in the Apocrypha: Tobit, Judith, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon. Many of these and other narrative genres are found within the books of the Old Testament.

The Book of Genesis is composed, as are most of the other narrative works, of numerous individual stories, most of which originally circulated independently and orally. The patriarchal stories in Genesis 11-50 have been called legends, sagas, and—more accurately—family stories. Many of them are etiological; that is, they explain some place, practice, or name in terms of its origin.

Poetic Works

The poetic books of the Old Testament may be taken to include Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon (Songs), and in the deuterocanonical books and the Apocrypha, Sirach and the Prayer of Manasseh. The Book of Wisdom has much in common with the poetic wisdom books, but it is not poetry. Most of the prophetic books are written in Hebrew poetry, but they are sufficiently distinctive to be considered separately.

General Characteristics

Hebrew poetry has two major characteristics, one relatively easy to recognize even in translation and the other difficult to discern. The more obvious characteristic is the use of parallelismus membrorum, or parallelism of lines or other parts. For example, the meaning of one line may be restated or paralleled by a second line, as in Psalms 6:1: “O Lord, rebuke me not in thy anger, nor chasten me in thy wrath.” These two lines are synonymous. On the other hand, the second line in the unit may state the negative side of the first line’s point, as in Proverbs 15:1: “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” In other cases, the second line may extend or explain the first, and in still others, the parallelism is merely formal. Parallelism can in some instances extend to three or more lines. One major advantage of most modern English translations of the Bible is that they retain the poetic form of the Hebrew, enabling the reader to enjoy and understand the structure of the original. The other major feature of Hebrew poetry is rhythm, which seems to have been based on the number of accents in each line. One of the more easily recognized meters is that of the qina, or dirge, in which the first line has three beats or accented syllables and the second line has two. The poetic books include a great many diverse genres. The most widespread types are the various songs of worship (Psalms) and wisdom poetry. In addition, the Bible contains one book of love poetry, the Song of Solomon (Songs).

Lyrical Poetry

Israel’s worship literature was lyrical poetry, that is, poetry meant to be sung. Most, but not all, of these songs are collected in the books of Psalms. Many are hymns—songs in praise of God himself, his works on behalf of Israel, or his creation. Others are communal laments or complaint songs, which were, in effect, prayers of petition sung by the people when they were faced with trouble. Approximately one-third of the Psalms are individual laments or complaints, songs used by or on behalf of individuals facing death or disaster. When the nation or the individual has been saved from trouble, thanksgiving songs would

be sung. A few Psalms, such as 2, 45, and 110, celebrate the coronation of a king in Israel as God's special servant.

Wisdom Poetry

The wisdom poetry includes collections of wisdom sayings and short poems, as in the Book of Proverbs, and long compositions such as Job, Ecclesiastes, and Sirach. The shorter wisdom materials are proverbs, sayings, and admonitions, commonly only two lines long. Some were undoubtedly traditional or popular sayings; others bear the marks of thoughtful and creative composition. Proverbs 1-9 contains a collection of poems on the nature of wisdom itself, but the Book of Job is a lengthy poetic composition in the form of a dialogue framed by a folktale. Ecclesiastes is a somewhat disjointed work; Sirach is a book written by a Jewish teacher and later translated by his grandson. The subject matter of the wisdom sayings ranges from practical advice for living a good and successful life to reflections on the relationship between following the wise path and obedience to the divinely revealed law. Job, at least on one level, agonizes over the question of the suffering of the righteous, and Ecclesiastes meditates sadly on the meaning of life in the face of death.

