

Go Figure! is an introduction to studying figures of speech in the Bible. The book covers 32 main figures with examples from popular culture and the Bible. With its blend of humor and scholarship, the book appeals to a variety of students.

Go Figure! An Introduction to Figures of Speech in the Bible
By Julia Hans PhD

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THIRD EDITION

GO FIGURE!

An Introduction to
Figures of Speech
in the Bible

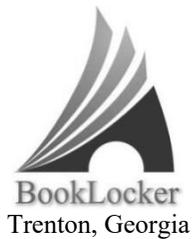
Julia Hans, PhD



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Table of Contents

Preface to the Third Edition	ix
Foreword to the Second Edition	xi
Preface to the Second Edition.....	xiii
Acknowledgements	xix
Introduction	1
Section 1: Figures of Repetition	33
Chapter 1: Anaphora.....	37
Chapter 2: Polysyndeton.....	43
Chapter 3: Epistrophe	53
Chapter 4: Epanalepsis	59
Chapter 5: Anadiplosis	63
Chapter 6: Epizeuxis.....	69
Chapter 7: Polyptoton.....	75
Chapter 8: Synonymia	81
Chapter 9: Repetitio.....	85
Chapter 10: Pleonasm.....	93
Section 2: Figures of Understatement and Overstatement	103
Chapter 11: Litotes	105
Chapter 12: Meiosis.....	113
Chapter 13: Hyperbole	119
Section 3: Figures of Omission	127
Chapter 14: Asyndeton.....	129
Chapter 15: Ellipsis	135
Section 4: Figures using Human Attributes.....	143
Chapter 16: Prosopopeia.....	147
Chapter 17: Anthropopatheia	155

Go Figure!

Section 5: Figures of Exchange	163
Chapter 18: Metonymy	167
Chapter 19: Metalepsis	187
Chapter 20: Synecdoche	191
Section 6: Figures of Comparison.....	205
Chapter 21: Simile	209
Chapter 22: Metaphor	217
Chapter 23: Metaphor	225
Chapter 24: Parabola.....	231
Chapter 25: Allegory.....	249
Section 7: Rhetorical Questions.....	259
Chapter 26: Erotesis.....	267
Chapter 27: Erotesis.....	271
Chapter 28: Erotesis.....	275
Chapter 29: Erotesis.....	279
Section 8: Idioms and Other Familiar Figures.....	287
Chapter 30: Idioma	291
Chapter 31: Eironeia	303
Chapter 32: Oxymoron	315
Appendix 1: Beautiful Feet: Seven Figures of Speech In Romans 10:8-15.....	321
Appendix 2: Select Print and Digital Resources For Further Research	347
Appendix 3: FAQ's.....	353
Bibliography	365
Scripture Index.....	371
About The Author.....	381
Other works by Julia Hans.....	383

Introduction

So, what are Figures of Speech Anyway?

Most writing, whether fiction, poetry, drama, or non-fiction, makes use of figurative language for many reasons: to emphasize a point, to dramatize a setting, to imbue a passage with some mood or tone, to make a passage more interesting or entertaining, and so on. Technically speaking, figures of speech are either departures from normal rules of speech or language, or they express a truth in an unusual or nonliteral way. Vilant-Macbeth defines figurative language as “a word or words thrown into a peculiar form. A word is used figuratively when it is brought forward in a form, construction, or application different from its first or its simplest form, construction, or application” (xl). In other words, language is figurative when there is a departure from standard rules of grammar or syntax, or when the meaning of the word is not literal.

Many rhetoricians classify figures into two groups: figures of grammar and figures of thought.

1. Figures of Grammar
2. Figures of Thought

Figures of grammar are those that depart from the rules of grammar or syntax. Bullinger writes, “All language is governed by law. But in order to increase the power of a word, or the force of an expression, these laws are designedly departed from, and words and sentences are thrown into, and used in, new forms, or *figures*” (v). For example,

polysyndeton is a figure of grammar that uses repeated conjunctions more than ordinary usage would require. Standard rules of grammar indicate that a conjunction comes between the last two nouns in a series, not between each noun. And so, an overabundance of “ands” in a sentence or verse may be a figure of repetition, *polysyndeton*. Consider the following verse:

Joshua 7:24 (emphasis added)

And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, **and** the silver, **and** the garment, **and** the wedge of gold, **and** his sons, **and** his daughters, **and** his oxen, **and** his asses, **and** his sheep, **and** his tent, **and** all that he had: **and** they brought them unto the valley of Achor.

In this verse, eleven nouns (or noun phrases) are linked together by the conjunction “and.” This abundant use of the word “and” in this sentence constitutes the figure *polysyndeton*, a figure of grammar that uses conjunctions beyond the grammatical norm. This figure emphasizes each item enumerated.

While figures of grammar are departures from normal rules of grammar, figures of thought occur when what is stated is not literally true to fact or true to its natural meaning. We use these types of figures every day. I could say “I’m tired,” but instead I say, “I’m worn out.” The dancer isn’t merely talented; you can’t hold a candle to her. And the ambitious executive isn’t decisive; he takes the bull by the horns. This is figurative language, not true to fact but true in meaning.

Now, let’s consider an example of a figure of thought in the Bible:

John 21:25

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even **the world itself could not contain the books** that should be written. Amen.

Are the words literal here--there would not be enough room in the world to hold all the books that should be written about the many other things that Jesus did? No, this is the figure of speech *hyperbole*, or exaggeration. In this verse, the figure is used to emphasize the significance of the “many other things” that Jesus did that were not written down.

Figures of speech, whether of grammar or of thought, enliven language and give it emphasis; they deepen expression, heighten the drama of communication, and give it freshness, vitality, and variety. They often, though not always, draw attention to what is being said.

So, how do we know if Biblical language is figurative or literal? Bullinger provides the following important insight regarding this question:

Whenever and wherever possible, the words of Scripture are to be understood *literally*, but when a statement appears to be contrary to our experience, or to known fact, or revealed truth; or seems to be at variance with the general teaching of the Scriptures, then we may reasonably expect that some figure is employed. (xv)

Go Figure!

Basically, Bullinger is saying that whenever and wherever possible, the words of the Bible are to be understood literally. Sometimes, though, the words are figurative. Let's take a closer look at Bullinger's guidelines. When a statement appears to be:

- contrary to our experience
- contrary to known fact, or revealed truth
- at variance with the general teaching of the Scriptures,

then we may reasonably expect that there is a figure of speech involved. These guidelines are helpful to keep in mind as we endeavor to understand and identify figurative language in the Bible.

