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## INTRODUCTION

In chapter one we touched briefly on the literary aspects of a passage of scripture. Now it is time to look at that more closely. One of the several definitions of the English adjective ‘literary’ is that it refers to something having the characteristic of humane learning. Literature in English alludes to writings composed either in prose or poetry.<sup>1</sup> The term can refer to writings in general, but often designates writings with certain literary qualities

<sup>1</sup>In Spanish, the English adjective ‘literary’ translates into ‘literario(a). And the English noun ‘literature’ comes over into Spanish as ‘literatura.’ The definitions of the Spanish words move along similar meanings as do the English words. For example, ‘literatura’ is described as “La literatura es el arte que utiliza como instrumento la palabra. Por extensión, se refiere también al conjunto de producciones literarias de una nación, de una época o incluso de un género (la literatura griega, la literatura del siglo XVIII, la literatura fantástica, etc) y al conjunto de obras que versan sobre un arte o una ciencia (literatura médica, literatura jurídica, etc)” in “Literatura,” wikipedia.org.

In German, the pattern is somewhat similar to Spanish and English. ‘Literature’ becomes ‘Literatur,’ and ‘literary’ is ‘literarisch.’ The use of the German Literatur is somewhat more technical than its counterparts in either English or Spanish: “Literatur ist seit dem 19. Jahrhundert der Bereich aller mündlich (etwa durch Versformen und Rhythmus) oder schriftlich fixierten sprachlichen Zeugnisse. Man spricht in diesem „weiten“ Begriffsverständnis etwa von „Fachliteratur“ oder „Notenliteratur“ (*Partituren*) im Blick auf die hier gegebene schriftliche Fixierung. Die öffentliche Literaturdiskussion ist demgegenüber seit dem 19. Jahrhundert auf Werke ausgerichtet, denen Bedeutung als Kunst zugesprochen werden könnte, und die man im selben Moment von Trivialliteratur, von ähnlichen Werken ohne vergleichbare „literarische“, sprich künstlerische, Qualität, abgrenzt. Das Wort Literatur wird bis in das 19. Jahrhundert hinein regulär für die Wissenschaften verwendet.” [“Literatur,” wikipedia.org] The Germans have less inclination to refer to writings generally as literature. It must possess certain ‘literary’ qualities before being correctly called Literatur.

In French, the noun ‘literature’ becomes littérature, and the adjective ‘literary’ is littéraire. The use of these words in French tends toward the technical meaning of the term:

Le mot littérature, issu du latin litteratura dérivé de *littera* (la lettre), apparaît au début du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle avec un sens technique de « chose écrite » puis évolue à la fin du Moyen Âge vers le sens de « savoir tiré des livres », avant d’atteindre aux XVII<sup>e</sup> - XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles son sens principal actuel : ensemble des œuvres écrites ou orales comportant une dimension esthétique (ex. : Une autre histoire de la littérature française, Jean d’Ormesson) ou activité participant à leur élaboration (ex. : « Se consacrer à la littérature »).

La littérature se définit en effet comme un aspect particulier de la communication verbale — orale ou écrite — qui met en jeu une exploitation des ressources de la langue pour multiplier les effets sur le destinataire, qu’il soit lecteur ou auditeur. La littérature — dont les frontières sont nécessairement floues et variables selon les appréciations personnelles — se caractérise donc, non par ses supports et ses genres, mais par sa fonction esthétique : la mise en forme du message l’emporte sur le contenu, dépassant ainsi la communication utilitaire limitée à la transmission d’informations même complexes. Aujourd’hui la littérature est associée à la civilisation des livres par lesquels nous parlent à distance les auteurs, mais elle concerne aussi les formes diverses de l’expression orale comme la poésie traditionnelle des peuples sans écriture — dont nos chansons sont les lointaines cousines — ou le théâtre, destiné à être reçu à travers la voix et le corps des comédiens. La technologie numérique est cependant peut-être en train de transformer le support traditionnel de la littérature et sa nature.

Le concept de littérature a été régulièrement remis en question par les écrivains comme par les critiques et les théoriciens : c’est particulièrement vrai depuis la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle où l’on a cherché à redéfinir - comme pour l’art - les fonctions de la littérature (par exemple

that make the writing more valuable and lasting.

Within that definitional framework the documents of the Bible certainly qualify to be called literature. The Christian Bible has exerted enormous influence not just over the religious life of Christians, but over virtually every aspect of western culture for many centuries. In North America especially this has spawned a separate academic discipline usually designated as the study of the Bible as literature.<sup>2</sup>

This more recent focus on the Bible as literature has substantially heightened interest in giving careful attention to the literary aspects of the text of the Bible as a part of the interpretive process. On the US side of biblical scholarship, it has enabled American biblical scholars to establish some 'cutting edges' of scholarship in biblical studies for the first time ever in the history of the study of the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.1 The Literary Nature of a Written Document

A piece of written expression of ideas must follow established patterns of written communication for the ideas to be understood by the readers. Only in some streams of contemporary poetry do writers tend to play 'cat and mouse' games with their readers in disguising their ideas for the sake of evoking emotional responses as well as some cognitive understanding by their readers.

Something along these lines but out of very different motivations drove many of the second century Gnostic writers to express their ideas in wording that made little or no sense at the surface level meaning. The stock phrases and expressions represented code signals for the initiated inside the movement to understand but to remain unknowable to those on the outside. Interestingly, for a person to be able to understand these writings he supposedly had to possess the secret γνῶσις, 'gnosis,' given to him in a highly emotionally charged conversion and confirmed by the ability to speak in tongues. A very early form of this being imported from the Eleusinian Mysteries cult near Corinth was what Paul had to deal with in First Corinthians 12-14 in the mid first century.

Overwhelmingly in the ancient world -- as well as in our world -- when someone writes down ideas, their intent is for those ideas to be understood by everyone who reads them. What Paul said to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 14:19 echoes a general viewpoint in the Greco-Roman world of his time: "I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue," θέλω πέντε λόγους τῷ νοῦ μου λαλῆσαι, ἵνα καὶ ἄλλους κατηχήσω, ἢ μυρίου λόγους ἐν γλώσσῃ.

As mentioned in chapter one, at the basic level literary aspects of written materials can be grouped into three logical categories: form, context, and structure.

#### 3.1.1 The Literary Forms: Genre

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avec la notion d'engagement pour Sartre, Qu'est-ce que la littérature ?) et sa nature (réflexion sur l'écriture et la lecture de Roland Barthes ou études des linguistes comme Roman Jakobson) et à renouveler les critères esthétiques (du « Il faut être absolument moderne » de Rimbaud au nouveau roman en passant par le surréalisme, par exemple)."  
["Littérature," wikipedia.org]

<sup>2</sup>For more details see "Approaching the Bible as Literature," Bible Gateway Blog. Leland Ryken, English professor at Wheaton College and his son have jointly edited a study Bible highlighting especially the literary qualities of the documents: *The Literary Study Bible*.

<sup>3</sup>In the world of biblical scholarship those whose work has dominated the advances in methodologies have always been the Europeans, and especially the Germans. Not until the mid twentieth century has any other group of scholars achieved the level of technical understanding and pioneering efforts in biblical studies. Biblical scholarship in North America, and in particular within the United States, have gained status on a level comparable to scholars in Europe with pioneering efforts in various fields of literary approaches to studying the Bible.

From the 1400s onward the Europeans were interacting with the growing influence of the Enlightenment on culture and society, while in North America the preoccupation was on nation building both in the US and Canada. Out of this interaction -- both positive and negative -- came the wide variety of approaches to Bible study in the modern era, all across the theological spectrum. Educational institutions in North America did not begin to achieve serious academic quality on a level with those in Europe until the post WWII era.

Only with the beginning of the twenty-first century has a doctor's degree from select universities and seminaries in North America possessed the same academic recognition as one from the major universities in the UK, France, and Germany. Many young doctoral graduates have discovered this to their dismay when beginning the arduous job search upon completing their doctorate in some field of religious studies. Across the theological spectrum from the far left to the right competing with a doctoral graduate from a European school for a professorship position almost universally meant the job went to the applicant with the European degree.

The French word 'genre' has become widely used in English literary circles.<sup>4</sup> The establishment of widely understood patterns of idea expression are normative to every western language. Also important is that literary forms are not static; rather, they are constantly evolving and changing. Thus the study of a set of literary forms will also locate one at a certain time in history, and usually within a specific culture and perhaps also language.<sup>5</sup> Any writer desiring to genuinely communicate either orally or in written expression must have some awareness of these patterns and how to effectively use them in order to communicate his or her ideas.<sup>6</sup> In biblical studies -- as well other ancient writings -- the challenge is understanding what patterns existed in the linguistic and cultural worlds of the biblical writers. What communication role did these play in that world? And then, how did the individual biblical writer make use of these patterns in communicating his ideas?<sup>7</sup>

The beginnings of serious focus on this aspect of the biblical text began in Europe primarily with the German professor Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932) at the universities in Göttingen and Giessen. Gunkel was a part of the emerging History of Religions School movement (die religionsgeschichtliche Schule) of the time.<sup>8</sup> In the comparative study of the various ancient near eastern religions the identification of common patterns of idea expression across religious boundaries played an important role in these early studies. In the naively optimistic atmosphere of pre world war I western culture both in Europe and the western hemisphere the goal was to find the very essence of religion universally existing in all major religions of the world both ancient and modern. Thus the early efforts of the emerging discipline of Form Criticism (Formgeschichte)<sup>9</sup> were mostly focused on identifying existing literary forms in the Bible with a view to tracing how they functioned orally and how these orally utilized forms were incorporated into the written literature of scripture. With the European birthing of this discipline of scholarly studies, the identification of forms was largely preliminary to attempts to trace out the history of the use of the forms. This methodology has undergone massive refinement and revision over the past hundred plus years with most of the efforts at tracing the history of forms being discarded as excessively subjective. Form Criticism as practiced today across the theological spectrum by biblical scholars centers on understanding the form patterns and their impact on determining meaning in communication.

What we are interested in with our study are the basics of genre identification along with summary infor-

<sup>4</sup>For helpful background studies at much greater detail, see the following: "Genre," wikipedia.org; "Lists of genres," wikipedia.org; "Genre studies," wikipedia.org; "Literary genre," wikipedia.org; "Lists of literary genre," wikipedia.org; "Biblical genre," wikipedia.org; Felix Just, S.J., "An Introduction to Biblical Genres and Form Criticism," catholic-resources.org; "Literary genre," Religious Education Support at www.ress.ie; "Explore the Genres of the Bible," Bible Gateway Blog.

<sup>5</sup>"Genres are neither universal nor static. Therefore, to avoid anachronism, it is important that a genre is classified within its era and literary milieu. For the NT books, this means placing them properly within the context of the Greco-Roman world of the first century A.D. Identification of a work's genre helps us understand its place within the literary history of both early Christianity and the Greco-Roman world and aids us in its interpretation." [Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).]

<sup>6</sup>"One of the crucial insights of form criticism in biblical studies was the realization of the importance of genre recognition for textual interpretation. One cannot understand a particular text without at least some implicit knowledge of the genre to which that text belongs. There is no literary creation *ex nihilo*. Every writer who desires to communicate with an audience must draw on previously known literary conventions of one type or another. The writer starts with a specific genre or set of genres in mind. He or she may work through the conventions associated with these genres, transform them in important ways, or even totally explode them, but use them he or she must. These same genre conventions provide the reader or hearer with an initial frame of reference, some means by which to begin to extract meaning from the text." [F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Genre" In *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 493-94.]

<sup>7</sup>"Genre. A term that refers to different types or varieties of literature or media. In the interpretation of texts, particularly the Bible, most exegetes agree that identifying the genre of the text to be interpreted is crucial and that the text must be understood in light of the common conventions that typified that genre at the time of its writing. Thus, poetry is not to be interpreted in the same manner as historical narrative, nor is prophecy properly read in the same manner as an epistle (letter)." [Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 55.]

<sup>8</sup>For a helpful critique of the American side of this movement, primarily identified with the University of Chicago, see "Religionsgeschichtliche Schule," Encyclopedia Britannica.

<sup>9</sup>In French this is la critique des formes. See "Exégèse biblique," wikipedia.org for detailed discussion. In Spanish, form criticism is labeled Critica del formas. For brief summary in Spanish see "Critica del formas," wikipedia.org.

mation on how they contributed to communication of ideas in the world of the Bible. The more technical analytical methods require advanced training that is well beyond the scope of our objectives here. What we will attempt to do in the sections below is to describe the characteristics of each form and to suggest the basic functions of each in communicating meaning in the ancient world.

Literary patterns operate at various levels inside written materials. They will be embedded inside elements and perhaps can be best pictured as (--(===(+++(--)+++)==)--). This diagram pictures genre elements at four different levels, and is somewhat typical of what happens inside the documents of the Bible. At the most basic level they will be known commonly as the 'broad genre,' which I have termed 'basic literary forms' (topics 3.1.1.1 and 3.1.1.2). These are the categories of grouping the documents of the Bible. Inside each of the documents, however, one will encounter many, many sub-genre forms. That is, small units of idea expression embedded inside the larger forms. These will be treated in summary fashion in topic 3.1.1.3 below.

### 3.1.1.1 Basic Literary Forms in the Old Testament

With the basic genre patterns of the Old Testament one first encounters two very different ways of grouping the documents: the traditional Jewish pattern and the traditional Christian pattern. In the Tanakh of Judaism, the divisions reflect this word as an acronym for the threefold division: T (=Torah); N (=Nevi'im, prophets); and K (-Ketuvim, writings), thus **TaNakh**. This threefold division represents the three levels of diminishing authority beginning with the Torah or Law of Moses as the highest authority.<sup>10</sup> But the Nevi'im section understands the idea of prophet more broadly than is typical in Christian circles, and begins with the book of Joshua. In literary character, however, those included in this section (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Twelve Prophets) cover historically the era from the entrance into the Promised Land until the Babylonian Captivity. Thus the historical focus is more important to the grouping than the literary nature of the documents, something reflected by Josephus in the first Christian century. The third category, Ketuvim, is almost a 'catch all' grouping, but traditionally is subdivided into various subgroups: "*Sifrei Emet* (ספרי אמת, literally 'Books of Truth') of Psalms, Proverbs and Job (the Hebrew names of these three books form the Hebrew word for 'truth' as an acrostic, and all three books have unique cantillation marks), the 'wisdom books' of Job, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs, the 'poetry books' of Psalms, Lamentations and Song of Songs, and the "historical books" of Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles."<sup>11</sup> Daniel is also included with the Ketuvim, in part because it wasn't perceived to fit the prophets category.<sup>12</sup>

The restructuring of the Old Testament by dividing the 24 Hebrew documents into 39 shorter documents also produced a re-sequencing of these 39 books based more on their dominant literary character.<sup>13</sup> This restructuring both in content and sequence originates in the Greek translation of these Hebrew documents called the Septuagint in the third century BCE. This Greek translation virtually became the Bible of first century Christians because of the dominance of the Greek language, especially with the Pauline mission to the Gentile world from

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<sup>10</sup>Interestingly Josephus in the first Christian century represents a slightly different perspective than what is found in the Talmud:

"The twenty-four books are also mentioned in the Midrash Koheleth 12:12.<sup>7</sup> A slightly different accounting can be found in the book *Against Apion*, by the 1st-century Jewish historian Josephus, who describes 22 sacred books: the five books of Moses, thirteen histories, and four books of hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life.<sup>8</sup> Some scholars have suggested that he considered Ruth part of Judges, and Lamentations part of Jeremiah; as the Christian translator Jerome recorded in the 4th century CE.<sup>9</sup> Other scholars suggest that at the time Josephus wrote, such books as Esther and Ecclesiastes were not yet considered canonical." ["Tanakh," wikipedia.org]

<sup>11</sup>"Tanakh," wikipedia.org.

<sup>12</sup>For a helpful discussion of the history of chapter and verse divisions of both the Hebrew Bible and also of the Christian Bible, see "Chapters and verses of the Bible," wikipedia.org.

<sup>13</sup>"The books can be broadly divided into the Pentateuch, which tells how God selected Israel to be his chosen people; the history books telling the history of the Israelites from their conquest of Canaan to their defeat and exile in Babylon; the poetic and "wisdom" books dealing, in various forms, with questions of good and evil in the world; and the books of the biblical prophets, warning of the consequences of turning away from God. For the Israelites who were its original authors and readers these books told of their own unique relationship with God and their relationship with proselytes, but the overarching messianic nature of Christianity has led Christians from the very beginning of the faith to see the Old Testament as a preparation for the New Covenant and New Testament." ["Old Testament," wikipedia.org]

the late 40s on.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.1.1.1.1 Torah

Both Jews and all branches of Christianity agree on the structure and grouping of the first five documents of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. As a single group, they are labeled different ways: Torah (/ˈtɔːrə/; Hebrew: תּוֹרָה, “Instruction”, “Teaching”); Law; Pentateuch (from the Greek πεντατεύχος, *pentateuchos* [penta=five, teuchos=book]); the Law of Moses; the Books of Moses. It should be noted that none of the labels show up inside these five documents. But in subsequent sections of the Old Testament labels surface either designation only the legal code sections or the five documents comprehensively.<sup>15</sup> Added to this is the reality that the finalized form of these documents that we have today was not achieved until the Babylonian exile. Thus these ‘internal’ references will be referencing an earlier form of either the collection of books or more specifically the legal code sections that pre-date the composition of these documents that we have access to today. From the very limited Hebrew manuscript texts known today it further becomes clear that more than one version of these documents circulated during this early period of time. From an authorship issue, it is rather pointless to fuss over whether Moses wrote them or someone else did. If you mean the documents we have today, Moses could not have written them. But if you mean many or most of the documents that served as foundational to the present documents, very likely Moses was responsible for them.<sup>16</sup>

The religious value of this general label Torah or Law is to acknowledge that this collection of documents have played an enormously significant role in the religious life of the Jewish people. It stands as the highest binding authority of all their writings regarded as sacred scripture because it contains the legal codes defining not just their religion but all of life. The only legitimate way to live life as a Jew is by carefully following the Law of God that came from Moses.

It was this comprehensive understanding of life in its totality defined by the legal codes of the Torah that presented the greatest challenges to early Christians, and down through the centuries of Christian interpretation. Jesus and the early church for the first couple of decades lived pretty much within the framework of the Torah.

<sup>14</sup>We will not treat the so-called OT Apocrypha which contains the additional books found in the Septuagint but not in the Hebrew scriptures. These documents in either the Roman Catholic Old Testament, or slightly differing versions in the various Orthodox churches are usually woven into the traditional Protestant Old Testament categories.

Some scripture of ancient origin are found in the Septuagint but are not present in the Hebrew. These additional books are Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah (which later became chapter 6 of Baruch in the Vulgate), additions to Daniel (The Prayer of Azarias, the Song of the Three Children, Susanna and Bel and the Dragon), additions to Esther, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees, 1 Esdras, Odes, including the Prayer of Manasseh, the Psalms of Solomon, and Psalm 151.

