

To understand the literature of any people, we have to understand their culture & style of writing.

To understand the *Jewish* Bible, we have to understand the *Jewish* style of writing. There are at least 11 characteristics.

Repetition

Writers say the same thing as many ways as possible

They tell a story 2 or 3 times, with differences between them

There is usually a general statement, after which the story is told as a broad outline.

It is then told again to include added details, or a new perspective. The 2nd time is like subdivisions of an outline

A 3rd telling will give even more details or yet another perspective

A writer who can tell the story more than once & give new details, is admired as a great & skillful author.

Mirror Image or Reverse Image

A series of facts are given in a specific order. Then more facts on the same idea are given, but in reverse order. All the facts center around a central theme. See **example** on the other side.

Picture Language (symbolism)

The author mentions an object that is real, and then uses it as a picture of spiritual truth.

Example: Crushing a snake's head is a picture of Jesus defeating Satan.

Numbers

Certain numbers have a literal meaning, as well as a spiritual meaning thruout the Bible.

Example: 40 is a number connected with testing or judgment.

Organized by topics - not by time

Events are described according to topic; they are not usually in the order they happened.

Never assume the text is in chronological order unless it clearly says so.

Be careful when you use the text to prove what happened 1st, 2nd & 3rd.

Extreme words with non-extreme meanings are used to emphasize ideas.

Examples: *God's anger/wrath* means *His judgment; His response to injustice, disobedience or evil.*

God's jealousy means *He is committed to what is right & fair.* We use the word *zeal* or *zealous*.

God's vengeance means *His justice.*

To love one & hate the other means *to chose one & not the other.*

Opposites are used to develop ideas.

Example: *love & hate; light & darkness*

Circular writing rather than linear

The author often begins & ends his chapter or book with the same idea or a contrasting idea.

Notice how the first unit of Genesis begins & ends: Gen. 1:1 and Gen. 2:3 *God created.*

Western writing is always moving forward; Jewish writing is always returning to the first idea.

Play on words

The author uses puns, words that sound similar or words that created a cadence.

Example: *They are not busy; they are busybodies...* 2 Thess. 3:11

Double meaning

In the books of the prophets, there is an immediate or current meaning within the context of the entire chapter. Then from one or two verses within the chapter, there is a future meaning. **Example:** Isaiah 7:14

Alphabetic acrostic

The first letter of each verse begins with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The first word of verse 1 begins with *A*, verse 2 with *B* & so forth. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet.



Example of **Mirror Image** style (technical term is “chiasm”) **The Flood Account** (Gen. 6:11 - 8:22)

- A: God resolves to destroy the earth 6:11-13
- B: Noah builds the ark 6:14-22
- C: God commands Noah & his family to enter the ark 7:1-9
- D: The Flood begins 7:10-16
- E: The Flood prevails for 150 days with the mountains covered 7:17-24
- F: **God remembers Noah** 8:1a
- E: The flood recedes after 150 days & the mountains become visible 8:1b-5
- D: The earth dries up 8:6-14
- C: God commands Noah & his family to exit the ark 8:15-19
- B: Noah builds an altar 8:20
- A: God resolves not to destroy humanity 8:21-22

