

Genre Guide

Narrative

Narratives are purposeful stories that retell historical events to give meaning, direction, and remembrance for a current audience. The basic components of a narrative are the characters, plot- which includes the conflict or tension- and the resolution. In Hebrew narrative, God is always the protagonist and His enemies, both spiritual and earthly, are the antagonists. God's people and those who serve Him are the agonists, major characters who get involved in the struggle of the protagonist and antagonist. The narrator of any story is not a trivial role. They present the point of view and include details according to their intent. The story is moved along through scenes and the focus is usually on the characters and their dialogue to propel the plot. Ancient narratives are primarily for HEARERS, not readers. In these texts, the author is retelling what happened, not necessarily moralizing what should have or ought to happen.

Law

In Scripture, "law" can refer to any one of the 600+ commands in Scripture. It can also be the collective group of commands or reference to the Pentateuch, the covenant laws and narrative context in which those laws were embedded. Laws are covenant agreements between two parties where BOTH have obligations to fulfill. There are moral, civil, and ritual/ceremonial laws given as the terms of the agreement between Isreal and Yahweh. The new covenant (NT) reaffirms and amends some of the old covenant (OT) but not all of it. The laws must be understood in their given context.

Gospels

The Gospel accounts give us 4 narrative perspectives on the life, teachings, and parables of Jesus. Think of them more as "memoirs of the apostles" than biographies of Jesus. There are many elements of shared work, but each author had an audience and purpose that impacted their choice of content and chronology. Comparing parallel passages is helpful as we remember the difference in purpose and perspective.

Parables are illustrative short stories or phrases that function to elicit a corrective response from the hearer. Most demonstrate the nature of the Kingdom of God and include cultural points of reference the audience would have understood to help make the point. Knowing who the intended audience was is important when studying parables.

Prophecy

Despite what you might think, the main function of the prophets was NOT fore-telling but forth-telling. They were to speak for God and were always calling His people back to covenant loyalty with Yahweh. Prophets were primarily covenant enforcement officers. When they were future-telling events, there was usually dual or multiple fulfillments: something current or soon-to-be fulfilled, something fulfilled in the Messiah, or something yet to be fulfilled. But the message was always the same- God always keeps His covenant. Yahweh is faithful, just, and true.

Wisdom

Wisdom literature is an ancient literary form concerned with right living. They include proverbs, poems, dialogue, and narratives that teach godly living through generalizations of how the observable world works. Wisdom is what one seeks to gain by applying God's truth and learning from their experiences.

Poetry

Poetry utilizes figurative language, metaphor, simile, and hyperbole. The most common feature of Hebrew poetry is parallelism, where an idea is first stated and then further developed in "parallels". Poems are meant to invoke an emotional response by speaking to the head through the heart. They were used for worship, demonstrated how to relate honestly to God, and showed how to reflect and meditate on what God had done.

Letters

Letters or epistles are correspondence and teaching where we have half the conversation preserved. Each letter was occasional, meaning it was written to and for a specific occasion. Some were intended for public reading, circulation, and discourse, while others were rather private.

Apocalypse

Apocalyptic literary form isn't used today, but in ancient times it was occasional to persecution or threat and was concerned with judgement and salvation. Primarily hopeful, the imagery was fantastical and the language symbolic and cryptic. There is apocalyptic form throughout the Bible, but the book of Revelation is the most well-known. Revelation cites the OT over 250 times!