Chapter I

Introduction

In spite of the great abundance and originality of English Literature, the most famous book in the language is not an original work but a translation. It is what we call the Bible.

(Fox 11)

There is a growing awareness among literary critics that the Bible is a work of literature, and that an updated knowledge of literary criticism is necessary for an in-depth study of the Bible. Critical approaches to the Bible from a strictly literary perspective have come to be accepted as legitimate and pertinent, especially, by the discerning elite. Their views have been widely articulated in literary workshops and critical writings, espousing the merits of this approach to the study of the Bible. Critical methods commonly applied to non-biblical literature are now applied to the Bible, representing a significant shift in perspective. Turning away from the narrow preoccupation with historical matters that has dominated biblical
studies for so long, there is a shift towards investigation of the literary dimensions of the Bible. Further, the tendency to fragment or disintegrate the text in quest of its antecedent components has been relegated to the background, in order to project a single book of the Bible, an integral whole, as a piece of literature.

Owing to the convergence of biblical and literary studies, the literary qualities of the Bible have caught the attention of the scholarly community. At the turn of the twentieth century, Richard Moulton’s pioneering studies – initially set in motion by his *The Literary Study of The Bible* in 1899 – ushered in a new perspective with regard to the scrutiny of the Bible as literature. These studies were in line with his views that a work of literature should be analysed as a self-sufficient entity, independent of its external relations, and he focused his biblical analysis on textual structures, forms, and genres. This opened the way for the modern approach to the literary study of the Bible, and an appreciation of its literariness. However, a great stimulus for the modern analysis of biblical narratives and the appreciation of its literary qualities came in the middle of the twentieth century, with the publication of Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis* (1957). Among other things, Auerbach compared the narrative techniques of the
Old Testament, the first of the two parts of the Bible, with those used in classical epics.

The second great stimulus came with the publication of Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), in which he discussed the function of biblical archetypes and the Bible’s influence on literature in general. From that point onwards, biblical literature, particularly, its narratives, increasingly received the attention of literary and biblical scholars. There has been a steady increase in the number of books attempting an evaluation of the Bible as a literary masterpiece. These studies generally express a responsiveness to the artistry of biblical narratives and typical narrative characteristics. *Literary Criticism of the New Testament* by William A. Beardslee (1969), Edgar McKnight’s *The Bible and the Reader: An Introduction to Literary Criticism* (1985), and Tremper Longman’s *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (1987) are some of the books that have opened up new vistas, facilitating innovative approaches to a more precise literary analysis of the Bible, and offering a keener insight into the content, its meaning and impact.

The first literary pieces in the New Testament, the second of the two parts of the Bible, examined as literary forms were a few parables in the Gospel narratives. Norman R. Petersen has served as the premier theorist of
the narrative-critical movement with his essay “Point of view in Mark’s Narrative” (1978). Subsequently, Jack D. Kingsbury’s *The Christology of Mark’s Gospel* (1983), and R. Alan Culpepper’s *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (1983) consciously followed the narrative-critical approach. It was David Rhoads who decided to call this new approach Narrative Criticism in his essay “Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark” (1982). A few years later, Kingsbury also produced the major narrative study *Matthew as Story* (1986), and Robert C. Tannehill contributed a similar analysis called *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts* (1986). Unlike the other literary approaches, narrative criticism as a movement may be said to have had an endemic aspect, as its evolution is strictly confined to biblical studies. The narrative-critical approach to the Gospel narratives has now been established. In terms of biblical interpretational history, it is still an emerging and expanding approach. It could be claimed that this nascent approach – narrative criticism – by its intrinsic vibrancy has generated considerable enthusiasm among those seeking a better understanding of the Bible.

Since each Gospel narrative is a literary whole, many narrative critics have undertaken the study of the Gospel narratives, applying the canons of narrative criticism. They have made a study of how stories are

The present study provides a narrative-critical approach to Luke’s Gospel narrative, exploring the currents of the story world in the Gospel, with its focus on narrative act – the interaction among the components of the narrative – as the primary object of interpretation. Accordingly, an attempt is made to study the Gospel of Luke as a narrative. The dissertation purports to probe into Luke’s Gospel, mainly in the light of the narrative-
critical approach, keeping away from its purview the methods of tradition, history, form, and redaction criticisms. Comparisons of Lukan material with other Gospel narratives are not made. The story world is made available through the narrative of Luke, without going into the cultural milieu.

There is ample scope in Luke’s Gospel narrative for a literary critic to pursue the narrative presentation of the story. A strong story-line, made discernible by the narrative act, moves clearly through the smoothly connected narrative. The focus on the narrative act enables a rediscovery of the sense of wholeness of the Gospel of Luke. Further, this aspect of the methodology facilitates a deeper insight into the mysteries of the Gospel stories, and profitably meets the need of synthesizing the stories for a better understanding of the Gospel narrative. A thorough and holistic understanding of the Gospel warranted by the narrative-critical approach, undoubtedly, is a major contribution to literary as well as biblical scholarship.

