

**Introduction of the Bible  
Using  
The Wonderful Wizard of Oz**

**A Bible Study by Rev. Melissa Fain  
Hosted by Fig Tree Christian**

## Order of Events

Week 1: Introduction

Learn background information about the book Wizard of Oz and the writer. Also, learn some background information about the bible and how the books came together.

Week 2: Chapters 1-6

Finding the characters. How do we understand biblical characters using Oz as a guide. Hint, MGM paints our visual identity more than Baum's book.

Week 3: Chapters 7-11

Oz through green colored glasses. How do we force our perspective on the text in the way the Wizard forces his vision on the Emerald City?

Week 4: Chapters 12-17

What is a way to understand God's wrath as Dorothy confronts the Wicked Witch?

Week 5: Chapters 18-21

How is the bible understood from both a social and spiritual vision through the world of the China Dolls?

Week 6: Chapter 22-24

What is our vision of God and is that vision set in stone. Could Glinda, the one in the book, be a possible image of God?

Introduction to the Bible  
Using  
The Wonderful Wizard of OZ

## How this study will work:

Each week the study will be separated into four sections:

1. Explanation of the Oz text. We will look at the book closely and see it in a new light. With this section you will understand the book better.
2. Explanation of Biblical text, and Biblical interpretation.
3. How the two come together. This is where you understand why the illustration meets the scripture. This is done with complete respect for the Bible.
4. Questions. Take these back to the conversation board found under the bible study tab. Let's have a conversation about what we have learned.

# Week One: An Introduction

## Wizard of Oz:

### Introduction:

A new Disney movie just came out focusing on the Wizard and how he found his way to the wonderful and magical world of Oz. It is a clever tact to take because it is still, up until this point, an untold story. Gregory Maguire tried to do the same thing with the Wicked Witch of the West. As I will go into more detail later, I believe Maguire's attempt would not have been appreciated by Baum.

Americans will always try to bring new life to The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. It is the collective fairy tale for our culture. Yes, we have Paul Bunion, fables about Johnny Appleseed, and even romanticized tales of the founding fathers, but nothing comes close to the stories about Oz and the people who live there. But, as much as we may say we love and care for the characters, we are shaped and formed more by secondary understandings of the book. Very few of us have actually taken time to read the relatively short book written by L. Frank Baum. Even fewer of us have then taken time to pick up other books from the Oz series and read them.

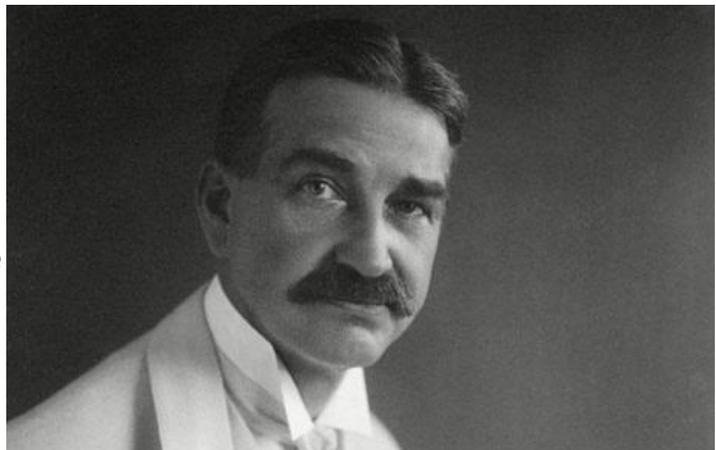
This is what makes Oz such a great parallel to introducing the bible. Our view of the bible is often a trip through second hand knowledge. Our culture helps us create our view of heaven and hell, and how we personify the characters we have come to know and love. In other cases, Oz becomes like the bible, where isn't enough to understand a scripture and secondary sources are required to understanding.

Through out this study we will take a light-hearted look at the Wonderful Wizard of Oz. How did Christianity shape Baum? When we read about Abraham and Moses how do we imagine them and how can we understand, in that light, how we imagine characters from Oz? Are we looking at the bible through green colored glasses? All these questions and more we will try to conquer over the next six weeks.

### About the Author:

L. Frank Baum was a man born into a well to do family. His family had high aspirations for their son and tried to raise him to be a banker or a lawyer. However, Baum was more interested in the arts and writing. His father, fearing his son was too feminine, put Baum in a military academy to try to move him towards more masculine aspirations. This failed.

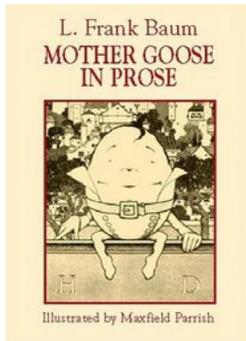
Instead, Baum focused his talents on writing, acting, and directing. His primary focus in his early years was acting. With help from his family, he had a theater built to host this passion. Luckily for us and unluckily for him, the theater burnt down. The incident forced Baum to focus his talents in other areas. He published his own magazine and wrote plays.



Early in life, Baum fell in love with a woman, the daughter of a feminist. The mother, of the

woman he fell in love with, didn't want her daughter to marry an actor. She felt a liberated woman should marry someone of higher means. It is believed Baum wrote his mother-in-law into one of the OZ books with Gingir. (Ginger attempts and accomplishes taking over the Emerald City by attacking with only women, leaving the men defenseless. They didn't want to hurt a female. She is later overthrown when Glinda finds Ozma and puts her back on the throne.) No matter how the mother-in-law might be personified in Baum's book, it appears he cared for elevating women. Not only were many of the uber-characters female, the ultimate hero is actually a heroine.

### About the Book:



Baum had mixed feelings regarding fairy tales. He believed children needed stories to engage their imagination but he believed the tales from Anderson and Grimm were too dark. Not only did Baum write Wizard of Oz to be a modern fairy tale devoid of the traditional darkness, he also took on a series of nursery rhymes to do the same thing. An excellent example is the Old Woman in the Shoe rhyme. In the original the Old Woman beats her children before putting them to bed, Baum rewrote the rhyme to have the old woman hug them and kiss them instead.

There was an old woman who lived in a shoe.  
She had so many children, she didn't know what to do;  
She gave them some broth without any bread;  
Then whipped them all soundly and put them to bed.

There was an old woman who lived in a shoe.  
She had so many children, she didn't know what to do;  
She gave them some broth without any bread;  
She hugged them and kissed them and them to bed.

This could be part of the reason the Wonderful Wizard of Oz has been panned by many in the English field. Story development requires the hero character to enter some form of darkness before the character ultimately reaches the light. In many of Baum's books, however, when the story has the opportunity to get dark it moves away from development and resolves itself. This is done on purpose. Yet, even with Baum's best efforts, his books are still filled with many dark moments, even if those moments are incredibly undeveloped.

## **The Bible:**

### **Introduction:**

The Bible is not just one book but a collection of books put together in a canon. No, I am not talking about the huge iron tube used to expel objects at a high velocity towards an enemy in order to cause damage. That is a cannon. I am talking about canon as a term where a group of one particular item has been placed together and considered the ultimate collection on a particular subject. They are the most important pieces on the subject. Canons can be collections of art, or music or the written word. The bible was canonized when different Christian communities started collecting letters and books that appeared to be veering away from the initial Jesus moment that happened back around 30 AD. Yet I am getting ahead of myself. What I am about to share with you is common knowledge... to anyone who has attended one of the top seminaries over the past 30 or so years. To understand the next few weeks I want to mix section two and three together for this week, and get right to where this comes together:

There are three companions we will be traveling with on this journey. For Dorothy those companions are the Scarecrow, Tinman, and Lion. For us, those companions will take a more figurative role of brains, heart, and courage. How we interact with the bible requires not just one of these companions but all three working together.

First, we have to use common sense and knowledge to help us understand. We've gotta use our brain. The Bible is not just a fairytale written to help people see and live in the world better. The bible is a faith, a history, and an understanding of how God has and does relate to Creation. It is OK to ask questions. There is nothing wrong with wanting to know something better. Thinking about any real relationship in life, asking questions allows us to grow closer to those we love. God wants relationship, therefore questions are appropriate when used correctly. Our brain, therefore, is the first pillar of biblical truth.

Second, we must not lose our heart in the book. The bible is full of real stories about real people. These people had real emotions. Meanwhile, when we are reading, our emotions and other's emotions play a role too. This isn't just about understanding what the text meant and what it means today; this is also about how our soul reacts to it. Knowing the emotional attachment of the biblical characters and ourselves, allows the bible to be as authentic as it should be.

Finally, we must be courageous in our biblical interpretations. It is not enough to have a strong head and a true heart coming to the bible. Courage gives us the ability to continue our study when our study reveals scary and uncomfortable truths. The first year of seminary tries future ministers, faith leaders and teachers. There are those who cannot make it past the first semester. Many of these people are very smart and loving followers of Christ. What many lack is the courage to continue once study begins.

### **Why continue?**

Many Christians today are not equipped to fight the battles coming our way. Churches across the United States are set up in a way where the truth is dangerous to job stability. Congregations will punish the truth through the offering plate, volunteering, or firing the clergy sharing it. This sets up a dangerous set of circumstances: First, ministers choose to hide their knowledge for the sake of job security. Ministers need to eat too. I don't think the congregations know they are hurting themselves

so much by suppressing the voice of their leaders. I don't even think many congregations are realizing they have suppressed their leader's voice. Many simply lack courage and react poorly. Second, knowing this information is knowing the weapons we need to fight the spiritual battle being waged outside the doors of the church. It is like the ministers and faith leaders are given metaphorical bazookas to pass out to congregants, when congregants insist on using sabres and flintlocks. There are now two faith languages being spoken in Christian circles. There is a language that is based on the knowledge and heart of people who have studied the bible for the past 2,000 years. This is the educated clergy voice. Some of this is good and some of it is not. But we are not given the chance to have this discussion. The conversation has stalled because the second language is stuck with the knowledge of the 1800's.

Let me show you a picture I saw from last Christmas:



This billboard was purchased by American Atheists, and it reads: "Keep the MERRY! Dump the MYTH!" It was placed in downtown Manhattan, and it was a genius attack. As an American culture we have an unspoken rule about Santa Claus. The media, parents, teachers, and in many cases, ministers, keep the secret and the myth regarding who Santa is. Adults know to keep our mouths shut so our children can have a sense of wonder come Christmas morning. At the same time Jesus Christ, especially the image chosen, is a historical person who was part of a historical event. Jesus died on a cross. That really happened. Yet, to fight this argument Christians would need to break the unspoken rule. They found a way to make Christians the losers period. Either we look like we are followers of a myth or we become humbugs who don't want to have a Merry Christmas. Do you want to take Santa away from kids? Are you really that mean? See what I mean?

Continue this study because of this billboard. We are fighting a spiritual war and these voices need to be confronted and fought. They are fighting against us and winning. We have been playing ignorant for too long. God is real. The bible was written because real people had a real experience with the divine and it was important enough to share with future generations. Over the next few weeks it will be a tough pill to take, but we will chase it with an American classic: The Wizard of Oz. Please continue. God's story is too wonderful to be lost to underhanded tactics like the one above. We will support one another in this journey. God will be with us, and with God with us, who could be against us. Now, let's get to work.

## The beginning of the written WORD:

The Christianity section of Reddit has taught and enlightened me in multiple ways, but the way I have been the most enlightened is knowing there are those who would pick apart the smallest piece of what someone would say. So, when I say WORD, let me explain. Depending on how it is used, the word could be a physical word that is said or written, Jesus Christ, or scripture. I am talking about the bible or also known as scripture. Let's not draw any comparisons beyond that. Simplicity y'all.

