

Bridging the Gap

Using short stories for evangelism and teaching in the Church can be highly effective for several reasons:

Engagement and Relatability

Short stories often focus on real-life situations or simple narratives that people can easily relate to. This helps listeners connect emotionally and intellectually with the message. In a world full of distractions, short stories can capture attention quickly and hold it long enough to deliver a meaningful point.

Simplifying Complex Ideas

Stories can illustrate deep spiritual truths in a simple and memorable way, helping listeners grasp difficult theological concepts. Jesus Himself used parables, short and symbolic stories, to teach about the Kingdom of God, faith, and morality. His listeners often found deep meaning in these accessible stories.

Memorability

People tend to remember stories better than abstract teachings. A well-told short story can leave a lasting impression and help people retain important messages. Because they are memorable and easy to retell, short stories make it easier for believers to share the Gospel or moral teaching with others.

Emotional Impact

Stories that evoke emotions, such as joy, compassion, or conviction, are more likely to inspire people to act on what they've learnt. Stories touch the heart and soul in a way that direct teaching sometimes cannot.

Many short stories powerfully demonstrate God's love, forgiveness, and grace in personal or communal contexts, making abstract theological concepts tangible and impactful.

Cultural Accessibility

Stories transcend cultural barriers more easily than formal teaching. A well-crafted short story can communicate spiritual truths to people from diverse backgrounds. In many cultures, storytelling is a primary means of communication, making it an effective tool for evangelism and teaching in both literate and non-literate contexts.

Creates Space for Reflection

Stories often leave room for personal interpretation and reflection, encouraging people to think about the spiritual truths being communicated and how they apply to their own lives. Short stories can serve as great conversation starters, sparking discussions in small groups or church settings that lead to deeper exploration of faith.

Overall, short stories offer a versatile and powerful way to communicate spiritual truths, engaging both the heart and mind in a format that resonates with people of all ages and backgrounds.

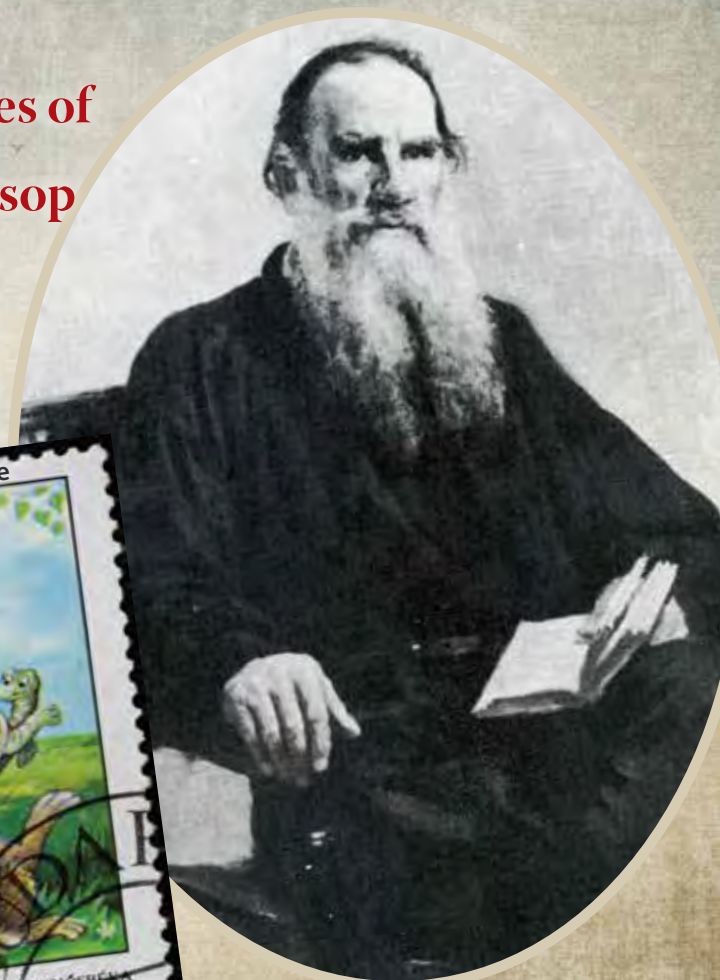


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Using the stories of
Tolstoy and Aesop
as a bridge to
biblical truths



The Gospel according to Aesop's Fables

The Gospel according to Tolstoy

Edited by Ron George and Ana Lopes

Bridging the Gap

*Using the stories of Tolstoy and Aesop
as a bridge to biblical truths*

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Introduction

USING SHORT STORIES as a bridge to biblical ideas and truths can be a powerful tool for teaching and reflection. Just why do short stories hold such value in this context?

Relatability through Everyday Scenarios

Short stories often draw from everyday life, reflecting common experiences, struggles and emotions. When a biblical truth is embedded in a relatable story, it becomes more accessible. Instead of abstract doctrine, people can see how faith applies in real-life situations, helping them connect the dots between their daily lives and spiritual principles.

Engagement and Retention

A well-crafted short story captures attention quickly. Its brevity keeps the listener engaged, and its focused narrative allows for clear, impactful messages. When biblical truths are conveyed through compelling, concise stories, they are more likely to be remembered and reflected upon.

Subtlety and Reflection

Short stories often work with subtlety and open-ended interpretations. They leave space for readers or listeners to reflect and discover the deeper meaning on their own. This reflective process can lead to deeper personal insight into biblical truths, as the listener isn't simply told the message but experiences it through the narrative.

Emotionally Resonant

Stories tap into emotions. Jesus himself used parables – simple, short stories – because they engaged people's hearts, not just their minds. When a short story stirs emotions, it creates a deeper connection to biblical teachings, allowing the truth to resonate on a personal level and evoke a transformative response.

Timelessness and Universality

Short stories, like biblical parables, can be timeless. They often explore universal themes such as love, forgiveness, sacrifice, and redemption, which align directly with biblical values. By presenting these themes in story form, they can transcend cultural and temporal boundaries, making biblical truths accessible to people from different backgrounds and generations.

Illustrating Complex Ideas Simply

The Bible contains profound theological concepts, which can sometimes feel overwhelming or complex. Short stories simplify these concepts, illustrating them in a way that feels digestible. They allow people to grasp complex truths – like grace, mercy, and justice – through a narrative that simplifies and embodies those principles in action.

Inviting Engagement and Dialogue

Short stories invite discussion. After hearing a story that illustrates a biblical idea, people are naturally drawn to ask questions, make connections, and share their own interpretations. This dialogue deepens understanding and helps others to internalize biblical truths in community.

In summary, short stories serve as a bridge between the abstract and the tangible, the doctrinal and the personal. By grounding biblical ideas in narrative form, they make spiritual truths more approachable, relatable, and impactful, allowing for deeper personal reflection and communal engagement.

