

Introduction

There's power in a story according to Tyrion. The creators and cast of Game of Thrones¹ would agree even more so. There was general outrage on social media about the last series because it did not seem consistent with what had come before. People were upset about a story they knew not to be real.

Some Biblical scholars also claim that stories have 'power.' Leland Ryken says that "one of the most universal human impulses can be summed up in the four words, "Tell me a story."² But it is more than entertainment. Ryken says that a story "invites the hearers to enter a whole world of the imagination and that incarnates the truth instead of simply illustrating it."³ Is this what we find in the letters of Paul? Is Paul engaging in a

¹ A popular television series based on fantasy novels of the same name. Tyrion is a character within the series.

² Leland Ryken, "With Many Such Parables": The Imagination as a Means of Grace," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1990): 397.

³ *Ibid.*, 398.

philosophical argument and ‘abstract propositions’? Or rather is he ‘incarnating’ his readers into a story of “characters in action”?⁴

Ryken laments the “atomistic” and “verse-by-verse” approach of “conservative scholarship.”⁵ This may be driven by the view that the epistles are philosophical propositions which require an analytical approach. My desire not to make this assumption but rather to explore a narrative criticism approach to Ephesians. This approach, then, requires the whole letter to be considered as a “unif[ied] framework”⁶ Our method will need to be sensitive to space limitations while accommodating the arc of the whole letter. Let us turn to the method now.

Outline of method

According to Ryken, “the basic ingredients of stories—and the corresponding terms with which they should be discussed—are setting, characters, and plot or action.”⁷

I will approach the text along these lines with a three-step process. The first step will be to set the scene by exploring the setting and the characters. The components of narrative criticism as presented by Coetzee⁸ will be the guide for this first step, where, along with setting and characters, I will touch on repetitions to highlight themes within the letter, and briefly consider authorship, audience, and the structure of the letter.

Once the scene setting is done, the second step will explore in more detail the plot, action and narrative structure within the letter using Greimas’ actant model. This is the heart of the analysis and will produce a “unique reading”⁹ of the text. Whether such an approach is appropriate for an epistle, which is not strictly a story, will be assessed. If nothing else, the model will, as Wright says, “force us to slow down and attend carefully at every stage to what is, in fact, going on.”¹⁰ Some comfort can also be drawn from the fact that others have used this method with the epistles with some success: for example, Richard Hay’s pioneering use of this method within Galatians.¹¹ To save duplication, and to guide the reader, the method will be spelt out in some detail as the model is populated.

⁴ Leland Ryken, “‘Words of Delight’: The Bible as Literature,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, no. January-March (1990): 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Leland Ryken, “‘And It Came to Pass’: The Bible as God’s Storybook,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1990): 135.

⁸ Narelle Coetzee, “Narrative Criticism: Old Testament [BIB601]” (Alphacrucis College, 2019).

⁹ As per the assessment question.

¹⁰ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God (Christian Origins and the Question of God)* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1996), 70.

¹¹ Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002).

The third and final step will be to draw insights from the populated model before critiquing its usefulness.

Some boundaries and preliminaries:

Due to space limitations, some boundaries are set on the method.

No chiastic analysis

Chiastic analysis has been used to analyse Ephesians.¹² However, given the low view of chiastic studies in McKenzie and Haynes,¹³ this line of analysis is not pursued.

No intertextuality analysis

Lunde and Dunne's analysis of the intertextuality of a passage in Ephesians¹⁴ shows that there would be much to be gained in using this method in conjunction with the narrative method, particularly if Paul is reframing the Hebrew Scriptures in light of the resurrection with the view of drawing his readers into this reframes story. This, however, will not be pursued.

Rhetoric and ancient literary forms

Ryken outlines many different literary forms in Paul letters such as the diatribe,¹⁵ paraenesis,¹⁶ metaphors and similes.¹⁷ For our purposes, we will not explore the letter using literary forms, but will drill down on a "particular category of paraenesis – the household codes,"¹⁸ and the metaphor of the armour of God.

The letter has been analysed as epideictic rhetoric,¹⁹ breaking the letter down into rhetorical categories such as *exordium*, *narratio*, *exhortatio*, and *peroratio*. Ryken warns of the dangers of forcing letters into one particular style of classical rhetoric,²⁰ however such analysis may be useful. While rhetorical analysis will not be used in the method for this paper, one insight from Gregory's analysis, pertinent to our opening questions, is

¹² For example see LJ Hooze, "Ephesians | Biblical Chiasmus," n.d., accessed May 15, 2019, <https://biblicalchiasmus.wordpress.com/category/n-t/ephesians/>.

¹³ Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes, eds., *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 228 "Narrative criticism has often deployed observations of formal patterning to substantiate pronouncements about meaning. Thus there exists numerous studies of the 'chiasm,' the abcbA pattern, whether on a few verses or a whole book (so much so that, as a friend put it several years ago, any literary critic worth his or her salt could fake a chiasm.)."

¹⁴ Jonathan M. Lunde and John Anthony Dunne, "Paul's Creative and Contextual Use of Isaiah in Ephesians 5:14," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society; Lynchburg* 55, no. 1 (2012): 87–110.

¹⁵ Leland Ryken, *Letters of Grace and Beauty: A Guided Literary Study of New Testament Epistles* (Weaver Book Company, 2016), 36.

¹⁶ Ibid., 63.

¹⁷ Ibid., 98.

¹⁸ Ibid., 68.

¹⁹ James Gregory, "Ephesians as Epideictic Rhetoric," *The Letter to the Ephesians*, August 30, 2009, accessed June 11, 2019, <https://allthingsephesians.wordpress.com/2009/08/29/ephesians-as-epideictic-rhetoric/>.

²⁰ Ryken, *Letters of Grace and Beauty*, 20.

that Eph 1:3-14 uses “us” repeatedly, which draws the audience into the praise that Paul is expressing – it includes them.

Paul? Ephesus?

There is much debate on whether Paul is the author of Ephesians, and whether the letter was intended only for Ephesus because the destination is left blank in early manuscripts. For the sake of this exercise, I will assume that Paul is the author given Wright’s view that Ephesians “is either Paul’s greatest summary of his own teaching or the work of a careful and close colleague and imitator.”²¹

I will also assume that Ephesus was a prime destination of the epistle, even though it was likely to be a circular letter to churches in that area.²²

Which translation?

