

***Illustrations
of
Bible Idioms***

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Introduction (1)

By “idiom” is meant a way of speaking peculiar to a particular language, people, or individual. In *Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (Robert Young, LL.D.; 1822-1888 A.D.), there are two pages at the beginning of the book entitled, “Hints and Helps to Bible Interpretation,” and subtitled, “Illustrations of Bible Idioms.” Seventy one divisions of “idioms” are listed with hundreds of Biblical examples. These are idioms characteristic of the authors and speakers of the Bible.

A category of idioms is “Hebraisms” (pronounced, “HE bray iz um”). “Hebraisms” are Greek words and expressions in the New Testament reflecting the idioms of the background Hebrew usages (Macknight, p. 28; Bullinger, p. 820). James Macknight (1721-1800 A.D.), in his essay on the language of the New Testament in his work, *Apostolical Epistles*, lists 331 examples of “Hebraisms” with multiple references under each.

Idioms and Hebraisms are sometimes classed under the more general category of “figures of speech” (Bullinger, p. 821). A “figure of speech” is, “An expression, as a metaphor or simile, using words in a non-literal sense or unusual manner to add vividness, beauty, etc. to what is said or written.” *Webster’s New World Dictionary* (3rd College Edition, 1994). D. R. Dungan, in his book, *Hermeneutics*, has 175 pages out of 400 devoted to the study of figurative language in the Bible. E. W. Bullinger, in a book of over 1,000 pages entitled, *Figures of Speech of the Bible*, names over 200 figures of speech and accompanies his discussions with nearly 8,000 references.

We can’t speak without using figures of speech (Well, we can. That’s a *hyperbole*—exaggeration for the sake of emphasis). “Give me half a cup.” “Pick up your room.” “Shake a leg.” “It purrs like a kitten.” “The pot is boiling.” “Don’t do that, or else...!” “He met his Waterloo.” “Evening.”

Like us (or we like them) the speakers and writers of the Bible had idioms characteristic of their language. In fact, figurative language is found from the first to the last of the Bible, not just in Ezekiel and Revelation. Just as it helps in understanding us to understand our idioms, the more familiar we are with figures of speech used by the people of the Bible, the better equipped we will be to understand them.

In these articles we will note some of the “Bible Idioms” Mr. Young has listed in his book. We encourage you to give these your consideration. They can be extremely valuable “hints and helps to Bible interpretation” and may unlock doors that were previously closed.

Anthropomorphism; Anthropopatheia (2)

The first idiom Mr. Young lists is this:

“1. Human feelings, actions, and parts are ascribed to God, not that they are really in Him, but because such effects proceed from Him as are like those that flow from such things in men.”

This figure of speech is also sometimes called “anthropomorphism” or

“anthropopatheia.” These words are based on the Greek word for man (*anthropos*).

“Anthropomorphism” is from *anthropos* plus *morphE*, form, thus a figure of speech “in which human form, or physical organs of any kind, are ascribed to God.” R. Milligan, *Reason and Revelation* (Christian Pub. Co., 1867), p. 397. “Anthropopatheia” is from *anthropos* plus *pathos*, passions, feelings. “This figure is used of the ascription of human passions, actions, or attributes to God.” E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker, 1968), p. 871. Let’s look at some examples.

Jer. 7:13, “‘And now, because you have done all these things,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I spoke to you, **rising up early** and speaking...’” In v. 25, “‘Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, **daily rising early** and sending them.’” The true God doesn’t *need* sleep. “The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired.” Isa. 40:28. When the prophets of Baal received no answer, Elijah mockingly suggested “perhaps he is asleep” (1 Ki. 18:27). But the God of creation does not sleep. “Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” Psa. 121:4. **How then could it be said He “daily arose early”?** *By this “idiom” or “figure of speech.”* The human actions that suggest earnestness, diligence, and zeal are attributed to God. It is a vivid way of expressing God’s active, loving efforts to call his people to obedience that he might bless them and not punish them.

God is a spirit (Jn. 4:24) and a spirit does not have flesh and bones (Lk. 24:49), yet He is said to have **ears** (Jam. 5:4), **eyes** (Heb. 4:13), **a hand** (Lk. 1:66), **a soul** (Lev. 26:11), **a face** (Num 6:25. “face to face” – intimately, Deu. 34:10. Think about this figure when reading Ex. 33:20,23.), **nostrils** (Ex. 15:8), **an arm** (Isa. 53:1), etc.

Though God is omnipresent, He is said to “**go down**” (Gen. 11:7). Though omniscient, He is said to “**remember**” (Gen. 9:15) and to “**forget**” (Hos. 4:6). The human actions of **laughing** (Psa. 2:4), **smelling** (Lev. 26:31), **touching** (Psa. 104:32), **walking** (Lev. 26:12), **begetting** (Psa. 2:7), etc. are attributed to God.

Remember this idiom when God is assigned *place* (1 Ki. 8:39; Hos. 4:15), *time* (Psa. 102:24,27, “years”), or other *circumstances* associated with human existence (using a sword, Dt. 32:41, or a spear, Hab. 3:11), etc.

Surely we can see the value of being familiar with this idiom!

Personification; Prosopopoeia (3)

The second idiom Mr. Young lists is this:

2. Abstract and inanimate things are frequently PERSONIFIED, *e.g.*—*Ears* are attributed to the heavens, the earth, death, and destruction; *hands* to the deep; *eyes* to the sea and the mountains; a *voice* to the deep, wisdom, and understanding; a *will* to the flesh and mind; *witnessing* to an altar, a song, a stone, blood, and water; *speaking* to the ear, eye, foot, days, years, blood, law, righteousness, and blood of sprinkling; *knowing*, *rejoicing*, *rising*, and *going down* to the sun; *being roused from sleep* to the sword and arm of Jehovah; *skipping* and *leaping* to mountains and hills; *crying out* to the heart and flesh, wisdom and understanding; *seeing* and *preaching* to the Scripture; *judging* to the word; *teaching* to grace the heaven, and the earth; *leading* and *guiding* to light, truth, and the commandments; *dominion* and *enmity* to death; *mastery* to sin; *comforting* to a rod and staff; *carrying a message* to anger, fear, mercy, light, and truth; and every *Christian virtue* to charity or love.

“Personification” is “3. a figure of speech in which a thing, quality, or idea is represented as a person.” *Webster’s New World Dictionary*. What we do with animated cartoons wherein trees, animals, and other things are given life-like qualities, this figure does with words. In personification, things, qualities, or ideas are “animated,” or given life and personality.

It is used of inanimate things.

In a vivid picture of God avenging the faithful in Israel against the wicked, he says, “I will make My *arrows drunk* with blood ... with the blood of the slain and the captives ...” Dt.. 32:42. The “eternal power and divine nature” of God is so “clearly seen” through “what has been made” (Rom. 1:20), that the heavens, the day, and the night are pictured as “*telling*,” “*pouring forth speech*,” and “*revealing knowledge*” of the glory of their Creator! Psa. 19:1.

It is used of members of the body.

Can’t you see the arrogance and pride of the wicked as their tongue “*parades*” (“walks” NKJV) through the earth, Psa. 73:9? Jesus emphasized doing your good deeds “in secret” when he said, “do not let your *left hand know* what your right had is doing.” Mt. 6:3.

It is used of animals.

Imagine the ferocious leviathan as he “*laughs* at the rattling of the javelin.” Job 41:29. Job said even beasts could “*teach* you” and the birds could “*tell* you” about the sovereignty of God! Job 12:7.

It is used of nations and cities.

Isa. 1:4...5-6 (Judah), and Gal. 4:26 (Jerusalem). In Ezek. 16 there is an extended discourse of God’s dealings with Jerusalem personified as a woman.