The canonical acceptance of these books varies among different Christian traditions, and there are canonical books not derived from the Septuagint. For more information regarding these books, see the articles Biblical apocrypha, Biblical canon, Books of the Bible, and Deuterocanonical books.

[“Septuagint,” wikipedia.org]

<sup>15</sup>“The earliest name for the first part of the Bible seems to have been ‘The Torah of Moses’. This title, however, is found neither in the Torah itself, nor in the works of the pre-Exilic literary prophets. It appears in Joshua (8:31–32; 23:6) and Kings (I Kings 2:3; II Kings 14:6; 23:25), but it cannot be said to refer there to the entire corpus. In contrast, there is every likelihood that its use in the post-Exilic works (Mal. 3:22; Dan. 9:11, 13; Ezra 3:2; 7:6; Neh. 8:1; II Chron. 23:18; 30:16) was intended to be comprehensive. Other early titles were ‘The Book of Moses’ (Ezra 6:18; Neh. 13:1; II Chron. 35:12; 25:4; cf. II Kings 14:6) and ‘The Book of the Torah’ (Neh. 8:3), which seems to be a contraction of a fuller name, ‘The Book of the Torah of God’ (Neh. 8:8, 18; 10:29–30; cf. 9:3).<sup>10</sup>” [“Pentateuch,” wikipedia.org]

“NT references to the Pentateuch continue along the lines already established in the OT but include specific references to Moses’ writing activity (e.g., Jn. 1:45; 5:46): Mt. 12:5; Mk. 12:26; Lk. 2:22–24; 10:26; 16:16; Jn. 7:19, 23; Gal. 3:10; etc.” [The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 3:742]

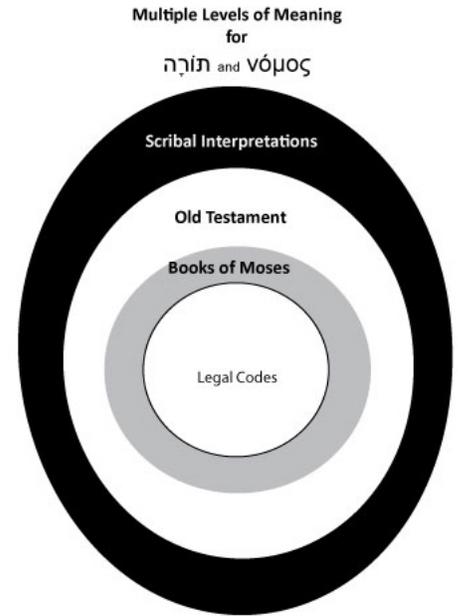
<sup>16</sup>Much of the modern controversy over Moses and the Pentateuch is -- in my opinion -- a completely artificially created debate driven by post-enlightenment ways of thinking that had virtually nothing to do with either ancient Jewish or early Christian ways of thinking. Never in the entire history of the Jewish people from their beginning to the present has the ‘authorship’ of any document of their sacred scriptures been a matter of debate or controversy. It’s just not important to them to know the name of an individual responsible for composing the documents. Up until the 1500s neither was it important to Christian thinking. But it has become a battleground for huge controversy in Christian circles since then, with nothing profitable coming from the debates. No genuinely informed scholar will debate Mosaic authorship of these present documents, but many also fail to acknowledge the obviously central involvement of Moses in the development of the early materials that served as foundational for the finalized form of these books in the exile.

Much of what Jesus taught served as an attempted correction to perceived misinterpretation of the Torah by the Judaism of His day. The Sermon on the Mount, which summarizes the essence of Jesus' teaching, was largely a "back to the Bible" call by Jesus to return to a true understanding of the Law of Moses. Jesus did not question the legitimacy of the Law, but severely condemned the misinterpretation of it especially by the Pharisees of His day (cf. Mt. 5:16-20).

In the subsequent centuries of Christian interpretative history how to handle these five documents has been problematic. Both within the gospels, and in the letters of the apostle Paul especially, there seems to be the tension of affirming the Law and at the same time denying it. Even inside the Sermon on the Mount, this tension surfaces with statements like *Μὴ νομίσητε ὅτι ἦλθον καταλῦσαι τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφήτας· οὐκ ἦλθον καταλῦσαι ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι* (5:16, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.") on the one hand. And then *Ἦκούσατε ὅτι ... ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι...* (You have heard that ... but I say to you that...) repeated six times in 5:21-48 with quotes of six different legal code demands of the Law. Jesus seemed to be affirming and denying the Law of Moses at the same time. Paul's writings only added to the tension in statements like *εἰδότες [δὲ] ὅτι οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεῦσαμεν, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ* (Gal. 2:16, yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.). For many centuries, and still among some Christian groups, the allegorizing method of scripture interpretation provided a way to both affirm and deny the Law at the same time. At the surface level of meaning the Law is denied as binding upon Christians, but at the supposed deeper 'spiritual level' of meaning it is affirmed. Not many accepted the radical approach of Marcion in the second century to completely eliminate the entire Old Testament from Christian scripture. Interestingly in modern times a few Christian groups have moved in that direction, although stopping short of the level of completely rejecting the Old Testament.<sup>17</sup>

One part of the difficulty is the multiple meanings of both the Hebrew word *תורה*, Torah, and the Greek word *νόμος* used to translate it in the New Testament. Law in both terms can mean the legal codes inside the Pentateuch, the Pentateuch itself, the entire Old Testament, and the scribal interpretive traditions accumulated by the first century. After the fifth century AD the Hebrew term also became a synonym for Talmud. Each reference must be carefully examined to determine from the context which of these levels is intended by the term. These distinctions of meaning have not always been carefully followed by interpreters of both the Old and New Testaments, thus causing some of the confusion.

As a broad genre label for the first five books of the Bible collectively, the term Law poses several challenges. But when one begins reading the text of these five documents a lot of history, poetry, and other literary forms surface inside them.<sup>18</sup> The only sections that are pure law, i.e., legal code, are the sections of the legal



<sup>17</sup>See "Christian views on the old covenant," wikipedia.org for an overview of the variety of perspectives taken toward the Old Testament in Christianity.

<sup>18</sup>The five books of the Torah are known in Judaism by their *incipits*, the initial words of the first verse of each book. For example, the Hebrew name of the first book, *Bereshit*, is the first word of Genesis 1:1: **Bereshit** (בְּרֵאשִׁית, literally "In the beginning"); **Shemot** (שְׁמוֹת, literally "Names"); **Vayikra** (וַיִּקְרָא, literally "And He called"); **Bamidbar** (בְּמִדְבָּר, literally "In the desert [of]"); **Devarim** (דְּבָרִים, literally "Things" or "Words").

The Christian names for the books are derived from the Greek Septuagint and reflect the essential theme of each book: **Genesis**: "creation"; **Exodus**: "departure"; **Leviticus**: refers to the Levites and the regulations that apply to their presence and service in the Temple, which form the bulk of the third book.; **Numbers** (Arithmoi): contains a record of the numbering of the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai and later on the plain of Moab.; **Deuteronomy**: "second law", refers to the fifth book's recapitulation of the commandments reviewed by Moses before his death.

According to the Oral tradition, the prose in the Torah is not always in chronological order. Sometimes it is ordered by concept according to the rule: "There is not 'earlier' and 'later' in the Torah" (הַרְוֵתָב הַרְוֵאמוּ מִדְּקוּמָיָא) [32] This

codes that are interspersed in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. There are three versions of legal codes embedded in these documents: Covenant Code; Holiness / Priestly Code; Deuteronomic Code. Considerable overlapping occurs among the three codes, with the codes not always defining a specific regulation with the same parameters.



Inside these five books are going to be a wide range of sub-genres, each with a distinctive pattern and function for communication. And most of these are going to be forms in common with the material found in the remaining documents of the Old Testament.

### 3.1.1.1.2 History

In the Protestant Bible arrangement, the history books begins with Joshua and end with Esther. This material covers the time period from the conquest of the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership to the return of the remnant of Jewish exiles from captivity in Babylonia. Again a wide variety of sub-genres are going to be found inside these twelve documents.<sup>19</sup> But one needs to understand how the history is presented in these vary different documents. Joshua is the conquest; this is followed by the period of the Judges; and after this comes the reign of kings over Israel. These are primarily presented in four documents, 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings, which were a single document in the Hebrew Bible. First and Second Chronicles will repeat most of the content -- some of it verbatim -- in 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings, because they follow a different understanding of history than do these four other documents. Ezra and Nehemiah will deal with the very end of Israel history in the Old Testament with a focus on the early stages of Jews migrating back into the homeland after the 70 years of exile in Babylonia. Esther is centered on the single person of this Jewish woman who became a Persian queen while in exile. Together these documents make up close to half of the content of the entire Old Testament.



Two ways of understanding history are found in these documents. The first six documents -- Joshua through 2 Kings -- interpret the history of Israel from conquest to the fall of the southern kingdom in a common way, that has been labeled 'Deuteronomistic history'<sup>20</sup> since the work of German professor Martin Noth in 1943 with his *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* publication.<sup>21</sup> The one central theme of this historical presentation

is "disobedience of the law will bring punishment by God, and particularly the withdrawal of the gift of the land."<sup>22</sup> A common 'grid' through which this material sees history is the fourfold pattern of "**people sin / God punishes / people repent / God restores,**" which is repeated in various ways in the narratives hundreds of times through out these documents. This plays itself out in the lives of individual leaders as well as the people collectively. One major theological orientation of this history is to be very critical of all of the kinds of Israel beginning with David

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position is accepted by Orthodox Judaism. Non-Orthodox Jews generally understand the same texts as signs that the current text of the Torah was redacted from earlier sources.

[“Torah,” wikipedia.org]

<sup>19</sup>In the Roman Catholic Bible, seven additional documents plus an alternative, longer version of Esther are usually added to this category: 1 Esdras, Judith, Tobit, 1-4 Maccabees. These documents extend the terminus of history down to less than two centuries before the beginning of the Christian era. The dating of 4 Maccabees, however, is the mid point of the first Christian century. But 3 and 4 Maccabees are not always included.

<sup>20</sup>“The adjectives Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic are essentially interchangeable: if they are distinguished at all, then the first refers to Deuteronomy and the second to the history.” [“Deuteronomist,” wikipedia.org]

<sup>21</sup>In the divisions of the Hebrew Bible, the sub-category “Former Prophets” corresponds exactly to the Deuteronomic history section in the Protestant Bible. Although Professor Noth believed the coherent history began with Deuteronomy chapter thirty two down to Second Kings, few scholars hold to that view today. Instead, Deuteronomy is viewed in part as a transitional document completing the Law of Moses but laying the foundations for the history of the Israelite people to the fall of the southern kingdom under the Babylonians.

<sup>22</sup>“Deuteronomic History,” askwhy.co.uk.

and ending with King Jehoiachin in 2 Kings 25.<sup>23</sup>

On the other side lay the two books of Chronicles<sup>24</sup> along with Ezra and Nehemiah.<sup>25</sup> The relationship of this history material to the Deuteronomistic history of Joshua through 2 Kings is complex.<sup>26</sup> Chronicles covers largely the same period of time, although the first nine chapters centers on genealogical tables that cover a lot

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<sup>23</sup>To be clear, a major objective of modern scholarship in this field has focused on the history of composition, with concern for the sources used in writing this history. Most of the projections of composition range from the sixth century to the fourth century BCE with a post exile time frame. To some extent this is logical since the material carries the history description into the beginning of the exile. But the theoretical projections of how this material was assembled and the precise nature of sources has proven not only highly controversial, but very elusive. Much of this grows again out of the post-enlightenment preoccupation with history writing's use of sources and specific authorship issues. Given these texts complete disinterest in such matters, along with a similar disinterest among ancient Jewish and most of the rest of the ancient world, it is no surprise that such modern probings prove almost impossible to be completed successfully. But as one scholar noted centuries ago, "Where angels fear to tread, men come thundering in!"

<sup>24</sup>"In the Hebrew Bible this work carries the title *dibrê hayyāmîm*, 'the events of the days.' The title 'Chronicles' can be traced back to Jerome, who, in his Prologus Galeatus (a preface to the Books of Samuel and Kings), provided a more appropriate title, *Chronicon Totius Divinae Historiae*, or *Chronicle of the Entire Divine History*. In his German translation of the Bible, Luther called the book *Die Chronik*, which led to the familiar "Chronicles" in English Bibles. In the LXX, Chronicles is called *Paraleipomena* (hereafter Par.), that is, 'the things omitted' or 'passed over.' The church father Theodoret interpreted this to mean that Chronicles assembled whatever the author of 1-2 Kings omitted, though this view does not indicate that Chronicles has also omitted much of what is contained in the biblical books of Kings. The division into two books appears first in the LXX and has been standard in Hebrew Bibles since the 15th century." [Ralph W. Klein, "Chronicles, Book of 1-2" In vol. 1, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 992.]

<sup>25</sup>"Chronicler, the name given the writer or school responsible for 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Scholars have suggested a variety of dates for this activity, with the most commonly held date around 400 B.C. These four books are considered a single historical work because of similar literary features and theological interests. Some scholars propose more than one period of literary activity, e.g., multiple chroniclers from two or three distinct historical periods. A growing number of scholars attribute Ezra and Nehemiah to an independent source because of inconsistencies between those books and 1 and 2 Chronicles, thematic differences such as the lack of importance of the house of David in Ezra and Nehemiah, and the manuscript evidence, which rarely finds these four books in our present OT order." [Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 163.]

<sup>26</sup>One should be careful to distinguish 1-2 Chronicles from references to others books referred to inside 1-2 Kings.

CHRONICLES OF THE KINGS (ISRAEL/JUDAH), BOOK OF THE [Heb *sēper dibrê hayyamîm lēmallê* (סֵפֶר דִּבְרֵי הַיָּמִים לַמְּלָכִי)]. A book or books not extant but cited by the author of 1-2 Kings. The term literally means "the daily affairs for [or belonging to] the kings of [Israel/Judah]," but it is most often translated as either the Chronicles of or the Annals of the Kings of Israel/Judah. The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah is mentioned fifteen times (1 Kgs 14:29; 15:7, 23; 22:46—Eng 22:45; 2 Kgs 8:23; 12:20—Eng 12:19; 14:18; 15:6, 36; 16:19; 20:20; 21:17, 25; 23:28; 24:5) in reference to every post-Solomonic ruler except Ahaziah, Athaliah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel is mentioned eighteen times (1 Kgs 14:19; 15:31; 16:5, 14, 20, 27; 22:39; 2 Kgs 1:18; 10:34; 13:8, 12; 14:15, 28; 15:11, 15, 21, 26, 31) in reference to every king of Israel except for Jehoram and Hoshea. These citations include a standard formula: "... the rest of the acts of \_\_\_ how he [or "and all that he did"] \_\_\_, behold, they are [or "are they not"] written in the book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel [or Judah]."

The author of Kings also refers to a book of the Affairs of Solomon (Heb *sēper dibrō šēlōmōh*), which is normally translated as the book of the Acts of Solomon (1 Kgs 11:41). Among the numerous sources mentioned in the OT book of Chronicles are "the book of the kings of Israel and Judah" (2 Chr 27:7), "the book of the kings of Judah and Israel" (2 Chr 16:11), "the book of the kings of Israel" (2 Chr 20:34), and "the chronicles of the kings of Israel" (2 Chr 33:18). Most scholars agree that these probably are descriptive terms rather than titles and most likely all refer to the same work. Disagreement exists as to whether these are the same books mentioned in 1-2 Kings. In addition, a book of chronicles (Heb *sēper dibrō hayyamîm*) is mentioned incidentally in Neh 12:23 as being a book in which the heads of Levite families are registered, but few scholars have connected this to the books mentioned in 1-2 Kings. The only other use of a similar term in the OT occurs in Esth 10:2 which, using the same formula used in 1-2 Kings, refers to the book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia.

Though the author of Kings specifically refers to the books of the Chronicles of the Kings only as sources for further information, it is widely assumed that he used these books as sources for his own writing (NDH, 57). Scholars who do not make this assumption generally conclude, on the basis of the titles, that they were the official court annals of the two kingdoms. For four of the kings of Judah and seven of the kings of Israel, the formula includes amplifying information ("how he \_\_\_") which would then be the only basis for judging what might have been their content. Indeed, ten of these eleven cases refer specifically to military campaigns, "conspiracies," or building projects. This corresponds well to known Mesopotamian court annals which typically include brief, highly stylized reports of military campaigns, building projects, and hunting exploits.

[Duane L. Christensen, "Chronicles of the Kings, (ISRAEL/JUDAH), Book of the" In vol. 1, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 991-92.]

of Genesis from Adam forward.<sup>27</sup> The Chronicler made extensive use of the Deuteronomistic history, but often repositioned the narrative perspective out of a different theological viewpoint. For example the Chronicler completely omits any reference to the Bathsheba affair of David.<sup>28</sup> David comes out looking much more positive and righteous. Were this an isolated instance it would mean one this, but this is a consistent pattern whereby the Chronicler portrays the kings ruling from Jerusalem beginning with David and continuing through those in the southern kingdom enormously more righteous and loyal to God. At the same time the wickedness of the kings in the north is highlighted more. He by this reflects a political loyalty to the southern kingdom that saw nothing but evil in the northern kingdom. This perspective stands in stark contrast to that of the Deuteronomistic historians who saw evil and wickedness rampant all through the covenant people from the kings down and thus as the reason for God's destruction of both kingdoms.

One other genre issue that needs to be addressed and that brings into the picture the issue of history. Since the Enlightenment the western world has come to define history purely in horizontal terms, that exclude vertical dynamics. The standard definition reads: history is "a chronological record of significant events (as affecting a nation or institution) often including an explanation of their causes."<sup>29</sup> Over the early periods of the Enlightenment any perceived divine element in historical occurrence was systematically removed. Although this definition of history has continued to evolve over the past four or five centuries, no allowance for the activity of any deity in history is made. To be sure, historical references to religious activity are included but only from a human perspective. All through the ancient world the idea of history (ההיסטוריה, ἱστορία, historia; historia, histoire, Geschichte) not only include deity in historical actions, but quite often -- as with Hebrew history -- the heart of history was not how people interacted to one another, but instead how God and His covenant people Israel interacted with one another. How people interacted was included but always the horizontal was secondary to the vertical.

When we in western culture try to make historical judgments about the ancient past modern definitions of history will dominant the framing of those judgments. Usually in non technical study, the vertical aspects of ancient history are seen as valid only for the history inside the Bible, but are automatically rejected for those outside the Bible. But for those working at a scholarly level such biased distinctions are not considered legitimate and clearly not scholarly. Modern scientific oriented history must treat the ancient past equally and fairly without prejudicing the evaluations. But as is obvious this creates enormous tensions. How does one do scholarly assessment of the ancient past as a committed believer in God and with high regard for the Bible? This dilemma has been present since the early days of the Enlightenment and continues through our day. No easy answer exists.

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<sup>27</sup>Some print volumes, also now available in digital form through Logos Systems Inc., are quite helpful in listing the parallel passages that surface. The older standard work is Crockett, William. *A Harmony of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles*. New York; Chicago; Toronto; London; Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell, 1897. Newer publications that cover all of the OT include Jackson, Jeffrey Glen. *Synopsis of the Old Testament*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009.