Before attempting an in-depth study of Luke’s Gospel, it is essential to have a glimpse of the Gospel’s literary status in the Bible as a whole and to establish the appropriateness of the narrative-critical approach for a study of the biblical narratives. Luke’s Gospel, as the third book in the New Testament of the Bible, is a narrative occupying just 42 pages in the Bible
(King James Version) of 1291 pages, the ratio approximately being 1 : 30. The word Bible is derived from the Greek biblia, literally “books”. The diminutive plural biblia was viewed as a singular in Latin, and from this was born the modern English word Bible (Grolier Academic Encyclopedia 3 : 237). The Bible is an anthology consisting of many books written by different authors, at different times, in different places, from different points of view, and reflecting different stages of religious, moral, social, and political development over a period of some one thousand years. Altogether, there are sixty-six separate writings in the collection as found in English translations.

The Bible is in two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word Testament derived from Latin Testamentum, a translation of a Greek diathékē (meaning “covenant” or “a sovereign administration of grace”) has been in use since the second century CE (The New Bible Dictionary 265). The original text of the Old Testament is in the Hebrew language with a few brief passages in Aramaic. The original of the New Testament is in Greek. The Old Testament is the ancient Hebrew Bible preserved and treasured through many centuries by the Jews. It includes books reflecting the religious life and experience of the Hebrews and the promises of the Kingdom made by God to his people through the
prophets. Similarly, the New Testament records the fulfilment of God's promises, interpreted as marking the establishment of his spiritual Kingdom in the world through Jesus Christ (Eiselen, Lewis, and Downey 15). The Old Testament was written during the course of more than one millennium, approximately in the period 1200-100 BCE (Encyclopedia Americana 3:662). The New Testament was written approximately during 49-125 CE (701).

Apart from the books of the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Jewish sacred books known as the Apocrypha, which was part Hebrew and part Greek, and belonged to a later period than the Old Testament, was also preserved (Davidson 52). In most editions of the Bible, the Apocrypha is sandwiched between the Old and the New Testaments. However, in the Bible in use in the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic churches, Apocryphal writings are strewn all over the Old Testament in sundry places. Most Protestants consider the Apocrypha "apocryphal" or untrue and, therefore, do not accord it the legitimacy of a sacred text. Their Bible is a compendium of two anthologies, the Old Testament made up of thirty-nine books and the New Testament with twenty-seven books.

Though the Biblical author, like any other author, is a person who gives expression to a subject through the medium of language, most biblical
works have quite a complex history of authorship behind them. The prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible are the easiest ones to account for; a large part of their contents is believed to be the words of the persons whose names are associated with them, persons who lived and prophesied in historical times. However, the form of these books — the selection and arrangement of their contents — seems to have been the handiwork of others. Although some of the books called Writings in the division of the Hebrew Bible — Ruth, Esther, Job, Ecclesiastes and Jonah — seem to be by single authors, in no case is anything known about the authors. The rest of the Hebrew Bible is, almost entirely, the product of a special kind of collaboration, since the various authors were widely separated in space and time, had no knowledge of one another, and certainly had no conception of the form that their work would finally take. The five books — Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy — comprehensively called the Pentateuch (in five volumes) belong to this category of writing. The Jewish tradition that ascribes to Moses the authorship of these books is not supported by internal evidence in the books themselves, and hence it is not possible to ascribe all that has been written about Moses and about those he led out of bondage to Moses himself (Gore, Goudge, and Guillaume 22). Most of the attributions of authorship in the New Testament, however, are merely traditional. Each of the four Gospels was written by a single author.
They are generally ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. There are also the letters of Paul and a few others and the Revelation of John, in the New Testament (The New Bible Dictionary 150).

Almost from the beginning, the books of the Bible have been translated into other languages. The earliest translations of the Hebrew Bible were into Aramaic, the common language of Jews in Palestine and throughout the Middle East in the sixth century BCE. The Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) was translated into Samaritan about 400 BCE. Following the conquests of Alexander the Great, Greek became the common language of the whole Eastern Mediterranean area and even of many regions farther East. The Hebrew Bible was accordingly translated into Greek from about 250 BCE onwards. The Greek version of the Old Testament is called the Septuagint, because seventy scholars of Alexandria are supposed to have worked on it and Septuaginta is the Latin for “seventy” (Fox 11). By 150 CE, translations of both the Old Testament and the New Testament books were available in Syriac, Latin and other languages. There were several versions of the Old Testament in Aramaic. The Coptic translation, the Armenian and many more, followed soon. The Latin version of the Bible, which came out near the end of the fourth century CE, is the revision made by S.Jerome and called the
Vulgate, because it was the popular one which had superseded all others. Vulgus is the Latin equivalent of “the common people”, and a book is Vulgate when it has reached the people (Fox 11). Eventually, the Bible came to be translated into all the emerging languages of the West.