Ryken advises that “If we want to experience what God moved the writers of the epistles to write, the only way to do it is to avoid modernising and colloquializing translations.”²³ To achieve this, and also see the text afresh, I have turned to translations that are unfamiliar to me, with NT Wright’s translation²⁴ as my primary text.²⁵

²¹ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol 4.*, Christian Origin and the Question of God (London: SPCK, 2013), 383.

²² For more discussion see Black: David Alan Black, “The Peculiarities of Ephesians and the Ephesian Address,” *Grace Theological Journal* 2, no. 1 (1981): 73 Black concludes: “Plausible as the encyclical theory may seem, when the evidence is considered the traditional view appears to best account for all the facts: the textual variation in 1:1, the non-local flavor of the epistle, the universal tradition of the church that the letter was written to the Ephesians, and the weighty documentary evidence in support of the Ephesian address. As a result, it may be concluded that the peculiarities of the letter are not conclusive reasons for rejecting the strong textual and historical testimony in favor of the Ephesian destination.”

²³ Ryken, *Letters of Grace and Beauty*, 103.

²⁴ John Goldingay and Tom Wright, *The Bible for Everyone: A New Translation* (SPCK, 2018).

²⁵ There is a danger in doing this, which I will talk about in the critique. I have tried ‘triangulate’ the translation with David Bentley Hart’s translation and the NRSV, however for brevity’s sake I haven’t done comparison of texts in this paper.

Step 1 – Setting the scene

The setting and back story: Acts 19

We can learn several things from the back story of Paul's visit to Ephesus described in Acts 19, which also set the background to our narrative reading.

The first is that, since Paul preached in the synagogue for three months,²⁶ there was a "sizeable Jewish community in Ephesus."²⁷

The second is that Ephesus was host to the Temple of Artemis (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world) which drew people from all around came to visit.²⁸ Furthermore, references to evil spirits in verses 12–19 support the claim that "Ephesus was ... a centre of the magical arts, a home for 'magicians, sorcerers, and charlatans of all sorts'."²⁹

Thirdly, from verses 18 and 19, we see not only the possibility that many of the Gentiles who became Christian had a history in the magic arts, but that they were fearful. The "spirit world exercise[ed] influence over virtually every aspect of life,"³⁰ and "the enchanted world of deities and demons is absolutely central to their lived experience."³¹

Fourthly, verses 24 onwards show how integral Artemis was to the economics of the city with a silversmith making statues of Artemis as a business. Wink indicates the nature and extent of this cultic embeddedness: "what people ... experienced as and called "principalities and powers" was in fact the actual spirituality at the centre of the political, economic, and cultural institutions of their day."³²

Finally, the tensions between the Christians and the general population and riots would be in Paul's mind when he wrote Ephesians, and I imagine that he would be wary of inflaming those tensions.

Characters

There are several characters referred to in the letter. For the sake of brevity, these will be drawn out as we populate the components of the actant model.

²⁶ Acts 19:8

²⁷ Lloyd K. Pieteresen, "Spirituality as 'Good Christian Citizenship' in the Pastoral Epistles?," *Acta Theologica; Bloemfontein* 31 (January 2011): 160.

²⁸ Acts 19:27

²⁹ Ernst R Wendland, "Contextualising the Potentates, Principalities and Powers in the Epistle to the Ephesians," *Neotestamentica* 33, no. 1 (1999): 204.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Pieteresen, "Spirituality as 'Good Christian Citizenship' in the Pastoral Epistles?," 157.

³² Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium*, Reprint edition. (New York: Harmony Books, 1999), 24.

Of interest, given the setting of Ephesus, is the cosmic forces referred to in Eph 1:21 over which Jesus rules: "arches ('ruler'), exousías ('authority'), dunáneos ('power'), and kyriótetos ('dominion')." ³³ In what follows, I will refer to these in shorthand form as rulers and authorities or similar.

Repetitions and key themes

As we look for repetitions and key themes, we must heed Ryken's warning to think that an epistle must have a "single unifying topic to which individual parts can be related." ³⁴ However, based on a literary analysis, the following themes are notable.

Strength and Power

"Power" or variations are used at least six times throughout the letter. ³⁵ Given the setting, it comes as no surprise that strength and power are key themes for Paul. Combined with the rulers and authorities, we can see the cosmic and apocalyptic nature of the letter.

Unity, together, one another – In Christ;

The words unity, ³⁶ oneness, ³⁷ togetherness ³⁸ and 'one-anothering' ³⁹ have at least seventeen mentions throughout the short letter. This theme of unity happens "in Christ" which has even more mentions in the letter; the phrase "in Christ" ⁴⁰ and "in him" ⁴¹ used at least twenty-one times. Clearly unity, in Christ, are key themes. We could assume that one of the greatest threats to the young Christian community would be to split along Jewish/Gentile lines.

Let me tell you a secret: three secrets and two purposes

In the enchanted world of the Ephesians, a potential rhetorical device to catch the listeners' attention would be to say, "let me unveil a mystery", or, as in Wright's translation, let me tell you a "secret." Foundational to our analysis and from which we will build our narrative model are the three secrets and two purposes contained in the letter:

- Secret 1 and purpose 1: Eph 1: 9-10
- Secret 2: Eph 3:6
- Secret 3 and purpose 2: Eph 3:9-10.

³³ Dan Liroy, "Paul's Apocalyptic Interpretation of Reality: A Case Study Analysis of Ephesians 1:15-23" 19 (2015): 62.

³⁴ Ryken, *Letters of Grace and Beauty*, 84.

³⁵ Eph 1:19, 1:21, 2:2, 3:7, 3:16, 3:20

³⁶ Eph 4:3,13

³⁷ Eight mentions in Eph 4:4 alone.

³⁸ Eph 2:5, 2:21, 4:16

³⁹ Eph 4:2, 4:32, 5:19, and 5:21

⁴⁰ Eph 1:1, 3, 9, 12, 20, 2:6, 7, 10, 13, 3:6, 11, 21, 4:32.

