
THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE

Introduction to the Bible
Pastor Bucey

LITERATURE

There is a preoccupation among biblical writers with artistry, verbal craftsmanship, and aesthetic beauty. The writer of Ecclesiastes presents a theory of writing that stresses beauty of expression as well as truthfulness of content; he labored to arrange proverbs “with great care” and “sought to find pleasing words” (Ecclesiastes 12:9–10). If the Bible is an artistically beautiful as well as a truthful book, it demands a literary approach in addition to the historical and theological approaches.¹

I should say at once that by the term “literature” I do not mean everything that is written. I use it in a more restricted sense to mean the types of writing that are often called “imaginative literature” or “creative writing” in contrast to expository writing.²

GENRE

In biblical studies, genre usually refers to the form of entire books. Textual units within a book may also comprise different styles and forms, but scholars often refer to the study of these as form criticism. Biblical genres are normally identified by examining a book’s style, structure, form, tone, context, and literary techniques.³

The *genre* of a piece of text is the kind of literature that it is. In the bible, we find quite a few distinct genres: historical reports, genealogies, songs, parables, letters, visions, proverbs. Roughly speaking, a genre is “a group of pieces of literature with similar organization or style.”⁴

¹ Dr. Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 1st ed. (Zondervan, 1985), 9.

² *Ibid.*, 12.

³ Capitol Hill Baptist Church, “How to Study the Bible” — Class 5: Biblical Genres: Narratives and Histories

⁴ Vern S. Poythress, *Reading the Word of God in the Presence of God: A Handbook for Biblical Interpretation* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2016), 207.

Biblical Genres⁵	
Genre	Book
Historical/Law Narrative	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Jonah
Wisdom	Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes
Poetry	Psalms, Song of Solomon, Lamentations
Prophecy	Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
Apocalyptic	Daniel, Revelation of John
Gospel	Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts
Epistle	Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, I and II Peter, I, II and III John, Jude

UNITY AND DIVERSITY

The Bible is comprised of many different genre. Nevertheless, there is one unified message.

GENRE AND INTERPRETATION

What might happen if we don't account for genre in our interpretation?

⁵ Capitol Hill Baptist Church, "How to Study the Bible" — Class 5: Biblical Genres: Narratives and Histories