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**BIBLICAL NARRATIVE IN THE FANTASY WORLD OF  
„THE LORD OF THE RINGS” BY J.R.R. TOLKIEN  
THROUGH METAPHORIC EPITHETS AND  
PERSONIFICATION**

Bachelor’s Thesis

Supervisor: *Lect.* N.Raud, PhD

NARVA 2025

## **Kinnitus**

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19.05.2025

## **PREFACE**

Works of J.R.R. Tolkien, especially „The Lord of the Rings,” have been thoroughly studied throughout the years, for instance by such researchers as Sullivan (2013) and Juričková (2019), who investigate symbolic and metaphoric representation of Tolkien’s Christian worldview in his works. However, despite its popularity among readers and researchers, and numerous works on its origin and language use few researchers addressed the specific use of stylistic devices, particularly metaphoric epithets and personification in portraying the corruptive influence of „The One Ring”. Additionally, this influence highly corresponds with Biblical themes of sin and temptation, which demonstrates familiarity between both Biblical and Tolkien’s narratives. (Juričková, 2019) The aim of this research is to examine how metaphoric epithets and personification are employed in „The Lord of the Rings” to convey biblical themes, focusing on the transformation of characters when confronted by the corruptive power of „The One Ring.” By drawing parallels with scriptural portrayals of sin and temptation, the study seeks to evaluate the degree to which these literary devices reflect or adapt biblical narratives in Tolkien’s work.

The research problem of this bachelor’s thesis centers on understanding how far these biblical themes particularly the personification of evil and the use of morally charged epithets indicate a deliberate engagement with Christian theology on Tolkien’s part. The unclear extent to which Tolkien’s use of metaphorical epithets and personification in character development reflects Christian theological concepts—especially in the portrayal of sin, transformation, and moral struggle—presents a significant gap in the literary analysis of his work. The Introduction part reviews the ongoing academic studies concerning religion’s place in modern society and its portrayal in contemporary literature. It then narrows the focus to Tolkien’s religious context and the critical discussions surrounding biblical allusions in „The Lord of the Rings.” Chapter I, titled „Religious Themes in Tolkien’s Legendarium,” analyses the historical and theological background of Tolkien’s writings, reviewing how Catholic influence and broader Christian traditions lay foundation for the moral and religious landscape of „The lord of the Rings.” Additionally, chapter explores peculiarities of metaphorical epithets and personification and outlines key concepts relevant to sin, temptation, and metaphor in biblical texts. Chapter II, „Biblical Metaphors and Personification in „The Lord of the Rings” presents a close reading of selected passages where these literary devices highlight characters’ moral transformations. Drawing on examples from biblical passages that personify sin, the chapter identifies linguistic and

thematic parallels, evaluating how effectively Tolkien's language mirrors scriptural narratives.

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# INTRODUCTION

## **The Role of Religion in Contemporary Literature and Modern Society**

Religion has played a crucial role in shaping cultural and historical narratives. Religion continues to provide a chance for examining moral and existential questions, despite the growing secularization of modern society. As Inglehart notes (2020), the decline of institutional religion in many parts of the world has not diminished humanity's need for spiritual meaning. According to the Pew Research Center (2017), approximately 85% of the global population identifies with a religious tradition, with Christianity remaining the largest faith at 31.2%.

Works like *The Shack* by William P. Young and *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson both of which have achieved bestseller status, show a continual interest in narratives that examine divine justice, human suffering, redemption, and the essence of belief (Douglas, 2020; Smith, 2018). In fact, *The Shack* initiated significant discussion regarding its unorthodox representation of the Holy Trinity. Poston (2009) critiques the novel's application of female pronouns for each divine figure, emphasizing the conflict between biblical interpretation and creative narrative. Nevertheless, the debate surrounding the book did not hinder its commercial success; rather, it underscored a lasting cultural desire to engage with essential theological inquiries, such as „Where is God while I suffer?“ (Kreider, 2017).

Often presented through symbolic creatures, mythic settings, and allegorical or semi-allegorical representation, fantasy literature remained an especially open for theological ideas. While authors like C.S. Lewis openly acknowledged their Christian aims, Lewis famously stated that *The Chronicles of Narnia* „supposes“ a Christ figure in a parallel world. J.R.R. Tolkien approached religious themes with more patience. Tolkien disregarded direct allegory but announced that his Catholic worldview informed his creative sub-creation in ways both conscious and unconscious (Carpenter, 2000). This dynamic has led to sustained debate about the degree to which *The Lord of the Rings* mirrors biblical narratives, particularly around themes of sin and redemption, the concept of a „chosen hero,“ and the ultimate confrontation between good and evil (Morris, 2012; O'Rourke, 2015). This underscores the enduring relevance of Christian narratives in contemporary culture and their

capacity to inspire and challenge readers on such themes as death, meaning of life and existence of God.

Within this context, J.R.R. Tolkien's work stands out as a profound exploration of religious themes. Tolkien, being a devout Catholic, viewed storytelling as an act of „sub-creation.” His letters reveal that „The Lord of the Rings” is a „fundamentally a Catholic work,” making emphasis on redemption, temptation, and the ultimate triumph of good over evil (Carpenter, 2000). Carpenter (2000) notes that while Tolkien famously resisted allegory, he acknowledged that his faith shaped the thematic topics of his stories in subtle and profound ways.

### **J.R.R. Tolkien's Religious and Literary Background**

Born in 1892, Tolkien lost his father at a young age and was raised by his mother, Mabel Tolkien, who converted to Catholicism despite intense family opposition (Carpenter, 2000). When she died, Tolkien was entrusted to the care of Father Francis Morgan. This Christian guardianship shaped much of Tolkien's moral and imaginative worldview. Later, as a professor of Anglo-Saxon at the University of Oxford, Tolkien combined his linguistic expertise with a love for mythmaking. After that he created an entire legendarium, featuring in „The Hobbit” (1937) and „The Lord of the Rings” (published 1954–1955).

While Tolkien resisted labelling his work as „Christian allegory,” he also described „The Lord of the Rings” as „fundamentally a Catholic work,” one that began unconsciously so, but became more deliberate during revision (Carpenter, 2000, p. 172). Key theological constructs presenting Catholicism are visible in „The Lord of The Rings:”

- Good and evil as ontological forces: evil is depicted not as the absence of good but as an active antagonist of created order, the idea consistent with Christian theology.
- Free will is tested: characters must exercise moral choice despite the seductive power of external evil forces, a presentation of biblical portrayals of temptation (Genesis 3; Romans 7).
- Providence and sub-creation: Tolkien conceptualized human creativity as „sub-creation,” an imitation of divine creation (Tolkien, 1966). In Catholic thought, God's

creative act is mirrored in lesser forms by human imagination, implying a subtle connection between the author's faith and the moral-linguistic themes of his work.

### **Biblical Motifs and the Question of Sin in „The Lord of the Rings”**

Central discussions of academic researchers are on Tolkien's biblical portrayal of „The One Ring.” In Scripture, sin is often personified. Genesis 4:7 describes it as „crouching at your door; it desires to have you,” creating an image of sin as a living, predatory force seeking to dominate the will of weak. The apostle Paul similarly writes of sin as though it exerts an enslaving power over individuals (Romans 7:17–20). Such language transcends metaphor, depicting sin as an entity with force of will on its own.

