

SPECIAL PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION CONTINUED (FIGURES OF SPEECH)

FIGURES OF COMPARISON

1. Simile. A simile is a comparison between unlike things using the word “like” or “as.” Job 41:24 says, “His heart is hard as stone.” That is an example of a simile. Peter used a simile when he said, “All men are like grass” (I Peter 1:24). We must ask, “in what way are men like grass?” Psalm 1 uses similes when it refers to a man who is “like a tree planted by the rivers of water” (verse 3), and to others who are “like chaff” (4). We must ask the question, “in what way is man like a tree or like chaff?” We must look to the point of comparison. A tree by the water is rooted deeply and well-watered, so is the blessed man who meditates day and night in the Word. Chaff is something worthless, a mere covering for grain that is separated during threshing.
2. Metaphor. A metaphor is an implied comparison without actually stating it. It is similar to a simile, but the words “like” and “as” are not used. You actually call a thing something that it is not. Isaiah 40:6 says, “All flesh is grass.” This is different than the statement in I Peter 1:24 that said, “All men are like grass.” The point of comparison is that both grass and humanity pass away after a brief time here on earth.

FIGURES OF RELATION

1. Metonymy. A metonymy is the substituting of one word for another. When we hear that a decision has been made by the White House, it is actually referring to the President of the United States. The residence of the President has been substituted for the President himself. Jeremiah 18:18 says, “Let us attack him with our tongues.” “Tongues” is used in place of words. In Revelation 3:7 the term “the key of David” refers to the authority of David.
2. Synecdoche. This a figure of speech where a part is put for the whole or the whole is put for the part. Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of “all the world” (Luke 2:1). When he spoke of the whole, he meant only the part, namely, the Roman world. Proverbs 1:16 says, “their feet rush into sin,” but it obviously does not mean only their feet, but the whole, i.e. all of themselves. Rushing “feet” adds emphasis to their eagerness to sin.
3. Personification. This figure of speech attributes human characteristics to inanimate objects or animals. “The desert and the parched land will be glad” (Isaiah 35:1) is an example of personification. When Isaiah referred to hills singing and trees clapping their hands (Isaiah 55:12), he was using personification.
4. Anthropomorphism. This figure ascribes human characteristics to God. Even though we know that God is spirit and that He is everywhere at the same time, we use human terms to help understand Him. The Bible makes references to His fingers (Psalm 8:3), ear (Psalm 31:2), and eyes (II Chronicles 16:9).
5. Euphemism. This is a substitution of a less offensive word or milder expression for a strong or offensive word. In English we refer to a person “passing away” when we mean death. The Bible speaks of the death of Christians as “falling asleep” (I Thessalonians 4:13-15).

Tomorrow we will look at more figures of speech.