Some figures, like many figures of repetition, are easy to spot. You can see the repetition right in the text. (One can imagine that these figures were also quite apparent when the Scriptures were read aloud.) For instance, note how the word "praise" is repeated in the following verses:

Psalm 148:1-4 (emphasis added)

Praise ye the Lord. **Praise** ye the Lord from the heavens:

Praise him in the heights. **Praise** ye him, all his angels: **praise** ye him, all his hosts.

Praise ye him, sun and moon: **praise** him, all ye stars of light.

Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that *be* above the heavens.

This is the figure of speech *anaphora*, a figure of grammar that occurs when a word is repeated at the beginning of successive sentences, phrases, or clauses. In these four verses, the word “praise” occurs eight times at the beginning of eight successive clauses. Figures of repetition, like *anaphora*, tend to be easier to identify than figures of thought because you can see the words repeated.

Figures of thought can be more difficult to identify and require careful consideration of the context. Consider these words spoken to Rebekah by her family just before she was about to leave them to marry Isaac:

Genesis 24:60

And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou *art* our sister, be thou *the mother* of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them.

In the context, Rebekah’s family sends her off with a blessing, “be thou the mother of thousands of millions.” The phrase “be thou the mother of thousands of millions” is not literal but figurative, either an idiom or hyperbole. It is a figurative way of saying, “may you be happy and prosperous.” Motherhood was highly valued in the lands and times of the Bible, and so to be the mother of many children would be considered a great blessing. Figures of thought like idiom and hyperbole can be more difficult to identify in the Scriptures than figures of grammar, and they require careful consideration of the context to appreciate their meaning.

Generally speaking, language is figurative when rules governing language are violated or when the words cannot be taken literally or are not true to fact.

Benefits of Studying Figurative Language

Identifying figures of speech in the Bible can benefit the reader in several ways. First, it can help us to avoid misunderstandings. Let's consider a record where Jesus Christ uses figurative language, but his disciples take him literally.

John 11:7-14

Then after that saith he to *his* disciples, Let us go into Judaea again.

His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?

Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world.

But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.

These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.

Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.

Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

After receiving word that his friend, Lazarus, had died, Jesus responds, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.” Here, Jesus is using *euphemismos* (euphemism), a figure that exchanges a harsh or unpleasant expression with a more pleasant one. We have many euphemisms in English: passed away for dead; made redundant for being let go from a job; collateral damage for accidental fatalities; and so on. Jesus Christ knows that Lazarus is dead but says, “Lazarus sleepeth.” His disciples take him literally. They respond by saying, quite logically, that if Lazarus is sick, sleep will do him some good. Finally, Jesus Christ has to spell it out for them: “Lazarus is dead.” In this record, Jesus Christ uses figurative language, but his disciples take him literally. Misunderstanding ensues. And so, understanding figures can help us to avoid misunderstanding when we read the Scriptures.

Second, identifying figures of speech in the Bible might help uncover hidden meaning or added emphasis. In his book *Key to the Book of Psalms*, Thomas Boys suggests that many figures are overlooked in an “ordinary reading” of the Bible and that this oversight may result in a loss of “sense or import” of a passage (22). In other words, failure to recognize a figure may result in failure to understand the emphasis or force of a particular passage. Consider the repetition of the word “faith” (in the Greek *pistis*) in the following passage:

Hebrews 11:3-11 (emphasis added)

Through faith (*pistis*) we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

By faith (*pistis*) Abel offered unto God a more excellent

sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

By faith (*pistis*) Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

...

Verses 17-31

By faith (*pistis*) Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

By faith (*pistis*) Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

By faith (*pistis*) he sojourned in the land of promise, as *in* a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

Through faith (*pistis*), also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

By faith (*pistis*) Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*,

Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

By faith (*pistis*) Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

By faith (*pistis*) Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, *leaning* upon the top of his staff.

By faith (*pistis*) Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

By faith (*pistis*) Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw *he was* a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

By faith (*pistis*) Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.

By faith (*pistis*) he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith (*pistis*) he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

Go Figure!

By faith (*pistis*) they passed through the Red sea as by dry *land*: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.

By faith (*pistis*) the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.

By faith (*pistis*) the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

In this passage, the Greek word *pistis* occurs 18 times at the beginning of numerous clauses in close proximity, making this the figure *anaphora*. Even though the King James Version inconsistently translates *pistis* (alternately “by faith” and “through faith”), it is the same word in the Greek. This figure emphasizes the repeated word *pistis* and that it is by faith or by believing that the aforementioned wondrous things occurred, as opposed to intellectual ability, moral rectitude, intense effort, and so forth. In this example, the force of the repetition is clear.

In other examples, the emphasis is subtler.

Ephesians 1:3 (emphasis added)

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath **blessed** us with all spiritual **blessings** in heavenly places in Christ:

In this example, the word “bless” occurs three times but in different forms: adjective, verb, and noun. This constitutes the figure of speech *polyptoton*, where a word is repeated in different inflections (see chapter 7). In this verse, the figure emphasizes the blessings we have in Christ.

All writing has natural places of emphasis, rendered either through diction (words), syntax (arrangement), or other rhetorical patterns or designs. Figures of speech usually, though not always, bring emphasis to a particular point or idea. And like all of God's Word, these figures occur in the Scriptures by divine design and therefore merit our attention. Recognizing figures of speech, then, may help us to appreciate a particular point of emphasis in the Scriptures.

A third benefit to identifying figures of speech in the Bible is that it allows the reader to gain an appreciation of the beauty and accuracy of God's Word. We often marvel at the intricate detail of God's creation in nature or at the perfection of the human body, which is "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). Yet the Scriptures are God-breathed and are therefore filled with linguistic beauty and perfection. Readers marvel at how writers like John Milton or William Shakespeare use figurative language in such complex and varied ways, and yet few marvel at how precisely and marvelously figures are used in the Holy Scriptures. There is no comparison! Without putting too fine a point on it, we might say that a third benefit to studying figures of speech in the Bible is that it allows us to appreciate the accuracy, beauty, and divine design of God's Word.

Studying figures of speech might help us:

1. To distinguish between literal and figurative meaning
2. To uncover hidden or obscured significance and emphasis
3. To appreciate the beauty of the Scriptures

Misconceptions about Figures of Speech

Myths about figurative language abound. The most common misconception is that all figurative language is metaphoric. If we say something that isn't literally true, we quickly add, "Oh, I was just speaking metaphorically." But *metaphor* is only one figure of comparison. When a poet compares a lover to a rose, or calls a ruffian a "beast," or somehow expresses a truth in a non-literal way, the assumption is that the poet is using *metaphor*. Not necessarily. She might be using a *simile*, a *metonymy*, or even *hyperbole*. So, it's essential to recognize that not all figurative language is metaphoric and that not all comparisons are *metaphors*.

