

Analysis of the use of a biblical text in a cultural text



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The story of the Prodigal son found in Luke 15 (Ellis, 1974) tells a story of a young son leaving his home and leaving his father and older brother to begin a new lifestyle. Unfortunately, things do not plan out as the son had hoped and after some time, after a memory from his father, he is reminded of his destiny and returns home. The meaning of this parable symbolizes forgiveness and fatherly wisdom. Likewise, the story of the Lion King film (LionKing. org, 2019) too tells a story of a son leaving home in longing for a new beginning and after an encounter with his father's spirit, the son returns home. Although the two stories have their differences, there are evidently links between the Disney film and this parable. There is the connection of the sons returning home after hardship and both tell a moving story about the circle of life which portrays a son's journey from childhood to adulthood and the realization of one's destiny. The characters in the Disney film additionally, resemble God's world in a contemporary cultural text, there is the main character of Simba who resembles the Prodigal son, the father Mufasa who represents God and there is the uncle, Scar who symbolizes sin. Thereby, the Lion King film is a representation of a reinterpretation of God's world and is an example of how the biblical text " The Parable of the Lost Son" has been reinterpreted in a contemporary context.

The parable of the Prodigal son is the last one of the three parables in regards to loss and redemption. It follows the parable of the Lost Sheep (15: 1-7) and the Lost Coin (15: 8-10). Jesus speaks of these parables to the Pharisees and religious leaders after they accused him of welcoming and eating with the sinners. The fathers overjoy which is depicted in the parable <https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-the-use-of-a-biblical-text-in-a-cultural-text/>

signifies heavenly love, the “ *boundless mercy of God*’ and “ *God’s refusal to limit the measure of his grace* ” (Sellew, 1994). The story of the Prodigal Son is found in Luke 15: 11-32 and opens with a man and his two sons. The youngest son asks his father if he could have his inheritance, his share of the estate early. The father agrees to his son's proposition and so the youngest son hastily ventures off to a faraway land and starts to waste his inheritance portion on *wild living*. Soon the money runs out and a brutal scarcity strikes his country and the son finds himself in ominous conditions. Desperate for money, the son finds a job feeding pigs and in due course finds himself longing to eat the food scraps which the pigs receive. The son eventually, from memories from his father, accepts he made a mistake and makes the journey to return home to his father who he asks forgiveness from. The father had been watching and waiting for his youngest son to return and now that he had, he greeted him back with open arms. The father promptly asks his servants to prepare a celebratory fest in honour of his son's return. It is soon afterwards that the eldest son returns from work to discover his younger brother has returned and is fuelled with anger and jealous rage. The father, in hopes to calm the older brother tells him “ You are always with me, and everything I have is yours.” (Sellew, 1994).

The parable of the two sons was said to teach forgiveness and fatherly wisdom. While there is no exact date, there are two options for the historical date of Luke which are present in academic literature, the 60's and 75-85 AD/CE (Bultmann, 2006). The historical concerns from that time included the catastrophic fire which almost destroyed the city of Rome, the rebellion in Jerusalem against Roman rule and the Civil War (Schulman, 2019). The third

Gospel does not specify its author. The passage of Luke 15: 11-32 is allegoric, genuine and is rich in a homely style. The parable, if received as purely subjective can be entertaining. While the sole objective of this parable is to offer the reader/hearer a new interpretation of the situation and to lead them to make a choice, the story too joins together to divide into two distinct stories of one family that bonds together at the end of the parable. The parable divides, first there is an emphasis on the youngest son, the Prodigal son through verses 11-24 and then focuses on the eldest son through verses 25-32 (Bultmann, 2006). Both stories have a focus on the son first and then the focus shifts to the father.

The Lion King is a 1994 American animated musical film which was produced by Walt Disney. It was the 32nd Disney film which was animated and was the fifth animated film throughout the period recognized as the *Disney Renaissance* (LionKing. org, 2019) . It is an example of how the biblical text “ *The Parable of the Lost Son* ” has been reinterpreted in a contemporary context. The story is about a young lion called Simba who is the next in line to take over from his Father Mufasa to become King. Simba dreams of the day but unfortunately the dream of being King was stolen from underneath him when his uncle Scar who wanted the title of King himself, murders Mufasa and convinces Simba that he was at fault for his father’s death. Struck with guilt, grief and anger, Simba leaves the kingdom and Scar became King. It wasn’t until years later when a childhood friend, Nala and a baboon, Rafiki, tells Simba that Scar is King and has destroyed their home of Pride Rock. She pleads for him to return but Simba still felt too ashamed to ever go home. It wasn’t until an unexpected encounter with what can only be explained at <https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-the-use-of-a-biblical-text-in-a-cultural-text/>

Mufasa's spirit that Simba is reminded of his destiny and ventures home to conquer Scar and bring back harmony to his home, Pride Rock (LionKing.org, 2019). Although the return of Simba is different from what Luke 15 wrote, it still captures the raw emotion of a father waiting for his son to return home.

From this plot, it can be alluding to the parable of the Prodigal Son. Simba, evidently is the Prodigal son by which we make references to the childhood egotism, and the physical and emotional transition from childhood to adulthood. Resembling the Prodigal son, Simba too was unsatisfied from his privilege and was eager to receive his destiny. Both the Prodigal son and Simba awaited their birth right which was warped into something they were due. Both Simba and the Prodigal son leave home to begin a new lifestyle. Simba adopts a Hakuna Matata lifestyle which translates into "no worries" (i.e. ignorance), while the Prodigal son after wasting away his inheritance, finds himself eating food scraps which are fed to pigs until both sons realize they must return home and face their actions. Additionally, Mufasa can be connected to the father in the parable and thereby, within the storyline of The Lion King, Mufasa is represented as God. Considering the father, son relationship which exists between Mufasa and Simba and the responsibility Simba has over the kingdom which he obtains from Mufasa signifies our inheritance from God. Mufasa's character embodies God's kindness, leadership and love and by being the King of Pride Rock represents an appropriate reminder of God's authority and power. Moreover, the character of the baboon called Rafiki who we see in the beginning on the movie performing a ritual on newborn Simba represents a strong suggestion of baptism. Likewise, Rafiki too symbolises our call from God from recognising

Simba needs to realize on his own what his fate is and choose it for himself. And lastly, Scar, the evil brother of Mufasa and Simba's uncle, represents sin. Scar is often portrayed as surrounded by flames which is quite reminiscent of the scriptural idea of hell fire. Scar separates Simba from his life when he convinces him that he will never be forgiven and tells him to "Run. Run away, and never return". As sin separates the people from God, Scar is recognised as sin as he has parted Simba from all things good in his life. This is the same phenomenon that keeps the Prodigal Son from going back home in the parable and what keeps the people from accomplishing God's requests (Ellis, 1974). Thus, these characters in the story *The Lion King* have symbolic meanings and represents a reinterpretation of God's World within a contemporary cultural text.

To conclude, the biblical text "*The Parable of the Lost Son*" has been reinterpreted in a contemporary context through the 1994 film, *The Lion King*. Ultimately, the story conveys that good will always prevail and evil will be conquered due to God always being in control. It may perhaps be said that Christ is the Disney hero.

Word count: 1475

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