During the Middle Ages (800–1450 CE), parts of the Bible were put into Anglo-Saxon, and Middle English. The first English version of the entire Bible was fashioned in 1383, by John Wycliffe and his associates who used the Latin Vulgate as their original. The Reformation, a European movement for reform of the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth century, which resulted in the establishment of the Protestant Churches, gave a further impetus to Bible translations into the modern languages. Martin Luther set himself to the task of making a new translation of the Bible into German, and William Tyndale into English in 1526. There have been several English translations, some of which are quite recent, but the most widely circulated is the Authorized Version of 1611, described on its title page as “translated out of the original tongues and with the former translations diligently compared and revised by His Majesty’s [King James’s] special command”. The process of translation and revision has never ceased, and the Bible has been translated in whole or in part in about fifteen hundred languages and dialects (Grolier Academic Encyclopedia 3:241).
The Authorized Version, also called the King James Version (KJV) has been the undisputed favourite of the English-speaking Protestants for more than three hundred years (Parmelee 159). For an understanding and appreciation of the Bible as literature, it is obvious, the King James Version is the right version; it is renowned for its majestic style, and for its wide diffusion across the world (Fox 12). "No one influence has been so great in the life of English-speaking people, religiously, morally, socially, politically as has this version. It still holds its own in many homes and pulpits" (Eiselen, Lewis, and Downey 85). Encyclopedia Americana also endorses this view:

In the long span of time since its publication, the King James Version has coloured so incalculably the thought and speech of English people, has so affected English literature and has influenced so much of life. (3 : 718).

Hundreds of years have passed, and, it appears that, nothing can dislodge the King James Version from its pre-eminent place in the literary world. The sublime literary qualities of the style and expression of the King James version, not discernible in the other versions, has served as the motivational factor behind the choice of Luke's Gospel in the King James Version as the text for study.
The Bible remains one of the most conspicuous glories of English literature. Its rather antique and quaint language was the language of the English Renaissance, and is "felt by the bulk of its readers to be the approximately majestic means of expression for the 'good news' of the Bible" (Gabel, Wheeler, and York 273). When one refers to the quaint, archaic diction of the King James Version, it is generally conceded that, updating the Bible languagewise is also fraught with risks. Some of these words have acquired a personality far beyond their verbal import; and the more familiar modern equivalents divest the text of the grandeur and majesty that have characterized it for over three hundred years.

Ancient Jews sought to make the biblical message relevant to the actual needs of the community by discovering allegorical meanings. Christians were influenced both by the Jewish tradition and by the philosophers who explained Greek myths as allegories. During the Middle Ages the allegorical method largely prevailed (Grolier Academic Encyclopedia 3:241).

During the Renaissance (1500–1600 CE), the revival of interest in the study of Greek and Latin classics influenced the study of the Bible, and in the eighteenth century, the techniques of classical studies began to be employed systematically in biblical studies. Textual critics compared the
manuscripts of the Bible in the original languages and the subsequent versions to determine, as nearly as possible, the authenticity of the original text (Grolier Academic Encyclopedia 3:241). It is often referred to as lower criticism to distinguish it from higher criticism, which deals with the questions of authorship, date, source analysis, and historical background.

The dominant mode of biblical studies for more than a century has been the historical-critical method. Actually a conglomeration of approaches, this method seeks to reconstruct the life and thought of biblical times, through an objective – scientific analysis of biblical material. It aims at discovering the value of biblical writings as evidence for history. Source criticism attempts to delineate the sources that biblical writers relied upon in the composition of their books. In the development of modern biblical scholarship, source criticism was often called (and still is sometimes called) "literary criticism". This is an indication that nineteenth-century biblical critics were initially concerned with the Gospels as literature. But the first most-glaring literary problem they had to grapple within the Gospels was the matter of sources. As a result, what they called "literary criticism" was rapidly reduced to the search for the written sources lying behind the biblical books. Nineteenth-century literary criticism of the Gospels, thus, dealt not with the Gospels, but with their prehistory.
Form criticism concentrates on defining the form the individual units of tradition might have had, before they came to be incorporated into the text. It also maintained its focus on the prehistory of the text. Form critics attempt to isolate the discrete units of oral tradition, preserved now in the written Gospels, and they assess how the form of each individual pericope, a unit of text, had been shaped in its original sociological context. Here one may discern, not only the same focus on the prehistory of the text that had been prominent in source criticism, but also the tendency already strong in source criticism to fragment or disintegrate the text in search of its antecedent components.