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Stories by Tolstoy

TOLSTOY the short story teller is a whimsical figure; a blend of his own timeless wisdom and the lightness of a modern storyteller. He carries the weight of classic Russian literature on his shoulders but weaves it into quick, accessible tales that are both profound and brief. His stories touch on themes of morality, human nature, and the simple yet powerful moments of life. He speaks with the gravity of a philosopher, yet his words are always brief, like a leaf carried on the wind – meant to land softly but leaving an impression long after they've been heard.

In Tolstoy's world, every encounter has meaning and every story is a gateway to understanding the complexities of the human soul, distilled into just a few well-chosen words. They form a bridge to the biblical narrative of the Christian Gospels.



Alyosha the Pot

The Story

This simple yet profound story explores themes of humility, sacrifice, and the quiet suffering of the oppressed. The protagonist, Alyosha, is a young, poor, and unassuming servant whose life is marked by his uncomplaining acceptance of hardship.

Nicknamed 'The Pot' because of an incident in his childhood where he dropped a pot, Alyosha is the son of a poor peasant family. At the age of 19 his father sends him to work as a servant for a wealthy merchant. Alyosha is a quiet, obedient, and hardworking boy who accepts all tasks without question. He does not complain or resist when people order him around, and he performs his duties diligently, from tending animals to running errands.

Alyosha's character is defined by his simplicity and meekness. He never seeks to assert himself or ask for more, accepting his lowly position in life with humility. Although he is treated as inferior by those around him, he is content with his lot and even finds small moments of joy in his daily routine.

At one point, Alyosha falls in love with a cook named Ustinya. She is kind to him, and they form a quiet, understated bond. However, when Alyosha's employer and father find out about their relationship, they put a stop to it. Alyosha, true to his nature, does not argue or fight back; he simply accepts their decision, though it brings him sadness.

Alyosha's life comes to a sudden and tragic end when he falls off the roof while performing a task. He dies quietly, without complaint, as he lived. His death is as unremarkable as his life, but Tolstoy uses Alyosha's story to highlight the dignity in his humility and the spiritual purity of his acceptance of life's hardships.

Biblical Comparisons

Jesus Washing the Disciples' Feet (John 13:1-17)

Before the Last Supper, Jesus humbles Himself by washing His disciples' feet, a task usually reserved for servants. This act symbolizes His teachings on humility, love, and service, and Jesus tells His disciples that true greatness is found in serving others.

Alyosha's life of selfless service mirrors the humility Jesus demonstrates in washing His disciples' feet. Like Jesus, Alyosha performs menial tasks without complaint, and his simple, unassuming nature echoes the ideal of humble service that Jesus embodies.

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes the blessedness of those who are meek, poor in spirit, and pure-hearted, promising them the kingdom of heaven. The Beatitudes celebrate virtues such as humility, mercy, and selflessness, offering divine rewards to those who live modestly and serve others.

Alyosha, with his simple and humble demeanour, personifies the virtues Jesus extols. He is meek, obedient, and accepting of his lowly station in life, embodying the type of blessedness described in the Sermon on the Mount. His quiet endurance and pure-hearted nature reflect the qualities that Jesus teaches will be rewarded in the kingdom of heaven.

Conclusion

These stories emphasise humility and the virtue of service. They reflect a deep spiritual ideal of living not for personal glory but for the good of others, an ideal that resonates throughout the Gospels and Tolstoy's story.



The Empty Drum

The Story

This story delves into the themes of greed, generosity, and the true essence of wealth. A king possesses an empty drum that will only produce sound under a specific condition: when the richest man in the kingdom gives all his wealth to the poorest man. Many attempt to make the drum sound through various means but fail. It is only when the wealthiest individual relinquishes all his riches to the most destitute person that the drum finally resonates. The story highlights the transformative power of selflessness and the hollowness of material wealth when it is hoarded.

Biblical Comparisons

The Rich Young Ruler (Matthew 19:16-22)

A wealthy young man approaches Jesus, asking, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" Jesus tells him to keep the commandments. The young man responds that he has kept them all and inquires what he still lacks. Jesus then says, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." The young man leaves in sorrow because he cannot part with his great wealth.

The rich individuals in both narratives are confronted with a moral decision that tests their attachment to material possessions versus their desire for spiritual growth or communal wellbeing.

The Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21)

Jesus tells the story of a rich man whose land yields an abundant harvest. Unsure of where to store his crops, he decides to tear down his barns and

build bigger ones. Confident in his wealth, he says to himself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry." However, God says to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" Jesus concludes, "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

Both the rich fool and the wealthy man in Tolstoy's story initially focus on accumulating wealth without considering its meaningful use. The rich fool faces divine rebuke and the loss of his soul, while the drum remains silent until generosity is displayed.

The Early Christian Community Shares Possessions (Acts 4:32-35)

In the early days of the Church, "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had". Those who owned land or houses sold them, bringing the proceeds to the apostles to distribute to anyone in need. This practice ensured that "there were no needy persons among them".

The believers' willingness to share their wealth mirrors the act of the richest man giving his wealth to the poorest in Tolstoy's narrative. Just as the drum's sound symbolizes harmony achieved through selflessness, the early Church's unity is a result of their shared generosity.

Conclusion

These Bible stories collectively underscore the belief that generosity enriches both the giver and the receiver, leading to a more meaningful and interconnected existence.



Father Sergius

The Story

This story follows the spiritual journey of Prince Stepan Kasatsky, who later becomes Father Sergius, a monk. The plot revolves around his search for meaning, inner peace, and closeness to God, contrasted by the temptations and trials he faces throughout his life.

Stepan begins as a proud and ambitious young man with a promising military career. He is engaged to a beautiful woman, Countess Mary Korotkova, but his world is shattered when he learns that she had been the mistress of Tsar Nicholas I. Humiliated and disillusioned, Kasatsky breaks off the engagement and retreats from worldly life, entering a monastery to become a monk, hoping to find solace in religious devotion.

As Father Sergius, he becomes widely admired for his piety and spiritual wisdom, but he constantly struggles with his inner desires, pride, and temptations. His journey is marked by a series of moral and spiritual challenges. One of the most significant occurs when a woman tries to seduce him, but instead of succumbing, he cuts off one of his fingers to resist the temptation. This act of self-mutilation gains him even more fame and admiration, but does not bring him the peace he seeks.

Father Sergius continues to grapple with his pride and, over time, becomes increasingly disillusioned with the life of a revered monk. He eventually abandons the monastery, realizing that true spirituality cannot be achieved through isolation or external praise. In the end, Father Sergius finds peace by living humbly and anonymously, helping others in a small village, learning that love and humility are the true paths to God.

The story explores deep spiritual and existential themes, including pride, temptation, the quest for true faith, and the contrast between external piety and internal struggles. Tolstoy critiques both the Church and societal values, emphasizing that genuine faith lies in humility, selflessness, and compassion for others.

Biblical Comparisons

The Temptation of Joseph by Potiphar's Wife (Genesis 39:1-20)

Joseph, sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, becomes a trusted servant in the household of Potiphar, an Egyptian official. Noticing his success and attractiveness, Potiphar's wife repeatedly tries to seduce him. Joseph resists her advances, steadfastly refusing to betray Potiphar's trust and sin against God. One day, she grabs his garment as he flees from her and, feeling spurned, falsely accuses him of attempting to assault her. As a result, Joseph is unjustly imprisoned, yet he remains faithful to God throughout his trials.

