



UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE

How to Read and Interpret the Bible

4 - FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

We all use figures of speech in our own language. When we say, “This is cool,” (or whatever the current phrase) the meaning is clear to us and we recognize immediately the point of reference. In Biblical figures of speech, the relevant point of comparison was obvious to the original hearers or readers. Because we may not be familiar with Biblical customs we cannot push the figure of speech beyond that point.

1. While _____ refers to what a word or phrase means in its ordinary, customary usage, figurative refers to the meaning of a word or expression when it is compared to something else. This is also called an analogy.
 - A. What do you think Jesus is referring to in the analogy of John 6:47-58?
2. Jesus taught through **similes**, comparisons explicitly stated with words such as “like” or “as.”
 - A. Luke 10:1-3 *...behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves.*
 - B. Matthew 23:37 *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!* (This was Jesus’ lament over Israel)
3. A _____ is a figure of speech, common in the Bible, in which the writer describes one thing in terms of something else.
 - A. Luke 12:32 *Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*
 - B. Another metaphor is found Luke 8:21 Jesus where taught that spiritual ties are more important than physical ties, *...my mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.*
4. **Anthropomorphism** is a metaphor which describes God’s power in terms human body parts and movements.
 - A. Isaiah 59:1 *Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear.*
5. **Anthropopathism** is a metaphor used to ascribe _____ emotions, feelings, and responses to God.

- A. God does have these emotions but His responses and emotions are perfect and not tainted by sinful human or dysfunctional behavior. When dealing with these passages we must remove self-centeredness that is so often a part of our emotions.
 - B. God's grief in Genesis 6:6; His wrath in John 3:36; Revelation 14: 10 and 15:1,7.
6. **Words of association** are substitutions that are well known in the language of the reader.
- A. Ephraim, a tribe of Israel, is often used to refer to northern Israel after the division into southern and northern kingdoms. We use the term, "White House" to refer to the presidency of the United States.
7. In **personification**, personal qualities are given to an object or an idea.
- A. Psalm 114:3-4 *The sea saw it and fled; Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like rams, the little hills like lambs.*
 - B. Matthew 6:34 *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*
8. **Euphemism** is a type of _____ often used in the Bible. It is a substitution of a more indirect or delicate term for a blunt one that may be offensive or distasteful.
- A. Genesis 4:1 *Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the Lord."* (Leviticus 18:6)
9. **Hyperbole** is the conscious _____ of a truth, usually to stress a point. Although Jesus used this often, not every instance is easily recognized. This is a very important type of speech to understand and each passage must be taken in its context.
- A. Matthew 5:29-30 *If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.*
 - B. Luke 14:26 *If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.*
10. In **irony**, the writer or speaker means exactly the _____ of what the words say. This is a vivid tool in writing, but since we cannot see the writer or hear the tone of voice, careful study of the context is necessary.
- A. God is ironic when he asks Adam, in the Garden of Eden "Where are you?" The question implies that God needed the information. Obviously God knew where Adam was. He wanted Adam to know where Adam was — hiding from God because of his disobedience.
 - B. 1 Kings 18:27 *And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened."* (Jeremiah 34:17)



PARABLES

1. A **parable** is a short fictional story that teaches a lesson by _____ and usually focus on only one, main point.
 - A. Many of Jesus' parables focused on the Kingdom of God and His Sovereign rule.
 - The Sower and the four soils (Matthew 13:3-9,18-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15).
 - The good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).
 - Note the list of New Testament parables on page 5.
2. When Jesus explained the parable of the Sower to His disciples, He also stated a very important idea in Mark 4:13, where He said, *"Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"* Jesus wanted them to know that if they understood *this* parable they would be able to better understand all His other parables.
 - A. This parable reveals hindrances of the heart to _____ the seed of God's Word.
3. Here are a few basic steps in interpreting the parables (See the parable worksheets for more detail)
 - A. Try to understand the earthly details as well as the original hearers did. Many of Jesus' stories were taken from the agrarian life of the day.
 - B. Note the attitude and spiritual condition of the original hearers. Was He speaking to disciples and followers or religious leaders?
 - C. If possible, note the circumstances that prompted the parable.
 - D. Remember, a parable has _____
 - State the point of the parable and give reasons for your selection. If several of the details are explained, try to uncover the main emphasis.
 - Try to relate that point to the Reign of the Kingdom of God. Matthew 13:10-11 *And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,..."*
 - Relate the main point or emphasis first to the readers of that time, then discover the contemporary application for us.

ALLEGORIES

1. An **allegory** is a story or teaching that is meant to convey a _____ meaning. Many times it involves several comparisons in which each element of the story or teaching stands for something specific. Unlike a parable, imagery (word pictures) in allegories are identified with the story and usually explain why they are included in the story.
2. Here are a few basic steps in interpreting allegories.
 - A. State as clearly as possible who the original hearers were and note why the allegory was told.
 - B. Try to see the basic points of comparison stressed by the original writer.
 - C. List all the points of comparison and the things for which they stand. State why these truths were important then and why they are important now.
 - D. An example of an Old Testament allegory is Proverbs 5:15-19 which addresses marital faithfulness by urging a man to “drink of his own cistern” and no one else’s. We are told the allegory’s meaning in verses 20-23 where the commandment is repeated in plain language.
 - E. Examples of New Testament allegories include:
 - Christ as the Good Shepherd in John 10:1-16.
 - The Vine and the branches in John 15:1-8.
 - The Last Supper in Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 21:14-23.
 - Paul as a wise master builder in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.
 - Paul’s illustration of God’s armor to be worn in our spiritual war in Ephesians 6:10-17.

