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Lofty and Figurative Language of the Bible.

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Lofty and Figurative Language of the Bible.

INTRODUCTION

Moses Joel Joseph and many other writers of Scripture not only use very figurative language very effectively, but also use lofty language and hyperboles (i.e., extreme colourful exaggeration and overstatements) to embellish and amplify a truth or to highlight God's power or to emphasize His glory, this is especially true in Bible prophecy. The following shines a spotlight on just a few examples of this type of figurative and lofty language.

THE SUN AND THE MOON AND THE ELEVEN STARS

- **Genesis 37:9:** Joseph dreamed another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.

The sun, the moon and the stars do not make obeisance to human men, in this vision the sun symbolizes Jacob and moon Rachel and the eleven stars symbolize Joseph's eleven brothers.

A PEOPLE CAME OUT OF EGYPT, AND COVERED THE FACE OF THE EARTH

- **Numbers 22:11:** Behold, a people has come out of Egypt, and it covers the face of the earth. Now come, curse them for me. Perhaps I shall be able to fight against them and drive them out (Num. 22:11).

No doubt as Balak looked out over the people of Israel they covered the earth as far as his eye could see, but they did not literally cover the face of the earth the writer is using lofty language to highlight how large the nation Israel is.

HEAR O YE HEAVENS, AND I WILL SPEAK; AND HEAR, O EARTH

- **Deuteronomy 32:1:** Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.

The heavens in this verse, refers to the religious rulers of Israel and the earth symbolizes all the congregation of Israel. Moses is using lofty language to depict how great the nation of Israel is before God when they are walking faithfully before Him.

LOCUSTS IN ABUNDANCE, AND THEIR CAMELS WERE WITHOUT NUMBER

- **Judges 7:12:** The Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance.

The armies of Midianites, the Amalekites and the East are likened to locusts the writer is using lofty language to highlight the fierce might and the great multitude of soldiers standing ready for battle. Locusts are a perfect picture of soldiers and warriors marching in their thousands because like locusts they destroy everything in their path and they are so large in numbers no one can stop them.

THE HEAVENS TREMBLED, AND THE EARTH SHOOK

- **2 Samuel 22:8-9:** Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations of the heavens trembled and quaked, because he was angry. ⁹Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him.

David spoke to the LORD the words of this song on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. David uses lofty language to describe the extreme victory of this battle on earth especially since, David's armies were much smaller than the armies of his enemy. The heavens trembled, and the earth shook means the battle was so great, the fear so intense, the destruction so enormous and the hundreds of thousands of human bodies that were left on the surface of the earth for birds to feast on is so vast that the only way to describe the alarm, panic, terror, horror and magnitude of the battle and the widespread destruction of the land and its cities is to say, the heavens trembled, and the earth shook out of its place.

David is using biblical lofty language to convey to the reader the magnitude and enormity of the awful events and the overwhelming killing, bloodshed and incalculable and gigantic number of deaths that had taken place on this horrific day.

THE LORD RODE ON A CHERUB; HE WAS SEEN ON THE WINGS OF THE WIND

- **2 Samuel 22:10-16:** the LORD bowed the heavens and came down; thick darkness was under his feet. ¹¹He rode on a cherub and flew; he was seen on the wings of the wind. ¹²He made darkness around him his canopy, thick clouds, a gathering of water. ¹³Out of the brightness before him coals of fire flamed forth. ¹⁴The LORD thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered his voice. ¹⁵And he sent out arrows and scattered them; lightning, and routed them. ¹⁶Then the channels of the sea were seen; the foundations of the world were laid bare, at the rebuke of the LORD, at the blast of the breath of his nostrils.

David spoke to the LORD the words of this song on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. David in this song presents the LORD as a fierce warrior fighting for Israel. David is using very figurative and lofty language to highlight the truth that God was with the armies of David. David in this song pictures the LORD as a mighty warrior riding on a cherub, but it is actually the armies of David fighting the battle against the armies of Saul and his enemies. David speaks of God fighting the battle because God was with the armies of David.

