

Figures of speech used in Psalms

What does figure of speech mean?

A figure of speech is a **creative use of language to generate an effect**. It can be a word or phrase that means something more or something other than it seems to say, the opposite of a literal expression.

Book Recommendation: Figures of Speech Used in the Bible by: E.W. Bullinger

The following figures of speech deal with a sample found in the Psalms and the Bible. There are plenty of other figures of speech that can be seen; like Idiom, Imagery, Merism, Paradox, etc.

1. *Allegory*

Definition: the expression of truths or generalizations by means of symbolic figures

Psalm 80:8-16

8 Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt:
Thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.
9 Thou preparedst room before it,
And didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the
land.

- 10 The hills were covered with the shadow of it,
And the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars.
- 11 She sent out her boughs unto the sea,
And her branches unto the river.
- 12 Why hast thou then broken down her hedges,
So that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?
- 13 The boar out of the wood doth waste it,
And the wild beast of the field doth devour it.
- 14 Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts:
Look down from heaven, and behold, And visit this
vine;
- 15 And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted,
And the branch that thou madest strong for thyself.
- 16 It is burned with fire, it is cut down:
They perish at the rebuke of thy countenance.

What is the allegory here?

Outside examples of allegory:

Pilgrims Progress by: John Bunyan

2. *Metaphor*

Definition: a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another. This is comparison by representation.

Psalm 84:11

For the Lord God is a sun and shield:

What truths of God are expressed in this metaphor?

Other examples of metaphor in the Bible:

Psalm 119:105; Psalm 23:1-4; Psalm 42:1; Psalm 18:2;
John 6:35; John 8:12; John 10:7

3. *Simile*

Definition: two essentially unlike things are compared often in a phrase introduced by like or as. This is comparison by resemblance.

Psalm 1:3-4

3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water,

4 The ungodly are...like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

What picture is being drawn here with the simile?

Other examples of simile in the Bible:

Psalm 42:1; Psalm 17:8

4. Metonymy

Definition: One word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated

Psalm 128:2

For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands:

What is "the labor of thine hands" referring to here?

Outside examples of metonymy:

“I have a mountain of work to do.”

“When you are sick, fluids are necessary.”

Other examples of metonymy in the Bible:

Matthew 10:34; Proverbs 30:16

5. *Synecdoche*

Definition: A figure of speech by which a part of something is put for the whole or vice versa

Psalm 52:4

Thou lovest all devouring words,
O thou deceitful tongue.

What is the tongue picturing here?

Outside examples of Synecdoche:

“Friends, Romans, countrymen; lend me your ears.” -
Julius Cesar

Other examples of Synecdoche in the Bible:

Matthew 6:11; Matthew 5:13

6. ***Hyperbole***

Definition: A figure of speech where exaggeration is used for emphasis or effect.

Psalm 6:6

All the night make I my bed to swim;

What imagery is being emphasized here?

Other examples of Hyperbole in the Bible:

John 12:19; 2 Chronicles 1:15; Luke 9:25

7. ***Personification***

Definition: A figure of speech in which inanimate objects or abstractions are endowed with human qualities or are represented as possessing human form.

Psalm 35:10

All my bones shall say,
Lord, Who is like unto thee,

Other examples of personification in the Bible:

Genesis 4:10; Genesis 9:5; Psalm 77:16; Proverbs 1:20

8. *Apostrophe*

Definition: A figure of speech where you address someone or something that is not present or cannot respond in reality.

Psalm 114:5-7

5 What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest?

Thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?

6 Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams;

And ye little hills, like lambs?

7 Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord,

At the presence of the God of Jacob;

Other examples of apostrophe in the Bible:

Psalm 43:5; Isaiah 44:23