Tolkien's „Ring” functions similarly. Critics note that the „Ring” „wants” to return to its master, Sauron, whispering temptations to its bearers, manipulating events to orchestrate its own deliverance back into evil hands (Morris, 2012). This near-sentient portrayal resonates strongly with the biblical concept of sin. Although Tolkien never explicitly identifies the „Ring” with sin, the parallels are difficult to ignore. The „Ring” „enslaves” Gollum (previously Sméagol), corrupts Frodo's resolve, and plays with Boromir's pride. Each of these characters, in succumbing to the „Ring's” influence, experiences a moral decline similar to scriptural accounts of individuals „giving in” to sin's influence (James 1:14–15).

In addition to personification, Tolkien's text frequently uses metaphoric epithets to track characters' evolving moral states. Gollum, for instance, is consistently labelled with words like „wretched,” „miserable,” „pitiful,” and „sniveling” (Morris, 2012). These descriptions mark his transition from a „once-hobbit-like being” to a creature enslaved by the „Ring's” power (sin). Such a transformation parallels biblical narratives describing individuals who fall from grace, often receiving new names signifying corrupted identity. Saul, for instance, is described as tormented by an evil spirit, while David's „man after God's own heart” epithet shifts to an adulterer guilty of murder (2 Samuel 11). In each case, figurative language in scripture shows the distance between the individual and their original, unfallen identity.

A considerable number of academic researchers investigates Tolkien's Christian influences. Morris (2012) argues that redemption and grace are vital threads in *The Lord of the „Rings,”* contending that the „Eucharistic symbolism” of „lembas” bread and the notion of fellowship

echo Catholic sacramental theology. O'Rourke (2015) explores how *The Lord of the „Rings“* functions in a „world with no explicit religion,” yet remains imbued with Christian ethics, demonstrating how Tolkien's moral vision can be „invisibly present,” shaping the moral universe without overly religious representation.

Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) work on conceptual metaphors demonstrates how the epithets used by Tolkien concretize moral states. Metaphors are not decorative but shape how readers conceptualize and emotionally respond to a character's arc. Meanwhile, comparative analyses with biblical texts often show specific intent: did Tolkien intentionally fashion the „Ring” as an analogue to sin, or are such similarities reflective of broader Christian or universal moral archetypes (Lakoff & Johnson's, 2003). Tolkien's rejection of strict allegory doubts researchers, pushing scholars to parse textual clues rather than relying on authorial statements (Carpenter, 2000).

Given their personal friendship and shared religious background, Tolkien's work is often compared to C.S. Lewis's „Chronicles of Narnia” (Carpenter, 2000). Lewis, an avowed Christian apologist, was more direct in his biblical parallels, Aslan as Christ, the Stone Table as the Cross, and so on (Clark, 2001). Tolkien, however, found Lewis's approach too „didactic.” Instead, Tolkien's references often manifest as broader narrative structures, archetypes, and subtler moral illusions (Ruud, 2001). The „One Ring,” for example, is not explicitly labelled as „sin” within the text, yet it operates functionally like sin. The way „The Lord of the Rings” channels Christian doctrine can make it appear „less religious” at first glance, though closer analysis reveals strong biblical themes in the novel's moral subtext (Morris, 2012).

This thesis claims that metaphoric epithets and personification in „The Lord of the Rings” provide crucial evidence of Tolkien's engagement with biblical narratives of sin and temptation. Specifically, the hypothesis states that Tolkien's consistent use of morally charged descriptors for characters, with the near-sentient portrayal of the „One Ring” as a force of evil (sin), mirrors the scriptural pattern of describing sin as an ever-present adversary (Genesis 4:7) and depicting the fallen or corrupted individual with changed language. To test this hypothesis, the research must address several key questions:

- How do metaphoric epithets used for characters like Gollum, Frodo, Bilbo, and Boromir change before and after their encounters with the „Ring,” and what moral or spiritual transformations do these changes imply?
- In what ways is the „Ring” personified; how does the text imbue it with an almost active agency akin to biblical descriptions of sin having „desire” over individuals?
- Do these biblical representations stand out as intentional reflections of Christian worldview (thus validating Tolkien’s Catholic orientation), or can they be explained within a larger framework of mythic archetypes?
- What do these parallels between Tolkien’s language and scriptural portrayals of sin imply about the interpretation of „The Lord of the Rings?” Do they suggest it to be the theologically rich text, or should they be seen as a byproduct of Tolkien’s cultural-linguistic worldview?

# CHAPTER I RELIGIOUS THEMES IN TOLKIEN'S LEGENDARIUM

## 1.1 Tolkien's Religious Worldview and Theological Foundations

The entire imaginary universe that J.R.R. Tolkien built was influenced by his strong Catholic religion; to him, writing was a means of expressing moral and spiritual truths through language and myth, not just a means of telling stories (Carpenter, 2000). Tolkien believed that he was a „sub-creator,” capable of only reflecting the divine act of creation, as he states in his own letters (Carpenter, 2000). This conviction is essential to comprehending how Tolkien constructed the ethical and spiritual foundation of his fictional universe. According to Flieger (2002), Tolkien thought that fantasy may be a genuine window into spiritual truth rather than just being a means of escapism.

In his correspondence, particularly the ones compiled in „The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien” (Carpenter, 2000), Tolkien discussed the manner in which his religious beliefs impacted his works. „A profoundly religious and Catholic book; unintentionally so at first, but consciously in the revision,” he once said of „The Lord of the Rings” (Carpenter, 2000, p. 172). Even though he disliked allegory, he knew that his religious values naturally shaped the structure, characters, and even the language of his stories. Scholars like Pearce (1999) and Kreeft (2005) have shown how themes such as providence, free will, sacrifice, and redemption are present in his works.

The theological mythos of Tolkien's work is often discussed in his correspondence: Tolkien writes that „the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism” instead of being explicitly mentioned in terms of doctrine or ritual in a letter to Jesuit priest Robert Murray (Carpenter, 2000, p. 172). The work can address Christian topics without offending and even attracting viewers who are not religious, while Catholic beliefs regarding humanity's relationship with God are present in Tolkien's tale, which revolves around the themes of free will, providence, and moral choice (Dowd, M. 2020).

Tolkien's other major works, „The Hobbit” (1937) and „The Silmarillion” (Tolkien, 1977), also thoroughly reflect similar moral and spiritual themes, even though these discussions usually focus on „The Lord of the Rings.” These works are taken into account as well, because they provide additional information on Tolkien's usage of figurative language as means of expressing characters development and state.

The *Hobbit* introduces Bilbo Baggins, an ordinary hobbit whose adventure with the fellowship of Thorin initiates a profound transformation (Tolkien, 1991). His brief but seminal encounter with the „One Ring” is the beginning of a much longer spiritual journey that unfolds throughout „The Lord of the Rings.” The essential Christian values of courage, humility, and grace are examined in this novel. It is Dickerson and Evans’ (2006) view that Bilbo’s development from a suspicious homebody to an unselfish adventurer can be a journey of spiritual growth. Thorin’s degeneration into greed and „dragon-sickness,” leading to his final repentance, is a definitive representation of biblical stories of pride and fall, such as those of King Saul or King David (Douglas, 2020).

The *Silmarillion*, a collection of myths, which was edited and published by Tolkien’s son, Christopher, presents a grand, mythic history of Tolkien’s world. Its opening creation story, the *Ainulindalë*, establishes similar story to the Biblical Genesis. Central figures like Melkor - who turns against his Creator out of pride and desire for dominion – strongly present the Christian story of devil’s fall. As Shippey (2001) and Curry (2004) explain, this tale of a creation, that is initially good, then corrupted by pride and rebellion forms a theological and moral backbone for everything else in Tolkien’s fictional world.

