

Chapter 1 : The World of Biblical Literature Summary - www.nxgvision.com

The bible is a literary masterpiece. Increasingly, literary scholars as well as general readers have joined the ranks of the religious orthodox in reading it. Robert Alter, long in this movement's vanguard, reflects on the paradoxes inherent in considering this great religious work as literature.

See Article History Biblical literature, four bodies of written works: The Old Testament is a collection of writings that was first compiled and preserved as the sacred books of the ancient Hebrew people. As the Bible of the Hebrews and their Jewish descendants down to the present, these books have been perhaps the most decisive single factor in the preservation of the Jews as a cultural entity and Judaism as a religion. The Old Testament and the New Testament—a body of writings that chronicle the origin and early dissemination of Christianity—constitute the Bible of the Christians. The literature of the Bible, encompassing the Old and New Testaments and various noncanonical works, has played a special role in the history and culture of the Western world and has itself become the subject of intensive critical study. This field of scholarship, including exegesis critical interpretation and hermeneutics the science of interpretive principles, has assumed an important place in the theologies of Judaism and Christianity. The methods and purposes of exegesis and hermeneutics are treated below. For the cultural and historical contexts in which this literature developed, see Judaism and Christianity. Many of them did not return to Palestine after their exile. Those who did return did so to rebuild a temple and reconstruct a society that was more nearly a religious community than an independent nation. The religion found expression in the books of the Old Testament: The survival of the Jewish religion and its subsequent incalculable influence in the history of Western culture are difficult to explain without acknowledgment of the importance of the biblical writings. When the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 ce Common Era, equivalent to ad, the historical, priestly sacrificial worship centred in it came to an end and was never resumed. But the religion of the Jewish people had by then gone with them into many lands, where it retained its character and vitality because it still drew its nurture from biblical literature. The Bible was with them in their synagogues, where it was read, prayed, and taught. It preserved their identity as a people, inspired their worship, arranged their calendar, permeated their family lives; it shaped their ideals, sustained them in persecution, and touched their intellects. Whatever Jewish talent and genius have contributed to Western civilization is due in no small degree to the influence of the Bible. Without the Old Testament, the New Testament could not have been written and there could have been no man like Jesus; Christianity could not have been what it became. This has to do with cultural values, basic human values, as much as with religious beliefs. The Genesis stories of prehistoric events and people are a conspicuous example. The Hebrew myths of creation have superseded the racial mythologies of Latin, Germanic, Slavonic, and all other Western peoples. This is not because they contain historically factual information or scientifically adequate accounts of the universe, the beginning of life, or any other subject of knowledge, but because they furnish a profoundly theological interpretation of the universe and human existence, an intellectual framework of reality large enough to make room for developing philosophies and sciences. This biblical structure of ideas is shared by Jews and Christians. It centres in the one and only God, the Creator of all that exists. All things have their place in this structure of ideas. All mankind is viewed as a unity, with no race existing for itself alone. The Covenant people i. Widows, orphans, the stranger, the friendless, and the helpless have a special claim. The church, driven in part by the power of biblical themes, called men to ethical and social responsibility, to a life answerable to God, to love for all men, to sonship in the family of God, and to citizenship in a kingdom yet to be revealed. The Bible thus points to a way of life never yet perfectly embodied in any society in history. Weighing every existing kingdom, government, church, party, and organization, it finds them wanting in that justice, mercy, and love for which they were intended. Major themes and characteristics The Bible is the literature of faith, not of scientific observation or historical demonstration. What is problematical for them is the human condition and destiny before God. The great biblical themes are about God, his revealed works of creation, provision, judgment, deliverance, his covenant, and his promises. The Old Testament contains several types of literature: There is an antiracist love story Ruth

