

Figurative Language in Hebrew Poetry *(The Message of the Prophets by J. Daniel Hayes)*

Figurative Language: words which paint vivid pictures

Similes: comparison of two unlike things using the words “like” or “as”

Examples:

Revelation 13:2 “The beast I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear’s, and its mouth was like a lion’s mouth.”

Revelation 10:10a “Then I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. It was as sweet as honey in my mouth,”

Revelation 1:14 “The hair of his head was white as wool—white as snow—and his eyes like a fiery flame.

Metaphors: direct comparison of two unlike things without the use of “like” or “as”

Examples:

Revelation 21:5 “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.”

Revelation 17:18 “And the woman you saw is the great city that has royal power over the kings of the earth.”

Hypocatastasis: indirect analogy that is more subtle than metaphor and simile; resemblance is implied

Examples:

Revelation 1:16 “He had seven stars in his right hand; a sharp double-edged sword came from his mouth, and his face was shining like the sun at full strength.”

If this had been stated as a *simile*, it would have said: “The angels of the seven churches were like seven stars; the words that came from his mouth were as sharp as a double-edged sword; his glory was so overpowering it shone like the sun at full strength.”

If it was stated as a *metaphor* it would have said: “The angels of the seven churches were seven stars; the words that came from his mouth were sharp double-edged swords; the glory on his face was the sun at full strength.”

Daniel 8:3 “I looked up, and there was a ram standing beside the canal. He had two horns. The two horns were long, but one was longer than the other, and the longer one came up last.”

If it was a *simile* it would have said: “the kings of Media and Persia were like a ram standing beside the canal . . .”

If it was a metaphor it would have said: “the kings of Media and Persia were a ram standing beside the canal . . .”

Hyperbole: intentional exaggeration for the sake of effect; shouldn’t be taken literally

Examples:

Luke 21:17-18 “You will be hated by everyone because of my name, but not a hair of your head will be lost.”

Luke 14:26: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

Personification: human characteristics attributed to nonhuman entity

Examples:

Joel 1:10a “The fields are destroyed; the land grieves;”

Ezekiel 36:1 “Son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel and say, ‘Mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD.’”

Anthropomorphism: human characteristics attributed to God

Examples:

Genesis 9:16 “And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that *is* upon the earth. (In this case God is described as “remembering” like a human would although we know that He knows all and therefore never forgets)

Psalms 113:5-6 “Who is like the LORD our God—the one enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth? (Here God, who is spirit, is described as stooping down to look)

Metonymy: the effect is stated when in fact the author wants to point the reader to the cause

Examples:

Micah 4:3 “They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. (The effect is that people no longer have need of weapons and are now turning their weapons into tools to use for agriculture. The cause is an end to war through a lasting peace.)

Luke 1:32 “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.”

(Throne represents the supreme authority to rule.)

Synecdoche: a representative part of an entity is mentioned to refer to the whole

Examples:

Jeremiah 10:16 “He who is the Portion of Jacob is not like these, for he is the Maker of all things, including Israel, the people of his inheritance—the LORD Almighty is his name.”
(Jacob stands for all of Israel)

Isaiah 51:19 “These two things have happened to you: devastation and destruction, famine and sword.”

Could synecdoche be happening with the 3rd horseman?

Revelation 6:6 “Then I heard something like a voice among the four living creatures say, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, but do not harm the oil and the wine.”

(Could “oil and wine” represent part of a larger category of items that are valuable but unnecessary to sustain life)

<https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/3335/Do-not-harm-oil-and-wine.htm>

Miscellaneous Figures of Speech:

Sarcasm/Irony: saying the exact opposite of what one really means to mock or express contempt

Examples:

Amos 4:4 “Come to Bethel and rebel; rebel even more at Gilgal! Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tenths every three days.”

Jeremiah 44:25 “This is what the LORD of Armies, the God of Israel, says: ‘As for you and your wives, you women have spoken with your mouths, and you men fulfilled it by your deeds, saying, “We will keep our vows that we have made to burn incense to the queen of heaven and to pour out drink offerings for her.” Go ahead, confirm your vows! Keep your vows!’”

Wordplay: witty use of language which exploits the ambiguities in words; it plays off the possible range of definitions or similar sounds

Examples:

See this website for an example of wordplay in Micah:

<http://www.confluenceblog.com/home/2019/3/28/micah-and-prophetic-word-plays>

Wordplay in the Minor Prophets:

<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/bible/jonah-minor-prophets/analysis/wordplay>

Figurative Language in Bible Prophecy (Way of Life Literature)

https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/figurative_language_in_bible_prophecy.php

Introduction to Hebrew Poetry (Bible.org):

<https://bible.org/seriespage/introduction-hebrew-poetry>

How to Read Hebrew Poetry:

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/hebrew-poetry>

Hebrew Poetry by Mike Mazzalongo

<https://bibletalk.tv/hebrew-poetry>