Both Joseph and Father Sergius face intense sexual temptation. Their confrontations highlight the struggle between moral integrity and carnal desires. Joseph's refusal to yield parallels Father Sergius's extreme measures

to resist seduction, though Joseph's resistance stems from loyalty and righteousness, while Sergius initially acts from pride.

Joseph endures unjust punishment despite his righteousness, while Father Sergius grapples with internal turmoil despite his outward piety. Both characters' journeys ultimately lead to deeper spiritual understanding and fulfillment.

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14)

Jesus shares a parable about two men praying in the temple. The Pharisee stands proudly, thanking God that he is not like other sinners and boasting about his religious deeds. In contrast, the tax collector stands at a distance, unwilling to even lift his eyes to heaven, and humbly prays, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner". Jesus concludes that the tax collector, not the Pharisee, goes home justified before God, emphasizing that those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Father Sergius initially embodies the Pharisee's pride, taking satisfaction in his ascetic achievements and moral superiority. His journey reflects a movement toward the tax collector's humility as he recognizes his own flaws.

The parable highlights that genuine righteousness is a matter of the heart, not external displays of piety – a central lesson Father Sergius learns. Both the tax collector and Father Sergius engage in deep self-reflection, acknowledging their unworthiness and seeking mercy, which leads to their spiritual renewal.

Jesus is tempted in the Wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11)

After his baptism, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where he fasts for forty days and nights. During this time, Satan tempts him three times: to turn stones into bread to satisfy his hunger, to throw himself from the temple pinnacle to test God's protection, and to gain all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worshipping Satan. Jesus resists each temptation by quoting Scripture, affirming his commitment to God's will over earthly desires.

Both Jesus and Father Sergius undergo periods of intense spiritual testing in isolation, facing temptations that challenge their commitments. Jesus relies on Scripture and his relationship with God to resist, while Father Sergius initially relies on extreme self-denial, eventually realizing the need for genuine humility and internal transformation.

Satan's temptations appeal to pride and power, similar to how Father Sergius grapples with his desire for spiritual superiority and recognition.

Conclusion

These stories collectively emphasise that while external accolades may fade, the enduring qualities of humility and genuine goodness lead to lasting inner peace and divine approval.



How Much Land Does a Man Need?

The Story

This is a moral tale about greed and its consequences, centred on Pahom, a peasant who believes that if he had enough land he would have no worries in life.

Pahom starts with a modest amount of land but constantly feels that it is not enough. His desire for more land grows as he acquires more, moving from one land deal to another. Eventually, Pahom hears of the Bashkirs who offer him a deal: for a small sum, he can have as much land as he can walk around in one day, but he must return to the starting point by sunset.

Excited by the opportunity, Pahom sets off early in the morning and greedily attempts to claim as much land as possible. As the day goes on, he pushes himself further, but as sunset approaches, he realizes that he is far from the starting point. He rushes back, barely reaching the starting line as the sun sets. Exhausted from his efforts, Pahom collapses and dies from the strain.

In the end, Pahom is buried in a simple grave and Tolstoy reveals the moral of the story: all the land a man truly needs is the space required for his grave – six feet of earth.

Biblical Comparisons

The Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21)

Jesus tells the parable of a rich man whose land produces an abundant harvest. Confronted with the dilemma of storing his surplus grain, the man decides to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. He tells himself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry.” However, God says to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for

yourself?” Jesus concludes the parable by teaching that this is how it will be for anyone who stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.

Both Pahom and the Rich Fool are consumed by the desire to accumulate more wealth, believing it will secure their future and bring them contentment. They place their trust in material possessions, neglecting spiritual wellbeing and the transient nature of life.

King Ahab and Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21)

King Ahab of Israel covets a vineyard owned by Naboth the Jezreelite because it is close to his palace. Ahab offers to buy it or exchange it for a better vineyard, but Naboth refuses, honouring it as his ancestral inheritance. Sullen and angry, Ahab returns home. His wife, Queen Jezebel, devises a sinister plan: she arranges for false witnesses to accuse Naboth of blasphemy, leading to his execution by stoning. With Naboth dead, Ahab takes possession of the vineyard. God sends the prophet Elijah to confront Ahab, pronouncing judgment on him and his household for his greed and injustice. Ahab eventually shows remorse, but the consequences of his actions linger.

Conclusion

Both Ahab and Pahom are driven by an insatiable desire for more land, disregarding moral considerations.

Ahab commits a grave injustice to acquire Naboth's vineyard, while Pahom's relentless pursuit indirectly leads to his own demise. Both stories illustrate how the pursuit of material possessions at the expense of ethical principles leads to personal ruin.



Ilyás

The Story

This is a story about the fleeting nature of wealth and the pursuit of true happiness. Ilyás starts off as a wealthy man who accumulates a great fortune, owning livestock, lands, and enjoying high status in his community. However, over time, due to misfortune and poor harvests, he loses everything.

Despite losing his wealth, Ilyás and his wife, Sham-Shemagi, find peace and

contentment in their humble life as labourers in the service of a kind master, Muhammad Shah. They come to realize that their previous wealth brought them only anxiety and worries. As labourers, they live a simple, frugal life, and, for the first time, they experience true happiness, free from the burdens of material possessions.

The story explores themes of humility, the perils of greed, and the idea that happiness lies not in wealth but in a contented, simple life. Tolstoy highlights that true fulfillment comes from spiritual richness rather than material success.

Biblical Comparisons

The Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21)

Jesus tells the parable of a rich man whose land yields an abundant harvest. Facing the problem of insufficient storage for his crops, he decides, “This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain.”

Confident in his accumulated wealth, he says to himself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry.” However, God addresses him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” Jesus concludes by teaching that this is how it will be for those who store up things for themselves but are not rich toward God.

Both the Rich Fool and Ilyás initially believe that wealth guarantees security and happiness. They place their trust in material possessions rather than in spiritual or relational fulfillment. The sudden death of the rich man and the unforeseen loss of Ilyás’s wealth underscore the transient nature of material possessions.

Teachings of Contentment by the Apostle Paul (1 Timothy 6:6-10; Philippians 4:11-13)

Paul writes to Timothy about the dangers of desiring wealth, stating, “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.” He warns that those eager for money fall into temptation and harmful desires, leading to ruin and destruction. “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”

To the Philippians Paul shares his personal experience with contentment, saying, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty.”

He emphasizes that he can endure all things through the strength provided by his faith in Christ.

Conclusion

Both Paul, Ilyás and the Rich Fool learn that true contentment does not depend on material wealth. Ilyás finds greater peace in his poverty than he did in his riches. Paul’s warning about the love of money leading to ruin reflects the experience of Ilyás and the Rich Fool, where the pursuit of wealth ultimately brings stress and unhappiness.



