

Figures of Speech

A figure of speech (or trope): When we use a word or phrase differently than what it would mean literally.

Recognizing a figure of speech: There are no fixed rules, but if a phrase doesn't make sense to take literally, use sober judgment to consider if it's a figure of speech.

When the Bible uses a figure of speech, that doesn't make the phrase "less true." Truth is conveyed in the Bible literally, and also using figures of speech. Behind every figure of speech is a literal statement.

Figures of speech that deal with comparisons:

- Simile: Makes a direct comparison between one thing and another.
 - Uses connector words such as "like" or "as." "As for man, his days are like grass."
 - Interpreting a simile:
 - First, recognize that the phrase is a simile.
 - Second, determine what the point of similarity is between one thing and the other. Also, determine how the original hearers would have understood the comparison. How would people in the ancient near east have understood word pictures involving things like agriculture, for example?
- Metaphor: Compares two things where one thing is symbolic of another.
 - Uses language such as "this is that" or "these are those." Example: "You are the salt of the earth."
 - Goes beyond a simile. A metaphor is more complex, where one thing becomes representative or symbolic of another thing.
 - Interpreting a metaphor:
 - First, determine how the original hearers would have understood the reference.
 - Second, find the points of comparison that the metaphor is meant to reveal.
 - Third, use the context, including other places in Scripture that use the same metaphor.

Figures of speech that substitute one word or phrase with another:

- Metonymy: "meta" (change) + "onoma" (name) = "change of name."
 - Substitutes one word or phrase with another. Example: "The White House" is a metonymy for "the President."
- Synecdoche: Substitutes the part of something for the whole of it, or the whole of something for part of the whole. The word "all" is one of the most often used synecdoches in Scripture. "All" is often used as a substitute for a certain part of "all."