

FIGURES OF SPEECH USED IN THE BIBLE

God has given us His heart and will in words as “holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost.” It is therefore important, if we are to understand God’s will, not only that we understand the meanings of the words themselves but also that we recognize when and how the words are utilized in a figure of speech. A figure of speech denotes a form which a word or sentence takes, different from its ordinary and natural form. This is always for the purpose of giving additional force, more life, intensified feeling, and greater emphasis to what is being communicated. Today, if someone says, “Oh, that is figurative,” it implies that the meaning is weakened, that it has quite a different meaning, or that it has no meaning at all. But with God’s Word, the very opposite is the case. A figure of speech is never used except to add force to the truth being communicated, emphasis to the statement of it, and depth to the meaning of it. We see why this area of study is so important and offers great promise of reward for the serious Biblical student.

In *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, E. W. Bullinger has cataloged over two hundred distinct figures of speech, some with from thirty to forty varieties. These are organized into different divisions based on whether the figure involves omission, addition, or change. Within these broad categories are many subdivisions based on how the figure is used. Each figure of speech is then defined and explained and illustrated with examples from the Scriptures. A series of indexes are provided to allow access to the contents based on proper names, English equivalents, texts and passages of scripture referred to in the book, structures, and subjects. There are even indexes to the places where Greek and Hebrew words are explained.

There are different ways to utilize the *Figures of Speech* book. However, for a simple and convenient way to learn, we will start with the study of a figure of speech called *polysyndeton*. This is a familiar figure that is referred to many times in foundational studies and teachings in the ministry. This is a figure a student would want to investigate further and develop a greater understanding of so that he could easily recognize it while reading the Scripture.

To find this figure in the book, look it up in the table of contents (or use the “Index of Figures”). *Polysyndeton* is located on page 208. The student is given the proper pronunciation and definition of this figure. After an in-depth explanation of *polysyndeton*, numerous scriptural examples are given and explained.

Polysyndeton is the repetition of the word “and” at the beginning of successive clauses. It is also called “many ands.” The purpose of the figure is to bring the reader’s attention to each point, to cause the reader to stop and weigh each matter that is being presented and to consider each particular that is being emphasized.

In the study of *polysyndeton* it is also appropriate to consider another figure of speech as well, which is the opposite of *polysyndeton*. This figure is called *asyndeton*. *Asyndeton* means the text has no conjunctions or “no ands.” The purpose of this figure is not for us to stop and consider each point but to hasten on to the end to the most important matter on which God is placing the greatest emphasis.

Here are some of the scriptures from the *Figures of Speech* book that illustrate *polysyndeton*.

In I Samuel 17:34-36, David was emphasizing each point in which his skills and abilities had been proven.

I Samuel 17:34-36:

And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, **and** there came a lion, **and** a bear, **and** took a lamb out of the flock:

And I went out after him, **and** smote him, **and** delivered *it* out of his mouth: **and** when he arose against me, I caught *him* by his beard, **and** smote him, **and** slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion **and** the bear: **and** this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.

I Corinthians 1:30 is a listing of some of our sonship rights. The emphasis is that each of these wonderful things is distinct, separate, and equally important, and each one is worthy of our thoughtful study.

I Corinthians 1:30:

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, **and** righteousness, **and** sanctification, **and** redemption.

Ephesians 4:31 and 32 illustrate both figures, *polysyndeton* and *asyndeton*. In verse 31 is *polysyndeton*. At each point God is calling our attention to stop, consider, and think because each one of these things needs to be put away from us.

Ephesians 4:31:

Let all bitterness, **and** wrath, **and** anger, **and** clamour, **and** evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.

Then in verse 32 is the figure *asyndeton*, in which there are no “ands” because there is a weighty conclusion waiting for the reader at the end. God wants us to hasten to the end and get to the point He wants emphasized.

Ephesians 4:32:

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

These examples given for the figure *polysyndeton* are not exhaustive. In Index III, “Index of Texts and Passages Illustrated,” is a listing of scriptures that are specifically explained and illustrated in the book. If you are interested in a particular verse of scripture, you can look here first to see if it is listed. If it is not listed, look up the figure of speech that you think is being used. Check the scripture references that are cited under that specific figure to see if the figure being illustrated is similar to the figure in the verse you are studying. By this process you should be able to tell if that figure of speech was used in the scripture you are working.

Remember, figures of speech are God's markings for what He deems important. He wants us to mark them, dwell upon them, and draw special instruction and insight out of the scriptures they emphasize. This book is a valuable reference that enables us to learn to notice and recognize figures of speech and enjoy the benefits as we work God's Word.