Another misconception is that if words are figurative, they aren't true, and that figurative language somehow *weakens* meaning. Quite the opposite is the case. In *A Poet's Guide to Poetry*, Mary Kinzie describes figures as "classical devices of rhetoric and grammar for arresting the attention and steering the audience" (413). While figures aren't true to fact, they are true to meaning. And because they arrest our attention, they are more potent, in a sense, than literal statements of fact. Far from weakening language, figures enliven language. Let's see how this plays out by considering a short passage by Charles Dickens, a writer who masterfully uses figurative language:

The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slyly down at Scrooge out of a gothic window in the wall, became invisible, and struck the hours and quarters in the clouds, with tremulous vibrations afterwards, as if its teeth were chattering in its frozen head up there. (*A Christmas Carol*: Stave 1)

Perhaps the reader doesn't realize it, but what makes this description so lively is its use of figurative language. Dickens packs four figures into one sentence. Twice, he uses *personification*: the bell is called "gruff," and it "peeps slyly down at Scrooge." He uses a *metaphor*, where the tower is compared to a head, and he uses a *simile*, where the tolling of the bell is compared to the sound of teeth chattering. A compelling writer and storyteller, Dickens takes something as commonplace as a bell tower and animates it with figurative language. He uses figurative language to draw the reader into Scrooge's world and help him feel how cold and harsh it is. Through figurative language, Dickens gives high drama to an otherwise mundane reality—a clock tower sounding on the half and quarter hours. Rather than weaken the meaning of language, figures of speech add force to language. If this is true in general literature, why wouldn't it be true in God's Word?

A third misconception about figurative language is that when it comes to the Bible, figures somehow erode the veracity of the Scriptures. Strict literalists might argue that if we consider a passage to be figurative, we are somehow saying that a passage isn't true. But is this the case? Figures of speech used in the Bible often emphasize truths; they may express truths in a non-literal way, and they frequently give force and feeling to language. Figurative language used in the Bible may not be literally true, but it is true, nonetheless. So just because language is figurative doesn't mean it isn't true to meaning.

Myths about figures of speech

- All figures are metaphors
- Figures weaken language
- Figures in the Bible erode veracity

Dispelling myths about figures:

- All figures are not metaphors
- Figures often intensify language
- Figures in the Bible express truths non-literally

How do Figures Bring Emphasis?

In literature, figures serve many functions. Here is a partial list, compiled from numerous sources, of how figures function in writing:

- Add emphasis
- Intensify feeling
- Diminish impact
- Arrest attention
- Appeal to emotion
- Cite authority
- Add ornamentation
- Bolster an argument
- Add aesthetic flourish
- Add zest or impact
- Reflect vernacular speech
- Dramatize feeling
- Serve as a mnemonic device
- Achieving a desired auditory quality
- Achieve a desired cadence or rhythm
- Serve a social function within a group
- Add comic value

Not all figures in the Bible are used to add emphasis or to draw the reader's attention. Some figures, like idiom and metonymy, were so

common in the Semitic languages that these expressions would not arrest attention or bring emphatic force. However, figures often do draw attention to a passage, or to a phrase, or a group of words. But how do we determine what a figure emphasizes? In large part, that depends on the *nature* or *characteristics* of the figure and upon the context in which the figure occurs. Let's consider the figure *asyndeton*, a figure that lists words or phrases together without conjunctions.

Mark 7:21-23

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:
All these evil things come from within and defile the man.

Note how there is no conjunction between the last two words in this list of vices. *Asyndeton* marks out this passage by putting emphasis on what comes at the end, causing the reader to hasten through the list of vices and focusing on the end matter—evil things come from within and defile a man. Understanding the figure, the reader realizes that the emphasis lies on the end matter, and not on each individual word in the passage.

Now let's take a look at the figure *polysyndeton*, which uses conjunctions beyond the grammatical norm.

Romans 9:4 (emphasis added)

Who are Israelites; to whom *pertaineth* the adoption, **and** the glory, **and** the covenants, **and** the giving of the law, **and** the service *of God*, **and** the promises;

In this verse, the conjunction (“and”) is repeated five times, drawing attention to each item in the list. When we consider the context of this verse, we learn that the apostle Paul is speaking about his fellow Israelites. Noting the characteristic of the figure and keeping the context in mind, we understand that this *polysyndeton* draws attention to all the matters listed here and that they pertain, specifically, to Israel. (For more detailed discussion about how figures function in the Scriptures, please see Appendix 3: FAQs, particularly questions 5 and 6.) So, to determine what a figure may emphasize, it’s necessary to understand the unique characteristic of the figure and the context in which it occurs.

How a figure might bring emphasis:

- By its unique characteristic
- By considering the context

Having said that, however, I need to clarify that not every single figure of speech in the Bible brings emphasis to a passage based on its characteristic. Some figures draw attention to what follows the figure of speech, while others emphasize what comes before or what is omitted, and some even highlight what is retained. There are no hard and fast rules when ascertaining how a figure may or may not bring emphasis. While many do bring emphatic force by their nature--figures of repetition emphasize what is repeated--that isn’t the case

with every figure of speech. As always, a careful consideration of the context is required in order to determine if and when and how a figure brings emphatic force to a passage.

What's in this Book?

Go Figure! An Introduction to Figures of Speech in the Bible is written to help students gain entry to the complex field of figurative language used in the Bible. Without a doubt, the definitive book on the subject is E. W. Bullinger's *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible Explained and Illustrated*. At nearly 1000 pages, this erudite reference book covers more than 200 figures of speech, some with up to 40 variations. *Go Figure!* narrows the field (32 figures) and simplifies the approach. The following criteria were used in selecting the thirty-two figures:

- It occurs with relative frequency in the Bible.
- Its definition and usage are relatively simple to understand.
- It is fairly recognizable in an English translation.
- No knowledge of Biblical languages and grammar is necessary to understand this figure.

If the figure met all or most of these requirements, then it made the list. If not, then I passed it by. For instance, you'll notice that the figure *heterosis* isn't in the lineup even though this figure occurs frequently in the Bible. Identifying this figure, however, requires some knowledge of Hebrew and Greek grammar. Figures like *epitrope* (admission) or *apologue* (fable) aren't included because even though they are simple to understand, they don't occur frequently in the Bible. The 32 figures provide a solid foundation for further study.