⁴¹ Eph 1:4, 7, 10, 11, 13x2, 2:22, 3:12, 4:21.

Structure

Commentaries typically break the letter up into a descriptive structure. Ryken⁴² gives a typical example.⁴³

For our analysis, the structural question is: 'Is there a coherence to the letter, particularly as it relates to how the cosmic-apocalyptic fits with the mundane (household codes)?'

⁴² Ryken, *Letters of Grace and Beauty*, 23.

⁴³ Outline of Ephesians

- salutation: sender, recipient, greeting (1:1-2)
- thanksgiving: the spiritual riches that the recipients possess and prayer for their spiritual welfare (1:3-23)
- body of the letter (2:1 - 4:16)
- paraenesis, or list of exhortations (4:17 - 6:20)
- closing: information on how the letter will be delivered and concluding benediction (6:21 - 24)

Step 2 – Populate Greimas’ actantial model

The model

Having set the scene in the previous analysis, we are now ready to come to the heart of our analysis using the Greimas’ actantial model. Due to the importance of this model to our analysis, Hébert’s explanation of the actantial method⁴⁴ is reproduced in the footnotes.⁴⁵ Hébert goes on to clarify that an “actant may correspond to a concept (courage, hope, freedom, etc.), and “may be individual or collective (society, for instance).⁴⁶

I will be using NT Wright’s slightly modified version of the model⁴⁷ where ‘Agent’ is used instead of ‘Subject.’⁴⁸ The model is depicted as follows:

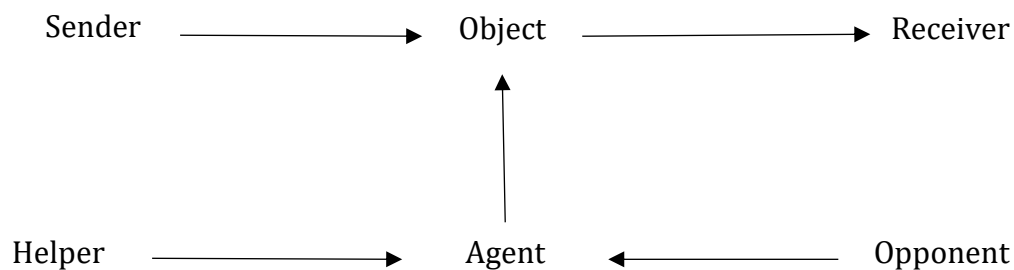


Figure 1 - Actantial model

Populating the model

As we have seen from our previous analysis, there are three ‘secrets’ and two ‘purposes’ that are revealed by Paul. Turning first to the third secret and second purpose contained in Eph 3: 9-10, as this is a key point in the whole letter.

*⁹My job is to make clear to everyone just what the secret plan is, the purpose that’s been hidden from the very beginning of the world in **God** who created all things. ¹⁰This is it: that **God’s wisdom**, in all its rich*

⁴⁴ Louis Hébert, “The Actantial Model,” in *Tools for Text and Image Analysis: An Introduction to Applied Semiotics* (Texto, 2006), 49.

⁴⁵ “The actantial model ... can be used to break an action down into six facets, or actants: (1) The **subject** (for example, the Prince) is what wants or does not want to be conjoined with (2) an **object** (the rescued Princess, for example). (3) The **sender** (for example, the King) is what instigates the action, while (4) the **receiver** (for example, the King, the Princess, the Prince) is what benefits from it. Lastly, (5) a **helper** (for example, the magic sword, the horse, the Prince’s courage) helps to accomplish the action, while (6) an **opponent** (the witch, the dragon, the Prince’s fatigue, a hint of terror) hinders it.”

⁴⁶ Hébert, “The Actantial Model,” 51.

⁴⁷ Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God (Christian Origins and the Question of God)*, 71.

⁴⁸ Wright slightly modified interpretation of the model as follows: “The ‘sender’ is the initiator of the action, who commissions the ‘agent’ to perform it, i.e. to take or convey the ‘object’ to the ‘receiver’. The ‘agent’ is prevented from doing what is required by a force or forces, i.e. the ‘opponent’, and is, at least potentially, helped by the ‘helper’.”

*variety, was to be made known to the **rulers and authorities in the heavenly places** – through **the church!***

The statement seems to fit neatly with the model: the *sender* is God, who created all things. The *object* is God's wisdom. The *receiver* is the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. And the *agent* is the church. Based on Eph 3:10 alone, we can fill out our model as follows:

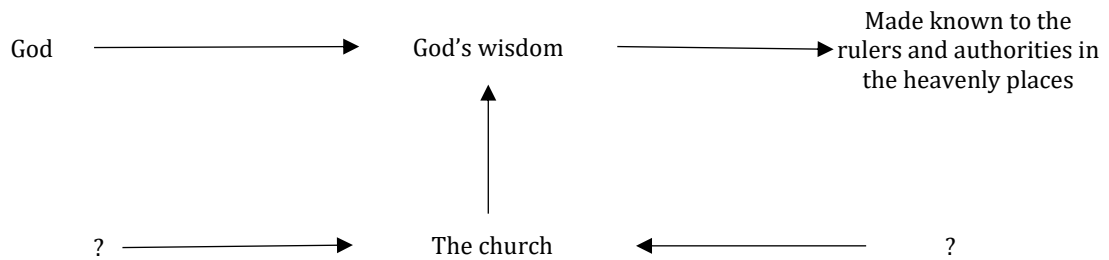


Figure 2 - Model based on Eph 3:10

Paul goes on, however, to add to the 'agent' of the church. Here, in Eph 3:11-12 we have Jesus as an agent of the same purpose:

*¹¹This was God's eternal purpose, and he's **accomplished** it in **King Jesus our Lord**. ¹²We have confidence, and access to God, in him, in full assurance, **through his faithfulness**.*

We see here that the purpose is accomplished in King Jesus, through whom the church achieves its agency through the faithfulness of Jesus. Therefore, we need to add to the agent part of our model.⁴⁹