, the story of a woman playing a dangerous game Esther , and one of a preacher who succeeded too well Jonah. There is a collection of epigrams and prudential wisdom Proverbs and a philosophic view of existence with pessimism and poise Ecclesiastes. There is poetry of the first rank, devotional poetry in the Psalms , and erotic poetry in the Song of Songs. Lamentations is a poetic elegy, mourning over fallen Jerusalem. Job is dramatic theological dialogue. The books of the great prophets consist mainly of oral addresses in poetic form. The New Testament also consists of a variety of literary forms. Acts is historical narrative, actually a second volume following Luke. A Gospel is not a history in the ordinary sense but an arrangement of remembered acts and sayings of Jesus retold to win faith in him. There is one apocalypse , Revelation a work describing the intervention of God in history. But the largest class of New Testament writings is epistolary, consisting of the letters of Paul and other Apostles. Originally written to local groups of Christians, the letters were preserved in the New Testament and were given the status of doctrinal and ethical treatises. Influences On Western civilization The Bible brought its view of God, the universe, and mankind into all the leading Western languages and thus into the intellectual processes of Western man. The Greek translation of the Old Testament made it accessible in the Hellenistic period c. The Bible in Latin shaped the thought and life of Western people for a thousand years. Bible translation led to the study and literary development of many languages. The Authorized Version English of King James Version and the others that preceded it caught the English language at the blooming of its first maturity. Since the invention of printing midth century , the Bible has become more than the translation of an ancient Oriental literature. It has not seemed a foreign book, and it has been the most available, familiar, and dependable source and arbiter of intellectual, moral , and spiritual ideals in the West. Millions of modern people who do not think of themselves as religious live nevertheless with basic presuppositions that underlie the biblical literature. It would be impossible to calculate the effect of such presuppositions on the changing ideas and attitudes of Western people with regard to the nature and purpose of government, social institutions, and economic theories. Theories and ideals usually rest on prior moral assumptionsâ€”i. In theory, the West has moved from the divine right of kings to the divinely given rights of every citizen, from slavery through serfdom to the intrinsic worth of every person, from freedom to own property to freedom for everyone from the penalties of hopeless poverty. Though there is a wide difference between the ideal and the actual, biblical literature continues to pronounce its judgment and assert that what ought to be can still be. On the modern secular age The assumption of many people is that the Bible has lost much of its importance in a secularized world; that is implied whenever the modern period is called the post-Judeo-Christian era. In most ways the label is appropriate. The modern period seems to be a time in which unprecedented numbers of people have discarded traditional beliefs and practices of both Judaism and Christianity. But the influence of biblical literature neither began nor ended with doctrinal propositions or codes of behaviour. Its importance lies not merely in its overtly religious influence but also, and perhaps more decisively, in its pervasive effect on the thinking and feeling processes, the attitudes and sense of values that, whether recognized as biblical or not, still help to make people what they are. The deepest influence of biblical literature may be found in the arts of Western people, their music and, especially, in their best poetry, drama, and creative fiction. Many of the most moving and illuminating interpretations of biblical materialâ€”stories, themes, and charactersâ€”are made today by novelists, playwrights, and poets who write simply as human beings, not as adherents of any religion. There are two views of the human condition that scholars have attributed to biblical influence and that have become dominant in Western literature. The first of these is the view that the mystery of existence and destiny is implicit in every man and woman. In contrast to the canons of classical tragedy, a person of any rank or station may experience the extremes of happiness or misery, exaltation or tragedy. The arts also put down the mighty from their seats and exalt those of low degree. Any man may be Everyman, the symbol of all human possibility. To be human is to know one short life in mortal flesh, in which the past and future are dimensions of the present. It is now or never that the choice is made, the offer of the gift of life accepted or declined. Any kingdom there is must be entered at once or lost forever. It is here in the actual situation of work and play, of love and need, and not in some far-off better time and place, that the crisis is reached and passed, the issue settled, and the record closed. These views, though here stated in language that has theological overtones, are not confined to adherents of Judaism or Christianity. They are

characteristically Western views of the human condition. That they can be put in words reminiscent of the Bible indicates that the representation of man in Western literature is indeed conditioned by biblical literature.

Chapter 2 : Review of Biblical Literature (RBL) | Best Commentaries Reviews

In 'The World of Biblical Literature', Robert Alter fills some gaps he felt he left in his Biblical narrative and poetry volumes. As such, the book is more of a collection of related articles rather than a sustained argument.

The influence of the Bible on the development of Western literature is impossible to ignore. There are more than a thousand biblical references in the works of Shakespeare alone. To this day, we continue to hear biblical phrases like: In fact, the diversity of these men is quite remarkable. Consider just a few: Isaiah was a prophet. Matthew was a tax collector. John was a fisherman. Paul was a tentmaker. Moses was a shepherd and a leader. From a literary point of view, it is absolutely astonishing that despite having been written by so many different authors from so many different backgrounds over a period of 15 centuries, the Bible does not contradict itself and does not contain any errors as it was originally written. It contains remarkable unity.

Approaching the Bible as literature The editors of *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* suggest asking the following questions when approaching a biblical passage: To what genre s does this text belong, and how does an awareness of the relevant generic conventions guide our encounter with the text? What are the unifying patterns and structure of the text? What artistry does the text exhibit?

