

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME
A Devotional Meditation from
Exodus 14:10-18; Deuteronomy 10:16; Ezekiel 36:24-28;
Matthew 14:13-20; Luke 22:19-20
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What have we lost by our cultural shift from books to movies? There is no question that cinema has become the literary genre of our time. Although movies have brought so much to our world, they have made us lazy. Who reads the books now when we can see the movies? In taking this easy road, we have cut ourselves off from some very powerful, nuanced elements in the great literary works of ages past.

Consider, for example, *The Wizard of Oz*. The captivating 1939 movie is itself a groundbreaking work of art, but it has overshadowed and obscured the political allegory of L. Frank Baum's original story, published in 1900 under the title, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Baum crafted his characters to represent the America of his day. Dorothy Gale, the perky young heroine from Kansas, symbolizes the average American. The Tin Man is the mistreated factory worker, the Scarecrow represents Midwestern farmers, and the Cowardly Lion is a depiction of Democratic presidential candidate and Populist icon William Jennings Bryan. These characters contend with the Wicked Witches of the East and West, who represent the powerful money interests of modern America. They journey to the Emerald City, which is Washington, DC, to get help from the Wizard of Oz, who represents the presidents of Baum's era (none of whom he liked). The Wizard supposedly has power to send Dorothy back home to Kansas, but in reality he is a fraud who extorts and exploits Dorothy and her friends to defeat the Wicked Witch of the West. And what brought Dorothy to Oz in the first place? That would be a cyclone – a symbol of the Populist Movement of the late 19th century that severely rattled the American political and economic order by its calls for returning power to the people, and for sound monetary policy.*



Ruby Slippers from the 1939 MGM movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, at the Smithsonian American History Museum, Washington, DC. (Photo by RadioFan (talk) via Wikimedia Commons.)

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* Steve, “16 Hidden Symbolic Messages in The Wizard of Oz You May Have Missed,” *History Collection*, October 18, 2018, (<https://historycollection.com/16-hidden-symbolic-messages-in-the-wizard-of-oz-you-may-have-missed/>).

movie became Dorothy's ruby slippers, are themselves an economic commentary, holding up sound money backed by silver as far superior to paper currency.

When we understand these symbols, we recognize echoes of Baum's literary protests in the America – and even in the whole world – of our day. Some say the problems, both then and now, can be solved by the common sense of good, hard-working, moral people, who are the silent majority, intimidated and belittled by the moneyed elite. That, at least, is a point carried from the novel to the 1939 movie. At the end, when Dorothy misses her opportunity to go with the Wizard back home to Kansas, Glinda the Good Witch appears, and Dorothy asks, "Oh, will you help me? Can you help me?"

Glinda answers, "You don't need to be helped any longer. You've always had the power to go back to Kansas."

This is a surprise to everyone. When the Scarecrow asks, "Then why didn't you tell her before?", Glinda explains, "Because she wouldn't have believed me. She had to learn it for herself."

The scene in the movie is touching, but when you think about it, Glinda's pronouncement falls somewhere on the scale between annoying and insulting. So Dorothy and her friends slog through the perils of their journey across Oz just because this girl from Kansas needs a practical exercise in self-improvement? What about the pain they suffered? What about the conflict they caused? How many others had to bear the consequences of Dorothy Gale upsetting the social and political order of Oz just because she wanted to go home?

Oh, but isn't that how our Creator deals with us? It seems strange that we cry out to the Lord for deliverance, only to find out that we had the power all along to deliver ourselves. The story of the Israelites on the shore of the Red Sea comes to mind in this regard. The Exodus account tells of a people panicked to see no way of escape from the Egyptian army bearing down on them. That's when Moses says,

Don't be afraid! Stand still, and see the salvation of *ADONAI*, which He will perform for you today. You have seen the Egyptians today, but you will never see them again, ever! *ADONAI* will fight for you, while you hold your peace. (Exodus 14:13-14 TLV)

This is what we would expect. The Hebrews are doomed unless God intervenes. But then God Himself tells Moses,

Why are you crying to Me? Tell *Bnei-Yisrael* to go forward. Lift up your staff, stretch out your hand over the sea, and divide it. Then *Bnei-Yisrael* will go into the midst of the sea on dry ground. (Exodus 14:15-16 TLV)

How maddening! Moses tells the people to be still and watch God save them, only to have God tell him to have the people save themselves. The emotions surging through Moses at that moment may have been the same as what the disciples experienced when they asked Yeshua for help feeding the crowd of 5,000 men, plus women and children, only to hear him say, "You give them something to eat." (Matthew 14:16) How powerless did they feel at that moment? Did they feel betrayed by the God they had trusted to bring the solution to their problems?

This is the point where they, and we, have a choice. The Hebrews on the seashore could have fallen on their knees to beg mercy of the Egyptians and return to bondage, or they could have trusted God and obeyed Him by walking into the waves. The disciples could have walked away from this crazy Messiah, or they could have persevered to see how God might make a way when there seemed to be no way.

But which is it: do we deliver ourselves, or do we wait on God to deliver us?

Both, of course. This God Who put our ancestors to such maddening tests is the same God Who said, "Circumcise the foreskin of your heart therefore, and do not be stiff-necked anymore," (Deuteronomy 10:16), and then later said:

I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean from all your uncleanness and from all your idols. Moreover I will give you a new heart. I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove the stony heart from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My *Ruach* within you. Then I will cause you to walk in My laws, so you will keep My rulings and do them. (Ezekiel 36:24-28 TLV)

This, of course, is the substance of the New Covenant He makes with the redeemed – the New Covenant made effective by the blood of our Messiah. A covenant requires two parties. That's why the power of the covenant derives not only from the God Who makes all things new, but also from the humans who submit willingly to the covenant's terms. We surrender all that we are, acknowledging that we really are powerless to deliver ourselves, and then we are ready to see what He can and will do in and through us.

It's what our Hebrew ancestors saw on the shore of the Red Sea. They moved forward into the waves, and God did the impossible by parting the sea. It's what our ancestors among Yeshua's disciples saw. They provided their pitifully small resources, and God's Messiah made sure the hungry thousands went away satisfied.

Who gets the glory in all this? That's the best part of all. It's the God Who made us, the God Who has made a place for us, and the God Who has put the longing for that eternal place in our new hearts. If we listen closely, we will feel the testimony of our hearts as they whisper, "There's no place like home."