Redaction criticism is the study of the editing. It seeks to discern the theological intentions of the biblical writers themselves, by observing the manner in which they edited their sources and arranged the individual units of tradition. Although redaction criticism tends to give more credence to the individuals who wrote the Gospels than the source or the form criticism had given, it still places a great emphasis on the prehistory of each Gospel, and tends to disintegrate each text into material labelled “tradition” and other material labelled “redaction”. Thus, in focusing on the documentary status of the books, the historical-critical method attempts to interpret the historical circumstances under which they came to be written (Powell 2).
The major limitation of all these approaches is that they fail to take the literary character of the Bible seriously. Further, owing to the biblical scholars' preoccupation with the question of how to interpret what the Bible says, biblical criticism has been left impoverished in techniques to describe and interact with the text itself. As early as the thirteenth century, it was argued that the church had done a good job of communicating the theological content of the Bible, but had failed to make the literal level of the biblical text come alive in people's imagination (Ryken 9).

The literary aspects of the biblical writings have long been overlooked. There are certain reasons for this. One reason is that the Bible looks different. One opens it at random and finds a formal arrangement of chapters and verses not found in other books, and this difference in form easily suggests a difference in fact. The consequence has been that the chapters, which presumably developed out of the sections into which the books of the Bible had been divided for public readings, have become more important than the complete books. The sectionalising of the Bible into chapter and verse might give it a unique aspect. However, what had once been a matter of expediency has now become an impediment to a literary interest in the text of the Bible. Further, in spite of the Bible's luxuriant literary variety, distinctions even between prose and poetry have been
obscured by the custom of printing the entire matter as though it were solid prose. In modern versions, however, like the New International Version and the New King James Version, this is to some extent remedied by printing prose passages as paragraphs and poetical passages as poetry, with indentation of lines and with separate stanzas. Still, the Bible is left far behind any modern book, in the use of printing devices appropriate to form and sense (Eiselen, Lewis, and Downey 19).

Another obvious reason is the fact that the Bible is, above all else, a religious book, that a literary analysis of the Bible goes against the grain of its nature, and that it is studied almost exclusively for religious purposes. Indeed, it is sometimes felt that the religious values of the Bible are so predominant, that turning aside from them to a consideration of its literary aspects, is to turn away from its true purpose, and to ignore its true character. The content and its import seem to have engaged the attention of biblical scholars; but they are more concerned with the message than with the manner in which it is put across in the Bible. The text of the Bible has been pushed to the background, and in a haze of theological interpretations, the magnificence of the written word is blurred somewhat.

It is further viewed that the Bible ought not to be considered as literature and subjected to literary scholarship, as it has been divinely
dictated, God himself being the actual author of each word in the sixty-six books of the Bible. However, the mystical and divine factors in the manner of its evolvement need not make it improper to be subjected to the canons of literary criticism, nor depreciate its value as literature; the mode of communication is, after all, the human language. Language is a wonderful instrument, but as with all instruments its use must be understood and mastered. Therefore, it is essential that any reverent search for the meaning of the Bible must be based upon the principles according to which language serves its universal purposes. As Leland Ryken rightly observes, “The one thing the Bible is not is what it is so often thought to be – a theological outline with proof texts attached” (9).

Like all other authors, the biblical authors used the languages native to them and the literary forms available. Therefore, the literary material created by them can be read and appreciated under the same conditions that apply to literature in general. Further, the Bible also makes continuous use of the resources of language that one can regard as literary. It is filled with evidences of literary artistry and beauty. Hence, when the Bible employs a literary method, it asks to be approached as literature. In the words of C.S.Lewis, “There is a […] sense in which the Bible, since it is after all literature, cannot properly be read except as literature; and the different
parts of it as the different sorts of literature they are” (3). This could only be taken to mean that without putting the Bible’s literary form and its stylistic features under literary scrutiny, it would be impossible to discern the true import of the message of the Bible.

Except for the literature of Greece and the derivative literature of Rome, the Bible contains the finest literature which has survived from ancient times. Further, the Bible has been an active force in English literature for over six hundred years. It has been a moulding force in the style of many writers. It has exerted a profound influence over the matter and spirit of English literature, and, hence, it is obviously true that a literary acquaintance with the Bible is essential to the understanding of English literature (Peake 18).

Biblical writings are great literature because they are greatly felt and greatly uttered; had it not been for their survival as writings, that is, as literature, they would have disappeared before they could have been gathered into the Bible. What emerges is that, to approach them as works of literature is simply to restore their purpose and meaning according to which they first appeared (Peake 24). When this is done – when the purpose and meaning of biblical texts are restored – the literary magnificence of this great compendium should stand out in bold relief, with
the misty theological abstractions no longer around to obscure vision. When the literary character of the Bible is studied and analysed, even the theological insights, sought to be culled from such writings, would assume an aspect of clarity.