Literature with a purpose The Bible contains quite a few outstanding literary sections; however, a crucial point that is often overlooked today is that those sections were not specifically written for the sake of making good literature. The literature is, without exception, used for specific purposes. And those purposes are clearly expounded in many places in the Bible itself. Understanding its context and history is important. It can be helpful to realize that the first book of the Bible was written about 3, years ago and the last book about 2, years ago. Since the last book was written, an explosion of scientific knowledge has occurred. Changing languages Along with the tremendous growth in technology, there have also been great changes in customs and languages. Our vocabulary now contains a host of words that simply did not exist when the Bible was being written. Yet the human condition has not changed, and as great literature that stands the test of time, the Bible is not handicapped by its lack of modern terminology. In fact, some even believe the scientific mind-set has had a detrimental effect on the power of modern language. For example, the fourth chapter of the book of Luke provides an interesting example of how Jesus used the Scriptures. He made use of the power of words to make an impact on His audience, both in terms of His reading from the Scriptures and His subsequent explanation. By way of a prologue, we read in this particular chapter that Jesus had traveled to Nazareth and, as His custom was, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. In the synagogue Jesus indicated that He wanted to speak, according to the accepted custom at that time, by standing up. After Jesus had stood up, the text continues: And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: Jesus read directly from chapter 61 of the book of the prophet Isaiah, which was originally written in Hebrew poetry. Even in the English rendition, the poetic structure is still recognizable. But the message itself was what was most important. The denouement As we read on, we begin to see the word picture develop before our eyes as this particular incident comes to its conclusion, or, to use a literary term, its denouementâ€™a climax in which the whole matter is put in an all-inclusive perspective. It is easy to picture the scene: All those in the synagogue at that time were staring at Jesus as if to say: It was used to convey the importance of what Jesus declared in the synagogue at that time and, by extension, it was recorded for our better understanding.

Poetic books The Bible also contains specific poetic works; in fact, the Bible contains no less than five specifically poetic books: In addition, much poetic phraseology can be found in many of the other books as well. It is difficult to put in exact words the difference between biblical poetry and biblical prose because the dividing line can be unclear. While the Bible contains specific literary and poetic sections, we need to keep in mind that the primary purpose of the whole Bible is for God to reveal Himself and to communicate with us. True religion is based on the entire Word of God as it applies to the individual Christian as well as the Church. We must always remember that whatever literary style is employed, the main purpose of God through the author is to get the message across. Hence the subject matter is the most important issue and the way in which the subject matter is expressed is secondary in the sense that it is used to make the subject matter primary. For instance, the opening verse of Psalm 42 shows that even

when the Bible uses a simile or metaphor in its poetry referred to as emblematic parallelism , it is still evident that the message is paramount and the poetry is merely the vehicle. Biblical commentators refer to this psalm as a meditative poem accompanied by a melody. This observation suggests that David almost certainly sang this psalm while playing the lute or harp. Here David begins his meditation, which is also the beginning of a paradox:

In this collection of essays, The World of Biblical Literature, Alter shows his preoccupation with a "literary" reading of the Bible. He views the bible as a unique literary production; an anthology of sorts without a discernible author or authors, this does not preclude the possibility to use the same tools of literary analysis employed in.