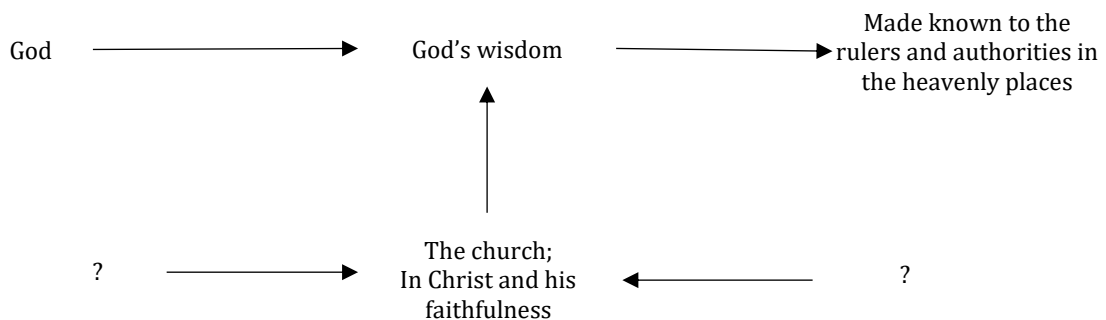


Figure 3 - Actantial model based on Eph 3:10-12

However, Eph 3:10 does not contain the only purpose in the letter: Paul speaks about a 'secret of his purpose' in Eph 1:9-10:

⁴⁹ We note the difficulty with mismatch of the tenses. And also the debate around whose faithfulness is being referred to.

This purpose sits alongside the purpose mentioned above. Assuming they are not separate purposes, the act of making God’s wisdom known to the rulers and authorities, also, somehow, achieves the purpose of summing up the whole cosmos in the king. We could add this to our diagram as a receiver, as Hébert allows.⁵⁰ However, in “application” of these ontological categories, Hébert suggests that there are “some common exclusions: subjects, senders and receivers tend to belong to the category of anthropomorphic beings. (An inanimate element or a concept must be personified in order to fill this role.)” “To sum up the whole cosmos in the king’ is not anthropomorphic, and therefore does not fit neatly into the receiver category. If we assume that the purpose in Eph 3:10 achieves the purpose in Eph 1:9-10, then the parallel between ‘making God’s wisdom known to the rulers and authorities’ and ‘the summing up of the whole cosmos in the king’ can be shown on the diagram as follows:⁵¹



¹¹Put on God's complete armour. Then you'll be able to stand firm against

⁵¹ We've stepped outside the strict actantial layout, but the diagram shows the relationship between the two purposes.

that rule the world in this dark age, against the wicked spiritual elements in the heavenly places.

Who or what the 'Helpers' are is not as clear. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is asking God to give the Ephesians the following, all of which appear to be helpers in what God has called them to do:

¹⁷ pray that the God of King Jesus our Lord, the father of glory, would give you, in your spirit,

*the gift of **being wise**, of seeing things people can't normally see, because you are coming to **know him***

*¹⁸ and to have the eyes of your inmost self **opened to God's light**.*

*Then you will **know** exactly what **the hope** is that goes with God's call; you will **know the wealth of the glory of his inheritance** in his holy people;*

*¹⁹ and you will **know** the outstanding greatness of **his power** towards us who are loyal to him in faith, according to the working of his strength and power.*

There is so much in this passage; Paul piles up many things, phrase upon phrase. He is asking God to give the Ephesians wisdom, that they may know God and God's light, which will in turn give them knowledge of, the hope, the wealth of the glory of his inheritance, and his power. He also has another prayer in 3:16, where he asks that strength and power is made known to the Ephesians "through his spirit." We will summarise all this on our diagram as follows:

Gift of being wise, to know God and his light,
so that they will know
the hope
the wealth of his inheritance, and
his power (through his spirit 3:16).

Our model is nearing completion. However, there are other passages that we need to address.

The first is related to the second secret revealed in Eph 3:6. Due to the importance we have placed on the other 'secrets' we should address this for completion:

⁶The secret is this: that, through the gospel, the Gentiles are to share Israel's inheritance. They are to become fellow members of the body, along with them, and fellow-sharers of the promise of King Jesus.

This follows Paul's argument that "He has made the two to be one,"⁵² and that, in him, "one new human being" was created "out of the two, through the cross."⁵³ This secret, then, is nested within the 'agent' of the church, **the new humanity formed through the cross**.

This, in turn, builds off the marking of the Spirit for both groups in Eph 1:13:

*¹³In him you too, who heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed it – **in him you were marked out with the spirit of promise, the holy one.***

As both groups have received the Spirit, there is no difference between them.

With that, our model is largely complete, and looks as follows:

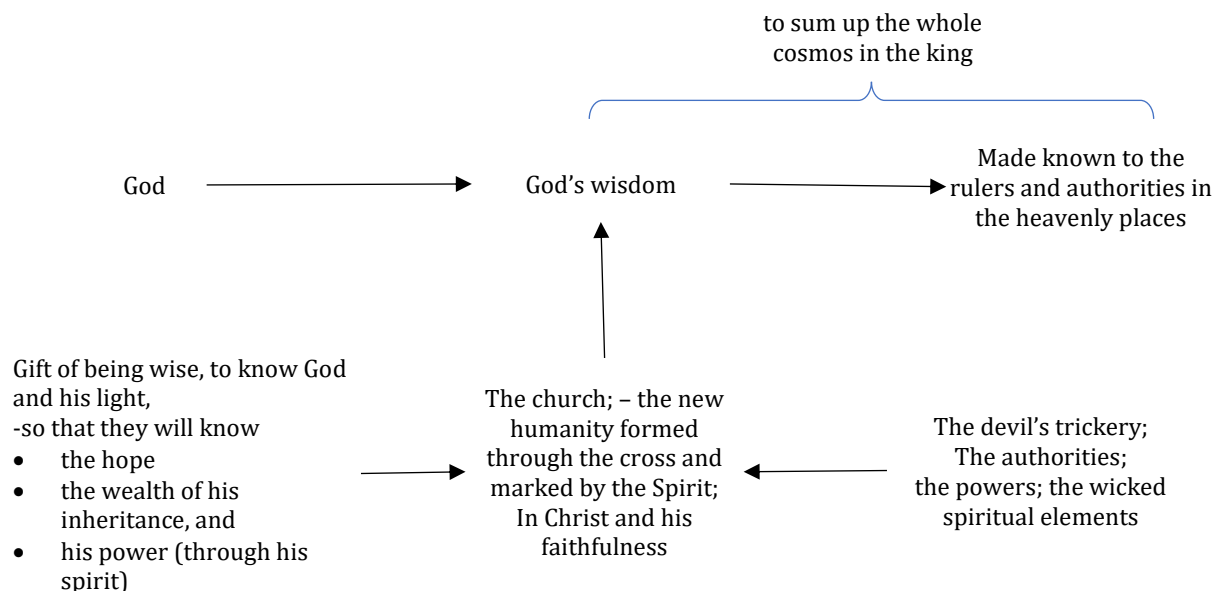


Figure 5 - Populated actantial model

Harking back to our observations on the overall coherence of the letter, some questions remain: Where do the 'household codes' fit? Where does the 'armour of God' fit? I attempt to address these questions in the analysis, but for now it is enough to note that two pathways lead to the authorities and powers, one defensive, and one of delivery. Although it would quite adequately sit as a helper, I will present armour as defensive, but operates in a similar way to the positive pathway: that is, a corporate display.

⁵² Eph 2:14

⁵³ Eph 2:15-16

Step 3 - Drawing insights from the populated model

United in a newly revealed cosmic story

The first observation is that all the elements of a narrative structure, according to the actant model, are present. There are characters in the sender, receiver and agent, and something to be delivered. Importantly for narrative tension, there is conflict or an opponent to the agent.

This narrative structure is not of the letter itself, but portrays the story in Paul's mind behind the letter. He appears to be calling, or better, writing the Ephesians, together, into a great cosmic struggle or dramatic story. The letter has the effect of uniting the Jewish and Gentile Christians by opening up Israel's story into a greater cosmic plan that includes them, in Christ, before the world was made (Eph 1:4-5). The following diagram⁵⁴ may help to show how Paul includes the Gentiles as part of Israel's story, by including Israel and the Gentiles together into a much larger cosmic story – the story of Adam and humanity restored.

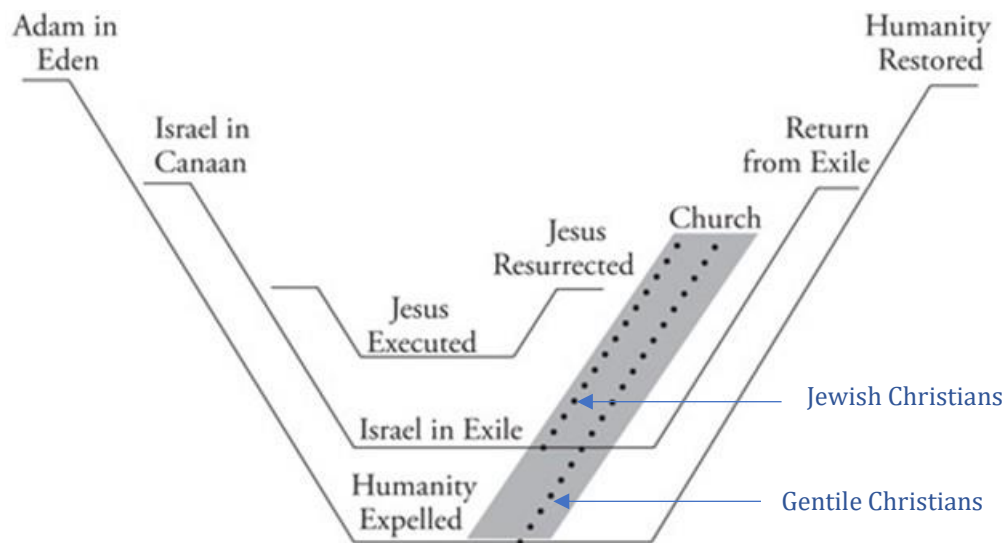


Figure 6 - Gentile and Jewish Christians united in a cosmic story

Paul, in a sense, is not trying to convince them that they are united. Instead, they become united in the very story that he is telling them; they are taken up into the story by being in Christ and his purposes. Keeping this in mind, let us step through the actants of the model to draw out further insight that the model may tell us.

⁵⁴ Gregory MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist: The Biblical Hope That God's Love Will Save Us All*, 2 Revised edition. (SPCK Publishing, 2012), 105.

The receiver (rulers and authorities) is also the opponent! –

The model makes it clear that the rulers and authorities play two parts: they are the opponent, but, counterintuitively, are also the receiver. How can this be? Part of the answer may be found in the letter to the Colossians, (1:16)⁵⁵ where it appears that the rulers and powers were created good and are to be redeemed eventually. Our model shows that they are somehow involved in the purpose of “summing up the whole cosmos in the king” as God’s wisdom is made known to them.

The back story may also provide some clues and plays a part here. Paul may remember how the Artemis temple cult⁵⁶ influenced every part of the Ephesians’ life, relationships, and economy. Nevertheless, ‘idoltrous’ as this cult was in Paul’s view, it was part of the functioning of the city, maintaining its society and order. The answer is not to overthrow this order – anarchy is not the answer (the violence that Paul experienced in the riots would be still a clear memory for him). Their dual role reflects the notion contained in Col 1:16 that they were created good, through and for Christ.

Rather than their overthrow, the aim is their redemption and to be brought back under the feet of Christ (Eph 1:21-22; Col 1:20). Paul is not asking for anarchy or violence, but, as our model shows, to redeem the powers through the display of God’s wisdom through the new humanity, by the way of the cross and the faithfulness of Jesus.⁵⁷ This may be why Paul recalls his own sufferings to the Ephesians, shameful as that may be in that society. The shameful death and resurrection of Christ displays this wisdom of God through the church.