It is used of ideas or abstractions.

Sin is “*crouching* at the door” like a beast of prey ready to devour Cain! Gen. 4:7. Instead of a dry dictionary definition, love is beautifully personified in 1 Cor. 13:4f, “Love is *patient*, love is *kind*...”

Fables use personification.

In Judges 9:8-15 we hear trees, a vine, and a bramble talking to one another! See also 2 Kings 14:8-9.

Prosopopoeia

“Prosopopoeia” is a synonym to personification. It is “a figure in which an absent, dead, or imaginary person is represented as speaking” (*Webster’s New World Dict*). Over 1,000 years after Rachel had died she is “heard in Ramah...*weeping* for her children” (Jer. 31:15). See Isa. 14:9-11.

Indeed, understanding and being alert to personification can be a “help” in Bible study!

Ampliatio (Adjournment); Metonymy: Appearance for the Thing Itself (4)

The ninth idiom Mr. Young lists is:

Persons and things are spoken of according to what they ONCE were, or PROFESSED (or are presently THOUGHT) to be, though not really so, wither formerly or at present...

There are two divisions to this listing: (1) persons and things spoken of as they once were; (2) persons and things spoken of as they are professed to be, though they are not so. The first division may be called, "*ampliatio*, or *adjournment*, i.e. an old name for a new thing." E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker, 1968), p. 689. It is "a retaining of an old name after the reason for it is passed away." *Ibid*. The second division may be classified as a kind of *metonymy*, where "The appearance of a thing, or an opinion about it, is put for the thing itself." *Ibid*, p. 597. Others may classify these differently, but the important thing is that we understand the concepts. Let's see examples of each of these in Scripture.

Persons or Things Spoken of as They Once Were

Ex. 7:12: "For each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents. But Aaron's **staff** swallowed up their staffs." Aaron's staff is still called a "staff" after it had become a serpent.

1 Cor. 15:5: "And that He appeared to Cephas, then to the **twelve**." The group of apostles is still called "the twelve" after one of them had committed suicide and there were but eleven of them.

Mt. 26:6: "Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the **leper**..." That is, Simon who once was a leper.

Jam. 2:25: "And in the same way was not Rahab the **harlot** also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?" Not that she was justified while she continued to practice harlotry, but she had been a harlot.

1 Cor. 7:11: "But if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her **husband** ..." Though "unmarried," she is said to have a "husband," i.e. he was once her husband though he is not so now. We might say, "x-husband." Sometimes people say she is still married "in the eyes of God" because he is called her "husband," but this misses the idiom. Clearly, the text says she is "UNmarried." See also Mk. 6:17.

Persons or Things Spoken of as They are Thought or Professed to Be

Gal. 1:6-7: "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different **gospel**; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ." The false teachers might call their doctrine the "gospel," but Paul said it was "really not another."

1 Cor. 1:25: "Because the **foolishness** of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." There is no "foolishness" in God's redemptive plan through the cross of Christ; the world of unbelievers just thought it so. See also v. 21.

Lk. 19:22: Jesus indicted the lazy slave with his own words. IF he really believed, as he professed—that Jesus was an “**exacting man**” (“reaping what I did not sow”)— he would have exerted effort to avoid crimination. Other examples: “father” in Lk. 2:48; “prophet” in Tit. 1:12.

Can we see that understanding and being aware of idioms used by the speakers and writers in the Bible serve not only our interest, but our interpretative ability?

Irony (5)

The tenth idiom Mr. Young lists is:

Words are frequently used in an IRONICAL manner ...

“**Irony**” - “The figure is so called when the speaker intends to convey a sense contrary to the strict signification of the words employed: not with the intention of concealing his real meaning, but for the purpose of adding greater force to it.” E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker, 1968), p. 807. “1a) a method of humorous or subtly sarcastic expression in which the intended meaning of the words is the direct opposite of their usual sense [the irony of calling a stupid plan clever]” *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, Third College Edit., 1995. Let’s see some examples.

Job responded to the men who proposed to know the reason he was suffering, “Truly then you are the people, and **with you wisdom will die!**” (Job 12:2). Wow! When they died, wisdom would die—they had it all! But, he denied that very fact in his next statement, “But I have intelligence as well as you; I am not inferior to you. And who does not know such things as these?” (Job 12:3). Job’s ironical statement was, as irony often is, satirical in nature (“...satirical implies as its purpose the exposing or attacking of the vices, follies, stupidities, etc. of others and connotes the use of ridicule, sarcasm, etc...” *Webster’s*).

Jesus said to the Pharisees and scribes, “You **nicely** set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.” (Mk. 7:9). The NIV translates, “You have a **fine way** of setting aside the commands of God...” The word translated “nicely” or “fine way” (“well” NKJV) is *kalos* (καλῶς) and means, “b. excellently, nobly, commendably (C. G. Wilke / C. L. Wilibald Grimm / Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). In his comments, Thayer says, “with bitter irony, Mark 7:9.” There isn’t anything “nice” or “fine” about setting aside God’s commands for human tradition! It is, in fact, deplorable!

Addressing the carnal minded pride of some of the teachers among the Corinthians, Paul said, “You are already **filled**, you have already become **rich**, you have become **kings** without us...”—then said, “and I would indeed that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you.” 1 Cor. 4:8. “You have become kings...I would indeed you had become kings...!” This is a clear example of the sarcastic irony Paul employed in writing about these arrogant teachers in Corinth, and without understanding this idiom, one will grossly misinterpret much of 2 Corinthians, chapters 10-13. Remember as you read the following that irony is saying just the *opposite* of what is intended.

“For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most **eminent apostles.**” 2 Cor. 11:5. “Eminent apostles” refers, not to the twelve, but to those “false apostles” among them who presented themselves as superior in knowledge to Paul. “Eminent apostles”—NOT! Rather they were “false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.” (v. 13). “I wish that you would bear with me in a little **foolishness**; but indeed you are bearing with me.” 2 Cor. 11:1. Was Paul actually being “a little foolish” in what he was writing? On the contrary! In a biting, but skilled way, he exposes the pride and foolishness of his detractors and of the Corinthians for following

them. Listen to him: “Again I say, let no one think me foolish; but if you do, receive me even as foolish, that I also may boast a little.” v. 16. Read vv. 17-21 in the light of *irony*.

Be alert to the possible use of irony in the Scriptures. Understanding it can enhance the meaning, explain seeming difficulties, and aid in correct interpretation.

Antanaclasis; Ploce (6)

The fourteenth idiom Mr. Young lists is:

“The same word has frequently a different meaning even in the same verse...”

This idiom or figure of speech is also called, *antanaclasis*, or, word-clashing. An example from our conversation today is, “The more I **think** of it, the less I **think** of it.” A related figure is *ploce*, or word-folding. “As in *Antanaclasis*, the same word is repeated in a different sense. Only with *Ploce* that sense implies more than the first use of it. ... “His wife is a wife indeed.” . W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker, 1968), p. 286. We say, “**boys will be boys!**”

Antaclasis

A clear example of this idiom is found in Lk. 9:60, where Jesus said, “Allow the **dead** to bury their own **dead**; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.” The impossibility of taking this literally points to a figure of speech. “Allow the **dead** [i.e. spiritually dead] to bury their own **dead** [i.e., physically dead]...” When commanded to “Follow Me!” the man said, “Permit me first to go and bury my father.” But Jesus, with this idiom, emphasized that following Him comes even before dearest family ties!