Stephen De Young This blog has often, and will continue to, make reference to extra-Biblical literature. The two most important categories of this literature are Second Temple Jewish literature and early Christian writings such as the Apostolic Fathers. Second Temple Jewish literature reveals to us the religious world and mindset of the first century AD from which Christianity emerged. It shows us the theological lens through which the apostles understood the revelation which came in the person of Jesus Christ. The Apostolic Fathers, and the Fathers of the second and third centuries as well, in particular, show us the continuity with, and transformation of, Second Temple Judaism that came to constitute the Christian religion. Not only is the New Testament rife with allusions and in a few cases direct references and quotations from Second Temple Jewish literature, so are the early Fathers who understand the scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, through that same religious grid. This is not to say that the later Fathers moved away from this understanding or replaced it with another. It has become a commonplace to argue that at some point, though this point differs in the telling, Christianity in the East moved away from its Jewish roots to replace them with Greek philosophy, Hellenizing the religion. This is more related to a way of reading certain later Fathers than to the Fathers themselves or their mind. The assumption is made that as new Greek terminology comes into play that this terminology brings with it its philosophical meaning from this or that philosophical system, usually Platonism. Rather, Greek terminology is brought into play from the philosophical and in some cases religious worlds to describe Christian concepts which emerged from Second Temple Judaism. Philosophical and religious Greek terminology is best suited to this, obviously, as attempting to translate such concepts into terms from some other area of life such as commerce would have produced even more, and more obvious distortion. When read in light of these texts, particularly in the Greek or Greek translation, it becomes apparent that the scriptures are still being read and understood by the Fathers throughout Orthodox history within this same context. The Fathers, Orthodox iconography, and Orthodox hymnography are filled with references to this literature and its interpretation of the scriptural text. The greatest demonstration of this is that the vast majority of the Second Temple Jewish literature still available in the world today was preserved to the present day by the Orthodox Church. While finds such as the Dead Sea Scrolls include many of these texts, the primary texts of importance were already known before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the middle of the 20th century. These perspectives and religious understandings were not just handed down in oral teaching, but in the form of the actual texts. The importance of this handing down, this traditioning, should not be underestimated. This is not a question of copies of texts continuing to exist in an Orthodox library or deposit of Orthodox text and happening to survive for two millennia or more. This is a case of texts being actively copied, over and over again, for centuries, by Orthodox Christian monastics. The reading, studying, and copying of these texts was not a minor or inexpensive matter, either. Copying these texts was an expensive and time consuming exercise. There was no ambiguity regarding the extra-Biblical nature of these texts. They are not included in lectionaries or Biblical codices. Yet their preservation was considered vitally important by generations of Orthodox Christian believers for the theological understanding which they impart. A prime example of such a preserved text is 2 Enoch, also sometimes referred to as the Slavonic Apocalypse of Enoch. As the second name implies, the full text of 2 Enoch is available to us only in Slavonic. Specifically, there are 20 manuscripts copied between the 14th and 18th centuries preserved for us in libraries of Russia, Serbia, and Bulgaria. The text includes certain Greek etymologies which demonstrate that it was translated from Greek. There are also a number of untranslated Hebrew terms and emphases regarding Jerusalem, the temple, and sacrifices that imply a Hebrew or Aramaic original from the pre-Christian era. For some time, there was a great scholarly debate about the antiquity of the text, with many scholars assigning its composition to the 10th century based on the Greek factors. Recently, however, a few Coptic fragments of the text have been discovered from an early date,

demonstrating the early date of the text. This means that this text was translated into Greek and preserved in Orthodox circles, ultimately translated into Slavonic, and that the Slavonic speaking Orthodox churches then continued to copy this text across a vast geographical swathe for more than years. The end of the manuscript evidence in the 18th century is not because 2 Enoch was abandoned, but rather due to the advent of the printing press. In 3 Baruch, Baruch, the scribe of the prophet Jeremiah, takes a journey through the heavens and describes his experiences of each. This text was originally written in Greek, as attested by two Greek manuscripts from libraries on Mount Athos from the 15th century. These two manuscripts show clear signs of being two copies of the same original. There are more than twelve manuscripts of 3 Baruch in Slavonic which represent at least three strands of copying tradition. Interestingly, one of the best Slavonic manuscripts, dating to the 13th century, comes from the library of St. This shows the wide circulation of this text throughout the Orthodox world and over a vast span of time. The antiquity of this text is attested to by the fact that Origen references it in *On First Principles* as the place to find a description of the seven heavens. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs represent Second Temple Jewish literature which is critical to understanding the New Testament in general and the Johannine literature in particular. In Genesis 49, Jacob on his deathbed speaks to each of his twelve sons imparting a prediction regarding their future. This format became the model for a wide variety of Jewish literature known as testaments. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, then, is a collection of twelve such testaments, one from each of the sons of Jacob who were the forefathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. These testaments were written originally in Hebrew, and many Hebrew fragments have been discovered in various locations, including the Dead Sea Scrolls. From Hebrew they were translated into Aramaic and Greek, and thence into Armenian, Slavonic, and other languages. The earliest full representation of the Greek manuscript is a 10th century manuscript from Mount Athos. Another manuscript from the 17th century comes from the library at St. The Mount Athos manuscript, from the Koutloumousiou Monastery, has a particularly useful copy of the Testament of Levi. The 10th century copyist had access to both an Aramaic and a Greek form of the text which differed somewhat. He copied the Greek text and then used notations to indicate the differences in the Aramaic, making this manuscript our best witness to both forms of the text. While there is not evidence of direct literary dependence between these testaments and St. Another testament document preserved in the Orthodox Church is the Testament of Abraham. This text from the 1st century AD describes an apocalyptic journey through the heavens and the earth by Abraham. This text was written originally in Greek and seems to have been deliberately composed to match the style of Greek Old Testament texts in circulation at the time. It is available in a complete form in Romanian translation and in parts in several Greek manuscripts and translations into Slavonic, Coptic, Arabic, and Ethiopic. One of the Greek manuscripts is from Jerusalem in the 15th century. This text bears important witness to the idea of the world being held under the sway of demonic powers who would someday be overcome by God and his Messiah. Once again, this text was copied and translated throughout the Orthodox world. One of the most popular Jewish texts of the ancient world is Joseph and Asenath. This text describes the romance between the patriarch Joseph and his wife Asenath, the daughter of an Egyptian priest as mentioned in Genesis. This text was written by a Jewish author in the first century AD, but was popular in both Jewish and Christian communities. As evidence of its widespread popularity, the Greek text is found in several manuscripts at St. In addition, two modern Greek illuminated manuscripts exist at Mount Athos from the 16th century. Throughout history, this has been a well-known text to literate Christians throughout the Orthodox world. The above mentioned examples are just that, a mere handful of significant examples of Second Temple Jewish texts preserved within the Orthodox Church because of their relevance to understanding the Christian faith and the scriptures. Indeed, it is only recent generations of educated, literate Orthodox Christians who are unfamiliar with these works, as is clear from their transmission and copying history, and their presence in all of the surviving ancient Orthodox libraries. Likely many more works, and more complete and better manuscripts of these works were present at the great monastic foundations of Constantinople before its fall. These texts, though not holy scripture, represent an important and too long neglected element of that tradition which has been handed down to us by our forefathers according to the faith.

