the absence of Christ.<sup>66</sup> We have briefly examined how the Synoptic authors varied their plot points to place emphasis in varying areas of

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<sup>66</sup> Culpepper 1983, 85-86.

discussion. We see how plot can be used to make different emphasis in the same story. This moves us onto our next question; what is the plot of *John*?

The *Gospel of John* starts off with an introduction to the character of Jesus. In this beginning we are introduced to Jesus as the divine *logos*. This introduction also gives us insight into the plot of the work. John 1:11-12 states, "He came to his own home, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who receive him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become Children of God." This can be seen as a plot summary for rest of the following text. We see in verse 14 why Jesus' ministry is significant due his divine nature. The work Jesus is sent to perform is emphasized throughout the Gospel. In 1:29 we read, "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" It is Jesus performing this task and making the Father known to the world that acts as the driving force in John's plot. We see in *John* 16:8-9 that the sin of the world is unbelief and we are given the understanding that Jesus' work is to undo this and make believers in the world. This plot moves throughout the story and brings Jesus to the cross and to his death. The cross in *John* is Jesus' seat of glory and allows him and the one who sent him to be revealed. These ideas are also what spark hostility toward Jesus. As he speaks more of the redemptive mission, we see how the world becomes more hostile to him, and we see the story develop. This establishes a dichotomy between those who believe and those who do not. We see then how the author uses plot to bolster belief as the right choice. While it appears Jesus and his followers have lost as Jesus takes his place on the

cross, the believers are able to see Jesus' glory revealed and the plot culminated.<sup>67</sup>

We have identified the plot of the *Gospel of John*. We will now deepen our understanding of how the *Gospel of John* develops its plot. We have already seen how the first chapter serves as introduction and plot summary. In the second chapter we see John the Baptist enter the story and begin to proclaim the coming of Jesus as Christ. We also see the opposition to Jesus arise in the form of the Levites who are sent by the Jews to question John the Baptist. We see the conflict deepen as Jesus enters and purifies the temple in Jerusalem. Here we see the religious authority in Jerusalem becomes a key figure in Jesus' battle with unbelief. In this section the author foreshadows Jesus' death and how the plot is moving to that point. It is Jesus' battle with the religious authority, who voice unbelief, that moves the story to the cross.<sup>68</sup>

In *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* Culpepper demonstrates how each chapter progresses the plot. Due to the length of this thesis I cannot do the same. It is here that I will focus on key points where the conflict intensifies. This will be done so one can see how the author uses plot to point to the result of unbelief.

It is in chapter five that we see the Jews take a more prominent role in the work. Here we see the debate on revelation rear its head. One voice argues that revelation can only come through the law. This is done by "the Jews" and specifically those who hold to the authority of the Torah. In this chapter they

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<sup>67</sup> Culpepper 1983, 87-88.

<sup>68</sup> Culpepper 1983, 90.

accuse Jesus of working on the Sabbath. By doing this they have labeled him a blasphemer, and in their eyes they have undermined his authority. The narrator then shows the extent of the religious authority's disbelief. 5:18 reads, "This was why 'the Jews' sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath, but also called God his own Father, making himself equal to God." The other voice in this conflict is that of Jesus. The Jews in the section reflect the unbelief Jesus works against. He links himself to past authorities i.e. Moses and Abraham. He then speaks of the tasks that the Son of Man is to perform. This debate is central to the plot of *John*.<sup>69</sup> By escalating this conflict the author of *John* is able to use the plot to show the reader how each side of the arguments plays out, and which side has true authority.

We now turn to Chapter 18. It is here that the conflict between belief and unbelief has reached a head. Jesus' death is fast approaching. We see the authority Jesus has when the powers that be are unable to take him, and Jesus goes voluntarily. As Jesus faces interrogation we see that his work with the disciples was not enough to overcome unbelief. This is done by Peter's denial. While the cross has been a part of the divine plan the whole time, we now see that it is necessary to voice Jesus authority and strengthen belief. We see Pilate placed into the middle of this fight as it goes on between the unbelieving Jews and Jesus. Pilate, a political authority, acknowledges that Jesus is not guilty, but allows the unbelievers to kill Jesus. Pilate does, in a small way, challenge the unbelievers when he places the title "King of Jews" above Jesus cross. Jesus completes his task and dies upon the cross. While it appears to be the day that

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<sup>69</sup> Culpepper 1983, 91.

unbelief has won, the reader is about to encounter the real winner of this conflict.<sup>70</sup>