At the level of content, biblical literature is characterized by experiential concreteness. Such experiential concreteness is achieved by the fidelity to fact and conformity with conventional human responses in a given situation. The Bible is an experiential book that conveys the concrete reality of human life. It is filled with the settings, sensations, and actions of everyday life. It incarnates ideas in the form of poetic images, stories, characters in action, and living situations in which readers can imaginatively participate. It appeals to the understanding through imagination (Ryken 17). As H.Richard Niebuhr sees it "[. . .] Man [. . .] is a being who grasps and shapes reality [. . .] with the aid of great images, metaphors and analogies" (161). The Bible is the best illustration of this, for it conveys the truth about reality more often by means of stories, characters, images, and lifelike situations than by theological abstractions. It is a further characteristic of the Bible that its human aspects render it its fascinating variety. The Bible's gallery of portraits comprises kings and beggars, rich men and poor men, saints and villains, wise men and fools and
so on. The philosopher deals with the dark problems of existence; the poet in the Bible weaves into poetry the longings, discoveries and aspirations of the soul; the prophet broods in sorrow over the pathos of man's blindness and sin, while the historian unfolds the significance of past events. There are pictures of family life, while wars are not excluded. On the whole there is no typical experience of human life that is not mirrored in the Bible.

One may find in the Bible a wonderful variety of literature – myth and legend, history and fiction, poetry and drama, idyll and allegory, proverb and prophecy. The Bible is a mixture of forms, some literary, some expository, and some mixed. The major literary forms are narrative or story, and poetry. Manfred Jahn defines narrative as "anything in the widest possible sense, that tells or presents a story" (N 1. 1). The visionary writing, including the books of prophecy and Revelation, and the historical writing in the Bible invariably move in the direction of the literary narrative (Ryken 26). The epistles of the New Testament frequently become literary because their style is poetic.

It is not to be supposed that all types of biblical literature exist so independently and characteristically, that all the books of the Bible can be mechanically classified and pigeon-holed. The Bible has its share of genres, that are either unique or decidedly hybrid. These are sufficiently
similar to familiar literary genres, and yield their meanings, if approached with literary tools. Visionary narrative, for example, requires an ability to interpret poetry. Biblical Revelation is not a typical story, nor is it ordinary poetry, yet narrative and poetry are exactly the right categories to approach the book of Revelation (Ryken 26). As indicated earlier, a literary approach to the unravelling of the true import of the Bible could be a rewarding experience.

The bearing of literary form upon interpretation is the vital factor in drawing the meaning of a passage. Neither scholarship nor piety can be depended upon while attempting a reliable interpretation of a passage, whose literary aspect remains obscure and ambiguous. It must be noted that the vital messages of the past, in so far as they have come down through the medium of language, are recoverable only in the degree to which they can be discerned within their literary forms. As such, a literary approach to the Bible has to concern itself mostly with the literary form of the books, because it is through the literary form that the Bible communicates its message. Both the literary and the non-literary readers of the Bible, however, have a common goal in their desire to discover what the Bible means. While the non-literary readers ignore the structure of the various books of the Bible, the literary students of the Bible take into account the
literary form of the Bible and its bearing upon its interpretation to discover the right meaning. As already indicated, the literary study of the Bible, then, may be described as a study of the characteristic forms and methods by means of which the messages of the Bible are expressed in language (Eiselen, Lewis, and Downey 19).

As Ryken observes, "There is a quiet revolution going on in the study of the Bible. At its center is a growing awareness that the Bible is a work of literature, and that the methods of literary scholarship are a necessary part of any complete study of the Bible" (11). Obviously, there are two sides of the movement. Literary scholars are showing increasing interest in applying their methods to the Bible, and biblical scholars are calling for a literary approach. Examples of biblical scholars, whose theory of biblical analysis is essentially literary, include Beardslee (1970), Amos N. Wilder (1971), Tannehill (1975), and James A. Fisher (1981). Literary scholars who have applied their methods to the Bible include N. Frye (1982), Roland Mushat Frye (1971), Ryken (1974), and Robert Alter (1981). It is vital to note that the literary approach to the Bible is becoming increasingly popular among both biblical and literary scholars.

Broadly speaking, a number of ingredients make up this new approach to the Bible. The main focus is on the Bible as it now stands, and
not on conducting excavations, as in the redaction process, behind the text. The scholars choose to treat biblical texts as finished wholes rather than as a patchwork of fragments. Their study is concerned with the literary forms of the Bible. The new approach is marked by an inclination to use literary terms, instead of traditional and theological terms, to discuss the stories and the poems of the Bible, an appreciation of the artistry of the Bible, and sensitivity to the experiential, extra-intellectual dimension of the Bible (Ryken 11).