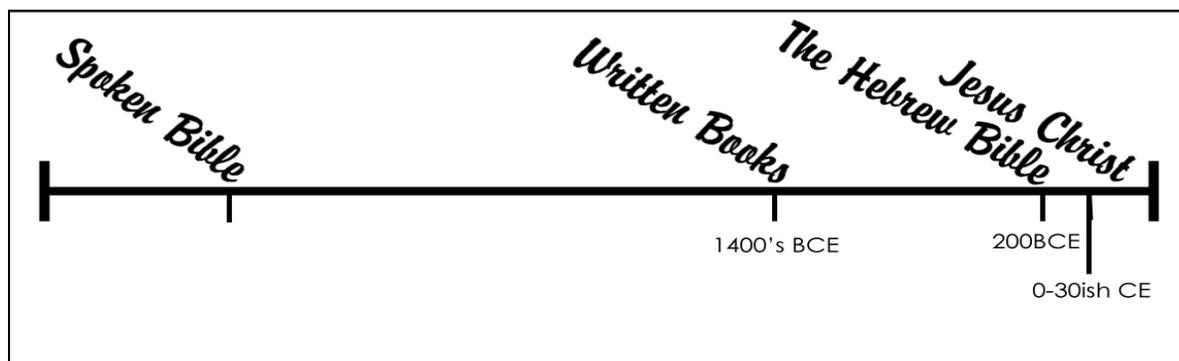
OK, gird up your brain, heart, and courage. Here we go. Talking about how the bible came to be known in the form we now use requires having a discussion about the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Separately. Both have a unique history and sets the ground work for biblical interpretation. Now, throughout the weeks I will go into the specifics of this in greater detail. This is an introduction.

When I first began biblical studies I could remember I had a stronger sense of cohesion regarding the Hebrew bible, aka Old Testament, than I did the New Testament. There were so many translations of the New Testament, meanwhile it seemed the Hebrew Bible was all about getting back to the original Hebrew. This cohesion with the Hebrew Bible seemed to be strongest when it came the canon. The New Testament canon was outwardly messier. We have the apocrypha and secondary books which researchers who felt they belonged in New Testament canon. Oh, there's that word again, canon.

So there are two canons in the bible: The Hebrew Bible canon and the New Testament canon. I discovered a few truths about each canon that, frankly, scared me at first. As someone who grew up in churches where asking questions and learning were expected, I wasn't expecting what I learned. What I am about to share might feel like I am pulling a rug right from underneath you, but hang in there. If that's true, what you might have been standing on wasn't made to be stood on. The bible isn't our foundation, it is our guide to understand our true foundation which is our faith. We all might have fears going into this, but it will be alright. If it helps, let's put the New Testament aside for this week and start with the Hebrew Bible.

## Hebrew Bible:

The Israelites began making their archaeological footprint around 1,200 BCE. Would you believe the written form of Genesis was written only about 200 years before that? The story existed way before but it wasn't until the 1,400's BCE the oral traditions around Genesis began to be written out. And, this was just Genesis, many books in the Hebrew Bible share similar stories where they existed in spoken form years before they were finally written down. Now here is the big one, the Hebrew Bible, as we mostly know it today, came together around 200BCE. This is incredibly close to the birth of Christ. Below you will see a poorly drawn chart showing what I am talking about:



To side track for a second and return to the Wizard of Oz. Baum wrote both the book we have come to love, and a play on the same subject he personally directed. For the most part, the two are very similar. However, there are some character choices that differentiate one from another. Now imagine if the original book was lost in some vault and only the play existed up to this point. The character choices of the play would become the dominate view of the story of OZ. Now imagine, in this secondary world, if the book was magically discovered in it's secret vault. Everyone knew the book came first, but which one do you follow? Of course, this is fiction, and the answer is: which ever one you like the most. But, what if this story was actually true for the Hebrew Bible?

Go to the source, and if you cannot go to the source go to the closest thing to it. In the case of Old Testament literature the really early versions don't exist anymore. It turned out the earliest version of scripture was not even in Hebrew but was translated from the Hebrew into Greek. It was from this Greek text the Christian Old Testament was translated from. Then came the Dead Sea Scrolls. Hidden in a cave, protected by a sect of Jewish leaders who felt the need to protect scripture, were Hebrew Bible scrolls (among other things) pre-dating the Greek translation. Like I had said about the Wizard of Oz play verses the book, the two versions were very similar but there were differences in the translation. With the limited knowledge I have given you, it might be easy just to say, "Go with the Hebrew, it's older." However, I am going suggest there are two reasons the answer isn't so simple.

There is reason to believe the Greek translation of the Hebrew bible might be a translation from text that pre-dates the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is like reading a translation of a first or second edition, next to reading from the original language of a third or fourth edition. Both texts become extremely valuable and important. Both texts shine light onto the real meaning of the text. Also, unlike how editions work in the book world, each version of the text is important because it might show something that has been mistakingly added or omitted. (Yes, that happens, even to holy text. We are humans copying divinely inspired acts.)

Also, you might be more married to the Greek version of the text than you would like to admit. I bring to your attention Isaiah 7:14. "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The **virgin** will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel," (NIV). This is a popular scripture to read during Christmas. I spent most of my childhood hearing a different translation, the NRSV, which reads: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the **young woman** is with child, and will bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel." The difference is in 'virgin' verses 'young woman.' The 'virgin' translation comes from the Greek version of the Hebrew bible. Meanwhile, the 'young woman' comes from the translation from the Hebrew. It is because of this translation issue, with a few other things, the NRSV cannot be found in many Christian bookstores. The NRSV translators were the first to use the Dead Sea Scrolls to aid in translation. The NIV would come later and use the NRSV's work to do their translation, but would choose the Greek for Isaiah 7:14 over the Hebrew. There are many who try to pretend the NRSV doesn't exist, they believe it is blasphemy to exclude the Isaiah reference to a virgin birth. Yet, the Dead Sea Scrolls have a word that suggests a 'young woman' is a better English translation than 'virgin.' Just try to find the NRSV in any conservative Christian bookstore. You probably won't.

This one example is one out of many. It begins to pull apart the throw away phrase: "The bible is divine revelation." It is a phrase that shuts down the argument before it can ever be made. The problem with divine revelation is which text is divinely revealed? Is it the Greek or Hebrew? Which version? Are our English/German/Chinese translations divine revelation as well? When does our free will come into play? At some point, the perfect document approach to biblical understanding begins to

fall apart. It is at that point we can step in with a different phrase: divine inspiration. It will be alright if the bible isn't perfect because our hands and thoughts influenced it. We can believe God's will stepped in and helped us along. God inspired the writers of the text to share an awesome story. A real story. A story worth surviving the ages.

### **In Conclusion:**

The best teacher I ever had was my first year Hebrew Bible professor at Candler School of Theology. His name is Dr. David Peterson. He knows his stuff and he has such a caring way in sharing it. When he would share faith shaking information he would always follow it with how to share that information with congregants. Now most of us were at least three years away from having our own full time congregation. Most of us were not even going to remember what he told us in that time. In his pastoral way, he was letting us know what was really important about the text. As I am years apart from his words, let me share the cliff notes of what he shared with us: No matter what you may learn, God is alive and real. There is a reason these moments survived the test of time and were ultimately collected and written down. God loves us. What I am sharing might feel like you have been pulled from your spiritual home like a Dorothy in a tornado. But, I promise, if you keep your wits about you, your heart open, and courage by your side, you will find your way back home by the end of the journey. OK, I added the last part, but it is true. Amen.

### **Extra Note:**

There have been many versions of the Wonderful Wizard of Oz over the past century. *Return to Oz*, a movie released by Disney in 1985, is considered the closest to Baum's vision. In the same breath, *Return to Oz* is also considered one of the worst interpretations. In my opinions *The Wiz* is probably one of the best, if not the best, interpretation. Visually, it is not even close to being the best, but the storytelling puts it over the top. *The Wiz* tells the story very close to the book and does something *Return to Oz* doesn't: *The Wiz* gives a meaning behind the text. We should strive to do both with the bible: We should try to be historically accurate to the text while also correctly pulling the meaning behind the text.

### **Talking to God:**

God,

Today we step out on a new and slightly scary journey. In so many ways, we just want to know we are not alone. Just let us know you are with us. When we need a shoulder to cry on, a partner to laugh with, let us know you are there. We look forward, over the next few weeks, in getting to know you better. Thank you for all you do in our lives.

So be it.

**Questions:**

What is your personal relationship with the Wizard of OZ? In what ways have you interacted with it over your lifetime?

What is your personal relationship with the Bible? From what faith tradition, if any are you coming from?

If you could make a billboard explaining the Christian Faith, what would it look like and what would it say?

What do you hope to gain from this study?

## Week 2: Character Development

## **Wizard of Oz:**

### **Chapter 1: Dorothy in a huge Gray World**

An orphan is a writer's best hero. Orphans immediately steers the reader to sympathetic emotions. Some famous fictional orphans include, but are not limited to: Peter Pan, Batman, Superman, Spiderman, Snow White, and Dorothy Gale. Baum doesn't spend a great amount of time introducing Dorothy so there has to be some kind of attachment right away. Orphan. How did she become an orphan? It doesn't matter. The subject of how children become orphans is too dark for Baum to delve into. (This is my opinion, but it is an opinion that makes reasonable sense.) So as the story begins we have our hero, a girl full of color, living in a gray world.

Now there are a couple of reasons Kansas is imagined as a gray world. The first reason is obvious to any child who looks at a school map of the United States. If you would, imagine that huge pull down map from your elementary and middle school class rooms. Each state or country is given its own color to show the separation. Anything outside the maps designated area is gray. The story is about OZ, so Kansas is naturally outside the map. Therefore the land is gray. As you read on you will realize each country in OZ is literally like a map, changing colors as they go across the country. It is such a child like idea that the ground and the world around them would change color like a map. This is a kids book so Baum takes the children's imagination and draws upon it, literally. Kansas is outside the Oz map and therefore gray. Now, there is another reason Baum chose to make Kansas gray. In some ways Kansas does have a harsh landscape. It especially had a harsh landscape in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Baum lived in Nebraska and experienced the harshness of the Midwest first hand. Another way to think about it: Dorothy is saved from her climate before the climate destroys her.

### **Chapter 2: Glinda is only a monster if she is there from the beginning**

Guess who doesn't show up? Glinda! Instead we get the Good witch of the North, an old lady. I have heard a wonderful argument that if the MGM movie is the canon for the Wizard of Oz than Glinda is the true villain of the story. Think about it: She forces the shoes on Dorothy, pushing the Wicked Witch's anger upon her. She even instigates the argument. She knew the way for Dorothy to go home from the beginning and could have saved her the drama that ultimately faced her. At one point she basically calls Dorothy ugly. Watch the movie, you will see what I mean. If Glinda is there from the beginning than she is a terrible character who is not to be sympathized. Yet, in the book we have a witch, for at least this book, remains nameless. She is old. She has a chalkboard. Her chalkboard is magic.

This encounter gives us two pieces of information which tie Oz to Pilgrim's progress. In Pilgrim's Progress three shining beings give the hero gifts. One places a shining mark upon his head. (The Witch kisses Dorothy's head giving her protection that lasts throughout the journey.) Another gives shining shoes. Dorothy takes the Wicked Witches silver shoes and wears them. Wanna know why the shoes in MGM became ruby instead of silver? The Wonderful Wizard of Oz was really trying to show off Technicolor, a new technology. Silver shoes do not pop as well as red. Therefore, ruby slippers become part of the collective memory of OZ instead of silver. A piece of Pilgrim's progress is lost.