“He made Him who knew no **sin** to be **sin** on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Cor. 5:21. “Sin” is a transgression of Divine law, 1 John 3:4. Jesus was not made a “transgression of law.” Recognizing the idiom serves to explain the statement. “He made Him who knew no **sin** [transgression of law—Jesus never sinned] to be **sin** [a sin-offering]...” Jesus was, indeed, our “sin offering” (Heb. 13:11-13), and the Hebrew writer encourages to “bear His reproach” with trusting steadfastness!

“...For they are not all **Israel** [i.e. the Israel of promise, spiritual Israel, people who enjoy the covenant with Abraham through faith] who are descended from **Israel** [by the flesh, through physical lineage]” Rom. 9:6. He explains in v. 8, “That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.”

“In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the **word**, they may be won without a **word** by the behavior of their wives,” 1 Pet. 3:1. No one can be “won” or converted to Christ without “the word”—the gospel. But a husband may be won by the chaste and humble life of a godly woman without *her* “word” of debate, criticism, and contention.

Ploce

“Pilate answered, “What I have **written** I have **written**.” John 19:22. While “written” has the same meaning in both occurrences, the second expresses the idea of permanence associated with it, it remains (contrast an oral statement) — he wrote it and would not change it.

“Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was **sin**, in order that it might be shown to be **sin** by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.”

Rom. 7:13. While “sin” in both occurrences refers to transgression of law, the second expresses the attribute of sin that it is deadly – “effecting my death,” thus, sin is shown to be “utterly sinful.” We might say, “Black that it might be shown to be black, was put beside white.”

I trust we can see that once again that understanding Bible idioms can indeed provide “hints and helps to interpretation.”

Metonymy: Writer for Writings (7)

Mr. Young's idiom #15b is:

The name of a WRITER is frequently put for his WRITINGS.

This is clearly illustrated in Luke 24:27: "And beginning with **Moses** and with all the **prophets**, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the **Scriptures**." "Moses" and "the prophets" are put for their writings—"the Scriptures."

Jesus used this idiom in telling the story of Lazarus and the rich man to issue an important warning (Lk. 16:19-31). When the rich man expressed concern about the destiny of his brothers still alive on earth and requested someone be sent back from the realm of torment to warn them so they did not end up where he was, Abraham said, "They have **Moses** and the **Prophets**; *let them hear them*." I.e., let them read the *writings* of Moses and the Prophets—the Scriptures—and listen to what they say! But, the man responded, "No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!" But Abraham was unmoved. He said, "If they do not listen to **Moses** and the **Prophets**, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead." *Nothing* will substitute for *reading and heeding the Scriptures*—not visions, mysterious events, even a visit from the realm of the dead! Jesus made clear it is God's plan we give attention—"listen"—to the writings of the Bible.

Today, we not only have "Moses and the Prophets," but also the "Apostles and the New Testament Prophets." The apostle Paul said, "when you *read* you can understand..." (Eph. 3:5). Peter said, "And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind." (2 Pet. 1:15). How? "This is now, beloved, the second *letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind* by way of reminder ..." (2 Pet. 3:1). We have Peter and Paul (and Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, James, and Jude)—the N.T. Scriptures—let us "*listen to them*"!

This idiom is an specific example of the larger figure of metonymy, "in which the name of one thing is used in place of that of another associated with or suggested by it (Ex.: the White House for the President)." *Webster's New World Dict.* It is used, not only of the *author* for his *writings*, but of *cause* for *effect*, *container* for *contents*, and other ideas associated in some way.

"...who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the **letter**, but of the **Spirit**; for the **letter** kills, but the **Spirit** gives life." 2 Cor. 3:6. This is not, as sometimes erroneously interpreted, contrasting the "letter" and the "spirit" of the *same* law. Rather, it is contrasting two *different* laws. "Letter" by metonymy is put for the "old covenant" (v. 14) written "in letters engraved on stones" (v. 7), and "Spirit" refers to the "new covenant" (v. 6), which is being contrasted with it. This much is clear. We can see the association that underlies using "letter" for the Old Covenant written "in letters engraved on stones." But why use "Spirit" for the New Covenant? One possibility is that "Spirit" may refer to the Holy Spirit—*cause* put for *effect*—He revealed the New Covenant (Jn. 16:13). But, He was also the moving force of the Old Covenant (2 Pet. 1:20-21). Another possibility is that "spirit" refers to the human spirit upon which the New Covenant must be written in order to enjoy covenant relationship. Under the Old Covenant men entered into covenant relationship by being born a Hebrew and then they must be taught to,

“Know the Lord.” Under the New Covenant, no one enjoys covenant relationship unless the Covenant is written “on their heart.” (See Jer. 31:31-34 for this contrast.)

We can see that understanding that this idiom is used in reference to the Scriptures can be a valuable tool in seeking to know and appreciate the truth revealed to us.

Polyptoton: Noun Repeated In Genitive Plural (8)

Mr. Young's idiom #18 is:

The REPETITION of a word denotes the SUPERLATIVE degree . .

In E. W. Bullinger's classic work, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, the repetition of words falls under the large division, "Figures Involving Addition." There are a number of subdivisions in this category involving repeating words. One is called, "Polyptoton," or, "Many Inflections." Under that subdivision is: "Nouns repeated in different numbers ... (b) In *singular and genitive plural*." You can see this in the examples given below. Bullinger comments, "A noun is repeated in the genitive plural *in order to express very emphatically the superlative degree* which does not exist in Hebrew." (Bullinger, pp. 282,283 - italics in both quotes are mine, srf)

Gen. 9:25, "So he said, 'Cursed be Canaan; **A servant of servants** He shall be to his brothers.'"—*i.e.*, the lowest and most degraded of servants, or the most abject slave." Bullinger. Observe, "servant"(singular) "of servants" (genitive plural).

Deu. 10:17, "For the LORD your God is the **God of gods** and the **LORD of lords**, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality, nor take a bribe."—*i.e.*, He is the *greatest* God, the *incomparable* Lord ... *there is none like Him!*

Ecc. 1:2, "**Vanity of vanities,**' says the Preacher, '**Vanity of vanities!** All is vanity.'"—*i.e.*, Life "under the sun" (v. 3) is *ultimate* futility, like "striving after wind" (v. 14)! This is the theme of this book. People spend their entire life investing in this life, yet when all is said and done there is no "advantage" or "profit" (1:3)—*he will take nothing with him!* In contrast, Jesus encourages men to "seek for His kingdom" and thereby to lay up "*an unfailing treasure* in heaven." Lk. 12:31,33.

Exod. 26:33, "And you shall ... bring in the ark of the testimony there within the veil; and the veil shall serve for you as a partition between the holy place and the **holy of holies**."—*i.e.*, the "most holy place" (1 Ki. 8:6), which represented coming into the very presence of the "**God of gods and Lord of lords**," who is, "**Holy, Holy, Holy**" (Isa. 6:3)—*holy to the very highest degree!* (another figure involving repetition of words—*epizeuxis*, or *duplication*, Bullinger, pp. 189,194).

Song of Solomon 1:1, "The **Song of Songs**, which is Solomon's."—*i.e.*, the "Best of the Songs" (NASB marginal note), or, the most excellent and beautiful song.

Php. 3:5, "circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a **Hebrew of Hebrews**; as to the Law, a Pharisee"—*i.e.* a Hebrew to the superlative degree enjoying every advantage such could give. But, Paul said, "whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ"!

Understanding and being alert to this figure of speech, or "Bible Idiom," enables us to capture the superlative degree the speakers (or writers) of the Bible intended.

Idioma: Distribution (9)

Mr. Young's idiom #23:

DISTRIBUTION—is expressed in a variety of ways, *e.g.*—by repeating the cardinal number “two, two” as in Gen. 7.9,15; Mark 6.7—by repeating the noun “heaps, heaps,” as in Exod. 8.14; “companies, companies,” Mark 6.39.

