Literary Forms in the Bible

Old Testament

Prose and Verse:

Prose narrative (mostly historical):
- Genesis, Exodus, Numbers; Joshua through Esther

Laws (in prose):
- Leviticus
- Deuteronomy (most of it)
- Passages in Exodus and elsewhere

Verse:
- Psalms
- Song of Solomon
- Ecclesiastes
- Job (except for the narrative frame)
- Most of the prophetic books

Other ways of defining form:

Prophecy:
- Isaiah through Malachi

Apocalypse:
- Daniel 7-12

Encomium (praises a character type or an abstract quality):
- Psalms 1, 15, 112, 128, 119, etc. (called hymns by Keck and Tucker)
- Proverbs (praise of wisdom, virtuous wife)
- Isaiah 52-53 (“song of the suffering servant”)

Prayers:
- Psalms of complaint and thanksgiving

Wisdom and instruction:
- Ecclesiastes
- Proverbs
- Job
- Stray passages in other books; often summed up by the Hebrew term mashal, which includes riddles, epigrams, stories

Satire:
- Amos
- Jonah

New Testament

Varieties of prose:

Prose narrative:
- Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (biographies of Christ that include subtypes thematically defined as stories about Annunciation and nativity, calling or vocation, recognition, witness stories, encounter conflict or controversy, pronouncement, miracle, Passion; as well as the subtype known as parable)
- Acts of the Apostles

Epistles (letters to Christian communities):
- Romans through Jude

Apocalypse:
- Revelation

Other ways of defining form:

Encomium:
- John 1:1-18 (praise of the incarnate Christ)
- Colossians 1:15-20 (praise of Christ)
- 1 Corinthians 13 (praise of love)
- Hebrews 11 (praise of faith)

Satire:
- Matthew 23 (denunciation of the Pharisees)
- Luke 12:13-21 (parable of the rich fool)
- Luke 16:19-31 (parable of the rich man and Lazarus)
- Luke 18:9-14 (parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector)

Wisdom and instruction:
- Various proverbial utterances such as Mark 7:15, Luke 17:37, Matthew 10:39.