Baum makes the assumption we know black= bad and white = good. Dorothy wears a blue and white gingham dress. Blue is the color of the Munchkins, therefore she is immediately embraced by the people. White is the color of good witches so they immediately believe she means no harm.

Finally, a note to remember and get back to in two weeks: It was not the good witch who sent Dorothy to the Emerald City, it was the chalkboard. Consider what that means to the story. Since there is a group who consider Glinda to be the villain in the MGM movie it is interesting that the book doesn't really have any PERSON tell her where to go. Is it fate? Perhaps.

**Chapter 3:**

**The Scarecrow**

U n i v e r s a l	Personal	Knowledge
	You Know What You Know	You Know What You Don't Know
K n o w l e d g e	You Don't Know What You Know	You Don't Know What You Don't Know

I love this four way chart that separates knowledge into 4 quadrants. It is called the Johari Window. It was developed by Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham in 1955. We know what we know. We know what we don't know. We don't know what we know. We don't know what we don't know. The vertical spectrum is our personal knowledge. On the left is what we personally know. On the right is what we personally do not know. The horizontal spectrum is a little bit more confusing. It is the knowledge we have of everything. The top is what we know of universal knowledge, and the bottom is what we don't know of universal knowledge.

Let's go through each quadrant. The top left contains all perceived knowledge. If our brain was a closet, these are the mental outfits we know we have and can pull out at will. I will give you a few examples: I know I can breath. I know How to add simple numbers together. I know my children's birthdays. The top right quadrant is like those fashion magazines. You know what is in them but you don't have them. Here are a few examples: I know I don't know how to do open heart surgery. I know I am oblivious regarding how to plant a garden. I don't know how to fix an air conditioning system. These are all areas where I know knowledge exists but, I don't personally have it. The bottom left quadrant is tricky because it is like those outfits you completely forgot about, tucked away in the corner of your closet. You have the knowledge, you just don't know it is there. Those around you might realize you have this knowledge, while you do not. The Karate Kid is all about this quadrant. Ah Daniel Son, didn't realize you knew that complex Karate move? Paint the fence! Wax on wax off! He knew something he didn't know he knew! Finally, the bottom right quadrant is the knowledge the universe holds that no one knows to know. I recall the scene in Men in Black where Kay tells Edwards there is extraterrestrial life living on Earth:

Edwards: Why the big secret? People are smart. They can handle it.

Kay: A person is smart. People are dumb, panicky dangerous animals and you know it. Fifteen hundred years ago everybody knew the Earth was the center of the universe. Five hundred years ago, everybody knew the Earth was flat, and fifteen minutes ago, you knew that humans were alone on this planet. Imagine what you'll know tomorrow.

These are moments where what we didn't know what we didn't know was revealed to us.

The scarecrow claims to be only a few days old. Therefore, most of his understanding fell into the lower quadrants, he didn't know what he knew, and he didn't know what he didn't know. For example, he didn't know he could use his mouth to speak. He didn't know stepping into a ditch would cause you to fall. However, once he experienced the ability to use his mouth or fell into the ditch, he never did it again. He began to learn, stating what he knew he didn't know, and moving new information into what he knew he knew.

#### **Chapter 4: The Tinman**

It was later understood Nick (the only one of the three with a name) was in love with the Witch's personal servant. How much does he love this girl? He loves her so much he refuses to see her again until he is sure he can give her the love she deserves. This self-sacrificial love takes some interesting turns in the book, as we will see. There will be moments where we will see what Baum is willing to show love and what deserves immediate disposal. This will be presented through the eyes of the Tin Man.

Ok, so here is a question. What about the Tinman's mouth? He groans to get their attention. When they find him he then sends them back to his cottage to get his oil can. He talks. Why didn't he yell for them to begin with? The MGM movie is aware of this and puts the oil can next to the Tinman and the first thing Dorothy does is oil is mouth. This is also true for *The Wiz*.

I recall Noah's Ark and the Creation story. The story is expanded by later sources. There are moments that simply don't make sense and need explaining, or explaining away. The question then becomes, which way do we read into the text? I know I we are going to get into the bible in just a bit, but a good way to understand biblical text is to mentally act it out in your head. Say the scripture the way you believe the figures would say them. Imagine what the scene would look like in real life.

#### **Chapter 5: The Lion**

I can remember watching Return to Oz and being bummed by how impersonal the lion was. It was only after I read the book I realized the character of the Lion is more distant than either MGM or *The Wiz* depicts him. After all, the Tinman was a human and the Scarecrow is supposed to be like a human. The Lion is an animal. Some believe movies have enhanced the character of the Lion because the actors have added much needed character to the, well, character. I almost believe the Lion is an afterthought for Baum. After all, eventually the Scarecrow and Tin Man decide to always be together. They needed one another. It is a shame the Lion gets left out. He is as much needed as the soul and the thought of the issue.

Finally, Dorothy invites the Scarecrow and Tin Man on the journey. Isn't it interesting the Lion invites his self? That is how we need to be in relation to the bible. We must be courageous about our discovery or we will get no where. Sometimes it is not good enough to wait for an invitation. We must initiate the journey ourselves.

## The Bible:

### Hebrew Bible:

Continuing where we left off last week, we talked about the two early translations of the Hebrew bible. I call both the Hebrew and the Greek “translations” because both were translated from the oral version which first existed before pen went to paper, so to speak. This is one of two reasons we cannot take the bible, in this case the Hebrew Bible, literally. The other reason has to do with authors. Based on machines, and archaeologists, linguists, and people way smarter than me, it is understood in educational circles that the first five books of the Hebrew Bible have four types of writers. This is a big deal when you consider it in context of the writing. First, let me share what these four voices are and then let me explain how it plays out on a biblical level.

The four types of writers are commonly known by four letters. These letters are, JEPD.

**J:** These writers name God as Yehweh. (Ya-way) The 'J' is used because the first translators who wrote the Hebrew into a western alphabetic symbols were primarily the Germans. The Germans spell Yehweh, Jahwe. In J material, God is close and relational. Example: God walks in the garden with creation in Genesis 3:8.

**E:** For the same reason, these writers are called 'E' because their chosen name for God is Elohim. Elohim is kinda the generic word for God or gods in general. In E material, God is distant and communicates through dreams or secondary sources like messengers or prophets.

**P:** These are the priestly writers. They are very concerned with boundaries and rules. (Genesis 1 is full of them.) They are also concerned with the right of the priestly family of Aaron.

**D:** These are the Deuteronistic writers. These writers consider God to be so distant it is only a voice. God, according to these writers, communicates through forms like burning bushes. One could gather from the name, most of the writings from these writers can be found in the book of Deuteronomy.

Understanding these different voices can help us when we are reading the creation story and wonder why humanity is created not only once, but twice. It turns out, studying the way it was written, there were two different voices sharing two different creation stories. One was written by the Priestly voice. The other was written by J. Knowing just this little piece of information can start a meaningful discussion regarding a literal creation. If such the creation story is literal, which one do we believe is literal? How can we see the reality of Genesis 1-2 in light of the given information? At least, it opens up discussion to why the two creation stories are written differently.

It also helps us understand the story of Noah's Ark, where two incomplete versions of the story exist. The two stories are merged together creating a complete tale which finds it's way into the bible... Side track just a minute. I am sure those two pieces of information are pretty difficult to take if you understood what I just wrote. I am not really questioning the purpose or authenticity of these two pieces of biblical literature. I'm not suggesting we forgo a search for the original ark on Mount Ararat. I do think there are better ways to use our time, but it is a worthwhile endeavor. After all, there were those who said Troy and the Trojan horse were made up stories. It turned out, Troy and the story of the wooden horse were real. The last thing I am suggesting by stating there was more than one author to Noah's Ark and Creation, is it's inauthenticity. What I am suggesting is, we need to stop looking at it word for word, and start looking at it as moment to moment. It is less important to quote the KJV word for word than it is to try to understand what it means that Noah was naked and drunk at the end of the story. It is less important to know if Noah brought 2 of every kind of bird or more than two for

the sake of sacrifice. It is more important to understand why the rainbow is so important as a sign of a covenant. Understanding how the bible came to be can get us to what is truly important about it. As for me, I stopped trying to prove a literal Creation story and started understanding why God wanted us to have that story and what purpose it served to the people who heard it. See? My salvation is not dependent on whether I believe God created everything in billions of years or whether it was created in 7 days.

### **New Testament:**

Last week I shared there might be some muddy waters regarding the New Testament translations and canons. Like the Hebrew Bible the New Testament started out as a spoken story based on the reality of Jesus Christ. People were astounded and amazed by the events that transpired around Jesus of Nazareth. In a very real way, we should be happy the story existed first in spoken form because there is something of a viral hit that happened around Christ and it exists in the voices that wanted to share it. I have books of my own story, otherwise known as journals. My story really doesn't mean anything to anyone other than me. Because it is written down, my story exists whether anyone wants it to exist or not. The story of Jesus exists because people saw it as something important and worth retaining.

Finally, when it was written down, pretty much only the important parts remained. I say that, because I think back to some of my early journals and I have really useless stuff in them. Today I don't need to remember what I ate for lunch on a Monday when I was 11 years old. Yet, you could look into my first journal and items such as that are commonly referred to. It was only until I was much older that I started to get to the meat of events and write things down that were worth remembering.

In both Testaments in the Bible we know little about what the people look like. Yeah, we know something about Sampson and a little bit more about John the Baptist. But, what did Mary, mother of Jesus look like? What characteristics of Simon and Andrew showed they were related? These are the type of questions we would have answers to today with so many people owning phones with built in cameras. It is not important to the story. It was only remembered if what they wore or how they looked was vital of the story.

### **New Testament Canon:**

After Christ, people shared the story and years later, the story began to be written down. These stories could be called books. Different communities had different books. The earliest writings we have are not from the gospels. The earliest writings are from the letters Paul wrote to the various new congregations throughout the Roman Empire. It might be startling to hear the Gospels hadn't been written down by the time Paul came into the picture, but think about it like this: most of the known world didn't know how to read or write. The immediate story of Jesus Christ would have held more importance in the spoken version over and beyond a written version. The illiterate masses could repeat a story they heard. Meanwhile, Paul was a very good reader and writer. He was an educated man who responded to educated people about the community they lived in. Because he was responding miles away from the people, letters were the best form of communication. And letters were immediate to the problems these early Christian communities were having.

So by 100 CE or so a community might have a gospel along with a copy of a couple of Paul's

letters. It also wasn't like every community carried around the Gospel of Luke with Paul's letter to the Romans and the Ephesians. One community might have those while another might have the Gospel of Matthew with a few other Epistles. And still another community would have different collection. By itself this was rather innocent. Yet, there were two things happening that led to the canonization of the New Testament.

**Gnostics-** Not much is known about Gnostics today. They were a group of Jewish Christians who mostly were drawn to the Gospel of John. According to the early church Fathers they held some views of the spiritual world that did not really seem to be accurate. Also, they were growing in popularity. It was partly because of them, fellow leaders of these communities decided to get together and agree on certain biblical points. This led to a creed which, aside from Paul, became the first overall theology for Christianity.