A literal rendering of the Hebrew text in Exod. 8 is, “And they gathered them **heaps heaps ...**” (Jay Green, *The Interlinear Bible*). That is, the dead frogs were gathered and distributed into several heaps. The translations (NKJV, NASB, ASV) have, “in heaps.” This illustrates the fact that this idiom is not always reflected in the translation—the translators have interpreted the idiom for the reader.

A literal rendering of Mark 6:39 might be, “And he commanded them sit down all **plots plots ...**” and Thayer's Greek Lexicon explains, “(a Hebraism), *i.e.* they reclined in ranks or divisions, so that the several ranks formed, as it were, separate plots, Mark 6:40...”

Again the translators have interpreted for the English reader, “And He commanded them all to sit down by groups ...” NAS95. Note that Thayer calls this a “Hebraism.” E. W. Bullinger lists it under “Idioma,” or, idiom (*Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1968, p. 836). A “Hebraism” is a Hebrew idiom.

Young points out this idiom is also used with numerals, as in Mk. 6:7. A literal word for word rendering might be, “...began them to send forth **two two...**” The KJV has “by two and two,” but there is no “and” between the “two”s. The NKJV has, two *by two*,” putting the “by” in italics to indicate the translators have added it. The NASB has, “in pairs,” which, while that is the meaning, is an interpretation of the idiom rather than a literal translation.

Interesting, but is there any practical benefit in being aware of this idiom? Maybe . . .

In Gen. 7:2 we read, “You shall take with you of every clean animal **by sevens**, a male and his female...” NASB. The footnote says, “Lit., *seven seven*.” Was Noah to take fourteen of every clean animal or seven of every clean animal? And the debate begins. The KJV renders, “by sevens.” The NKJV translates, “seven each of every clean animal.” The ASV has, “seven and seven.” The NRSV chooses, “seven pairs.” If this is the idiom we are looking at, does not “seven seven” mean “by sevens” or as the NKJV translates, “seven each of every clean animal”—just like “two two” in Mk. 6:7 or “heap heap” in Ex. 8:14? So...? It would make a big difference as to how many animals Noah had to fit into the ark.

Compare Gen. 7:9, “by twos”—“Lit., *two two*” (NASB marginal note). Compare this with Gen. 6:19, “And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female.”

Well, this won't settle the debate on Gen. 7:2, but at least it serves to make us aware of the potential value of understanding this idiom in explaining a problem text. And understanding this idiom may help us somewhere else down the road in our Bible study and teaching.

Synecdoche: Part for Whole (10)

Mr. Young's idiom #28:

A PART of a thing is frequently put for the WHOLE ...

This is one form of the figure of *synecdoche*. *Synecdoche* (or, *Transfer*) is a "figure by which one word receives something from another which is *internally* associated with it by the connection of the two ideas: as when a part of a thing is put by a kind of Metonymy for the whole of it, or the whole for a part." .” E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1968), p. 613.

Examples of *synecdoche* in our speech: “hired **hand**” for a hired worker; “Say your **abcs**,” where “abcs” is put for the entire alphabet; “Got a new set of **wheels**” when we mean new car.

Gen. 12:5, “And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the **souls** that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.” KJV. The NASB translates, “persons,” instead of “souls” and puts a marginal note, “Lit., *souls*.” “Soul,” a part of man, is here and often put for the whole person.

Mat. 6:11, “Give us this day our daily **bread**.” “Bread” is put for the whole of what is necessary to sustain life.

Rom 12:1, “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your **bodies** a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” While this ‘sacrifice’ certainly includes the body, it is more. It is a devotion of the whole person that Paul has in mind—one that cannot take place without “the renewing of the mind” (v. 2) and involves love (v. 9), fervency of spirit (v. 11), and hope (v. 12).

Mat. 26:28, “...for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for **many** for forgiveness of sins.” “Many” is by the figure of *synecdoche* put for *all*: “...by the grace of God He might taste death for *everyone*.” Heb. 2:9; “...He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the *whole world*.” 1 Jn. 2:2; “who desires *all* men to be saved ...” 1 Tim. 2:4. Calvinists teach the doctrine of “limited atonement.” They say that Christ’ death was not for everyone but limited to the “elect” from all eternity. Missing the figure of *synecdoche*, they use this verse in support of their doctrine saying Christ did not die for everyone, but for “many.”

John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever **believes** in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” Serious error is adopted by the denominational world by the failure to recognize that “believes” is here used by the figure of *synecdoche* for *all* that proceeds out of faith that is essential to salvation, including repentance (Acts 3:19), confession (Rom. 10:9), and baptism (Acts 2:38). Note that the word is “believeS” (“believETH” KJV), not “believed.” It includes a continuing life of faith—“if indeed you *continue in the faith* firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard ...” Col. 1:23. We make the same mistake as our denominational friends if we think we are saved because we believe in Christ and do not demonstrate that faith in obedience: “What use is

it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?... are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" Jam. 2:14,20.

Being familiar with the figure of synecdoche is not simply an interesting triviality, but knowledge that can help us avoid vital error!

Synecdoche: Whole for Part (11)

Mr. Young's idiom #29 is:

The WHOLE is frequently put for a PART . . .

This is another form of the figure of *synecdoche*. *Synecdoche* (or, *Transfer*) is a "figure by which one word receives something from another which is *internally* associated with it by the connection of the two ideas: as when a part of a thing is put by a kind of Metonymy for the whole of it, or the whole for a part." .” E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1968), p. 613.

Examples of this form of *synecdoche* in our speech: “**Arizona** won the World Series” (i.e. the Arizona Diamondbacks Baseball Team—the *whole*, “Arizona,” for a *part*, its baseball team); This vessel will sink if it hits an iceberg (i.e. *genus or general class*, “vessel,” for *species or a specific of that class*, “ship”).

As an example of *synecdoche*, Mr. Young gives, “The ‘world’ for the Roman Empire or Palestine...” Luke 2:1 clearly demonstrates this usage, “Now it came about in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of **all¹ the inhabited earth**. [¹I.e., the Roman empire]” Lk. 2:1, NASB, KJV, NKJV, translate “**all the world.**” Compare Acts 11:28; 17:6; 19:27.

Mr. Young also mentions “**all flesh**” as an example of this idiom. Gen. 6:12 says, “all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.” The *greater part* had, but this did *not* include Noah: “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.” (v. 9). This phrase serves to illustrate that *context* and *harmony* must rule in any interpretation. While “all flesh” in Gen. 6:12 refers to the greater part of *humanity*, in verse 19 it refers to all kinds of *animals*, as verse 20 clearly shows. Because a word or phrase may demand a particular figurative interpretation in one place, it does not mean we can arbitrarily assign it that meaning in another place. In Gen. 7:21, “all flesh” refers to man *and* animals (see vv. 21b-23).

“And **all flesh** shall see the salvation of God” (Lk. 3:6) does not refer to *all* that literally may be called “flesh” (e.g. Gen. 6:12, animals; Jer. 25:31, wicked nations). Rather, applying the law of *harmony*, it refers by *synecdoche* to a *part* of “all flesh”—penitent believers of both Jews and Gentiles (see Acts 10:35; 11:18; Eph. 2:11-18).

In Acts 2:17 (“**all mankind**,” NASB; “**all flesh**,” KJV, NKJV), the *context* defines it to be “*your*” (Jews) “sons and daughters...young men...old men” who were God’s “bondslaves” that prophesied, saw visions, and dreamed dreams. After about 400 years of silence, here in the “last days” of the Jewish dispensation the Holy Spirit empowered certain God-fearing Jews to prophesy (e.g., Mary, Elizabeth, Zacharias, Simeon, Anna, John the Baptist, the apostles), and all these pointed to Jesus as the Messiah! What powerful evidence to *those people* that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed Lord (vv. 21,36)!