After Jesus body is laid to rest in royal like fashion, the story moves to Mary Magdalene. The story follows her discovery of the empty tomb and her returning to the disciples to tell them that the body is gone. We run with Peter, the Beloved Disciple, and Mary back to the tomb. Immediately the Beloved Disciple believes. It takes a little something for Mary to come to the same place. Mary encounters the risen Jesus but does not realize who he is. When Jesus calls her by name, she declares him as teacher and accepts him as risen. He instructs her to tell the others that he has not yet ascended to the Father, but he has risen from the grave. This signals Jesus' victory over unbelief. As the story continues we are shown that the disciples are to bring others to belief. We are shown that, even in the face of death, those that believe are the true winners, and the unbelievers are in the wrong in regards to God's authority.<sup>71</sup>

The plot of *John* is episodic and breaks down the action to demonstrate certain thematic points to the reader. This is done to persuade the reader to interpret Jesus' life the way the author has. While each episode has its own miniature plot we, the readers of the whole, are able to see how shorter episodes demonstrate a much larger conflict. "The affective power of the narrative, however, is the most important feature of its plot. By showing Jesus confronting everyday situations, the gospel dramatizes "the Word became flesh and dwelt

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<sup>70</sup> Culpepper 1983, 95-96.

<sup>71</sup> Culpepper 1983, 96.

among us.”<sup>72</sup> Each character witnesses Jesus’ glory and points the reader to right side of the conflict between belief and unbelief.<sup>73</sup> The plot is designed to pull the reader into seeing that Jesus is worthy of belief and should be accepted as a religious authority.

Now that we have investigated how plot works in the *Gospel of John*, we will now look at some of the characters. Once again it is important to note that *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* has a much broader scope on characters than what we can garner from this thesis.<sup>74</sup> To develop a base understanding of how characters work in *John* we will engage Culpepper’s introduction to characterization and then examine his views on two of the characters. The two characters we will engage are Jesus and ‘the Jews.’ This is done because these two characters take central roles in driving the conflict that drives the plot of the *Gospel of John*. We will examine these characters will get a stronger idea of how characters drive a plot and work to pull the reader into the side of belief, that is, as defined by the implied author.

Before we investigate the characters found in the *Gospel of John* we have to ask certain questions to determine the legitimacy of this type of study. While it is debated how much of the Gospel is historical and how much of it lies in the realms of fiction, we have to understand that the people portrayed in the work are somewhat historical figures. Is looking at these figures through the lens of characterization a correct method for analysis?<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Culpepper 1983, 97.

<sup>73</sup> Culpepper 1983, 96-97.

<sup>74</sup> Culpepper 1983, 101-148.

<sup>75</sup> Culpepper 1983, 105.

Let me respond to this question developing further some of the perspectives that I advanced in my discussion of characterization in *Mark*. First we must examine what we are actually looking for and at as we engage characterization. In this type of study we are examining how an author creates a portrait of a person for the reader to engage. Even if we are dealing with an entirely historical work, we are considering how the author chose to portray the person and what traits the author has allowed the reader to see. So it does not matter if the person we encounter is a real or fictitious person. We, as the reader, are not engaging the real person. We are encountering the character. We are looking at what the author has chosen to portray in relation to the sequence of events that the author is describing. When the author chose to portray a human being they make a construct of the person, by choosing what is presented for the reader to interact with.<sup>76</sup> This allows us to move forward and study the people we encounter in *John* as characters, legitimately.

As stated before, our study will focus primarily on Jesus and ‘the Jews.’ We must note that Jesus and his relation to the Father is a predominant focus in *John*. To examine Jesus we must examine his relation to the Father, because the character of Jesus openly acknowledges his dependence on the Father throughout the work.<sup>77</sup> In the early parts of *John* we encounter Jesus as alive and at work in three varying time periods. We see him at work in the prehistory as the *logos*. We watch how he works in the time the narrative flows, and finally *John* also reveals Jesus as a central eschatological figure. Let us first look at how

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<sup>76</sup> Culpepper 1983, 105-106.

<sup>77</sup> Some examples of this can be found in John 4:34, 5:19, 5:36, 6:40

Jesus' introduction as a pre-historical figure shapes the readers response to the character of Jesus. The introduction of Jesus begins abstractly as the figure of the *logos* is first mentioned. It is through the title of Christ and the establishing of Jesus' relation to Moses that the reader is to understand Jesus is the *logos*.<sup>78</sup> Through the introduction the reader is introduced to how the character of Jesus drives the plot. He will enable others to become 'Children of God.' He will be rejected by his own people, and he will make it possible for the sin of the world to be removed.<sup>79</sup> While the reader has some idea about the events that will happen to the character of Jesus, they have yet to see the how Jesus performs these actions. This moves us to how Jesus works in the time of the narrative.