Chapter 4 : The world of biblical literature - Robert Alter - Google Books

The deepest influence of biblical literature may be found in the arts of Western people, their music and, especially, in their best poetry, drama, and creative fiction. Many of the most moving and illuminating interpretations of biblical material—stories, themes, and characters—are made today by novelists, playwrights, and poets who write.

The Torah Law, Pentateuch, or Five Books of Moses Composition and authorship The Torah, or Pentateuch Five Scrolls , traditionally the most revered portion of the Hebrew canon, comprises a series of narratives, interspersed with law codes , providing an account of events from the beginning of the world to the death of Moses. Modern critical scholarship tends to hold that there were originally four books Genesis , Exodus , Leviticus , and Numbers resulting from the division into manageable scrolls—a so-called Tetrateuch—to which later was added a fifth scroll, or book, Deuteronomy. A theory, once widely held, that the Book of Joshua was originally integral with the first five books to form a Hexateuch Six Scrolls is now generally regarded as dubious. Since these claims, however, are written in the third person, the question still arises as to the authorship of the passages; e. There are also other passages that seem to be written from the viewpoint of a much later period than the events they narrate. The documentary hypothesis Beyond these obvious discrepancies, modern literary analysis and criticism of the texts has pointed up significant differences in style, vocabulary, and content, apparently indicating a variety of original sources for the first four books, as well as an independent origin for Deuteronomy. According to this view, the Tetrateuch is a redaction primarily of three documents: According to this hypothesis , these documents—along with Deuteronomy labelled D—constituted the original sources of the Pentateuch. On the basis of internal evidence, it has been inferred that J and E are the oldest sources perhaps going as far back as the 10th century bce , probably in that order, and D and P the more recent ones to about the 5th century bce. The Yahwist, or J, is the master of narrative in biblical literature , who sketches people by means of stories. He takes his materials wherever he finds them, and if some are crude he does not care, as long as they make a good story. He presents God as one who acts and speaks like human persons, a being with whom they have direct intercourse. The Yahwist, however, has one very definite theological or theo-political preoccupation: More reflective and theological in the apologetic sense is the Elohist, or E. No fragment of E on the primeval history presented in the first 11 chapters of Genesis has been preserved, and it is probable that none ever existed but that the Elohist began his account with the patriarchs presented in the remainder of Genesis, in which the J and E strands are combined. Unlike these, it tries to mitigate the offensiveness of the subterfuge: The Elohist is also distinct from the Yahwist in generally avoiding the presentation of God as being like a human person and treating him instead as a more remote, less directly accessible being. Significantly, E avoids using the term YHWH throughout Genesis with one apparent exception , and it is only after telling how God revealed his proper name to Moses, in chapter 3 of Exodus, that he refers to God as YHWH regularly, though not exclusively. It is inferred from certain internal evidence that E was produced in the northern kingdom Israel in the 8th century bce and was later combined with J. Because it is not always possible or important to separate J from E, the two together are commonly referred to as JE. The third major document of the Tetrateuch, the Priestly code, or P, is very different from the other two. Its narrative is frequently interrupted by detailed ritual instructions, by bodies of standing laws of a ritual character, and by dry and exhaustive genealogical lists of the generations. According to one theory, the main author of P seems to have worked in the 7th century and to have been the editor who combined the J and E narratives; for his own part, he is content to add some brief, drab records—with frequent dates—of births, marriages, and migrations. The P material is to be found not merely in Leviticus but throughout the Tetrateuch, including the early chapters of Genesis and one of the creation accounts and ranging from the primeval history Adam to Noah to the Mosaic era. Like the Elohist, P uses the term Elohim for God until the self-naming of God to Moses Exodus, chapter 3, in the P strand and shows a non-anthropomorphic transcendent stress. Form criticism, for example, has stressed particular literary forms and the historical setting out of which they arose: Tradition criticism centres on the pre-literary sources; i. Archaeological criticism has tended to substantiate the reliability of the typical historical details of even the