Prophetic Materials

Prophets were known elsewhere in the ancient Near East, but no other culture developed a body of prophetic literature comparable to that of Israel. Ancient Egyptian writers produced literary works called "prophecies," for example, but these writings are different in both form and content from the biblical prophetic books. Most Hebrew prophetic books contain three kinds of literature: narratives, prayers, and prophetic speeches. The narratives generally are stories or reports of prophetic activity, either attributed to the prophet himself or told by some third person. They include vision reports, reports of symbolic actions, accounts of prophetic activities such as conflicts between the prophets and their opponents, and historical narratives or notes. One book in the prophetic collection, Jonah, is actually a story about a prophet, including only one line of prophetic address (see Jonah 3:4). The prayers include hymns and petitions such as Jeremiah's complaints (for example, Jeremiah 15:10-21). Speeches predominate in the prophetic literature, for the essence of prophetic activity was to announce the word of God concerning the immediate future. The most common addresses are prophecies of punishment or of salvation. Both of these are framed, as are most prophetic speeches, by formulas that identify the words as revealed by God; for example, "thus says the Lord." The prophecy of punishment usually gives reasons for the punishment in terms of social injustice, religious arrogance, or apostasy and spells out the nature of the disaster—military or otherwise—to be visited upon the nation, group, or individual addressed. The prophecies of salvation announce God's impending intervention to rescue Israel. Other speeches include prophecies against foreign nations, woe speeches enumerating the sins of the people, and admonitions or warnings.

Law

Legal materials are sufficiently prominent in the Hebrew Scriptures that the term Torah (Law) came to be applied in Judaism to the first five books, and in early Christianity to the entire Old Testament. Legal writings dominate in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. The fifth book of the Bible was called Deuteronomy ("second law") by its Greek translators, although the book is primarily a report of the last words and deeds of Moses. It does, however, contain numerous laws, often in the context of interpretation and preaching. According to biblical tradition, the will of God was revealed to Israel through Moses when the covenant was made at Mount Sinai. Consequently, all the laws—except those in Deuteronomy—are found in Exodus 20 through Numbers 10, where the events at Mount Sinai are reported. Scholars have recognized in the Hebrew laws two major types, the apodictic and the casuistic. Apodictic law is represented by, but not limited to, the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:1-21, 34:14-26; Deuteronomy 5:6-21). These laws, usually found in collections of five or more, are short, unambiguous, and unequivocal statements of the will of God for human behavior. They are either commands (positive) or prohibitions (negative). The casuistic laws, on the other hand, each consist of two parts. The first part states a condition ("If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it …") and the second part the legal consequences ("… he shall pay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep," Exodus 22:1). These laws generally concern problems that arise in agricultural and town life. The casuistic laws are parallel in form, and frequently in content, to laws found in the Code of Hammurabi and other ancient Near Eastern law codes.

Apocalyptic Writings

The apocalypse as a distinctive genre arose in Israel in the postexilic period, that is, after the Babylonian Captivity of the Jews from 586 to 538 BC. An apocalypse, or revelation, contains the disclosure of future events by means of a lengthy and detailed dream or vision report. It makes use of highly symbolic and often bizarre images, which in turn are explained and interpreted. Apocalyptic writings generally reflect the author's historical view of his own era as a time when the powers of evil are gathering to make their final struggle against God, after which a new age will be established. Daniel is the only apocalyptic book as such in the Hebrew Scriptures, and its first half (chap. 1-6) is actually a series of legendary stories. Sections of other books, however, are similar in many respects to apocalyptic literature (see Isaiah 24-27; Zechariah 9-14; and some parts of Ezekiel). In the Apocrypha, 2 Esdras is an apocalypse. Judaism in the last two centuries BC and the first century AD produced numerous other apocalyptic works that were never considered canonical. These include Enoch, the War of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness, and the Apocalypse of Moses. Until recently, most scholars argued that the development of apocalyptic literature and thought was strongly influenced by Persian religion. That view is being challenged by the recognition of the roots of apocalyptic literature in Israelite thought itself, especially the prophetic understanding of the future, and in older Near Eastern traditions.