As we listen to Jesus speak in the story, we understand that his mission is established by and related to his relation to the Father. Through his words we see that Jesus is constantly relying on the Father. Jesus' dialogue also helps the reader know how wrong those who remain in unbelief truly are. The reader is to understand that while Jesus faces conflict he is the one who is in control of the events. No events or conflicts happen in the plot that Jesus does not allow. Jesus even knows of his approaching death as early as *John 2:4*. The character of Jesus also employs definite "I am" statements to display his majesty.<sup>80</sup> These all work together to portray Jesus as a character who possesses true authority from God, the Father.<sup>81</sup> One who is deserving of belief.

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<sup>78</sup> John 1:17-18

<sup>79</sup> Culpepper 1983, 107-108.

<sup>80</sup> See John 6:35-48, 6:51, 8:12, 10:7-9, 10:11-14, 11:25, 14:6, and 15:5.

<sup>81</sup> Culpepper 1983, 107-109.

We now move our focus to 'the Jews' as characters. Though there is some variation in their portrayal, the Jews are often presented as the direct contrast of those who accept Jesus and often represent disbelief. This makes them important figures in terms of plot advancement. As we encounter them in the various episodes in *John* we see them develop as their hostility to Jesus grows stronger. Unlike Jesus, they play a lesser role in the introduction. We see this in the fact that they are only mentioned ten times in first four chapters, compared to the 60 more appearances they make throughout the rest of the book. The Jews first appear and attempt to challenge Jesus through questions.<sup>82</sup> The questions demonstrate their unbelief. We then see their reaction which is to reject the answer that Jesus gives. The reaction of 'the Jews' is shown to be the wrong response. This helps convey to the reader that the correct response is to believe in Jesus.<sup>83</sup> As their conflicts with Jesus escalate, they move to take official action against Jesus. While Jesus allows himself to go to the cross, the Jews are the ones who demanded it. Their unbelief turns to anger, and this moves them to desire the destruction of Jesus.<sup>84</sup> The Jews appear to win out due to the fact that Jesus is killed; however the reader understands that their unbelief leads to the loss of their own lives. This is compared to those who accept belief and win life eternal.

*John* provides a variety of characters with which the reader interacts. Jesus is given a central role, and the other characters allow us to see varying

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<sup>82</sup> An example of these kind of interactions is starts at *John* 2:6.

<sup>83</sup> It is important to note that we do have example of the Jews in a positive light. There are some instances where some of the Jews come to believe in Jesus. See *John* 11:45.

<sup>84</sup> Culpepper 1983, 125-131.

reactions to Jesus as a divine being. Here we have investigated the Jews and their rejection of Jesus. Through plot and characterization, the author pushes the reader to see that believing in Jesus as divine is the correct response. These characters give the plot life. They make the narrative dynamic and allow the reader to see how the author wants one to believe in Jesus.<sup>85</sup>

Now that we have investigated how plot and characters work in the *Gospel of John* we turn our attention to how the voice the author uses weaves the tale, the narrator. First we will determine the point of view the narrator takes. What does our narrator tell that helps us determine their range of knowledge? The narrator speaks about events that happened in prehistory as we see Jesus has been with the Father since the beginning of time. The reader is also shown that narrator knows that Jesus is all knowing.<sup>86</sup> So we have a narrator who can provide glimpse into one character's state of mind. Is the narrator limited only to knowledge of Jesus mind set? As we continue on we see that the narrator understands what goes on in the minds of disciples.<sup>87</sup> The narrator is also able to give us glimpses into the thoughts of Jesus' opposition.<sup>88</sup> From this we can conclude the narrator of *John* display traits of omniscience.<sup>89</sup>

It is also important to note that the narrator tells the story from the outside. This means the narrator takes on the third person point of view. S/he does not interact in the events portrayed. While this technique usually establishes trust

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<sup>85</sup> Culpepper 1983, 145-148.

<sup>86</sup> See John 2:24

<sup>87</sup> See John 2:11, 2:17, 2:22, 4:27, 12:16, 13:28-29, 20:9, and 21:4.