<sup>28</sup>Note **2 Sam. 11:1 - 12:31. 11.1** *In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle*, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; *they ravaged the Ammonites*, and *besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.* [11:2-12:25, the Bathsheba affair] **12.26** Now *Joab fought against Rabbah* of the Ammonites, and *took the royal city.* **27** Joab sent messengers to David, and said, "I have fought against Rabbah; moreover, I have taken the water city. **28** Now, then, gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it; or I myself will take the city, and it will be called by my name." **29** So David gathered all the people together and went to Rabbah, and fought against it and took it. **30** *He took the crown of Milcom from his head; the weight of it was a talent of gold, and in it was a precious stone; and it was placed on David's head. He also brought forth the spoil of the city, a very great amount.* **31** *He brought out the people who were in it, and set them to work with saws and iron picks and iron axes, or sent them to the brickworks. Thus he did to all the cities of the Ammonites. Then David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.*

Note the chroniclers account in **1 Chron. 20:1-3. 1** *In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle*, Joab led out the army, *ravaged the country of the Ammonites*, and came and *besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. Joab attacked Rabbah, and overthrew it. 2* *David took the crown of Milcom from his head; he found that it weighed a talent of gold, and in it was a precious stone; and it was placed on David's head. He also brought out the booty of the city, a very great amount. 3* *He brought out the people who were in it, and set them to work with saws and iron picks and axes. Thus David did to all the cities of the Ammonites. Then David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.*

Very obviously the chronicler is borrowing from the Deuteronomistic history but re-writes the narrative including omitting the hugely negative account of David's immoral activity. This enables him to paint a much more positive picture of David than is found in his deuteronomistic source.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. "History," Merriam-Webster online dictionary

### 3.1.1.1.3 Prophets

Again, the Jewish Bible division of Prophets (נְבִיאִים *Nəbī'im*) and that called Prophets in the Christian Bible differ considerably from one another. The Jewish category includes, under the sub-category Former Prophets, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings (4 books), and, under the sub-category Latter Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the book of Twelve Minor Prophets (4 books). The Protestant Bible designates as Prophets only what the Hebrew Bible includes as Latter Prophets. The first difference in it is that the single Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets, the *Trei Asar*, is unpacked into twelve separate books, one for each prophet. Additionally the Lamentations of Jeremiah is linked to the Book of Jeremiah, and Daniel is shifted to the Prophets category from the Hebrew Writings group. Also this expanded category is then subdivided into Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel) and Minor Prophets (Hosea - Malachi; 12 books). Finally, this category was shifted to the final grouping category in the Protestant Bible over against the middle category in the Hebrew Bible.

Regarding genre concerns, the Protestant Bible by this grouping emphasizes the later understanding of prophecy acknowledged by the Latter Prophets grouping in the Hebrew Bible, over against the earlier understanding of it signaled by the Hebrew Bible's group Former Prophets. Primarily but not exclusively two Hebrew words relate to the idea of prophecy: רֹאֶה (*rō'eh*), *seer*, and נְבִיא (*nābī'*), *prophet*. Although the terms, especially early on in Israelite history, could be used interchangeably with either positive or negative tones, by the beginning of the classical eight century prophets of Amos and Isaiah, the latter term increasingly specified the prophets, while the other term took on a negative tone close to 'fortune teller'.<sup>30</sup> The ministry of the classical prophets (the Latter Prophets in the Hebrew Bible and the Prophets in the Christian Bible) was seen as normative and the legitimate extension of the role of Moses as the first great prophet of Israel. The core responsibility of these prophets was to deliver God's warnings to His covenant people that divine punishment was coming to them because of their disobedience to God's Law. The predictive elements in their prophesying remained very general without much specific detail. More importantly, their message to the people was God's message to straighten up their lives or else face God's wrath. The chicle expresses the idea well: a biblical prophet is primarily a forth-teller rather than a fore-teller. Unfortunately the latter idea of predicting the future is what arouses the curiosity of many Bible readers and has led to all kinds of misunderstandings of the texts of the prophets in the Old Testament. Thus when trying to interpret a passage in this section of the Bible careful attention must be given to the nature of biblical prophecy so as to not twist it into something else.

Inside these documents of the Prophets in the Old Testament the reader will find a wide variety of sub-genres. One sub-form distinctive to the Prophets category is the Oracle.<sup>31</sup> This represents a distinctive message delivered to the people by the prophet and is usually rendered in poetry structure in most modern translations today. It possessed more rhythmic and poetic qualities than the straight forward speaking of the prophets. Content and theme orientation also play a role in distinguishing this form of prophetic speech.<sup>32</sup> Careful attention to

<sup>30</sup>1 Samuel 9:9 is instructive here as a parenthetical comment inserted by the exilic editors of the text reflecting the much later perspective: "(Formerly in Israel, anyone who went to inquire of God would say, 'Come, let us go to the seer'; for the one who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer.)"

<sup>31</sup>"Although discussions of prophecy in the OT often use the English word 'oracle' as a general term for any speech by a prophet, the RSV and other modern translations use it mostly to translate a single Hebrew word, *maśśā'*. *Maśśā'* designates a specific type of speech used by ancient Israelite prophets. Thus when translating *maśśā'*, 'oracle' indicates that a prophetic passage or speech belongs to this specific type.

"The OT identifies eighteen passages by means of the Hebrew term *maśśā'*. The RSV labels all of them with the term 'oracle.' These are: 2 Kgs 9:26a; Isa 13:2-14:23; 14:29-32; 15:1b-16:12; 17:1b-11; 19:1b-25; 21:1b-10, 11b-12, 13b-17; 22:1b-14; 23:1b-18; 30:6b-7; Ezek 12:11-16; Nah 1:2-3:19; Hab 1:2-2:20; Zech 9:1-11:3; 12:1b-14:21; Mal 1:2-3:24[—Eng 1:2-4:6]."

[Richard D. Weis, "Oracle: Old Testament" In vol. 5, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 28.]

<sup>32</sup>"Within ancient Israel the type, or genre, of speech called *maśśā'* is found exclusively within the prophetic movement. A *maśśā'* responds to a question about a lack of clarity in the relation between divine intention and human reality. Either the divine intention being expressed in some aspect of human experience is unclear, or the divine intention is clear enough, but the human events through which it will gain expression are unclear. In any event, the initiative for a *maśśā'* lies not with the deity or the prophet, but with the prophet's community—or a member thereof—which asks the question to which the *maśśā'* is a response.

"The topic of a *maśśā'* is thus always some person, group, situation, or event (e.g., Philistia, the ravaging of Moab, the destruction of Tyre, Babylon, the renovation of postexilic Judah, Nineveh, Jerusalem, King Ahab). The addressee of a *maśśā'* is either the

the distinctives of this sub-form then should be given in the interpretive process.

#### 3.1.1.1.4 Writings / Wisdom

Just as with the previous category, the Hebrew Bible did not group a lot of the material the same way as is done in the Protestant Bible. In the latter the title Wisdom is normally the label given to Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Job.<sup>33</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, the category Writings (כְּתוּבִים, *Ketuvim* or *Kəṭūbîm*) includes Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah (1 book), and Chronicles (1 book).<sup>34</sup> In part, this grouping had to do with an understood lesser level of inspiration for these documents: “The Ketuvim are believed to have been written under the *Ruach HaKodesh*, but with one level less authority than that of prophecy.”<sup>35</sup> Thus the literary quality of the documents did not play a major role for grouping in the Hebrew Bible.

First, some clarification of the term ‘wisdom’ is necessary. “WISDOM IN THE OT [Heb *ḥokma* (חָכְמָה); Gk *sophia* (σοφία)]. ‘Wisdom’ is a term that can be used to indicate certain books which deal particularly with (biblical) wisdom, or it can refer to a movement in the ancient world associated with ‘teachers’ or sages, and it can also suggest a particular understanding of reality which presents some contrasts with other biblical books.”<sup>36</sup> From a genre concern, all three aspects of the word ‘wisdom’ come into play in understanding the literary role of the OT books that fall under this label. The Hebrew term *ḥkm* for wisdom shows up 318 times in the OT in one form or another; over half of these are found in Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes (183x). Add to that the hundred plus uses of the Greek terms σοφία

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prophet’s own community or the person or group that is the topic of the passage.

“A *maśśā*’ is based on a particular revelation (given to the prophet) of the divine intention or of a forthcoming divine action. A speech or text belonging to this genre was composed by the prophet in order to expound the way in which the revealed divine action or intention would actually express itself in human affairs. Thus, regardless of the overall formal structure they exhibit, all texts belonging to the genre *maśśā*’ link descriptions of God’s acts or intentions with descriptions of human acts and events in order to present events taking place in the human realm as the manifestation or result of divine initiation (e.g., Isa 13:6–8; 19:1b; 23:11–13; Zech 9:4–5a).

“On the basis of this exposition a *maśśā*’ gives direction for human action in the present or near future, or provides insight into the future. Those texts that give insight into the future are predominantly announcements of future events and conditions (e.g., Isa 17:1b–11; 30:6b–7; Ezek 12:11–16). Those texts that give direction contain commands and/or prohibitions that are justified by reports of past or present events and conditions (e.g., Isa 15:1b–16:12; 21:1b–10; 22:1b–14; 23:1b–18). Commands or prohibitions concerning jubilation and lamentation are addressed to the person or group that is the text’s topic (e.g., Isa 23:1b–6, 14). Commands or prohibitions concerning concrete human action apart from jubilation or lamentation are always given to the text’s addressee (e.g., Isa 16:3–4a is addressed to officials of Judah, not to the Moabites).”

[Richard D. Weis, “Oracle: Old Testament” In vol. 5, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 28.]

<sup>33</sup>In the Roman Catholic Bible the books of the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus (ben Sira, Sirach) are added to this category.

This second document has a distinct history centered around its name. “The “Book of ben Sirach” (ספר בן סירא, *Sefer ben Sira*) was originally written in Hebrew, and is also known as the ‘Proverbs of ben Sirach’ (משלי בן סירא, *Mišley ben Sira*) or the ‘Wisdom of ben Sirach’ (חכמת בן סירא, *Hokhmat ben Sira*). The Greek translation was accepted in the Septuagint under the (abbreviated) name of the author: *Sirakh* (Σιραχ). Some Greek manuscripts give as the title the ‘Wisdom of Iēsous Son of Sirakh’ or in short the ‘Wisdom of Sirakh’. The older Latin versions were based on the Septuagint, and simply transliterated the Greek title in Latin letters: Sirach. In the Vulgate the book is called *Liber Iesu filii Sirach* (‘Book of Jesus Son of Sirach’). The Nova Vulgata and many modern English translations of the Apocrypha use the title given by the early Latin Fathers: Ecclesiasticus, literally ‘of the Church’ because of its frequent use in Christian teaching and worship. Today it is more frequently known as Sirach. The name Siracides, of more recent coinage, is also encountered, especially in scholarly works.” [“Sirach,” wikipedia.org]

<sup>34</sup>The sub groupings of this section inside the Hebrew Bible are the (1) *Poetic Books* of Psalms, Proverbs, and Job; the (2) *five scrolls, Hamesh Megillot* (*Five Megillot*), including Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. In Jewish understanding they did not gain authoritative status as sacred writings until around 200 AD. A third catch all category (3) *of other books* includes Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles (1 book). Interestingly, major portions of both Daniel and Ezra were composed originally in Aramaic rather than in Hebrew. [“Ketuvim,” wikipedia.org]

<sup>35</sup>“Ketuvim,” wikipedia.org

<sup>36</sup>Roland E. Murphy, “Wisdom in the OT” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 920.

and σοφός in Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon in the deuterocanonical books. With these one encounters the heart of the Hebrew wisdom literary tradition.

Some of the sub-genres dominantly found in these OT books are **proverbs** (לְשׁוֹן, māšāl) and aphorisms.<sup>37</sup> These patterns and other forms will tend to play off the core structure of a wisdom saying. Usually two lines in length, some expression of parallelism common to ancient Hebrew will form the heart of the saying.<sup>38</sup> As we will explore further below in topic 3.1.1.3.1, identifying the nature of the parallelism is a critical part of the interpretive process. Out of this also comes admonitions, disparate sayings (cf. Prov. 10ff.), consecutive poetry (cf. Prov. 1-9) and other patterns.

Ecclesiastes presents unique problems from a literary standpoint. How it is structured remains puzzling to most scholars, along with identification of some of the sub-genre forms.<sup>39</sup> Thus understanding it with confidence is somewhat more challenging than with the other documents. This urges great caution in the interpretive conclusions that are reached.

One common element in the Hebrew wisdom tradition is the theological perspective, that tends to be different from elsewhere in the Old Testament. The canonical wisdom books, in contrast to the two apocryphal wisdom documents, will not mention “elements generally considered to be typically Israelite: the promises to the patriarchs, the Exodus experience, the Sinai covenant, etc.”<sup>40</sup> Part of this perspective comes out of the shared wisdom heritage with Egyptian and other Semitic wisdom traditions.<sup>41</sup> The salvation history, so important to the rest of the Old Testament, is missing in the Wisdom materials. The focus is on day to day experiences and the reality of God

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<sup>37</sup>“The definition of ‘proverb’ is notoriously difficult. The Hebrew term *māšāl*, commonly translated as ‘proverb,’ has a wide range of meanings (indicating even the taunt song in Isa 14:4ff.). Etymologically it seems to be connected with comparison and with rule or power. Another term for the sayings in the Wisdom Literature is ‘aphorism.’ J. Williams (1980: 38–40) enumerates several features of aphoristic speech exhibited by the biblical proverbs: the speech is assertive, apparently self-explanatory, and says something as though it is *a priori*; it is frequently paradoxical; it is brief and concise; there are frequent plays on words; the comparison is a basic feature. It appears that the word ‘proverb’ should be used for sayings that have come into popular use, whatever their origins (Hermission 1968: 33; J. Williams 1981: 78–80).” [Roland E. Murphy, “Wisdom in the OT” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 921.]

<sup>38</sup>“The basic wisdom saying is usually composed of two lines in parallelism, a common feature of Proverbs 10–31. Very often there is simply a juxtaposition, without a verb, as the following illustrates: ‘A gatherer in summer—a wise son; a sleeper during harvest—a disgraceful son’ (Prov 10:5). The juxtapositional style, which is not evident in the usual translations, enables the author to put things together (synonymous parallelism), and also to contrast them (antithetic parallelism). But even the ‘identity’ of two subjects is more or less an implicit comparison. Sometimes the comparison is made explicit: ‘Like a bird straying from its nest—a man straying from his home’ (Prov 27:8). The style of the sayings varies considerably. One can have ‘not good’ sayings (Prov 19:2), or ‘abomination’ sayings (Prov 11:1), or ‘better’ sayings (Prov 22:1), or ‘numerical’ sayings (x-number, plus 1; cf. Prov 30:18–19), or ‘impossible questions’ (Job 8:11; Crenshaw 1979). In English, or in any other vernacular translation, it is practically impossible to convey the striking alliterations, assonance, and wordplay which generally characterize the collections of Hebrew proverbs (McCreesh 1982). Two examples must suffice: *bā’ zādôn wayyābō’ qālôn* (Prov 11:2a, ‘comes pride, then comes disgrace’); *ṭōb šēm miššemēn ṭōb* (Eccl 7:1a, ‘a good name is better than good ointment’). Such sayings deal with a vast array of topics. Sometimes they register a paradox (Prov 20:17), or convey an observation: ‘a rich man’s wealth—his strong city; destruction of poor—their poverty’ (Prov 10:15). The latter saying merely registers a fact: money makes a difference. It does not of itself draw a moral (contrast 15:16). However, most proverbs are value-laden and hence explicitly didactic, attempting to influence action.” [Roland E. Murphy, “Wisdom in the OT” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 921.]

<sup>39</sup>“As the structure of Ecclesiastes is highly disputed (Wright 1968; 1980), so also the literary forms are difficult to capture. The several sayings in the book (e.g., chaps. 7, 10) are obvious. For the rest, the author seems to utilize reflections on various turns in life (Ellermeier 1967: 66–79; Braun 1973: 155–158).” [Roland E. Murphy, “Wisdom in the OT” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 921.]

<sup>40</sup>Roland E. Murphy, “Wisdom in the OT” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 922.

<sup>41</sup>My first realization of this came in the early 1980s when I sat in the lecture class of Prof. Johannes Botterweck studying the Book of Proverbs in the Katholische Fakultät at the University of Bonn. We spent the first half of the semester translating various Egyptian and Assyrian texts (from the original languages) in German and then analyzing them. When we begin working our way through the Hebrew text of Proverbs, I was astounded at the close parallelisms between the Hebrew traditions and these other ancient wisdom perspectives.

in those experiences, rather than on the covenant themes of God's relationship to Israel through the covenants with Abraham and through Moses.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.1.1.2 Basic Literary Forms in the New Testament

By the second half of the first Christian century when the documents of the NT began appearing, the world of the NT writers was dramatically different than that for the editors of the documents of the OT some four or five centuries before. In its beginnings with Jesus and the early church through the early 40s, the language of Jesus and Christianity was Aramaic with Hebrew in the temple and the synagogues. But the Pauline mission to the non-Jewish world, in large part, had ushered in a new era of Christianity transitioning it from an insider movement within Judaism to a new and separate religious movement apart from Judaism, and consistently the object of hostility from Judaism. The world of the Mediterranean Sea was controlled by the Romans and the impact of Greek culture, especially in the eastern Mediterranean Sea region, was pervasive and filtered through every culture and ethnic group including the Jews. Thus the writing of the 27 documents of the New Testament from the late 40s to the mid 90s of the century was done in the *lingua franca* of that world, Koine Greek. None of the documents of the NT was targeting Christians living in Palestine, but rather in cities and regions often far away from the Jewish homeland. These were both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians who shared the common language of Koine Greek. Thus no NT document was written either in Aramaic (or Hebrew) or in Latin (understood but not widely used outside official Roman government circles in the eastern Empire).

The choice of literary forms in which to cast the message of the Gospel in written expression is fascinating. Most of the forms have connections to existing forms in the Greco-Roman world which had been around for centuries. The one basic genre not previously in existence was what was labeled εὐαγγέλιον by the church fathers toward the end of the second century AD. Yet, as we will observe, it possessed some traits in common with the ancient βίος, 'life of ---', and also a few with standardized norms of ἱστορία, history, of the first century world. Of the 27 documents in the NT, 21 of them fall under the grouping of 'letter.' This is not surprising since writing a letter -- either formal or personal -- was the next best means of communication outside of oral conversation in the ancient world. The other forms find usage in part because the categories themselves were targeting specific kinds of communication.