Observe the value of recognizing this idiom when interpreting Mt. 24:14, “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the **whole world** for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.” “Whole world”—North and South America? Australia? Africa? If this is what “the whole world” means, then the “end” certainly

could not refer to anything that happened in the first century (destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70)! But, Paul writes in A.D. 61-63 that the gospel had been “proclaimed in **all creation** [“to every creature,” KJV, NKJV] under heaven” (Col. 1:23). “The whole world,” *without distinction as to race*, Gentiles (“for a witness to all the nations”) as well as Jews, would have the gospel preached to them before the “end” would come. And Paul declared this was done (“to every creature” *without distinction*) at least 7-9 years before the destruction of Jerusalem—just as Jesus predicted ... “this generation will not pass away unto all these things take place” (v. 34)! See Acts 1:8 and its fulfillment in the book of Acts. The “end” refers to the end of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation, Mt. 23:36-38; Lk. 21:9...20-24. Bullinger explains further this form of *synecdoche*: “When ‘all’ and ‘every,’ as universal affirmations, extend **not to all the individuals, but to all kinds; or all that are specified or implied.**” (p. 616, bold mine, srf). See other examples: Jn. 1:9, “**every man**”; 12:32, “**all men.**”

Well, we have barely “touched the hem of the garment” about *synecdoche*, but maybe we have raised our awareness of the “help” that understanding this “idiom” can be in Bible interpretation.

Metonymy: Action for Declaration of It (12)

Mr. Young's idiom #35 is:

Things are spoken of as GIVEN, DONE, or POSSESSED, which are only PROMISED and PROPOSED...

Similar is #70c:

Active verbs frequently express an *announcement* of it ...

E. W. Bullinger, in *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker Book House, Michigan, 1971), lists this figure under "Metonymy of the Subject" and explains, "i. *The Subject* (i.e. the Thing or Action) *for that which is connected with it* (i.e. the Adjunct)." (p. 567). Under this category is this subdivision, "2. Verbs. Where the action is put for the declaration concerning it: or where what is said *to be done* is put for what is declared, or permitted, or foretold as *to be done*: or where an action, said *to be done*, is put for *the giving occasion* for such action." (p. 570). Then, under "Idioma," "Idiomatic usages of Verbs," he lists, "3. Active verbs are used *to declare* that the thing has been or shall be done, and *not the actual doing of the thing* said to be done." (pp. 821,822, italics mine). The best way to appreciate the value of understanding this idiom is to see it in use.

The first example Mr. Young gives is Gen. 15:18, "On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants **I have given** this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates...'" The "descendants" ("seed" KJV, ASV) had not even been born yet! (16:1; 17:17; 21:2f). "I have given" = "I have promised to give"—this was the promise of His "covenant."

God told Isaiah to, "**Make the heart of this people dull**, And their ears heavy, And **shut their eyes . . .**" Isa. 6:10 (NKJV). Obviously, Isaiah's mission was not to make people so prejudiced they could not see the truth, but rather to *declare* that condition of their hearts. Compare Mt. 13:14,15, which serves as a Divine commentary on the passage: "And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; and you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; for the heart of this people **has become dull**, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and **they have closed their eyes . . .**'"

"What God **has cleansed**, no longer consider unholy." Acts 10:15. God had not yet actually cleansed the Gentile, Cornelius. But he is *announcing* to Peter that He *would!* (10:47,48; 11:14,18)

"Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God **has joined together**, let no man separate." Mt. 19:6. This "joining together" refers not to a specific couple, but to the *declaration of His law* concerning every couple married according to His law, vv. 4-5.

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever **you shall bind** on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever **you shall loose** on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Mt. 16:19. It was the apostles' mission to *declare* or *reveal* what God had bound and loosed. See Mt. 10:19,20; Jn. 14:26; 16:13-15; Acts 2:37,42; 1 Cor. 14:37,38.

There are many other examples of this idiom, but these should suffice to make us aware of it and to cause us to appreciate its value in Bible interpretation.

Antimeria: Noun in Regimen Used as Adjective (13)

Mr. Young's idiom #38 is:

Persons and things are reckoned children of that which they imitate, or to which they are attached ... And in such expressions as "Children—of God, Abraham, Jacob, Israel; of faith, wisdom, wrath, disobedience, Satan, hell; the devil, the promise, the resurrection, the day, the light, the bridechamber, the bondswoman, the kingdom," etc.

James Macknight (*Apostolical Epistles*, Gospel Advocate, 1960) lists these as follows: "30. *Idiomatical nouns* are words used by the Hebrews in a *sense peculiar to themselves*. Of these the following are examples 37. *Children, Sons*, joined with a quality, denote a high degree of that quality." pp. 33,34. Bullinger (*Figures of Speech*, Baker, 1971) categorizes this under the figure, *antimeria*, or, "exchange of parts of speech," e.g., when a noun is used in regimen for an adjective, pp. 497, 503f. "In regimen" = "3. (Gram.) (a) A syntactical relation between words, as when one depends on another and is regulated by it in respect to case or mood." *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dict.*, 1998, *MICRA, inc.*).

One example Mr. Young gives is 1 Sam. 25:17, "for he is such a **son of Belial**, that a man cannot speak to him." KJV. "Belial" means "worthlessness." The NKJV and the NASB translate the figure, "he is such a scoundrel" (NKJV), "he is such a worthless man" (NASB). Both put footnotes indicating the literal rendering is, "son of Belial." One can readily see in this text that "son of" is used to denote "a high degree of that quality [worthlessness]," and that the noun, "worthlessness" (Belial) is used for an adjective.

Mark 3:17, "and James, the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, '**Sons of Thunder**')." (NASB)—because of their stormy temperament? See Lk. 9:51-56.

In Eph. 2:2-3, Paul says that when men live according to the norms of the world, which is governed by Satan, they are "**sons of disobedience**" and therefore "**sons of wrath.**" These figures serve to paint the condition of the world without Christ in its true and proper light (not just "good 'ole Joes" whom God will "wink" at in their misdeeds)!

Ephesians 5:8, "for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as **children of light.**" (NASB). "Children of light" does not simply mean "you were baptized," but rather that our life is to imbibe and display the quality of "light." This manner of living is discussed in the context from v. 3f. Note, for example, "as is proper among saints," v. 3, and "the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth," v. 9.

1 John 3:10, "By this the **children of God** and the **children of the devil** are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother." (NASB). Regardless whether one has been baptized and attends a local church regularly, if he "does not practice righteousness" and "does not love his brother," he is a "child of the devil"—not simply an "erring child of God"!

There are *many* examples of this idiom and it can be extremely valuable to be aware of it.

Hendiadys; Hendiatris (14)

Mr. Young's idiom #41 is:

When two nouns are coupled by a conjunction, the second is frequently equal to an adjective ...

This is the figure E. W. Bullinger calls *hendiadys*, or, *two for one*: "Two words employed, but only one thing, or idea, intended. One of the two words expresses the thing, and the other ... intensifies it by being changed (if a noun) into an adjective of the superlative degree, which is, by this means, made especially emphatic." *Figures of Speech*, (Baker, 1971) p. 657.

Jer. 29:11 (Mr. Young's 1st example) provides a good illustration of this idiom because of the varied translations and marginal notes. The KJV reads, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." In the marginal note on "expected end" the KJV says, "Heb. **end and expectation**." The KJV has taken the second noun, "expectation," and translated it as adjective, "expected." The word "expectation" refers to something one waits for eagerly, something one would "hope" for. The NKJV and NASB translate, "**a future and a hope**." The NRSV has captured the idea with, "future with hope." – God was assuring Israel of a *hopeful future*, an "end" filled with "expectation and anticipation."

