

Micah:
Life According to God's Purposes

January-May 2013
The Rev. Loren Fox



A Church Community with a Heart for the World

Resources for Interpreting Poetry

Do the words make complete sense on their own account? If not, look for an idiom, that is, a figure of speech. Note that some translations like the NIV (New International Version) attempt to replace figures of speech in the Hebrew or Greek, with corresponding figures in English, while the King James Version (KJV) and others attempt to translate the words directly. Either way, the reader has to look for and pay attention to those figures of speech.

We use hundreds of figures of speech. We can add or subtract letters, words, or even phrases. We can change letters, words or phrases in order to change the meaning. Sometimes we use figures of speech to amplify what we are saying, to downplay what we are saying, or simply to try and get our point across in a different manner. We choose figures of speech to fit the mood, tone, and social circumstance of the conversation.

When reading poetry and studying its meaning, we will often be able to interpret the idioms and forms of speech without much hesitation. In some cases, when pressed, we will admit that we really do not know what the author is saying, or more accurately, what the author means by the words on the page. Likewise, there will be times where we miss the intended meaning because we have failed to correctly interpret the figures of speech. This short summary is designed to alert us to the poetic possibilities and to strengthen our skills to spot figures of speech in the text.

For more information, you can research figures of speech in the Bible on the internet—e.g. at Robert I Bradshaw, www.biblicalstudies.org.uk. The most comprehensive discussion is found in E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible Explained and Illustrated*, 1898 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 1968 reprint).

FIGURES OF OMISSION

- Ellipsis An omission of word/s that are assumed to be understood.
- Irony Stating one thing while meaning the exact opposite.
- Sarcasm When irony is used to taunt or ridicule.
- Meiosis A phrase that understates or lessens one thing in order to magnify another.

- Euphemism The substitution of a cultured or less offensive term for a harsh one.
- Antithesis A direct contrast in which two sets of figures are set in opposition to one another.

FIGURES OF ADDITION

- Hyperbole An exaggeration to make or reinforce a point.
- Hendiadys The combination of two or three things to express the same meaning.
- Parallelism Repetition of which completes, intensifies, and/or expands the meaning.

Staircase or Climactic Parallelism: A-B-A-C-A-D-A'-E

Antithetical Parallelism: A "but" B

Emblematic Parallelism: (Like A)-B

Chiastic Parallelism: A-B-C-C'-B'-A'

External or Sectional Parallelism: (A-B-C)-(A'-B'-C')

FIGURES OF CHANGE

- Simile The likening of one thing to another, usually using "like" or "as".
- Metaphor An implied comparison between two objects without the use of "like" or "as".
- Metonymy The substitution of a noun for another closely associated noun.
- Synecdoche The substitution of the part that stands for the whole or the whole for the part.
- Eponymy The substitution of an individual who stands for the whole nation.
- Merismus The use of a combination of parts to express the whole of the totality.
- Personification The representation of an object or concept as if it were a person.
- Apostrophe Addressing an object or concept that has been personified.