How the Book is Organized

Go Figure! is arranged in eight sections by topic:

1. FIGURES OF REPETITION
2. FIGURES OF OVERSTATEMENT AND UNDERSTATEMENT
3. FIGURES OF OMISSION
4. FIGURES USING HUMAN ATTRIBUTES
5. FIGURES OF EXCHANGE
6. FIGURES OF COMPARISON
7. RHETORICAL QUESTIONS
8. IDIOMS AND OTHER FAMILIAR FIGURES

I chose to arrange this book topically as an aid to understanding. Grouping figures of repetition together helps students remember that repetition is a key characteristic of these figures. Similarly, thinking about simile, metaphor, parable, and allegory as figures of comparison helps to remind us that these figures rest on some comparison. So, while this material could be organized in any number of ways, I chose a topical arrangement because it will help students understand and remember the figures.

Each of the eight sections opens with a short introduction and is then divided into chapters, with one chapter devoted to a single figure. In his work, Bullinger catalogues figures with extreme specificity, separating figures into categories, subcategories, and sub-subcategories often to dizzying effect. In the interest of keeping things simple, I divide the work into eight sections and thirty-two chapters, with only the occasional subdivision. For example:

Section 1: FIGURES OF REPETITION

Chapter 1: Anaphora

Chapter 2: Polysyndeton

a) “and”

b) other conjunctions

Chapter 3: Epistrophe

Chapter 4: Epanalepsis

Chapter 5: Anadiplosis

Chapter 6: Epizeuxis

Chapter 7: Polyptoton

Chapter 8: Synonymia

Chapter 9: Repetitio

Chapter 10: Pleonasm

Each chapter offers a detailed and comprehensive definition of the figure, followed by numerous examples from general culture and from the Bible. Tips are included when applicable, “for further study” is included at the end of each chapter, and copious endnotes are provided for those who wish to investigate the field further.

The book also includes three appendices. Appendix 1 offers original essays I’ve written to help illustrate how the study of figures of speech might inform teaching. Appendix 2 consists of an annotated bibliography of select print and digital resources that students may find to be particularly helpful. Appendix 3 includes detailed answers to questions I am routinely asked about figures of speech. Finally, a Scripture index is provided for ease of reference.

Methodology

Names

The first obstacle I encountered when assembling this material was determining which names to use. Classical or contemporary? Transliterated Greek or English? Choosing which names to use poses a unique problem for English readers because these names exist in Greek, Latin, English, and other languages, and these names change over time or are known by different terms. In *Go Figure!* Classical names (transliterated Greek or Latin) are used, followed by an English equivalent. These classical names are used for continuity: scholars across a spectrum of disciplines still refer to figures by these classical names, and so if a student wishes to further their study of a particular figure, they will be familiar with the term used by scholars today. Because these names can be difficult to pronounce, a pronunciation key is provided. When the pronunciation of a term varies (usually between British and American English), *Go Figure!* follows the American pronunciation provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Finally, a page reference to *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible Explained and Illustrated* (1968, Baker), Bullinger's book is provided in the chapter heading so that students may easily reference Bullinger's book if they wish.

Readers can expect a chapter heading to look something like this:

Chapter 3 *Epistrophe*

(repeated sentence endings) 241

e-PIS-tro-fee

Epistrophe is the repetition of the same word or words at the end of successive sentences, phrases, or clauses.

Here, the classical name is given (EPISTROPHE), with a short definition, and then the page reference to Bullinger's book. A pronunciation key follows. Then a more detailed definition is given. Examples from general culture and from the Bible are provided.

When deciding on the names of figures, I encountered a second problem. Because language is fluid, the names of some figures change over time. For instance, what is the name of the figure of understatement that uses a negative to express the positive to a high degree? Depending on the source, the answer might be *tapeinosis*, *litotes*, or *meiosis*. Bullinger and Vilant-Macbeth, both writing in the nineteenth century, equate *meiosis* with *litotes*. Bullinger considers *tapeinosis* or *antenantiosis* to be a figure of understatement that uses the negative to express the positive to a high degree, not *litotes*. But according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the term *tapeinosis* is an obsolete term. Amongst twentieth-century scholars, there is a wide consensus that *litotes* is a figure of understatement using the negative to express the positive to a high degree (see Joseph, Lanham,

Espy, *Silva Rhetorica*). Further, the OED defines *litotes* as, “A figure of speech, in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of the contrary.” So, according to modern sources, a figure of understatement that uses a negative to express the positive to a high degree is *litotes*. In a case like this, I use the more modern term and note its older equivalent in the endnotes.

In my research, I consulted numerous sources from different disciplines and from different centuries. Sometimes, sources were in agreement about a particular name, with variations in spelling. Sometimes, they differed widely. Often, I encountered what I call a “clash of the centuries” where older sources, like Bullinger and Vilant-Macbeth, are in agreement but newer sources, like Lanham and Espy, disagree with the older and concur with one another. When faced with this type of dilemma, I look to the *Oxford English Dictionary* to act as umpire. This authoritative source traces the meaning of a word throughout the centuries, and so one can see how a word might change over time.¹ In the end, I have always tried to choose the term that I felt would be of most use to students today, especially those who wish to continue their study of this field. Hanging on to an obsolete term would not be of much use to those wishing to further their study. At the same time, I have been careful to note the obsolete term or alternative names in the endnotes, recognizing this is a fluid enterprise.

Speaking of endnotes, readers will notice I have relegated the academic debate over names and meanings of figures—at times hairy and contentious—to the endnotes. There, students will find enough detail that if they wish, they may research these inconsistencies themselves.

Definitions

If naming the figures was a challenge, deriving definitions proved to be a monumental task. As one can imagine, there is little consensus about the definition of any one figure of speech. One challenge in writing this book has been sifting through the morass of opinion and theory about definitions of specific figures of speech. In the years spent researching this book, I have learned that generally speaking, the older the scholarship, the more precise and detailed the definition. There is a tendency in modern scholarship to conflate meaning and to blur or to erase distinctions, even to the point of error. I have also noticed that there are slight (and sometimes glaring) differences in definitions amongst literary scholars, classicists, rhetoricians, and linguists. Each field has its own theoretical framework, terminology, and intellectual bias; and so there are, quite understandably, differences amongst these disciplines when it comes to definitions of specific figures. The meaning of metaphor, for instance, varies widely between literary scholars and linguists. A literary scholar might adopt a narrower definition while a linguist, a broader one; or vice versa. In fact, whole books have been written about the meaning of metaphor, and several academic camps have assembled around the divergent meanings of this one figure. So, to write a short, succinct definition of metaphor is not without its challenges. While there is undoubtedly merit and value in taking a linguistic approach to figurative language, and while I have consulted books by linguists on this topic, because I am trained in literary theory and history and know literary apparatus, I have naturally favored a literary view of figures of speech.

When it comes to writing a definition, I always start with *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible Explained and Illustrated* and then consult respectable literary sources like Vilant-Macbeth, Espy, and Joseph.

Go Figure!