Clearly, the literary approach to the Bible is the result of the new criticism of secular literature. Prior to 1940, secular critics paid a great deal of attention to establishing the identity, circumstances, and intentions of a work’s historical author. Any interpretation of a work done by William Shakespeare or Charles Dickens would be expected to take into account the circumstances of its writing, the life and personality of the author, and perhaps the conditions of English society at the time. In the 1940s, however, this manner of interpretation was by and large replaced by an approach that came to be called the new criticism (Powell 4).

New criticism rejected the notion that background information is needed to interpret a text. It held that the author’s intention is irrelevant to the understanding of the text, since it prevents the work from being read on
its own terms. The contention of the new critics is that meaning and value reside within the finished, and free-standing text itself (Powell 5). It is now accepted as axiomatic in literary circles that the meaning of literature transcends the intentions of the author. When new criticism broke into the critical field of secular literature, it proved propitious for biblical scholars. In the past century, an enormous amount of research was done in regard to questions regarding the authorship, dating, provenance and sources of various New Testament books. Nevertheless, the cases in which anything like a consensus has been reached are few. New criticism enables the biblical critics to learn much about the meaning and impact of certain books, without first having to settle these persistent and perhaps unsolvable problems. However, secular literary critics do not evince much interest in studying the Bible as literature. Hence, biblical scholars developed a new branch of criticism called narrative criticism transporting the canons of new criticism into it. Thus secular scholarship knows no such movement as the narrative criticism, though it seems most natural to suppose that narrative criticism developed from the new criticism of the secular literature. For the present, narrative criticism is confined to the study of the narratives of the Bible.

The Books of the Old Testament and the New Testament of the Bible can be classified based on their literary forms.
I. The Old Testament

A. Historical Narratives:
   Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel,
   1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

B. Law Narratives:
   Leviticus, Deuteronomy

C. Poetry:
   Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

D. Visionary Narratives:
   Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos,
   Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai,
   Zechariah, Malachi

II. The New Testament

A. Gospel Narratives:
   Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

B. Historical Narrative:
   Acts of the Apostles

C. Epistles:
   Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians,
   Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon,
   Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, 1-2-3 John, Jude

D. Visionary Narrative:
   Revelation
It can be seen that narrative is the most conspicuous and characteristic form of biblical writing. Among the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi, thirty-four books are narratives and there are six narratives in the New Testament among the twenty-seven books. A view shared by many critics is that the Bible is not a collection of sermons and essays with some anecdotes interspersed, but “an artistically beautiful as well as a truthful book” (Ryken 9). In the opinion of N.T. Wright, “[. . .] the Bible in general, and a good bit of New Testament in particular, is emphatically not simply a list of doctrines to be believed or commands to be obeyed. It consists, at a far more fundamental level, of stories, Narratives” (ix - x).

The prominence of the narrative form in the Bible is well captured in Wilder’s statement that, “the narrative mode is uniquely important in Christianity” (56). The implication is that the more the readers of the Bible know about how narratives work, the more they will enjoy and understand vast portions of the Bible. The narratives of the Bible vary widely in regard to the fullness with which they are told. Some are entries in a chronicle, like the historical narratives. They obey the documentary impulse to tell what happened, and avoid the literary impulse of presenting in detail how it happened (Ryken 33). Naturally one is inclined to accept such narratives as
histories. The books of Numbers, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles are such historical narratives. But they are not histories either, for they are not impersonal records. Further, though they are historical material, they are not told for mere historical purposes. The historical books of the Old Testament furnish not so much a history of Israel as materials for its history, and are called narratives (Gore, Goudge, and Guillaume 35). In other words, whatever is considered a biblical history, it claims that aspect only because it contains rudiments of historical material. While they contain much historical material, they offer themselves as an interpretation rather than as a record, and point out the moral of history rather than an uncoloured view of the events. The law narratives and the visionary narratives also come under this narrative category. At the other end of the continuum, one can find full-fledged stories like those of David and Job. They obey the literary impulses to present an event rather than simply tell about it. They are full, circumstantial, and embellished with detail; they allow the reader to reconstruct the story in his or her imagination.

Next come the Gospel narratives in the New Testament. Gospel is an English word from the Anglo-Saxon god spel. The word translates the Latin euangelium from the Greek euangelion, all of which mean the same thing "good news". Originally the word gospel meant the "reward" given to
a man bringing good news. Then it came to signify God’s “good news” proclaimed by Jesus and embodied in him (Hunter 23).