<sup>88</sup> John 12:4-6, 8:27, 12:10 are some of examples of how the narrator provides glimpse into the mindset of Judas and the Jews.

<sup>89</sup> Culpepper 1983, 20-26.

from the ones who read the work, it is important to note that the narrator is not impartial.<sup>90</sup> The narrator is used to portray some characters in a positive light and others in a negative light.<sup>91</sup> The narrator is also the eyes through which we see conflicts unfold. It is the voice that demonstrates which side is correct and which is wrong.<sup>92</sup>

We see now how we use the tools found in Narrative Criticism to discern meaning from the whole, aside from dissecting it and only finding meaning in the work's sections. We have now been introduced to how Narrative Criticism can give us insight into John. We must note that this study does not render other methods obsolete. If one seeks to have heightened understanding of the Bible, one must look to a variety of techniques. It is also important to note that we have examined only one example of Narrative Criticism in relation to *John*. R. Alan Culpepper is a pioneer and his work provides a foundation, but his points are not the final words. The ideas on plot, character, narrator, and other aspects of Narrative Criticism are debatable.<sup>93</sup> *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* does not give a final take on Johannine scholarship. What it does is deliver a challenge to always keep one's mind open to new ideas and new ways to understand the way the Biblical writings work.

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<sup>90</sup> Culpepper 1983, 32-34.

<sup>91</sup> This evident from the above discussion on Jesus and the Jews as characters.

<sup>92</sup> Please refer back to the discussion on plot in the *Gospel of John*.

<sup>93</sup> Some examples are Staley: *The Print's First Kiss*, Thatcher and Moore: *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism*, Moore: *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, Resseguie: *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, Stibbe: *John as Storyteller*. And Davies: *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel*.

## CHAPTER 5

### JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA IN JOHN'S STORY

Joseph of Arimathea is placed toward the end of the *Gospel* of John. He is once again given the task of collecting Jesus' body after the crucifixion. Joseph is also presented with the work of acquiring the rights of the body from Pilate. It is in the sequence Joseph makes first and only appearance in *John*, but as you will see in the New Revised Standards rendering of this section *John's* Joseph is not alone. *John* 19:38-42 reads:

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with spices in linens cloths, according to the burial customs of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

As we just saw Joseph is placed alongside of Nicodemus, and unlike Joseph the reader has already met him in their reading of *John*. I will now construct our Narrative Critique of Joseph of Arimathea. We will first look into the description the author of *John* gives him. This will demonstrate how the character is used to support the author's position on a secret confession and belief system based on Jesus. We will then move on to how his placement with Nicodemus impacts the character construction process. Finally we will see how the author uses death to cast a negative light on secret discipleship of Jesus.

Joseph of Arimathea is first given one of the highest compliments the author of *John* can give. He is presented as a disciple of Jesus. As we have seen *John's* desire for belief plays a heavy roll in driving his story. He condemns those who do not believe, and exalts those that do accept Jesus. It is clear John wants to portray the acceptance and belief in Jesus as God in a very positive light. So in our first encounter Joseph is displayed as a believer, but we must read on. In doing so we come to understand that Joseph has not made his belief public knowledge. Joseph, like the parents presented 9:13-34, and the authorities mentioned in 12:42-43 is motivated by fear. This is his fear of the Jews. In the story world *John* constructs, believers in Jesus, most or all of which are Jewish themselves, face persecution from their Jewish neighbors. The believers face banishment from their community, and thus a loss of cultural identity. This is a very scary thing. However, *John* glorifies those that face this exile.<sup>94</sup> As we will read on, we will see how *John* uses the character of Joseph to denounce fear and try to motivate the reader into a public belief system in Jesus as divine.

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<sup>94</sup> John 9:35-41

We also note here, that unlike *Mark*, Joseph is not described as a member of the council. In *John's* portrayal Joseph had no hand or part in Jesus' death. It does appear that he is somehow a man of respect as he has the ability to approach Pilate, but nothing is said of the means by which gains the ability to do so. The only title the author ascribes to Joseph is that of Disciple. In doing this it is clear that our author in some way is trying to cast Joseph in a somewhat positive light. The author gives traits that would allow the reader to construct a character with positive qualities. Through this we see that the author does not despise a secret confession of Jesus, like the author does in regards to unbelief, but as we continue our analysis we will see the author hopes to display full public confession in the most positive of lights.