**Forgeries-** The other reason unity was reached, especially in relation to canon, were forgeries. Even in the babyhood of Christianity, people were creating false writings and attributing it to an Apostle, or even Jesus. The leaders of the communities gathered together to decide what was authentic and what was not. There were some books that almost didn't make it, the book of Revelation being one of them. There were some books that were easy picks: the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew Mark and Luke. Today there are some questions regarding the canon. For example: some believe the letters attributed to Peter really wasn't written by Peter. To bring up one really good reason, Peter never had the money, means or status to learn how to write.

### **Drawing the two together:**

When we think about how the OZ characters look I am sure many turn immediately to their favorite adaptation. For me, I immediately picture the actors from the MGM movie. My mind cannot see Dorothy Gale without imagining Judy Garland in the role. Therefore, my Dorothy is about 6 years older than Baum imagined her to be.

Meanwhile, how we imagine biblical characters are rarely based on descriptions we have from the Bible. Moses looks strangely like Charlton Heston. God looks comfortable on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Angels all have wings. How we imagine the look of biblical stories are greatly influenced by the imagination of others. Hell? Thank Dante for much of our creative understanding of that frigid place.

When we read the bible we need always question where our understanding is coming from. Are we pulling from the culture around us or are we gaining insight from the text. We should also be open and accepting to how others interpret how the bible looks. In OZ, we have a greater connection to those ruby slippers than we do to the silver ones. Does the fact that they are ruby instead of silver really change the story? Not really. Deep down the connection to Pilgrim's Progress is still there. For the Bible, because people are not described, many different cultures can relate to the people in their own context. It doesn't change the story. It just makes it easier to relate to. Just compare a European Icon to an Asian Icon. Moses, Mary, and even Jesus look like the culture who is depicting them. It makes complete sense. We are created in God's image. Icons are images of the divine. The icons favor us.

The key is this: God wants to relate to us in a form we are comfortable with, but we shouldn't be arrogant enough to believe our area of comfort is what is right for everyone. Like, when I personally relate to God, God doesn't look like the guy trying to touch the naked man's hand on the

ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Perhaps you relate best when God comes to you in that form. That doesn't mean that form works for me.

**Extra Note:**

One of the more recent biblical discoveries is related to Moses and the separating the Red Sea. It appears there was a translation issue. The Red Sea was not the sea Moses and the newly released Israelites went to. They went to the Reedy Sea. This is not information many life long Christians would feel comfortable knowing, because the miracle isn't in the grand separation of the sea, but in the small miracle of the low tides working in the Israelite favor. The Reedy Sea was more of a swamp. If this kind of information bothers you, ask yourself, is it any less a miracle a people were able to safely cross something like a Middle Eastern Okefenokee Swamp, over a sea? God doesn't work like in the movies. God works through the processes and rules God built into the creation. Understanding the reality of the Reedy Sea miracle helps us the miracles still happening in our world today. In that, there is something to focus on.

**Talking to God:**

God,

This is overwhelming to say the least. Help us see you in all of it. Help us understand how your hand moved and guided your story. Most importantly, help us keep our faith as our solid foundation, while we transition the bible as a guide to that faith. Your presence is real and palpable. Thank you for helping us see that.

So be it.

**Question:**

1. Pick a year in the past where you existed but not extremely close to the present. Make a Johari Window and attempt to fill it out using that date. What was your perceived knowledge in relation to the universal knowledge of the time. If you are with a group, share.
2. How has God best related to you? Take a sheet of paper and draw what that looks like. After you are finished reflect on how your image has been influenced by the world around you, and how it could be divinely inspired.

## Week Three: Perspective

## Wizard of Oz:

### The Kalidahs:

The Kalidahs are creatures that do not make it into much of anything other than the original book. They are fearsome beasts with bodies like bears, and heads like tigers. What is ironic is how similar Kalidah sounds to kaleidoscope. It is ironic because kaleidoscope comes from the Greek, which first meant beautiful form. Between the bugs and the Kalidah, we begin to see a theology of OZ begin to take shape through the person of the Tin Man.

*During the rest of that day there was no other adventure to mar the peace of their journey. Once, indeed, the Tin Woodman stepped upon a beetle that was crawling along the road, and killed the poor little thing. This made the Tin Woodman very unhappy, for he was always careful not to hurt a living creature; and as he waded along he wept several tears of sorrow and regret.*

Here we get the basis for understanding the Tin Man. The Tin Man wants to be careful not to hurt any living creature. This is first tested when Dorothy was hungry and the Lion needed to eat.



*“The tree fell with a crash into the gulf”*

*“If you wish,” said the Lion, “I will go into the forest and kill a deer for you...” “Don’t, please don’t,” begged the Tin Woodman. “I should certainly weep if you killed a poor deer, and then my jaws would rust again.” But the Lion went away into the forest and found his own supper, and no one ever knew what it was, for he didn’t mention it.”*

Therefore, the Tin Man wants to be careful not to hurt any living creature, and doesn't want anyone else to hurt any living creature, unless, he is not witness to it. Lions eat meat. It is a safe assumption the Lion went into the woods and killed an animal for sustenance.

Another amendment to the “careful not to hurt any living creature” clause happens as the quad have crossed a deep ravine by traveling over a tree the Tin Man had cut down. The Kalidahs are close behind and begin crossing over the fallen tree in order to get to the group in and tear them up. This is when this happens:

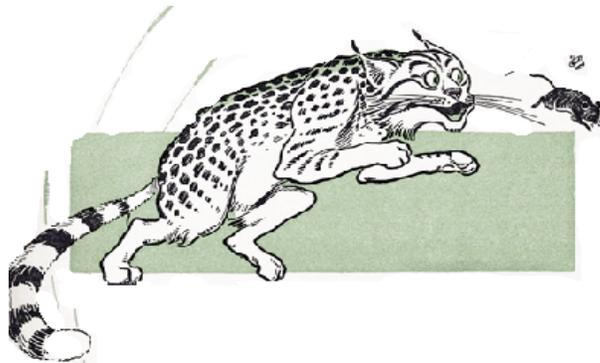
*“Wait a minute!” called the Scarecrow. He had been thinking what was best to be done, and now he asked the Woodman to chop away the end of the tree that rested on their side of the ditch. The Tin Woodman began to use his axe at once, and, just as the two Kalidahs were nearly across, the tree fell with a crash into the gulf, carrying the ugly, snarling brutes with it, and both were dashed to pieces on the sharp rocks at the bottom.*

The Tin Man wants to be careful not to hurt any living creature, and doesn't want anyone else to hurt any living creature, unless, he is not witness to it, or the creature wants to kill his friends or him. In that case, the life of the attackers are forfeit. As this is a children's book, and Baum didn't want to expand on the darkness, we get these brief excerpts without any understanding of how the group felt

about them. As an adult, it would be nice to understand the moral dilemma surrounding the Tin Man's choices.

### **The Mice and the Beast:**

This is such an interesting part of the story considering the current understandings regarding mice and beasts. I say this because, I lived on my Grandmother's farm for a couple of years, and I remember the biggest pests we had were rodents. Rodents, both mice and rats, would destroy anything that could be chewed through. They could destroy the food meant for the animals, and they were carriers of disease. Rodents were step two in the spread of the Black Plague. First the fleas, than the rodents... Meanwhile, beasts are to be saved and protected. Beasts can end up on the endangered species list. Beasts need their habitat protected and guarded. Imagine what the World Wildlife Federation would say about all the destruction of beasts in the Wizard of Oz.



In the book the love for rodents is redeemed when the Tin Man chooses the mouse over the beast. In a situation like this I must return to the Tin Man's morality. The Tin Man's love is a moment by moment experience. His love is only skin deep. As long as he doesn't have to dig too deep, look too hard, or explore too much, he can live within his morality. He doesn't know what the mouse has done to others or what she will do with the rest of her life. Perhaps the mouse had just chewed holes into someone's house and destroyed their winter rations. It is not information she had to share.

It is the same for the beast. Perhaps the Tin Man killed the last of it's kind. Perhaps the beast was protecting a small community from some larger predator. Perhaps, like a farm cat, the beast was doing what it was made to do. This we will never know for the beast was killed before it could explain it's actions. It turned out to be beneficial for the lion that the Tin Man chose to help the mouse, but who is to say it couldn't have been helpful the other way around too? Yet, at face value, skin deep, the Tin Man made the moral choice.

### **Pennies:**

I am so amazed I haven't seen more articles, musings, and memes regarding the green glasses and the Emerald City. I blame it on MGM who removed the glasses from the script and had the quad enter into a green city. In the movie *The Wiz*, the color changes at the whim of the Wizard. As he changes the color, the city is bathed in the chosen light. When I first saw Disney's *Return to Oz* I was so confused there was nothing green at all about the Emerald City. I expected the stone to be green marble, the metal to be green, and the clothes to be green. It was only until I read the book I realized the true probability and possibility of the Emerald City.

Only the outside of the city had to be green to give the allusion of complete greenness. Lisbeth Zwerger illustrated the a printing of the Wizard of Oz back in 1996. She struggled with the green city and how to make it exciting. In the end she realized she didn't have to paint everything green. She could be creative with her color palate and include a set of green glasses for the readers. This was included in the 1996 printing:

*DEAR READER:*

*You will find a pair of green glasses slipped into the back of this book. The Great Wizard Oz has decreed that you must wear them when you enter his wonderful Emerald City. Whenever you see the little symbol of glasses at the bottom of the page next to the page number, you will know that it is time to put on your glasses. If you don't see the symbol, you may remove the glasses. Do not dare disobey the will of the Great and Terrible Oz!*

Genius! I noticed in the Broadway musical, Wicked, Both Glinda and Elphaba wear green glasses when they make their way to the Emerald City. The audience gets to see the color of the city while the main characters are forced into a green perspective.

What I find interesting about the book is as Dorothy makes note of everything that is green, her last comment is on paying for the items with green pennies. Everything down to the change is green, but pennies are something that could actually be green. Oxidized copper turns green. So what is interesting is this: Because their eyes are being persuaded to see only one hue, it is impossible to appreciate the items which are naturally green because they simply blend in with everything else.

## **The Bible:**

Today's study is all about perception and the role perception plays on our actions. Whether we look at the problem like the Tin Man or cover over our view like the green spectacles, we are manipulating our view and therefore manipulating how we would deal with it. But, like it or not we all have views and beliefs we wear and cannot take off. Being aware of the things that distort our view can help us see the bible more realistically. Let's delve into that a little deeper.

### **Personal Glasses:**

We sometimes put on our green colored glasses when we pick our favorite bible verses and try to make those select verses fit the rest of the bible. It is not meant to be that easy. It is not about picking a few verses and pushing theology on it. Painting the bible with just a few scriptures could lead us to miss the very thing we are looking for, like green coins in a green world. The bible is far more colorful and diverse than that. For example, I think one of the strongest scriptures in the bible is Matthew 22:37-40. "He replied, *"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."* (CEB) This scripture makes Psalm 137 look like it should be struck from the bible completely. The Psalm concludes with a blessing to the ones who could take the Israeli captors babies and smash their brains out against the rocks. No, really, look it up. It could be easier to put blinders up on the sides of our personal glasses. It would be easy to ignore the verses that doesn't work with our personal verses. Perhaps, like the one from the Psalm.

Many good paintings are filled with shades and colors. To highlight the areas that need to be highlighted, the darkness must exist. If the whole painting were light it would show nothing. In the same way we should be willing to accept the darker biblical moments because they help enhance the highlighted moments. Also, even the darkened moments in the bible have something important to say. I believe Psalm 137 shows just how desperate and lost the Israelites were feeling. Away from home. Disconnected. In a much more real and dark place than Dorothy ever was. I had to remove some personal glasses to see this truth.