The *Hobbit* and *The Silmarillion* - demonstrate how Tolkien uses metaphorical epithets not just for style, but as a way to show how deeply characters are affected by temptation or grace.

## **1.2 The Hobbit: Narrative and Christian Motifs**

J.R.R. Tolkien's first foray into the Middle-earth universe, *The Hobbit*, was published in 1937 and serves as the foundation for many of the themes that would be fully explored in „The Lord of the Rings” (Shippey, 2001). The plot, which appears to be a straightforward children’s adventure book, in fact follows the unexpected voyage of Bilbo Baggins, a cozy hobbit who becomes involved in a mission to assist a group of „dwarves” in regaining their ancient kingdom from the monster „Smaug.” Tolkien's strong Catholic views are reflected in the intricate network of moral and spiritual themes that are present in this simple tale (Carpenter, 2000).

This „spiritual journey,” rich in Christian tradition: a path from spiritual poverty to moral maturity through hardships and deeds of virtue; is mirrored in Bilbo's transition from an unassuming character to a wise, fearless hero (Dickerson & Evans, 2006). Crucial moral trials that demand courage, humility, and, above all, mercy distinguish his journey. The story not only propagates these values, but also demonstrates their superiority over greed, sinfulness and violence. For example, the Christian appeal for forgiveness and grace is demonstrated in Bilbo's deed of kindness toward Gollum, where he decides not to kill him despite the risk (Carpenter, 2000). This moment finds a Biblical parallel in the story of David sparing Saul's life in 1 Samuel 24:10, showing mercy when vengeance was possible.

Greed is personified in the form of Thorin Oakenshield's desire for the „Arkenstone” and this provides a narrative correspondence with Biblical warning against corrupting influence of wealth (Tolkien, 1991). Thorin's moral decline is referred as „dragon-sickness” and encapsulates the Biblical idea of sin as a „disease” that taints human wants. In 1 Timothy 6:10, the Apostle Paul has warned that „the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil,” which Tolkien portrays through the sad figure of Thorin (Douglas, 2020). His final realization of his „foolishness” and his repentance on the verge of death also confirm the redemptive representation of fall and redemption at the core of Christian beliefs (Douglas, 2020; Dickerson & Evans, 2006).

Divine providence is another reappearing motif presented through *The Hobbit* (Douglas, 2020). What the characters often refer to as „luck” or coincidence can be interpreted guiding hand of God (Carpenter, 2000). Bilbo's finding of the „Ring,” his narrow escapes, and even his eventual success in the „Battle of the Five Armies” suggest a narrative structure where some kind of „unseen forces” are at work, aligning with Tolkien's belief in the sovereignty of God (Pearce, 1999; Kreeft, 2005). This idea is strongly reinforced with Romans 8:28, where Paul writes that „in all things God works for the good of those who love him.”

As Dickerson and Evans (2006) observe, through „The Hobbit,” Tolkien promotes a certain moral vision: the affirmation of such the values as peace, simplicity, and moral courage over power and wealth. This perspective aligns with Christian virtues, particularly as presented in the Beatitudes: „the meek, merciful, and peacemakers” are called „blessed” (Matthew 5:3–12). In this way, „The Hobbit” becomes a spiritual narrative that uses fantasy to convey Christian virtues (Carpenter, 2000).

### 1.2.1 Temptation and Metaphoric Epithets in The Hobbit

The *Hobbit* gives early indications of the „One Ring’s” power, even though it does not provide details about its corrupting impact as „The Lord of the Rings” provides. Following Bilbo’s acquisition of the Ring, the discourse surrounding him gradually changes. He develops more sly and secretive tendencies, which are not characteristics of his natural self. Characters like „the burglar” or „tricksy” allude to a slow moral ambiguity, which is the initial stage of the trilogy's greater arc of temptation and change (Shippey, 2001).

In Bilbo's encounter with Gollum, the most overt metaphorical epithet occurs: Gollum is frequently called „wretched” and „miserable,” that serve as both moral judgments and descriptions of his physical condition (Tolkien, J. R. R. 1991). These epithets have theological significance and recite biblical terminology for sinners - Paul, in Romans 7:24, uses similar language for himself, calling out: „What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” Gollum’s addiction to the „Ring” and his obsession with it (calling it „my precious”) personifies the vice of idolatry (Kreeft, 2005). In Christian thought, idolatry is not limited to the worship of false gods but includes any form of excessive attachment that displaces God, and Gollum’s relationship with the Ring fits this definition.

Thorin Oakenshield is shown early in the novel as a proud and honourable monarch who is seeking justice (Tolkien, 1991). However, as the narrative goes on, such epithets as „stone-hearted,” „grim,” and „possessed” start to describe his actions (Tolkien, 1991). His isolation increases along with the harshness of his language. This change is a reflection of a temptation-driven fall from grace: Thorin starts out with good intentions but is ultimately brought to ruin by his incapacity to control his desires, much like the Biblical King Saul (1 Samuel 15:17-23; Carpenter, 2000). Noteworthy that a degree of dignity is restored by his death as an act of repentance, which also ends his story on a redemptive note (Shippey, 2001).

„The Hobbit” uses metaphoric epithets to signal shifts in character morality (Kreeft, 2005). Through linguistic means Tolkien shows how temptation affects both actions and identity.

These changes marked by the descriptions that other characters use or by the narrator's tone, present reflection of Christian teaching (Carpenter, 2000).

### **1.3 The Silmarillion: Narrative and Christian Motifs**

One of Tolkien's most theologically complex works in his legendarium is „The Silmarillion,” which was edited by his son Christopher and published posthumously in 1977. It supplies the mythopoeic underpinnings for all of Middle-earth mythology, including the world's origin, Melkor's fall into evil, and the conflict between good and evil that predates the „First Age” (Dowd, M. (2020). According to Carpenter (2000), Shippey (2001), Kreeft (2005), and others, the text's thematics reflect Tolkien's strong Catholic faith, providing similarities to biblical ideas, especially with regard to pride, fall, sin, and redemption.

Eru Ilúvatar creates the universe with music at the beginning of the Ainulindalë, or the „Music of the Ainur” - this recalls the Genesis story of creation by divine speech (Genesis 1). Melkor, the most powerful of the Ainur, disrupts this orderly framework by introducing „dissonance” for his own purposes - this recalls the pride and revolt of the devil (Isaiah 14:12–15). Tolkien unmistakably depicts Melkor's revolt as a moral and theological fall from grace, bringing suffering and disharmony to the world, and also as a metaphysical disturbance (Carpenter, 2000, p. 285).

Another analogy to the Bible, similar to the „hoarding of heavenly riches” (the story of the Tower of Babel - Genesis 11:1–9), is given by Fëanor's creation of the Silmarils and his refusal to share them. According to Carpenter (2000), the Silmarils represent divine light or forbidden knowledge that has been corrupted and sought after by fallen individuals. Fratricide and the eventual destruction of Fëanor's household are the result of his inherited curse to recover them at any cost shows how unbridled ambition can lead to devastation when it acts outside of God's authority (1 John 2:16).

The Silmarils serve as theological representations of temptation—beautiful and seductive, yet dangerous from a spiritual standpoint. Nearly everyone who wants them is degraded. The biblical cautions against the pride of life and the desire of the eyes are closely followed by this motif (1 John 2:16). In keeping with St. Augustine's view that evil is a perversion of

good, Morgoth's stealing of the Silmarils solidifies his position as the ultimate corruptor, whose power comes from distortion rather than creation (Kreeft, 2005).