Gospel narrative is a unique genre in the New Testament. It is the story of Jesus and his mission. It is different from a biography in that it does not seek to give an account of the life of Jesus from beginning to end. It records nothing of the physical appearance of Jesus, nothing of his education, nothing except a few stories of his early life and the last three years of his life. Gospel narrative is not a memoir, for in memoirs the story, the events, and the characters— all centre round the author, while in the Gospel the author might as well be anonymous for all that he says about himself (Barclay, Gospels 151). Thus Gospel narrative is a new literary genre. Nothing exactly corresponding to it is to be found in ancient literature. E.J. Goodspeed remarks: “The Gospel is Christianity’s contribution to literary types. It is without doubt the most effective literary form of religious expression that has ever been devised” (125). The Gospel narratives are encyclopedic in that they include elements of biography, historical chronicle, story, proverb, and poetry.

According to the nearly unanimous opinion of modern scholars, Mark’s Gospel narrative was written around 70 CE. The next two after Mark would have been Luke and Matthew, somewhere between 80 and 90
CE. John was written about 100 CE (Gabel, Wheeler, and York 213). There is a great deal of uncertainty about these dates, and there is no real way of knowing which Gospel narrative was composed first. When the four were collected into one book (not long after 100 CE), that book was known as “the Gospel”; its four components were distinguished by additional words According to Matthew, According to Mark etc. (Manley, Robinson, and Stibbs 319).

Traditional approaches to Gospel narratives have been preoccupied with questions of historical authenticity, theological content, and their relation to the religious milieu of the first-century church. Further, they have been looking for literary precedents or models, and stages of oral transmission that can be traced backward to a primitive original form. However, narrative-critical approach substitutes an entirely different agenda of interests that are complementary to the traditional questions. It begins with the conviction that Gospel narratives are first of all stories, and focuses on the point of view from which the stories are told. Narrative criticism concerns with the overall structure and progression of the stories – the narrative patterns which generate the action. Narrative critics bring to focus how the characteristics of the narrative world, that each Gospel builds in the reader’s imagination, effectively convey the meaning of each of the
Gospel narratives. The Gospel narratives are intended to be read from beginning to end, not dissected and examined, to determine the relative value of individual passages (Powell 2). “The genre characteristics of the Gospel are [. . .] narrative characteristics” notes W.S.Vorster, as he criticizes the inadequacies of traditional approaches (88). “The Gospel writers produced neither volumes of learned exegeses nor sermons”, writes Robert M.Fowler, “rather, they told stories; and if we wish to understand what the Gospels say, we should study how stories are told” (626).

Even before the advent of modern literary approaches, redaction critics had discovered pervasive unifying features that are found in each of the Gospel narratives. Literary studies have furthered such research, and exposed a surprising coherence of narrative elements. R.M. Frye, a literary scholar has examined the four Gospel narratives, and has concluded that each of them appears to be a “narrative of considerable literary merit, in which diverse materials have been effectively integrated that each Gospel should be treated as a literary work in its own right” (220). As early as 1946, it was felt that narratives could be studied according to the canons of general literary criticism, for in choosing narrative discourse as their medium, the Gospel writers inevitably selected a form of expression, that presents a narrative depiction of reality. This is a feature that Gospel narratives share with other literary works (Powell 4).
The need for a more literary approach to the Gospel narratives was sounded in 1969 by Beardslee (47). He suggested that an analysis of biblical forms would provide insight into the literary meaning and impact of the texts themselves. Another concern voiced by Beardslee was the need for greater attention to the Gospel narrative as a finished product, and to the Gospel editors as authors who were personally responsible for the form of Gospels. Finally, Norman Perrin expressed his view that if the evangelists are authors, they must be studied as other authors are studied (9). To Petersen, Gospel narratives have significant stories to tell, and they should be first comprehended on their own terms, before they are treated as evidence of something else. Instead of treating a Gospel narrative as documentary evidence that supports certain facts of history, it should be acknowledged as, what it really is, a story narrated as all stories are narrated (Literary Criticism 20). The main new factor is a growing consensus that the primary form of the Gospels is narrative or story, not sermon or saying.

As each of the Gospel narratives creates its own narrative world, one of the best general approaches to the Gospel narratives as stories is to allow them to build a total self-contained picture in the reader’s imagination. Boris Uspensky has rightly said:
there is presented to us [in every Gospel story] a special world with its own space and time, its own ideological system, and its own standards of behavior. In relation to that world, we assume [...] the position of an alien spectator [...]. Gradually we enter into it, becoming more familiar with its standards, accustoming ourselves to it, until we begin to perceive this world as if from within. (137)

In Matthew’s Gospel narrative, for example, the reader enters a Jewish world, where the Old Testament prophecies and religious practices are a constant force. Jesus is repeatedly portrayed in terms of royalty, and the teaching of Jesus is presented in a very orderly fashion. When one reads the Gospel narrative of Luke, he is in quite a different world, a cosmopolitan world, in which people on the social and religious fringes – the disreputable and tainted members of society – are important, because they are the ones who get the full flavour of the Gospel story (Ryken 135).

