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Main Idea

Identify literary structures and forms

Exercise

What is the plot line of your life?

Core questions

- How do different literary structures add meaning to story or poem?
- How do literary forms use differences to create emphasis?
- How does poetry work differently than prose?

Identifying Literary Structures

Identifying literary structures and forms

Types of literary structures

- **Acrostic** - Successive units of a poem begin with the consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. (Ps 9-10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145; Prov 31:10-31; Lam 1, 2, 3, 4; Nahum 1))
- **Allusion** – Direct or indirect reference to something else that adds meaning and depth. John 8:58, “Jesus said ... before Abraham was, I AM.” Exodus 3:14 “God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” ... ‘I am has sent me to you.’” (serpent in Genesis, exodus story, suffering servant (Is 53), Jonah and the fish, Passover Lamb, Bronze serpent, Melchizedek, Day of the Lord, Tree of Life, Covenant with Abraham)(see also <https://www.examples.com/english/biblical-allusion.html>)
- **Chiasm** - a literary device in which a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated in reverse order. The result is a “mirror” effect as the ideas are “reflected” back in a passage. Each idea is connected to its “reflection” by a repeated word, often in a related form. The term chiasm comes from the Greek letter chi, which looks like our letter X. Chiastic pattern is also called “ring structure.” (http://www.bible.literarystructure.info/bible/03_Leviticus_e_1.html; <https://www.chiasmusxchange.com/>; <https://www.chiasmusxchange.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/chiasmus-in-the-scriptures-1.pdf>)
- **Climax** – A series of actions or qualities is repeated and intensified. Climaxes may be found in the plot of a narrative or in statements such as: “What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten” (Joel 1:4).
- **Ellipsis** - The omission of one or more words that must be supplied by the reader to complete the thought. In the following examples, the word in the bracket is not actually in the text. ‘And Saul had a concubine, whose name [was] Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. So [Ishbosheth] said to Abner, ‘Why have you gone in to my father’s concubine?’” (2 Sam. 3:7).
- **Inclusios** – Placing one story within another story where the inner story provides greater meaning to the outer story. (2 Sam 11:1-12:31)
- **Merism** – Using the extremes of a category to portray the totality. (ex: Jer 31:34b ... from the least to the greatest; Gen 1:1 ... heavens and the earth; Ps 95:4-5 depths of the earth ... mountain peaks ... sea ... dry land)
- **Paradox** - A statement that appears to contradict itself but contains some truth, theme, or humor. “Blessed are those who hunger.” (Matthew 5:6) “No one who comes to me will ever be hungry.” (John 6:35); Divine transcendence and immanence (Ps 113:5-6; 139:1-3) wisdom and sorrow (Eccl 1:18)

- **Parallelism** – Two or more clauses are related to each other through the lines of a poetic structure in order to make a larger point. (Ps 19:1-2; 24:3-4; 73:26; Hab 3:17-18; 1:2; Deut 6:5)(<https://www.crivoice.org/parallel.html>; <http://www.christianresearcher.com/articles/hebrew-parallelism>)
- **Repetition** - Emphasis is gained by repeating the same word, phrase, or sentence. “Moses, Moses!” (Exod. 3:4) By repeating people's names in particular circumstances, God shows us that he is a relational God. He speaks to get our attention, and he speaks to our hearts. He is the God who pursues intimacy with us. (Gen 22:11-12; 46:2-3; 1 Sam 3:10; Luke 10:41; 22:31-32; Acts 9:4-5 cp. Matt 23:37; 27:46; 7:21)