The Development of the Old Testament

By no means did all the books of the Old Testament originate at the same time and in the same place; rather, they are the product of Israelite faith and culture over a thousand years or more. Consequently, another literary perspective examines the books and their component parts in terms of their authorship and their literary and preliterary history. Virtually all the books went through a long history of transmission and development before they were collected and canonized. Moreover, it is necessary to distinguish between traditional Jewish and Christian views concerning the authorship and date of the books and their actual literary history as it has been reconstructed by modern scholarship from the evidence in the biblical books and elsewhere. It is not the aim of this survey to present a detailed account of the literary history of the Old Testament. Many of the facts are not known, the history is long and often complicated, and older conclusions regularly are being revised under the weight of new evidence and methods. The general contours of that history can, however, be summarized. For most Old Testament books it was a long journey from the time the first words were spoken or written to the work in its final form. That journey usually involved many people, such as storytellers, authors, editors, listeners, and readers. Not only individuals but different communities of faith played their parts. See the individual entries for each book of the Old Testament. Behind many of the present literary works stand oral traditions. Most of the stories in Genesis, for example, circulated orally before they were written down. Prophetic speeches, now encountered in written form, were first delivered orally. Virtually all the Psalms, whether originally written down or not, were composed to be sung or chanted aloud in worship. It is not safe to infer, however, that oral transmission was merely the precursor of written literature and ceased once books came into being. In fact, oral traditions existed side by side with written materials for centuries.

The Pentateuch

According to Jewish and Christian tradition, Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. Nowhere in the books themselves, however, is this claim made; tradition stemmed in part from the Hebrew designation of them as the books of Moses, but that meant concerning Moses. As early as the Middle Ages, Jewish scholars recognized a problem with the tradition: Deuteronomy (the last book of the Pentateuch) reports the death of Moses. The books are actually anonymous and composite works. On the basis of numerous duplications and repetitions, including two different designations of the deity, two separate accounts of creation, two intertwined stories of the flood, two versions of the Egyptian plagues, and many others, modern scholars have concluded that the writers of the Pentateuch drew upon several different sources, each from a different writer and period. The sources differ in vocabulary, literary style, and theological perspective. The oldest source is the Jehovistic, or Yahwist (J, from its use of the divine name Jahwe—modern Jehovah—or Yahweh), commonly dated in the 10th or 9th century BC. The second is the Elohist (E, from its use of the general name Elohim for God), usually dated in the 8th century BC. Next is Deuteronomy (D, limited to that book and a few other passages), dated in the late 7th century BC. Last is the Priestly Writer (P, for its emphasis on cultic law and priestly concerns), dated in the 6th or 5th century BC. J includes a full narrative account from creation to the conquest of Canaan by Israel. E is

no longer a complete narrative, if it ever was; its earliest material concerns Abraham. P concentrates on the covenant and the revelation of the law at Mount Sinai, but sets that into a narrative that begins with creation. None of the writers of these documents—if they were individuals and not groups—was a creative author in the modern sense. Rather, they worked as editors who collected, organized, and interpreted older traditions, both oral and written. Therefore, most of the contents of the sources are much older than the sources themselves. Some of the oldest written elements are parts of poetic works such as the Song of the Sea (see Exodus 15), and some of the legal material was derived from ancient legal codes. One recent view suggests that the individual stories of the Pentateuch were collected under the heading of several major themes (Promise to the Patriarchs, Exodus, Wandering in the Wilderness, Sinai, and Taking of the Land) and took their basic shape by about 1100 BC. In any case, the story of Israel's roots was formed in and under the influence of the community of faith.

Deuteronomistic History

In recent years the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings have been recognized as a unified account of the history of Israel from the time of Moses (13th century BC) to the Babylonian exile (the period from the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC to the reconstruction in Palestine of a new Jewish state after 538 BC). Because the literary style and theological perspective are similar to those of Deuteronomy, this account is called the Deuteronomistic History. On the basis of the last events it reports, among other evidence, it seems to have been written about 560 BC, during the exile. It is possible, however, that at least one edition was written earlier. The writer (or writers) of the work set out to record Israel's history and also to account for the disaster that befell the nation at the hands of the Babylonians. On the one hand, he worked as any other historian would, by collecting and organizing older sources, both written and oral. He used materials of many kinds, including stories of the prophets, lists of various sorts, earlier histories, and even court records. In fact, he often refers the reader to his sources (for example, see Joshua 10:13; 2 Samuel 1:18; 2 Kings 15:6). On the other hand, however, he worked as a theologian—and one who already had firm convictions about the course and meaning of the events he recorded. He expressed those convictions by the way he organized the material and by placing speeches, which he had written, into the mouths of the major characters (for example, see Joshua 1). He believed that Israel had fallen to the Babylonians because of disobedience to the law of Moses (as in Deuteronomy), especially in its worship of false gods in false places of worship; he also believed that the prophets had warned of the exile long before it happened.

