

Understanding Hebrew Poetry:

(back)

Characteristics:

- Concise, concentrated expressions of thought
- Emotional language, spoken from the heart to the heart
- Visual language that uses creative imagery and vivid metaphors
- Poetic forms, including Hebrew parallelism

Suggestions:

- Pay attention to Hebrew parallelism and how the thought of one line is either restated, expanded, or contrasted in the next line
- Remember that imagery and emotion are used to express something about the world we live in or the God who made it
- Listen to the tone of a poem to understand what is going on in the poet's heart and the emotions being elicited by the author

Questions to Consider – Poetry:

Reread Jonah 2:1-3.

Why do you suppose the author has transitioned at this point in the book of Jonah from narrative to the poetry of Jonah's prayer?

From what we know about Jonah's character in this story so far, what should our attitude be as we listen to Jonah's prayer?

How does the description of Jonah's experience in the first lines of his prayer compare to the author's description of these events in 1:1-17?

PRINCIPLE FIVE: Understanding Genre (Part 1)

(front)

What is "Genre"?

The word "genre" refers to a certain "family" or "type" of communication. It is used in everything from music and art to entertainment and literature.

In literature, genres are distinguished by characteristics like style, form, content, and subject matter.



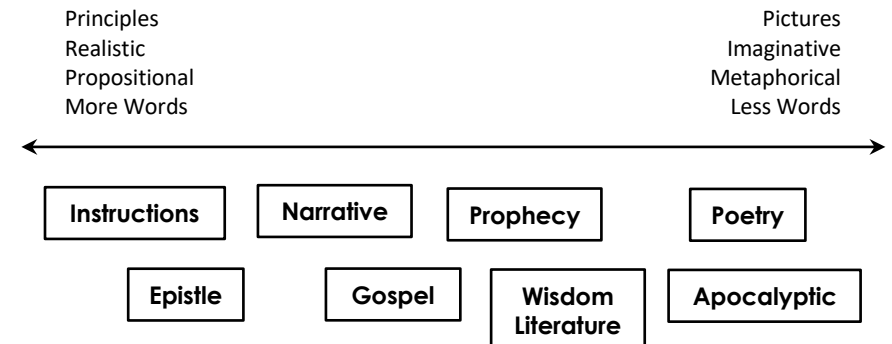
Why is "Understanding Genre" important?

Understanding the genre of a particular passage or book of the Bible sets our expectations for what we will find in it. It then helps us understand what an author is saying through it.

What are the genres of the Bible?

Since the Bible is made up of many different books of many different sorts, it contains many different types of literature, many different "genres." Moreover, while most of the individual books of the Bible are associated with a single genre, many contain more than one genre within them.

One important way to distinguish the genres of the Bible is by how each uses language to express its message. The following spectrum compares different genres by the kind of language each one uses:



What are the genres of the book of Jonah?

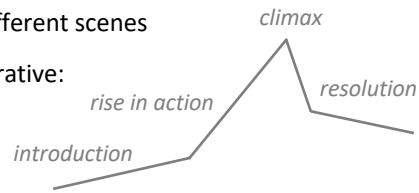
Although Jonah is typically thought of as a "prophetic" book, this has more to do with its focus on Jonah, a prophet, than its literary characteristics.

When looked at through the lens of literature, the two genres found in the book of Jonah are: 1. *Historical Narrative*; and 2. *Hebrew Poetry*.

Understanding Historical Narrative:

Characteristics:

- Complex characters known by their actions and dialogue
- A coherent story made up of different scenes
- The essential elements of a narrative:
 1. Problem or Conflict
 2. Climax
 3. Resolution (sometimes leading to new problems / conflicts)
- A narrator who tells the story from a particular perspective and for a particular purpose



Suggestions:

- Identify the overarching story and how each scene relates to it
- Consider why the author tells each part of the story in a particular way
- Identify a story's climax to see how its problem / conflict is addressed
- Identify a story's resolution to understand its wider significance
- Remember that the Bible's narratives ultimately teach us about God because he is its central character

Questions to Consider – Narrative:

Reread Jonah 1:1-17. This chapter is the first act of the larger story.

Who are the main characters in this passage? How are they introduced and developed?

Who are the supporting characters in this passage? How do they support the development of the story?

What is the problem / conflict in this passage? How does it arise?

How does the passage develop? Where do tensions arise?

What are the major turning points in this passage?

Where is the climax of the passage? How is the initial problem / conflict of the passage finally addressed?

Where is the resolution of the passage? From this, what is the significance of this passage for its readers?