Speaking to the apostles, Jesus promised, "... I will give you **a mouth and wisdom** which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist." (Luke 21:15, NKJV). Obviously, he was not going to literally give them a mouth. What he promised was a *wise mouth*, wisdom in their speech. Mark's account includes the source of this wisdom: "And when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit." (Mark 13:11, NASB).

John 1:17, "For the Law was given through Moses; **grace and truth** were realized through Jesus Christ." (NASB). The Law contained both truth and grace. The point here is that *true grace* was realized through Jesus Christ—grace in its fulness, or "grace upon grace," v. 16. The Law was but a "shadow of what is to come; but substance belongs to Christ." (Col. 2:17, NASB).

2 Timothy 4:1, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and **by His appearing and His kingdom** ..." i.e. by *His royal appearing*. He came the first time humbly, as a baby, but he is coming the second time as a reigning King to judge and deliver! What a solemn warning to gospel preachers to "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction"! (v. 2)

Sometimes there are three words involved in this kind of figure and it is called a *hendiadys*, or, *three for one*. In Dan. 3:7 we read that, "people, nations, and languages" worshiped the golden image Nebuchadnezzar had set up. (KJV, NKJV). "Languages" do not fall down and worship. The meaning is, "*people of all nations and languages*." Note the italicized words in this phrase in the NASB, "all the peoples, nations and *men of every language*."

In a discussion with His disciples about the “way” to the Father (see vv. 4,5), Jesus said, “I am **the way, and the truth, and the life**; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.” (Jn. 14:6, NASB). I.e., “I am *the true and living way*...!”

Surely we can see the value of being familiar with this “idiom” in Bible interpretation!

Pleonasm, or Redundancy; Metonymy (15)

Mr. Young's idiom #44 is:

The NAME of a person is HIMSELF or his CHARACTER ...

This idiom may be classified under two different categories.

Pleonasm, or Redundancy

When the word "name" is redundant and could be omitted from the sentence without changing the sense, it is the figure of *pleonasm*, or, *redundancy*. "The figure is so called when there appears to be a redundancy of words in a sentence; and the sense is grammatically complete without them. ..." E. W. Bullinger (*Figures of Speech*, Baker, 1971), p. 405. "Redundancy of language in speaking or writing; the use of more words than are necessary to express the idea; as, I saw it with my own eyes." *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, © 1996, 1998 MICRA, Inc. Psalms 20:1, "May the **name** of the God of Jacob set you securely on high"—i.e., may *the God of Jacob* set you on high. "Name" is redundant, or unnecessary, to the grammatical sense of the passage. It points to what God is known to be, or, as Young puts it, his "character"—powerful, loving, and faithful to His people (see the rest of the Psalm).

Mt. 6:9, "Hallowed by Thy **name**."—i.e., May *our Father in heaven, the one true God*, be hallowed and revered. His "character" makes Him worthy of such worship. ("character" – "The combination of qualities or features that distinguishes one person group, or thing from another." *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Co.*)

Rom. 10:13, "... whoever will call upon the **name** of the Lord [i.e. *the Lord*] will be saved." It is not saying his name in prayer that is in view, but an obedient trust in *Him* as Savior.

Metonymy

The use of "name" Young discusses may also be classified under the figure of *metonymy*, wherein "The NAME of a person for the person himself" (Bullinger, p. 608).

Acts 4:12, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other **name** under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved."—i.e., no other person. "Name" is put by *metonymy* for *Jesus Christ* (see vv. 10-11). Peter was declaring simply, but forcibly, that there is no other Savior.

Acts 5:41, "They therefore departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the **Name**." (ASV), i.e. for *Jesus Christ*.

Concerning the exaltation of our Savior, Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul wrote in Eph. 1:20-21 that God "seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority and power and dominion, and every **name** that is named ..."—i.e. above every *being* that possesses rule, or authority, or power, or dominion that is named (or, called upon. Compare 2 Tim. 2:19).

Being aware of this idiom of the language of the speakers and writers of the Bible can help us avoid erroneous conclusions about “name” and help to understand what is truly meant.

Synecdoche of the Species: “Answered” (16)

Mr. Young’s idiom #46 is:

The word ANSWERED is frequently used when no preceding statement appears... E. W. Bullinger in *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1968) classifies this under *synecdoche of the species*: “Verbs having a special meaning are used in a more general sense.” (p. 625). “To ANSWER, or OPEN THE MOUTH is put for speaking” (p. 632).

A clear example of this figure is seen in Mark 11:13-14: “13 And seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 And He **answered** and said to it, ‘May no one ever eat fruit from you again!’...” When we use the word “answer,” we think of a reply or response to something, e.g., a question, or an argument. But, to “answer” a tree...?! Hmm... But, once we understand the figure, it becomes perfectly clear, “He spoke (“answered”) and said to it...”

R. C. H. Lenski comments on Mark 11:14, “Apokriyeiv [“answered” srf] is at times used in a wide *sense as when one responds to a situation* that calls for a word.” (italics mine, srf). William Hendriksen, in his commentary on Mark 11:14, translates, “He spoke up and said to it...” Then, on a similar use of “answered” in Mark 9:5, he comments, “Literally, this verse begins as follows, ‘And Peter **answering** said to Jesus.’ However, no question had been asked; so how could Peter be answering? The solution is that the word used in the original for ‘answering’ has a broad meaning. Here—as often—it simply means that Peter *reacted* or *responded* to a situation, namely, that of (what he conceived to be) the need of Jesus and of the two men who had suddenly arrived from heaven.” (bold mine, srf). On the word, *apokrinomai*, *apokrinomai* (“answered”), Thayer’s Lexicon says, ““2. In imitation of the Hebrew *hn*[:... *to begin to speak*, but always where something has preceded (either said or done) to which the remarks refer ...” (*Greek-English Lexicon of the N. T.*, Joseph H. Thayer)

So, when “answered” occurs, we may find as Young points out, “no preceding statement” to which it is a reply; however, the speaker may be responding to a *situation* in view. In Mark 11:14, Jesus was responding to a *situation* where a fig tree had leaves but no fruit. In Mark 9:5, Peter was responding to the *situation* of the three distinguished persons in his presence.

In the marginal note on Job 3:2, “And Job **said**,” the NASB has, “Lit., *answered and said*” and the KJV has, “Hebrew, *answered*.” Job was responding, not to a question or argument, but to the *situation* of his suffering.

Mt. 11:25, “At that time Jesus **answered** and said...” Answered who? There was no preceding question or argument. The NAS95 version changed the translation to, “At that time Jesus said...” He was responding to the *situation* of the hardness of hearts, vv. 7-24.

Truly, recognizing this “Bible idiom” can be helpful in unraveling what seems at first abrupt and illogical.

Idioma: Special Idiomatic Usages of Nouns and Verbs - "to be called" (17)

Mr. Young's idiom #49 is:

The phrase TO BE CALLED frequently indicates actual BEING ...

E. W. Bullinger in *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker, 1968), p. 830, lists this figure under *idioma*, or, *idiom*, and notes that, "New Testament Greek abounds with *Hebraisms: i.e.*, expressions conveying Hebrew usages and thoughts in Greek words." (p. 820). An "idiom" is a way of speaking peculiar to a particular language, people, or individual.

Old Testament

We see this *Hebraism* in the language of the Old Testament.

Isaiah wrote that Jerusalem would "**be called** the city of righteousness, a faithful city" (Isa. 1:26) after it had been purged of its wickedness. The point is not what people might say when referring to it, but what it would *be*.