Four categories of basic genre surface inside the New Testament: gospel, history, letter, and apocalypse. These literary categories serve as the organizing anchor for the 27 documents. One important point is that the sequential listing both of the groups and the individual documents inside each category has absolutely nothing to do with the time-frame of the writing of each document. In fact chronologically in very broad terms, Paul's letters were written first with the General Letters except for the three letters of John composed during the same time frame of the late 40s to the mid 60s. The first three gospels -- the synoptic gospels -- and Acts come during the late 60s to the early 80s. And the writings of the Johannine section -- the fourth gospel, three letters, and Revelation -- come sometime from the late 80s to the mid 90s. Additionally, as already noted in an earlier chapter, the sequential listing of the letters both in the Pauline section and the General Letters section is based solely on a descending length from longest to shortest and has again absolutely nothing to do with the time of the writing of each document.

#### 3.1.1.2.1 Gospel

What is a gospel? It is not the same as Gospel. Inside the New Testament the term εὐαγγέλιον is used some 76 times to refer to the orally proclaimed message of salvation in Jesus Christ. Inside the New Testament this is its sole meaning.



<sup>42</sup>“The fact of the matter is that there is no incompatibility between the saving God of history and the God of human experience. The Psalms show this perhaps most clearly. The psalmists usually ask for salvation in the concrete order of things, not for an intervention in national history. They seek *šālôm* from the hostile agents they recognized in daily life. It is this same *šālôm* which the sages held out to their readers: the good life. Indifference to Israel's historical experience does not indicate that wisdom is any the less 'Israelite' or 'religious'.” [Roland E. Murphy, “Wisdom in the OT” In vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 922.]

But late in the second century the word begins to surface with a different meaning. Now εὐαγγέλιον is being used to refer to a written story of the life and ministry of Jesus. Although εὐαγγέλιον is only used in the singular to refer to the Gospel, in this later usage it begins showing up in the plural τὰ εὐαγγέλια referencing the multiple written accounts of the story of Jesus. Earlier in the middle of the century, the Latin church father Justin Martyr (*Apologia*. I 66) labeled them *apomnēmonemata*, memoirs using the label of Xenophon describing the writings about Socrates and implying historical - biographical content in the documents. The Greek label



εὐαγγέλια, gospels, became the dominant designation not only of the four canonical written gospels but also of the many apocryphal<sup>43</sup> and Gnostic gospels that began circulation in the late second century.<sup>44</sup> Thus the label εὐαγγέλιον referring to a written document came to apply to documents attempting to present a story about Jesus of Nazareth in what He said or did. This trait became a central identifying mark: it was a document about the life and ministry of Jesus.

One important question arises but doesn't have a clear answer: when did the term εὐαγγέλιον begin to be used regarding the four canonical gospels? Prof. Martin Hengel of Tübingen university has argued strongly that the Greek label originated when the canonical documents began to be circulated as a collection (a growing collection to four as they were written) of authoritative writings about Jesus. He projects this clearly sometime within the time frame of 69 to 100 AD, more likely toward the end of it. The problem with this is the complete lack of evidence from external sources to support it. His view is solely based on deductive reasoning.<sup>45</sup> Additionally the source of the term εὐαγγέλιον Prof. Hengel saw as coming from Mark 1:1, Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [υἱοῦ θεοῦ], [the beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, God's Son](#). From the extremely limited data that can

<sup>43</sup>“Many Gospels or narrative accounts of all or part of Jesus’ earthly life and teaching, including his appearances on earth between the resurrection and the ascension, were written in the early centuries of Christianity, besides the four Gospels that became canonical. Most of these noncanonical, or apocryphal, Gospels do not resemble the canonical Gospels in genre. Some works that were entitled Gospels, such as the Gospel of Truth, the Gospel of Philip, the Coptic Gospel of the Egyptians and the Gospel of Eve, do not conform to the definition of providing narrative accounts of the life or teaching of Jesus. Many extracanonical traditions about the life and teaching of Jesus, some of great importance for the study of the NT and its background, are not found in Gospels as such but in other early Christian literature.” [Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).]

<sup>44</sup>The category of New Testament Apocryphal Gospels will typically contain references to accounts under the following groupings: Infancy gospels; Jewish Christian gospels; Non-canonical gospels; sayings gospels; passion gospels. Increasingly this is a distinct category from the so-called Gnostic texts which are usually subgrouped as Dialogues with Jesus, General texts concerning Jesus, Sethian texts concerning Jesus, and Ritual diagrams. Most of the NT Apocryphal Gospels are also gnostic in belief but by format and content emphasis are distinct from the Gnostic texts category.

As an illustration one can get some feel for the later highly Hellenistic orientation of these documents by looking at the Infancy Gospel of James. The full document contains three sections of eight chapters each: • the first contains the story of the unique birth of Mary to Anna and her childhood and dedication to the temple, • the second starts when she is 12 years old, and through the direction of an angel, Saint Joseph is selected to become her husband. • the third relates the Nativity of Jesus, with the visit of midwives, hiding of Jesus from Herod the Great in a feeding trough and the parallel hiding in the hills of John the Baptist and his mother (Elizabeth) from Herod Antipas. A major point of this writing is to establish the perpetual virginity doctrine of Mary which became important in later Christianity. This is done by both claiming Joseph as a widower with children from his first wife before marrying Mary, and second by the supposed mid-wife, Salome, who declared her to be a virgin forever. Of course this is pure fiction invented to justify twisted doctrines developed in contradiction to the canonical gospels.

<sup>45</sup>Having known Martin for many years prior to his death as a personal friend, he was never shy about projecting hypotheses based more on logic than on factual evidence. And he would passionately defend his views against any challenger.

be gleaned from the church father sources, such a hypothesis is clearly reasonable, but remains just a hypothesis and not an established fact.

During New Testament scholarship of the twentieth century, views shifted back and forth regarding the history and the biographical aspects of the canonical gospels. Because so much of modern technical studies was built off the Enlightenment views of history, the acceptance of the historical accuracy, the historicity, of the gospel accounts of the life of Jesus has covered the full range of total skepticism to complete confidence. On the skeptical side, the question of the ‘historical Jesus’ has been a battle ground since the 1920s in many circles. The so-called modernist / fundamentalist controversies of the first half of the twentieth century raged in large part over whether or not there was a historical Jesus, and, if so, how much could we really know about him. The emergence of Redaction Criticism in the 1950s (Redaktionsgeschichte, Kompositionsgeschichte, or Redaktionstheologie) brought about major shifts away from purely historicity concerns to the realization that the genre gospel was more interested in presenting a theological or religious interpretation of Jesus than a pure history of Jesus, or even a biography of Jesus. Widely practiced still today across the theological spectrum this methodology has put the emphasis closer to what is stated clearly inside the two gospels of Luke (1:1-4) and John (20:30-31) as the purpose behind the writing of these gospel accounts. The current discussions over the past three decades in the western hemisphere mostly have centered on tracing similarities and differences of gospel to the ancient Greco-Roman βίος, *biography*.<sup>46</sup> The problem is that while some writing traits are shared between εὐαγγέλιον and βίος, substantial differences between them are also present. Then the distinction between both εὐαγγέλιον

## Codex Vaticanus



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<sup>46</sup>One of problems with the Greek label βίος or its Latin equivalent *vitae* is that it focuses on what can be described as physical existence and appearance, in contrast to the much more widely used term ζωή. Both terms are usually translated as ‘life’ but have profoundly different perspectives on what constitutes life. The first term βίος, as designating an ancient form of biography, signals the depiction is going to be on the external expression of a person’s existence including his physical appearance, his extraordinary accomplishments, the amount of power he accumulated, the number of people he controlled and/or defeated in battle etc. But the gospel narratives in our New Testament have little interest in such things; instead, they are much more focused on Jesus’ ζωή, the life dynamic given Him via being both God and man at the same time. Luke locates this ζωή especially in the presence and leadership of the Holy Spirit over Jesus’ life.

Below is a listing of the ancient lives now known to exist:

“Greco-Roman ‘lives’ circulating alone that are extant in significant portions include: Satyrus, Life of Euripides (3d century B.C.E.); Andronicus, Life of Aristotle (ca. 70 B.C.E.), the substance of which is probably to be found in the *Vitae Aristotelis Marciana* (Momigliano 1971:86–87); Nicolaus of Damascus, Life of Augustus (1st century B.C.E.); Tacitus, Life of Agricola (98 C.E.); the anonymous Life of Aesop (2d century B.C.); the anonymous Life of Secundus (2d century C.E.); Lucian, Life of Demonax, Life of Alexander, and Passing of Peregrinus (ca. 180 C.E.); Philostratus, Life of Apollonius of Tyana (216 C.E.); Porphyry, Life of Pythagoras and Life of Plotinus (3d century C.E.); Ps-Callisthenes, Life of Alexander (ca. 300 C.E.).

“Certain Jewish and Christian ‘lives’ also circulated alone. Philo, Life of Moses, On Abraham, and On Joseph (ca. 25 B.C.E.) are Jewish biographies circulating outside a collection of “lives.” Examples from the numerous Christian “lives” circulating individually include: Pontius, Life of Cyprian (259 C.E.); Eusebius, Life of Constantine (early 4th century C.E.); the anonymous Life of Pachomius (4th century C.E.); Athanasius, Life of Anthony (357 C.E.); Jerome, Life of Paul, the Hermit (376 C.E.) and Life of Malchus (386 C.E.); Life of Hilarion (391 C.E.); Sulpicius Severus, Life of Martin of Tours (397 C.E.); Paulinus of Milan, Life of Ambrose (400 C.E.); Palladius, Life of Chrysostom (408 C.E.); Hilary, Life of Honoratus (431 C.E.); Ennodius, Life of Epiphanius (503 C.E.).

“Greco-Roman collections of ‘lives’ include: Cornelius Nepos, Lives of Great Generals (1st century B.C.E.); Plutarch, Parallel Lives (100 C.E.); Suetonius, Lives of the Twelve Caesars (120 C.E.) and Lives of Illustrious Men (110 C.E.); Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers (3d century C.E.); *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (3d–4th centuries C.E.). The anonymous *The Lives of the Prophets* (1st century C.E.) is a Jewish collection of brief sketches of the “lives” of the prophets. Jerome’s *Lives of Illustrious Men* (4th century C.E.) offers an example of a Christian collection.”

[Charles H. Talbert, “Biography, Ancient” In vol. 1, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 746.]

This represents only a small portion of the writings that are referenced in ancient literature.

and βίος from ἱστορία, history,<sup>47</sup> comes into the picture.<sup>48</sup> This idea by the beginning of the Christian era had become established as a prose depiction of the past in place of epic poetry, e.g., Homer's *Illiad*, as the vehicle for describing the past. The Greek philosopher Herodotus (484-425 BEC) is credited with establishing history as a major vehicle of describing the past. And it was this Greek tradition of history that shaped the understanding of the Romans and most of the rest of the Roman world. Clearly the canonical gospels contain historical elements, and generally follow a basic chronological order in presenting the life of Jesus. The indication by Luke in the Prologue to his gospel in 1:1-4 signals the use of typical patterns for writing ancient history in his using sources and thorough investigation into the materials as preparation for writing his gospel account.<sup>49</sup> To what extent the

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<sup>47c</sup> ἱστορέω is to be derived from ἵστωρ, a word which is found in the older Greek of several districts, and which is formed from the stem ϖιδ in the reduced grade with an ending -τωρ as a nomen agentis.<sup>1</sup> The meaning is 'one who knows,' 'one who has seen,' 'one who is acquainted with the facts.' The word is used both as noun and adjective.<sup>2</sup> It should not be overlooked that in the first instance it denotes an action, and only secondarily a state. The ἵστωρ is not merely one who knows; he is one who puts his knowledge to effect.

ἱστορέω and ἱστορία derive from ἵστωρ as ἀδικέω and ἀδικία from ἄδικος. The verb means to know in the special sense of to put knowledge to effect, and the noun this putting to effect, or its result. Study of the usage yields for ἱστορέω and ἱστορία the senses of 'to investigate,' 'to enquire,' and 'investigation,' 'knowledge'; cf. the Ionians.<sup>3</sup> But ἱστορέω can also mean 'to bear witness to' in Hippocrates.<sup>4</sup> This sense arises naturally from the basic meaning. The man who knows puts his knowledge into effect vis-à-vis the ignorant by telling what he knows. But the sense of 'to investigate' is also natural. For knowledge cannot be separated from inquiry. In many cases the activity of knowledge necessarily implies that of investigation.<sup>5</sup> The Ionian representatives of ἱστορίη, Thales, Heraclitus, Hecataeus of Miletus, and Herodotus, surpassed their contemporaries as investigators.<sup>6</sup> The word ἱστορέω passed from Ionic into Attic tragedy in the sense of 'to enquire.'<sup>7</sup> With Ionic nature philosophy ἱστορία also passed into Attic philosophy in the sense of 'enquiry,' 'science,' 'information.' Plato knows the term,<sup>8</sup> and uses it as a target of witticisms.<sup>9</sup> He does not adopt it into his scholarly vocabulary. Perhaps the fact that Heraclitus uses it for a valueless smattering of many things<sup>10</sup> has some influence here. But Aristotle finds a place for it in his terminology. He speaks of ἡ ἱστορία ἢ περὶ τὰ ζῷα or ἡ ζῳικὴ ἱστορία.<sup>11</sup> Later Theophrastus speaks περὶ φυτῶν ἱστορία (ed. F. Wimmer, p. 1 ff.). Here ἱστορία is information resting on methodical and scientific research. The word does not necessarily imply that the method is inductive. In this general sense the word was used for a long time, and passed into Latin. Latin has the phrase *naturalis historia* for natural science.<sup>12</sup>

"We cannot say exactly when ἱστορία came to be used for 'history.' This was certainly from the time of Aristotle,<sup>13</sup> and probably of Herodotus.<sup>14</sup> Thucydides does not use ἱστορία or ἱστορεῖν. He calls his work (I, 1, 1) συγγράφειν, not merely to differentiate himself from Herodotus,<sup>15</sup> but more likely because ἱστορία was not yet commonly used in the sense of history. As the title of a historical work ἱστορία is first found in Ephorus, then Polybius and others.<sup>16</sup> Why it took on this narrower sense, we can only conjecture. It is not irrelevant that according to a later account Pythagoras called geometry ἱστορίη.<sup>17</sup> ἱστορία is an account of what happened on the basis of research, as distinct from poetic narration."

[*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 3:391-93.]

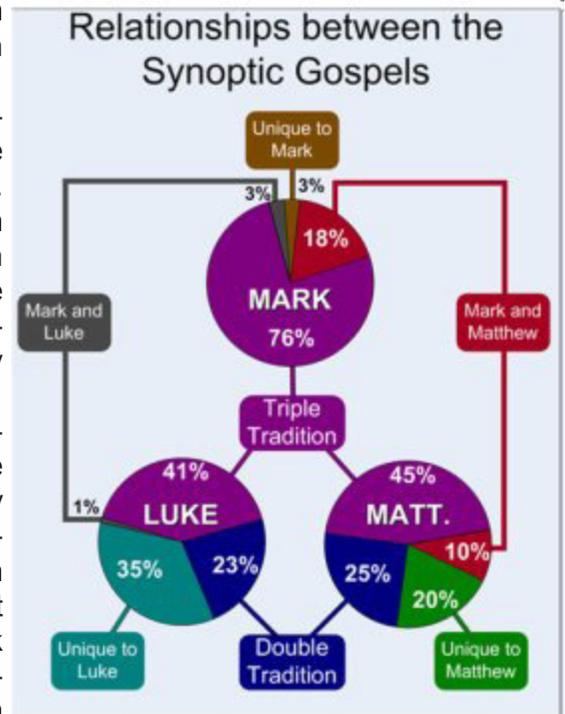
<sup>48c</sup> Although there is no great uniformity in these writings that designate themselves 'lives,' it is still possible to discern what is essential and what is accidental to ancient biography. It is constitutive of ancient biography that the subject be a distinguished or notorious figure (kings, generals, philosophers, literary figures, lawgivers, prophets, or saints) and that the aim be to expose the essence of the person. Lucian, *Demonax* (67) puts it succinctly: 'These are a very few things out of the many which I might have mentioned, but they will suffice to give my readers a notion of the sort of man he was.' This constitutive feature becomes clear when biography is compared with history in antiquity. Whereas history focuses on the distinguished and significant acts of great men in the political and social spheres, biography is concerned with the essence of the individual. This difference may be seen at two points where history most nearly approaches biography. The first is the historical monograph which concentrates primarily on one individual. In Sallust's *Catiline* and *Jugurtha* the aim is not to set forth the individuals' essence but to narrate political events with which these two individuals were associated. The second is the incorporation of biographical material into a historical record. In Dio Cassius' *Roman History* (45-56) biographical material about Augustus is incorporated into a history of Rome. The very inclusion of this material in a historical context changes its aim from concern with Augustus' individual essence to his place in a social and political process. The same thing happens when Eusebius incorporates material from his earlier *Apology* for the *Life of Origen* into his *Ecclesiastical History* (6). Biography is interested in what sort of person the individual is, the subject's involvement in the historical process being important only insofar as it reveals his essence. Whereas history attempts to give a detailed account in terms of causes and effects of events, biography presents a highly selective, often anecdotal, account of an individual's life with everything chosen to illuminate his essential being. Ancient biography consists of information about a significant person, selected so as to reveal what sort of person the subject really was." [Charles H. Talbert, "Biography, Ancient" In vol. 1, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 746.]

<sup>49</sup>**Luke 1:1-4.** 1.1 Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 3 I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, a to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may

other gospel writers followed this procedure is unknown, although what Luke reflects in the Prologue is typical for the ancient world in general.

Thus what we have in the genre of gospel, mainly as it relates to the canonical gospels, is an orderly presentation of the life and ministry of Jesus in order to promote Him as the Son of God. The major historical concern is to explore how God was working in and through His life. Thus the miraculous plays a significant role in these documents. There are few or no interests in the most of the concerns of an ancient βίος to describe his life physically and humanly.<sup>50</sup> Obviously the gospels in no way reflect a modern literary biography with dramatically different purposes.

One important aspect of the canonical gospels is the similarities of the first three gospels in contrast to the fourth gospel. The first three are known as the Synoptic Gospels, simply because they approach telling the story of Jesus in the same essential way.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, huge literary dependence upon one another is present. In the most commonly held view, Mark is not only the shortest account but also the first one to be written. Almost 90% of the content of Mark is reproduced verbatim in both Matthew and Luke, which were written independently of each other after Mark but they used a common source (known as Q) for the narratives these two documents share in common but are not contained in Mark. The fourth gospel reflects virtually no dependency on any of the synoptic gospels.



In the content of these four gospels one will encounter a wide array of differing sub-genre forms. The patterns in the Synoptic Gospels are more common to one another. And most of them do not show up in the fourth gospel. We will give more attention to this below in topic 3.1.1.3.2.

