

# **Conflicts, Human Awareness, and Choice vs Responsibility**

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## **Introduction**

Examining historical literature can lend a great deal of knowledge to the reader. Historical literature gives an account of some of the struggles and thoughts of previous generations. Some of these pieces of literature have endured for thousands of years because of the thought that went into their crafting and the ways they change minds, capture and tell of human emotions people today still face. *The Odyssey*, a tale of a Greek warrior named Odysseus working to get home from war tells of the struggles and experiences he faced. Genesis, the first book of the Bible, tells of the creation of the universe and the reasons behind why the way the world is today. Both of these stories provide insight into human emotion and fascination, and give readers a new perspective on the way the world is. They produce readings that have stood the test of time for thousands of years. In many ways, these pieces of literature are cornerstones for themes such as choice versus responsibility, a higher order, and long lasting relationships.

## **The Book of Genesis in Human Awareness**

The book of Genesis is in many ways the explanation of all things that have come to be in the world we know. To do this, it builds the creation of the universe from God in an orderly and chronologically laid out story. Genesis covers the entire creation, starting from the time when there was nothing and finishing with the completion of creation. The very start of Genesis, at Chapter 1 Verse 1, it goes on to tell that “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”. By implying that those did not exist beforehand, Genesis starts off by telling the reader that they are reading the beginning of all things they know. From time, to space, to matter, all these have been created. Throughout the following chapters of Genesis, God continues to add more to Creation until He finishes on the 6<sup>th</sup> day, in Genesis 1:31. Once this saga

is complete, Genesis concludes the creation in Genesis 2:1, where it says “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array”. By breaking down the creation of the universe in this way, it allows the reader to better understand the vastness and the entire picture of the fascinating complete world they live in.

God is described in Genesis in a few distinct ways. These descriptions are important for the larger context of Genesis, and the impact it has. God is shown as being organized, planned, and concise in His actions. He does not experiment around with Creation, once it is created, He does not go back and change aspects of it. This is shown in the verses of Genesis 1 where the 6 days of creation are described. The first day’s work of Creation, in Genesis 1:3, is unchanged in later verses. Different layers of creation are added onto it, such as the additions in Genesis 1:6 or 1:14, but the foundations are never changed. By telling this, Genesis describes God as being steadfast and resolute in His creation. The later creations in Genesis 1 tell of a specific planned order, where God adds to what has already been created. In the later days of the 6th day Creation, God layers on more creation that depends on existing creation to exist. If this had been done in any other order, different aspects of Creation would not be able to exist.

God works through physical matter and time in many ways to allow people to find meaning, order, and purpose. To do this, God allows people free will to make their own decisions. At the dawn of time, God gave Adam and Eve a simple purpose and meaning. Even though the task assigned to Adam was menial, the task in Genesis 2:15 gave a strong purpose to Adam’s life, as he is now supposed to take care of the garden of Eden. This instruction from God has a clear and organized reason behind it, to give Adam’s life purpose and meaning. In Genesis 3:6, Eve has the free will to eat the fruit of the tree. As a result of this, in Genesis 2:14, the fall of man starts, and sin has entered the world. Even though this choice Eve made lead to the ultimate punishment, she still had the choice and free will to do so. This free will allows people room to grow and experience the consequences of wrong actions, thus giving their lives purpose from the knowledge they have gained.

Genesis has had the ability to change and expand the awareness of those

who read it over thousands of years. The observation of the universe, coupled with the reading and understanding of God's word creates a sensation of two fold revelation. The reason for this is evident in the book of Genesis, which starts off by describing the creation of the universe. Those who read Genesis and other books of the Bible begin to grow their awareness of God's power. This awareness has allowed people who read the book of Genesis to become humbler, based on the passages discussed earlier. The idea that one is made in the image of God, part of a greater master plan, a plan that is perfect in all ways has captivated people for hundreds of years.

## **Conflicts and Choice in The Odyssey**

While Genesis covers the explanation of the world we live in, along with the creator behind it, Homer's *The Odyssey* is a tale of the struggles and experiences of someone who lives in it. There are many different lessons and details that Homer makes evident and uses to tell his story. All of them add to the adventures that the main character, Odysseus, endures during his long 19 year journey home after a war in Ancient Greece.

Homer's characterization of the three characters Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus is important to the greater story Homer is trying to tell. Homer, through these characters is working to describe simple conflicts that people can relate to. Telemachus for example, does not quite live up to his father in page 292, line 431 where Telemachus slips up and forgets to lock the armors door. This allows the suitors to gain an unplanned hand in the battle him and Odysseus had. This slip up contrasts to Odysseus who makes very few mistakes. By describing Telemachus in this way, Homer shows a human conflict that people can relate to. That conflict is the difference between young and old generations with the differences in experience. Homer also uses this story element to show Telemachus that he has much to learn from Odysseus before he is fit to become a leader. Historically, the struggle for power in leadership is strong, and Homer uses this scenario so people can use their own experiences of conflict to relate to the story.