### **Communal Glasses:**

There is something great and worthwhile about gathering as a community and gelling on central beliefs. As a community our personal beliefs can be tested and worked out. As a community we can accomplish way more than we could ever do on our own. This can all be thrown out the window when God's will is glazed over by a communal view, or communal glasses.

I turn to my favorite non-example, Jim Jones and Jonestown. There were many who believed Jim Jones had figured out how to make communism work. Jonestown was supposed to be the communal utopia everyone wished they could emulate. Unfortunately everyone was wearing colored glasses on this one. He painted himself as an evangelist who wanted to help the least of these. He painted this picture with such broad strokes he successfully covered over the dark and dangerous areas of his ministry. He didn't practice safe boundaries, as he had sexual relations with People's Temple members. There was question of murder regarding a follower who disagreed with what Jones was doing. This, all before he took a large group of followers to the forests of Guyana. There, he forced his will on the people and made his will the only will worth living to. He was so good at convincing his point he made people believe there was no way but death. Men, women and children died by cyanide

laced Flavor-Aid. It was horrific.

These communal glasses have been worn by many over the centuries to greater or lesser degrees. There were the crusades where the Holy War was a horrible mess This one war is partially to blame for our poor relations with Islam. There was the civil war where slavery was considered right based on a few texts. Many hateful things have been said to both sides regarding the future of homosexual marriage under the umbrella of “the bible tells me so.” Finally, as a woman I have heard both sides of the argument regarding ordaining females. Most arguments I have heard have been swayed by the community they are coming from. There are those who believe I am wearing the communal glasses of the left by being female clergy. I suggest you openly dig into the text and decide based on prayer and study. Which leads me to my final point...

### **Choosing not to Dig:**

We could live a very simple life if we just take everything at face value. We could live like the Tin Man with a simple morality, which falls apart when dug into too deeply. It is not good enough to just read the bible, we have to study it too. At face value a piece of scripture might be saying one thing, but looked into deeply, it might be saying something completely different. Be careful how you read. You could be digging a hole for yourself instead of digging into the bible.

### **Talking to God:**

God,

Sometimes it is difficult to know what are my thoughts and what are your thoughts. It is difficult to know where I cannot see the truth because I have blinded my gaze to see what I want to see. Help clean my eyes. Help take down the blinders. Thank you.

So be it.

### **Question:**

Randomly pull a bible verse and reflect on it.

Read the bible verse once and ask yourself: What comes to my attention about this bible verse?

Read it through twice and ask yourself: What could I know more about if I chose to dig a little into what the words mean, what the culture was like, how the world worked?

Read it through a third time and ask yourself: Is there something I am choosing to ignore or might be reading into in order to see the scripture a certain way?

## Week Four: Evil and the Wrath of God

## **Wizard of Oz: Different Kinds of Evil**

Michael Patrick Hearn, the commentary writer of *The Annotated Wizard of Oz*, expressed something that personally hit a chord with me. The Wicked Witch was not pure evil, for she was afraid. Pure evil would avoid things that could hurt or destroy them but pure evil wouldn't fear it. He explains the exception to the rule was the mark upon Dorothy's head. Pure evil will always fear good, especially in morals and fables, for good is the only thing pure evil cannot overcome.

I found in this week's chapters, five different kinds of evil. Below I will share them with you:

1. **Power Grabbing Evil**: This kind of evil seeks to always be in control. Therefore, it will do monstrous things to retain it. Corrupt governments, and dying churches exhibit this kind of evil. In the book, it is the Wizard who encapsulates it the best. The most telling reason comes as the heroes are dropped off at the entrance to the Emerald City. The guard at the gate says, "What! [A]re you back again?" Notice he doesn't say, "Are you back so soon?" To be back again suggests not even the people of the Emerald City expected them to return free or at all. The Wizard, afraid of being outed, sent the group on a death mission. He became like the biblical David. (Killed a giant with a single stone, and became the first King of Judah) See, David had a thing for the wife of one of his soldiers. While the soldiers were off to war he slept with his wife and she became pregnant. He tried to cover his tracks and ultimately decided to send the husband to the front lines, knowing it would kill him. He then took the widow as his wife. He was later outed privately by his priest, Samuel. The Wizard sent the metaphorical husband (the heroes) to the front lines to save face. Instead of Samuel calling out the disgraced King, the heroes return triumphant outing the wizard in a different way. This is my connection, but you can preach that. So when the wizard claims to be a good man, but just a bad wizard, I say no.
2. **Forced Evil**: The Winkies and the monkeys had no will of their own. Therefore, what they did, whether good or bad is not their fault. (As a side note, I see the Winkies like the Israelites in Egypt. They have grown accustomed to captivity which is why they are so willing to embrace it again in the person of the Tin Man. This is part of the reason it was good the Israelites had 40 years in the desert. They had to unlearn what it meant to be a slave, and learn what it meant to be free. In relation to the Winkies, the Tin Man never gives him the chance because the Tin Man wants to do the opposite of forced evil. He wants to be loved so badly he will force love. Both are wrong.) Both the Winkies and the monkeys are innocent. Therefore, forced evil is the only innocent evil. BUT- in the same way forced good is in no way righteous for those forced to do it.
3. **Self Absorbed Evil**: The reason the monkeys were held to the wishes of the cap, and the Wizard sent the heroes to certain death was they were self-absorbed. They couldn't see beyond their own pleasure or needs. In a way it is a clueless kind of evil. They are still guilty of what they did, but they cannot comprehend their guilt because their view is self-centered. This form of evil might be the most dangerous form. What we don't know, or understand, can hurt us. Case in point, the Holocaust. Need I say more? I sure hope not.
4. **False Goodness**: I really mean this in two forms. First, those who punish self-absorbed evil, instead of helping them see the world around them for what it truly is, is only exhibiting false goodness. This is the case for Gayelette and the

monkeys. Quelala did a much better job living out what true goodness is by sparing them.

Second, I mean goodness in the same way as someone raises themselves as a deity. I had mentioned Jim Jones a week ago. He would fake miracles in order to justify his call. (I hold Jim Jones close to me because he was raised for ordination by my denomination. It is important to remember, out of any system really great and good people and really dark and evil people can rise up. We are mere mortals and capable of many things.) There is something dark in a person raising themselves to be worshiped. Once again, the Wizard fills this role, but so does the Tin Man, to a lesser degree. The Tin Man's need for love is so strong, he is willing to keep a people in captivity in order to gain it.

False goodness can easily turn into power grabbing evil if the person wishes to retain power once the worshiping body turns their attention elsewhere. This means false goodness is a scary kind of evil because it is a starting point for a darker and worse kind of evil.

5. **Spoiled Rotten Evil**: Story time! One short story. My creation. It explains spoiled rotten evil:

#### The Children of Gayelette and Quelala

Once upon a time in the land Oz, there lived a sorceress, Gayelette, and her new husband, Quelala. All in all, they were a very happy couple, especially after Quelala order the monkeys to leave his wife alone with the power of the magic cap.

There was only one thing they wanted for, their own child. It was Gayelette who decided the natural way of have children would not do. Any child could come from 'mating.' She would just have to make one. At first she brainstormed what she wanted in a child. Secluded in her castle she spent weeks thinking of what were good qualities for a person. She thought intelligence would be good, but a child too smart would know how to get into bad things without a parent finding out. She thought love would be good, but a child filled with too much love would constantly weep and be saddened by how unloving the rest of the world was. She thought courage would be good, but a child with too much courage would leave the home before it was time. They wouldn't stick around to learn the lessons they needed to first. Ultimately, she decided the most wonderful attribute of any child was sweetness. Quelala, who was made wiser than Gayelette by Gayelette, knew the danger in sweet children and suggested it was a bad idea. She would hear none of it.

So she set to work creating the sweetest child ever. A magic spell here. A few ingredients there. For months she worked to form this new child they would love. Eventually, one Summer morning it all came together and from her work, a child was born. Now this child was the sweetest child ever. She was so sweet she literally tasted sweet! Oh how her parents doted on her and praised her. Everything her heart desired was hers. If she wanted to play, they played. If she wanted one of them to read to her they read to her. If she wanted a toy, she got a toy.

A few years passed and Quelala decided it was time to take their child on a walk and begin educating her. The girl gleefully walked the woods with her dad as he began to identify plants, sharing their names and what they were good for. She idly watched, not paying much attention. For her, it was just something to do. When Quelala asked if she was listening she would brush her hand up casually. This made Quelala worried, as he realized they had never punished or reprimanded their daughter. He needed her to understand what they were doing was important. "Listen to me when I am talking to you!" After years of never saying anything negative to their child, the daughter simply stared blankly at her father. She thought how odd he sounded. Then she laughed. More than laughed, she cackled.

For the first time, Quelala was frightened of his daughter. Calmly he collected himself and

asked if she would follow him. Shrugging her shoulders she casually began to follow. He took her deep in the woods and stopped behind a fallen tree. Ahead of them were the flying monkeys playing in a pool and splashing each other. They looked like they were having so much fun. "What are those?" asked the girl pointing the monkeys.

Carefully, Quelala shared the story of the monkeys and his wedding day. He said he vowed never to use the power of the cap again. The monkeys deserved to be free. He would destroy the cap but it would break her mother's heart, as it was a wedding gift. The girl stared intently at the monkeys. "I want the cap." said the girl. The father breathed in a quick breath. "No," he replied. "I told you, it should never be used again."

The girl stood up and walked into the middle of the monkeys. The leader stopped, followed by the rest, and stared at the girl. "I want you to play with me." Quelala stayed behind the log horrified at what he was seeing. Yet, he did nothing, for maybe a lesson could be learned if he was patient. As if on cue the monkeys began to laugh. "Play with you?" one of them yelled. "We don't do nothing for nobody!" said another. "Wait," said the leader, "we'll play with you." Flying down to the pool he splashed some water in the girls face and directly into one of her eyes.

The girl began screaming and ran back to her dad waiting behind the log. The monkeys laughed again and resumed their play, ignoring the girl. The father took his daughter in his arms. "It's OK," he said, "it was only water. You take bathes all the time." But, upon looking at his child the water had literally washed one of her eyes out. After years of doting on their sweet daughter she had literally turned to sugar, and she was spoiling. "Help me Papa!" she cried softly. So, Quelala took her daughter home to her mother. He told her the story about her eye getting splashed, omitting the monkeys from the story.

Gayelette took her daughter back to her magic room. After inspection it was concluded there was nothing that could be done about the lost eye. One could not heal what was not there to begin with. Instead, Gayelette made her one remaining eye ultra sensitive and powerful to make up for it. For protection, Gayelette gave her daughter an umbrella to protect her from the water, and vowed never to draw a bath for her again.

But now the girl had changed. She was spoiling, and she had been told 'no' way later than she should have. After a minute to reflect she decided she must be through with her parents and she planned to run away from home. Late the next night she broke into Quelala's private room and stole the magic cap. She gleefully realized the magic words had been stitched into the cap, so they may never be forgotten. Putting the cap on she made the walk out of the castle, but waiting at the front door were her parents, aware of what she was about to do.

"You cannot leave," cried Gayelette, "You will not be able to protect yourself in that cruel world!"

"Then I shall stop by your zoo as I leave and take your fiercest creatures to protect me," replied the girl.

"You cannot leave," cried Gayelette, "There is no one out there to give you the love we have given you!"

"Then I shall find a people that I shall force to love me."

"You cannot leave," cried Gayelette, "You have not learned all the lessons we needed to teach you."

