How To Study The Bible (#12)
Figures of Speech -3

Introduction

There are almost as many ways of dividing and defining figures of speech in the Bible as there are authors writing about the topic. This study, and the next two, will list, define, exemplify and discuss some of those figures of speech as presented in D.R. Dungan’s Hermeneutics. [cf. HTSB 10-12 for all three handouts on Figures of Speech]

21. Parallelism
Def: from para (beside) and allelo (each), parallelism is a figure of speech in which several lines, usually two or three, are placed “side by side” in sequence; the “parallel” lines are either in sync, out of sync or lead to a new conclusion, thus multiple forms of parallelism are presented; it is frequently used in Old Testament wisdom literature (especially poetry), the prophets and even in Hebrew narratives; especially evident in OT songs; “the use of successive verbal constructions in poetry or prose that correspond in grammatical structure, sound, meter, meaning, etc.” (NOAD); the purpose of parallelism is obvious - in a culture that focused so much on the word of God there was need for that word to be made as memorable as possible; not everyone was reading literate, but many, obviously, heard what was read by others; what was read then, must be read in a way to make it memorable, and much of the OT includes mnemonic devices such as parallelism (repeating the central thoughts in a slightly different way each time); alliteration (most notably the 119th Psalm that is segmented into parts, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet; each octet’s lines also starts with that same letter)

Examples: Ex 15 - Miriam’s song of victory after the crossing of the Red Sea; 1 Sam 18:7 - the song comparing and praising David over Saul; cf. song in Judges rejoicing at Deborah and Barak’s victory over Sisera; Luke 1:46-55 - Mary’s response to Elizabeth re the birth of Christ; Gen 31:26-28, 36-37 - Laban to Jacob as the latter was leaving)

22. Synonymous Parallelism
Def: a series of parallel lines each containing the same thought, or something very close to it

Examples: Gen 4:23-24 - hear my voice/listen to my speech, wounding me/bruising me, seven fold/seventy seven fold;

Identical synonymous parallelism: Examples - Prov 6:2; Ps 93:3-4 - the floods have lifted up (voice, waves, waters, etc.); Is 55:6-7 - seek God while he may be found/call on him while he is near;

Similar synonymous parallelism: Examples: Job 6:5-10 - several animals behave in similar fashion, etc.; Hos 9:8-9 - How shall I give/deliver/make/set Ephraim/Israel/Admah/Zeboim; Joel 2:6-9 - might men/men of war, march in ways/not break ranks, etc.;

23. Antithetic Parallelism
Def: a series of parallel lines each seemingly opposing/contradicting the other as they progress

Simple antithetic parallelism - lines appear more simply opposed; Examples - Pr 14:28-15:2 - several contrasting lines - sound heart is life/envy is rottenness, wicked is thrust down/righteous has hope in death, righteousness exalts a nation/sin is a reproach to any people

Compound antithetic parallelism - lines appear more less directly opposed; Examples - Is 1:3 - ox/donkey know master’s crib/Israel doesn’t know God; Is 1:18-20 - sins as scarlet/can be white like snow; sins as crimson/white like wool;

24. Synthetic Parallelism
Def: the sequences of lines do not repeat or oppose each other as much as they lead to a new thought or conclusion (i.e., synthesis)

Corresponding synthetic parallelism: correspondence exists between related sentences, sometimes in a single sentence, sometimes in more; Examples - Ps 27:1 - God is light/salvation, no reason to fear and God is strength/why be afraid (example of simple synonymous parallelism); Ps 35: 25-26 presents a more difficult figure - four lines, the first two are not quite synonymous, followed by two that lead to a conclusion that builds off the first two lines; the last two lines are not quite synonymous or antithetical, with the last line serving as an intensification of the line before it
Cumulative synthetic parallelism: each line in the series of parallel lines builds on the preceding line until a climax is reached; though the truth might be initially stated, the series makes the case for its claim even stronger; these sort of parallelism exists in both an ascending and descending manner

Ascending examples: Ps 19 - presents a series of lines that builds to the apex (re creation); verses 7-11 of the same chapter do the same thing that the first six verses do with creation, but for the word of God; cf. Ps 29:1-9

Descending example: Prov 9:13-17 - Proverbs description of the foolish women - she talks too much, knows nothing of importance, makes sure she is seen in the right places, attracts those who aren’t doing what they are supposed to be doing, suggests secret sins are sweet, and kills her subjects (things just get worse as they go along)

Irregular synthetic parallelism: thoughts are brought up in unusual ways, almost without rules; sometimes three or four lines of comparative thoughts with the first and third matched, or the second and fourth matched; sometimes the first and last and the two middle are matched; appear at points to be antithetical