### 3.1.1.2.2 History

The single representative of ancient history is the Book of Acts. One must not overlook the differences between approaching history writing in the ancient world from those in the modern world.<sup>52</sup> In general, and especially in the Old and New Testament approaches, history was mostly a vertical focus with efforts to trace out the movements of God in the world He created, and in particularly among the people He claimed as His own people. Although variations of approaches to history are embedded in the Old Testament, the dominant and most influential one is the Deuteronomistic history with its grid approach to assessing the actions of leaders and people: **“people sin / God punishes / people repent / God restores.”**

[know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.](#)

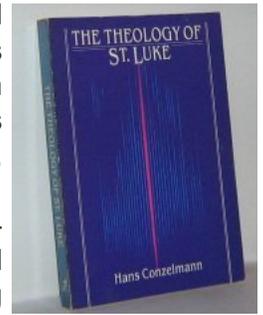
1.1 Ἐπειδήπερ πολλοὶ ἐπεχείρησαν ἀνατάξασθαι διήγησιν περὶ τῶν πεπληρορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων, 2 καθὼς παρέδοσαν ἡμῖν οἱ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου, 3 ἔδοξε καμοὶ παρηκολουθηκότη ἀνωθεν πᾶσιν ἀκριβῶς καθεξῆς σοι γράψαι, κράτιστε Θεόφιλε, 4 ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν.

<sup>50</sup>This is one of the significant differences between the canonical gospels and the other gospel accounts. Among these latter documents the influence of the Greek βίος will be much more noticeable. Jesus comes across looking much like the so-called *theos aner*, the ancient Superman image, that typified the Greek and Latin biographies. One area where this becomes especially noticeable is in the handling of the miraculous. Jesus in these documents looks much like the modern TV healer preacher. He does healing sensationally and always to call attention to himself and the fact that he possesses divine power himself to use as he chooses.

<sup>51</sup>In scholarly circles this is labeled the Synoptic Problem signifying the difficulty of determining precisely the details of the literary dependency of these three gospel accounts on one another.

<sup>52</sup>“It is safe to say that the ancient world did not regard historical writing in the same way that we view it in the modern era, where history is a largely scientific record of verifiable events, governed by evidence and proof. As modern historical methods emerged in the nineteenth century, modes of criticism sprang up that were suspicious of the biblical text for not conforming to this new genre and for the alleged scientific unreliability of its narrative. Understanding the forms of history in the Bible itself can help to correct some of the misleading claims.” [Leland Ryken, Jim Wilhoit, Tremper Longman et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 386.]

Luke will reflect an understanding of this idea of history more than the other gospel writers, and also some influence by it. The major aspect taken from the Israelite heritage is the theological concept of God working through history to accomplish His plan of salvation for humanity. In the late 1950s Prof. Hans Conzelmann of Göttingen university published his Habilitationsschrift entitled *Die Mitte der Zeit. Studien zur Theologie des Lukas*. In the 1960s, it was translated into English and published in the US under the title *The Theology of St. Luke*. This proved to be one of epic publications that changed the course of scholarly studies. Conzelmann saw in Luke's agenda for his gospel and for Acts the essence of the Old Testament salvation history, the so-called Heilsgeschichte. That is, God's plan for redeeming sinful human was to be realized in three stages or eras: the era of Covenant Israel (**preparation**); the salvation **provision** in Christ (Luke's gospel account); and the **implementation** of that salvation provision through the church (Luke's Acts account). To be sure Conzelmann's views have undergone revision and modification over the years since the mid-twentieth century, but they remain foundational for most all Lukan studies still today, especially where theological concerns play a significant role.



One point is very clear and is that the view of history emerging from the New Testament, including Acts, is that history is being moved forward by God toward a climatic ending which will usher in the eternal order of Heaven, along with Hell.<sup>53</sup> This stood in stark contrast to the dominate Greek cyclical view of time as never ending repetitions of cycles of good and bad.

Luke, in the writing of Acts as volume two of his works, sought to portray the first three decades of the religious movement established by Jesus and commissioned just before His ascension (Luke 24 and Acts 1). Thus in this document we discover the origins of the Christian movement began at Jerusalem and extended to Rome, the imperial capital of the world at that time. The strategy of presenting this history follows standard conventions of history writing as set forth by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the preeminent court historian of emperor Augustus just before the first Christian century. In his *Περὶ λεκτικῆς Δημοσθένους δεινότητος*, *On the Admirable Style of Demosthenes*, Dionysius sets forth a series of criteria that should be used in judging whether a historical writing is to be considered worthy or not. Luke followed these standards quite well while writing his history of the church from the framework of the basic OT understanding of history.<sup>54</sup>

When assessing the contents of Acts, two dynamics are at work simultaneously: the expanding witness of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome as anticipated in Acts 1:8, and, more importantly, his contention that God was involved in the expansion of this Gospel message beginning with Jesus (gospel), moving to the Jewish Christian phase (Acts 1-11) and concluding with the Gentile Christian phase (Acts 12-28). This story is primarily built around the three key personalities of Jesus, Peter, and Paul, who stand as the central characters in this two volume project. In this way Luke affirms that the original promise to Abraham to be a blessing to all nations was being realized not just in the coming of Jesus but through His commissioning of the church to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Why did Luke end his story with Paul in Rome? Most modern commentators with little or no knowledge of history writing standards in the first century speculate that Luke caught up in time in his story, or that he intended to write a third volume later on. But this is modern reasoning speculating, when the explanations is simple within standards of history writing in the first century. Dionysius contended vigorously that good history should have a good starting point both in time and geography as well as a good ending point in both areas. Clearly Luke's mind was to trace the spread to Christianity from its home in Jerusalem (for him the religious center of the world at that time) to the political and military capital of the world, Rome. In the process, God was fulfilling His covenant promise to Abraham. From the political capital of Rome Christianity could sizeably impact the entire Roman em-

<sup>53</sup>“The Bible’s picture of history is strongly linear, moving toward a goal of consummation to be followed by eternity. In all spheres history is given a strongly providential cast, with the outcome of human actions regarded as either produced or influenced by God’s activity. Biblical history is also viewed through a moral lens in which people’s success or failure is attributed to whether they do good or evil. The primary form in which this history is embodied is narrative, but we also infer history from such genres as law, lyrics, epistles and prophetic utterances. Significant shifts occur as we move from the OT to the NT.” [Leland Ryken, Jim Wilhoit, Tremper Longman et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 385-86.]

<sup>54</sup>I had the privilege of being a part of a group of half a dozen scholars several years ago that translated the original Greek text of this work and then using the standards set forth by Dionysius we applied them rigorously to the book of Acts. We concluded that when judged by these standards that were normative in Luke’s world he would receive very high marks in his history of the Christian movement.

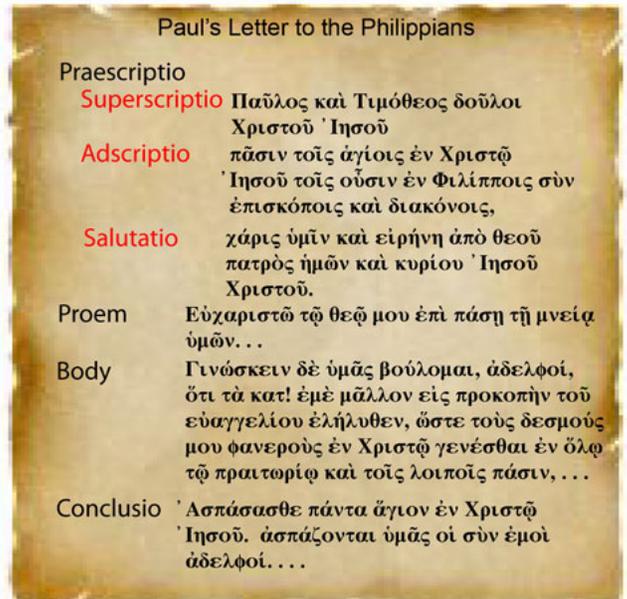
pire for the Gospel, which the unfolding history over the next several centuries illustrates.

Inside Acts one will also find a good variety of sub-genres, most of which Dionysius discusses in his treatise on Demosthenes. These we will examine below in Topic 3.1.1.3.2.

The implications of the history genre for Acts are important for the interpreting process. If one misses the understanding of history by Luke, he is doomed to misunderstand the content of Acts. Further, if one only applies the standards of modern history writing to Acts, he will come away highly skeptical of the historicity of a lot of what is contained in Acts. One of the major illustrations of this is the long time debate over the Lukan Paul and the Pauline Paul. One of the struggles of many scholars is the assumed very different and essentially contradictory view of Paul's life and ministry in Acts from the portrait that emerges in the accepted letters of Paul in his own writings. All kinds of implications have been generated from this supposed tension dealing with both chronology and theology regarding Paul. The vast majority of this debate has come out of ignoring history standards in Luke's day and subjecting Acts exclusively to modern history standards.

### 3.1.1.2.3 Letters

With 21 of the 27 documents of the New Testament falling into this grouping, the role of the letter<sup>55</sup> in the ancient world is critical to proper understanding of the content of these documents in the New Testament. What we find in the two sections of letters -- Paul's and the General Letters -- in the New Testament reflect most of the range of letter writing patterns in the surrounding world of the New Testament. Interesting, the letter form used exclusively was that of the Greeks, rather than a similar but yet different Semitic letter form in the near east often utilized by Jewish letter writing in this era.<sup>56</sup> The primary reason is that all of the letters in this



Ancient Letter on papyrus

<sup>55</sup>In Greek the primary word for letter as a written document is ἐπιστολή, which is variously translated either as letter or epistle. It is used some 24 times in the New Testament referring to various letters, or in Paul's writings to various individual letters that he had written. 2 Peter 3:1 defines this as Peter's second letter, and 3:16 makes reference to Paul's letters known to him at the time of his writing in the mid 60s as being circulated as a collection. The LXX uses ἐπιστολή to translate six different Hebrew terms, with יְגֵרֶת ('iggeret) being the primary word, although the Hebrew word most often refers to legal documents. The normal Hebrew word for letter is מְשֻׁלָּה, but shows up in the OT once only meaning 'letter of accusation' (Ezr. 4:6).

The Greek word γράμμα can refer to a letter as a written document (1x in Acts 28:21) but more naturally refers to a unit of an alphabet, most of the 14 uses in the NT.

The noun ἐπιστολή originates from the verb ἐπιστέλλω, meaning to inform by a letter in the three NT uses. The use of a messenger carrying the letter is assumed in the ancient world "ἐπιστέλλω is a tt. from Hdt. (e.g., III, 40, 1) for 'transmitting a message or direction' either by word of mouth or more esp. in writing. ἐπιστολή is 'what is transmitted by the messenger,' usually the 'letter.'" [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 7:593.]

Closely related is διαστέλλομαι: "In the NT the whole group is very close to διαστέλλομαι in so far as this presupposes an actual or at least a claimed authority → 591, 21 ff. The few instances of the verb (Ac. 15:20; 21:25; Hb. 13:22) bring out very clearly the authoritative and almost official nature of the primitive Christian epistle. It is a generally acknowledged fact to-day that the apostolic letters collected in the NT are marked by this. Connected herewith is the point that for all their formal similarity to the epistles of antiquity the NT epistles constitute a special genre."<sup>22</sup> [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 7:593-94.]

<sup>56</sup>"The study of Hebrew epistolography in the biblical period only became genuinely possible with the discovery of letters from extrabiblical contexts. This is true because so few remnants of epistolary formulae are present in the letter fragments preserved in the Hebrew Bible and because of the historiographic problems of the Hebrew Bible. There were some early attempts at the study of the biblical Hebrew letters (especially Beer 1913; Marty 1939) but not until the publication of the Lachish ostraca was it possible, for example, to understand the phrase w' th, which may be roughly translated "and now," (2 Kgs 5:6; 10:2) as an authentic remnant of the epistolographic style (EncMiqr 4: 972). The major groups of extrabiblical letters are those from Tell ed-Duweir (Tel Lachish in Hebrew), excavated in the 1930s and from Tel Arad, excavated in the 1960s. The editiones principes of these texts were primarily concerned with philological

section, apart from Hebrews and James, were written to dominantly Gentile oriented churches.<sup>57</sup> And these two documents targeting mainly Jewish Christians only make limited use of the letter form<sup>58</sup> while being essentially sermons more in the pattern of an ancient Jewish homily.

The fundamental role of the letter was a ‘substitute visit’ that took the place of a face to face conversation.<sup>59</sup> Thus the letters in the New Testament represent the desire of the letter sender to visit either individuals or Christian communities in person but being unable to do so due to some circumstance in his life at that moment. The next best option available to him was to dictate a letter to a writing secretary and then arrange for it to be carried to its intended destination.

The composition of the letter was mostly done by writing secretaries connected to the sender or senders of the letter. Two of these are mentioned by name in the New Testament: Τέρτιος, Tertius, in Rom. 16:22,<sup>60</sup> and Σιλουανοῦ, Silvanus = Silas, in 1 Peter 5:12.<sup>61</sup> Paul evidently used several of his trusted assistants, as Timothy, Silas, and others, to do the actual writing of the letter that he dictated to them. The patterns of dictation normally ranged from word-for-word dictation to sketching out the gist for the writer to fill in the details in the composition. Proofing with revisions and re-writings were normative in this process.

From the genre aspect particularly, the letter is composed in response to perceived need by the targeted readers.<sup>62</sup> That is, it is ‘occasional’ correspondence, meaning that some occasion prompts its writing. Thus the and historical questions (extensive bibliographies are to be found in Pardee 1982 and only the primary publications will be indicated here below). Loewenstamm’s 1962 study (EncMiqr 4: 966–74) was path-breaking, and since then Pardee has provided an overview (1978b) and a Handbook (1982). These studies were in many ways dependent on the study of Aramaic epistolography, for which documents were discovered earlier (see the following article).

“In spite of the insights afforded by these extrabiblical documents, however, knowledge of Hebrew epistolography in the pre-Medieval periods is still extremely scanty because of the dearth of documents (there are a total of 48 epistolary documents between ca. 700 B.C. and 135 A.D.) and because of the concentration of these few witnesses into discrete groups, as defined both geographically (Lachish, Arad, Meşad Hashavyahu, Dead Sea) and chronologically (ca. 700–586 B.C., A.D. 132–135). These two factors give relatively clear snapshots of certain letter-types from particular places and time periods but leave massive periods and areas totally unaccounted for. As a result the history and interrelationships of many epistolary features are at present untraceable.”

[D. Pardee, “Letters: Hebrew Letters” In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 282.]

<sup>57</sup>“The Hebrew letters are more limited in number and in type than the Aramaic letters. Because the number of formulae is thus correspondingly reduced our ability to interpret the proper usage and the function of each formula is severely limited. The most complete Hebrew letters of the biblical period consist of address, greetings, transition to body, and body. All of these elements are optional, including the body (though there are no Hebrew letters of the type, there are Ugaritic letters which consist entirely of formulae).

“The letters of the Bar Kokhba period include these elements and closing formulae as well. The use of the epistolary formulae appears to have been much more rigidly prescribed in this period, for the address and the greeting formula šlwm are always present, where verifiable, in this corpus of texts.”

[D. Pardee, “Letters: Hebrew Letters” In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 283.]

<sup>58</sup>James only has the letter Praescriptio in 1:1 and Hebrews only a letter Conclusio in 13:18-25.

<sup>59</sup>“The letter is one of the most common and socially significant kinds of written text from antiquity. Extant letters represent every level of Greco-Roman society from Egyptian peasants to Roman emperors. The letter served the most basic needs of day-to-day communication and the most highly developed art and ideology. The letter is also arguably the most important, and certainly the most prevalent type of literature in early Christianity.” [Stanley K. Stowers, “Letters: Greek and Latin Letters” In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 290.]

<sup>60</sup>**Rom. 16:22.** ἀσπάζομαι ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ Τέρτιος ὁ γράψας τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἐν κυρίῳ.  
I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord.

<sup>61</sup>**1 Peter 5:12.** Διὰ Σιλουανοῦ ὑμῖν τοῦ πιστοῦ ἀδελφοῦ, ὡς λογιζομαι, δι’ ὀλίγων ἔγραψα παρακαλῶν καὶ ἐπιμαρτυρῶν ταύτην εἶναι ἀληθῆ χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς ἣν στήτε.

Through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written this short letter to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

<sup>62</sup>“Letters more than other types of literature are obviously embedded in the social contexts and interactions of particular historical moments (for example, a nearly bankrupt shopowner sends a letter to a wealthy acquaintance begging for financial help).

letter is designed to address issues existing with the readers. Whoever carried the letter to its destination would read the letter to the group, and answer questions regarding the contents. Often this was the same individual who had done the actual composition of the letter, and so would be in an excellent position to explain the content to its readers. Occasionally this is signaled in Paul's letters by including the writer as an additional 'sender' of the letter in the introductory *Adscriptio* section of the *Praescriptio*.

In this grouping inside the NT, there are the letters of Paul beginning with the longest, Romans, and extending sequentially by length down to the shortest, Philemon. These letters both adhere more closely to the common letter form and at the same time exhibit the creativity of Paul inside the various sub-forms of the letter. The General Letter section technically begins with James, the longest, and extends down to Jude, the shortest. Hebrews is tucked between these two sections reflecting its partial association in later times with the apostle Paul. Inside this section the letters of Peter, Jude, and 2-3 John adhere more closely to the typical letter format. James and Hebrews contain very minimal epistolary elements, since fundamentally they are Jewish Christian homilies. Likewise First John is missing both the introductory *Praescriptio* and the conclusionary *Conclusio* elements of the ancient letter. With a more formal Prologue at the beginning in 1:1-5, it takes on the tone of an ancient treatise using some epistolary tones without the formal elements of a letter. The label General Letter or the older label, the catholic epistles, is due to the lack of specific designations of recipients. Only 3 John (to Gaius) and 1 Peter (To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia) have addressees with some degree of geographical specificity. And even 1 Peter is very general, with these addressees roughly being equivalent of Peter saying, "To the Christians all over the country of Turkey." We also are left to guessing where Gaius lived. With the rest we are at a loss to know who the letter was sent to in terms of a geographical location and personal name specification.

Again we will treat below the sub-genre forms contained inside the letters.

#### 3.1.1.2.4 Apocalypse

The last genre category is that of apocalypse.<sup>63</sup> This uncommon English word comes from ἀποκάλυψις, literally meaning 'uncovering.' Thus through such a writing the reader is supposed to be able to uncover the hidden agenda of God for humanity and history so as to see clearly what God is up to in this world, especially His long term objectives. A good description of this idea is found in Rev. 1:1-2 which introduces the book of Revelation:<sup>64</sup>

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The times, places, social status, and historical contexts of sender and receiver are crucial components of a letter's meaning. The letter 'fictionalizes' the personal presence of the sender and receiver. The authorial voice is constructed as if speaking directly to the audience. Letters also tend to be dialogical; the author in the text anticipates what the audience will say and how it will react. A letter may belong to an exchange of letters or other texts, and may incorporate portions of these texts into itself in the form of an imagined conversation. By its very nature the letter is able to assimilate texts belonging to other genres. Thus the letter has often served as the framework for essays, narratives, and poetry. In such cases the ostensible epistolary occasion and the audience may become purely fictional." [Stanley K. Stowers, "Letters: Greek and Latin Letters" In vol. 4, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 290.]

