

Contrasting Types of Old Testament Literature

Adapted from Homer Heater, Dallas Theological Seminary

I. Contrasts Between the Historic, Poetic, and Prophetic Books

<u>Historical Books</u>	<u>Poetical Books</u>	<u>, Prophetical Books</u>
Past	Present	Future
What the People <i>Did</i>	What the People <i>Felt</i>	What the People <i>Should Do</i>
National	Individual	National & Individual
Actions	Axioms	Alarms
War history	Worship Helps	Warning & Hopes
Soldiers	Sages	Servants
Records	General Revelation	Special Revelation
Many ANE Parallels	Many ANE Parallels	Few ANE Parallels

(ANE = Ancient Near East)

(Now, how can we explain the middle column above?)

II. Distinguishing Between Wisdom and Poetic Literature

Wisdom	Poetic
Concerns content of writing	Concerns style of writing
Content = Principles to live by	Style = repetition of thought
Appeals to one's logic	Appeals to one's total being (including emotions)
Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes	Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Song, Lamentations
The smaller category (subset)	The larger grouping

See also Roy B. Zuck, "A Theology of Wisdom Books and the Song of Songs," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck, 208-9.

III. Contrasts Between the Wisdom Books

Job	Proverbs	Ecclesiastes
Wrestles with issues	Presents issues as resolved	Questions issues altogether
Debates with others	Declarations and commands	Debates with self
Incomprehensible	Black and white	Gray
Question of justice	Question of success	Question of purpose
Some exceptions to retribution	No exceptions to retribution	Many exceptions to retribution
Wicked generally die early	Wicked always die early	All die
Skeptical	Practical	Skeptical
Negative	Positive	Negative
Wealth removed	Wealth attained	Wealth questioned
Righteousness brings submission	Righteousness brings wisdom	Righteousness brings freedom
Wickedness brings judgment	Wickedness brings foolishness	Wickedness brings frustration
Why fear God?	Fear God	Why fear God?
What good is life?	How to have a good life	What good is life?
"Is the world well managed?"	"A life well managed"	"Is life worth living?" ¹

IV. Overview of the Poetic Books

	<u>Job</u>	<u>Psalms</u>	<u>Proverbs</u>	<u>Ecclesiastes</u>	<u>Song of Songs</u>
<i>The problem...</i>	suffering	trials	conduct	the chief good	perverted love
<i>The solution...</i>	sovereignty	praise	obey	fear God	growth in marriage
<i>Christ...</i>	suffered	prayed	behaved perfectly	reverenced the Father	is love

¹Derek Kidner, *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 10, 56, 90. See the review of this book by Roy B. Zuck in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144 (April-June 1987): 233.