ALLEGORIZING A PARABLE

1. Difficulties arise when we insist on our own interpretation and go beyond the explanation given in the Bible.
2. This method of interpretation does _____ follow correct exegetical rules and, sadly, is used by many Bible teachers today. An example (below) is the interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 by Origen (185 –254 AD) and Augustine (354 - 430 AD)...
 - A. The man who was going down to Jericho is Adam.
 - B. Jerusalem is paradise, and Jericho is the world.
 - C. The robbers are hostile powers (the flesh and the demonic).
 - D. The priest is the Law, the Levite is the prophets, and the Samaritan is Christ.
 - E. The wounds are the result of disobedience, the beast is the Lord’s body.
 - F. The inn is the Church and the manager of the inn is the head of the Church to whom its care has been entrusted.
 - G. The Samaritan’s promise to return represents the Second Coming of Christ.



THE PARABLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. The Sower and the four soils (Matthew 13:3-9,18-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15)
 - A. Jesus said that this was the key parable when interpreting the parables. Mark 4:13 *And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"*
2. The wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43)
3. The mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32)
4. The leaven (Matthew 13:33)
5. The hidden treasure (Matthew 13:44)
6. The pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-46)
7. The dragnet (Matthew 13:47-50)
8. The householder (Matthew 13:51-52)
9. The unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21-35)
10. The laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)
11. The two sons (Matthew 21:28-32)
12. The wicked vinedressers (Matthew 21:33-46)
13. The wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-14)
14. The wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)
15. The talents (Matthew 25:14-30)
16. The growing seed (Mark 4:26-29)
17. The two debtors (Luke 7:41-43)
18. The good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
19. The friend at midnight (Luke 11:1-13)
20. The rich fool (Luke 12:13-21)
21. The barren fig tree (Luke 13:6-9)
22. Taking the lower place (Luke 14:7-11)
23. The great supper (Luke 14:15-24)
24. The lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7)
25. The lost coin (Luke 15:8-10)
26. The prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32)
27. The unjust steward (Luke 16:1-15)
28. The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)
29. The unprofitable servants (Luke 17:7-10)
30. The persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8)
31. The Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14)
32. The minas (Luke 19:11-27)

PARABLES WORKSHEET | *Matthew 13:1-23*

1. Read the parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:1-23 (also in Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15). Remember Jesus' words in Mark 4:13.
2. Describe the environment in which Jesus taught the parable and to whom the parable was spoken. Hint, chapter 12 sets the stage since chapter 13 begins with "On the same day..."
 - *For those who believe, no proof is necessary. For those who don't believe, no proof is possible.* — Stuart Chase
3. If we first establish the key (main) point, the soils make more sense. In light of that understanding describe in your own words what the soils represent.

A. The wayside (hard soil or path).

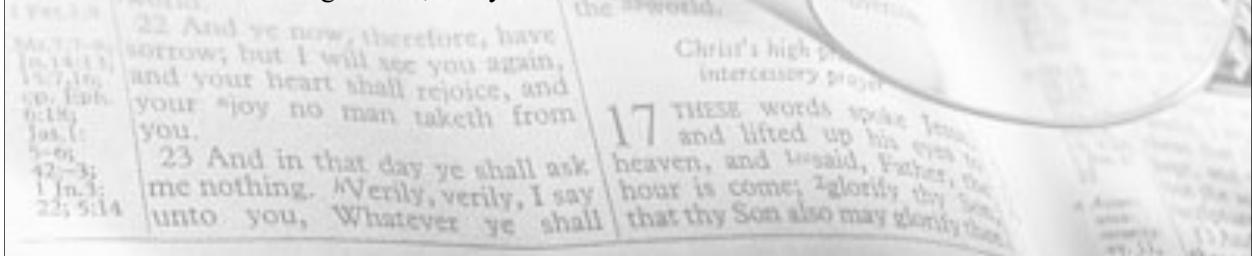
B. Stony places (compare this with Luke 8:6).

C. The ground with thorns (weeds).

D. The good ground.

4. What would Jesus have wanted the original hearers to "catch" from this?

5. What is the message for us, today?



ASSIGNMENT

1. Weekly Time Sheet

- Meet with your accountability partner
- Daily devotions
- Read the lesson
- Memorize Hebrews 4:12
- Journal

2. The Parables Worksheet

- Read the parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:1-23
- Follow the worksheet and answer the questions

ANSWERS

literal
metaphor
human

understatement
exaggeration
opposite

comparison
receive
one main point

figurative
NOT

WEEKLY TIME SHEET - UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 5:16 ...*redeeming the time*...

1. Name _____ Date _____
2. My accountability partners _____

3. Scripture memory verse (Write it from memory below before class)
4. Journaling (Briefly write the main thoughts and continue on other side if necessary)

Check ✓ each box below as you do the activity for that day

ACTIVITIES	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
Personal prayer time							
Bible reading & journaling							
Lesson reading							
Fasting							
Scripture memorization							
Sunday AM & Wednesday PM							
Accountability meeting/connection							
Volunteer service (specify below)							
I've invited a new person to church							