THE EARTH SPLIT BY THEIR NOISE

- **1 Kings 39-40:** There Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, "Long live King Solomon!" ⁴⁰And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by their noise.

Here we are told the earth split at the sound of Israel's joy and rejoicing; the earth does not split no matter how loud a noise a nation may make. The expression, "The earth split by the noise of their rejoicing" is lofty language to express and highlight the extreme joy of the people.

A PEOPLE AS NUMEROUS AS THE DUST OF THE EARTH

- **2 Chronicles 1:9-10:** O LORD God, let your word to David my father be now fulfilled, for you have made me (Solomon) king over a people as numerous as the dust of the earth.
¹⁰Give me now wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before this people, for who can govern this people of yours, which is so great?"

Here Solomon speaks of the people of Israel as being as numerous as the dust of the earth; obviously Israel has never had a population that would equal the particles of dust on the earth. He is using lofty language to highlight how large and mighty the nation Israel has become.

MAN'S EXCELLENCY MOUNTS UP TO THE HEAVENS, YET HE SHALL PERISH LIKE DUNG

- **Job 20:4-7:** Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; Yet he shall perish forever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he?

The expression, "His excellency mounts up to the heavens" refers to people attaining to great wealth, success, riches and fame in this mortal world and the words, "His head reaches into the clouds" means their pride and ego is extreme. The statement, "He will perish forever like his own dung," means that no matter how great a person's wealth, success, riches and fame is in this world they will grow old, wrinkle, decay and be laid in the grave never to rise again. It means their total life has been a waste like dung is the waste of those who excrete it. This is because they have given no thought to God and therefore all the excellency they have attained in this mortal world counts for nothing before the immortal invisible God who has the power of eternal life. It carries the idea that no matter how great a person who denies God attains to in power, riches, wealth and fame at the end of their life their pride and ego will bring them to an eternal end.

NOTICE: ever since mankind was placed upon earth, the wicked, the prideful and the deceptive have triumphed with joy, success and worldly riches, but the joy of the life of the wicked, the hypocrite and the pretender is but for a moment? Because eventually they will die and waste away like dung on the earth in contrast to those who have had faith in God being resurrected to eternal life and everlasting glory (it should always be kept in mind that compared to eternity our mortal life is but a twinkling of the eye).

STRONG BULLS OF BASHAN GAPED UPON ME AS A RAVENING AND A ROARING LION

- **Psalms 22:11-13:** Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help, many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.

Obviously, David is not talking about literal bulls; he is using very figurative and lofty language to highlight the strength, might and fierceness of his enemies. He speaks of his enemies as strong bulls with ravening mouths like lions because bulls are enormously strong and lions devour their prey without any sense of mercy or compassion.

THE WINDOWS OF HEAVEN ARE OPENED, THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE EARTH TREMBLE

- **Isaiah 24:17-18:** Terror and the pit and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth!
¹⁸He who flees at the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit, and he who climbs out of the pit shall be caught in the snare. For the windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble.

All of these terrors are a result of wickedness, greed and oppression upon the earth and its inhabitants turning away from God and denying His existence. It is very much like an earthly father who is supporting his son and paying the mortgage on his home. If the son says to his Father, he wants nothing to do with him because he wants to live his own life, then for that father to grant his son his desire he has to withdraw all the support he has been giving his son. When the inhabitants of the earth turn away from God and deny His existence, because they want to do their own thing and go their own way God like the earthly father withdraws His favour and blessings since they refuse to acknowledge Him and allows them to go their own way and do their own thing.

In this sense mankind's sin and denial of their creator (i.e., the global acceptance of the teaching all things were created by evolution and not God) results in God withdrawing His hand of blessing and favour and allowing mankind to follow the vain and prideful thoughts of their mind and do their own-thing. The words, "The windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble" is lofty language to highlight the enormous global terror and destruction that will come upon the earth and its inhabitants.

THE EARTH STAGGERS LIKE A DRUNKEN MAN

- **Isaiah 24:19-21:** The earth is utterly broken, the earth is split apart, the earth is violently shaken. ²⁰The earth staggers like a drunken man; it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again. ²¹On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth.