Next, I check general and specialized encyclopedias and handbooks on rhetoric, such as those edited by Enos, Lanham, Quinn, and Sloane. I may consult works on a single figure like Jon Winokur's *The Big Book of Irony* (2007) or Benjaim Keach's *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphor in Four Books* (1858), or I may consult a general work on the topic such as Sylvia Adamson's *Renaissance Figures of Speech* (2007) if it sheds light on a particular figure. Finally, I check credible online sources like *Silva Rhetorica* and *RhetFig*. Usually, at this point, I start to see overlap and the clash of centuries mentioned earlier. In the end, I have to make a judgment call and have tried to write definitions that were both easy to understand yet detailed enough to retain accuracy.

In his book *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content*, Bruce Metzger describes the unique challenge of popularizing research: "The chief danger, as every writer who has attempted to popularize research knows, is that, in making the complex clear, one may also make it appear simple, or, in making the debatable plain, one may also make it appear certain" (14). Indeed, while I have striven to make this book clear and simple, in no way do I mean to portray this field as non-debatable and clear as crystal.

Examples: General Culture

Now comes the easy part. After deciding on a name and writing a definition, I give examples of the figure from general culture. By general culture, I mean early and modern literature, popular culture including advertising slogans and television shows, song lyrics from secular and Christian songwriters, speeches, aphorisms both common and obscure, and from many other sources. I have attempted to include a variety of examples from different generations and cultures;

however, my examples are, admittedly, overwhelmingly American. This is more a result of convenience than it is of a desire to convey an American bias. Not only do I live in the United States, but my graduate studies also focused on twentieth-century American literature and culture, especially humor and satire. So, if my examples tend to favor comedians like Mindy Kaling or George Carlin, it's because these are the works I know best.

Examples: from the Scriptures

After giving examples from general culture, I next provide examples of the figure as it occurs in the Scripture. The biblical examples used in this book are from the King James Version of the Bible. These examples come from my own research, from *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, *The Might and Mirth of Literature*, and other sources. The selection process was pretty simple: I went for the low-hanging fruit, a metaphor or idiom meaning things that are relatively easy to grasp. If a figure like *anaphora* was fairly easy to see in the KJV, then I might select it for inclusion in *Go Figure!* If, however, the *anaphora* was hidden in the English translation, then I might have passed it by or included it with explanatory notes.

And that leads me to an important point: Because these figures occur in the biblical languages, not in English, their occurrence needs to be verified in the Hebrew or Greek. Each biblical example in *Go Figure!* has been verified, to the best of my ability, in the Hebrew or Greek, meaning that I have checked interlinears, lexicons, and other research tools. On occasion, I offer other English translations if the figure is more clearly rendered than in the KJV. For example, because the figure *polyptoton* is not apparent in the KJV, I offer several other versions or translations that do make the figure more apparent:

Genesis 2:17b (KJV)

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Note how the *polyptoton* is not reflected in this version. Now note how the figure is reflected in other English translations:

Genesis 2:17 (YLT) (emphasis added) and of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou dost not eat of it, for in the day of thine eating of it -- **dying thou dost die.**'

Genesis 2:17 (D-R) (emphasis added)

But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat. for in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt **die the death.**

In these two versions, the *polyptoton* is translated word-for-word. So, when a figure is not clear in the KJV, I sometimes offer a different English translation or version if it helps to make the figure clearer to the reader.

Readers will undoubtedly notice that there is not much explanation or interpretation given in *Go Figure!* Because this is an introductory book, the exposition of the Scriptures has been kept to a minimum. Where possible, I have avoided controversial passages and have given just enough explanation so that students may understand how a figure might function in a particular passage. I have avoided turning this book into an expository treatise on the significance of figures in the Bible, which is not my focus. When it comes to explaining the significance

of a figure, as much as possible, I have endeavored to follow the admonition given in Ecclesiastes 5:2b: “Let thy words be few.”

Unique Features of this book

- More than 1200 Bible verses
- Topical arrangement
- Expanded definitions
- Research from various disciplines, spanning several generations
- Examples from popular culture
- Exposition of Scriptures
- Annotated bibliography
- Original essay
- Q and A's

How To Use This Book

This is a small reference book that may be used in different ways. You might read one chapter to become familiar with a particular figure of speech. Using the examples provided, you could then note the figure in the margins of your Bible, and you could study the figure as it occurs in each verse listed under “for further study.” The more familiar you are with the name and characteristics of the figure, the more likely you are to spot other occurrences of the figure on your own. Second, you may use this as a reference tool by consulting the index at the back of the book. There you will find the occurrence of every figure listed in this book, arranged in canonical order. Finally, you may use this book as a springboard for further study: the endnotes and bibliography are provided with this in mind.

A Word of Caution

When studying figures of speech in the Bible, the student must take care not to read into a figure of speech meaning that isn't supplied by the context. For instance, when studying metaphors, it's essential to derive the comparison from the biblical context, and not from our own factual knowledge of a subject. Take the metaphor of the One Body, where the human body is compared to Christian saints. Let's look at the first occurrence of this metaphor:

Romans 12:1–8

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

⁴For as in **one body** we have many **members**, and the **members** do not all have the same function,

⁵so we, though many, are **one body** in Christ, and individually **members** one of another.

⁶Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;

⁷if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching;

⁸the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

In this passage, the human body, with its constituent parts, is compared to the body of Christ with its constituent parts. Just as a human body has many different parts, so too does the Church have many parts (called “members”). So far, the comparison is easy to understand. There is one human body with different parts. There is one body of Christ with different parts.

The next point of comparison, expressed in verses 4-8, is that each body part has a different function. Just as human body parts don't all perform the same function, so do individual saints differ in their function or functions. Each saint has deeds, doings, or practices to perform within the Church, yet we don't all execute the same deeds, doings, and practices. That's very simple—and foundational--to understand.

How important it is to let the context determine the point or points of comparison of this metaphor and not bring in our own points of comparison based on our own knowledge. For instance, we know that a human body gets sick or gets well, and we may be tempted to read that knowledge into this passage where the One Body metaphor occurs. We might thereby conclude that because a human body can get sick and then get well, the Body of Christ can get sick and then get well. However, that is *not* the comparison given in the context of Romans 12. Our knowledge of the human body, in this instance, is factual—a human body can get sick, and a human body can get well--

but this is not the comparison given in the context of Romans 12. With all figures of speech, especially figures of comparison, it is essential to let the context determine the point or points of comparison, or the intended meaning of the figure, if we want to rightly divide the Word of truth.