Ivan the Fool

The Story

This is an allegorical short story about three brothers – Simeon, Taras, and Ivan. The first two represent different aspects of society while Ivan, the protagonist, symbolizes humility, simplicity, and innocence.

The three brothers inherit a portion of their father’s land. Simeon, the eldest, is a soldier, Taras is a merchant, and Ivan, nicknamed the Fool, is a humble farmer. Each brother follows his own path:

Simeon becomes a military leader, Taras accumulates wealth through trade, while Ivan quietly works the land with his family. Ivan’s simplicity and foolishness lead others to believe he is unintelligent, but he lives contentedly and peacefully.

The Devil, angered by Ivan’s happiness and success, sends his minions to corrupt the brothers. Simeon and Taras fall prey to the Devil’s temptations, leading them to misery and failure. However, the Devil’s efforts to corrupt Ivan fail because he remains unaffected by greed, ambition, or violence, continuing to help others and share what he has; spreading goodness and generosity in his community.

Eventually, Ivan becomes king, but he rules without force or greed, making decisions that benefit everyone. The story concludes with a vision of a utopian society where people live in harmony, free from materialism and oppression.

The story contrasts material success with spiritual fulfillment. It critiques

military power, commerce, and intellectualism, while celebrating the virtues of humility, simplicity, and communal living. Tolstoy uses Ivan's character to convey the moral that true happiness comes from kindness and contentment rather than wealth or power.

Biblical Comparisons

Teachings on Wisdom and Foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18-31)

Paul addresses the concept of divine wisdom versus human wisdom, writing: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

He goes on: "For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength."

Paul emphasizes that God chooses the "foolish" things of the world to shame the wise and the "weak" things to shame the strong. This passage highlights how true wisdom is often contrary to worldly expectations and values.

Ivan is considered a fool by societal standards because he rejects conventional pursuits of power and wealth. Similarly, Paul speaks of how God's wisdom appears as foolishness to the world.

Ivan's humility and simplicity ultimately lead to genuine prosperity and peace, paralleling the biblical theme that God exalts the humble. Just as Paul's message challenges believers to rethink their values, Ivan's story critiques societal norms that prioritize ambition and cunning over goodness and integrity.

The Sermon on the Mount – The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12)

Jesus presents the Beatitudes as a series of blessings that overturn conventional notions of happiness and success:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' (Matthew 5:3)

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.' (Matthew 5:5)

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.' (Matthew 5:8)

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.' (Matthew 5:9)

These teachings elevate qualities that Ivan embodies, such as humility, meekness, righteousness, mercy, purity, and peace-making.

Jesus Blessing Little Children (Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 18:1-5)

People bring children to Jesus for blessings. The disciples rebuke them, but Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." He emphasizes that anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

In Matthew 18:1-5, when the disciples ask who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus calls a little child to stand among them and says, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." He highlights the virtues of humility and innocence.

Conclusion

Ivan's simplicity and lack of guile resemble the qualities of a child, which Jesus decrees as being necessary for entering the kingdom of God. Ivan does not seek status or power, reflecting the teaching that true greatness comes from humility. Like children who trust and depend on others, Ivan trusts in the goodness of life and remains uncorrupted by cynicism or ambition. Just as the disciples initially dismiss the children, society views Ivan as a fool. However, both are affirmed by a higher wisdom.



Master and Man

The Story

This is a profound short story about the relationship between a wealthy landowner, Vasily Andreevich Brekhunov, and his servant, Nikita, as they embark on a journey that ultimately transforms their lives.

Vasily, a greedy and self-centred merchant, and his humble, loyal servant Nikita set out on a cold winter's day to a neighbouring village to buy a forest. Despite warnings about the dangerous weather conditions, Vasily is determined to proceed, driven by his desire to close the business deal.

They travel through the snowy wilderness but soon become lost in a worsening snowstorm. As the blizzard intensifies, the two men struggle to find their way. While Nikita remains calm and accepting of their dire situation, Vasily begins to panic. The harsh conditions force them to stop, and Vasily becomes more aware of the servant's quiet strength and endurance.

Eventually, they reach a moment of crisis where Vasily, fearing for his life, selfishly leaves Nikita to seek help but ultimately fails.

In the climactic scene, Vasily has a change of heart. He returns to Nikita and, in a moment of self-sacrifice, lies over him to keep him warm, realizing the value of human connection and humility over wealth. Vasily dies from the cold, but his selfless act saves Nikita, who survives the night.

Master and Man is a poignant reflection on the deeper meanings of life, death, and the ultimate realization that human values like compassion and humility surpass material success.

Biblical Comparisons

The Conversion of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)

Zacchaeus is a wealthy chief tax collector in Jericho. Tax collectors were often despised by their fellow Jews because they collected taxes for the Roman occupiers and were notorious for extorting money. Curious to see Jesus, Zacchaeus climbs a sycamore-fig tree due to his short stature. As Jesus passes by, he looks up and says: “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”

Overjoyed, Zacchaeus welcomes Jesus into his home. Observers grumble that Jesus is associating with a sinner. Moved by Jesus’s acceptance, Zacchaeus stands up and declares: “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

Jesus responds: “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Both Zacchaeus and Vasily begin as wealthy individuals focused on accumulating wealth, often at the expense of ethical considerations. Zacchaeus gains wealth through exploitation, while Vasily is driven by greed to prioritize business over safety.

An encounter with Jesus prompts Zacchaeus to re-evaluate his life, leading to repentance and restitution. Similarly, Vasily’s life-threatening situation forces him to reflect on his priorities, resulting in a moral awakening.

The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

In response to a lawyer’s question about inheriting eternal life and who qualifies as a neighbour, Jesus shares this story about a man travelling from

Jerusalem to Jericho who is attacked by robbers, stripped of his clothes, beaten, and left half-dead. A priest and a Levite pass by without offering assistance. Then, a Samaritan – a member of a group despised by Jews – comes along. Moved with compassion, he tends to the man’s wounds, pouring oil and wine on them, places the man on his own donkey, brings him to an inn and cares for him overnight. He pays the innkeeper to continue the care, promising to cover any additional costs.

Jesus concludes by asking which of the three was a neighbour to the injured man. The lawyer answers, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus tells him, “Go and do likewise.”

The Samaritan helps a stranger who may have considered him an enemy, disregarding social prejudices. Vasily, initially indifferent to Nikita’s well-being, transcends the barriers of class and status in his final act.

Conclusion

These stories challenge the listener to expand their understanding of who deserves kindness and assistance. Vasily comes to see Nikita not just as a servant but as a fellow human being deserving of care, while the parable and the story of Zacchaeus emphasize that true love is demonstrated through actions.



An Old Acquaintance

The Story

Set in the Caucasus during a military campaign, this story follows Prince Nekhludov, who encounters an old acquaintance from his past. The story centres on the unexpected meeting of Nekhludov and Guskof, a man who has fallen from grace. Once a respectable officer, Guskof is now disgraced, living a life of hardship and humiliation. Through their meeting, Nekhludov reflects on Guskof’s downfall, feeling both pity and discomfort as he observes the changes in his old friend. Guskof’s attempts to impress the officers with stories of his connections and former status only deepen his sense of isolation. The story explores themes of pride, social class, and the harsh realities of human frailty, illustrating how quickly one’s fortune can change.