Looking forward to the Messianic age, Isaiah wrote, "And a highway will be there, a roadway, and it will **be called** the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it ..." (Isa. 35:8). No telling what the "unclean" may *say* about this way—"too strict"? "a sect"? But what it will *be* is a "Highway of Holiness," and *being* that, the unclean "will not travel on it"!

New Testament

Now note this *Hebraism* in the New Testament.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall **be called** sons of God." Mt. 5:9. If these are men who make peace between men and God by preaching the gospel (Acts 10:36; 2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 6:15; Col. 1:20), *the world* may call them derogatory terms, casting "insults" and saying "all kinds of evil against" them (v. 11). But, the "blessedness" they enjoy is that, regardless of what men call them, they *are* "sons of God"!

Matthew 5:19, "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall **be called** least in the kingdom of heaven ..."—i.e., shall *be* ...

Matthew 21:13, "And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall **be called** a house of prayer'; but you are making it a robbers' den." —i.e., "shall *be* a house of prayer." That is what God intended it to *be*, but instead, "you are making it a robbers' den"—not, you are "calling" it a robbers' den.

1 Jn. 3:1: "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should **be called** children of God; and such we are." It is an honor to be recognized by others and designated as "children of God." But that is not the point. In fact, men may be called "children of God" by others when they are NOT! The great love of God is demonstrated in that we *are* children of God, and the hope that "when He appears, we shall be like Him" (v. 2) is contingent on *being* children of God. Note John's clear statement of his meaning: "Beloved, now we *are* children of God ..." (v. 2). Throughout his letter John

discusses the tests of this relationship: righteousness (2:29; 3:6-9); love (3:14; 4:7-8); and faith (2:22-23; 5:10-13).

While “called” does not *always* convey this meaning, being aware that, as Young points out, it is “frequently” used in this way, can be a valuable “hint” in our Bible interpretation.

Idioma: Special Idiomatic Usages of Nouns and Verbs - “cannot” (18)

Mr. Young’s idiom #52 is:

CANNOT, in Scripture idiom, frequently means WILL NOT ...

While “cannot” often means one does not have the *ability* to do something, clear examples abound where it means “*will not*.” “Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, ‘The matter comes from the LORD; so we **cannot** speak to you bad or good.’” Gen. 24:50, NASB. That is, we *will not* say anything bad or good in view of the fact that this matter of selecting Rebekah as a wife for Isaac is from the Lord (see context). “And Jesus said to them, ‘While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom do not fast, do they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they **cannot** fast.’” Mark 2:9. I.e., they *will not* fast as long as the bridegroom is with them. “And from inside he shall answer and say, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I **cannot** [i.e. *will not*] get up and give you anything.’” Lk. 11:7.

We, too, often use the word “cannot” in the sense of “will not.” One may say to his child, “I’m on the phone; I **cannot** answer your question right now.” Pledged to secrecy, one may answer another, “I **cannot** tell.”

Can being aware of this be useful in Bible interpretation? Let’s look at some passages.

“He **could not** do any miracles there...” Mk. 6:5, NIV. That is, he *would not*. This may be due to obstinate unbelief of the people (compare Lk. 4:23-27; Mt. 12:38-39), or maybe because the unbelievers would not come to him seeking healing. Whatever the reason, it was not because he *could not* in the sense that he lacked the power to do so. In fact, he did some miracles, v. 5, and certainly could have performed more had he *willed* to do so.

“Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son **can do nothing** of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.’” Jn. 5:19, NASB. The point was that he *would* do nothing that was not in perfect harmony with the Father’s *will*. The Jews accused him of breaking the Sabbath and of blasphemy, v. 18. He was guilty of neither. What he did and what he claimed about himself was indeed in harmony with the Father’s will. See also v. 30.

“No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he **cannot** sin, because he is born of God.” 1 Jn. 3:9, NASB. Calvinism may argue that the “child of God” (in their view, one elect from all eternity to be saved) literally “cannot” sin—cannot apostatize, or fall away—because he is “born of God.” “Once saved, always saved.” But John’s point is that as long as “His seed abides in him”—“the word of God abides in you” (2:14); “If what you heard from the beginning abides in you” (2:24)—he *will not* continue in sin. In fact, John’s letter was warning these disciples not to be drawn away by the deceivers. Why warn them about apostasy, if they *could not* apostatize? The word of God about His Son as delivered by the apostles abiding in us through a living faith will make us *will not* to “practice sin.”

Heterosis of the Tenses: Past for the Future (19)

Mr. Young's idiom #60 is:

The PAST tense is frequently used to express the CERTAINTY of a future action . . . E. W. Bullinger lists this under *Heterosis of the Tenses*, "As the Hebrew verb has only two principal tenses, the past and the future, these two with the participles supply all the other tenses. Hence, in the New Testament, where the thought and idiom are Hebrew, though the tenses are Greek they consequently have all the variety which these tenses have in Hebrew. . . . *The Past for the Future*. This is put when the speaker views the action as being as good as done. This is very common in the Divine prophetic utterances: where, though the sense is literally future, it is regarded and spoken of as though it were already accomplished in the Divine purpose and determination: the figure is to show the absolute certainty of the things spoken of." *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker, 1968), p. 517, 518.

Young gives John 17:18 as an example: "As Thou didst send Me into the world, **I also have sent them** into the world." NASB. Does this refer to the limited commission he had previously sent them on (Lk. 9:1-6)? No, for the mission Jesus is referring to in his prayer will cause them to be hated ("**the world has hated them**"—another example of this figure—*will be* hated). They were not hated, persecuted, brought to trial, and killed on the limited commission. This prayer of Jesus (chapter 17) focuses on the apostles and the mission they would undertake after he had ascended back to heaven. Therefore, "I also have sent," means, *will send*, just as God had sent Him. In view of the reception they would receive, their remaining "sanctified" or set apart for the task Jesus gave them would be in connection with the truth about Jesus (vv. 17,19)—their belief and commitment to it.

"Thou **hast made him for a little while lower** than the angels; thou **hast crowned him with glory and honor**, and **hast appointed him over** the works of thy hands;" Heb. 2:7, NASB. This is a quote from Psalm 8:5, written by David about 1000 BC. While it evidently had a first application to man generally (see the rest of the Psalm), and in that sense truly past tense, it is clearly Messianic as indicated by the Hebrew writer's use of it, and thus prophetically *future*—*will make lower, will crown, will appoint over*. Adam was a type of Christ.

"And whom He predestined, these He also **called**; and whom He **called**, these He also **justified**; and whom He **justified**, these He also **glorified**." Romans 8:30, NASB. Have those "predestined" already been "glorified"? "Called ... Justified ... Glorified All first aorist active indicatives [expressing action in past time, srf] of common verbs But *the glorification is stated as already consummated ..., though still in the future in the fullest sense.*" (italics mine, srf). A. T. Robertson, *Robertson's Word Pictures*. "The whole purpose of God with reference to the redemption of man through the gospel of Christ is viewed as completed, so as to show how all things do work together for good to those who are called according to his purpose. *The plans and purposes of God which are certain of fulfillment are sometimes spoken of as fulfilled when the fulfillment is yet future.*" (italics mine, srf). Robert L. Whiteside, *A New Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Saints at Rome* (Miss Inys Whiteside, Denton, TX, 1945/1955). "While the calling and justifying are still in process, and *the glorification yet in the future* (of man's time

frame), the scheme of redemption has an eternal quality, existing in the mind of God 'before the foundation of the world' (Eph. 1:4-6; 3:9-11). *All elements of God's plan are treated as things accomplished.*" (italics mine, srf). Robert F. Turner, *Reading Romans* (Florida College Bookstore, 1995).