oldest periods and to discount the theory that the Pentateuchal accounts are merely the reflection of a much later period. The new methods of criticism have served to direct attention to the life, experience, and religion out of which the Pentateuchal writings arose and to take a less static and literal view of the constituent documentary sources; yet most scholars still accept the documentary theory, in its basic lines, as the most adequate and comprehensive ordering of the variegated Pentateuchal materials. The following presentation rests mainly on an analysis and interpretation of the literary sources. See below The critical study of biblical literature: In any case, the five books that have come down in various texts and versions have been seen as a unit in the religious communities that preserved them. Their basic content may be divided thus: The book falls into two main parts: The primeval history The Bible begins with the creation of the universe. It tells the story with images borrowed from Babylonian mythology, transformed to express its own distinctive view of God and of humanity. Out of primary chaos, darkness, void, depths, and waters God creates the heaven and the earth and all that dwell therein—a coherent order of things—by his will and word alone. Actually, there are two creation accounts: He and the woman Eve created for him out of his rib are put into a paradisaical garden Eden, especially created for them to till and to tend and to sustain life. The two are forbidden only to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil on pain of death there is also a tree of life in the middle of the garden. The cosmic setting and concern of the P account is thus followed by the human setting and concern of the J account. Creation is followed by temptation, disobedience, and fall and all that follows from that for the history of humankind. At the instigation of the serpent, the shrewdest of the beasts, who holds out the possibility of attaining godlike knowledge, the woman eats of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and gives some to her husband to eat also. Their distinction from beasts and children manifests itself immediately by a sense of modesty about exposing their bodies, and loincloths become the first products of the higher knowledge. The primal human couple are punished by God for their disobedience by being driven out of the idyllic garden into the world of pain, toil, and death. The reason given by YHWH to the divine beings is: In the biblical framework and rendering and subsequent interpretation, the archaic stories and images acquire a different meaning, suitable to the idea of a transcendent deity and an imperfect humankind. With the exile from the garden, human history and culture begins. In the flood story in the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic, by contrast, there is no apparent moral reason why the gods resolved to destroy humankind, and the only reason why the hero of the Flood and his kin are saved is that he is favoured by one of the gods, who tricks the others, including the chief god. After the Flood, God blesses Noah and bestows on human beings the earth and the things on it for sustenance and makes a covenant with Noah and all creatures that he will never again unleash a world-destroying flood. In the story of the Tower of Babel, the final story in the primeval history, a primal unity of humankind in which there is only one language is shattered when, in their pride, human beings decide to build a city and a tower that will reach up to the heavens. YHWH again takes steps to check dangerous collaboration: Again, the Yahwist has apparently used ancient mythological motifs to explain the diversity of humankind. The story may be regarded as simply a direct borrowing from the older traditions, without any monotheistic adaptation. In its textual setting, however, it may also be taken as another instance of the ruin of primal harmony by human willfulness and pride. The Tower of Babel, oil painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, ; in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna Courtesy of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna The patriarchal narratives The universal primal history of humanity in the first 11 chapters of Genesis is followed by an account of the fathers of the Hebrew people; i. From a literary point of view, this portion may be divided into the sagas of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the story of Joseph. Although these narratives are not historical in the ordinary sense, they have an evident historical setting and refer to various particulars that fit in with what is generally known of the time and area. They apparently rest on the traditions of particular families, clans, or tribes and were probably passed down orally before they took written form. Theologically, they are an account of a divine promise and Covenant and of human faith and unfaith in response, with Abraham as the model man of faith. The 12 sons of Jacob-Israel are eponymous ancestors of Israelite tribes ancestors after whom the tribes are named; the actions and fortunes of the eponymous ancestors, including certain blessings and other pronouncements of Jacob-Israel, account for the future positions and fortunes of the particular tribes. Though there is less history and more legend, much of the atmosphere of an older age is preserved, with the

