

# **The Basics of Bible Interpretation**

## **Understanding Figures of Speech**



“A word or phrase that is used to **communicate** something other than its **literal**, natural meaning.”

## DEFINITION OF FIGURES OF SPEECH



A. Always take a passage in its **literal** sense unless there is **good reason** for doing otherwise.

## **Guidelines for Differentiating Figurative and Literal Expression**



B. The figurative sense is intended if the **literal** would involve an **impossibility**.

## **Guidelines for Differentiating Figurative and Literal Expression**



C. Take the **figurative** sense if the literal would demand **immoral** action.

## **Guidelines for Differentiating Figurative and Literal Expression**



D. Note whether a figurative expression is followed by an **explanatory literal** statement.

## **Guidelines for Differentiating Figurative and Literal Expression**



E. Sometimes a figure is marked by a **qualifying adjective**.

## **Guidelines for Differentiating Figurative and Literal Expression**



A **comparison** in which one thing **explicitly** (by using like or as) resembles another.

**SIMILE**





**A comparison in which one thing is, acts like, or represents another.**

**METAPHOR**



**A comparison in which the likeness is implied by a direct naming.**

**HYPOCATASTASIS**



He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, **Feed my sheep.**

**JOHN 21:17**



The **substituting** of one word  
for another.

**METONYMY**



Abraham saith unto him, They have **Moses and the prophets**; let them hear them.

**LUKE 16:29**



The **substituting** of a part of something for the **whole** or the whole for the part.

**SYNECDOCHE**



For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to **the Greek.**

**ROMANS 1:16**



The ascribing of **human** characteristics or actions to **inanimate** objects or ideas or to animals.

## **PERSONIFICATION**





The ascribing of **human** characteristics or actions to **God**.

**ANTHROPOMORPHISM**



For the **eyes of the Lord** run to  
and fro throughout the whole  
earth....

**2 CHRONICLES 16:9a**



The ascribing of **animal**  
characteristics to **God**.

**ZOOMORPHISM**



A question that does not require a **verbal** response and is given to force the reader to **answer** in his mind and consider the implications of the answer.

## **RHETORICAL QUESTION**



**An overstatement or  
exaggeration for effect.**

**HYPERBOLE**



An understatement or negative statement to express an affirmation.

**LITOTES**



For I am **the least of the apostles**, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

**1 CORINTHIANS 15:9**



A kind of **ridicule** expressed **indirectly** in the form of a compliment.

**IRONY**





An apparent **contradiction** in terms.

**PARADOX**



An expression peculiar to a given **language** or to people in a certain **geographical** location.

**IDIOM**



I have loved you, saith the Lord.  
Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou  
loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's  
brother? saith the Lord: **yet I  
loved Jacob, And I hated Esau...**

**MALACHI 1:2-3a**



**A. Determine if a figure of speech is involved**

**Guidelines for Interpreting  
Figures of Speech**



B. Discover the **image** and the **nonimage** in the figure of speech

**Guidelines for Interpreting  
Figures of Speech**



**C. State the point of  
comparison**

**Guidelines for Interpreting  
Figures of Speech**



D. Do not **assume** a figure  
always **means** the same thing

**Guidelines for Interpreting  
Figures of Speech**



**E. Use common sense**

**Guidelines for Interpreting  
Figures of Speech**