Paul does not put his hearers offside by dismissing the cultic practices and consequently their worldview. He takes their life situation seriously. Instead, he grafts a new way of

⁵⁵ *For in him all things were created,
in the heavens and here on the earth.
Things we can see and things we cannot,
- thrones and lordships and rulers and powers -
all things were created both through him and for him.*

⁵⁶ My supervisor suggests that I have overplayed the influence of Artemis. “There were numerous cults operating the in city Aepilius (a temple dedicated to healing), Dionysis (in the early 2nd Century the largest house in terrace house 2 was converted into a dedicated venue for the cult), Isis and Serapis (hugely popular in the Roman empire), and the local cult of Men, the 12 gods, Cybele etc. ... and the cult of the Emperors. The cult of the Emperors was situated opposite the town council (the boule) and looked out over the city. A far more powerful image than the temple of Artemis situated about 40 minute(?) walk from the centre of the city.” Fair point. But I guess every cult was woven into the economic fabric of life in this time.

⁵⁷ I am indebted to Walter Wink and Matthew Croasmun for bringing these thoughts to the foreground for me. Wink, *The Powers That Be*; Matthew Croasmun, “‘Real Participation’ The Body of Christ & the Body of Sin in Evolutionary Perspective,” in *“In Christ” in Paul: Explorations in Paul’s Theology of Union and Participation*, ed. Constantine R. Campbell, Michael J. Thate, and Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

thinking onto the pagan ‘enchanted’ worldview;⁵⁸ he draws them in as he re-orientes and reframes their story into the much larger cosmic battle spoken of above.⁵⁹

The agent: co-agency of the church in Christ

By placing them in the same actant, our model emphasises the combined agency of the church and Christ. By having them both as agent, Paul seems to remove any distinction between the two; the ‘body of Christ’ has the role of making God’s wisdom known to the rulers and authorities. The church, as agent and sign, is to be a blessing to the world through its role in enacting God’s purpose to sum up the whole cosmos in the king.

It is interesting that in our model, grace⁶⁰ is not a helper. Grace seems to be about being chosen to be part of the new humanity that embodies the job of being the agent of the blessing to the world. Paul seems to emphasise grace to put both Jew and Gentile on an even footing “so no one is able to boast.”⁶¹ Again, Paul seems to be drawing them into unity through the ‘incarnational’ power of the story – the gospel.

The corporate dimensions of the ‘agent’ are expressed in Paul’s references to the spirit. The Spirit, as well as being a helper,⁶² is a stamp or seal of membership that demarks the people of God (Eph 1:13).⁶³ It is the sign of being in the community after hearing and believing the Gospel. And in what could be a rebuke to the cultic festivals and associated drunkenness,⁶⁴ Paul exhorts the Ephesians not to get “drunk with wine,” but to be “filled with the spirit,” which involves corporate activities of “singing and chanting” to each other.⁶⁵ It also seems to be the basis for unity⁶⁶ and from which Paul goes into the household codes and the “one-anothering” of the letter.

It appears that Paul brings his readers into the story by how they are to make God’s wisdom known; where everyone has a role to play at the most basic level of the unit of society – the household. Here Paul unites the cosmic and the mundane, the temple of God and the household (Eph 2:19-22). I will discuss in greater detail in a section below

⁵⁸ It is interesting that, even though the rulers, authorities and powers are characters in this framework, they are not named. This could be because Paul does not want to dignify them with names; and/or it might be because naming them was a way to invoke them in the magical culture of the time. He may also be wary of inciting violence or further social strife if he were to single out any particular deity or the imperial cult. Or, possibly, the real power lay in principalities and powers higher up that used the cult for their purposes.

⁵⁹ I note that Paul places the devil’s trickery alongside the wayward authorities and powers. The differences between them, and how the Ephesians would have thought about this is not pursued.

⁶⁰ Eph 1:6

⁶¹ Eph 2:9

⁶² Eph 3:16

⁶³ “In him you too, who heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed it – in him you were **marked out** with the spirit of promise, the holy one.”

⁶⁴ Eph 5:7 “Don’t share in their practices.”

⁶⁵ Eph 5:18-19

⁶⁶ Eph 4:3: “Make every effort to guard the unity that the spirit gives, with your lives bound together in peace.”

how Paul's *paraenesis* might form a new way of being in the world that transforms society from below, to make God's wisdom known.

Helpers – wisdom, knowing God and hope (feed a new imagination)

Paul's prayers for the Ephesians overall imply a certain freedom of interpretive agency and participation within the story into which he is calling them. Wisdom, for example, implies decision making, but a wisdom shaped by the hopes and desires formed by the purposes of God for the cosmos. Hope seems to be an anticipated eschatology that calls the Ephesians into a new imagination which helps them improvise within the larger story.

In terms of our narrative reading, it seems Paul's prayers, and the helpers, set the Ephesians up to be incarnated within the story – to understand the whole plan of God and to embody its unfolding.

The household codes, armour of God, and the powers

The personal and mythological language that Paul uses for the rulers and authorities may sound a little foreign to our modern ears, but a little reflection may show that there is some commonality with modern concepts. For example, the modern concept of a company is considered in law to be a 'person.'⁶⁷ Anyone who has worked across different companies would be able to describe their different 'personalities.' These personalities, or company cultures, remain similar over time even if the people in them change. Marketing companies personalise companies and try to use it in marketing. An illuminating example is the Mac vs PC advertising campaign that ran in the mid to late 2000s,⁶⁸ which characterised each company and product as contrasting personalities.⁶⁹ Our language about the behaviour of markets is also personal, with the 'invisible hand' of the market reacting, or correcting itself.⁷⁰ Croasmun, in his book "The Emergence of Sin,"⁷¹ uses modern theories of emergence, complexity and personhood to show how personalities arise out of a complex web of relationship and decisions. He also describes how these personalities also have "downward causation" on the individuals within these

⁶⁷ Innovation and Science Australian Government; Department of Industry, "Company," Business Topics, last modified August 14, 2018, accessed May 28, 2019, <https://www.business.gov.au/planning/business-structures-and-types/business-structures/company>.

⁶⁸ Angus Lo, *Complete 66 Mac vs PC Ads + Mac & PC WWDC Intro + Siri Intro*, n.d., accessed June 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0eEG5LVXdKo>.

⁶⁹ Travellers may also speak of the different personalities that cities present. I found Naples to be very different to other cities in Italy, and New Orleans different to other places in the USA.