<sup>63</sup>"In recent attempts to add precision to the terminology used in discussing the phenomenon loosely called apocalyptic, 'apocalypse' has come to designate a literary genre in contrast to the related concepts 'apocalyptic eschatology' and 'apocalypticism' (see also the heading 'Early Jewish Apocalypticism' later in this article). This triad and the specific definitions given to each of its members are of considerable heuristic value in the scholarly attempt to clarify a complex ancient phenomenon (Koch 1972: 23–28; Hanson IDBSup, 27–28). Heuristic devices must not be regarded as more than they are, however, namely, tools useful to the extent that they shed light on the ancient materials themselves. In using such tools, one does well to remember that the ancient apocalyptic writers did not distinguish rigidly between genre, perspective, and ideology, and from this it follows that such categories should be used only with great sensitivity to the integrity and complexity of the compositions themselves." [Paul D. Hanson, "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism: The Genre" In vol. 1, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 279.]

<sup>64</sup>"In using the term "apocalypse" to designate a genre, we are utilizing a derivative of the Greek noun *apokalypsis* ('revelation, disclosure'). The first attested use of the term to refer to a literary work is in the opening line of the book of Revelation, 'The apokalypsis of Jesus Christ.' This bears both historical and formal significance: historical inasmuch as the book of Revelation has exercised considerable influence on the Western understanding of the genre; formal inasmuch as the book exhibits nearly all of the principal characteristics of this genre (pseudonymity being one notable exception).

"The first two verses of the book of Revelation contain in nuce the narrative structure of the genre: a revelation is given by God through an otherworldly mediator to a human seer disclosing future events. V 3 contains an added feature commonly found (or implied)

1 **Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ** ἦν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστειλάς διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ, 2 ὃς ἐμαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὅσα εἶδεν. 3 Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς.

1 **The revelation of Jesus Christ**, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

One should not forget that this literary form and the writings connected to it reflect a Jewish and/or a Christian perspective. Other religious traditions in the ancient world did not have an end of the world teaching; to the contrary, Greek and Roman philosophy saw history as a never ending repetition of cycles of good and bad.

Also the apocalypse of John in no way originated this literary form. It had been around in Jewish tradition for several centuries. The roots of this kind of thinking and writing reach back to the prophets Ezekiel and Zechariah (chaps 1-6) in the sixth century BCE.<sup>65</sup> Fuller developed expressions moving toward the apocalyptic genre come afterwards in Daniel chaps. 7-12 with the series of visions. But the full fledged form surfaces in the intertestamental documents of First Enoch, Fourth Ezra, and Second Baruch.<sup>66</sup>

Small segments of this kind of writing are embedded into the synoptic gospels at Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, with Matthew containing the largest section. But these are expressions of apocalyptic writing, not full fledged apocalyptic documents, and they contain a heavy emphasis on eschatology without the bizarre imagery typical of apocalyptic documents. Some apocalyptic expressions also surface in 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; and 2 Peter 3:1-13, but these neither claim to be visions nor contain bizarre imagery. They are

in apocalypses, namely, an admonition. Beyond these three verses the book of Revelation as a whole casts further light on this genre. It offers descriptions of the seer's response to awesome revelatory experiences that resemble those recurring in other apocalypses. True to the structural complexity of many apocalypses, the book of Revelation embraces a series of vision accounts, interspersed with smaller genres like the epistle, the doxology, the victory song, and the blessing. And while the emphasis is on the visionary experience of the seer as the mode of revelation, in chap. 4 the seer, following a heavenly summons to 'come up hither,' finds himself in the heavenly throne room, thus providing an example of the 'heavenly journey' found, often in vastly elaborated form, in other apocalypses."

[Paul D. Hanson, "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism: The Genre" In vol. 1, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 279.]

<sup>65</sup>"While fully developed apocalypses first appear in the 3d and 2d centuries B.C.E., two biblical books from the 6th century B.C.E. adumbrate many of the formal features of the genre and can be viewed as important sources. In the opening verse of the book of Ezekiel the prophet reports that 'the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.' In its present form the book of Ezekiel is constructed around five visions, revealing both future judgment and future salvation. In a series of eight visions in Zechariah 1-6 the prophet views supernatural phenomena which are then explained by an interpreting angel as bearing on future events. It seems plausible to assume that later visionaries considered themselves to stand in the tradition of such worthy predecessors." [Paul D. Hanson, "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism: The Genre" In vol. 1, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 279.]

<sup>66</sup>"1 Enoch, which is actually an anthology of apocalyptic writings ascribed to the antediluvian figure Enoch and arising over a period of at least two centuries, is preserved in an Ethiopic translation of a Greek version (partially preserved) of Aramaic originals (fragments discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls). The earliest of the Enochic apocalypses originated at least a half century before Daniel 7-12. Notable among these earliest materials are chaps. 6-11, which trace the rise of evil in the world to the rebellion in heaven alluded to in Gen. 6:1-4, and chaps. 17-36, which describe the heavenly journeys of Enoch. Clearly datable to the period of the Maccabean revolt is the allegorical history of the world in chaps. 89-90 referred to as the 'Animal Apocalypse,' and the 'Apocalypse of Weeks' in 1 En. 93 and 91:12-17. These apocalypses from 1 En. illustrate the eclectic nature of the genre as it took shape in the Hellenistic period, for we find eschatological visions in continuity with earlier prophecy combined with sapiential and speculative materials reflecting other influences. Nevertheless, the dominant emphasis of these apocalypses and those discussed below is harmonious with the themes of earlier Israelite religion, for they reveal a time/place beyond the fallen present in which God's sovereignty will be restored and the righteous will be vindicated.

"4 Ezra and 2 Baruch. These two works are closely tied together by common themes and a shared setting in the aftermath of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. In 4 Ezra three dialogues between seer and an angel are followed by three visions which, in an allegorical fashion recalling Daniel and the Maccabean period apocalypses of 1 Enoch, describe the movement of history through the ages down to the concluding divine denouement. 2 Baruch similarly combines dialogue and visions into a tapestry of apocalypses and other genres subservient to the eschatological theme of the fulfillment of human history in final judgment and salvation."

[Paul D. Hanson, "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism: The Genre" In vol. 1, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 280.]



expressions of the apocalyptic eschatology described below.

This raises one of the issues in this field of study in which progress has been made in the last couple of decades.<sup>67</sup> Consequently one needs to distinguish between ‘apocalypse,’ ‘apocalyptic eschatology,’ and ‘apocalypticism.’ The last term, apocalypticism, designates a movement centered in a group of people whose view of the future is heavenly influenced by ‘apocalyptic eschatology’ and out of this comes writings expressing that understanding using the full fledged genre of ‘apocalypse.’<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup>“The word ‘apocalyptic,’ though properly an adjective, in common parlance has come to designate the phenomenon of the disclosure of heavenly secrets in visionary form to a seer for the benefit of a religious community experiencing suffering or perceiving itself victimized by some form of deprivation. The book of Daniel is the foremost literary example of this phenomenon in the world of Jewish antiquity, though Jewish apocalyptic writings range far beyond the Bible and betray connections with related phenomena in other cultures.

“The problem with the proper usage is that it leaves unclear what qualities determine whether a given experience or written account fits the category apocalyptic: whether literary characteristics, a particular world view or pattern of ideas, or a certain type of social setting. This unclarity has led scholars to prefer a triad of definitions, differentiating between ‘apocalypse’ as a literary genre, ‘apocalyptic eschatology’ as a religious perspective, and ‘apocalypticism’ as a community or movement embodying an apocalyptic perspective as its ideology (Koch 1972; P. Hanson IBDSup, pp. 28–34; Collins 1984).”

[Paul D. Hanson, “Apocalypses and Apocalypticism: Introductory Overview” In vol. 1, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 280.]

### <sup>68</sup>A. Apocalypse

Though the phenomenon designated “Jewish apocalyptic” comes to expression in more than one genre, the specific genre “apocalypse” occupied a privileged position. First used explicitly as the designation of a writing in antiquity in Rev. 1:1, the structure of the apocalypse reflects more closely than any other genre the essential characteristics of the apocalyptic phenomenon, and its history is more closely intertwined with the history of Jewish apocalyptic than is the history of any other genre.

### B. Apocalyptic Eschatology

The ideas and concepts that come to expression in apocalyptic writings range broadly from ancient mythic motifs to biblical themes to speculation reflecting a Hellenistic milieu. Nevertheless, as the genre “apocalypse” enjoys pride of place on the literary plane, a world view we can designate “apocalyptic eschatology” more frequently than any other perspective provides the conceptual framework within which the diverse materials encompassed by the apocalyptic writings are interpreted.

Eschatology, as the study of “end-time” events, developed earlier in biblical prophecy. The perspective of apocalyptic eschatology can best be understood as an outgrowth from prophetic eschatology. Common to both is the belief that, in accordance with divine plan, the adverse conditions of the present world would end in judgment of the wicked and vindication of the righteous, thereby ushering in a new era of prosperity and peace. In an early postexilic prophetic oracle, Yahweh announces:

For the former troubles will be forgotten,  
For now I create new heavens  
and a new earth (Isa 65:16b–17a).

Prophetic eschatology and apocalyptic eschatology are best viewed as two sides of a continuum. The development from the one to the other is not ineluctably chronological, however, but is intertwined with changes in social and political conditions. Periods and conditions permitting members of the protagonist community to sense that human effort would be repaid by improved fortune tended to foster prophetic eschatology, that is, the view that God’s new order would unfold within the realities of this world. Periods of extreme suffering, whether at the hands of opponents within the community or those of foreign adversaries, tended to cast doubts on the effectiveness of human reform and thus to abet apocalyptic eschatology, with its more rigidly dualistic view of divine deliverance, entailing destruction of this world and resurrection of the faithful to a blessed heavenly existence.

### C. Apocalypticism

The social and political setting within which most of the Jewish apocalyptic writings arose is a matter of scholarly conjecture. A noteworthy exception is the corpus of sectarian writings found at Qumran. Though actual examples of the genre of the apocalypse at Qumran are rare and fragmentary in form, the sectarian writings are permeated with the perspective designated above as “apocalyptic eschatology.” Within the community at Qumran, the perspective of apocalyptic eschatology had been elevated to the status of an ideology, functioning to inform its interpretation of Scripture, to provide the basis for its understanding of Jewish and gentile adversaries, and to supply a historiographic point of view from which to develop a detailed scenario of final conflict and divine vindication of the elect.

Apocalypses and other writings sharing the perspective of apocalyptic eschatology originating outside of the Qumran community were copied and studied within that community (e.g., the writings within the Ethiopic corpus designated 1 Enoch, minus the parables, and Jubilees). Though these writings differ at important points from the Qumran writings, shared views on calendar, angelology, demonology, cosmology, and eschatology suggest that different communities embodying the perspective of apocalyptic eschatology maintained contact with one another, possibly with the consciousness of being united under the umbrella of a wider Essene movement.

Hopefully future archaeological findings coupled with intensified study of existing written and archaeological material will shed further light on Jewish apocalypticism. In such scholarship the temptation to try to homogenize all apocalyptic writings into one broad movement must be eschewed. 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch, bearing affinities as they do with Pharisaic teachings, illustrate that not all apoc-

Thus when attempting to understand the Book of Revelation as an apocalypse questions about the community of origin, the motivating circumstances prompting the writing of this document etc. must be answered as a part of the interpretive process.

One helpful starting issue that puts this literary form in better perspective is the question: Where did this kind of thinking originate historically? An identifiable genre form means that this vehicle of communication has been around for some time and is well enough established that a writer can use it to express his ideas in full confidence that his targeted readers will better understand his thinking through the use of a particular genre. For John's audience to understand his ideas in Revelation they would have needed to be familiar with the apocalyptic form of expression. This becomes particularly true with Revelation since it utilizes several of the same bizarre images, and similar type images, found in First Enoch, Second Enoch, Fourth Ezra (= 2 Esdras<sup>69</sup>), Second Baruch, and Third Baruch. Plus the drift of thought expression is similar to these documents.

The answer to this question has been a subject of considerable debate among scholars for the past 150 years. Early on the view was that the roots of this thinking reached back to the Persian dualism picked up by the Jews in the Babylonian exile. But few scholars hold to such a view today. The German professor Gerhard von Rad in the 1970s sought to revive an earlier view that apocalyptic thinking emerged out of the Jewish wisdom tradition, but again not many have followed his contentions. Biblical prophecy as the foundational source continues to be the viewpoint most accepted by scholars in today's world.<sup>70</sup>

The circumstance prompting the writing of this kind of material seems to uniformly be some kind of crisis moment, usually including a strong sense of persecution threat from outside forces. Out of a seemingly hopeless situation where evil is reigning supremely comes a message uncovering the ultimate reality that God actually remains in control and that His purposes will be accomplished no matter how powerful evil appears to be at

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alyses come from the Essenes. Apocalyptic themes in later rabbinic writings indicate that an apocalyptic motif in a literary composition does not constitute proof of origin in an apocalyptic movement (Block 1952). Apocalypticism, as a designation for a movement that has adopted the perspective of apocalyptic eschatology as its ideology, must accordingly be used with great caution and only in cases where sufficient evidence accumulates to point to a community that has constructed its identity upon the world view of apocalyptic eschatology.

[Paul D. Hanson, "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism: Introductory Overview" In vol. 1, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 280-81.]

<sup>69</sup>“As with 1 Esdras, there is some confusion about the numbering of this book. Some early Latin manuscripts call it 3 Esdras, while Jerome and the medieval Latin manuscripts denoted it 4 Esdras, which to this day is the name used for it in modern critical editions,<sup>7 8</sup> which are typically in Latin, the language of its most complete exemplars.<sup>9</sup> Once Jerome's 1 and 2 Esdras were denoted Ezra and Nehemiah in more recent times, the designation 2 Esdras became common in English Bibles. It appears in the Appendix to the Old Testament in the Slavonic Bible, where it is called 3 Esdras, and the Georgian Orthodox Bible numbers it 3 Ezra. This text is sometimes also known as Apocalypse of Ezra (chapters 3-14 known as the Jewish Apocalypse of Ezra or 4 Ezra, chapters 1-2 as 5 Ezra, and chapters 15-16 as 6 Ezra).” [“2 Esdras,” wikipedia.org]

<sup>70</sup>“What were the influences that fostered the development of Jewish apocalyptic? Scholars were once confident that the source could be traced to a form of Persian dualism with which Judaism came into contact in the Second Temple period. Support for this view has evaporated as the result of studies indicating that the Persian sources upon which the hypothesis rested were written over a half millennium after the period of alleged influence.

“Gerhard von Rad, reviving an idea advanced in the 19th century, argued that the Wisdom tradition was the source of Jewish apocalyptic (Von Rad 1972). This he did by identifying the heart of apocalyptic not in eschatology but in a deterministic interpretation of history. Von Rad's hypothesis has found few followers and many critics, largely due to the fact that apocalyptic eschatology—while not excluding other patterns of thought—frequently provides the conceptual framework into which other materials are integrated and on the basis of which they are interpreted (Von der Osten-Sachen 1969).

“The source that continues to emerge from the debate concerning origins with the highest degree of credibility is biblical prophecy. Here the key lies within a group of writings that can either be designated ‘late prophecy’ or ‘early apocalyptic’ (e.g., Isaiah 24–27; Isaiah 56–66; Zechariah 9–14), insofar as they occupy a transitional position between the more historically oriented perspective of classical prophecy and the more transcendent view of salvation characteristic of the apocalyptic writings. Challenges to the prophetic source theory, however, have also made a contribution: they have indicated that Jewish apocalyptic becomes increasingly complex over the course of the centuries and especially as it enters the Hellenistic era, at which point it draws freely upon rather refined sciences such as learned speculation on celestial and terrestrial phenomena and sapiential reflection betraying stronger connections with Mesopotamian mantic traditions than with Egyptian or Israelite wisdom (Collins 1977; Stone 1976).”

[Paul D. Hanson, “Apocalypses and Apocalypticism: Introductory Overview” In vol. 1, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 281.]

the moment.<sup>71</sup> Two major events seem to loom large in most of this material as motivating circumstances: the Babylonian captivity of Israel for 70 years approximately from 587 to 538 BCE, and the Maccabean revolt (167-164 BCE). Two of these documents, Third Baruch and the Apocalypse of Abraham, center on the destruction of Herod's temple in the first Christian century, and thus are contemporary writings to the Apocalypse of John.

From the second century on, several clearly Christian apocalypses appeared in Christianity: Apocalypse of James (First; 2nd cent.); Apocalypse of James (Second; 2nd cent.); Apocalypse of Goliath (12th cent.); Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius (7th cent.); Apocalypse of Paul (4th cent.); Apocalypse of Paul (Coptic; 2nd cent.); Apocalypse of Peter (2nd cent.); Apocalypse of Peter (Gnostic; 2nd cent.); Apocalypse of Samuel of Kalamoun (at least 8th cent.); Apocalypse of Stephen (2nd cent.); Apocalypse of Thomas (5th cent.); Apocalypse of the Seven Heavens (at least 2nd cent.).<sup>72</sup>

For the Book of Revelation, the originating circumstance prompting the writing of this Christian document seems to be the experience of intensive Roman government based persecution of Christianity for the first time under the reign of Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD). In a massive revitalization program to strengthen the hold of the Romans on the empire Domitian launched a vigorous effort to reassert loyalty to the traditional Roman gods and goddesses, along with reviving the practice of the imperial cult where the emperor was worshiped as a god. Religions perceived to be a variance with these Roman traditions came under heavy persecution, including Christianity. Also, the imperial cult became especially strong in the provinces of Asia and the rest of what now constitutes modern Turkey, where John was imprisoned at the Roman hard labor camp at Patmos. Although a few streams of viewpoint among the Old Syriac Version of the NT see the persecution under Nero in the 60s as the historical setting, that persecution was highly limited to Rome and the nearby towns and didn't last very long. The later reign of Domitian seems a much more likely setting for Revelation, which was far more systematic and lasting mainly because of emperor worship demands.

From the genre concerns, one needs to approach the apocalyptic literature recognizing the dependency of this materials on earlier expressions of God's revealed will to His chosen people. Daniel drew heavily from the prophet Jeremiah as he states directly in 9:2. The Jewish community at Qumran found the basis for their eschatological views in the prophetic books of Habakkuk and Nahum. The role of biblical prophecy from the Old Testament is significant for this literature. And yet, significant differences between prophecy and apocalypse are clearly present.<sup>73</sup> These differences justify apocalypse as a separate genre from prophecy, although some overlapping is present between the two. The dependency of Revelation as an apocalypse on OT prophecy is signaled in part by the use of the Greek words προφητεύω (verb, [I prophecy](#); 2 of 28x in NT), προφητεία (noun, [prophecy](#); 7 of 19x in NT), προφήτης (noun; [prophet](#); 8 of 163x in NT), and ψευδοπροφήτης (noun, [false prophet](#); 3 of 11x in NT).