The four Gospel narratives fall into two groups, the first three on one side, and John by itself on the other. The first three – Matthew, Mark and Luke – are commonly called Synoptic Gospels, because they have so much common material, that they can be conveniently arranged in three parallel columns as a “Synopsis”, a form in which they may be studied together.
The four Gospel narratives are fundamentally different in content, arrangement, emphasis, and purpose. Although they all bring the “good news” of Jesus, each does so in its own way, and when the Gospel narratives are allowed to speak on their own terms, they manifest different patterns. Thus there are four different perspectives to view the Gospel. The Gospel narratives have provided four more or less independent accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus. Each of these has its own distinctive characteristics, each emphasizes certain aspects of the life and teachings of Jesus, and each makes a unique contribution to the Gospel narratology in general. Furthermore, each has been apparently written with a specific objective in view, that determines its arrangement and material, which is sometimes chronological and sometimes topical. In the words of Date, “Altogether, the 4 gospels give a wellrounded out conception of Jesus Christ as the ideal King, ideal Servant, ideal Man and ideal God” (121).

Matthew’s Gospel narrative sets forth Jesus as the King of the Jews. Through a carefully selected series of the Old Testament quotations and events, singled out and emphasized from the life of Jesus, it is narrated how Jesus fulfils all the regal prophecies concerning him. The genealogy, the baptism, the discourse and the miracles – all point to the same inescapable conclusion, Jesus is King (Bagster 1306).
The message of Mark’s Gospel narrative is captured in a single verse: “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Chapter by chapter the Gospel narrative unfolds the dual focus of Jesus’ life: service and sacrifice. Mark portrays Jesus as a servant on the move, instantly responsive to the will of God. He narrates how by preaching, teaching, and healing Jesus serves his people until his death, and how after his resurrection he commissions his followers to continue his works in his power, as servants following the steps of the perfect Servant (The Open Bible 1007).

John’s Gospel narrative portrays Jesus as God. The narrative intention is to delineate Jesus in his deity. The narrative begins on the heights of divine reality, with the description of Jesus as the eternal Word of God manifested in time. The Gospel presents Jesus of history as the divine Son of God, and thereby links history with philosophy (Eiselen, Lewis, and Downey 1066).

The Gospel narrative of Luke, specifically, intends to relate the story of how Christ, the Son of God, assumes humanity on earth as Jesus, vanquishes Satan, and restores God’s people, till then captives of Satan, to their rightful status. Through a collection of episodes connected as story,
the narrator recounts how Jesus by his obedience to God accomplishes his victory over Satan, and secures for his people a spiritual Kingdom on earth. Through the story of the sacrificial life of Jesus, the miracles, the parables, and the discourses the reader comprehends the process of the spiritual Kingdom of God coming into existence in the hearts of his people.

Luke’s Gospel is the first volume of a two volume work, the second of which is the Acts of the Apostles; like the other three Gospels it belongs to the Gospel-narrative genre. The Acts, on the other hand, looks very much like a historical narrative. But the Acts is no more history than the Gospels are history. It is a deliberately constructed narrative, designed even to the smallest detail, for the sake of recounting the story of the reign of the Spirit of Jesus in the spiritual Kingdom (Gabel, Wheeler, and York 231). Luke’s Gospel narrative according to Barclay, “is one of the loveliest books in the New Testament” (Gospels 245). Surveying the whole story of Luke, the great German scholar Harnack wrote: “What a note of joy, courage and triumph sounds through the whole Lukan story from the first to the last pages” (qtd. in Hunter 53). Lucien Cerfaux rightly argues, “With the work of St.Luke, the gospel tradition embarks on its career as literature, [. . .]” (57).
The foregoing discussion focused on the growing awareness of the literariness of the Bible among literary critics, and the resultant literary perspective in them leading to the treatment of the Gospels as narratives. The Gospel narrative of Luke is set against the literary backdrop of the King James Version of the English Bible. The Gospel narrative is presented as an interesting case of a narrative, for a literary critic to pursue it under the rubric of narrative criticism. The critical review has traced the course of various biblical-critical approaches, the point of convergence of biblical and literary approaches, and the point of divergence of narrative criticism from new criticism as an independent entity in the world of biblical criticism.

The limitations of the former approaches, and the expediency of the narrative-critical method for a literary study of the Gospels have also been pointed out. Putting the narrative goals of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John in a nutshell, the narrative goal of Luke’s Gospel is explained as Jesus’ establishment of God’s Kingdom in the world and in the hearts of his people. The intrinsic characteristics of the narrative-critical methodology, its focus, its parameters on interpretation, and its application to Luke’s Gospel narrative are the concern of the following chapter.