The story is deeply reflective of Tolstoy's experiences in the Russian army and his recurring focus on moral introspection and the consequences of social hierarchy.

Biblical Comparisons

The Reunion of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 32-33)

Jacob and Esau are twin brothers whose relationship becomes strained after Jacob deceives their father Isaac to receive the blessing intended for Esau. Fearing Esau's anger and potential retribution, Jacob flees and spends many years away, building his own family and wealth. After two decades, Jacob decides to return home, apprehensive about how Esau will receive him. He sends ahead gifts and messages in the hope of appeasing his brother. When they finally meet, instead of hostility, Esau embraces Jacob, weeping with joy. Their reunion is marked by forgiveness, reconciliation, and a restoration of brotherly affection.

Both stories centre around a meeting between individuals who have not seen each other for many years, prompting reflections on the changes time has wrought. Jacob fears Esau's wrath due to past wrongs, similar to any underlying tensions that may exist between the protagonist and his old acquaintance in Tolstoy's story.

Esau's willingness to forgive Jacob mirrors the potential for renewed understanding and the healing of old wounds in Tolstoy's narrative. Jacob and Esau have led different lives during their separation, highlighting how time and experiences can alter relationships – a key theme in *An Old Acquaintance*.

The brothers move beyond past grievances and social divides, akin to the characters in Tolstoy's story, overcoming societal judgments to reconnect on a human level.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

In this parable told by Jesus, a younger son asks his father for his share of the inheritance and then leaves home to pursue a life of indulgence. After squandering his wealth in reckless living, he finds himself destitute during a severe famine. Reflecting on his plight, he decides to return to his father, hoping to be accepted as a hired servant. Upon his return, his father sees him from a distance and is filled with compassion. He runs to his son, embraces him, and celebrates his return with a feast. The elder son, who remained loyal,

struggles with feelings of resentment, highlighting themes of forgiveness, repentance, and unconditional love.

The return of the prodigal son prompts deep reflections on personal choices and the enduring bonds of family, similar to the introspection triggered by the meeting in Tolstoy's story. The son's fall from wealth to poverty contrasts with his past life, paralleling any shifts in social status between the old acquaintances in Tolstoy's narrative.

The father's open-armed acceptance of his repentant son underscores the power of forgiveness, echoing the potential for reconciliation in *An Old Acquaintance*. The elder son's resentment highlights the challenges in overcoming jealousy and pride, which may reflect societal attitudes toward changes in status or fortune explored in Tolstoy's story.

The parable emphasizes the value of relationships over material possessions, aligning with Tolstoy's critique of societal judgments based on wealth and status.

Conclusion

In *An Old Acquaintance* Tolstoy delves into the complexities of human relationships, the impact of time on personal connections, and the superficial nature of social distinctions. The biblical stories of Jacob and Esau and the Prodigal Son resonate with these themes by highlighting the healing that comes from forgiveness and the willingness to move beyond past conflicts. The characters undergo significant personal growth, prompting reflections on identity, choices, and the possibility of change.

The stories question societal expectations and emphasize the importance of genuine human connection over external measures of success. Despite time and distance, the fundamental relationships endure, suggesting that true connections can transcend life's changes.

These parallels underscore the timeless message that empathy, forgiveness, and open-hearted acceptance are essential in overcoming barriers erected by pride, resentment, or social inequality.

Tolstoy and the biblical authors invite readers to reflect on their own relationships, encouraging a deeper appreciation for the shared humanity that binds people together across time and circumstance.



The Porcelain Doll

The Story

This is a playful letter-turned-story written in 1863 to Tolstoy's sister-in-law, Tatiana Behrs. In it, he humorously describes his wife, Sonya, as a fragile 'porcelain doll', too delicate to endure the challenges of rural life. This light-hearted narrative reflects Tolstoy's affection for his wife and his concern for her during her pregnancy. The story also subtly critiques the expectations placed on women and the fragility associated with societal perceptions of femininity during that period. The story is imbued with warmth, love, and gentle humour, highlighting the tenderness and care between husband and wife. Themes include marital love, the fragility of loved ones, protection, and the deep emotional connection shared in a marriage.

Biblical Comparisons

The Song of Songs (Song of Solomon)

This poetic book in the Old Testament celebrates the passionate and intimate love between a bride and groom. Composed as a series of lyrical poems, it features dialogues between two lovers expressing their deep affection, desire, and admiration for each other. The text is rich with vivid imagery and metaphors, portraying the beauty of romantic love and the joy found in mutual affection.

Both *The Porcelain Doll* and the Song of Songs focus on the profound love between a man and a woman within the context of marriage. Tolstoy compares his wife to a delicate porcelain doll, highlighting her preciousness. Similarly, the Song of Songs employs extensive metaphors to describe the lovers' beauty and the depth of their emotions (e.g. 'Your neck is like the tower of David, built with elegance'.)

The mutual admiration and tender expressions found in both works emphasize the emotional intimacy and respect between the partners. Tolstoy's depiction of his wife's fragility underscores his desire to protect her. In the Song of Songs, the lovers often express a desire to care for and cherish one another.

Jacob's Love for Rachel (Genesis 29:1-20)

In the Book of Genesis, Jacob travels to his uncle Laban's house and meets Rachel, Laban's younger daughter. Captivated by her beauty and character, Jacob falls deeply in love with her. He agrees to work for Laban for seven years in exchange for Rachel's hand in marriage. The scripture notes that the seven years seemed like only a few days to him because of his great love for her. Despite challenges – including being deceived into marrying Rachel's sister Leah first – Jacob remains devoted to Rachel.

Jacob's profound love and commitment to Rachel mirror the affection Tolstoy expresses for his wife in *The Porcelain Doll*. His willingness to labour for many years to be with Rachel reflects a dedication to his beloved, akin to Tolstoy's attentive care for his wife's wellbeing.

Both narratives emphasize the cherished qualities of the loved one – Jacob treasures Rachel's uniqueness, just as Tolstoy highlights Sophia's delicate and precious nature. Jacob's perseverance through hardships to secure a life with Rachel underscores themes of protection and enduring love, resonating with Tolstoy's portrayal of safeguarding his 'porcelain doll'.

Conclusion

Both Bible stories share themes of deep, affectionate love and the special bond between individuals in a close relationship. *The Porcelain Doll* reflects Tolstoy's intimate and caring relationship with his wife, using playful metaphor to convey her preciousness to him. Similarly, *The Song of Songs* celebrates romantic love with rich poetic language, emphasizing admiration, desire, and mutual respect between lovers.

The story of Jacob and Rachel illustrates enduring love, commitment, and the lengths one will go to cherish and protect their beloved.

