

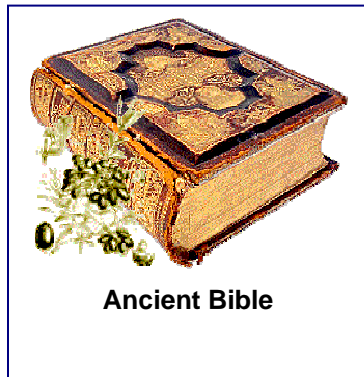
## Bible Basics – Literary Styles

### Overview

When you read the bible, you will notice that it seems to have more than one style of writing. The Jews made use of many different ways in which to present their inspired stories. As we learned earlier – there were also many types of inspired writers.

### Literary styles or forms

It is very important to know what literary form a writer uses to convey his message. Is it a work of history, a poem, a figure of speech, a parable? If you do not know, you may misunderstand the writer's message. That is why we must pay attention to the literary styles (forms) of the Bible. The following are just a few of them.



- ❖ **The Parable:** is a short fictitious narrative from which a moral or spiritual truth is drawn. See Isaiah 5:1-7 (the Vineyard Song) and the parables of the Gospels! Keep in mind that the point of the parable (not the details) is God's message to believers – but is used to illustrate the point.
- ❖ **The Allegory:** is a figure story with a veiled or hidden meaning. Read Genesis 2:3 (creation); 4:1-16 (Cain and Able); 11:19 (tower of Babel). The Bible does not teach science; it teaches religious values. It uses these folktales to teach a lesson. Again, the point of the allegory (not the details) is God's message to you.
- ❖ **The Beast Fable:** See Numbers 22:22-35 (where Balaam is summoned). The author chose this literary form to convey his message.
- ❖ **The Short Story and the Historical Novel:** See Judges 13:16 (birth of Samson) and Exodus. The cores of these stories are historical, but remember that the author did not intend to write history as we find it in our schoolbooks; he simply uses traditions and fashions them to bring out a religious lesson.
- ❖ **The Problem Story:** The best-known problem stories in our contemporary literature are those on the race issue. A Hebrew problem story is the Book of Ruth on intermarriage. The point is a plea for tolerance.
- ❖ **The Speech as a Literary Device:** Read 1 Kings 8:14-21; Acts 17:22-31. It is not important whether or not King Solomon or Paul delivered these speeches verbatim as related here. It is the inspired author who wants to state something by putting these words into the mouth of a person with authority.
- ❖ **Etiology:** Often this device was used to describe something the Jews observed but had no explanation for. In Genesis we read that Eve was to have pain associated with childbirth and the explanation is that it was as a penance for her disobedience to God. This device is used often throughout the Bible.