Example: Pr 23:15-16 - if you will be wise with a heart glad like mine, I will rejoice when you speak what is right - the thoughts here appear to be out of order; cf. Ps 35:15-21 - v 15 matches 21, 16 matches 20, 17 matches 19, and 18 the last verse; Is 65:21-22 - alternate lines are antithetical - build houses, plant vineyards, will not build, will not plant; sometimes the parallelism is in triplets with three lines saying the same thing or one answers two, sometimes four expressing the same thing (cf. Is 2:1ff; cf. Pr 1:8-9)

Figures of Thought

25. Antithesis
Def: from anti (against) and thesis (setting); “a figure of speech in which an opposition or contrast of ideas is expressed by parallelism of words that are the opposites of, or strongly contrasted with, each other, such as “hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins” (NOAD); polar opposites (or something close to it) help us understand principles/truths, if we can grasp the meaning of one principle/truth in an antithetical relationship, then we can grasp the meaning of the other

Examples: Mt 5:21, 27, 33, 34, 38, 39, 43, 44 - you have heard it said, but I say; Mt 25:46 - comparison of eternal life and eternal punishment; Rom 2:7-10 - compares/contrasts Jews/Greeks, law keeping/unrighteousness, etc.; 1 Cor 15:42-44 - corruption vs. incorruption, dishonor vs. glory, weakness vs. power, natural body vs. spiritual body; 2 Cor 3:5-13 - extended comparison/contrast of law of Moses and gospel of Christ

26. Symbols
Def: from sym/syn (like) and ballo (throw), or throw together; “a thing that represents or stands for something else, esp. a material object representing something abstract” (NOAD); some symbols have a meaning naturally applied (lions are courageous, sheep are meek), some are not so obvious

Rules For Interpreting Symbols
1. Allow the author’s interpretation to stand.
2. Inspired interpretations by other writers also stand. (These first two do not contradict.)
3. A repeated use of a symbol by another author may employ the symbol in a clearer fashion.
4. The names of symbols are literal.
5. There is always a similarity between the symbol and what it represents.
6. Context and circumstance of those receiving the symbol aids in understanding the meaning of the symbol.

Examples - Ezek 37:1ff re dry bones; Jer 18:1-10 re potter’s wheel; Is 22:22 - key and the house of David (cf. Rev and Mt 16:18ff); Gen 49:10 - scepter will not depart from Judah; Zech 4-6 - Interpretations are given in the text, lamp stand and olive trees with oil represented God’s care and watchfulness, assuring Zerubbabel of success; Dan 2 and the successive kingdoms; a large part of the book of Revelation employs symbols
27. Miraculous Symbols

Def: [Note: Dungan’s breakdown appears a bit muddled at points.]: Examples - Gen 3:24 - cherubim and sword prevent return to the garden are not just physical preventions, they reflect God’s will to keep man from living in Eden forever cursed by sin; Ex 3:2 - the burning bush reflects God’s ceaseless glory; Ex 13:21 - the pillar of fire and pillar of clouds represents God’s abiding presence, both physically and providentially; Acts 2 - the miraculous speaking in tongues demonstrated that God was behind the events of that day

28. Material Symbols

Def: distinguishing between symbols and types can be difficult; symbols relate to the present, only relates to the future if the strength of the symbol holds; types start here and moves from where something is (its current condition) to where that thing will be (its later condition); types are more past and present oriented, especially as it relates to the past finding fulfillment in the present (or future)

Examples: Ex 25:16-21; 31:18 - the testimony of the tablets of the covenant (Deut 9:9) are the basis of God’s testament with Israel (Ex 35:27-28; Deut 4:13) - they serve as God's warning against sin; incense symbolized worship/prayers of God’s people; cherubim above mercy seat symbolized heavenly concern about worship/sacrifice; Is 7:4 - smoking firebrands of Rezin (Syria’s king) and Pekah (Israel’s king) [This illustration is used elsewhere ... of it DRD notes: “Of course, in the form in which this comes to us, it is a metaphor; but it should be remembered that a symbol is in action, or being what a metaphor is in speech.”]; Mt 26:26-28 - the elements of the last supper symbolized Christ’s body and blood; Gen 9:13 - the rainbow symbolized God’s covenant/promise

29. Visional Symbols

Def: Seen in visions, dreams, etc., visional symbols are used as object lessons to relate truth, a future event, etc.

