

Biblical Genre

Historical Narrative – A lot of the Bible is the people of God telling stories of what God did throughout their history. Because the Bible has so many stories, it's basically a story of stories.

Law – These are the commands God gave to his people (the Israelites) after rescuing them from slavery in Egypt, both do's and don'ts. Some commands described what's good and evil for all time and they aren't bound to one time or place; others were limited to describing how to run the ancient nation of Israel many centuries ago.

Poetry – This is a way of writing in verse, often using figurative language and evoking strong feeling. Hebrew poetry used a lot of parallelism (parallel lines of poetry), often where the second line restates or reinforces the first line in some way. Poetry is sprinkled throughout the Bible, with some books being entirely poetic. Around a third of the Bible is written in poetry.

Wisdom Literature – These are collections of wise sayings and theological reflection given by Jewish sages. These range from short statements which give practical advice for particular situations (Proverbs) to deep explorations of difficult questions, such as why good people suffer (Job) and why life seems futile sometimes (Ecclesiastes). Much Wisdom Literature is written in poetic form.

Prophecy – These are messages from God's messengers to God's people, sometimes given when the people were unwilling to listen. Typically, these were messages meant for the prophet's own generation, but sometimes they were interspersed with predictions of the future (e.g., events such as the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC and the coming of the Messiah). It's been said that God gave these messages to comfort the afflicted—and afflict the comfortable.

Gospels – These are biographies of Jesus, with the name "gospel" meaning "good news." They narrate Jesus' ministry, including his teachings and miracles. Each spends a good percentage of its space narrating the events of the final week of Jesus' life, climaxing in Jesus' death and resurrection. "Each Gospel spends a good percentage of its space narrating the events of the final week of Jesus' life, climaxing in Jesus' death and resurrection."

Parables – These are fictional stories told using the stuff of everyday life (a fisherman separating good and bad fish, a farmer sowing seed, a guy getting robbed) to point to spiritual realities. The word literally means "to throw alongside" (para = alongside; bole = to throw). These stories were "thrown alongside" the truth being taught. Jesus taught numerous parables.

Letters – These are letters written by early church leaders such as Paul, Peter, and John to early Christians to help them navigate questions they had and issues their churches faced. Many are written to churches in particular cities, such as Romans (written to the Christians in Rome) and Ephesians (written to the Christians in Ephesus).

Apocalypse – This is a way of describing cataclysmic events using rich symbolism. The word means to “uncover” or “reveal.” Bible books which use the apocalyptic genre are Daniel in the Old Testament and Revelation in the New Testament.

An excerpt from Orpheus J. Heyward, **God’s Word: The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture** (Renew.org, 2021).



“Scan the QR code for a short video describing Biblical Literary Styles from BibleProject.

“Familiarity with the different Bible genres can help us read and interpret God's word more accurately.”

BIBLE GENRES

Historical Narrative: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Acts (history of early church)

Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Prophecy: (Major) Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel **(Minor)** Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Poetry/ Wisdom Literature: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations

Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

Letters: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude

Apocalypse: Daniel, Revelation