“Ah, but for that. I have watched you work Mother, and have learned your spells. I do not need to be smart with the power I will hold. And with the monkeys at my will, there will be no one who will stop me!”

At that she left. If either of her parents had doused her with water as she left, her wickedness and herself would have been destroyed. She was rotten to the core. Only her parents couldn't kill their only child, so away she went. Gayelette spent the next few weeks in her garden, weeping. She grew weaker and weaker, and Quelala saw his wife was dying. For most of the time he sat beside her, only leaving to try to get a meal she wouldn't eat. She would drink water, saying it was the only way she would replenish the liquid needed to continue crying. Then, one day she called her husband by her side and cried one last tear for their child. The sorceress had died.

Her last tear fell upon a rose bud. Quelala, mourning his late wife began to cry too and one of his tears landed on that same bud. In the trueness of the moment the bud began to grow and from it was born a baby. Quelala, in shock, took the child and cradled it. In this immense tragedy, something wonderful had been born. He named the baby Glinda, and raised her to be wise and loving. He never spoiled her, but he loved her.

### **The Power of Evil**

Evil always seems to come with the bigger guns. If not stopped early, evil can inflict great damage. Below here are three powers evil possess:

1. **Better Sight:** Literally speaking, the Wicked Witch of the West is not the only one with an all seeing eye. I recall Tolkin's Lord of the Rings, where Saruman is a big all seeing eye. It is interesting the witch is afraid of the dark, because people are normally afraid of the dark because danger and bad guys might be in the dark. There is this fear they can see better than you in the darkness.
2. **Taking Advantage:** It appears evil can more readily take advantage of what good doesn't know. In the case of Wizard of Oz, the witch took advantage of Dorothy's ignorance regarding the shoes. Good is never looking to take advantage of evil. In the very nature of taking advantage, one is doing something underhanded. It isn't in good's nature.
3. **Destroyed Pathways:** Evil must be stopped before the paths to it are taken out. I guess it is in our nature to isolate evil instead of destroy it. Yet, in isolation, that is when evil can build up power and grow. Recall in the Wizard of Oz how the man at the gates told the heroes there are no paths to the Witch of the West because no one wants to go that way.

A few side notes that didn't make it anywhere specific:

The witch is the true villain for the heroes. She is the exact opposite of all four combined. First, she has no heart for she does not care about their lives or the lives her creatures she is sacrificing. Second, she has no courage for she is scared of the dark and water and will not face them. Third, she has no brains because she keeps repeating the same action over and over again with the same results. (Sending her creatures to kill the heroes.) Finally, she has no home, she simply stole the home she currently lives in.

I am interested in writing a back story for the Tin Man and the Scarecrow. Perhaps the Tin-Man

is not anything corporal at all. Perhaps his being, his soul is trapped in the Tin Body. This would be why he could survive the drop from the monkeys. Perhaps his spirit is like a glowing orb inside of him and always has been. He could have been created by the Wicked Witch of the East to be his husband. When he fell in love with another, her spite took over and she ordered him to kill himself. It is an interesting concept I would like to look into more deeply some day.

I am also interested in the Scarecrow. Coming from the same country, perhaps he was once a Munchkin. Perhaps he was a Munchkin who stood up to the Witch of the South. In her hatred she did not destroy him but turned his entire self into fabric. She gave the fabric to a farmer with the stipulation he must use every stitch on one project. Needing a new scarecrow, he used it for that. See, he is all jumbled up because he was turned to fabric, cut to pieces, and re-situated in ways he wasn't meant to be. He was scrambled in the worst way possible. I would also like to explore that concept a little more deeply. So, the Tin Man is soul, but not body. The Scarecrow is body, but not soul. Once again, it makes them the perfect pair together.

## The Bible:

So far, we have discussed the different voices found in the bible, how the canons in the New and Old Testament came together, and last week discussed what isn't said in the bible, particularly when it come to perspective or image. Today's study is all about evil. Part of understanding how evil plays out in the bible is understanding everything we have learned up to this point.

This is what you need to know about my theology to continue. I do not believe God took control of the minds of others to help them put pen to paper and write out a book of the bible. I think the closest we have to this sort of Divine Revelation is in the 10 commandments, (which, depending on where you are looking in the bible and which religious group you are, the number of commandments and how they are separated are up for discussion.) I do believe God inspired others to continue stories of Divine moments, and would later inspire others to write those moments down. Also, I believe we are an imperfect people. We fail all the time. There is nothing in the world we can do perfectly. Put these two things together and we have this: we have to constantly ask ourselves as we read the bible, is this God's Divine act, or human interference? The second any of God's plans get into our hands the perfection becomes imperfect. The Word, the story of God's work in the world was put in our hands. The bible is imperfect because we were put in control of writing it.

This might be the point where you might be asking, "Melissa, then why does God do it? Why does God keep handing the plan over to us?" I say, because God loves us so much we are made part of the plan. Sometimes it is not executing a perfect plan but creating relationship. You know, it is like making cookies with your child, or your niece or nephew. You know you can do it better on your own. You can make less of a mess. You will get all the ingredients just right. But if you did it all yourself you wouldn't have the opportunity to get to know that little someone just a bit better. Yeah, they may leave a bit of egg shell in the batter, and it might take an extra ½ hour to clean up. It is not a culinary masterpiece that is gained. What is really gained is relationship. A lack of relationship can have no impact, good or bad. Relationship is a key ingredient to love. We must relate, get to know, interact with those who we wish to love. God is all about love. Perfect love = God.

Then we have moments in the bible where God appears to be playing the villain. God appears self-absorbed, power grabbing, or just seems to be pretending to be good. What do we do with that? First off, we see if there is egg in the batter. Could what we be reading be forced theology from a group trying to change the mind of a people? I am a minister who has heard so many sermons from so many people who wear the mantle of Christian leadership. Not everything I have heard over the years is 100% God. People sneak in their own beliefs, or confuse God's thoughts with their thoughts. I know, personally, I am constantly in prayer, hoping what I write or say is a close to what God wants me to say. Yet, even I fail. Miserably. The best I can hope to do is apologize and move on. It wouldn't be a stretch to believe the early Jewish Priests kept order by adding a little to the story. (Although my money is more on a Deuteronomical level than a Priestly level. Different conversation for another day.)

Another possibly of egg in the batter are not in initial writing but in initial interpretation. Could what we be reading be misunderstood by the ones who continued the story? Sometimes love hurts. Not everything you do in love is supposed to be sunshine and roses. Sometimes one has to nudge the ones they love with lessons and medicine. Like, if you really love someone addicted to drugs, you are going to have a 'come to Jesus' moment with that addict. So when we read about God's wrath, it might be God's love expressing itself in a way that sets a people on the right path.

Another interpretive moment relates to the bible and natural disasters. It could be the case

that biblical natural disaster might just be the result of a chaotic world, not a wrathful God. Many of us don't blame tornadoes, tsunamis, floods on God today. What makes the story different in the bible? The only difference between then and now is we know the people affected. Maybe God is present in a loving way when natural tragedy strikes. I remember the terrible tsunami in Japan a year or two ago. It really struck me how many American teachers felt a call to teach in Japan before the tsunami. Then, how many of those teachers saved the lives of children when the tsunami came. God works in mysterious ways.

If we have trouble finding eggshell in the batter, perhaps we should be looking a little closer at the recipe itself. I love to use the Tower of Babel. It is a great way to show God's love as it might appear as wrath. God destroyed the tower the people were building. It was a moment where humanity could accomplish anything and that was the problem. You don't want your 8 year old to have complete control over the house finances, vehicles, local and national politics... well everything! They wouldn't be able to handle it. Heck, if we were able to do anything we wouldn't be able to handle it either! As a parent, it is an act of love to be kept from some dangers. It is my belief, the story tells about God dispersing language and destroying the tower because God loved us. Great message whether it was divinely inspired or based on actual events. (Or both.)

### **Bringing the Two together:**

What I did above was try to show how God's love exists in the midst of wrathful moments. The first resource I use to make my claims are the words from the bible. The second resource I turn to are how other's have translated those words. Then I might turn to archaeological research or scientific study. If everything is of God, anything can help us understand God better. Finally, with all the information I try to understand myself how it all comes together. I am going to use Gregory Macguire's *Wicked* to show how I wouldn't deal with evil in the bible.

I am a huge fan of the musical *Wicked*. I used to sing Glinda's and Elphaba's songs while I cleaned the kitchen or drove to work. It was a possible "what if" scenario of the MGM movie. I did not like the book. It was too sexual for my taste, and I am not sure if it was meant to redeem the wicked witch, or explain why she was wicked. Yeah, it appeared he had read the original book, but very loosely based his work on what Baum wrote. I also think Baum probably would like his adaptation the least, as he wanted to create a fairy tale void of the traditional darkness. Macguaire appears to remove most of the fairy tale and fill the void with darkness.

Not that what Baum intended or wanted matters, the readers ate it up. It has spawned more than a trilogy of books, and a Broadway musical. This is a case where I don't personally believe the popular way is the right way. As we talk about evil and the bible let's consider that sentence: perhaps the popular method, especially 10-20 years ago, of pushing hell in order to scare people into salvation, isn't right. Quiet a few great Christian people stood up to the popular view in order to say what was right. Martin Luther. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Martin Luther King, Jr. Jesus Christ. Those were just off the top of my head. I know of more. There are so many great moments in the bible where God talks about love. There are so many places where you can point to where God is seeking relationship with creation. Believing destruction is the center of God's purpose just doesn't make sense. God is the light, and that light is so bright the darkness cannot overcome it.

### **Talking to God:**

God,

You love me? Me? Messed up, dysfunctional me? I am so humbled to have something so wonderfully great as YOUR love when I have done nothing to deserve it.

Help me each day. There is evil in the world. I cannot overcome it by myself. I need your help. Be with me as I struggle. Help light my path so I can guide my steps. And, most importantly, thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

So be it.

### **Questions:**

Can you find another version of evil in this section? If so, what is it? If not, does one of the adaptations of the Wizard of Oz share a different version of evil?

Write out all the versions of Wizard of Oz you have seen. Which witch do you think is the best villain?

Why do you think pastors tend to go to one extreme or other when it comes to discussing evil at the pulpit? There are those who even refuse to say the word sin. Why do you think that is?

You might have noticed I never compared the Witch to a devil. I believe, "the devil made me do it," only takes away accountability. How are we to better ourselves if we always blame our failings on a devil on Satan? What do you think? Is there a physical Satan, and if there is what power does that demon have? (Hint- the serpent didn't force Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. The Accuser didn't force God to take everything from Job. The devil only suggested to Jesus what to do in the wilderness.)

## Week Five: Social and Spirituality

## The Wizard of Oz:

For this week I am going to break my own rules for the skeleton of the bible study... again. Consider the skeleton more of a suggestion for myself to keep some sort of order. While what I am going to do will be in the general outline of Oz, Bible, and how they all come together, the times this week will be far more porous than in previous weeks.

This week I want to give all my attention to the land of the China Dolls. It is, in my mind, one of the most interesting chapters for the very reason many don't like it: It doesn't fit. I have always been drawn to the out of place things in this world. I mean, look at me! I am one of the most out of place, awkward people out there. Yet, God created me to live in this world. I can't help but have love for the awkward in this world, as God has love for me.

In that light, I wanna know, why did Baum write this chapter devoted to a land filled with china? It is the only time the heroes clearly become the villains. Their sin, if I may call it that, is in showing up. Just their presence is wrong. There is nothing good that comes from being there.