Along the same lines, it's essential to exercise restraint when teaching about figures of speech in the Bible. One might think that a particular figure of speech exists in a verse or passage and then fashion one's teaching around how this figure brings emphasis to a specific truth. But one might be wrong. And then, one's teaching slides into error. Better to exercise caution and restraint with teaching about figures of speech in the Bible, especially if there is doubt about the identity of the figure or if and how the figure brings emphatic force to a passage. Finally, it's good to remember that studying figures of speech in the Bible is one tool used to uncover how the Word of God interprets itself. We must never magnify the figures of speech in the Scriptures above the Scriptures themselves. For instance, if I were to teach all the figures of speech occurring in the Epistle to the Philippians, at the end of my teaching, what is likely magnified? Figurative language, and not necessarily the Epistle to the Philippians, or the God Who authored that Epistle. And so, when it comes to teaching about figures of speech in the Bible, it may be helpful to think about this task in terms of using salt in cooking. A little enhances the flavor, but too much ruins the dish. An imperfect metaphor, to be sure, but you take my point.

Let's close by reading a verse from Psalm 119:

Psalm 119:105

Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Psalm 119:105 is the theme verse for this book. In it, the psalmist uses a lovely metaphor to compare God's Word to instruments that provide light—a lamp and a light. What a privilege it is to have the light of God's Word available to us today. I pray that this work may help students better understand and appreciate God's Word and that, in the process, they may grow closer to God, who has been so kind and so gracious throughout the centuries to make Himself known in His Word.

Chapter 1:

Anaphora

(like sentence beginnings) 199

an-AFF-o-ra

Anaphora is the repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of successive sentences, phrases, or clauses.

It's not enough for words to be repeated: in order for it to be *anaphora*, the repetition must come at the *beginning* of a sentence, phrase, or clause, and those sentences, phrases, or clauses must come in close succession.

Anaphora can bring emphasis in several ways. Like most figures of repetition, *anaphora* may emphasize the word or phrase that is repeated. But *anaphora* might also emphasize the parallel or antithetical relationship between the sentence, phrase, or clause that is linked by the repeated word. Finally, *anaphora* is sometimes used as a rhetorical device to bring the reader along to an endpoint or climax. In that case, the emphasis in *anaphora* lies on the end matter. Context helps to determine how the figure might bring emphasis.

FROM GENERAL CULTURE

Example 1 (emphasis added)

She was not quite what you would call refined. **she was** not quite what you would call unrefined. **she was** the kind of person that keeps a parrot. (Mark Twain)

In the first example, the words “she was” are repeated at the beginning of successive phrases in order to emphasize the subject--Twain’s unidentified woman. The repetition also serves to lead the reader to Twain’s humorous climax, or punch line about the parrot.

Example 2 (emphasis added)

I’d be packin’ my bags when I need to stay
I’d be chasin’ every breeze that blows my way
I’d be building my kingdom just to watch it fade away
It’s true (TobyMac, “Me Without You”)

Song lyrics use lots of figures of repetition. In this example, the phrase “I’d be” draws attention to where the singer would be without God.

Example 3 (emphasis added)

Every breath you take
Every move you make
Every bond you break
Every step you take
I’ll be watching you
Every single day
Every word you say
Every game you play
Every night you stay

I'll be watching you. (The Police, "Every Breath You Take")

Repeating the word "every" eight times at the beginning of eight successive sentences certainly draws attention to this word.

Example 4 (emphasis added)

With malice toward none, **with** charity for all, **with** firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right.
(Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address")

This is one example where the emphasis is not necessarily on the repeated word. Instead, the word "with" joins the phrases together, indicating that the three subjects are parallel in significance. In his closing remarks to a war-torn nation, Lincoln suggests that these three phrases are of equal importance to the nation's well-being.

FROM THE SCRIPTURES

Example 1

2 Corinthians 11:26 (emphasis added)

In journeyings often, *in* **perils** of waters, *in* **perils** of robbers, *in* **perils** by *mine own* countrymen, *in* **perils** by the heathen, *in* **perils** in the city, *in* **perils** in the wilderness, *in* **perils** in the sea, *in* **perils** among false brethren;

With the word "peril" occurring eight times in successive phrases, this is a textbook example of *anaphora*. The figure here stresses the perils Paul faced as a minister of Christ.

Example 2

Psalm 115:12-13 (emphasis added)

The Lord hath been mindful of us: **he will bless us**; **he will bless** the house of Israel; **he will bless** the house of Aaron. **He will bless** them that fear the Lord, *both* small and great.

The figure emphasizes that God is One who blesses. As the Psalmist records, God will bless the house of Israel, the house of Aaron, and those who fear Him.

Example 3

Philippians 3:2 (emphasis added)

Beware of dogs, **beware** of evil workers, **beware** of the concision.

The repetition of the word “beware” at the beginning of three sentences makes this an *anaphora*. In the context, the apostle Paul warns the Philippians to beware of legalists who have confidence in their flesh to bring about their own righteousness. The repetition of this stern warning would certainly have arrested their attention.

Example 4

Jeremiah 5:17 (emphasis added)

And **they shall eat up** thine harvest, and thy bread, *which* thy sons and thy daughters should eat: **they shall eat up** thy flocks and thine herds: **they shall eat up** thy vines and thy fig trees: they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustedst, with the sword.

In this verse, the repeated words “they shall eat up” occur at the beginning of three successive sentences. This *anaphora* emphasizes the surety of pending devastation. But note how this figure also links the subjects together: Israel’s enemies will consume food from the ground, food provided by animals, and food from trees and vines.

Example 5

Philippians 2:1-2 (emphasis added)

If *there be* therefore **any** consolation in Christ, **if any** comfort of love, **if any** fellowship of the Spirit, **if any** bowels and mercies,

Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind.

Here’s an example where the *anaphora* is not that obvious in the KJV but is clearer in the Greek, where the phrase *ei tis* begins four successive clauses. In this example, the figure is used as a rhetorical device to bring the reader along to an endpoint or climax, which is stated in verse 2.

Note how the NIV translates the *anaphora*:

Philippians 2:1 (NIV) (emphasis added)

Therefore, **if there is any** encouragement in the Messiah, **if there is any** comfort of love, **if there is any** fellowship in the Spirit, **if there is any** compassion and sympathy,

This translation places the repeated phrase at the beginning of each phrase, making the *anaphora* more obvious than in the KJV.

Go Figure!

For Further Study

Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20,
24, 26, 29

Deuteronomy 28:1-6

Psalms 29:1-5,7-9

Jeremiah 1:18

Jeremiah 4:23-26

Jeremiah 51:20-23, 25, 27, 29

Matthew 5:3-11

Matthew 11:7-9

Matthew 23:13-16

1 Corinthians 1:20

1 Corinthians 6:12

1 Corinthians 13:7

1 Corinthians 14:15

Ephesians 6:12

James 5:7-8

1 John 2:12-14

Chapter 2:

Polysyndeton

(repeated conjunctions) 208

pol-ee-SIN-de-ton

Polysyndeton repeats a conjunction more than ordinary usage would require.