These narratives underscore the importance of love, admiration, and the desire to cherish and protect one's beloved, paralleling the sentiments expressed in Tolstoy's story. They highlight how profound affection can inspire individuals to express themselves through poetry, sacrifice, and acts of devotion.



The Wisdom of Children

The Story

Also known as *Little Girls Wiser Than Men*, this is a short parable about forgiveness and the innocence of children, contrasted with the quarrels of adults.

The story begins with two young girls, Akulya and Malasha, playing outside during Holy Week. While playing near a puddle, Malasha accidentally splashes muddy water onto Akulya's new dress. Akulya becomes upset and the situation escalates when the mothers of the two girls get involved, leading to a heated argument. Soon, other villagers join the quarrel and what started as a simple mistake threatens to turn into a full-blown fight.

Amid the growing chaos, Akulya's grandmother steps in and urges everyone to stop fighting, reminding them that it is wrong to behave this way, especially during a time of celebration. Meanwhile, Akulya and Malasha have already been reconciled and returned to playing together. Their innocence and ability to forgive quickly highlight the pettiness of the adults' conflict.

Tolstoy uses this story to emphasize the purity of children and the foolishness of adults who allow minor issues to escalate. The moral is clear: we can learn a lot from children about forgiveness and avoiding unnecessary conflict.

The story reflects Tolstoy's Christian beliefs about love, humility, and living in harmony with others. We see that children embody untainted moral values and sincerity, that the straightforwardness of children contrasts with adult complexities and that acts of genuine care and empathy from children can influence and transform adults. The story highlights the value of simple virtues over material pursuits.

Biblical Comparisons

Jesus Blessing the Children (Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17)

In the Gospels, multiple accounts narrate an event where people bring their children to Jesus for Him to bless them. The religious leaders, perceiving Jesus's attention to children as a deviation from societal norms, attempt to rebuke them. However, Jesus responds with profound wisdom, emphasizing

the importance of children in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Just as the children in Tolstoy's story embody pure virtues, the biblical children represent innocence and humility, qualities essential for entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

Both the disciples and religious leaders are reminded by Jesus of the fundamental values that children naturally possess, paralleling how Tolstoy's children impart wisdom to the adults around them.

Both stories teach that true wisdom and moral integrity often reside in simplicity and sincerity, traits inherent in children.

Samuel Listening to God (1 Samuel 3:1-21)

The story of Samuel is a profound biblical narrative where a young boy demonstrates exceptional spiritual insight and responsiveness to God's call, profoundly impacting his community and shaping the future of Israel.

Samuel is a young boy serving under the priest Eli at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. During the night, God calls out to Samuel. Initially, Samuel mistakes the voice for Eli's and runs to him. This happens three times, with Samuel seeking Eli's guidance each time. Eli realizes that it is God calling Samuel and instructs him to respond, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening".

Following Eli's advice, Samuel listens attentively and receives God's message. God reveals impending judgment against Eli's family due to their corrupt practices.

As a result of this response, Samuel grows in stature and favour with God and men, becoming a pivotal prophet in Israel's history. His obedience and attentiveness as a child set the foundation for his influential role.

Samuel's ability to listen and respond to God's call mirrors the children in Tolstoy's story who listen with sincerity and act with integrity. Like Tolstoy's children, who display unexpected wisdom, Samuel exhibits deep spiritual understanding beyond his years.

Samuel's obedience leads to significant changes in his community, similar to how the children in Tolstoy's narrative influence adults towards moral betterment.

Conclusion

Leo Tolstoy's *Wisdom of Children* eloquently portrays the profound moral and spiritual lessons that can be derived from the innocence and sincerity of children. This narrative aligns closely with biblical stories such as *Jesus*

Blessing the Children and *Samuel Listening to God*, both of which highlight the intrinsic value of childlike purity, honesty, and the capacity to influence and teach adults through genuine compassion and spiritual insight.



Fables by Aesop

AESOP, THE CREATOR OF AESOP'S FABLES, is a figure whose life is shrouded in mystery and legend. He is believed to have lived around the 6th century BCE in ancient Greece, though there are few concrete historical details about his life. Most of what we know comes from later writers, and much of it blends history with myth.

Aesop is traditionally thought to have been a slave of African or possibly Thracian descent, serving in various households in ancient Greece. Despite his status as a slave, he was known for his wit, intelligence, and storytelling abilities. According to legend, Aesop's cleverness earned him freedom from slavery, and he later travelled widely, sharing his stories and wisdom with people from all walks of life.

Some ancient accounts describe him as living at the court of King Croesus of Lydia, where his insights and moral lessons impressed the king and his guests. Over time, Aesop's reputation grew, and he became a legendary figure in Greek culture, though his life ended tragically – some stories suggest that he was falsely accused of a crime and executed.

Aesop's Fables is a collection of short, moralistic stories often featuring animals with human-like qualities. These fables were not originally written down by Aesop himself but passed along orally and were later collected and written down by various authors over the centuries, particularly during the Classical period of Greece and later in the Roman Empire. Some of the first written collections of *Aesop's Fables* come from the 4th century BCE.

Each fable is designed to teach a moral lesson through simple, yet clever, narratives. Animals, such as foxes, lions, and hares, are used as characters to highlight human virtues and vices. For example, in *The Tortoise and the Hare*, the lesson of persistence and humility is taught, while *The Fox and the Grapes* shows the dangers of moaning over things we can't have.

Historical Significance

Aesop's Fables became a staple in both Greek and Roman education, serving as a tool for teaching morality, ethics, and critical thinking. These stories spread across cultures and time periods, influencing writers, philosophers, and educators throughout the centuries. Today, they remain some of the most well-known and beloved fables in the world, used to teach both children and

adults valuable life lessons.

Though we may never know the full truth of who Aesop was, his legacy endures in the timeless wisdom of his fables, which continue to resonate with readers across generations. By observing life and nature he provides a bridge to biblical truths and a friendly, enjoyable atmosphere to communicate them.



The Wolf and the Crane

The Story

A feeding wolf got a small bone stuck in his throat and, in terrible pain, begged the other animals for help, promising a reward. At last, the Crane agreed to try and, putting its long bill down the Wolf's throat, loosened the bone and took it out. But when the Crane asked for his reward, the Wolf replied, "You have put your head inside a wolf's mouth and taken it out again in safety; that ought to be reward enough for you."

Biblical Comparisons

Samson and Delilah (Judges 16)

In the fable, the Wolf asks the Crane for help and promises a reward but later shows ingratitude, saying the crane should be satisfied with simply surviving the interaction. In the biblical story, Samson trusts Delilah and reveals the secret of his strength, expecting that she will be faithful to him. Instead, she betrays him to the Philistines for money, leading to his capture and downfall.

In both stories, one party (the Crane or Samson) helps or trusts another (the Wolf or Delilah), expecting some form of reciprocity or fairness, but instead they encounter betrayal and exploitation. Both the fable and the biblical story illustrate the dangers of trusting the untrustworthy and the harsh reality of dealing with those who are driven by self-interest rather than gratitude or loyalty.