patriarchs represented as seminomadic, essentially peaceful and pastoral tent dwellers—alien residents—among the settled Canaanites and as observing customs otherwise only attested in Mesopotamia. Anachronistic features, however, insinuate themselves from time to time. The God of the patriarchs is presented as Yahweh—explicitly by the Yahwist and implicitly by E and P—i. God apparently was originally the personal, tutelary deity of each of the patriarchs, called by a variety of names and later unified into the one God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There are various cult legends in this portion of Genesis, etiological accounts of the origins of various cult sites and practices; though probably of Canaanite origin, these all indicate the places and customs held holy by the Israelites and perhaps also by their claimed Hebrew ancestors. There are direct appearances of God to some of the main figures in the narratives, intimate personal communication between men and God.

Chapter 5 : Review of Biblical Literature

In view of Alter's continuing insistence that the Hebrew Bible represents more unity than diversity, it is somewhat ironic that even the casual reader can discern that the chapters of this book.

Biblical writers used chiasmus to add emphasis to their writings, to highlight details of particular importance. Here are some of the more commonly used literary devices found in Scripture: Acrostic This is a device found in Old Testament poetry in which the successive units of a poem begin with the consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The units might be single lines, pairs of lines, or stanzas as in Psalm This can only be seen in the original Hebrew text. Alliteration This is the repetition of the same initial sounds of adjacent or nearby words, and is used for narrative effect. This is a literary device that can really only be seen or heard in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages of the Bible. The person, thing, or event being alluded to is understood from a personal or cultural context or knowledge. This projection of human characteristics onto God was done in order to make Him more understandable to us. It is the language of appearance, of describing God in human terms. And why are you disquieted within me? Shout, you lower parts of the earth, break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! This is a literary device that can really only be seen or heard in the original languages of the Bible. The two clauses display inverted parallelism. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched. Look, the world has gone after Him! Merism This is a listing of opposite parts to signify a whole or a totality. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. She cries out in the chief concourses at the openings of the gates in the city she speaks her words. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. In the Bible, this is a person or thing as is found in the Old Testament prefiguring another person or thing as is found in the New Testament. For example, the bronze snake pole that the people looked to serves as a type, or prefiguring, of the Cross. Biblical writers made plays on word meanings that can only be seen in the original languages. There is an incredible array of varying literary means and methods used by God in His Word to convey what He wanted to reveal to us. The simple answer to that is that God delights in using His children. He delights in the talents and gifts He has given to us, and in our using them. That even comes down to the way the many human writers of the Bible expressed themselves when inspired by the Holy Spirit to write what God would have them write. If you think of it on a human level, parents delight in the things their children do. My three kids have always loved words. Alasdair once told us all he knew about World War II. He was very enthusiastic and animated as he creatively expounded all his knowledge and research to us. As for Kirstie, when we lived in Miami, we would often take a wee holiday up to Orlando to visit my sister. And I love that. Just as God delights in His children. For instance, when a major computer company put out a revolutionary new computer system, their slogan was:

Chapter 6 : Extra-Biblical Literature in the Orthodox Church - The Whole Counsel Blog

Subjects: Bible, New Testament, Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Literature, Methods, Literary Approaches Login to Read the Review(s) You must be a member of SBL to read the review(s).