On that day refers to the day the earth staggers like a drunken man. In this vision Isaiah sees that the earth is in global turmoil, terror and extreme destruction, it is full of transgression and the world's financial system has collapsed and will not recover, no one will be able to escape the effects of this day of the LORD'S judgment. The populations of the world are thrown into a stupor and confusion so much so they are likened to a drunken man who doesn't even know his way home.

The expression, "The host of heaven" in this context refers to all those in high places of religious authority, the priests, religious leaders and teachers who are leading God's people astray and using their position of privilege for their own gain. Isaiah is saying that God will not only punish corrupt kings and rulers of nations, but also corrupt religious leaders in high positions of authority, power and influence.

THE MOON WILL BE CONFOUNDED AND THE SUN WILL BE ASHAMED

- **Isaiah 24:22-23:** They (the kings and religious leaders) will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished. ²³Then the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed, for the LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory will be before his elders.

The expression, "The moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed is lofty language that expresses the truth when the Lord Jesus Christ is reigning in Jerusalem on mount Zion his glory (light) will be so breathtakingly glorious even the moon and sun will feel that the light they give is nothing compared to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. The phrase, "The Host of Heaven" shows that it is religious leaders that are in focus and not secular kings and rulers. Isaiah's prophetic statement, "The LORD will punish the Host of Heaven" means that the LORD will punish Israel in Jerusalem and by extension all those throughout the world who are in religious places of authority and have great power and influence, but are using God and their followers for their own selfish gain. After the earth staggers like a drunken man and has been harvested (the wicked

separated from the righteous) and Christ returns people all over the earth are pictured singing songs of joy and praise to the Righteous One the Lord Jesus Christ, because of his royal majesty and glory.

THE RETURN OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

At God's appointed time the Lord Jesus Christ will return as, King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:11-16) to rule and reign from God's Holy City Jerusalem (on Mount Zion God's Holy Mountain) to establish God's Kingdom on earth during his millennial reign. The dead in Christ and the faithful, who are alive, will be gathered together to rule and reign as kings and priests with the Lord over those nations who are left outside the Holy City of God. Christ the King united with his people will not only bring peace to the Middle East, but establish God's Kingdom of steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness, joy and peace throughout the world and the glory of God will cover the earth. Jesus will do justice to the poor and oppressed, he will be a faithful and compassionate King forever. He will not allow anyone to strike terror in the earth, or use lies and deception to enlarge their own wealth and power. The land will abundantly produce and even the deserts will flourish. The animals will not feed on each other and even the lamb will be able to lie down with the wolf and everyone will eat of their own hands because all that they plant will produce. All nations the LORD has made will come and worship before the Lord Jesus Christ. They will glorify God's Name, proclaiming the LORD is great and does wondrous things and that He alone is God. The book of Revelation states:

- Jesus Christ, the faithful witness who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father is coming in glory and every eye shall see him, and they also who pierced him and all kindreds of the earth (Revelation 1:5-7).

And in Revelation chapter five we are told that:

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- Christ was slain, and by his blood he redeemed a people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation and made them a kingdom and priests to God and they shall reign on the earth (Revelation 5:9-10).

AFTER MANY DAYS THEY WILL BE PUNISHED

The words, "After many days they will be punished" has a prophetic and local application for Israel at the time of Isaiah, but it is also echoing another majestic event that will take place at the end of Christ's glorious Kingdom reign as King of kings and Lord of lords when God Himself descends to earth on a Great White Throne and the sea, death and hades (the grave) give up the dead. They stand before God and are judged according to what is written in the Book of Life and certain other heavenly books according to what they have done. Death and those counted unworthy are cast into the Lake of Fire a symbol of eternal destruction (i.e., total extinction) (also called the, Second Death) (Rev 20:11-15). Christ hands the Kingdom over to his heavenly Father and God is All in All and ETERNITY begins in all its fullness and majestic royal glory. For further information see titles:

- Kingdom of God (ON WEBSITE MENU).
- The Second or Great White Throne Judgment.

In, Resurrection (ON WEBSITE MENU).