In English, as in Greek, grammar rules normally indicate that a conjunction occurs between the last two words (or word groups) in a series.² For instance, note the use of the conjunction “and” in the following sentence (emphasis added):

The tiny amusement park consisted of a roller coaster, a Ferris wheel, some bumper cars, **and** a merry-go-round.

In this example, there are four items in the series, so the conjunction comes between the last two nouns. *Polysyndeton* breaks that rule by placing a conjunction between each noun. If the sentence were rewritten using the figure, the sentence would read as follows (emphasis added):

The tiny amusement park consisted of a roller coast **and** a Ferris wheel **and** some bumper cars **and** a merry-go-round.

Go Figure!

The figure adds the conjunction “and” between each noun, bringing emphasis to each word in the series. Generally speaking, *polysyndeton* emphasizes **each individual item** in a series rather than the list as a whole. Perhaps subconsciously, the repeated “and” slows the reader down in order to consider each object and to weigh each matter in the list.

Writing about secular literature, some scholars say that this figure is used to achieve a certain rhythm to writing by giving a steady cadence to a passage, where words in a series are moved along at the same powerful pace, resulting in a “measured deliberateness” (Joseph 59). Others assert that *polysyndeton* draws attention not only to each item in a series but also to the fact that the items are “roughly equal members” (Quinn 11).

Repeated “AND”

FROM GENERAL CULTURE

Example 1 (emphasis added)

As a medic, Rat Kiley carried a canvas satchel filled with morphine **and** plasma **and** malaria tablets **and** surgical tape **and** comic books **and** all the things a medic must carry, including M&M’s for especially bad wounds, for a total weight of nearly 20 pounds. (Tim O’Brien, *The Things They Carried*)

In this list, the repeated “and” between words gives emphasis to each item.

Example 2 (emphasis added)

There were frowzy fields, **and** cow-houses, **and** dunghills, **and** dustheaps, **and** ditches, **and** gardens, **and** summer- houses, **and** carpet-beating grounds, at the very door of the Railway. Little tumuli of oyster shells in the oyster season, **and** of lobster shells in the lobster season, **and** of broken crockery **and** faded cabbage leaves in all seasons, encroached upon its high places. (Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*)

In this rich description, Dickens uses *polysyndeton* to draw attention to each image and perhaps to emphasize how crowded the scene was with the many items mentioned.

Example 3 (emphasis added)

By seven o'clock the orchestra has arrived, no thin five-piece affair, but a whole pitful of oboes **and** trombones **and** saxophones **and** viols **and** cornets **and** piccolos, **and** low **and** high drums.... The bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside, until the air is alive with chatter **and** laughter, **and** casual innuendo **and** introductions forgotten on the spot, **and** enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other's names. (F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*)

In this description of a party scene, Fitzgerald uses *polysyndeton* in a list of musical instruments and then in a list of types of speech.

FROM THE SCRIPTURES

Example 1

Ephesians 4:31 (emphasis added)

Let all bitterness, **and** (*kai*) wrath, **and** (*kai*) anger, **and** (*kai*) clamour, **and** (*kai*) evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

In this example, the word “and” (in the Greek, *kai*) occurs four times between five nouns, drawing emphasis to each item enumerated and how believers are to put away all of these things.

Example 2

Luke 7:38 (emphasis added)

And stood at his feet behind *him* weeping, **and** (*kai*) began to wash his feet with tears, **and** (*kai*) did wipe *them* with the hairs of her head, **and** (*kai*) kissed his feet **and** (*kai*) anointed *them* with the ointment.

In this verse, four phrases are linked together by the conjunction “and.” This figure emphasizes the woman’s actions, calling attention to each loving gesture. (Note how the Lord later commends the woman’s actions. re: Luke 7:44-50)

Example 3

Romans 9:4 (emphasis added)

Who are Israelites; to whom *pertaineth* the adoption, **and** (*kai*) the glory, **and** (*kai*) the covenants, **and** (*kai*) the giving of the law, **and** (*kai*) the service of *God*, **and** (*kai*) the promises;

In this verse, the conjunction “and” occurs five times, drawing attention to each item in the list. When we consider the context of this verse, we learn that the apostle Paul is speaking about his fellow Israelites. This figure of speech draws attention to all the matters listed here and that they pertain, specifically, to Israel.

Example 4

1 Corinthians 4:11-12 (emphasis added)

Even unto this present hour we both hunger, **and** (*kai*) thirst, **and** (*kai*) are naked, **and** (*kai*) are buffeted, **and** (*kai*) have no certain dwellingplace;

And (*kai*) labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it;

In this passage, the figure draws attention to each of the actions the apostle Paul and others endured for the sake of the gospel.

Example 5

1 Corinthians 14:3 (emphasis added)

But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men *to* edification, **and** (*kai*) exhortation, **and** (*kai*) comfort.

The figure here emphasizes the benefits of prophecy spoken in the church.

Repeated “OR” and “NOR”

Polysyndeton repeats a conjunction more than ordinary usage would require.

In Greek, the most common occurrence of *polysyndeton* involves the repetition of the word *kai*, generally translated “and” in English. However, this figure occurs with other conjunctions such as “but,” “or,” and “nor.”³ Because these words are conjunctions (or more technically disjunctive conjunctions), when they are repeated beyond the norms of grammar, they function the same way any other *polysyndeton* might: they emphasize each word or phrase in a series.

FROM GENERAL CULTURE

Example 1 (emphasis added)

Neither snow **nor** rain **nor** heat **nor** gloom of night
stays these couriers from the swift completion of their
appointed rounds.

This saying is associated with the United States Postal Service, taken from an inscription on the James Farley Post Office in New York City. With the repeated conjunction “nor,” the emphasis is that the delivery of the mail will not be hindered, no matter what the weather conditions.

Example 2 (emphasis added)

Happiness is neither virtue **nor** pleasure **nor** this thing
nor that but simply growth. We are happy when we are
growing. (John Butler Yeats, Letter to Miss Grierson,
June 2, 1909)

Stating it in the negative, Yeats describes what happiness is not. The repeated conjunction “nor” emphasizes that happiness, according to the writer, is not any of the things listed in this sentence.