Pharaoh and Moses during the plagues (Exodus 7-12)

In the fable, the Wolf represents a self-serving, dangerous figure who manipulates the Crane, asking for help and then showing ingratitude by refusing to offer a promised reward. In the biblical story, Pharaoh repeatedly

promises to let the Israelites go after each plague, especially when under pressure, but once the danger is alleviated, he changes his mind and refuses to honour his promises, showing similar deceit and ingratitude.

Both stories share a central lesson about the dangers of trusting deceitful and ungrateful individuals, who may act out of selfish interest and refuse to honour promises. In both cases, the powerful or dangerous figure (the Wolf or Pharaoh) manipulates someone's trust (the Crane or Moses/Israelites) for their own benefit, with no intention of offering anything in return.

Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. (Psalm 146:3)

This verse also warns against placing trust in powerful, yet unreliable, figures who may not act in good faith.

Conclusion

Though not an exact narrative match, the story of Pharaoh and his deceitful dealings with Moses illustrates similar principles of ingratitude and the folly of expecting fairness from those who are motivated purely by self-interest. While Samson's downfall is a more complex and tragic story, both tales reflect themes of misplaced trust and the lack of reward for well-meaning actions when dealing with those who are inherently deceitful or self-serving.



The Donkey in the Lion's Skin

The Story

An Ass puts on a lion's skin and amuses himself by terrifying all the foolish animals. At last, coming upon a Fox, he tries to frighten him also, but the Fox no sooner hears the sound of his voice than he exclaims, "I might possibly have been frightened myself, if I had not heard your bray." The moral of the story is often quoted as: 'Clothes may disguise a fool, but his words will give him away.'

Biblical Comparisons

Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27)

Jacob disguises himself as his brother Esau in order to deceive their father Isaac and receive the blessing intended for Esau. Jacob wears Esau's clothes and covers his arms with goat skins to feel like his hairier brother. Isaac, who is blind, is initially deceived, but Jacob's deception is ultimately exposed, leading to conflict with and estrangement from his brother.

Both the fable and the biblical story revolve around deception through appearance: the Ass wears a Lion's skin and Jacob wears Esau's clothes and goatskin. In both cases, the false pretence is successful for a while, but the truth eventually comes out.

Just as the Ass's braying reveals its true identity, Isaac's doubt is first stirred by Jacob's voice (Genesis 27:22), which doesn't sound like Esau's, suggesting that words can expose deception.

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)

This husband and wife sell a piece of property and pretend to give all the proceeds to the apostles, but they secretly keep part of the money for themselves. They attempt to deceive the early Christian community and God, presenting themselves as more generous and faithful than they truly are.

Just as the Ass's deception is revealed when it brays, Ananias and Sapphira's deceit is exposed and they face serious consequences for their dishonesty.

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14)

The Pharisee pretends to be righteous through outward appearances, boasting of his piety, while the tax collector humbly admits his sins. Jesus teaches that those who exalt themselves will be humbled, a message echoed in the fable when the Ass's deception is revealed and ridiculed.

Conclusion

Both the fable and these biblical stories highlight the dangers of pretending to be something one is not, and how false appearances or attempts to deceive will ultimately lead to exposure and consequences.



The Lion's Share

The Story

The Lion, the Fox, the Jackal, and the Wolf agreed to go hunting together, sharing whatever they found.

One day the Wolf ran down a stag and immediately called his comrades to divide the spoil. Without being asked, the Lion placed himself at the head of the feast to do the carving, and, with a great show of fairness, began to count the guests.

"One", he said, counting on his claws. "That is myself the Lion. Two, that's the Wolf, three is the Jackal, and the Fox makes four". He then very carefully divided the stag into four equal parts.

"I am King Lion", he said, when he had finished, "so of course I get the first part. This next part falls to me because I am the strongest and this is mine because I am the bravest."

He now began to glare at the others very savagely. "If any of you have any claim to the part that is left", he growled, stretching his claws menacingly, "now is the time to speak up."

Biblical Comparisons

King Ahab and Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21)

Ahab covets Naboth's vineyard and, using his royal power, has Naboth unjustly accused and executed in order to seize the vineyard for himself. Ahab's wife, Jezebel, orchestrates the plan, taking advantage of their power over Naboth, a commoner.

Both stories revolve around the powerful taking advantage of the weak. The lion uses its position as the king of beasts to claim everything, and Ahab, as king, abuses his power to seize what he desires.

Micah 2:1-2

These verses speak of those who covet and seize by violence or deceit: "They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance."

David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11)

King David abuses his power to take Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of his loyal soldiers. He sends Uriah to the front line of battle, ensuring his death, so he can marry Bathsheba. The prophet Nathan later rebukes David with a parable of a rich man who takes the only lamb of a poor man, illustrating how David, like the rich man (and like the Lion), took what did not belong to him simply because he had the power to do so.

Conclusion

These stories reflect the untrustworthiness of alliances with the powerful and show how the strong often use their position to oppress and take advantage of the weak, leaving them with nothing. The stories highlight the injustice that occurs when those in power act selfishly and oppressively.



The Old Man and Death

The Story

An Old Man, burdened by his heavy load of sticks and wearied by life, calls for Death to relieve him of his suffering. However, when Death arrives, the man realizes that he does not truly wish to die and instead asks for help to continue bearing his burden.

Biblical Comparisons

The prophet Elijah and Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 19)

The prophet Elijah becomes overwhelmed by despair after being threatened by Jezebel. He flees into the wilderness and, in his exhaustion and fear, prays that God might take his life: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." But instead of granting Elijah's wish, God sends an angel to provide food and water, strengthening him to continue his journey and purpose.

Psalms 118:17

"I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord."

Job endures suffering but is restored (Job 3-42)

Job undergoes extreme suffering, losing his wealth, family, and health. He laments his situation, wishing he had never been born and expressing a desire for death to end his suffering: "Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?" However, as the story progresses, Job clings to life, continues to wrestle with his suffering, and eventually, through a dialogue with God, finds the strength to carry on, leading to his restoration.

Conclusion

These stories feature a character who, burdened by the hardships of life, wishes for death in a moment of despair. However, when confronted with the reality of death or the potential for relief, the Old Man, Elijah and Job choose to continue living and bear their burdens with renewed strength.

They all illustrate that, despite weariness and suffering, there is a deep-seated love of life and a recognition that life is worth continuing, even in the face of hardship.

*The Fox and the Goat***The Story**

A Fox fell into a well and could not get out. He tricked a Goat into jumping in by promising that the water was good. The Goat, thinking only of satisfying his thirst, jumped in without considering how he would get out. The Fox escaped by climbing on the Goat's back, leaving the Goat behind and illustrating how the Goat's lack of foresight had led him into a trap.

