



Biblical Foundations

Course I - Bible Basics

From History to Daily Use

Week 6 – How to Read Biblical Genre:
Narrative, Epistle, Poetry/Wisdom

Objectives

- To understand the various types of writing in the Bible (genres).
- To begin to understand the guidelines that inform how we read each of those genres.

Primary Bible Genres

Old Testament:

- Law
- History
- Poetry/Wisdom
- Prophecy

New Testament:

- Gospel
- History (Acts)
- Letter/Epistle
- Apocalyptic (Prophecy)

20 Books of Pure Narrative

- Genesis
- Joshua
- Judges
- Ruth
- Books of Samuel
- Books of Kings
- Books of Chronicles
- Ezra
- Nehemiah
- Esther
- Daniel
- Jonah
- Gospels
- Acts

Rules for reading every text:

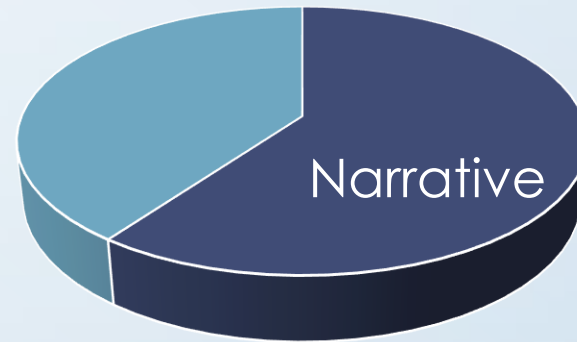
- It's not about you!
- Consider the influence of Author, Audience, and Context (Middle Eastern)
- The Author has a particular, specific, and limited message to convey. **AND SO...**
- A text can't mean what it never meant! It means first what it meant there and then to them.



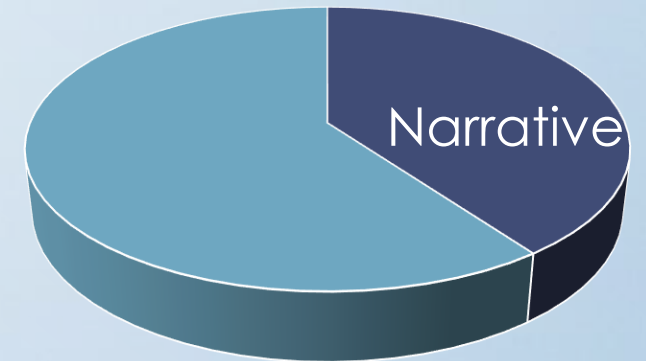
Narrative – a sub-genre

- 60% of the New Testament
- 40% of the Old Testament
- **Purpose:** To entertain and inform creatively.

New Testament



Old Testament



Parts of Narrative

Plot

- The story's map or path; it has a particular, specific, limited purpose/message

Characters

- We know them by what they do and what they say

Dialogue

- Offers clues to the speaker's inner life, motives, personality

Setting/Scenes

- Context within the story that give clues to meaning and message

Characteristics of Narrative

- Scripture Narrative records **real** events about **real** people in **real** places doing **real** things. It is not allegory!
- Narrative is not necessarily **prescriptive** or **normative**
- Narrative **does not establish doctrine or provide exhaustive theology**, but illustrates what is taught elsewhere
- Narrative is **selective** and **limited** in its details

Well, Timmy...

The “moral” is
not the point
of the story.





God is the hero and the point of every story.

No ***part*** of a Narrative can
be fully understood
outside the context of the
whole passage,
whole chapter,
whole book...
Whole Bible.



DANGER!

Misinterpret

Misunderstand

Misapply

Misled



Dear Jill,

It was such a blessing to see you last week and to visit with you and Chad. It's always such a lively conversation when we are all together. I wanted to tell you that I saw the movie you mentioned and thought it was excellent, though I disagree with your thoughts about the CG.

Now, about the decision you're trying to make: I think you should reconsider your plans to make such a big purchase just now in favor of saving. In light of the economy, it seems only prudent to lay away a nest egg. I trust and hope that this advice will help you secure a stable future.