FROM THE SCRIPTURES

Example 1

Romans 8:38-39 (emphasis added)

I am persuaded that **neither** (*oute*) death, **nor** (*oute*) life, **nor** (*oute*) angels, **nor** (*oute*) principalities, **nor** (*oute*) powers, **nor** (*oute*) things present, **nor** (*oute*) things to come,

Nor (*oute*) height, **nor** (*oute*) depth, **nor** (*oute*) any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The repeated “nor” (*oute* in Greek) emphasizes each word listed, drawing attention to the truth that none of these things, despite their power and reach, can separate the born-again believer from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.⁴

Example 2

Romans 8:35 (emphasis added)

Who shall separate us from the love of God? *shall* tribulation **or** (*ē*) distress, **or** (*ē*) persecution, **or** (*ē*) famine, **or** (*ē*) nakedness, **or** (*ē*) peril, **or** (*ē*) sword?

In this example, “or” (*ē* in Greek) occurs six times in this short series, making it the figure *polysyndeton*.⁵ It brings emphasis to each word in the group, causing the reader to stop and to consider how not one of these dreadful conditions might separate the born-again believer from God’s love.

Example 3

1 Thessalonians 2:6 (emphasis added)

Nor (*oute*) of men sought we glory, **neither** (*oute*) of you, **nor** (*oute*) yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

In the Greek, *oute* occurs three times in this verse, although it is translated inconsistently in the KJV. The *polysyndeton* draws the reader's attention to each item in this list. In the context, we read that Paul and company did not seek the glory of people, not men, nor the Corinthians, nor other people. The figure here makes this emphatic.

Example 4

1 Corinthians 5:11 (emphasis added)

But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be [either] (\bar{e}) a fornicator, **or** (\bar{e}) covetous, **or** (\bar{e}) an idolator, **or** (\bar{e}) a railer, **or** (\bar{e}) a drunkard, **or** (\bar{e}) an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

In this example, the repetition of the Greek word \bar{e} makes this *polysyndeton*. The figure draws the reader's attention to each item in the list, making the admonition emphatic. The apostle Paul admonishes the Corinthians not to keep company (to associate with) nor to eat with any brother who is any of the things listed in this verse.

HINTS AND TIPS

According to some sources, in Koine Greek, most sentences are joined by a connecting particle or conjunction such as *kai* (and). (Consider the Gospel of Mark or the Book of Revelation where many verses start with the word “and.”) Because *polysyndeton* uses conjunctions like “and” in an unusual way, we don’t normally consider the first “and” in a sentence when identifying this figure in the Scriptures. Generally speaking, starting a sentence with the conjunction “and” (*kai*) is not unusual for Koine Greek but is actually normative.

For Further Study

“AND”

2 Samuel 22:2

Matthew 16:21

Matthew 20:19

Acts 1:8

1 Corinthians 1:30

1 Corinthians 4:3,11-12

Ephesians 1:21

1 Thessalonians 1:3

1 Thessalonians 5:23

Hebrews 2:4

Hebrews 12:18-19

1 Peter 1:4, 7

1 Peter 2:1

“OR”

Leviticus 6:2-3

1 Corinthians 3:22-23

1 Corinthians 14:6

Ephesians 5:3-4

Colossians 2:16

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Julia Hans is a national award-winning essayist, former journalist, and retired English professor. Extensively published in the secular field, her first Christian book, *Lamps, Scrolls, and Goatskin Bottles: A Handbook of Bible Customs for Kids*, was produced by Standard Publishing in 2000. *Go Figure!* is her second book in the biblical research field, originally published in 2018. In 2023, together with her husband, Ravi Hans, she wrote *Christ Jesus our Hope: Living in Light of Christ's Return*, published by Westbow Press. In 2025, she self-published a book for Christian parents and teachers: *The Beginning of Wisdom: 52 Bible Lessons for Children Ages 4-12, with Games, Crafts, Activities, and More*. Today, Dr. Hans writes blogs, booklets, books, and eBooks on various topics in biblical research. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, spending time with family, being outdoors, and watching funny cat videos online. You can reach her at: jhans@onthingsabove.org

Other works by Julia Hans

Books

The Beginning of Wisdom: 52 Lessons for Kids Ages 4-12 with Games, Crafts, Activities, & More. Carthage, NC: On Things Above, 2025.

Christ Jesus our Hope: Living in Light of the Return of Christ.: Bloomington, IN: Westbow Press, 2023. (co-authored with Ravi Hans)

Go Figure! An Introduction to Figures of Speech in the Bible. Bloomington, IN: Westbow Press: 2018.

Lamps, Scrolls, and Goatskin Bottles: A Handbook of Bible Customs for Kids. Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 2000.

E-Books

Miriam's Rebuke

Avoiding Ageism in the Church

Biblical Binaries: Is Positive Thinking Biblical?

Booklets

All Sufficiency in All Things at All Times: A Study of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9

'Death and Life are in the Power of the Tongue': A Biblical Study of the Words We Speak

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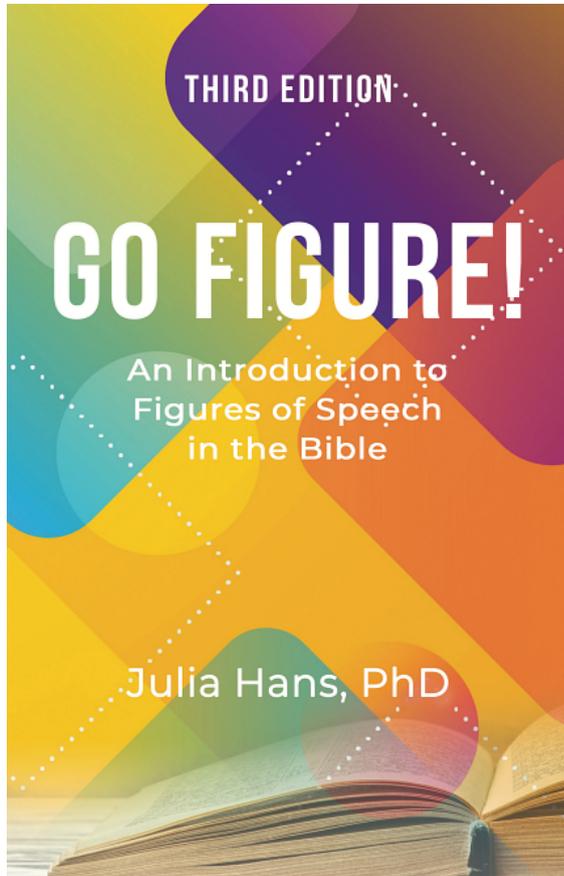
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‘I Am So Troubled I Cannot Speak’: What the Psalms of Lament Teach Us

‘Members in Particular’: A Study of the One-Body Metaphor

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Go Figure! is an introduction to studying figures of speech in the Bible. The book covers 32 main figures with examples from popular culture and the Bible. With its blend of humor and scholarship, the book appeals to a variety of students.

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