Idioma: Active Verbs Sometimes Express Attempt (20)

Mr. Young's idiom #70 (a) is:

Active verbs frequently express only an *attempt* to do the action . . .

Warning of future national judgment if Israel abandoned Jehovah, Moses wrote, "And the LORD shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again: and there **ye shall be sold** unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you." (Dt. 28:68, KJV). How can they be "sold" if no one would buy them? Later versions have translated the figure, "shall be **offered for sale**" (NKJV), or, "shall **offer yourselves for sale**" (NASB) — the equivalent of "*attempt* to be sold." Whether Egypt is symbolical of bondage or whether this refers to a literal future event, the warning is clear: They will suffer a humiliating and dreaded punishment if they forsake the LORD!

"Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you **are justified** by the law; ye are fallen from grace." (Gal. 5:4, KJV). But, earlier in this very letter Paul said, "by the works of the Law *shall no flesh be justified.*" (2:16). "Are justified," then, means, "*attempt* to be justified." The NKJV translates, "you who **attempt to be justified** by law" (the italics are in the version itself). The NASB translates, "you who are **seeking to be justified** by law." The verb is present indicative, and Burton in *Moods and Tenses of New Testament Greek* says, "The Present Indicative is occasionally used of action *attempted, but not accomplished.*" (T&T Clark, 1966, p. 8. Italics mine, srf) He gives Gal. 5:4 as an example.

Another example Burton gives is John 10:32: "Jesus answered them, 'I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you **stoning Me?**'" That is, "for which of them are you *attempting* to stone me—See v. 31: "The Jews took up stones . . . to stone him."

"Let us therefore, as many as **are perfect**, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you." (Php. 3:15). "Perfect" here means spiritually mature. Should not *everyone* have "this attitude" Paul has been setting forth, or is this an exhortation only for the spiritually mature? If this idiom is being employed, the meaning is clear, "Let us therefore, as many as are *attempting* to be perfect have this attitude." The attempt to have this attitude would, in fact, be a sign one was attempting to be "perfect." James Macknight, a commentator who lived in the 1700's in Scotland, recognized the idiom in his commentary: "As many, therefore, *as wish to be perfect.*..."

"Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God **leads** you to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4, NASB). That is, God *attempts* to lead you to repentance through the kindness, forbearance, and patience he shows toward you. To reject such loving intent by the Almighty God indeed reflects "stubbornness and unrepentant heart"! (v. 5).

We can see that being familiar with this idiom can help to clarify statements in Scripture that otherwise may appear illogical and untrue.

Idioma: Active Verbs Sometimes Express Permission **(21)**

Mr. Young's idiom 70(b) is:

Active verbs frequently express a *permission* of it . . .

2 Sam. 24:1 provides a good example of this when compared with 1 Chron. 21:1. 2 Sam. 24:1 reads, "Now again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and **it incited David against them** to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah." ("**He moved David against them**" KJV, NKJV). But, 1 Chron. 21:1 explains, "Then **Satan** stood up against Israel and **moved David** to number Israel." So, with the light provided by the author of Chronicles, we can interpret 2 Sam. 24:1 to mean that God *permitted* Satan to incite David to number Israel. Understanding the figure of speech helps to understand the passage in 2 Samuel and solves the difficulty of saying God incited David to sin. One might ask why God would allow Satan to so influence David. We must remember that David not have to yield to Satan's influences. Satan *cannot*, and God *will* not, override a man's will to make him sin. Read James 1:13-16. Also remember, God will not override a man's will to make him do right! The problem in some way was with David and his attitude, and when temptation came, he failed the test.

This should help us to understand what Jesus meant when he told men to pray: "And do not **lead us** into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Mt. 6:13). Since God "does not tempt anyone" to do evil (Jam. 1:13), we can understand that what Jesus is teaching us to ask is that God not *permit* us to be lead into temptation, but rather to "deliver us from evil." See 1 Cor. 1:13.

Jeremiah said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Surely **Thou hast utterly deceived this people** and Jerusalem, saying, 'You will have peace'; whereas a sword touches the throat." (Jer. 4:10). Obviously, God did not himself deceive the people. It is the false prophets who told the people they would have peace and not suffer the devastation of war, Jer. 5:12; 14:13. The people did not want to hear the painful truth from Jeremiah, 23:25-40. So, God *permitted* them to be deceived. So it is today. If men do not have a love for the truth, God will "send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false" (2 Th. 2:11)—i.e. he will *permit* them to be deluded by "false wonders" and the "deception of wickedness" (vv. 9,10).

Twenty times in Exodus it is said that Pharaoh's heart was hardened. Ten of those times it says the Lord hardened his heart, e.g. 4:21, "**I will harden** his heart." Sometimes it says, "Pharaoh hardened his heart," 8:32. Which is it? Both are true. The Lord *permitted* Pharaoh to harden his heart. Pharaoh was a "stubborn" man, Ex. 7:14; 13:15 (NASB, NKJV). The Lord could have brought about circumstances from the beginning that would have changed Pharaoh's heart, as He finally did with the tenth plague. But He *permitted* Pharaoh to harden his heart that both Israel and Egypt, and all others who heard of the astounding miracles of the Exodus, would know that the God of Moses "is the LORD," the earth is His, and there is no one else like Him! (Ex.. 6:6,7; 7:5; 8:10; 9:16,29)

Conclusion (22)

This is the final article in this series of articles on Bible Idioms.

If they serve to awake a consciousness of the abundance of Bible idioms and the value of understanding them in interpreting the most important writings in the world, the effort will have been worth it. Moreover, should they encourage Bible students to be more conscious of the tools they may already possess—in this case, *Young's Analytical Concordance*—it would be “icing on the cake.” We have but touched the hem of the garment. Mr. Young has 71 divisions of idioms with hundreds of Scriptures as illustrations. You will not agree with him on his allocations of all the Scriptures, but it certainly opens a door to study that can be extremely helpful to the discerning student.

If you wish to pursue this area of study further, we mentioned in the first article some other helpful reference works. E. W. Bullinger, in a book of over 1,000 pages entitled, *Figures of Speech of the Bible*, names over 200 figures of speech and accompanies his discussions with nearly 8,000 references. James Macknight (1721-1800 A.D.), in his essay on the language of the New Testament in his work, *Apostolical Epistles*, lists 331 examples of “Hebraisms” with multiple references under each. D. R. Dungan, in his book, *Hermeneutics*, has 175 pages out of 400 devoted to the study of figurative language in the Bible. As always when using the works of uninspired men, caution is in order. We must be careful to “examine everything carefully” (1 Th. 5:21). Not all these men say about the Scriptures they introduce as examples is true. But, with discernment, their work can serve as a valuable springboard to this deep well of valuable knowledge.

That such a pursuit can be worth the effort is indicated in the following incident: “*This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.*” (John 10:6). The KJV has “parable” for “figure of speech.” However, it is not the word ordinarily used for a parable (*parabole*), but *paroimia*, which means, “properly, a saying out of the usual course or deviating from the usual manner of speaking” (Thayer’s Lexicon). While a “parable” is a specific kind of figure, the word here used refers to the general category of figures of speech. The thing to observe is that *because they did not understand the figure of speech Jesus was using, they did not understand the point Jesus was making.* If we want to avoid similar mistakes, we need to continue to pursue an understanding of the figures of speech used by Jesus and the other speakers and writers of the Bible. The aim in these series of lessons has been to stimulate that desire and provide some suggestions for understanding the specific passages and figures written about.

A more in-depth study of figures of speech is available at the web site. It is the class material on “Figures of Speech including Notes.” If interested, look for it in the PDF column.

May God bless us in our continued pursuit of His will. “The unfolding of Thy words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.” Psa. 119:130 (NASB).

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