The Poetic Books

Both the cultic and wisdom poetry of the Old Testament are difficult to date or to attribute to particular authorship, primarily because they contain so few historical allusions. David is regarded as the author of the Psalms because of the tradition that he was a singer and composer; in fact, only 70 of the 150 Psalms are specifically identified with David, and far fewer than that originated during his era. The attributions to David and to others are found in the superscriptions, which were added long after the Psalms were written. The identification of Proverbs and other wisdom books with Solomon stems from the tradition of that king's great wisdom, and is reliable to the extent that

Solomon did encourage institutions that developed such literature. Wisdom poetry contains in the sayings some of the oldest material in the Hebrew Scriptures, and in compositions such as Ecclesiastes and Sirach some of the latest. The Book of Psalms became the hymn and prayer book of Israel's second temple, but many of the songs predate the second temple. They contain motifs, themes, and expressions that Israel inherited from its Canaanite predecessors in the land. Many voices speak in and through the Psalms, but above all they are the voices of the community at worship.

The Prophetic Books

Few if any of the prophetic books were written entirely by the person whose name serves as the title. Moreover, in most instances even the words of the original prophet were recorded by others. The story of Jeremiah's scribe Baruch (see Jeremiah 36; see also Isaiah 8:16) illustrates one of the ways the spoken prophetic words became books. The various utterances of the prophets would have been remembered and collected by their followers and eventually written down. Later, most of the books were edited and expanded. For example, when the Book of Amos (circa 755 BC) was used in the time of the exile, it was given a new and hopeful ending (Amos 9:8-15). The Book of Isaiah reflects centuries of Israelite history and the work of several prophets and other figures: Isaiah 1-39 stems primarily from the original prophet (742-700 BC); chapters 40-55 come from an unknown prophet of the Exile, called Second Isaiah (539 BC); and chapters 56-66, identified as Third Isaiah, come from various writers of the period after the exile. The Canon The Hebrew Bible and the Christian versions of the Old Testament were canonized in different times and places, but the development of the Christian canons must be understood in terms of the Jewish Scriptures.

The Hebrew Canon

The idea in Israel of a sacred book dates at least from 621 BC. During the reform of Josiah, king of Judah, when the temple was being repaired, the high priest Hilkiah discovered "the book of the law" (see 2 Kings 22). The scroll was probably the central part of the present Book of Deuteronomy, but what is important is the authority that was ascribed to it. More reverence was paid to the text read by Ezra, the Hebrew priest and scribe, to the community at the end of the 5th century BC (see Nehemiah 8). The Hebrew Bible became Holy Scripture in three stages. The sequence corresponds to the three parts of the Hebrew canon: the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. On the basis of external evidence it seems clear that the Torah, or Law, became Scripture between the end of the Babylonian exile (538 BC) and the separation of the Samaritans from Judaism, probably by 300 BC. The Samaritans recognized only the Torah as their Bible. The second stage was the canonization of the Nebiim (Prophets). As the superscriptions to the prophetic books indicate, the recorded words of the prophets came to be considered the word of God. For all practical purposes the second part of the Hebrew canon was closed by the end of the 3rd century, not long before 200 BC. In the meantime other books were being compiled, written, and used in worship and study. By the time the Book of Sirach was written (circa 180 BC), an idea of a tripartite Bible had developed. The contents of the third part, the Ketubim (Writings), remained somewhat fluid in Judaism until after the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in AD 70. By the end of the 1st century AD the rabbis in Palestine had established the final list. Both positive and negative forces were at work in