Types of literary forms

- **Hyperbole** - Exaggerating to create a strong effect. “Every one could sling a stone at a hair’s breadth and not miss” (Judg. 20:16; Joshua 10-11; Numbers 13:33;).
- **Idiom** - An expression that is peculiar to a particular language, and in and of itself cannot be understood from the individual meanings of its component words taken separately. Bite the dust (Ps 72:9) broken heart (Ps 34:18); Skin of our teeth (Job 19:20); leopard change its spots (Jer 13:23)
- **Imagery** - The use of vivid or figurative language to represent objects, actions, or ideas. Bride of Yahweh (Ezek 16:4-14); well-tended vineyard (Isa 5:1-4); drink the cup of God’s wrath (Ps 75:8-9) (<https://www.agapebiblestudy.com/charts/Symbolic%20Images%20of%20the%20Old%20Testament%20Prophets.htm>)
- **Metaphor** - Direct or implied comparisons of two unlike things. “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer” (2 Sam. 22:3). Allegories are extended metaphors. **Allegorical** stories have several points of comparison. allegories often use words in a figurative rather than literal sense. Allegory examples (Bride and Bridegroom, Song of Solomon) Potter and the clay (Jeremiah 18:1-12) eagle and the vine (Ezek 17:1-24)
- **Personification** – Taking a human characteristic and applying it to an object, quality, or idea. “Destruction and Death say, ‘We have heard a report about it with our ears’” (Job 28:22). Anthropomorphisms are types of personification that apply human characteristics to God. Theomorphisms are types of personification that apply divine characteristics to people. We have emotions because Yahweh has emotions.
- **Puns/wordplay** - playful use of words. Samson’s riddle Judges 14:14 “From-the-eater out-came eat[s] and from-the-strong out-came sweet[s]” (*Akal yasha ma ’akal az Yasha matoq*) Judges 3:8-10 Othniel battles Cushan (dark) Rishathaim (doubly wicked) from Aram Naharaim 1 Samuel 2:29 Eli and his sons made them “fat,” Eli died when he fell back because he was old and heavy (kabed). But he is not honored (kabod).
- **Simile** - An explicit comparison of two unlike things using the words “as” or “like.” “So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a hut in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city” (Isa. 1:8). Parables are extended similes using short stories to teach a truth or answer a question. Parables often use realistic situations to make effective use of the imagination. (Ps 1:3; 42:1; 119:105; prov 35; 13-14; Dan 12:3; Isa 1:18; 40:31; Jer 6:16)

Identifying types of literature

Narrative in the Bible

Biblical narrative is not just a recount of what happened. It is a **narrative** about what happened from a particular **theological** viewpoint. It is much more sophisticated than it might appear. Every **detail** is there for a **reason**, whether it’s a detail about the **event** itself or it’s a detail that **links** to other narratives in the

Bible. If there are **ambiguities**, they are there **deliberately**. Also, many literary devices that are usually found in poetry, may be found in narratives as well.

Plot

- **Plot** begins with a **character** in a **setting**, then something new happens that lead to some ultimate **conflict** which is **resolved** and the character is **changed**, living in a new normal. Each scene must be interpreted as part of a larger plot line. We can get the wrong message if we ignore where a scene occurs in a plot. Each story has its own plot line which fits into the larger plot line of the Bible.
 - Ex: **Gideon** and the fleece.
 - By itself: Gideon wants to trust God and gives the fleece test to test God and find out.
 - In the larger setting, God gives Gideon a sign by lighting an altar, but Gideon tears down an altar to another God, but Gideon does it at night.
 - Then before Gideon attacks the Midianites, he asks for the fleece sign.
 - The real question is when Gideon will start trusting God. So now God tests Gideon and whittles 30,000 men to 300 armed with trumpets and torches.
 - So, the story is not about trusting God but about how he continues to use flawed people to do more than we can imagine.

Character

- **Character** faces a **conflict** and tries to **overcome** it. Biblical characters are **mirrors** to see ourselves and our human nature. Biblical characters have **minimal** detail, like what they look like so when we do see that detail, it means something.
 - **Appearances** are **symbolic**, names symbolize roles. **Rarely** are we given people's thoughts or **motives**, nor **God's** thoughts about those actions.
 - Moral commentary is avoided. They allow a character's **words** and **actions** reveal their **motive** and allow to **judge** the behavior by seeing the **consequences**.
 - Bible characters are a mixed bag of **good** and **evil**, like us, and God keeps working with them **despite** their failures.
 - Many stories show people getting to the **end** of themselves before they **trust** in God's **grace**. That show us how **we** can surrender in humility to God. We can see **our** worst behavior on display and God's continued grace.