Reminiscent of Romans 8:28, „And we know that in all things God works for the benefit of those who love him,” Eru Ilúvatar reasserts sovereign will by absorbing discord into a greater harmony, despite the fact that evil spreads due to Melkor's malice. Scripture's redemptive narrative is reflected in the world's continuing optimism in the face of recurring tragedies (Pearce 1999). This shows Tolkien's belief in divine providence, which maintains that even tragedy can serve the greater good in God's story (Pearce 1999; Carpenter 2000).

Christian virtue is also modelled by characters such as Lúthien and Finrod Felagund (Pearce 1999). As an example of Christ's selflessness, Finrod gives his life for Beren (John 15:13). It is possible to interpret Lúthien's willingness to give up immortality for Beren as a metaphor for incarnational theology and divine love, echoing Philippians 2:6–8, in which Christ humbled himself to become human (Kreeft, 2005).

### 1.3.1 Temptation and Metaphoric Epithets in The Silmarillion

In The Silmarillion, Tolkien uses metaphorical names to convey his characters' moral assessments and spiritual development. More than just embellishing, these adjectives serve as religious commentary that changes as the moral statuses of the individuals do (Carpenter 2000).

Fëanor, initially revered as „the Spirit of Fire,” is celebrated for his creative genius. However, his descriptors - „fierce” and „unyielding” - change as he gives in to pride and anger, revealing his spiritual downfall. This is similar to how devil, the „morning star,” transforms into satan, the enemy, in the Bible (Isaiah 14:12; Revelation 12:9). Rebellion changes Fëanor's identity in the same way that it changes devils.

The change of Melkor into Morgoth, „the Black Foe of the World,” is another instance of how naming reveals religious truths. In the Bible, name changes are sometimes symbolic of moral reforms, such as Abram becoming Abraham (Genesis 17:5) or Simon becoming Peter (Matthew 16:18). But Morgoth's renaming represents his final death and complete separation from the light of Ilúvatar (Carpenter, 2000; Mulder, 2012).

Alternatively, Beren is called „the courageous” and „the treasured.” His willingness to confront evil because he loves Lúthien is a testament to his humility and resolve, thus his tale is comparable to that of King David, who, despite his shortcomings, is emphasized as „a man after God's own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14).

Other characters' spiritual moods are likewise disclosed by these epithets: Lúthien is frequently referred to as the „fairest of all the Children of Ilúvatar,” not just because of her beauty but also because of her grace and redemptive love (Carpenter, 2000). Her descent into „Angband” and her defiance of Morgoth function as a Marian figure or even a type of Christ-figure - one who enters death's realm to reclaim the beloved (Murashkina et al., 2022).

As with the New Testament epistolary tradition, where Paul calls the early believers „saints,” Tolkien's epithets function to denote moral orientation. „You are slaves to the one you obey... either to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness,” emphasizes Romans 6:16. Tolkien's characters' shifting labels work as literary indicators of this theological reality.

### **1.5 The One Ring as a Literary and Theological Device**

One of the most significant symbolic elements in Tolkien's „The Lord of the Rings” is the „One Ring” (Pearce 1999). „The Ring” is a literary and theological depiction of power, sin, and temptation that goes far beyond a „magical artifact” (Pearce 1999). Its existence reveals and strengthens the moral fibre of those who come into contact with it, and it is a tool of control and enticement (Mulder, 2012). The Ring's acts in the story, including its apparent agency, ability to betray, calling out, and corruption, are compatible with biblical portrayals of sin as a living, corrupting creature (Kreeft, 2005).

Throughout the narrative, Tolkien imbues the Ring with characteristics usually attributed to a sentient being: it „betrays” its bearers, „wants to be found,” and „calls” people to influence them, especially „Sauron,” its master (Tolkien, 1954). The personification of sin in the Bible is very similar to this: „Sin is crouching at your door; it seeks to take you, but you must rule over it,” - God tells Cain in Genesis 4:7 (KJV, 2024).

Morris (2012) remarks that the Ring acts as a catalyst for moral corruption and temptation: it intensifies latent tendencies that are already present in individuals instead of creating evil from nothing. For instance, Boromir has a valid reason for wanting to use the Ring to defend Gondor; however, the Ring pushes him to try to take it by force. Similar to this, Frodo starts off as a naive and sincere „Ring-bearer” but eventually becomes weaker due to the Ring's power, which prevents him from willingly destroying it. Formerly Sméagol, Gollum is completely engrossed in his fixation, calling the Ring „my precious” and representing the possessive, enslaving character of sin (Carpenter, 2000).

Theologically speaking, this is similar to Paul's view of sin in Romans 7:17–20, where sin is defined as an innate force that governs human behavior: „Because I continue to do the evil I do not want to do, rather than the good I want to do.” Similar to sin, the Ring subverts freedom, manipulates human will, and separates a person from their moral compass (Kreeft, 2005).

The Ring's power, as explained by Verlyn Flieger, transcends its physical form and owes much of its power to its psychological and spiritual influence; it instills fear, desire, and obsession, thereby illustrating the mechanics of temptation as it operates on the will and the reason (Flieger, 2002). This is consistent with James 1:14–15, which says how lust leads to sin: „But every man has his own temptation when he is enticed and drawn away by his own desire. When lust has conceived, it brings forth sin, and sin, when it is fulfilled, begets death.”

The Ring, as implied by Pearce (1999), is also a moral test, compelling characters to face their greatest flaws: Samwise Gamgee, for example, shows humility and resistance by not taking the Ring when it is presented to him. Galadriel's rejection of the Ring, even though she was tempted by the prospect of being a great and evil queen, is an exhibition of free will and moral triumph (Pearce 1999).

In his religious research, Poston (2014) explains that the Ring operates exactly as the biblical concept of idolatry. It is above every other loyalty and becomes the object of absolute devotion. The Ring is worshiped, hidden, and pursued with religious zeal, as is the case with the golden calf in Exodus 32. The Ring thus turns into a spiritual parasite that takes the soul in exchange for power (Poston 2014).

Morris (2012) emphasises that the „Ring” reveals rather than implants corruption. This corresponds to Jesus’ teaching in Mark 7:20–23, where he states: „What comes out of a person is what defiles them.” The Ring serves as a lens through which the hidden inclinations of characters become visible and intensified (Morris 2012).

Tolkien, however, denied that the Ring was a strict allegory for sin, stating that he disliked allegory in all its forms (Carpenter, 2000). Nevertheless, his theological imagination allowed for typological resonance. In his theory of „applicability,” Tolkien offered his readers interpretive freedom while still embedding his work with the moral and spiritual fabric of his faith. Thus, the „Ring” stands as a theological device: a symbol of sin’s power, temptation’s pull, and the persistent hope of moral freedom and grace.

## **1.6 Theoretical and Literary Framework**

In order to carry out a coherent theological-literary analysis of Tolkien’s use of metaphoric epithets and personification, it is important to define the key terms and theories that frame this investigation.

### *Metaphoric Epithets*

A metaphoric epithet is a descriptive phrase or title that applies metaphor to convey a deeper conceptual reality associated with a character or concept - it extends beyond literal meaning to evoke emotion and reflection in the reader (Ryken, 1984). In Biblical literature, metaphoric epithets are abundant and often used to reflect an individual’s role or spiritual condition during temptation. For instance, in Isaiah 14:12, devil is referred to as the „morning star,” a term that metaphorically indicates his original glory before his fall. Similarly, in Mark 3:17, Jesus calls James and John the „Sons of Thunder,” metaphorically expressing their zeal and passion.