All the best to you and your family –

Melissa

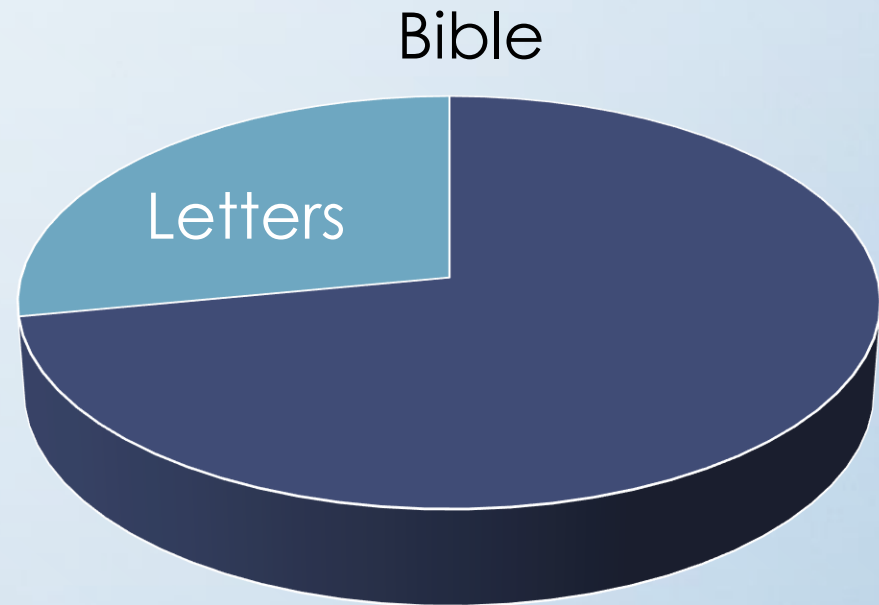
Personal Letters/Encyclical Epistles:

Purpose: To inform, instruct, request, inquire, remit, order, advise, correct, and question.

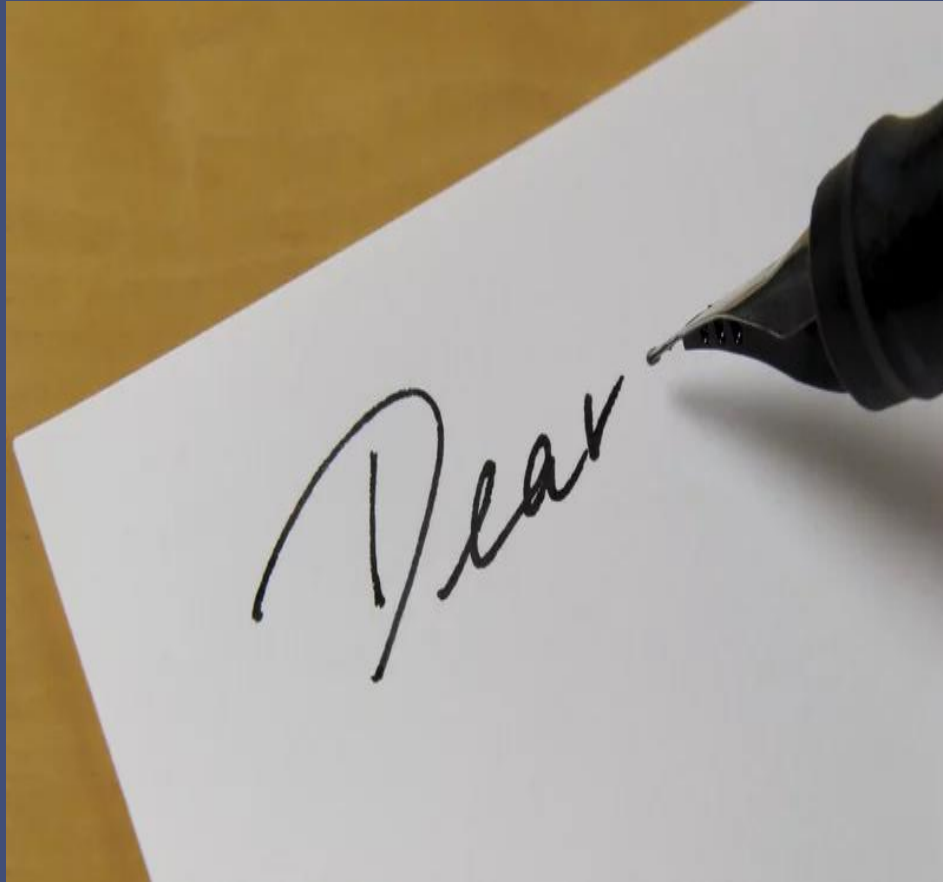
Parts:

Writer and Recipient
Greeting
*Prayer, benediction
Body
Farewell

- **28%** of the Bible is comprised of **21 Letters, 6 Authors**



Behind the Letter: 3+1



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- Author
- Audience
- Context
- Occasion

Characteristics of Letters

Occasional Documents

- “arising out of, and intended for a specific occasion or purpose”

Oral Documents

- meant to be read aloud

Establish Orthodoxy

- clarify proper theology, doctrine, and practice of Christian life

Demand Orthopraxy

- emphasize the need for correct conduct

It means FIRST what it meant THEN,THERE, to THEM.
Not, “What does it mean TO ME?”