Wizard of Oz was written in 1900. Sometimes looking at cultural events surrounding a literary or artistic work can enlighten us. In 1900, only a month following the publication of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, was the Boxer Rebellion. The Boxer Rebellion, and the months leading up to it, was a moment of church failure. Missionaries went to China to convert the people to Christianity. It failed, terribly. (Don't confuse this with mission work today. Today, missionaries get to know the culture and come to them with the traditions of the people. Missionaries today know God is already present before they ever arrive. Missionaries in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century took the western culture and attempted to push those traditions and culture on a people in attempts to share the word of God.) Baum did not care much for the work of missionaries. The China Doll chapter appears allegorical to these feelings. It was probably added after the initial draft of the story was written to flesh out the book. Even Baum would later omit it from future publications. Let's look deeper into this world and dissect it some.



*Illustration 1: The Boxer Rebellion: June 1900*

The Great Wall of China: Both the missionaries and Dorothy with her friends had to cross over a Great Wall of China. Both of these walls were created to keep intruders out. Both are breached by intruders.

The Dog: In the land of the China Dolls the temporary villains meet a large headed dog. This dog is illustrated as a Chinese Pug. Perhaps to symbolize one of the Chinese Boxers?

The Church: Oz was not a religious place. Baum tended to find more morality in fairytales than the bible. He also probably didn't want to polarize his readers. Yes, even in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, culture worried about appearing too "preachy." Yet, at the conclusion of this chapter, there is a church. If the land of the china dolls is an allegory to the issues leading up to the Boxer Rebellion, perhaps the foursome breaking the church on their way out is symbolic of the missionaries and how they were failing. Baum would not yet know the real issues in China would lead to an ultimate failure and rebellion. I do know he had a distaste for missionaries. A destruction of a church would be a fitting end to the chapter.

## The Bible:

As I work on this study I brought it together in this way. I read the book, and other Baum books in the Wizard of Oz series. I did not read the books written by Ruth Plumly Thompson. They were written the years following Baum's death. I do not consider them part of the official Wizard of Oz canon. I watched the every movie I could get my hands on, including *SyFy's: Tin Man*. I did try avoid most of the movies that were redoing the MGM movie, like *Elmo in Grouchland*, but I have two kids under the age of 10 so there were a few that snuck it's way in. I read *Wicked* and saw the musical.

Then I re-read *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, separating the chapters into sections. The sections were focused into topics of biblical discussion. This week, for example, is one of those sections. Then I read commentary on the book and the bible. The bible commentary, for the most part, has been review. The Wizard of Oz commentary has been eye opening.

I mention this because I wanted to talk about the china dolls in light of biblical interpretation. When I decided on the topic for this week I had not yet read Wizard of Oz commentary. I did not know the land of china was symbolic to actual China. I ask if you will follow me into this next part with that realization in mind.

Two characters are brought together in opposition to one another. The first is a china princess and the second is the clown. The princess is unbroken and perfect. The clown is cracked all over. The princess does not want to move for fear of breaking. The clown tries to get the most out of life even if the consequences are breaking.

The princess does not want to be put on a mantle because on a mantle she would lose her ability to move. Unless you delve into technicalities, there is no real difference in life between choosing not to move verses not being able to move. They both look the same. Take that and turn it to spirituality. There are tons of ways to find your faith to be "good enough." There isn't much difference between having a frozen faith and not choosing to exercise your faith. I say this because it is easy to look at examples of other faith traditions that appear frozen in a decade or generation and vow never to turn into them. But, how different is the one who, afraid exploration of faith will break them, refuses to budge? This is where spiritual vanity can come into play. Refusing to work the spirituality might look pretty, or cool on a Sunday morning, but it does nothing for the call God's whispering in your ear. When we crack we can be mended. When we refuse to move, we gain nothing.

I realize this might be a great time to segway to something you might be thinking: Where are the bible stories? You might be realizing we are getting a lot of Oz and explanation of the story. Meanwhile, it appears I am almost ignoring the bible stories. In a way I am. As an introduction to the bible, this is not supposed to be a run through of the stories and parables included in it. Watch the made for TV movies and mini-series if you are looking for a Sunday morning schooling. This is a base. It is important to know the stories and the lessons in the bible, and it is important to know the context you are using coming to these stories. Everyone, no matter who they are have a context. In other words, I am not using *my* context to tell you the stories. I am giving you the tools I use to understand the bible so you can do it yourself. This makes it an introduction. I have used the tools I suggest on *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* because I know it can scary to begin this journey getting right to the biblical text. Using the tools on Oz first allows us to learn without being afraid. Also, Oz gives us some illustrations for how to act, or behavior we should avoid when dealing with biblical study.

Next week I am going to share how I have used what we have learned over the past five weeks, and what that means to biblical interpretation. I am going to do this by discussing the feminine image

of God in relation to Glinda the good witch. Consider it a backstage tour to how ministers work through their theology. In many ways, all six weeks are the behind the scenes info to how many today look at the bible. Please look behind the curtain. One more week to go, don't let your faith freeze.

### **Talking to God:**

Dear God,

The bible is full of real people, with real problems, relating to you. You related to me too. Right now I have celebrations and I have issues I am dealing with. Help me understand how you are with me through those times. And, as you are with me, keep me going. Sometimes I freeze up and fear I will break if I keep going. Keep me moving.

So be it.

### Questions:

1. Where has your faith frozen because you fear breaking?
2. How has your faith broken in the past and how was it mended? If it wasn't mended, are you ready to mend it?

## Week Six: Using the Lessons

## The Wizard of Oz:

### The Problem with Movies:

It seems like today books have become a rough draft for the eventual screen play of a motion picture. Huge swaths of story are cut out with pieces re-written to fit 250 pages into a nice 2 to 2 ½ hour movie. In the movie *Jurassic Park*, John Hammond, the eccentric creator of the island turned dinosaur theme park, doesn't die from dozens of his own creations slowly eating him. Yep, that's what happens in the book. In the movies John Hammond gets to die an old man in his bed. In the movie, *Where the Heart Is*, the characters are all portrayed as clean and mostly beautiful even though the writer, Billie Letts, goes the extra mile to explain just how normal each character looks. [SPOILER: for those who want to see *Warm Bodies*, jump to the next paragraph.] In the movie, *Warm Bodies*, the Father ultimately saves R and therefore helps save Earth from death. In the book he goes straight from being human to being a Boney because he isolates himself from everyone including his daughter. The father, in the book, is the ultimate non-example. The movie ending just fizzles out.

This is probably why I like two movies in particular: *The Princess Bride*, and *The Hunger Games*. *The Princess Bride* was written by William Goldman and he insisted he write the screenplay too. Yes, there are some major differences between the book and the movie, the most notable being the exclusion of the Zoo of Death. Yet, the movie doesn't sacrifice the story to get everything wrapped up in a tight two hour time frame. *The Hunger Games* was written by Suzanne Collins and she co-wrote the screenplay. I like it because it takes a different perspective. The book was all 1<sup>st</sup> person Katniss, and the movie has more of a President Snow view of what is going on. The movie kinda supplements the book. In both cases the authors had direct input into its creation and the original story remains intact.

Then there is the *Wizard of Oz*. Something really important was left out the MGM movie, something that altered the view of a character drastically enough it possible tipped her from hero to villain. The Good Witch of the South was omitted. It is Glinda, the good witch of the North, who travels to the South to see Dorothy for herself, not the Good Witch of the South. It is Glinda who sends Dorothy on a mission she never has to go on because of the power of her shoes, when, in the book, the Witch of the South uses her magic chalkboard to send Dorothy forward. Glinda instigates the hatred of the Witch of the West towards Dorothy, even though the Witch of the West never shows up at the beginning of the book. To make a tight story MGM had to fudge the story line slightly, and it paints the Witch of the West as a woman mourning the loss of her sister. It paints Glinda as someone politically motivated to get a little girl to do her dirty work. It also turns Dorothy, perhaps the smartest person in the book, into a clueless dullard in the movie. All for the sake of tight storytelling. And that is why the books are often better than the movies. I digress.

What I have been sharing is the beginning of the book. We finished with the beginning five weeks ago. Now we are at the end. The heroes all have what they wanted, all except Dorothy. They are told the only person in all of Oz who can help them is Glinda, the Good Witch of the North. Probably the reason no one thought to send the young girl to Glinda to begin with, is Glinda lives in a land that is difficult get to. There are the Hammerheads, the living trees, and the China Wall that must be traversed before reaching the land of the Quadlings where Glinda lives.

When the heroes finally reach Glinda everything is suspiciously similar to Gaylette, who we found out about from the flying monkeys. This could be a similarity to the northern region of Oz, or Glinda was Gaylette, and Baum forgot. Therefore, two names for Glinda exist in the text for one character. This is a strong possibility. In another part of the book Dorothy uses a silver whistle to call

the Queen of the Mice. If you recall, the Queen never gives Dorothy a whistle and the only other whistle we hear about is owned by the Witch of the West. One could assume Baum mixed up who owned which magical objects. If he could mix up who owned a magic whistle, he could mix up a previous name for Glinda, or forget to change it. Another theory, as I shared a few weeks ago, perhaps Glinda is the daughter of Gaylette. In my mind, this makes the most sense because we do not see Quelala.

### **Returning to Quelala:**

Quelala has become one of my favorite characters in the *Wizard of Oz*. I like him in much the same way I have grown to like the women who show leadership in the bible. Baum wrote a book where the women hold the power. Both good and evil are steered by feminine hands. The men, for the most part, are useless. The wizard is not really a wizard. The Lion, Tin Man, and Scarecrow were incapable of accomplishing anything without the help of a girl.

Meanwhile the story is moved forward with female ingenuity. The most pure of the pure and the most evil of the evil are female. The new Disney movie, the Great and Powerful Oz frustrated me. They took these strong females and suggested they couldn't continue without a male to help them. Glinda became weak. Glinda needed to be saved. It was not in the spirit of the original Wizard of Oz where Glinda would eventually save the Wizard, teaching him how to use the craft for real. Yeah, that's in a later book.

Then there is Quelala. Hidden like Jabez in the text, he has only a few sentences written about his character, yet those sentences suggest a very good and well rounded persona. It is his good judgment which leads to the monkeys being tied to the hat instead of drowned in the river. This would later impact Dorothy and her friends. He is also really good natured about the whole ordeal. I think he needs attention and respect as a character. We should always be aware of the oppressed voice in any situation. In the case of Baum books, it is the male voice that is oppressed. Blame Baum's overly masculine father, or overly feminist mother-in-law, he subverts masculinity in the book. For a brief moment, Quelala is a male who can stand on his own. We should praise that in an overly feminine book. (I say that understanding it was Gayelette who gave Quelala his wisdom. Still, he seems to use wisdom better than Gayelette.)

### **Glinda and future female Oz leads:**

I had spoke early on regarding canon. The Oz canon is problematic. Baum wrote 14 books between 1900-1920. But there were 19 additional Oz books written after Baum's death. There are also secondary stories and contradictory information found in the musicals Baum wrote for the touring group. Also, some secondary characters from some of Baum's other books find their way into the wonderful land of Oz. Put all that together with Baum contradicting himself within his own books, it makes the whole thing a huge mess. If you just take Baum's books written about the land of Oz, Glinda starts out pure and perfect, but failing in wisdom. She wants to make Oz a place where everyone's dreams come true. She is told how bad a choice that is by Ozma, who said no good would come from not being able to strive for gain. If you just take the *Wonderful Wizard of Oz* as the only piece of the puzzle, Glinda seems perfect in every way, much like Mary Poppins. She almost seems God like, much like the Child Like Empress does in *The Neverending Story*. Not everyone can have the whole story knit together like Tolkin did with *Lord of the Rings*. The role Glinda plays in the land of Oz could just be tied

up as a mystery. Unknown to us. (I personally hate mystery being the final Christian argument. "Mystery" becomes this huge book end to close the discussion. So, I end Glinda in the same way. Remember it, I will return to mystery later.)