Setting

- **Settings** can **prepare** us for what is coming. Settings evoke **memories** and **emotions** because of other stories. Good authors will mess with settings to mess with **expectations** and make a point.
 - Ex: Egypt. First seen with Abraham.
 - When Abraham arrives in Promised land there is a famine. He doesn't **trust** God and goes to **Egypt** where he deceives Pharaoh who tries to marry Sarah. God **rescues** Sarah by sending plagues so that Pharaoh sends Sarah back with riches.
 - So **Egypt** is where people make **stupid** decisions but God **rescues**.
 - Later Israel ends up in **Egypt** because of **stupid** decisions but God sends plagues and **rescues** them.
 - Later Solomon makes deals with **Egypt** who ends up **oppressing** Israel.
 - This turns around when Joseph and Mary take Jesus to **Egypt**, it becomes a place of **safety**. King Herod has become like Pharaoh.
 - Sometimes the **settings** are not a place but a **situation**. Ex: when people move to the **East**, expect **trouble**: Adam and Eve banished to the **east**, Cain wanders to the **East**, Israel exiled to the **East**.

- **Time** is another **setting**: 40 indicates a situation where **faith** is **tested**: 40 days of **rain** during the flood, Moses on **mountain** for 40 days and Israel makes golden calf, Israel spies **investigate** land for 40 days, Israel is the **wilderness** for 40 years, Jesus tested for 40 days.

Design patterns

- Key **words** and **images** can link stories together.
- Ex: Temptation resulting in tragedy: see, desire, take
 - 1) Adam and Eve see, desire and take the fruit from the tree of knowledge
 - 2) Abraham and Sarah see the Egyptian slave, take her and do what is good in their eyes
 - 3) Aaron at Mt Sinai sees the gold and takes it to make the golden calf.
 - 4) Achan sees the gold of the Canaanites and desires it and takes it.
 - 5) Israelites, see Saul and take him as their king
 - 6) David sees Bathsheba, desires her and takes her
 - CONTRAST: Jesus sees, then says not my will but your will be done.
- **Creation** out of **chaos**
 - 1) God separates **land** from water, making a place for humans to **flourish**
 - 2) God rescues Noah's family the flood (chaos) to a mountain where they could **flourish**
 - 3) Israel left the land of slavery through the (chaotic) sea into freedom and **flourishing**
 - 4) Israel crossed the waters of the Jordan River into the land of milk and honey
 - 5) Isaiah hoped for a new **exodus** with a new **king** into a new **creation** (nations are the chaotic waters)
 - CONTRAST: Jesus goes into Jordan River and back out again (baptism) and God announces Jesus is God's son who will lead us out of our chaos and violence and into new creation by going through death himself.

Poetry in the Bible

The most prominent characteristic of the TNK is **parallelism**, where ideas, phrases, or clauses are arranged in corresponding or contrasting pairs. This creates a rhythmic and emphatic effect that doesn't rely on rhyme or meter like much Western poetry does. This parallelistic structure not only in the "poetic books:" (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs) but in many poetic **passages** embedded within the narrative and prophetic books. There are several main types of parallelism found throughout TNK poetry:

Synonymous parallelism - where the second line restates or **reinforces** the first line's idea using different words.

Psalms 19:1: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."

Antithetic parallelism - where the second line **contrasts** with or opposes the first line's idea. Proverbs frequently uses this structure.

Proverbs 10:1: "A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son brings grief to his mother."

Synthetic parallelism - where the second line builds upon, completes, or **expands** the thought of the first line.

*Isaiah 40:9 You who bring good news to Zion/ go up on a high mountain.
/ You who bring good news to Jerusalem, / lift up your voice with a shout,
/ lift it up, do not be afraid;/ say to the towns of Judah, / "Here is your God!"*

With our translations, there are aspects of the poetic nature of the Bible that we miss.

- There is a lot of sound **play** and **evocative** language that is not as evident in our translations.

*Is 5:1 let me sing now to my beloved/ a song to my lover about his vineyard;
/ a vineyard has my beloved / on a hill a fertile hillside.*

*ashirah na lididi/ shirat dodi l'karmo/
Kerem hayah lididi/ b'keren ben shamen*

- Hebrew poetry lacks **rhyme** at the end of the lines but does use **rhyming** effects.

*Is 33:22 - For Yahweh is our judge, Yahweh is our lawgiver, Yahweh is our king, he will save us
ki Yahweh sopetenu, Yahweh mehoqegenu, Yahweh malkenu, hu yowosienu*