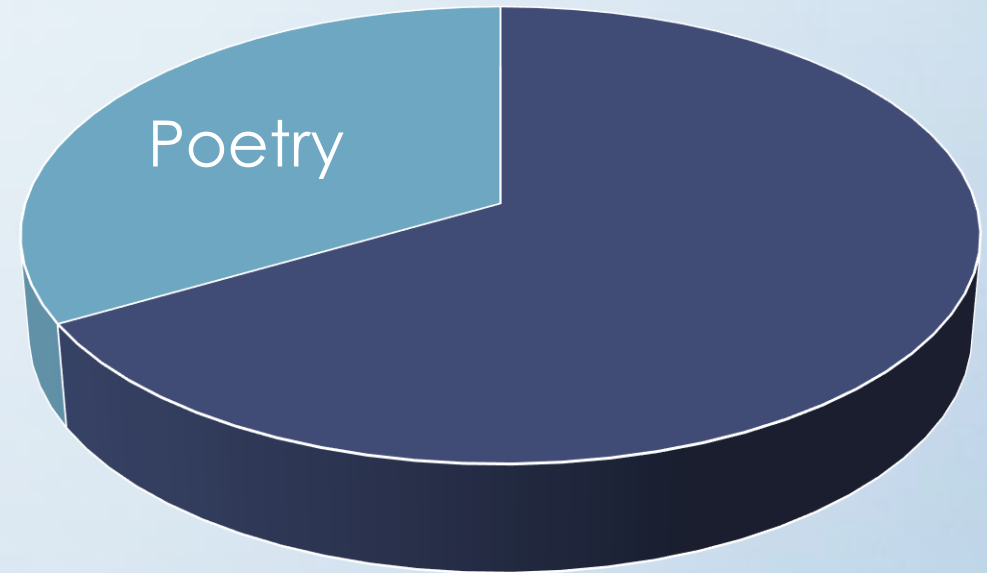


Applies THE SAME to us NOW only when/where
our situations are comparable to theirs,
otherwise only in principle.

Poetry/Wisdom:

Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon
(and sometimes Lamentations)

- **1/3** of the Bible is comprised of Poetry and Wisdom



Purpose of Poetry:

- Tools for worship or prayer; songs and poems designed to creatively invite the listener to share the Author's circumstances, experience, and feelings, or enter his reasoning.
 - Poetry has a more **general and universal** appeal to the emotion or reason of the listener than other genres in scripture.

Characteristics of Poetry

- Sound **unmetered** and **unrhymed** in translation
- Arranged in **lines**, **couplets** and **stanzas** working in ***parallelism***
- Use highly **figurative language**



Psalms



The Two Basic Types:

Laments

Hymns of Praise

Five “Books: Mimic Torah

Purpose of Wisdom Literature:

- Though they are poetically crafted, they are meant to appeal to ***reason*** to inspire deeper **thinking, speculation, reflection, and to stimulate a corrective response.** Meant to draw man's mind and heart back to the Lord in repentance. All the characteristics of Poetry still apply, and Wisdom Literature retains its more general and universal appeal.



Parts and Purposes of Biblical Wisdom Literature:

Job

- Speculative wisdom poetry
- Asks, “What is good and right and true”.
- Characters and questions are foils or contrasts for God’s perfect unfailing wisdom and truth.

Proverbs

- Short, poetically crafted, expressions of general truths.
- Easy to remember; not meant to be precise or universally true.
- Not meant as promises, or to establish doctrine, but as general truths for a life oriented toward God.
- “Hinge” for the other two.

Ecclesiastes

- Speculative wisdom poetry
- Asks “What’s the point?”
- Characters and questions are foils or contrasts for God’s perfect unfailing wisdom and truth.

First Rule of Reading Proverbs:

They are NOT promises.



Parts of Proverbs: 4 Sections

- **Chapters 1-7** – Poems from a father to a son **to impart wisdom for Godly living**
- **Chapters 8-9** – An invitation to the salvation of wisdom
- **Chapters 10-29** – The “truisms” and wisdom of Jesus... our “Greater Solomon”
- **Chapters 30-31** – Epilogue and illustration of wisdom employed

Assignment

Practice Reading Epistle, Poetry, Wisdom