⁷⁰ Croasmun, *The Emergence of Sin: The Cosmic Tyrant in Romans*, 1 edition. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press USA, 2017), 180.

⁷¹ Croasmun, *The Emergence of Sin*.

relationships. These personalities can be oppressive and permeate throughout the structure of a society.⁷²

No wonder Paul, remembering the fear that the Ephesians live under, wants to unmask and “expose” the “darkness.”⁷³ He is telling the secrets that reveal the light and calls people into a new way, which, in turn, reveals God’s wisdom to these powers, while defending against them.

This brings us back to our narrative model, and trying to understand how Paul’s paraenesis of the household codes, and the armour of God fit into the story. Turning first to the ‘armour of God.’

Armour of God

Paul use of words such as “stand firm”⁷⁴ and “withstand”⁷⁵ seems to imply that the armour is a defensive barrier to the powers. Nowhere does Paul express a desire for the powers to be attacked. This is consistent with what we have discovered: the powers are to be redeemed rather than destroyed, and the back story of tensions within the Ephesian population. Paul makes clear that the battle is not “against flesh and blood.”⁷⁶ Rather than fighting, the message is one of freedom from being “in step with ruler of the power of the air.”⁷⁷

We also saw before how Paul extends the worldview rather than dismissing it. Paul’s metaphorical language also may be a mechanism to reframe the thought processes⁷⁸ of the Ephesian Christians.⁷⁹ Paul is skilfully blending the familiarity of the Roman armour, passages from the Hebrew scriptures,⁸⁰ in the style of *peroratio*.⁸¹ If we recall that the letter is to the gathered church in Ephesus, and not directed specifically to each individual, then we can assume that the church needs to put on the armour corporately. Indeed, a ‘body’ is needed to display armour. Paul is asking the Ephesians to embody truth, justice, the good news of peace, faith and God’s word. It is all dedicated to the new way of being in the world, and not a private spiritual battle. We begin to see how the

⁷² Anyone who laments the grip of social media, a system of our own creation, would begin to understand this.

⁷³ Eph 5:11

⁷⁴ Eph 6:11, 14

⁷⁵ Eph 6:13

⁷⁶ Eph 6:12

⁷⁷ Eph 2:2

⁷⁸ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 6.

⁷⁹ Lakoff and Johnson make the claim “that metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words. ... On the contrary, human thought processes are largely metaphorical. ... The human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined. Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person’s conceptual system.”

⁸⁰ Eg. Isa 11:5, 49:2 and 59:17

⁸¹ Harold W. Attridge and Society of Biblical Literature, *The HarperCollins Study Bible: Fully Revised & Updated* (HarperCollins, 2006), 1989 In a footnote, *peroratio* is described as “the document’s summary, passionate appeal such as a general might make before battle.”

‘corporate making’ dimensions of the spirit manifest in corporate armour baring. We will also see that the household codes also help form a new body, that works along the delivery part of our model. Let us show these on our model now for clarity: one positive, and one defensive,⁸² both being the result of the church being animated by the spirit. We also begin to see how the mundane fits with the cosmic story along the two pathways to the rulers and authorities:

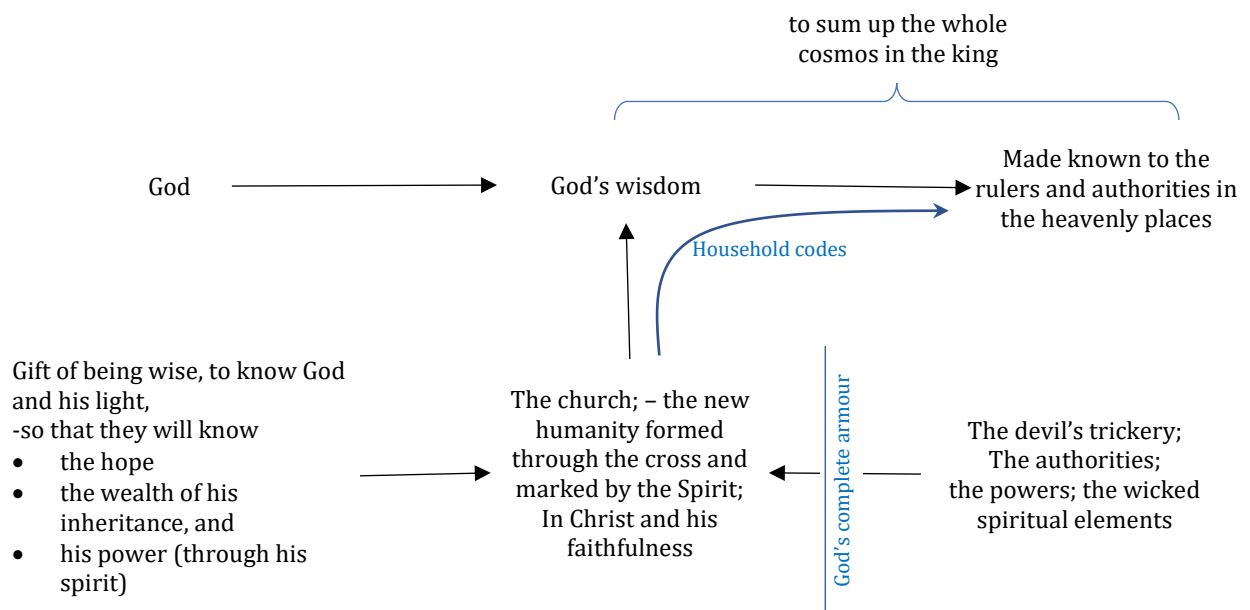


Figure 7 - Populated model showing action of household codes and armour of God

Household-codes

There are clues in the letter to Paul linking the household with the cosmic. We see the play between the household and “God’s household;”⁸³ and that God will live in them as the new Temple.⁸⁴ Again, Paul seems to be building off concepts familiar to the Ephesians, the household and temple.

Paul may also be building off the following conventions that would be familiar to the Ephesians: *eusebeia*,⁸⁵ *hybris*,⁸⁶ and *declamations*.⁸⁷

⁸² Armour, while it is a help, is better displayed as a defensive wall to the powers.