Examples: Jer 1:11-12 - Jeremiah saw a rod of an almond tree, symbolizing God’s watchfulness; Jer 1:13-14 - Jeremiah saw a seething caldron that represented an outpouring of war/persecution that would come from the North; Gen 40:1-20 - Joseph’s dreams of cows and grain represented what God was providentially going to do with Joseph and his family; Acts 10:1ff - Peter had a vision of a sheet with unclean animals on it (according to the law) that he saw repeatedly in order to teach him that God no longer called those things unclean; the lesson was not about food restrictions as much as it was about lifting association with Gentile “restrictions”

30. Typology

Def: from the work tupos/tuptein, to strike (e.g., typewriter); “a person or thing symbolizing or exemplifying the ideal or defining characteristics of something” (NOAD); the term is used throughout the New Testament to indicate a part/counter-part or type/anti-type relationship between two key thoughts, usually one relating to the Old Testament (the type) and the other relating to the New (the anti-type)

Dungan re the use of types/antitypes in scripture (“...’s are verbatim):

1. “The original meaning of the word is not that which is generally found in the Scriptures.--It does not generally mean to strike, nor yet the result of striking. We say that we have seen a horse's foot in the clay, when we have only seen the impression of his foot, which would be the type. But when we take the track of the foot for the foot, we really have just the opposite of the foot. So if a man should strike his fist into a ball of putty, he would leave there, not his fist, but the type of it. Though this is not the meaning it generally has in the Bible, yet to remember this original import will be of service in the interpretation of types.”

2. “We must never expect the type and the antitype to be the same, for that would not be type and antitype, but identity. We shall find, therefore, that it is utterly impossible to find something in the antitype that is analogous to every feature of the type, or that the type has perfectly prefigured the antitype.”

3. “Let us remember that for one purpose generally the type has been selected, and, finding that purpose, the application will be easy.”
4. “It must foretell something.--When it is a representation of a present truth or duty, it is a symbol, and not a type.”

5. “It must not simply happen to represent something in the future and therefore do as an illustration--it must have been intended to represent that thought or fact when it was given. It must be as old in design as the antitype it presents.”

6. “The Scriptures should be made to interpret them, as far as possible; and with such definition we must be content.”

7. “While we are always safe in calling anything a type that is so denominated in the word of God, it is not necessary to suppose that we are limited to these statements. It would not be reasonable that they should have gone through the whole Bible, and descended upon every type.”

8. “As in the interpretation of symbols the similarity between type and the antitype will lead, in most cases to the true meaning.”

9. “Any thing, to be a type, must have been a real person, thing, event, or office.--Not so with the symbols. All the visional symbols were unreal--they were seen by assisted or superhuman sight--they were not present, though they appeared to be. But the type is real. Adam was a type of Christ; so were the sacrifices from the foundation of the world; the kings, priests, and prophets, in that they were anointed; the serpent in the wilderness, Solomon, and Joshua, etc. These were as real as the Saviour.”

10. “The antitype is always superior to the type.--If this were not the case, there would be no reason in the type. The type is always visible at the time it is given, because it is material; but the antitype contains divine or spiritual thought. However, many times there are two or more of them in one line, and one seems to look to another as its fulfillment; yet they are all looking to the final object for their meaning.”

11. “Sometimes figurative, language is employed in giving a typical event.--The figure should be treated as it would be if given under any other circumstances.”

12. “The rules for the interpretation of symbols apply as well to types.--They have several features in common. In so far as the type becomes a prophecy, history should be carefully examined, that we may have all the facts on both sides.”

Kinds of Typology In Scripture

1. People - more specifically a key office, characteristic, etc., of a person, makes the typology meaningful: Examples: types of Christ include Adam (Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15:22, 45); Moses (Deut 18:15-18; Acts 3:22-24); Melchizedek (Gen 14:18-20; Heb 5:5-10; 6:20; 7:1-17); David (Acts 13:33-35); Solomon (2 Sam 7:13-15; 1 Kgs 8:18-20); Zerubabbel (Hag 1:1-12; Zech 4:1-10; 6:12, 14); types of John include Elijah a type of John the immerser (Mal 3:1-6; Is 40:3ff; Mt 3:1ff)

2. Things - Example: John 3:14; Num 21:9 - the serpent in the wilderness and Christ; Titus 3:5-7; Heb 10:22 - laver stands for baptism

3. Institutions - Sabbath (Heb 4:1-10), Day of Atonement (Lev 16); Passover (Ex 12; 1 Cor 5:7); Pentecost (Lev 23:15-16; Acts 2); Feast of Tabernacles and the church (Zech 14:16); Jubilee (Lk 4:16-21); Tabernacle (Heb 9:9-10)


5. Conduct - Abraham’s life is pattern for all faithful (cf. Romans 4; Galatians 3); Isaiah 20:2-4 - Isaiah symbolized Israel’s weak spiritual condition)

6. Events - Crossing the red sea represented baptism (cf. 1 Cor 10:1-10); manna in the wilderness symbolized the bread of life/Christ (Jn 4:36); Noah’s ark patterned redemption via baptism (1 Peter 3:18-22)

7. Places - tabernacle as a symbol of the church/kingdom (Heb 7-10); Egypt reflected sin and bondage; Canaan represents rest (cf. Heb 9)