Some of the themes commonly found in apocalyptic literature include: hopelessness, God's sovereignty, catastrophic judgment, celestial visions, ethical teachings, divine visitation, and new age. These ideas are typical expressed in bold, dramatic ways using graphic imagery, that sometimes reach back into earlier biblical prophe-

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<sup>71</sup>“**Characteristics.** Apocalypse as a genre is exceptional for its underlying feeling of hopelessness: evil seems to have the upper hand. The conclusion is that things will definitely get worse before they get better. Yet glimpses of heaven and the future make it clear that God is on the throne and in control. And those glimpses reveal how totally opposite are our world and God's. Fortunately, God will soon start the processes to make our world like his world. But the predicament is so critical that God himself must visit this earth again. The only solution is catastrophic judgment against all forms of evil and the establishment of a completely new order that will last forever.” [Leland Ryken, Jim Wilhoit, Tremper Longman et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 35.]

<sup>72</sup>For hyperlinks with explanations and texts to each of these documents see “Apocalyptic Literature: Non-canonical,” wikipedia.org.

<sup>73</sup>“Though apocalypse may be considered a sub genre of prophecy, the two literary styles are sufficiently different to merit calling them separate genres. Prophecy speaks to those who have backslidden and begs them to repent; apocalyptic speaks to the faithful and urges them to persevere. Prophecy announces God's judgment of sin on a local scale using natural means; apocalyptic announces a coming cataclysm when the whole earth will be destroyed. Prophecy records its message in poetry; apocalyptic in narrative accounts of visions and heavenly journeys full of mystery. Prophecy promises restoration and future blessing; apocalyptic an unexpected divine visitation that will result in a new heaven and new earth.” [Leland Ryken, Jim Wilhoit, Tremper Longman et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 35-36.]

cy passages.<sup>74</sup>

Hopefully from this survey of the basic genre categories of both the Old and New Testaments there has arisen a greater sensitivity to the importance of understanding the role of literary forms for interpreting the Bible. Repetitive patterns of expressing ideas play an absolutely critical role in communication both oral and written. So many of the patterns found in the Bible are not genres that we normally use in the modern world. And even where some overlapping may take place, e.g., with letters, the role and function of the ancient forms most likely will be considerably different from the role the same form plays in modern communication. Thus we must spend some time learning not only what those basic forms in the Bible are, but also effort must be given to understanding how they functioned in their world. Only then can we begin to construct a legitimate bridge from the 'then' to the 'now' meaning of the biblical text.

### 3.1.1.3 Dealing with Sub-Forms

When reading through a biblical book, one will come across a wide variety of smaller forms that function in the same way as the broad forms examined above.<sup>75</sup> These sub-genres will sometimes be distinctive to one basic category of literary patterns. For example, the Proem sub-genre is unique to ancient letters, and is not found elsewhere. But the use of this form by Paul for expressions of prayers of thanksgiving will utilize patterns both oral and written in non-letter settings elsewhere in the Bible and in first century synagogue and church life. In this way clear links to other literature are established as an important part of the interpretive process.

But other sub-forms can easily be found across the full range of broad genre patterns in the Bible. For example, Hebrew parallelism in several of its expressions will be found completely across all of the categories of the Old Testament documents, and very often scattered throughout the New Testament documents as well. Although somewhat more technical to spot and analyze, this parallelism shows up not only in the metric oriented patterns at the surface level of grammar both in Hebrew and Greek. But additionally, it is especially extensive at the sub-surface level of linguistic expression in the Greek text of the NT. Here the tendency of the Jewish writers to still largely be thinking in Hebrew or Aramaic thought constructs while writing in Greek comes into the picture.<sup>76</sup> This will include for the New Testament the full range of Hebraisms, Aramaisms, and the rare Latinisms. But it goes deeper than just these. Fluency in ancient Hebrew, ancient Aramaic in its multiple forms, classical Attic Greek, and Koine Greek opens up substantial perspectives to instantly spot when a writer is drawing heavily on his mother tongue's way of thinking while he is writing in one of the foreign languages he knows.<sup>77</sup>

The range and number of the sub-genre forms appearing in the Bible are extensive. They are too many for us to cover in detail in this overview study. What I want to attempt in the study is to highlight some of the more frequently occurring sub-forms, along with alerting you on how to draw upon serious Bible commentaries and dictionaries that will emphasize those forms in every passage of the scripture. Where these sub-genres are unique

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<sup>74</sup>“The themes of apocalyptic are most often expressed in bold and graphic imagery. This imagery may be allusions to earlier biblical phrases, though the phrases may be reinterpreted in the present context. For example, the ‘Son of Man’ motif in Mark 13:26 draws on Daniel 7, but the meaning is not the same in both places. The imagery in the book of Revelation has many parallels with the books of Ezekiel and Daniel, but individual images cannot be assumed to mean the same in both contexts. The imagery of apocalyptic is very fluid and is dependent on the immediate context.” [Leland Ryken, Jim Wilhoit, Tremper Longman et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 36.]

<sup>75</sup>For a helpful introduction to many of these sub-genre forms see “Felix Just, S.J., “An Introduction to Biblical Genres and Form Criticism,” catholic-resources.org.

<sup>76</sup>For those reading this material who have a multi-cultural background and are at least bi-lingual, you understand exactly what I am talking about here. Even after becoming highly fluent in one or more foreign languages, the tendency will always be to do a lot of your thinking in your mother tongue even while speaking in one of these foreign languages that you know.

<sup>77</sup>For most lay folks, this is where the role of serious, solid commentaries plays a vital role. Unfortunately, a majority of biblical commentators, professors, and scholars even do not possess these skills and consequently misunderstand the biblical text much too often. The older European scholars represent the zenith of linguistic skills for dealing with ancient texts. Most contemporary European scholars possess above average skills in this. And North American scholars unfortunately represent a very mixed bag here. Some possess excellent multi-language skills that match or surpass their European colleagues, but the majority have only limited knowledge of biblical Koine Greek or of classical Hebrew. Canadian scholars tend to do better here than those in the US because of the different attitudes toward foreign language learning between the two cultures.

to one broad category, and where they surface across multiple broad categories will be noted. Some noting of whether these categories are more Hebrew oriented or Greek oriented will also be given.

Our objective will be achieved if you become alerted to the existence of these patterns and have some idea of their importance. I don't expect expertise in using them for interpretation with this introduction. This can gradually develop over time and practice.

### 3.1.1.3.1 Old Testament Sub-Forms

Much of the understanding here originates from the work of Form Criticism over a century ago. The method has undergone massive revisions and shifts in emphasis over the past century. The concern has been to use solid methods to identify repetitive patterns of expression, usually that originated in oral communication but have been preserved in the written documents of the Bible. Depending on the scholar some or a lot of emphasis then centers on understanding the sociological setting giving rise to the form and also to how a particular form was used to communicate ideas.

With the Old Testament materials especially some distinction exists between the terms 'form' and 'genre' at the technical level. Often among scholars today the German term for genre *Gattung* will be used in order to more clearly specify this level of understanding. The word 'form' in this usage will designate the grammatical structure of a passage without reference to its content among other things.<sup>78</sup> In studying passages this way those with common structures can be grouped together for more careful genre analysis at the *Gattung* level of study.<sup>79</sup> Debate exists over whether content should play any role in the understanding of forms. The 'purists' in the field usually insist that only the formal structures reflected in grammar, syntax, and metrical features should be considered. But the nature of the Hebrew text will signal clearly that content emphases also played a role in developing the differing patterns of idea expression, and thus content should be included in the analysis.<sup>80</sup>

Labels for these short expressions, *Gattungen*, are normally developed by scholars. In the legal sections of the OT, especially the Torah, some of these labels are apodeictic and casuistic laws, that is, laws that define boundaries of proper actions without specified penalties for violation (apodeictic) or with specified penalties (casuistic). In the study of the psalms the most common labels are the hymn, the lament, the thanksgiving. These often can be further divided into thanksgiving for victory in battle, etc. The wisdom books, including the psalms, will contain proverbs, riddles, fables, and rhetorical questions. The prophetic books normally contain oracles of

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<sup>78</sup>“The first, the ‘form’ properly so called, is the structure or shape of an individual passage or unit, as in this may be described without regard to the content of the passage. For example, in studying the Psalms we can begin by describing each Psalm in terms of its meter, the number of stanzas or strophes it contains, whether the speaker is singular or plural, whether it is addressed to God or (as in Psalm 37) to the reader, and so on. Formal description at this level is an important method of breaking a text up into its component parts, and is essential in studying the OT because as it now stands the text lacks the kind of section divisions we are familiar with in modern books.” [John Barton, “Form Criticism: Old Testament” In vol. 2, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 839.]

<sup>79</sup>“Once a number of passages have been analyzed from a formal point of view, it may be possible to see them as belonging to a general class or genre, and it is for this that the German term *Gattung* is used. Thus there is a large number of Psalms that begin with a call to worship God and go on to extol God's mighty acts (e.g., Psalms 29, 33, 47, 66, 96, 98, 100); there are many laws in the Pentateuch that begin “‘f a man ...’ (e.g., Exod 22:1, 5, 7, 10, 14 [Heb 21:37; 22:4, 6, 9, 14]); there are many prophetic oracles that run ‘Because ... therefore thus says the LORD ...’ (e.g., Isa 7:5–8; 29:13–14; Amos 1:3–5). Having discerned the presence of such repeated structures and phrases, we are justified in concluding that Israel's literature (written or oral) included such stereotyped forms as standard types of which the particular cases we encounter in the OT are examples.” [John Barton, “Form Criticism: Old Testament” In vol. 2, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 839-40.]

<sup>80</sup>“Though form critics have sometimes maintained that form criticism should appeal only to strictly formal features (grammatical, syntactical, and metrical features of the text), most, in practice, regard the subject matter as relevant in establishing the *Gattung* to which a text belongs. In some cases, for example the category ‘royal psalms,’ subject matter is expressly the criterion used; more often, however, subject matter is one among a number of factors. Oracles of judgment in the prophets can be identified both by formal features (e.g., first person address by God, often with ‘Thus says the LORD’ or ‘oracle of the LORD’ attached) and by their distinctive content, concerning the future of Israel or of other nations. This mixture of form and content as criteria for assigning a text to a particular *Gattung* is no different in principle from what happens in classifying modern literature, where to call a work a tragedy, for example, is to say both that it has the formal features of a play—with acts, scenes, dialogue, and so on—and that it has a certain kind of theme and plot.” [John Barton, “Form Criticism: Old Testament” In vol. 2, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 840.]

judgment, accusations of guilt, woes, and taunts.

After careful analysis of the literary structure of an expression, the next question is “How was that kind of expression used in Israelite life?” The formal label for this inquiry is *Sitz-im-Leben* from the German meaning ‘setting-in-life.’ Although related to the historical occasion for the writing of a document, this *Sitz-im-Leben* is distinct from it. For example, Psalm 74 pretty clearly signals from its content that it originated in the early stages of the Babylonian exile.<sup>81</sup> But this is not the *Sitz-im-Leben* for Psalm 74, since such settings in life are repeatable occasions that prompt the use of the psalms. It is a lament psalm that becomes particularly appropriate for every national calamity by God’s people, especially when produced by war. In such dark moments of life, the message of the psalmist is to reach out to God with confidence of His care and in praise of His greatness. The psalmist pleads with God to bring honor to His name by taking action to restore His people and address the evil of the enemies.

This aspect of study can throw considerable light on how ancient Israelite life functioned.<sup>82</sup> But without formal training in identifying such patterns how can we discover them in the text? **The first recommendation** is to read and re-read the text several times, and from different translations each time. Each time look for signals of repetitive patterns of thought expression. Make some notes about what you notice. **Second**, turn to a serious commentary for insights about the literary patterns present. For evangelicals, unquestionably the best commentary series available is the Word Biblical Commentary. This 59 volume commentary set on the entire Bible is available in both print and electronic formats. Several other commentary series from slightly varying theological perspectives will also give careful, detailed attention to the literary aspects of the biblical text. These include the Anchor Yale Bible series, Hermeneia Commentary series, Sacra Pagina series, Interpreter’s Bible series et als.<sup>83</sup> **Third**. Many others may mention literary forms present in the text but without much if any explanation. The helpfulness here is alerting you to the presence of such forms. These can then be checked in Bible dictionaries,

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<sup>81</sup>One analysis of the ‘form’ structure is the pattern of main clause verb usage. G. F. Sharrock (AUSS 21 [9183] 211–23) has chosen to begin an analysis with the pattern of the main verbs in the psalm:

2-3	imperatives
4-9	perfects
10–11	imperfects and imperative (?) in v 11
12–17	perfects
18–23	imperatives and jussives

Sharrock concludes that the psalm has an inverted symmetrical structure in the following order:

A	imperatives
B	perfects
C	imperfects
B’	perfects
A’	imperatives

[Marvin E. Tate, vol. 20, *Psalms 51–100*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 245.]

What the psalmist is doing is making use of the Hebrew poetical structure called a chiasmus. This provides a critical avenue into grasping the organization of ideas in the psalm. Thus any exegesis of the psalm that has accuracy will need to examine the psalm against this literary form. Professor Tate in his interpretation of the psalm also identifies several other literary genre aspects as an important part of approaching the content of the psalm. These include grammar patterns, sentence structural patterns etc.

<sup>82</sup>“Form criticism of the prophetic books raises some particularly interesting issues. As we have just seen, some of our information about certain spheres of life in Israel — for example, the procedures in law courts — derives from the use of legal forms by the prophets; but this use is at one remove from the primary or original use of legal forms, since the prophets are deliberately adopting forms from a sphere of activity other than their own in order to communicate their message more vividly. Whereas descriptions in the first person of a vision (as in 1 Kgs 22:19–23 or Amos 9:1–4) may be regarded as characteristically prophetic forms, with their *Sitz im Leben* in public prophesying, forms from the law court, the world of the popular singer (Isa 5:1–7), or the priestly call to worship (Amos 4:4) represent a deliberate use (or rather misuse) by the prophets of forms from other spheres of life. Amos, in effect, pretends to be a priest in order to utter sentiments that no priest would have accepted: that God no longer requires the worship of the sanctuaries. A form-critical study, by showing us the original and proper function of the forms used by the prophets, helps us to see more sharply the originality with which they contradicted the people’s expectations.” [John Barton, “Form Criticism: Old Testament” In vol. 2, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 840-41.]

<sup>83</sup>We are going to come back to the use of ‘secondary’ tools for Bible study later on in Session Six: Bible Study Tools. Additionally my Annotated Bibliography section at cranfordville contains listings of several thousand commentaries with some explanation of how they are formatted etc. This is far from complete but will provide insight into the use of these kinds of tools.

and on the internet, primarily through the Wikipedia.org site. One needs to exercise great caution in using the internet, simply because outside of web sites generated by genuine scholars a lot of worthless junk can be found. **Fourth**, when the commentaries being used mention specific literary genres in the passage, make a habit out of looking this form up in a Bible dictionary. Having a growing background understanding will not only increase your comprehension of the content of a passage, but will significantly help you spot the presence of these forms in other passages.

### 3.1.1.3.2 New Testament Sub-Forms

The picture of how repetitive patterns of expression served as vehicles of communication both orally and in written expression is complex. And modern scholarship continues to struggle in order to get a handle on how all this worked during the first Christian century. The adoption of methods of Form Criticism from Old Testament studies into the field of New Testament work began in the early 1900s with scholars such as Karl Ludwig Schmidt (*Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu*, 1919), Martin Dibelius (*Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*, 1919), Rudolf Bultmann (*Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (1921), and Vincent Taylor (*The Formation of the Gospel Tradition*, 1933). But the limitations of most of these methods -- essentially analyzing assumed orally developed forms in written materials using methods designed only for written materials in source analysis efforts; also a preoccupation with issues of historicity -- have over time raised serious questions regarding especially the Sitz-im-Leben inquiries. For Dibelius and Bultmann, their German Lutheran background made Jesus look very much like an early 1900s Lutheran pastor in Germany. The historical issues of authenticity and historicity eventually overwhelmed much of this methodology rendering it of little value for studying the life of Jesus. But the positive contributions from this approach have been numerous largely in sensitizing the reader to the existence of repetitive patterns as important vehicles for communicating ideas.

In the US, the emergence of Literary Criticism in the 1930s for literature in general prompted biblical scholars such as Amos N. Wilder (*The Language of the Gospel*, 1964), who just happened to be the older brother of Thornton Wilder, the playwright and novelist, to advance the methods of form analysis. Wilder called attention to the fact that the written forms in the NT lie outside the formal categories of secular written forms in the Greco-Roman world. His conclusion was that the NT forms had their beginnings in oral communication and still retained many of those oral characteristics. A variety of American scholars have specialized on different forms in the NT through the 1980s under the umbrella label of Aesthetic Form Criticism. These scholars drew heavily from the parallel discipline in modern English literature studies in both the US and the UK.

In the 80s another version began to emerge that has come to be labeled Rhetorical Criticism. It evolved into three separate expressions with emphasis on ancient modes of rhetoric as a primary focus.<sup>84</sup> A second focus was centered on the use of Hellenistic rhetorical categories to analyze especially the rest of the NT beyond the gospels. Hans Dieter Betz was a major pioneer in this area. The third category focused on analyzing these forms in the entire NT with central interest in social analysis of first century society. A key leader in this was Klaus Berger at Heidelberg University.<sup>85</sup> His massive linguistic skills and knowledge of ancient literature served as the basis for the most comprehensive analysis of the sub-genre forms of the entire NT that has ever been accomplished (*Die Formgeschichte des Neuen Testaments*). But a wide range of scholars, mostly in the US, have worked on the social setting angle of the huge variety of sub-forms that surface inside the NT.

Although clearly the modern trends have limitations built into them as examples of applying methods developed for literary critical fields, the importance of gaining understanding about the wide variety of genre forms undeniably present in the NT text prompts continuing efforts to fully grasp the nature and role of those forms for communication of the Gospel in the ancient world.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Robert Tannehill would be a key scholar here. I had the opportunity in the 1980s to being a limited participant in the Rhetorical Criticism seminar of the North American Society of Biblical Literature group. My interest in this field of studies had originated out of my earlier interest in and work with classical Greek and the methods of communication developed from Aristotle on.

<sup>85</sup>In addition to working closely with Prof. Gerd Theissen on my sabbatic leave year in 1990-91 at Heidelberg university, I also sat in classes led by Prof. Berger, and had private conversations with him regarding this work, which fascinated me.

<sup>86</sup>“One of the crucial insights of form criticism in biblical studies was the realization of the importance of genre recognition for textual interpretation. One cannot understand a particular text without at least some implicit knowledge of the genre to which that text belongs. There is no literary creation ex nihilo Every writer who desires to communicate with an audience must draw on previously known literary conventions of one type or another. The writer starts with a specific genre or set of genres in mind. He or she may work

Regarding the gospels, the groups of the sub-genres tends to follow the categories growing out of what Jesus said (1; sayings) and what He did (2, narratives).<sup>87</sup> Among the sayings section, the most frequent pattern is the parables of Jesus. In the narrative materials of the gospels, the miracles of Jesus are the most prominent form, but other forms such as the Pronouncement Story, and Stories about Jesus (from a heroic angle) are found. In the Acts account Luke builds his story of the early church out of narratives and speeches (which take up more space than the narratives). Among the narratives two distinctly different types are used: episodic narratives describing a single event, and including some miracle and commissioning narratives; and summary narratives that characterize idealistically a period of time in the early church (including brief narratives and summarizing statements). Among the speeches, both the Defense Speech (defending the Gospel against critics) and the Missionary Speech (presenting the Gospel to non-christian audience) dominate the materials. Among the letters, the basic categories of ancient letter (Praescriptio; Proem; Body; Conclusio) form the organizing structure. Inside each of these is an extensive use of smaller sub-forms for idea expression. With the final apocalypse category, two basic sub-genres are used: visions and letters. Interestingly, in both Acts and the letters much greater dependence on Hellenistic Greek forms is seen than either for the Gospels or Revelation, which draw primarily out of their Jewish social settings.