Biblical Comparisons*Rehoboam and his subjects (1 Kings 12)*

Rehoboam, son of King Solomon, becomes king of Israel. When the people ask him to lighten their heavy burdens, Rehoboam consults both the elders and his young friends. The elders advise him to be kind and considerate, but his young friends suggest he make the burden even heavier. Without thinking of the consequences, Rehoboam follows the advice of his peers. As

a result, the people rebel, leading to the division of the kingdom. Rehoboam's lack of foresight and reliance on poor counsel leads to disaster, just as the Goat's impulsiveness results in being trapped.

Proverbs 13:16

"All who are prudent act with knowledge, but fools expose their folly."

Eve and the Serpent (Genesis 3:1-13)

Eve is deceived by the Serpent, who convinces her that eating from the Tree of Knowledge will make her like God. Not fully considering the consequences, she eats the fruit and gives some to Adam. As a result, both Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden of Eden.

Proverbs 14:15

"The simple believe anything, but the prudent give thought to their steps."

Conclusion

These stories emphasize the need for discernment and caution when making decisions, as failure to do so can lead to undesirable outcomes. They highlight the consequences of trusting deceitful individuals and making impulsive decisions without careful thought.

*The Crab and its Mother***The Story**

The Mother Crab scolds her son for walking sideways and tells him he should walk straight. When the son asks her to demonstrate, she tries but finds that she can only walk sideways herself! The moral of the story is that one should not criticize others for behaviour they themselves cannot model.

Biblical Comparisons*Jesus' teaching about hypocrisy and self-examination (Matthew 7:3-5)*

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let

me take the speck out of your eye, when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Romans 2:1

"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same thing."

Jesus speaks to the crowd about the Pharisees (Matthew 23:1-4)

"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practise what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."

Conclusion

These stories convey the message that actions speak louder than words and it is important to correct one's own behaviour before trying to correct others. Both the fable of The Crab and Its Mother and Jesus' teaching stress the need for self-awareness and the importance of leading by example rather than criticizing others for faults that one has oneself.



The Oak and the Reed

Story

In the fable, the Oak Tree stands tall and strong, believing it can withstand the storm, but its rigidity causes it to break and fall. Meanwhile, the Reed, though weak and flexible, bends with the wind and survives the storm. The moral centres on the virtues of humility and flexibility over pride and stubbornness.

Biblical Comparisons

Proverbs 16:18

"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." This is directly comparable to the Oak's downfall due to its pride and its inability to bend, which ultimately leads to its destruction.

Jesus speaks about meekness (Matthew 5:5)

Jesus said: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." The Reed's meekness and willingness to adapt mirrors the biblical virtue of meekness and humility, which leads to survival and blessing.

Isaiah 2:12

"The Lord Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted (and they will be humbled)."

Conclusion

Both the fable and the biblical teachings emphasize that pride leads to downfall, while humility and adaptability lead to survival and success. The Oak Tree's pride mirrors the biblical warning against self-reliance and arrogance, while the Reed's humility reflects the wisdom of yielding to circumstances rather than resisting them out of pride.



The Fisherman and the Little Fish

The Story

A Fisherman catches a Little Fish. The Little Fish begs the Fisherman to let it go so that it can grow larger, but the Fisherman refuses, reasoning that a small gain today is better than the hope of a larger gain tomorrow, which may never come.

Biblical Comparisons

Ecclesiastes 11:1-2

"Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you may find it again. Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may

come upon the land.”

James 4:13-14

“Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”

Conclusion

Both the fable and the biblical teachings share the message of making the most of present opportunities and the uncertainty of future gains, emphasizing the wisdom of valuing what is available now. This emphasizes taking action and making use of present opportunities, not waiting for an uncertain future that may never come to fruition.



The Dog and the Wolf

The Story

A gaunt-looking Wolf met a plump and well-fed Dog who suggested that if the Wolf joined him in his master’s house, he would have a comfortable and warmly lodged life. The Wolf was looking forward to this change of existence when he noticed a worn patch around the Dog’s neck. On learning that this came from a chain which restricted the Dog’s freedom, the Wolf declined the offer.

Biblical Comparisons

Esau and Jacob (Genesis 25:29-34).

Esau and Jacob are twin brothers, sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Esau, the elder, is a skilled hunter and his father’s favourite, while Jacob is a quiet man who stays among the tents and is his mother’s favourite.

One day, Esau returns from the fields famished and finds Jacob cooking some stew. Esau says to Jacob, “Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!” Jacob seizes the opportunity and offers to give Esau some stew in exchange for his birthright - the special inheritance and blessing given to the

firstborn son.

Driven by hunger, Esau agrees, saying, “Look, I am about to die. What good is the birthright to me?” He swears an oath, selling his birthright to Jacob for the meal then leaves, showing contempt for his birthright.

Later, this decision leads to significant consequences, as Esau loses the blessings and privileges that come with the birthright.

Conclusion

The moral of the fable is that freedom is more valuable than comfort and security. The lesson from Esau and Jacob’s story is that we should not sacrifice long-term blessings for short-term gratification. Both stories emphasize the importance of considering the long-term consequences of our choices and valuing what truly matters over immediate, fleeting desires.



The Eagle and the Arrow

Story

An Eagle is struck by an Arrow and, upon examining it, realizes that it is feathered with its own plumage. The moral of the story is that sometimes we are harmed by our own actions or by something that we have contributed to.

Biblical Comparisons

The eagles and the vine (Ezekiel 17)

This parable involves two eagles and a vine, being a metaphor for the political situation of Israel at the time. The first eagle represents the king of Babylon, who takes the top of a cedar tree (symbolising the king of Judah) and plants it in a city of merchants. This action signifies the initial subjugation and relocation of the Judean king and people.

The second eagle represents Egypt. The vine (symbolising the people of Judah) turns towards this second eagle for support, seeking an alliance against Babylon. The vine’s turning towards the second eagle is seen as a betrayal of the covenant with Babylon. This leads to the downfall of Judah, as the alliance with Egypt fails to provide the expected support.

Conclusion

The fable and the parable both serve as cautionary tales about the consequences of one's actions and decisions. They remind us that our choices, whether personal or political, can lead to unintended and often ironic outcomes.



The Fox and the Cat

The Story

The Fox and the Cat were discussing what would happen if there were an invasion. The Fox had a number of tricks up his sleeve which he declined to share with the Cat who only had one. A pack of hounds arrived and the Cat quickly ran up a tree. The Fox was unable to use any of his tricks and was torn to pieces, highlighting the contrast between being overly concerned with many things against focusing on what is truly important.

Biblical Comparisons

Martha and Mary (Luke 10)

Jesus visits the home of two sisters, Martha and Mary. Martha is busy with all the preparations that need to be made, while Mary sits at Jesus' feet, listening to His teaching.

Martha is distracted by all the preparations and becomes frustrated that Mary is not helping her. She approaches Jesus and asks, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

Jesus gently rebukes Martha: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed – or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Conclusion

Both stories emphasize the importance of focusing on what truly matters and not being overwhelmed by numerous distractions. They teach us that, sometimes, simplicity and single-mindedness can lead to better outcomes than having many complicated plans.

Epilogue

The Beginning:

¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

John says:

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.