Ryken (1984) notes that the Bible employs metaphoric epithets theological understanding. Terms such as „man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3) and „the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11) are central to Christian theology.

Metaphoric epithets play a similar role in Tolkien's writing: characters such as Gollum are described as „wretched” and „miserable,” both a moral status and a spiritual condition (Morris, 2012). These descriptors mirror the Biblical technique of revealing character through symbolic naming.

### *Personification*

Personification is the attribution of human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities. It is a common literary device in both secular and sacred texts. In the Bible, sin is personified as a predator in Genesis 4:7: „Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you.” Wisdom is likewise personified in Proverbs 8, where „she calls out to humankind and dwells at the gates of the city.”

According to Ryken (1984), personification in Biblical narrative serves to embody abstract spiritual realities in tangible, relatable forms: it allows readers to conceptualize forces like sin and wisdom not as ideas but as characters with agency. Tolkien mirrors this technique in his depiction of the „One Ring,” which „wants” to return to its master, „calls” to others, and „betrays” its bearer (Tolkien, 2004; Carpenter, 2000). This technique helps render evil and temptation more visceral and narratively compelling (Morris, 2012).

### *Biblical Narrative*

The term „Biblical narrative” refers to the overarching storyline of the Bible, consisting of four major movements: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and New Creation (Wellum, 2021). These themes are not merely historical or theological but deeply literary, providing a structural and symbolic framework that informs much of Western literature, including Tolkien's legendarium (Ryken, 1984).

Tolkien's own narrative arc—from the peace of the Shire (creation), through the spread of evil (fall), the quest and sacrifice (redemption), and the restoration of peace (new creation)—reflects this Biblical structure. Pearce (1999) notes that Tolkien's stories resonate with Christian teleology even though they are not explicit allegories.

### *Sin and Temptation in Judeo-Christian Theology*

In Judeo-Christian thought, sin is a moral and relational breach—an offense against divine order. As noted in Genesis 3 and Romans 5:12, sin enters through disobedience and fractures human relationship with God. It is often described not merely as an act, but as a condition, a force, or a contagion (Cosgrave, 1999).

Temptation is the mechanism through which sin often operates. James 1:14–15 describes temptation as beginning with desire, which leads to sin, and then to death. In Biblical typology, figures like Adam, David, and Jesus serve as examples of failure and triumph in the face of temptation. Tolkien adopts this theological dynamic in characters like Frodo, Boromir, and Gollum, whose moral trajectories reflect their response to temptation (Kreeft, 2005; Morris, 2012).

### *Literary Theory Insights*

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's (2003) theory of conceptual metaphors posits that human thought is fundamentally metaphorical. Abstract concepts are understood through more concrete experiences (e.g., „argument is war”). This theory provides a cognitive explanation for Tolkien's use of metaphorical language, particularly in naming, epithets, and descriptions of evil.

In Tolkien's texts, abstract spiritual realities like sin, grace, and evil are given tangible form through symbolic figures and metaphors. The „Ring” is not an object, but a conceptual metaphor for sin, domination, and desire. Lakoff and Johnson's framework helps articulate how such metaphors shape reader cognition and emotional response.

Leland Ryken (1984), in his study of Biblical literary artistry, argues that Scripture should be read not only as doctrine but as literature. He emphasizes narrative techniques, symbolism, and character development as vehicles for theological truth. Tolkien's work follows a similar logic, prioritizing story as the medium through which truth is unveiled.

Narrative theology, as explored by Hans Frei and George Stroup, supports the idea that theology is best conveyed through story rather than systematic abstraction. Tolkien's narratives, though fictional, carry theological weight because they dramatize existential and spiritual truths in narrative form (Pearce, 1999).

Typology - the reading of Old Testament events as foreshadowing New Testament realities - also informs Tolkien's symbolism. Aragorn as a returning king, Frodo as a suffering servant, and Gandalf as a resurrected guide all introduce Biblical archetypes, further embedding Tolkien's work within a theological-literary tradition (Morris, 2012).

### **1.7 Biblical Approach to Temptation**

In the biblical tradition temptation is frequently portrayed as a crucial spiritual experience that exposes and „molds” people's moral nature. Scripture frequently uses personification and complex metaphorical language to convey the internal and exterior conflicts brought on by sin and thus temptation. These literary devices give readers a clear, concrete understanding of spiritual realities that are abstract (Ryken, 1984).

Personification is prominently used to depict sin as an active and certain aggressive force rather than a passive condition. For instance, Genesis 4:7 portrays sin as a „predator „waiting to overpower Cain: „Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it” (NIV, 2011). Similarly, Romans 7:17–20 describes sin as a living entity actively working against human's desires to reach out to God. The personification highlights sin's relentless nature and the ongoing internal battle (Cosgrave, 1999).

Metaphoric epithets in the Bible frequently serve as literary tools to depict individuals' spiritual states or moral conditions. Phrases like „sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17) and „man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3) condense complex spiritual and psychological truths into imagery. These evocative expressions are particularly pertinent for assessing moral deterioration and transformation because they frequently indicate important changes in spiritual states (Ryken, 1984).

## 1.7.1 Biblical Figures and Temptation

### *Adam & Eve*

Before their fall, Adam and Eve are described as “naked and felt no shame” (Genesis 2:25). From this metaphoric epithet the concept of spiritual **innocence** is derived. They are also presented as being created in the “image of God” or “likeness of God” (Genesis 1:27), which Ryken (1992) interprets as a metaphor for concept of moral **beauty**, moral **goodness** and **authority**.

After sinning, the language shifts: such metaphorical epithets as “ashamed,” “hiding,” and “banished” are used to describe Adam & Eve (Genesis 3:7-24). These epithets metaphorically express concepts of **guilt**, **vulnerability**, **alienation** and **fear**. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) emphasize that metaphors like “banishment” encode abstract loss as physical separation.

### *David*

David’s pre-sin description includes “a man after God’s own heart,” “a mighty man of war,” “sweet psalmist of Israel,” “anointed,” “brave man,” “rescuer,” “protector” and “the Lord is with him.” These metaphorical epithets point to concepts of **bravery**, **protection** and being **chosen**.

After his sin with Bathsheba, metaphoric epithets regarding David’s description change, which is shown in Psalm 51: “displeased the Lord,” “despise the world of the Lord,” “evil in his eyes,” “utter contempt,” “sin is always before me,” “create in me a pure heart,” “renew a steadfast spirit,” “restore joy of salvation,” “grant me a willing spirit” and “broken spirit.” These express the concepts of **guilt**, **repentance**, **lust** and moral **evil** or **brokenness**.

### *Judas*

Before his betrayal, Judas is described as: “chosen” “disciple,” “drive out impure spirits and heal every disease and sickness,” “appointed,” “Apostle” (Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:14-19); metaphors expressing concepts of **trust**, **care**, **authority** and being **chosen**. He is counted among the Twelve—Jesus’ closest followers.

After his sin, however, Judas' descriptions changes: "watched for an opportunity to hand Him over," "woe to that man," "betrayed," "seized with remorse," "I have sinned," "betrayed innocent blood," "hanged himself," "betraying with a kiss," "Satan entered into him" (Matthew 26–27; John 13:27). These metaphorical epithets express such concepts as **betrayal**, **desperation**, **guilt**, moral **evil** and being **cursed**. As Flieger (2002) and Morris (2012) observe, the use of betrayal through a kiss further intensifies the metaphor of false closeness masking moral treachery.