Now let us return to our concept of character construction. As noted earlier the author can control how a reader constructs a character by the amount of details given about the figure. The author can also aid in the construction of a character by placing them along side of another character. To demonstrate this we will develop the character of Nabil the man. Once again I have only supplied you a name and gender for the character. However, if I tie him to our previously constructed Will I can shape how the reader perceives him. I, as the author, can tell you that Nabil escorted Will, who was returning the books he used in writing his Master thesis, to library. By linking the two characters the author has now had a say on how you, the reader, constructs Nabil. You know he occupies the same physical space as Will, seems to want to be in Will's company, and it is quite possible he himself is Master's student as well. Thus, to fully understand a

character it , you must also understand the character they are tied to. For this thesis that means to fully understand Joseph of Arimathea's role in *The Gospel of John* we must also understand Nicodemus.

Nicodemus appears two times in the Gospel of John before his final appearance with Joseph of Arimathea after the crucifixion of Jesus. He enters the work at chapter 3:1-21 when he approaches Jesus at night to learn about the true nature of Jesus. The second time Nicodemus appears is in a gathering of Pharisees, which he is.<sup>95</sup> These Pharisees are projecting disappointment about the police's inability to capture Jesus. Here Nicodemus speaks up and tries to reason with his peers. He suggest that their customs give Jesus the right to hearing. This suggestion is mocked, and another nameless Pharisee attempts to suggest that Nicodemus shares commonalities with Jesus. This is where the second story of Nicodemus ends. There is no challenge or acceptance of the allegations brought against him. The Gospel simply moves onto the next story. We can now see what information we can find about Nicodemus that will help us understand Joseph.

The first thing we learn about Nicodemus is has some authority. *John 3:1* reads, "Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews." The author of John wants us to see that even those in positions of authority regard Jesus highly, and this established early on in the work. With this in mind it is easy to see that Joseph is able to converse with the upper crust of society in this story world *John* creates. He works alongside a Jewish leader, and has the ability to appeal directly to Roman authority. With this information we can see that the

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<sup>95</sup> John 3:1

author wants us to assume Joseph is a disciple of Jesus that comes from the upper class in this society.

Our attention is now focused upon the time of day in which Nicodemus comes to learn from Jesus. This Jewish leader comes to the *John's* Messiah figure at night. We must question why our author places this meeting at this point in the day? One reading demonstrates that night time is often used by the author as the setting for evil actions.<sup>96</sup> An example of this is Judas' betrayal of Jesus takes place at this time.<sup>97</sup> Some commentators have tried to render a positive reason for Nicodemus approaching the man he comes to describe as a teacher from God. This is done by drawing connection to the time of day when one would have usually studied scripture and discussed law.<sup>98</sup> This connection is plausible due to the fact that Jesus receives the title of teacher. However, it seems unlikely that the author would want the reader to view this event as a completely positive happening. Nicodemus does approach Jesus with respect as a teacher and acknowledges him being sent from God, but he does not confess Jesus as God. This is the central position our author is defending and is the belief system that is rewarded.<sup>99</sup> We also note there is no mention of Nicodemus taking public action. The way the account is rendered gives the reader the impression that the only people who were involved with this incident were Jesus and Nicodemus. We have seen that the account of this event is not an retelling of an evil event and that it lacks certain qualities that would have be rendered a completely positive

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<sup>96</sup> Brown 1966, 138-141

<sup>97</sup> John 18:1-11

<sup>98</sup> Smith 1989, 93-94

<sup>99</sup> John 9:35-41

encounter. This means both of the answers presented here are not completely satisfying in terms of questions upon setting it at night.

One commentary points out the night is seen as a time of ignorance.<sup>100</sup> It also logical to accept that night is seen as a time of darkness, and darkness conceals and hinders one from bearing a completely accurate witness. Both of these fall in line with how Nicodemus is portrayed. This of night helps the reader understand that Nicodemus is a character who moves in secret and wishes to keep his encounters with Jesus hidden from his peers. The night also allows the reader to see that Nicodemus inability to move his belief system into the public is ignorant, and is not the path to be followed.