I also have to mention another female that doesn't find herself in first book, but would show up later: Ozma. I am really amazed the LGBT community hasn't rallied behind Ozma. Her storyline is filled with issues of gender stereotyping, and she is possibly the first trans-gender children's character.

According to Baum's Oz lore, the Emerald City was once ruled by a family. The rightful ruler was a princess by the name of Ozma, but the princess disappeared as an infant. Little did the people know, an evil sorceress by the name of Mombie, stole the baby and enchanted her by turning her into a boy. No one would ever look for a boy, so the child grew up with no one knowing she was really Princess Ozma. It wasn't until Gingir overtook the Emerald City and the rightful ruler had to be found, Glinda discovered the truth and removed the enchantment.

The reverse story actually happened. *As Nature Made Him* by John Colapini, is the true story of a baby who suffered a botched circumcision. Attempting to do the right thing, the parents decide to raise the male baby up as a girl. The child has issues with sexuality and eventually learns 'she' is really a 'he.' He decides to reclaim his initial sexuality. Unfortunately the damage had already been done. He never recovered, and sadly committed suicide as an adult. I was horrified reading the book. His psychologist, Dr. John Money, wanted to prove sexuality was completely nurture over nature so badly. He turned two kids, because the child had a twin brother, into case studies to prove his hypothesis. His twin took his life as well. Really, gender is the mixture of both nature and nurture. It is a page turner. It is also terrible to know it is a true story.

The story of Ozma is not a true story and everything turns out happily ever after for her. Mombie names Ozma, Pip. Pip grows up a boy and as an adolescent discovers the truth. She embraces her femininity as if nothing traumatic had ever happened her in her whole life. Only, I noticed Ozma always had a special fondness for Dorothy. Now, I'm not saying Dorothy or Ozma are gay. In fact, I am fairly confident Baum wouldn't even consider crafting that into the story line. I am saying, today, it is worth looking into the dynamic. *Wicked* dealt with some very adult themes, perhaps it is time to deal with something that was actually in the book. What would be the issues Ozma would have spending most of her life in a gender that was not hers? Could there be a discussion of nature versus nurture in the Wizard of Oz? I think there can.

## **The Bible:**

### **Taking what we learned in relation to the nature of God:**

If there is one topic I feel prodded into over and over again it is the subject of femininity in Christianity. Believe me, at first I avoided it like the plague. I wanted nothing to do with it. I wanted to talk about more important things than why everything doesn't have to be masculine. It was, in my mind, a non-issue. Then I came out as a female minister on the internet. Oh the frustration. Over and over again I have had to have the discussion about female ministry instead of talking about God's grace or Jesus' love. I know it is because there is some false sense of safety slinging those one liners out over the internet. As if my call to ministry can be completely dismantled with a pithy comment on my place in the church and home. They come at me as if I believe the bible the same way they do.

Ah, see there it is, the reason we have spent 6 weeks going over background, behind the curtain bible stuff. Let's have the discussions from the same playing field. When it comes to creationist theology, femininity in the church, God's wrath, and pretty much any topic on Christianity, we have to come from the same base if we are going to have the discussion. The problem is the chasm between the different Christian groups is so wide we have stopped speaking the same language. It is as if a baseball player and a soccer player could have a discussion about fouls with each other using their own rules. It just doesn't work. It is the same truth with Christianity. It really comes down to biblical interpretation. What I have shared over the past six weeks is how many scholars interpret the bible. Let's use this knowledge with the image of God and have a discussion.

### **Made in the Image of God:**

I do not believe in a literal 6 day creation. I see the creation story like a parent giving a child a discussion about the 'birds and the bees.' We, as a people, were too young to understand the scientific paintbrush God used to create. I believe, in many ways, we are still pretty adolescent regarding the building blocks for our existence. The point is, God comes to us in a way we can relate to, and we needed a story to understand. Just like a child needs a story to understand how they came to be. It makes Genesis important, but not literal.

So I find myself reading Genesis 1-2 and asking myself, "What is important about this scripture? What should I take away from it?" One of the verses that jump out at me, that stand up against a literal or figurative creation is Genesis 1:27: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" NRSV. This is from the Priestly version of creation. (Remember, I shared there were two creation stories.) The Priestly creation story is newer than the Primeval creation story starting in Genesis 2:4. The Priestly additions to the bible give order. I cannot stress that enough. What is the order of male and female? Equality. They were created together. More importantly, they were created in the image of God. Both male and female were created in the image of God. Therefore, there is something holy in being open to seeing the feminine nature of God.

Today I am not a trinitarian. Yes, I accept the threeness as an image of God, but I see the problematic nature which resides in the threeness and the exclusionary aspects of it. Another discussion, another study. As a child I was very trinitarian. My mind saw the gender of the Trinity in this way: The Father or parent was non-gender specific. God was greater than gender. Jesus was male. The Spirit was female. I just always assumed those female angels in pictures was the Spirit. Anyway, it was only when I began exploring other Christian faith traditions I began to hear exclusive male

language. I was used to hearing male centered God language. I grew up with 'he' being the general language for anyone. It was only when I got into high school and college the language for general gender became plural. (This was problematic for a former congregant of mine who was also an English teacher. Masculine language was greatly shunned in seminary, but by then I never used it.) Anyway, it caught me off guard when I began hearing Spirit language in a masculine tone. It was the first time I realized it was scandalous to talk about God in any feminine way. It made me feel disconnected to God. If I couldn't see God, in any way like a female, how was I created in the image of God? I couldn't see it.

Two pieces of the puzzle come together for me when it comes to the 'He' language of God. First, United States culture has a double standard of general 'he' language and the bible. While many are writing today in a more gender neutral way, we don't consider what might be gender neutral language in the bible or a cultural choice from ancient Israelites. Sure, in a literal creation story, (the second one, not the first), men are made in God's image and women are made in man's image. In that case, we should call God a 'He' and women should worship man, not God. In my mind, it turns man into an idol and breaks one of the great commandments.

The second piece of the puzzle is why male imagery is prevalent over and beyond female imagery. 'Just because' doesn't work for me. Usually it goes back to Genesis 2 again and the fall of humanity being perpetrated by a female. The female is more of a fallen creature than the man. Man is closer to God than female. Well, what if there wasn't a literal Eden and a literal Adam and Eve? That is just something to think about. I realize I might be stepping on some really huge toes right now. It is scary to consider the possibility and have courage when you consider it. (Remember, one of the three pillars to biblical study.)

I will say, there are female images of God in the bible. When you consider the hands that put the bible together was a patriarchy, any female Godly images are important. In the Psalms there is 22:10 "On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God." The verse relates God to a nursemaid. It is a reoccurring theme as it also appears in Job 38:8-11 where God tells Job, "[W]ho shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?- when I made the clouds its garment, and this darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped?" There is also Psalm 131:2. "But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother' my soul is like the weaned child that is with me." God is like the mother in this verse and we are like the baby. There are also images in Isaiah. In 42:14 "For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor, I will gasp and pant." This new mother narrative, relating God to a woman and Israel her child continues in Isaiah 49:15, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you."

These brief scriptures point to a Maternal God. It is an image of God we rarely explore as Christians. It is also a scandalous view even though there is biblical precedent. Here is my head, heart, and courage in a nutshell. Head: During the time of Abraham it was not uncommon for the male head of household to be deified following death. The people understood family lines and deification only from a male dominated role. There were female gods but those gods belonged in polytheistic mindset, which would have been wrong to any good practicing Israelite. Even with that, there are still images of God in a feminine role. It must be important if these illustrations exist in any way shape or form. Heart: God loves us all. We are all made in God's image, and in the end there is no

slave or free, Jew or Gentile, male or female. It is undermining to femininity as a whole to suggest femininity is excluded from God's nature. Are females made in the image of God or not? If we are, we should respect how God comes to us as a female. Courage: It can be more difficult to say what is right and be chastised for it, than to go along with the crowd and say nothing at all. Being a voice on the internet, I have heard people who easily chastise anything that doesn't follow their strict dogma. Words hurt. Courage is sometimes more than just being willing to search out the truth. Sometimes courage is standing up for it once you discover it. And, stepping back when you learn you are wrong. Which is why, I promise to apologize when I am wrong, and not back down when I am right. I understand God has a femininity to Her. I stand by that.

## Bringing it together:

### Glinda and other Female story characters, a place to start?:

I do not believe Glinda was written to be a god in the land of Oz. At the same time, I do believe it is possible to have a discussion regarding her omniscience, and omnipotence and relate it to God. How has MGM and other movies personified Glinda and her power? What are her powers in the book? How have those powers been manipulated or twisted over time? How do these questions relate in our understanding of God?

If there is room to start talking about God in a feminine way, perhaps we can start by looking for God like examples in fiction and non-fiction. Glinda might be a comfortable way to start. Or, perhaps, like me you see a feminine Spirit.

No matter where you start, or even if a feminine view of God is your starting point, the future for your biblical journey will not be easy. I bring to your attention the conclusion to the *Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Dorothy takes her three steps and finds herself home, with her Uncle Henry and Aunt Em. Before her journey Aunt Em would scream at the sight of Dorothy. When Dorothy returns her Aunt hugs her.

Aunt Em had just come out of the house to water the cabbages when she looked up and saw Dorothy running toward her.

"My Darling child!" she cried, folding the little girl in her arms and covering her face with kisses; "where in the world did you come from?"

"From the Land of Oz," said Dorothy, gravely. "And here is Toto, too. And oh, Aunt Em! I'm so glad to be at home again!"

This is how the story ends, and I pull two truths from this closing snippet. First, as wonderful and fascinating Dorothy's journey was, it was also Dorothy talked gravely about. She is no longer the girl who began the journey. She is closer to Aunt Em now. She has suffered loss. She has seen how dangerous and scary the world can be. Second, Aunt Em is no longer the woman she used to be either. As dark and gray as her world it needed light and color. She didn't appreciate Dorothy before the journey, and now that it was concluded, she rightly embraced her.

You are Dorothy. We have come full circle and your life will never be the same. You cannot live in the childhood innocence the bible afforded you before. Now you can walk in a fuller deeper faith. More importantly, you are not alone. There are others out there ready to embrace you and your new found faith. You will be able to say with all seriousness, "I'm so glad to be at home again!"

## Works Cited

- Baum, L. Frank. The Annotated Wizard of Oz (C. New York: W. W. Norton, 2000.
- Ehrman, Bart D. Forged. New York: Harper One, 2011.
- Maguire, Gregory. Wicked: The Life and Times of. New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 1995.
- NIV Archaeological Study Bible. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Ralph, Margaret N. "And God Said What?": An Introduction to Biblical Literary Forms for Bible Lovers. New York: Paulist Press, 1986.
- The Harper Collins Study Bible. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2006.
- The New Oxford Annotated Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- The Wizard of Oz. Dir. Victor. Perf. Judy Garland, Frank Morgan, Ra. DVD. WarnerVideo.com, 1939.
- The Wiz. Dir. Sidney. Perf. Diana , Michael Jackson, Nipsy. DVD. Universal Studios, 1978.
- Return to Oz. Dir. Walter. Perf. Fairuza Balk, Nicol Williamson. DVD. Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 1985.