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Chapter 7 : THE WORLD OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE by Robert Alter | Kirkus Reviews

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Lesson 1 What Makes the Bible Literature? This lesson explores what it means to say that the Bible is literature, and provides an introduction to literary approaches to the Bible. The Good Book Adam and Eve. The birth of Jesus. Its stories and psalms, phrases and proverbs, have seeped into our everyday lives. It is the book that has permeated Western culture more than any other. It is, in common parlance, the Good Book. It is not simply a good book; it is the best. This book is dynamite. You need not have a particular religious orientation to take a literary approach to the Bible. You can pick it up as you would a novel and delve into its world, get to know its characters, and follow its rich and wonderful stories. Even if you feel you already know the Bible, this course will give you an opportunity to engage it on another level. Together we will look at the Bible through new eyes. **Where Did the Bible Come From?** The first thing you need to know about the Bible is that it is not one book but an anthology of 66 individual books. What we do know is that dozens of authors wrote it over a span of approximately 1,500 years. For the most part, it was composed in the Middle Eastern region then called Palestine. It could be said that the Bible has a national unity in the sense that virtually all of its authors were Jewish. The individual books of the Bible gradually were collected into one volume, but we know little about the process. The phases through which the parts of the Bible passed were these: Naturally, given the long span of its composition and its many authors, you may be wondering how it can be said to be one cohesive story. We will look at the question of what unifies this diverse, sprawling book in the final lesson of the course, Lesson 8. **What to Expect First and foremost,** this is a literature course, not unlike a college-level English class. In most lessons, we will look at one or more literary genres of the Bible. Typically, each lesson will combine: Assigned reading in the course textbook, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*. Learning by doing – application of ideas covered in the reading and lesson to specific passages in the Bible. At certain points, you will be asked to read a passage and take a few minutes to analyze it before continuing on with the lesson. Discussion topics, which you will be encouraged to explore with your instructor and classmates on the Message Board. A short quiz on the main ideas of the lesson. Our goal is to explore how the Bible works as literature – but first we must answer one key question: He looks at you with a puzzled expression. What would you say to him? Whatever your definition of literature, it should touch on at least these three points: Literature portrays human experience. Literary authors not only portray human experience – they also interpret it. Literature is an art form. The style of expression – its skillful technique and beauty – may be as significant as the content of a work. You can expand on this definition of literature as you see fit. For more discussion of what literature is and how it applies to the Bible, read the Lesson 1 assignment in *How to Read the Bible as Literature*. **Cain and Abel** Our working definition of literature gives you a lens through which you can view the Bible. Look for how individual stories portray recognizable human experience. Take a passage and examine its style as well as its substance. Now ask yourself the following question: What is literary about the story of Cain and Abel? Take a few minutes and write down your thoughts on a sheet of paper. Does the story of Cain and Abel portray human experience? Here is a partial list of the conditions and emotions it touches on: How does the author interpret human experience? Crime will be punished. The story is not just a tale of murder, but also of retribution. Does the story have an artistic style? The plot of the story is masterfully organized – it is a complete tale with a beginning, middle, and end. He theorizes that you can break down the Bible into three types of writing: **Religious Historical Literary** In many – if not most – Biblical passages, you may find all three types of writing converging at once. The Bible is a religious book, and it is a rare passage that does not make an explicit or implicit comment on how to live spiritually and morally in the world. Secondly, one of the distinctive features of the Bible is the consistency with which its authors place events in real-life history. In any given passage of the Bible, typically you can identify which type of material dominates. Here is how it breaks down: **Literary** As you read the Bible, bear in mind that passages that are primarily literary often have

historical and theological material. It is all too easy to pay lip service to the idea that the Bible is literature and then read it as though it were a history or theology book. A better way to read the Bible as literature is to look at the Bible as an interpretive portrayal of human experience in artistic form. How can you do this? Read the book and ask questions of the text: What recognizable human experiences are portrayed in this text? What interpretation of human experience is expressed? Does the passage fall into one or more standard literary genres? What is the artistic style of the passage? What use does the passage make of literary techniques like metaphor, simile, word play, and the like? The question of what makes the Bible literature has been much discussed, debated, and written about. Moving Forward Having constructed a working definition of literature no small feat, incidentally, you are ready to begin a journey of discovery through the many literary genres in the Bible, starting with the most popular of them all: What Makes the Bible Literature? For an introduction to the Bible and the question of what literature is, read pages of How to Read the Bible as Literature.

Chapter 8 : The Bible as Literature - Life, Hope & Truth

The Society of Biblical Literature is the largest international association of scholars who teach and research the variety of fields that make up biblical studies. SBL is an interdisciplinary, humanistic, academic society that includes scholars of history, literature, archaeology, anthropology, theology, and more.

Chapter 9 : Lesson 1 | The Bible as Literature

A peculiar literature --Biblical imperatives and literary play --The literary character of the Bible --Narrative specification and the power of the literal --Allusion and literary expression --Literary criticism and the problem of commentary --The quest for the author --The medium of poetry --Scripture and culture.