### *Saul*

Saul is initially portrayed by metaphoric epithets as "as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel," "anointed ruler," "deliverer," "spirit of Lord powerfully upon him," "chosen," "no one like him" (1 Samuel 10:1-10). These epithets express concepts of **wisdom**, being **chosen** and **unique**. Saul is also described as "changed into a different person," suggesting deep inner transformation by God's presence.

Metaphorical epithets used to describe post-sin Saul are as follows: "foolish," "regret," "turned away," "rebellion," "arrogance," "rejected," "tormented by evil spirit," "afraid" "Lord departed from Saul," "in great distress," "Lord has become enemy," "fell on his own sword" (1 Samuel 13–16). These epithets express concepts of **arrogance** and **pride**, being **cursed** and **tormented**. Saul experiences a reversal from the Lord's anointed to one abandoned by divine presence. (Ryken, 1992; Kreeft (2005)

## **1.8 Methodology**

Metaphorical epithets are used in order to express deeper conceptual ideas associated with characters (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Research is conducted on the same conceptual basis. Metaphorical epithets used to describe key Biblical characters were analysed (Adam and Eve, Saul, David, and Judas Iscariot). Those characters were chosen because of abundant language means, notably metaphorical epithets, revealing their experiences with sin. Analysis revealed a list of key Biblical concepts expressed by metaphorical epithets in descriptions of characters before and after their exposure to sin. These Biblical concepts serve as the foundation for comparative analysis and are listed in the form of the table (see Table 1). This approach is also founded by the narrative theology explored by Kreeft (2005), Flieger (2002), and Morris (2012), who emphasise that theology can be embedded in the

moral arcs and language of literary characters. Tolkien's own moral universe, though not allegorical, is deeply shaped by Catholic theology and reflects biblical structures of temptation, fall, and redemption (Carpenter, H. (Ed.), 2000).

From “The Lord of the Rings” four characters were chosen for comparative analysis on metaphorical epithets used to describe them before and after contact with the “One Ring.” These characters are Frodo, Bilbo, Boromir and Gollum; and are chosen due to their unique and demonstrative experiences with the “One Ring.” Metaphorical epithets regarding these characters will be examined to determine whether they reflect the same key biblical concepts as characters from the Bible. If such parallels exist, it will support the hypothesis that Tolkien’s use of metaphorical language functions not only as a stylistic device, but also as an expression of theological truths.

**Table 1.** Biblical Concepts before Sin

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Represented by</b>	<b>Metaphorical Epithets / References</b>
Innocence	Adam & Eve	“naked and felt no shame”
Beauty	Adam & Eve	“image of God”
Goodness	Adam & Eve	“very good”
Authority	Judas, Saul	“appointed”, “anointed”, “Spirit of the Lord upon him”
Bravery	David	“brave man”, “rescuer”, “mighty man of war”
Protection	David	“protector”, “the Lord is with him”
Chosen	All figures	“chosen”, “appointed”, “no one like him”
Trust	Judas	“disciple”, “appointed”
Care	Judas	“drive out spirits, heal diseases”
Wisdom	Saul	“changed into a different person”, “Spirit of the Lord”
Unique	Saul	“no one like him”

**Table 2.** Biblical Concepts after Sin

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Represented by</b>	<b>Metaphorical Epithets / References</b>
Guilt	Adam & Eve, David, Judas	“ashamed”, “transgressions”, “betrayed innocent blood”
Vulnerability	Adam & Eve	“realized they were naked”, “made coverings”
Alienation	Adam & Eve, Saul	“banished”, “hiding”, “departed from the Lord”
Fear	Adam & Eve, Saul	“afraid”, “in great distress”
Repentance	David	“broken spirit”, “contrite heart”, “renew a steadfast spirit”
Lust	David	“evil in His eyes”, “utter contempt”
Evil	David, Judas	“despised the word”, “Satan entered into him”
Brokenness	David	“broken spirit”, “restore joy”
Betrayal	Judas	“betrayed”, “kiss”, “betraying with a kiss”
Desperation	Judas	“seized with remorse”, “hanged himself”
Cursed	Judas, Saul	“woe to that man”, “Lord has become enemy”
Arrogance	Saul	“rebellion”, “arrogance”
Pride	Saul	“foolish”, “turned away”
Tormented	Saul	“tormented by evil spirit”, “Lord departed”

## CHAPTER II BIBLICAL METAPHORS AND PERSONIFICATION IN „THE LORD OF THE RINGS”

### 2.1 Biblical Metaphors in „The Lord of the Rings”: Characters

Since the storyline of *The Lord of the Rings* features approximately 982 characters, only a select few were chosen for this analysis - specifically those whose narrative most clearly align with the theological and metaphorical criteria established in subchapter 1.8. These characters, being „Gollum,” „Boromir,” „Frodo” and „Bilbo,” will be analysed on metaphorical epithets being present to describe their states before and after exposure to the „One Ring.” Therefore, a comparative analysis will be conducted to reveal similarities between these descriptions and those of the Biblical characters being exposed to the influence of sin.

#### *Gollum*

Before his exposure to sin, Gollum (then known as Sméagol) was part of a people described in “*The Fellowship of the Ring*” as “hobbit-kind.” Hobbits are consistently described by Tolkien as “peaceful,” “shy of the Big Folk,” “fond of good tilled earth,” and notably uninterested in the affairs of the powerful (Tolkien, 1991, Prologue). This description expresses the biblical concept of **innocence** - a state of simplicity, harmony, and unawareness of evil. Just as Adam and Eve are described as “naked and felt no shame” (Genesis 2:25), living in a peaceful lands of Edem garden (Genesis 2:8), Sméagol’s original existence reflects moral simplicity and spiritual purity, unburdened by internal conflict.

Following his acquisition of the “One Ring,” Sméagol is slowly overtaken by its influence. The text describes him with epithets such as “wretched,” “miserable,” “pitiful,” and “slinker” (*The Two Towers*, Tolkien, 1991, p. 235, 254). Sam, observing him, says:

“He's a villain. And he's wretched, too. Miserable.”

These terms are rich with theological meaning.: the word “wretched,” for instance, aligns with Paul’s declaration in Romans 7:24:

“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

In both cases, the epithet encapsulates the concept of **guilt** as well as being **cursed** or **broken**. Ryken (1992) notes that such metaphorical language in Scripture externalizes spiritual conditions - turning internal spiritual state into visible and narratable form.

Gollum's dual personality, constantly fighting between "Sméagol" and "Gollum," further reflects the biblical concept of spiritual **torment**. In one scene, Gollum says, "Leave now, and never come back!" before he "spoke to himself," smiling and then snarling again (Tolkien, 1991, p. 254). This internal fragmentation mirrors Saul's torment in 1 Samuel 16:14, where "an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him."

Tolkien's depicts Gollum shrinking from the light:

"He covered. His hand lifted for a blow, and then he shrank back" (The Two Towers, p. 246)

This text connects with the biblical narrative in Genesis 3:8, where Adam and Eve "hid from the Lord God among the trees." This behavior expresses the concept of **alienation** and **fear**, which is noted through a separation from what is good and starting to fear it. This comparison with Scriptural narrative is further shown through John 3:19 where sinful people are described as loving darkness more than light:

"...people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."

Lakoff and Johnson (2003) emphasize that physical movement in metaphor (like shrinking or hiding) is often used to express emotional and inner states of characters.

