

THE DIVERSITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

The Scriptures have a rich and beautiful diversity of material in them. There are narratives, poetry, parables and epistles; a variety of literary forms and authors. A brief survey of the Books of the Bible reveals the many forms of God's written word.

In the Old Testament., the first 5 books., written by Moses around the 15th century B.C. are called the "Torah" or "Law." In them we have the narrative material of the Patriarchs and the Exodus and wilderness wanderings; In Exodus, the instructions for the Tabernacle and the Moral Law; Leviticus contains instructions for the worship and sacrifices; and in Deuteronomy the Moral law (God's covenant with Israel), the civil laws and Moses' final words.

Joshua through Chronicles contain historical narrative and biographical material. Writers contributing included Samuel and Ezra., as well as many nameless prophets and individuals. In the Jewish canon of Scripture, these were included as a part of the prophets, with the exception of Ezra., Nehemiah and Esther.

The Psalms contain Hebrew Poetry, many of which were written by David. There are a variety of forms of poetry represented. Job is an extended dramatic poem. The Proverbs is a collection of Hebrew "wisdom". Ecclesiastes is an essay on meaning in life and Song of Songs a love poem.

The Major and Minor Prophets have a rich variety of material: sermons, object lessons, poetry, predictions, narrative material, exhortation and warnings. Isaiah and Jeremiah have poetry to rival the Psalms, Hosea and Ezekiel object lessons, the predictions of Isaiah, Daniel and Zechariah strikingly accurate in their fulfilment. There is much symbolism and apocalyptic material.

The New Testament begins with the Gospels rich in narratives concerning the life of Christ, with many parables and sermons, especially in Matthew 5-7 and its parallels, and in John's discourses. Acts is an accurate narrative of the growth of the church with numerous speeches and sermons included.

The Pauline Epistles contain correspondence including doctrinal discourses, personal greetings, sermon material, admonition and encouragement. The General Epistles also contain much of the variety of things you would expect in letters from church leaders to their flocks concerning the needs of the community of believers.

The New Testament has prophetic material in the book of Revelation.

In interpreting these various kinds of material, all the basic principles apply. The consideration of word meanings and grammar, contexts and historical background, the recognition of figures of speech, etc. The basic principles of one meaning per passage and taking the plain (literal) sense still apply when interpreting poetry and prophecy in the same way they do in prose and narrative, as does the principle that "a text can not mean what it never meant" to its original writers and readers.

We will consider specific rules of interpretation relative to particular genres or type of Biblical literature: Epistles, Narratives, Law, Poetry, Gospels, Parables, Prophecy, Wisdom Literature, Typology, Symbolism and Apocalyptic Literature individually.