AT THE SOUND OF THE NEIGHING OF THEIR STALLIONS THE WHOLE LAND QUAKES

- **Jeremiah 8:16:** "The snorting of their horses is heard from Dan; at the sound of the neighing of their stallions the whole land quakes. They come and devour the land and all that fills it, the city and those who dwell in it.

Jeremiah in this vision sees the Babylonian armies and their horses preparing for battle. They are pictured as being so vast in number that the snorting and neighing of their horses are spoken of as causing the ground to quake. Snorting and neighing of horses do not cause the ground to shake. Jeremiah is using lofty language to highlight the fierceness, strength and might and the vast multitudes of Babylonian warriors and their stallions that God is preparing to come against Judah because of their rebellion and gross sin.

A LITTLE HORN CAST THE HOST OF HEAVEN AND THE STARS TO THE GROUND

- **Daniel 8:9-10:** Out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land and it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them.

The little horn refers to a ruler who lacks power, but rises to great authority obviously no human king no matter how powerful can cast down literal stars and trample upon them. This is lofty language to highlight the enormous power this king has. The host of heaven refers to the religious leaders and rulers of Israel and the stars refer to the people of Israel. They are symbolized as the host of heaven and the stars because they are God's chosen people. The picture presented in this vision of Daniel's is of a ruler who rises to such great power he leads his armies against Israel and Jerusalem and has a great victory over many of God's chosen people.

THE CUTTING LOCUST, THE HOPPING LOCUST AND THE DESTROYING LOCUST

- **Joel 1:3-4:** Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation. ⁴What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten --- NOW GO TO JOEL CHAPTER TWO ---
²⁵I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you (Joel 2:25).

The locust, the cankerworm, the caterpillar and the palmerworm refer to secular armies that God has used to bring judgment upon Israel because of their gross wickedness and rebellion.

These armies are pictured as locusts for the following three reasons:

1. Locusts destroy everything in their path.
2. During a plague locust are so vast in number that no one can stop them.
3. Locust plagues were common in the Middle East (so the people understood the figurative meaning).

For these reasons' locusts are a perfect picture of fierce armies especially when the warriors of these armies are arrayed in their thousands on the battle field.

HORSEMEN COME FROM AFAR; THEY FLY LIKE AN EAGLE SWIFT TO DEVOUR

- **Habakkuk 1:7-8:** They (the Chaldeans) are dreaded and fearsome; their justice and dignity go forth from themselves. ⁸Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves; their horsemen press proudly on. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour.

Here the horses of the Chaldean armies are described as having the speed of leopards, the fierceness of wolves and flying like an eagle. Obviously, horses cannot run as fast as leopards, nor are they as fierce as wolves and they do not fly. Habakkuk is using lofty language to depict the savageness and fierceness and the power and might of the Chaldean armies.

ARMIES PILE UP EARTH AND TAKE IT

- **Habakkuk 1:9-11:** They (the Chaldeans) all come for violence, all their faces forward. They gather captives like sand. ¹⁰At kings they scoff, and at rulers they laugh. They laugh at every fortress, for they pile up earth and take it. ¹¹Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!"

Obviously, the Chaldean armies do not literally pile up dirt Habakkuk is using lofty language to highlight the fierceness, strength and might of these warriors. The expression "They pile up earth and take it" is a graphic picture of the armies of the Chaldeans conquering and destroying all their enemies and the destruction they leave behind them as they march through a city and destroy it.

THE ETERNAL MOUNTAINS WERE SCATTERED; THE EVERLASTING HILLS SANK LOW

- **Habakkuk 3:5-6:** His (God's) brightness was like the light; rays flashed from his hand; and there he veiled his power. ⁵Before him went pestilence, and plague followed at his heels. ⁶He stood and measured the earth; he looked and shook the nations; then the eternal mountains were scattered; the everlasting hills sank low. His were the everlasting ways I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.

Since mountains are not eternal or scattered; they represent the rulers and leaders of Israel and hills are not everlasting, nor do they sink low, they are representing the people of Israel. Habakkuk is using lofty language to depict how high Israel was before God and how far they have fallen from Him. Added to this Tents do not feel affliction it is the people who live in them and curtains do not tremble.