Another key point of Gollum's description is his behavior toward Frodo. Though he addresses Frodo as "master" and calls him "nice master," he plots to betray him (Tolkien, 1991, p. 321). This moment reveals the concept of **betrayal**, most clearly seen in Judas's act of handing Jesus over with a kiss (Matthew 26:48). Gollum's apparent affection conceals treachery - Flieger (2002) and Morris (2012) identify such notions as literary masking of moral **evil** through false closeness.

A rare moment of hesitation and possible remorse occurs in Ithilien, where Gollum weeps when Frodo calls him "Sméagol" with gentleness:

“Tears sprang in his eyes” (Tolkien, 1991, p. 280).

This metaphorical epithet further expresses concepts of **guilt** as well as of **repentance** and **vulnerability**. Judas returning the silver and declaring, “I have sinned... I have betrayed innocent blood” (Matthew 27:4) after his exposure to sin expresses the same concepts.

### *Frodo*

Before prolonged exposure to the “One Ring,” Frodo is introduced by Gandalf as someone “meant to have it,” and described by others as “the best hobbit in the Shire” (Tolkien, 1991, p. 61). This presentation aligns with the biblical concept of being **chosen**, as seen in David, who was described as “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14). The portrayal of Frodo at this stage is marked by simplicity and good intention, associated with the biblical concept of **innocence** and **goodness**.

The concept of **cursed** is central to Frodo’s character - close to the epithet „guilty,” „tormented” or even „condemned.” In „The Fellowship of the Ring,” Frodo says,

„I am not made for perilous quests. I wish I had never seen the Ring!” (Tolkien, 1991, p. 80).

As his journey continues, Frodo is described by metaphorical epithets such as “burdened,” “wounded,” “bent,” and “broken.” Tolkien writes:

“Frodo had been wounded by knife, sting, and tooth, and a burden laid on him so heavy that he could not move” (Tolkien, 1991, p. 935).

This wounds, even after victory, shows metaphor of the biblical idea of being **tormented** - as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:7 (KJV),

„There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me.”

These descriptions express Frodo as **cursed**, **tormented** outside and within as well as depicting the concept of **brokenness** that results from sin.

By the conclusion of his journey, Frodo is referred to, by himself and others, with the epithet broken, although the exact word itself is not always used. He says:

„There is no real going back. Although I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same; for I shall not be the same” („The Return of the King,” p. 1006).

This metaphoric epithet further expresses his state of being **broken**, yet Frodo’s conclusion hints at the concept of **repentance**. Though scarred, he is not cast away but rather permitted to sail to the “Undying Lands.” This moment symbolically parallels David’s plea in Psalm 51:12: “Restore to me the joy of your salvation.” As Ryken (1992) explains, metaphor in biblical literature captures the depth of spiritual transition, and Tolkien similarly uses these figurative terms to show theological resonance.

### *Boromir*

At the Council of Elrond, Boromir is introduced as a noble and commanding figure: “a man fair and tall, clad in fur and mail, and a cloak of rich grey fur” (Tolkien, 1991, p. 243). In addition to this, Boromir’s valour and status as Gondor’s representative is similar to the biblical depiction of Saul and David being “anointed,” “taller than any of the people” and “a mighty man of war” which are associated with concepts of **authority** and **trust**.

Words of Boromir at the Council carry weight among the assembly, and he speaks with a tone of conviction and loyalty to Gondor. This portrayal expresses biblical descriptors associated with figures entrusted with leadership, especially Saul and David before their exposure to sin. His military courage as Gondor’s protector reflect concept of **bravery**.

Additionally, he is the son of the Steward of Gondor, and his courage and martial prowess are known among men. Though Tolkien does not apply direct epithets like “chosen,” Boromir’s role in the Fellowship and his authority as Gondor’s representative establish him within the narrative as a man with a divinely appointed task. This aligns with the concept of being **chosen**, as recognized in biblical contexts where individuals are set apart for a specific purpose (e.g., Judges 6:12; 1 Samuel 10:1).

Boromir's valour is consistently reinforced in other characters' descriptions. Aragorn calls him "a valiant man," and despite his later fall, Boromir's strength and devotion to Gondor remain evident. However, Boromir's changes when he is confronted with the power of the "One Ring." His insists:

"It is a gift, I say; a gift to the foes of Mordor! Why not use this Ring?" (Tolkien, 1991, p. 389).

This expression reveals a growing confidence in human strength, which expresses a concept of **pride** and **arrogance**. This aligns with Proverbs 16:18:

"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

Moreover, Boromir's failed attempt to seize the "One Ring" from Frodo marks his changes with metaphorical epithet:

"His fair and pleasant face was hideously changed; a raging fire was in his eyes" (Tolkien, 1991, p. 392).

This description strengthens the concept of **arrogance**, as well as **lust** for power as his outward form mirrors his inner state. This description corresponds with Sauls, who "turned away" and was ultimately "rejected" (1 Samuel 15), or David in his moment of "utter contempt" for God's law (2 Samuel 12:9).

The moment of Frodo's escape triggers immediate remorse:

"What have I said? What have I done?"

"I tried to take the Ring from Frodo. I am sorry. I have paid" (Tolkien, 1991, p. 414)

This descriptions introduce the concept of **guilt**, **desperation** and hint at **repentance**.

His death defending Merry and Pippin is described by Aragorn as noble: "He died well; achieving some good thing before the end" (Tolkien, 1991, p. 414). This metaphorical

epithet strengthens presence of the concept of **repentance**. Kreeft (2005) and Ryken (1992) both emphasize that repentance in biblical narratives often comes not through survival but through self-sacrifice, acknowledgment of guilt, and renewed purpose.

### *Bilbo*

Bilbo, like other hobbits, begins in a state of peace and simplicity, reflecting the concept of **innocence**: "with no use for adventures," "with no use for adventures." This parallels biblical portrayals of individuals in their pre-sin state, such as David as a shepherd or Saul as a modest young man from a small tribe, as well as with Adam and Eve's pre-sin state in the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:25).

In "The Fellowship of the Ring," Gandalf confronts Bilbo:

"You have had that Ring quite long enough... You are always trying to put it on!" (Tolkien, 1991, p. 46).

Bilbo's reaction: "It's mine, I tell you. It came to me!" expresses the concept of lust, paralleling David's aggression: "evil in His eyes." Yet Bilbo's metaphoric epithets quickly change toward expressing the concepts of **guilt** and **repentance**. Tolkien describes:

"His hand jerked back, and the packet fell on the floor. Before it touched the ground, Bilbo was on his knees, trembling" (p. 47).

This physical image metaphorically conveys inner surrender and guilt, much like David's broken spirit in Psalm 51.

Bilbo is the only "Ring-bearer" to release the "One Ring" freely, strengthening the concept of **repentance**. Unlike Gollum or Frodo, whose detachment from the Ring comes through force, Bilbo chooses to let go. This metaphorical description is similar to David's prayer in Psalm 51:12—"Restore to me the joy of your salvation."

Later, in Rivendell, Bilbo is described as "old and shrunken," saying:

“I am old, Gandalf. I don't look it, but I am beginning to feel it in my heart of hearts” (Tolkien, 1991, p. 287).

The metaphor of sudden inner aging conveys the concept of **brokenness** by burden (sin). Ryken (1992) explains that such a metaphor in biblical literature often expresses such emotional depth through physical imagery.

## 2.2 Summary of Metaphoric Epithets and Biblical Parallels in „The Lord of the Rings”

The following table presents the number of key Biblical concepts that were expressed through characters of Tolkien’s „The Lord of the Rings“ through metaphorical epithets.

