

Literary Genres of the Bible

Genre	Characteristics	Biblical Books And Examples
Biography	Close-up view of an individual's life; subject is often portrayed in contrast to someone else; selected events reveal character development, either positively or negatively	Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Saul, David, Elijah, Jesus
Encomium	Sings high praise of someone or something; rehearses in glowing terms the subject's origins, acts, attributes, or superiority; exhorts the reader to incorporate the same features into his own life	I Sam 2:1-10 Psalm 19 Psalm 119 Prov 8:22-36 Prov 31:10-31 Song of Solomon John 1:1-18 I Corinthians 13 Col 1:15-20 Hebrews 1-3
Exposition	Carefully reasoned argument or explanation; well-organized; logical flow; terms are crucial; builds to a logical, compelling climax; the aim is agreement and action	Paul's letters Hebrews James I and II Peter I, II and III John Jude
Narrative	A broad category in which story is prominent; includes historical accounts; structure is conveyed through plot; characters undergo psychological and spiritual development; selected events used to convey meaning; events juxtaposed for contrast and comparison	Genesis-Ezra The gospels Acts
Oratory	Stylized oral presentation of an argument; uses formal conventions of rhetoric and oratory; frequently quotes from authorities well known to listeners; usually intended to exhort and persuade	John 13-17 Acts 7 Acts 17:22-31 Acts 22:1-21 Acts 24:10-21 Acts 26:1-23
Parable	Brief story illustrating moral truth; frequently	II Sam 12:1-6

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	relies on stock characters and stereotypes; presents scenes and activities common to everyday life; encourages reflection and self-evaluation	Ecc 9:14-16 Mtt 13:1-53 Mark 4:1-34 Luke 15:1 - 16:31
Pastoral	Literature dealing with rural, rustic themes, especially shepherds; heavy on description, lean on action; often meditative and quiet; emphasis on the bond between a shepherd and his sheep; idealized presentation of life away from urban evils	Psalms 23 Isa 40:1 I John 10:1-18
Poetry	Verse intended to be spoken or sung rather than read; emphasis on cadence and the sounds of words; vivid images and symbols; appeals to the emotions; may employ features of encomium, pastoral, and other literary styles; in OT, heavy use of parallelism	Job Psalms Proverbs Song of Solomon
Prophecy	Strident, authoritative presentation of God's will and words; frequently intended as a corrective; intended to motivate change through warnings; foretells God's plans in response to human choices	Isaiah-Malachi Revelation
Proverb	Short, pithy statement of a moral truth; reduces life to black-and-white categories; often addressed to youth; frequently employs parallelism; points readers toward the right and away from evil; heavy use of similes and metaphors	Proverbs
Satire	Exposes and ridicules human vice and foolishness; is employed by various literary styles, especially narrative, biography, and proverb; warns readers through a negative example	Prov 24:30-34 Ezekiel 34 Luke 18:1-8 II Cor 11:1-12:1
Tragedy	Relates the downfall of a person; uses selected events to show the path toward ruin; problems usually revolve around a critical flaw in the person's character and moral choices; warns readers through a negative example	Lot Samson Saul Acts 5:1-11
Wisdom Literature	A broad category in which an older, seasoned person relates wisdom to a younger; may use	Job Proverbs

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	parable; gives observations on fundamental areas of life - birth, death, work , money, power, time, the earth and so on; appeals on the basis of human experience	Psalm 37 Psalm 90 Ecclesiastes
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