Again, general familiarity with these forms is important to the interpretation process. Identifying the sub-forms as they surface inside a passage is very helpful to understanding the text. As with the OT sub-forms, the use of secondary tools, primarily commentaries and Bible dictionaries, is very important to developing sensitivity to the existence of these forms in the text.

### 3.1.2 Literary Setting: Context

Not only is identifying the literary genre at its various levels important, but learning to recognize the impact of the surrounding context on the meaning of a passage is equally important. Several important aspects of this need to be put on the table.<sup>88</sup>

**First**, the determination of a natural unit of text material as the starting point of interpretation. At a beginning level the comparing of the paragraph limits found in different translations helps get the process underway. Biblical writers developed their ideas in 'chunks' of written expression that general hang together as a natural unit of thought. Learning to spot standard 'discourse markers' such as vocative case forms, shifts of scenes in a narrative, use of rhetorical questions to introduce a new topic etc. will enable the reader to sense where the units of thought start and stop. Quite often a distinct literary genre such as a parable will set the boundaries of the passage simply by the literary form being used by the writer.

**Second**, when seeking to determine the precise meaning of words and short phrases, the flow of thought in which these exist plays an important role in deciding whether meaning two or four of a word is the correct sense of reference or not. For example, in determining the meaning of the verb φιλέω for John 15:19, the dictionary meanings are 1) consider someone as a friend, or love 2) to enjoy doing things, or 3) to kiss someone as sign of affection. In translating εἰ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου ἦτε, ὁ κόσμος ἂν τὸ ἴδιον **ἐφίλει**, [if you belonged to the world, the world would ? you like it does its own](#). Obviously meaning one is the only meaning that will work correctly here through the conventions associated with these genres, transform them in important ways, or even totally explode them, but use them he or she must. These same genre conventions provide the reader or hearer with an initial frame of reference, some means by which to begin to extract meaning from the text." [F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Genre" In *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 493-94.]

<sup>87</sup>For a detailed listing and summary explanations of the various sub-genres in the New Testament see my "New Testament Genre," [cranfordville.com](http://cranfordville.com).

<sup>88</sup>"This aspect of the exegesis process seeks to understand the implications of the position of a passage within a major division of a biblical book, and within the overall structure of the book itself. What does the passage immediately follow and precede? What does it depend upon that has already been said to the reader, and what does it tell the reader that subsequent passages will reflect in some way? Any passage in any biblical book is either part of a structured progression of information (as in one of the historical books) or a particular instance of a type of literary unit among similar or different types collected in a biblical book (as one psalm in the Psalter). The author or editor of any book has presumably used some sort of criterion for the arrangement of the material as now found (even if that criterion is simple randomness or convenience of grouping according to the order in which the materials came into his or her hand), and any passage can somehow be identified by its contribution to that arrangement and its influence upon it. Conversely, some of the meaning of any statement or passage is derived from its position within a larger document, since meaning is at least partly a function of context." [Douglas Stuart, "Exegesis" In vol. 2, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 683.]

due to the context.

**Third**, locating the passage inside the context of the full document can be very important. When Paul labels himself as δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, κλητὸς ἀπόστολος, Christ’s servant, a called apostle, in Rom. 1:1, the meaning is determined by the fact that both δοῦλος and ἀπόστολος appear here in the titular section of the Prae-scriptio of the letter. That is, both these terms are titles of divinely commissioned authority. Coming at the very beginning of this long letter they assert who Paul is within the parameters of God’s calling on his life.

Below some basic guidelines to follow are set forth.

### 3.1.2.1 Principle of *Usus Loquendi*

This Latin phrase has different meanings depending on how it is used. But in the field of biblical interpretation it is often used to specify an expanding context that plays a vital role in determining text meaning. For analyzing word meanings etc. the context of the particular document is important. Does that word or short phrase occur multiple times in the document? If so, the likelihood is great that the author is going to use it with the same category of meaning consistently through the document. This is especially important for words that are loaded with rich theological meaning, such as χάρις, *grace*, which is used in 18 different texts in Romans.

Checking these words, even in translation, can be done by the use of a Bible concordance. Although these are available as printed books, increasingly Bible students turn to the internet based concordances. Two in particular I would recommend as having wide flexibility to set how much of the Bible you want to search and which translation you want to use in doing the searching: *Bible Study Tools* at [www.biblestudytoos.com](http://www.biblestudytoos.com) and *Bible Gateway* at [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com). Both contain translations in a wide range of translations in several different modern languages.

The expanding context of a passage extends ever wider to include the entire Bible and can include related literature in the ancient world, if it is addressing the same or similar topic as the passage being studied.

### 3.1.2.2 Scripture Cross-References

Just a word about the various levels of cross-references you will come across in Bibles and sometimes in separate books. These are intended to link up all scripture references to a particular word or biblical theme. Limited listings often are in the center columns of print Bibles, or else on the outside margins. The example on the right from the NASB is rather typical. Often the complexity of the format is such that it is confusing to try to use them. One has to exercise caution about the way the listing of references is done. In my studies over the past half century, I have not found most of these to be of much significant help.

There are separate books, some of which are available online, that contain more thorough listings. The ones that most often show up both in print and online are the *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, first published around 1830 in London and many decades later was revised by R.A. Torrey, whose name is most often associated with it. Of course it is based on the King James Version of the Bible, and is substantially outdated.<sup>89</sup> Precisely because the copyright ownership of the publication has long since expired, it shows up at many websites dealing with Bible study. The other popular volume is *Nave’s Topical Bible*, first published in the early 1900s. Likewise it used the KJV, but a later revision also was made available using the English Revised Version. It is also available online at most of the Bible study websites, for the same copyright reason as the TSK. Both of these can be of some value, but I would urge caution in using them because of their limitations of being published over a 100 years ago, and the use of the KJV text.

### 3.1.2.3 Avoid Proof-Texting

What do we mean by ‘proof-texting’? In Bible study it refers to the stacking up of a series of scripture

<sup>89</sup>For a helpful analysis of the history and formatting of this volume see “What was the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge?,” the Scriptorium at [patheos.com](http://patheos.com).

## THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN

### *You Walk in the Truth*

**1** \*THE elder to the beloved <sup>b</sup>Gaius, whom I <sup>c</sup>love in truth.

**2** Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. **3** For I <sup>1</sup>was very glad when <sup>b</sup>brethren came and bore witness to your truth, *that is*, how you <sup>a</sup>are walking in truth. **4** I have no greater joy than <sup>1</sup>this, to hear of <sup>a</sup>my children <sup>b</sup>walking in the truth.

**5** Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the <sup>a</sup>brethren, and especially *when they are* <sup>b</sup>strangers; **6** and they bear witness to your love before the church; and you will do well to <sup>a</sup>send them on their way in a manner <sup>b</sup>worthy of God. **7** For they went out for the sake of <sup>a</sup>the Name, <sup>b</sup>accepting nothing from

<sup>1</sup> \*2 John 1  
<sup>b</sup> Acts 19:29;  
20:4; Rom.  
16:23; 1 Cor.  
1:14 <sup>c</sup> 1 John  
3:18; 2 John 1  
3 <sup>1</sup> Or, *am very  
glad when  
brethren come  
and bear  
witness*  
<sup>a</sup> 2 John 4 <sup>b</sup> Acts  
1:15; Gal.  
6:10; 3 John 5,  
10  
<sup>4</sup> Lit., *these  
things, that I  
hear*  
<sup>a</sup> 1 Cor. 4:14f.;  
2 Cor. 6:13;  
Gal. 4:19;  
1 Thess. 2:11;  
1 Tim. 1:2;  
2 Tim. 1:2;  
Phillem. 10;  
1 John 2:1  
<sup>b</sup> 2 John 4

the Gentiles. **8** Therefore we ought to <sup>1</sup>support such men, that we may be <sup>b</sup> fellow workers <sup>2</sup>with the truth.

**9** I wrote something to the church; but Diotrefes, who loves to <sup>a</sup>be first among them, does not accept <sup>1</sup>what we say. **10** For this reason, <sup>a</sup>if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself <sup>b</sup>receive the <sup>c</sup>brethren, and he forbids those who desire to *do so*, and <sup>d</sup>puts them out of the church. **11** Beloved, <sup>a</sup>do not

<sup>5</sup> \* Acts 1:15; Gal. 6:10; 3 John 3, 10 <sup>b</sup> Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2 <sup>6</sup> Acts 15:3; Titus 3:13 <sup>b</sup> Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12 <sup>7</sup> \* 1 John 15:21; Acts 5:41; Phil. 2:9 <sup>b</sup> Acts 20:33, 35 <sup>8</sup> Or, *receive such men as guests* <sup>2</sup> Or, *for* <sup>9</sup> Lit., *us* <sup>2</sup> John 9 <sup>10</sup> \* 2 John 12 <sup>b</sup> 2 John 10; 3 John 5 <sup>a</sup> Acts 1:15; Gal. 6:10; 3 John 3, 5 <sup>4</sup> John 9:34 <sup>11</sup> \* Ps. 34:14; 37:27

verses from different parts of the Bible in order to assert a theological proposition. Normally this means lifting each of the verses out of its original context with a high likelihood of new, different meaning being given to the verses when they are strung together in order to prove some religious point. This is a horrible practice and enables the individual to make the Bible say whatever he wants it to say.<sup>90</sup> The hermeneutical reason such abuse of scripture is wrong and dangerous is that when a series of isolated verses are strung together in some way to prove a point a brand new context is established for these verses completely outside scripture and normally based on human reasoning that stands behind their organization as 'scripture proof' of some point.

Proof texting is scripture cross referencing gone sour! Honest scripture study will studiously avoid treating the biblical text in such an abusive manner.

### **3.1.3 Literary Structure: Idea Organization**

The last literary aspect needing some attention is the internal organization of ideas within the established passage of scripture. How does one grasp the flow of thought in the text?

A wide variety of interpretive procedures have been advocated over the years.<sup>91</sup> Any procedure used must give attention to some basics in the text.

#### **3.1.3.1 Grammar Basics**

Modern western languages have their own distinctive ways of putting ideas together, as did the Hebrew and the Greek of the Bible. In using translations for Bible study careful attention to these building blocks can also be very helpful.

Languages in the western world begin with single words. Add other words to them and phrases of some kind emerge, such as a prepositional phrase: when the word 'church' is expanded to 'inside the church' you automatically know that church can no longer mean people but now in the phrase means a building. Further expansions come with verbal action expression, 'because the people are inside the church.' At this dependent clause expansion suggests some else about church. But it can be expanded more: The people are safe from the weather because they are inside the church. By adding an independent clause you now have a sentence with a primary clause -- the people are safe from the weather -- and a dependent clause -- because they are inside the church. Further expansions can be made to this in order to extend the idea: The people are safe from the weather because they are inside the church, and they are thankful to God for His protection. Now you have two main ideas with a secondary idea attached to the first.

#### **3.1.3.2 Primary and Secondary Ideas**

One needs to learn to read the Bible noting these kinds of structure. To be sure, some restructuring of thought relationships will take place in translation simply because these two ancient languages may not put sentences together the same way as modern languages do. But comparative study of a couple of translations will help you begin to see the primary ideas expressed in a paragraph or a few paragraphs that comprise a scripture text.

The next step is to identify the sentences in a paragraph of text. Once these have been noted, pay close attention to the 'connectors' linking the sentences informally. Note 3 John 2-4:

2 Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul.

3 I was overjoyed when some of the friends arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely how you walk in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

These can be of a wide variety of patterns. When the elder speaks of the health of their soul in v. 2, he comes back to touch on this with 'faithfulness to the truth' in the second sentence in v. 3. This is then linked in that

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<sup>90</sup>“Many ministers and teachers have used some version of the following humorous anecdote to demonstrate the dangers of proof texting: ‘A man dissatisfied with his life decided to consult the Bible for guidance. Closing his eyes, he flipped the book open and pointed to a spot on the page. Opening his eyes, he read the verse under his finger. It read, ‘Then Judas went away and hanged himself’ (Matthew 27:5b) Closing his eyes again, the man randomly selected another verse. This one read, ‘Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise.’” (Luke 10:37b)” [“Proof text,” wikipedia.org]

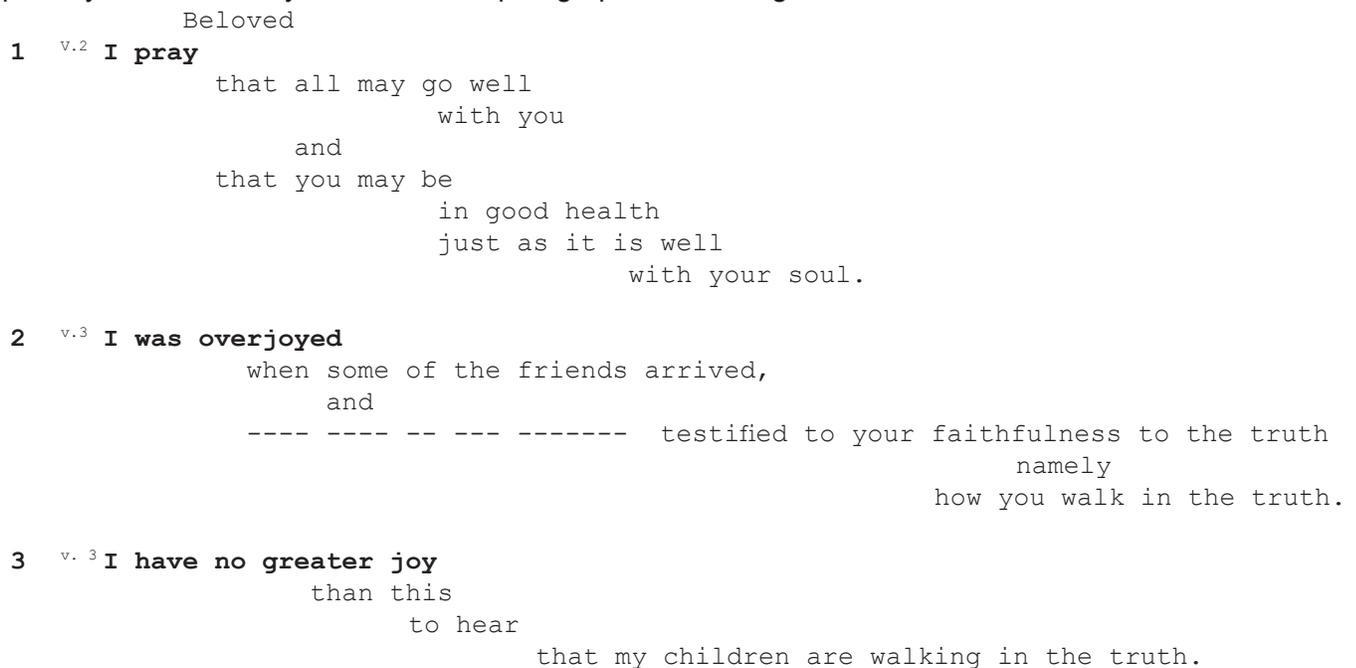
<sup>91</sup>For a helpful survey of many of these see Fee, Gordon D. *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*. 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002) under “The Structure Analysis” in Section II.1. Also see Stuart, Douglas K. *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*. 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) under “6. Structure,” with five subpoints of analytical activity for OT passages.

sentence to ‘walk in the truth,’ and is repeated again at the end of verse 4. The three main clauses in the three sentences are “I pray”, “I was overjoyed,” and “I have no greater joy than this.” This signals that the primary emphasis of this paragraph is the positive feeling of the elder toward Gaius. The secondary clauses flesh out the content and motivation for this positive feeling toward Gaius: his prayer for Gaius (v. 2); when good news came about Gaius (v. 3); what gives the elder his greatest joy (v. 4).

One of the quite intriguing ideas here is the elder’s prayer that Gaius may be prospered with physical health that comes up to the high level of his spiritual health. This is not the usual thrust of prayers for others. Additionally, one key word here that is repeated three times is ‘the truth.’ Here is where commentary study and Bible dictionaries become important, and can be supplemented by a concordance survey of ‘truth’ in 3 John, the Johannine letters, then the Johannine writings including the gospel and Revelation. The context can be expanded further if needed in order to gain the broader picture. But this study needs to come after identifying the words connected to truth in the passage: Gaius exemplified ‘faithfulness to the truth’ and he ‘walked in the truth.’ What do these concepts mean? What other words are connected to ‘truth’ elsewhere in this letter? Gaius is ‘loved in truth’ (v. 1); believers may be ‘co-workers with the truth’ (v. 8); the elder’s testimony is ‘true’ (v. 12). Now a broader picture is emerging about ‘truth.’

### 3.1.3.3 Block Diagramming of Pericopes

Block diagramming is the schematizing of the sentences of the text in order to create a visual presentation of primary and secondary ideas.<sup>92</sup> In this paragraph such a diagram would be as follows:



Note the key issues in review by answering the following questions;

- 1) How many ‘main’ ideas are in this paragraph?
- 2) What are the two things in the content of the elder’s prayer for Gaius?
- 3) How did the elder come to be overjoyed? Name the two aspects of the ‘when’ clause.
- 4) Why did the elder structure statement #3 in an inclusive way rather than just referring to Gaius?
- 5) Explain the nature of ‘truth’ as defined here in this paragraph.
- 6) List some possible teaching and preaching points from this paragraph.

### 3.2 Utilizing Literary Aspects for Interpretation

Hopefully in this presentation regarding the literary aspects of the text you have picked up some important points regarding things to look for when reading and study a Bible passage. At the beginning it can seem daunting to get a handle on all that I have presented, And it is indeed a ‘mouth full’ of ideas needing to be

<sup>92</sup>For detailed instructions on doing this procedure see “Steps to a Literary Structural Analysis of the Greek Text,” at cranfordville.com: <http://cranfordville.com/gkgrma05.pdf>.

grasped. Let me suggest that you begin systematically by working on one or two aspects at a time. Read through the background discussion above. Then raise relevant questions from that material in connection to 3 John. It takes time to learn how to read the biblical text like what I'm proposing. What you are reading above is the accumulated result of over 50 years of study and skill development on my part. I didn't learn all this over night! So be patient with yourself and begin developing these skills for reading texts.

### **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has opened some new horizons for you. Some of them seem daunting and difficult to master. But given time and patient work those skills will begin to materialize in your own study of scripture. Gradually, over time you will find yourself concentrating more and more on just the biblical text, and depending on outside help less and less. When seeking to prepare to teach or preach from the text, you will increasingly come to the place of feeling there is so much here in this text, what to I eliminate in order to fit it into the limited time I have.