**Table 3.** Key Biblical Concepts Present in “The Lord of the Rings”

<b>Character</b>	<b>Concepts Before Exposure to the “One Ring” (Sin)</b>	<b>Concepts After Exposure to the “One Ring” (sin)</b>	<b>Metaphorical Epithets</b>
<b>Gollum</b>	Innocence	Guilt, Vulnerability, Alienation, Fear, Torment, Betrayal, Desperation	“wretched,” “miserable,” “sniveling,” “shrinking,” “tears sprang in his eyes”
<b>Frodo</b>	Innocence, Goodness, Chosen	Guilt, Torment, Brokenness, Restoration	“burdened,” “wounded,” “so heavy he could not move,” “I shall not be the same”
<b>Boromir</b>	Bravery, Chosen, Authority	Pride, Arrogance, Guilt, Restoration	“a man fair and tall,” “a raging fire was in his eyes,” “I am sorry. I have paid,” “He died well”
<b>Bilbo</b>	Innocence, Wisdom, Chosen	Guilt, Lust, Regret, Restoration	“It’s mine,” “trembling,” “his hand jerked back,” “old and shrunken,” “feel it in my heart of hearts”

Results indicate that most of the key biblical concepts were expressed through Tolkien’s characterizations. However, in a number of cases, especially with more subtle transformations like that of Bilbo, the connection to biblical concepts was more interpretive than directly metaphorical - the presence of metaphorical epithets representing biblical ideas does not confirm a deliberate attempt by Tolkien to integrate Christian vocabulary. Metaphorical epithets in Tolkien’s “The Lord of the Rings” suggests biblical themes and remain intentionally indirect, which connects it in this way to C.S. Lewis’s Chronicles of

Narnia. The influence of the “One Ring” and changes in characters descriptions draw theological parallels, but often without explicitly biblical vocabulary. As Ryken (1992) notes, literature often expresses its true meaning implicitly, through character and metaphor rather than through direct approach. While some metaphorical epithets used in Tolkien’s descriptions were found to reflect biblical concepts, their usage is often metaphorical rather than theological.

The presence of biblical ideas in “The Lord of the Rings” is unmistakable but expressed by subtle language means. It is concluded that Tolkien’s intention was to create a myth that resonates with Christian values without directly quoting or relying on biblical vocabulary.

## CONCLUSION

This bachelor's thesis has explored the theological concepts in J.R.R. Tolkien's „The Lord of the Rings“ by analysing the use of metaphorical epithets and personification as tools to express biblical themes. It sought to determine whether Tolkien's language stylistically represents biblical concepts. Tolkien rejected direct allegory, but he also declared that The Lord of the Rings is „fundamentally a Catholic work,“ and this analysis aimed to uncover how his faith was expressed in the metaphorical epithets used to describe character before and after their encounters with the „one Ring.“

Chapter I provided an overview of Tolkien's religious worldview and the biblical concepts, drawing comparisons with descriptions of biblical characters (Adam and Eve, David, Saul, and Judas). These characters were examined on the presence of biblical concepts through their pre- and post-sin states, using metaphorical epithets that express key theological ideas. The analysis produced two sets of core concepts: one representing the state before sin (e.g. innocence, chosen, wisdom, bravery), and one after sin (e.g. guilt, alienation, torment, brokenness, betrayal).

Chapter II conducted a comparative analysis between these biblical concepts and the metaphorical language used to describe four characters from Tolkien's trilogy: Gollum, Frodo, Boromir, and Bilbo. Metaphorical epithets of these characters change after their exposure to the "One Ring," a symbol that exhibits characteristics similar to sin in the Bible (Genesis 4:7; Romans 7). The result of the analysis is that all 16 core biblical concepts identified in the methodology were expressed in the character descriptions through Tolkien's use of metaphorical epithets.

Nonetheless, the analysis also showed that Tolkien's work expresses biblical concepts in subtle and interpretive rather than direct. Some crucial moments in character development, such as Bilbo's or Frodo's repentance, do not always use overt biblical vocabulary. This suggests that his intention was to express Christian truths through myth rather than direct means.

Therefore, the hypothesis of Tolkien's usage of morally charged descriptors for characters is partially true: Tolkien's use of metaphorical epithets and personification serves as a theologically suggestive literary method, one that supports Christian themes while

maintaining the artistic independence of myth. His literary method illustrates that the presence of faith need not always be explicit to be profoundly felt.

## SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

See bakalaureusetöö uuris teoloogilisi mõisteid J.R.R. Tolkieni teoses „Sõrmuste isand“, analüüsisides metafoorsete epiteetide ja isikustamise kasutust piibellike teemade väljendamise vahendina. Töö eesmärk oli välja selgitada, kas Tolkieni keel esindab stiililiselt piibellikke mõisteid. Tolkien lükkas küll otsese allegooria tagasi, kuid on siiski öelnud, et Sõrmuste isand on „põhimõtteliselt katoliiklik teos“. Käesolev analüüs püüdis mõista, kuidas tema usku väljendatakse metafoorsetes epiteetides, mida ta kasutab tegelaste kirjeldamisel enne ja pärast kokkupuudet „Ühe Sõrmusega“.

Peatükk I andis ülevaate Tolkieni religioosest maailmavaatest ja piibellikest mõistetest, tuues paralleele piiblitegelaste (Aadam ja Eeva, Taavet, Saul ja Juudas) kirjeldustega. Neid tegelasi analüüsiti piibellike mõistete esinemise põhjal nende patueelse ja -järgse seisundi kaudu, kasutades metafoorseid epiteete, mis väljendavad võtmelisi teoloogilisi ideid. Analüüsi tulemusel eristati kaks põhimõistete gruppi: üks tähistas patueelset seisundit (nt süüitus, valitus, tarkus, vaprus) ja teine patujärgset (nt süü, võõrandumine, piin, murtus, reetmine).

Peatükis II viidi läbi võrdlev analüüs nende piibellike mõistete ja metafoorse keele vahel, mida Tolkien kasutab nelja tegelase – Gollumi, Frodo, Boromiri ja Bilbo – kirjeldamisel. Nende tegelaste metafoorsed epiteedid muutuvad pärast kokkupuudet „Ühe Sõrmusega“, mis Tolkieni maailmas sümboliseerib patu olemust sarnaselt Piiblile (1Ms 4:7; Rm 7). Analüüsi tulemus näitas, et kõik 1.8 peatükis määratletud 16 põhimõistet väljenduvad Tolkieni tegelaskujude kirjeldustes läbi metafoorsete epiteetide.

Samas tõi analüüs välja, et Tolkieni teos esitab piibellikud mõisted pigem kaudselt ja tõlgenduslikult kui otseselt. Mõned olulised hetked tegelaste arengus, nagu Bilbo või Frodo kahetsus, ei sisalda alati selgelt piibellikku sõnavara. See viitab sellele, et Tolkieni kavatsus oli kristlikke tõdesid väljendada müüdi kaudu, mitte otsese keelekasutuse kaudu.

Seega on hüpotees Tolkieni poolt moraalselt laetud kirjelduste kasutamisest tegelaskujude puhul osaliselt tõene: metafoorsed epiteedid ja isikustamine toimivad teoloogiliselt laetuna kirjandusliku võttena, mis toetab kristlikke teemasid, säilitades samas müüdil põhineva kunstilise iseseisvuse. Tolkieni kirjanduslik meetod näitab, et usu kohalolu ei pea alati olema otsene, et olla sügavalt tuntav.

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19.05.2025