Let us now return to Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph is clearly a secret disciple, the author tells us this plainly. Yet, we do not know what it means to be a secret disciple, or how one acts. By linking Joseph with Nicodemus we have a complete picture of what it means to be a secret disciple. These characters come to represent believers in Jesus who do not make their belief system public knowledge.<sup>101</sup> We will now look to see how the author of *John* shows what this belief system reaps in where he places them in terms of the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

*John's* passion story encompasses many characters, and displays the wide range of responses to Jesus that the author uses characters to demonstrate. As Christ is placed upon the cross the religious authorities reject him as their king one last time when they appeal to Pilate to change the title

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<sup>100</sup> Brown 1986, 32

<sup>101</sup> Culpepper 1983, 135-136

placed on Jesus cross. We then have Pilate who keeps the title, but does not change the situation and allows Jesus to die. We see the family and friends who remain with Jesus until the end. This brings us to our two secret disciples. Joseph and Nicodemus enter the picture after Jesus death, and see that his body is tended to in the ways of their people. While these two figures honor Jesus, they are tied to death and old customs. If we continue to read we see how the two of the public disciples experience an empty tomb, yet they are still unaware of its true nature. Finally we see Mary, who remains at the grave wanting to find and honor the body of Jesus is rewarded with being the first to experience and be commissioned to tell of the resurrection. *John* uses his death sequence to demonstrate how each belief system is rewarded. By connecting Joseph and Nicodemus to customs of burial *John* shows us that secret discipleship brings honor to Christ, but these followers do not get to participate in the full glory of a risen Lord.

## CONCLUSION

We have completed our Narrative analysis of the character of Joseph of Arimathea. We can now move to compare and contrast the characters as they are presented in *Mark* and *John*. In doing this we will see how Narrative Criticism can help us understand differences in the way material is presented by these different authors. We will do this to show that even if these authors are relating actual historical events their narrative techniques will help us understand other points the author is trying to make. Thus I will show how narrative studies can aid and benefit historical surveys.

As we have seen the stories of Joseph of Arimathea are quite similar. The character enters the Gospel at the same time, after Jesus' crucifixion. Joseph goes to Pilate and requests the body, and each account has Joseph involved with the burial of Jesus. However, we see that through a Narrative critique of the texts the accounts differ a good bit. As I have demonstrated *Mark's* plot is focused on a coming rule of God. This rule is tied with Jesus' life, death, and presumed resurrection. After the plot hits its climax in the death of Jesus, *Mark's* story world is a different place. Now there is one who separates himself from a group that persecuted Jesus. In doing this we no longer see this figure as a nameless one of our antagonists, but as Joseph. This man is also waiting for the kingdom of God, and sees that it is important to honor Jesus. For *Mark* Joseph

signifies that the rule of God is to have an impact on all those in this world. Even those that persecuted Jesus can take part of the Kingdom.

In *John's* story Joseph is used in a different way. The author has driven his plot on demonstrating the necessity of belief. In doing this he has crafted characters that show his reader the wide range of responses to Jesus, God on earth. We have those who reject, and seek his death. We have those that fully confess and believe in him, such as Mary Magdalene. Then several responses that fall somewhere in between the aforementioned extremes, and Joseph is a character that falls into this category. Joseph of Arimathea is disciple of Jesus, and for *John* this is one of the best places to be. However, he has kept his belief secret. While we have little to go on in terms of description of Joseph we know he is a figure akin to Nicodemus. These characters represent how belief can be hampered by fear of the Jewish community. While those closer to Mary's side of the spectrum get to see a risen Lord, our secret disciples only get to honor a dead body with old customs. It is with these characters *John* demonstrates his desire for his reader to be bold in their beliefs.

We have now seen how Narrative Criticism can help us understand the nuances each writer uses to craft his Gospel. Each writer sets out with a similar goal, to craft a story of Jesus. Through Narrative Criticism we can see how the writers drive their stories in different ways. They use plot and characters to drive home what they deem to be the relevant message in regards to the life of Jesus. For *Mark* Jesus is a catalyst that is to bring about the rule of God. The author uses this as his plot and builds characters to help support his message. For *John*

it is important to know that Jesus is the Son of God and God's form on earth. He uses his characters to demonstrate how one can respond to Jesus. He then uses his plot to demonstrate the various rewards associated with each action. Each writer wants to tell the same story, which may be a historical happening, but they use crafted story telling techniques to focus their reader in on the central theme of their work.

This thesis has provided a study of Narrative Critiques of *Mark* and *John*. It has also demonstrated how Narrative Criticisms work by analyzing Joseph of Arimathea. In doing this we have shown that Narrative Criticism does not stand in contrast with other types of Biblical Scholarship, but can help supplement other types of study. As we have seen with Joseph of Arimathea it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of an event, even in the face of possible historicity. Through Narrative Criticism one can gain insight into the possible motivations for writing, and see a deeper understanding of how the Gospel works as a story.

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