⁸³ Eph 2:19

⁸⁴ Eph 2:20-22

⁸⁵ Pieterse, “Spirituality as ‘Good Christian Citizenship’ in the Pastoral Epistles?,” 159 Eusebeia “denotes respect for the orders of life, especially in connection with family and government,” but also relates to the “proper attitude of devotion to the gods.”

⁸⁶ Lyn Maree Kidson, “Rhetorical Strategies of the First Chapter of 1 Timothy: The Relationship of the First Chapter to the Purpose of the Letter” (Macquarie University, 2017), 230. Hybris was a name given to “social convention” demonstrating the vice, particularly for young men, of a “lack of restraint.” that can disrupt a family.

⁸⁷ Christy Friend, “Pirates, Seducers, Wronged Heirs, Poison Cups, Cruel Husbands, and Other Calamities: The Roman School Declamations and Critical Pedagogy,” *Rhetoric Review* 17, no. 2 (1999): 303. Declamations were part of the curriculum for rhetoric students where they had to argue to defend those of little authority in a household: women, children and slaves.

He may start with the familiar, but, as Gombis argues, Paul reframes the household codes in the way he addresses them in Ephesians. He overturns convention by: addressing the subordinate member first;⁸⁸ commanding husbands to love their wives, “a command that appears in no other contemporary household codes;”⁸⁹ and the fact that he addresses children at all.⁹⁰

Gombis presents a view that fits directly with our narrative model delivery pathway: the household codes “subjects [the powers] to new creation dynamics.”⁹¹ Here we have an explanation of how the mundane transforms the cosmic. Paul is rewriting the ‘DNA’ of the Ephesian household in a way that challenges and transforms the whole society from its most basic building block. In Croasmun’s language, the body of Christ is an emergent body from the new network of transformed relationships, including the “one-anothering,” “togetherness” and “unity” themes we identified earlier. “It is in this particular social body - the ecclesia - that the new creation is breaking into the old. What appears now as a political body is, in fact, a cosmic body coming into being.”⁹² The very unity and new humanity, created by the story, is not only a sign to the powers, but transforms them. Hence the addition to our actant diagram: the household codes are integral to delivering God’s wisdom to the powers.

⁸⁸ Timothy G Gombis, “A Radically New Humanity: The Function of the Haustafel in Ephesians,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 2 (June 2005): 325.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 327.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 328.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 324.

⁹² Croasmun, “‘Real Participation’ The Body of Christ & the Body of Sin in Evolutionary Perspective,” 138.

Critique of method

Before turning to the strengths and insights from the method, it is worth considering the weaknesses.

As touched on in the introduction, I think the model would be strengthened by use in conjunction with other methods, such as rhetorical analysis and particularly intertextual analysis. I imagine a lot is missing from my analysis because I have not fully appreciated what Paul draws from the Hebrew Testament. This weakness is born out by Hays' ground-breaking approach⁹³ in which he used the actantial model to identify areas of investigation using other critical methods.

As for the actantial model itself, White questions whether a model "developed for the study of actual narratives - folk tales of the sort that Greimas analysed - is particularly helpful for articulating meta-narratives."⁹⁴ This criticism results in the rather "arbitrary feel" to populating the model when compared to a "real story like little red riding hood."⁹⁵ It certainly felt that way when I perused the myriad of actantial models in NT Wright's work.⁹⁶

This raises a related criticism of my approach – the primary use of NT Wright's translation. Using this translation to fill out the actantial model may have confirmation bias. Wright's translation fits very neatly with the model, but the translation may incorporate his conclusions on what Paul is trying to do in his letters, which is very much the storied approach.⁹⁷ To use the actantial model faithfully would require investigating the original Greek.

Having said the above, I was surprised how neatly Paul's narrative fragments contained in the 'three secrets' map; it does show a story with narrative tension and characters filling the actant positions. I think the model also does indeed make one 'slow down to see what is really going on,' and highlights parallels that may not be immediately apparent. The following insights may not be unique, but they are certainly clearer with the use of the narrative method and actant model:

- How the back story of Ephesus and Paul's cosmic story relate;

⁹³ Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 107.

⁹⁴ Joel R. White, "N. T. Wright's Narrative Approach," in *God and the Faithfulness of Paul. A Critical Examination of the Pauline Theology of N.T. Wright*, ed. Christoph Heilig, J. Thomas Hewitt, and Michael F. Bird (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 189.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ See chapter 7 of Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*.

⁹⁷ As an example of this, Wright, at the start of chapter 2 of Ephesians, has Paul begin with the question "So where do you fit into all of this?" which sounds very much like Paul about to show how they fit into the story. But Bentley Harts translation begins simply with "And you..." which has a different feel.

- The identification of the secrets and purposes, and how these map together form the narrative structure and tension;
- The dual roles of the powers illustrating their redeemability;
- The corporate making role of the spirit;
- The co-agency of the church and Christ;
- How the mundane fits with the cosmic; How armour defends against, while household codes transform the powers through the formation of a new humanity; and the corporate dimensions of both;
- How letter itself was “doing” what Paul was trying to do: unify the Ephesians into a common cosmic story, merging their histories and uniting them as one new humanity against a common opponent with a common mission;
- and in doing this, how Paul extended and reframed their worldviews within the new story, using familiar things like the household codes, amour, and temple motifs to incarnate the Ephesians into the story.

Conclusion

The introduction had a quote from Tyrion. It sounded good as far as it goes, but it was not calling people into a new story. Paul calls the Ephesians into a new story, and the reader can feel the power of it. I, for one, have a new appreciation of how my fundamental relationships with my wife and children and others in the body of Christ have cosmic ramifications. In the end, I may not have drawn much insight from my model application at an ‘arm’s length’ analytical sort of a way. Instead, the insight is how the letter has affected me, and incarnated me ever deeper into the story Paul tells. In this sense, the exercise confirms the following statement from one of the pioneers of narrative criticism:

Viewing one's beliefs as a story underscores the need to act as well as to believe. It makes Christians participants in the grand drama of redemption, not simply the recipients of a doctrinal system.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Ryken, “‘And It Came to Pass’: The Bible as God’s Storybook,” 142.

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