

## Biblical Genres and Form Criticism

adapted from material by Felix Just at:  
myweb.lmu.edu/fjust/Bible/Genres.htm  
and from  
Mark Allen Powell's, *The Gospels*, 20-23

## GENRE

- A category or type of literature (or of art, music, etc.) characterized by a particular form, style, or content
  - Verbal / Non-verbal
  - Prose / Poetry
  - How or where published
  - Large genre can be composed of a variety of smaller genres

## FORM CRITICISM

- The branch of biblical studies that
  - Classifies the various literary genres
  - Identifies the probable function of the unit in the 'life setting' (Sitz im Leben) of the community that preserved it
  - Attempts to reconstruct what the unit was like before being incorporated into the tradition

## Major Genres within the Hebrew Bible (OT):

- Foundational Myths & Legends
- Legal Codes
- Genealogies
- Annals
- Prophetic Books
- Psalms & Odes
- Prayers
- Proverbs
- Wisdom Literature
- Apocalypse

## Major Genres within the New Testament

- Gospels - Mark, Matt, Luke, John
- Acts
- Letters - Paul's letters
- Church Orders - 1 Tim, Titus
- Testament - 2 Tim & 2 Peter
- Homily/Sermon - Heb
- Wisdom Collection - James
- Epistles/Encyclicals - 1 & 2 Peter
- Apocalypse - Rev

## Typical Forms within the Gospels

- SAYINGS

## Typical Forms within the Gospels

- SAYINGS: memorable quotations preserved apart from any specific context
  - Legal
  - Eschatological (prophetic or apocalyptic)
  - Proverbs (gnomic or wisdom sayings)
  - "I" sayings

### Mark 8.33

Jesus said to his disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the leaven of Herod. They are some standing and they will not let me die."

## Typical Forms within the Gospels

- SAYINGS
- PRONOUNCEMENT STORIES

## Typical Forms within the Gospels

- PRONOUNCEMENT STORIES: (apophthegms or paradigms) short narratives of incidents that provide context for memorable sayings
  - Biographical Stories
  - Controversy Stories
  - Didactic Stories

### Mark 3.31-35

Mark 3.31-35  
Then his mother and his brothers came; ... And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ... "Here are my mother and my brothers," Jesus said, "who do the will of God."

## Typical Forms within the Gospels

- SAYINGS
- PRONOUNCEMENT STORIES
- PARABLES
- COMMISSIONING STORIES
- MIRACLE STORIES

## Typical Forms within the Gospels

- MIRACLE STORIES: narrative accounts of people displaying supernatural (divine or demonic) power
  - Exorcisms
  - Healings
  - Resuscitations
  - Nature Miracles
  - Feeding Miracles

## Typical Forms within the Gospels

- SAYINGS
- PRONOUNCEMENT STORIES
- PARABLES
- COMMISSIONING STORIES
- MIRACLE STORIES
- HYMNS
- GENEALOGIES
- LEGENDS
- MYTHS

## Identifying Forms

- Break the unit down into its component parts (i.e., outline the logic and flow of the unit)
- Compare it with other similar units
- Identify the core components