The problem of choice versus responsibility is a strong theme in *The Odyssey*. Homer uses a multitude of examples throughout *The Odyssey* to show this. A large

majority of Odysseus's trip home is riddled with misfortune, often times because of a choice that Odysseus directly or indirectly made. One positive prime example is the choice that Odysseus made to leave Calypso the Nymph to find Penelope on page 68, line 215. Calypso was madly in love with Odysseus, and because of that she was willing to give many things to Odysseus if he stayed with her. However, Odysseus longed for his home, and true wife Penelope. He felt as though he had to fulfill the responsibility of finally returning to Penelope and the life he had left many years ago. This feeling of responsibility was greater than the choice of immortality, as promised by Calypso.

## **Responsibility Over Choice**

Odysseus's encounter with the cyclops is another example of Odysseus putting responsibility before a better choice. For a significant amount of time, Odysseus and his crew were stuck captive by a cyclops. The cyclops was not friendly and had plans to murder the rest of his crew. As described in page 120, line 410, Odysseus and his crew formulated and put into motion an escape plan to finally escape from the grasp of the cyclops. Before the plan was put into motion, it was thought to be dangerous and possibly having no chance of success. Despite the doubt, Odysseus saw it as his responsibility to not only save the remaining crew but to also continue their journey home. As the odds were stacked against them, they made the choice to follow through with the plan, deciding the responsibility of getting home was more important than the choice of staying with the cyclops. In the end, the brave escape ended up working in the groups favor. Before, this ending was not immediately clear. For the group to value responsibility over the immediate choice speaks a lot about their character, and the way Homer expands on the problem of choice versus responsibility.

## **Responsibility Driving the Story**

In order to drive the story home, Homer writes *The Odyssey* as a theology. He does this in many ways, but one of the most notable examples is Athene's constant interaction and intervention with Odysseus to drive the story along. Odysseus both trusts Athene to get him through sticky situations and asks for her to do so. One example

of this is when Odysseus's boat is washed ashore violently, and begins to break apart on page 167, line 264. Odysseus is saved by the power of Athene, and she prevents him from dying. Instead, she directs him to a safer location, which ultimately allows him to grow his character in regard to his bad situation. Athene also intervenes several times in Chapter 19 where Odysseus finally returns home to Ithaca. She transforms his figure multiple times to help reveal him to various people such as his son, Telemachus.

As described in *The Odyssey*, Homer tells of a unique and long-lasting relationship between Odysseus and Penelope, one that is rekindled back together after 19 years apart. The amount of time that Odysseus and Penelope have been apart is no doubt a substantial amount of time, and to reintroduce them to each other, Homer uses some unique plot elements to do so. Odysseus returns to Ithaca on the day of a new moon, as stated on page 257, line 305 of *The Odyssey*. By having Odysseus arrive on the day of a new moon, Homer shows the reader that Odysseus has a fresh cycle of life. As a new moon does, Odysseus starts new because of the time he's been gone, but continuing the old cycle rekindling with Penelope.

Odysseus decided to keep his arrival secret, only telling certain characters that he has returned as the story progressed. Because of the old and aged look he was using, he was able to keep himself blended in as a beggar. However, due to his interactions with the different characters, he couldn't keep his disguise a secret forever. One person, a nurse named Euracilia, noticed a distinct scar on Odysseus's body. This scar didn't exist on other people, so this nurse connected the dots, as described on page 260, line 467. She realized that she was looking at a much older Odysseus once she sees this distinct scar. Homer gives this genius introduction to Odysseus's return to help bridge the 19 year gap that he's been gone. As extreme news should always be delivered, a slow and steady method is the best way to go about that. Introductions to long lost friends or family are no different, and by slowly introducing Odysseus back into different past friends he had known, Homer softens the blow.

## **Storytelling and Conflict**

One of the best examples of Homer bridging the 19 year gap is between Odysseus and Penelope, where both of them live their lives backward through memories. This powerful story element allows both characters to introduce themselves to each other indirectly and without giving the other too much shock from a sudden and quick introduction. Odysseus for example, does this by describing the exact clothes to Penelope that he wore when he departed Ithaca. As this was a moving moment for Penelope, she vividly remembers what he wore, and this description from Odysseus, that only Odysseus knows on page 271, line 104. This allows the 19 year gap to be bridged between the two as they rekindle their memories and lives together.

As discussed earlier, Odysseus had been wearing a disguise, which hid him as an old worn out man. However, due to the things shared to Penelope by Odysseus, Penelope begins to realize through verbal interactions that she is interacting with someone familiar. On page 263, line 241, Penelope begins to suspect that she is interacting with Odysseus. On the flipside, Odysseus also realizes this and starts to share details to regrow the bond between the two without actually giving Penelope the shock of telling her that he's back. This method of interaction is another example of Homer having the characters of *The Odyssey* bridge the long 19 year gap between the two.

## **Conclusions**

With all this considered, both *The Odyssey* and the book of Genesis have endured for millennium. Genesis has captured the imagination of readers for thousands of years. The epic tale of Odysseus, as he ventured to return to his home of Ithaca and the problems he endured while growing through his experiences. Both Genesis and *The Odyssey* give insight into the greater picture of the world, an image that can only be obtained through these stories. They give insight into common human conflict and inquiry. Both stories have endured for thousands of years, and because of these reasons will endure four many years to come.