

## Literary Genres of the Bible

GENRE	CHARACTERISTICS	BIBLICAL BOOKS AND EXAMPLES
Apocalyptic	Dramatic, highly symbolic material; vivid imagery; stark contrasts; events take place on a global scale; frequently narrated in the first-person as an eyewitness account; portrays a cosmic struggle between good and evil.	Revelation
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 (comedy) or negatively (tragedy).	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.	<a href="#">1 Sam. 2:1–10</a> <a href="#">Psalm 19</a> <a href="#">Psalm 119</a> <a href="#">Prov. 8:22–36</a> <a href="#">Prov. 31:10–31</a> Song of Solomon <a href="#">John 1:1–18</a> <a href="#">1 Corinthians 13</a> <a href="#">Col. 1:15–20</a> <a href="#">Hebrews 1–3</a>
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 1 and 2 Peter 1, 2, and 3 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.	<a href="#">John 13–17</a> <a href="#">Acts 7</a> <a href="#">Acts 17:22–31</a> <a href="#">Acts 22:1–21</a> <a href="#">Acts 24:10–21</a> <a href="#">Acts 26:1–23</a>
Parable	Brief oral story illustrating moral; truth frequently relies on stock characters and stereotypes; presents scenes and activities common to everyday life; encourages reflection and self-evaluation.	<a href="#">2 Sam. 12:1–6</a> <a href="#">Eccles. 9:14–16</a> <a href="#">Matt. 13:1–53</a> <a href="#">Mark 4:1–34</a> <a href="#">Luke 15:1–16:31</a>
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.	<a href="#">Psalm 23</a> <a href="#">Isa. 40:1</a> <a href="#">John 10:1–18</a>
Poetry	Verses 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 O.T., heavy use of parallelism.	Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes 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

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 metaphors and similes.	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.	<a href="#">Prov. 24:30–34</a> <a href="#">Ezekiel 34</a> <a href="#">Luke 18:1–8</a> <a href="#">2 Cor: 11:1–12:1</a>
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 <a href="#">Acts 5:1–11</a>
Wisdom Literature	A broad category in which an older, seasoned person relates wisdom to a younger; may use 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.	Job Proverbs <a href="#">Psalm 37</a> <a href="#">Psalm 90</a> Ecclesiastes