



Box 1.7 Some Representative Literary Genres in the Hebrew Bible

A library of ancient Israelite literature, the Hebrew Bible (Tanak) contains a remarkable variety of literary genres composed over a period of more than 1000 years. Scholars believe that ancient hymns celebrating Israel's military victories (late second millennium B.C.E. are among the oldest documents incor-

porated into the biblical text; mystical visions of future history, such as those found in Daniel, are thought to be among the last written (c. 165 B.C.E.). Scholars disagree on the dates of composition for most of the examples given below.

GENRE	REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLE
Battle/Victory Hymns	"Song of the Sea" (Exod. 15:1-18) "Song of Deborah" (Judg. 5:1-31)
Fable	"Jotham's Fable of Kingship" (Judg. 9:8-15)
Historical Narrative	Prose Epic of Israel's Origins: from the call of Abraham to the Israelites' arrival at Mount Sinai/Horeb (Gen. 12:1-Exod. 19:25); from the formulation of the Mosaic Covenant to the forty-year wandering in the wilderness (Exod. 24:1-18; 32:1-34:35; Num. 10:11-26:4; 31:1-36:13); from the conquest of Canaan to the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon (Josh. 1:1-2; Kings 25:30).
Divine Commands and Statutes	The Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21). The Book of the Covenant (legal regulations) (Exod. 20:22-23:33); collections of divine decrees and ordinances (Exod. 35:1-40:33; Lev. 1:1-27:34; Num. 1:1-10:10; Deut. 4:44-30:20)
Genealogies	Tables of Descent: from Adam to Noah (Gen. 5:1-32); from Noah to Abraham (Gen. 10:1-32; 11:10-27); <i>sons of Jacob (Israel)</i> (Gen. 35:22-26; 46:8-27; cf. Exod. 1:1-5); from Adam to the family of Saul, first king of a united Israel (1 Chron. 1:1-9:35); list of returnees from the Babylonian exile (Ezra 2:1-63; Neh. 7:6-63)
Short Stories	Prose tale of a Moabite ancestress of King David (Ruth 1:1-4:22); nationalistic tale of a heroic queen (Esther 1:1-10:3).
Wisdom Books	Collection of practical advice (Prov. 1:1-31:31); poetic drama questioning divine justice (Job 1:1-42:8); skeptical meditations on life's futility (Ecclesiastes 1:1-12:14)
Devotional Poetry	Anthology of lyrics sung at Temple services, including songs of praise, bitter complaints, and appeals for help (Ps. 1:1-150:6).
Erotic Poetry	Compilation of passionate lyrics celebrating physical love (Song of Songs 1:1-8:14)
Prophetic Oracles	Collections of warnings and promises, commonly in poetry, by Israel's prophets (Isa. 1:1-66:24; Hosea 1:1-14:9; Micah 1:1-7:20; Joel 1:1-3:21, etc.)
Apocalypse (a "revelation" or "unveiling" of the spirit world and/or future events)	Mystical visions, in highly symbolic language, of God's long-term plans for Israel and the world (Daniel 2:1-45; 7:1-12:13)

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