

Hermeneutics – Figurative

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

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6. *Apostrophe* — addressing of an absent object:

“O Absalom! My son! My son!” (II Sam. 19:4)

“O death, where is thy sting?” (I Cor. 15:55)

7. *Hyperbole* — an exaggeration:

“Oh that mine head were waters!” (Jer. 9:1)

“The light of the sun shall be sevenfold” (Isa. 30:26)

8. *Irony* — the opposite is said:

“Cry aloud: for he is a god!” (I Kings 18:27)

9. *Allegory* — an extended metaphor:

“This Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia” (Gal. 4:24)¹

10. *Parable* — an extended simile:

“Behold, a sower went forth to sow” (Matt. 13:3)

“The kingdom of heaven shall be likened unto ten virgins”
(Matt. 25:1)

11. *Riddle* — statements designed to puzzle and hide. The Scripture contains a very restrained use of riddles. When a riddle is used, it is often indicated as such (Rev. 13:8 “Here is wisdom . . 666”) or is immediately solved in the context (Samson’s riddle).

12. *Fable* — animals or things in imaginary actions. There are only two fables in the Scripture. These are Jotham’s fable in Judges 9 and Jehoash’s fable in II Kings 14. Both of

C. Classification of Figures of Speech

In general, there are twelve classes of figures in the Bible, as follows:

1. **Simile**—comparison of two unlike things using adverbs such as “like” and “as.” Instances of similes in prophecy are:

“His eyes were as a flame of fire” (Rev. 1:14)

“The moon became as blood” (Rev. 6:12)

“Three unclean spirits like frogs” (Rev. 16:13)

2. **Metaphor**—similar to simile but without the adverb:

“Tell that fox” (Luke 13:32)

“Thou worm Israel” (Isa. 41:14)

“Jehovah is my rock and fortress” (Ps. 18:2)

“The moon shall be turned into blood” (Joel 2:31)

3. **Metonymy**—use of one name for another related name:

“If the house be worthy” (Matt. 10:13)

“Egypt where our Lord was crucified” (Rev. 11:8)

4. **Synecdoche**—similar to metonymy but physical resemblance is stressed:

“All the world should be taxed” (Luke 2:1)

“Behold the Lord maketh the earth [Israel] empty” (Isa. 24:1)¹

5. **Personification**—citing of inanimate objects as if animate:

“The trees shall clap their hands” (Isa. 55:12)

“The earth mourneth and fadeth away” (Isa. 24:4)