Habakkuk is using figurative and lofty language to depict how near the impending terror and destruction to come upon Israel is.

- **Habakkuk 3:8:** Was your wrath against the rivers, O LORD? Was your anger against the rivers, or your indignation against the sea, when you rode on your horses, on your chariot of salvation?

God is not angry at rivers or at the sea; the rivers and the sea represent people nor does God ride on horses and chariots they represent the armies God uses to bring about His judgment upon nations or upon Israel and His eternal plans and purposes. Habakkuk is using lofty language to dramatize and highlight God's wrath and His power.

GOD STRIPPED THE SHEATH FROM HIS BOW, CALLING FOR MANY ARROWS

- **Habakkuk 3:9:** You (God) stripped the sheath from your bow, calling for many arrows. Selah You split the earth with rivers.

Clearly God does not need a bow and arrow, yet He is pictured here as a mighty warrior with a bow and many arrows. The split-rivers represent the many divisions among the nation of Israel. Habakkuk is using lofty language to depict the power and strength of the armies God uses to bring about His judgment and eternal plans and purposes concerning Israel's salvation and by extension mankind's salvation.

THE MOUNTAINS WRITHED

- **Habakkuk 3:10:** The mountains saw you and writhed the raging waters swept on the deep gave forth its voice it lifted its hands on high ¹¹The sun and moon stood still in their place at the light of your arrows as they sped at the flash of your glittering spear.

Mountains do not have eyes nor do they squirm in fear, the sun and the moon do not stand still in their place and God does not fire arrows from a bow or throw spears. Habakkuk is using figurative and lofty language to emphasis and highlight the fact that rulers of great authority and influence and armies of great might, power and strength came to nothing.

GOD MARCHED THROUGH THE EARTH IN FURY AND CRUSHED THE NATIONS IN ANGER

- **Habakkuk 3:12:** You (God) marched through the earth in fury; you threshed the nations in anger. ¹³You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck. Selah.

God is pictured as marching through the earth destroying the rulers of the nations and their armies for the salvation of His people. God does not march over the earth, but his armies do. Habakkuk is using figurative and lofty language to highlight the truth that God uses human armies to achieve His eternal purposes. Sometimes God uses Israel to bring judgment on secular nations while at other times when the land of Israel was full of gross wickedness and rebellion God used secular nations to bring His judgment upon them. The following are few examples of God using secular nations:

- God used His servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to punish the people of Judah and bring their land to ruin and waste for seventy-years (Jer. 25:1-2, 8-9) (see also Jeremiah chapter 49, 50, 51, 52).
- God used Babylon to bring about His judgment against Tyre (Ezek. 26:7).
- God actually paid Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon wages because he and his armies laboured and worked so hard for the LORD against Tyre and received nothing for their labour. The wages God paid Nebuchadnezzar was the land of Egypt and its wealth (Ezekiel 29:17-21).
- God not only used the king of Babylon to bring about His judgment upon Egypt, but also strengthened the armies of Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek. 30:10) (Ezek. 30:24-25).
- God calls Cyrus (the secular king of Persia) His anointed shepherd and Isaiah pictures the LORD holding Cyrus's right hand while he opens all doors that no man can shut so that Cyrus is able to subdue all nations (Isaiah 45:1, 28). Added to this the LORD says, even though Cyrus does not know the Him He calls Cyrus by name and will equip him and go before him (Isaiah 45:2-6).

These verses very clearly show that God not only uses secular kings, nations, and armies to bring about His judgment, but also uses them to bring about His eternal plans and purposes.

THOUGH ISRAEL IS AS THE SAND OF THE SEA, ONLY A REMNANT WILL BE SAVED

- **Romans 9:27:** Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved."

Obviously, the population of Israel is not literally as the sand of the sea, in fact they are one of the smallest nations on earth. The expression, "They are as the sand of the sea," is lofty language to highlight the truth that amongst the majority of the population of Israel only a small number (the faithful) will be saved in comparison to the vast number of the unfaithful and unbelieving who will not.

WILL YOU CAPERNAUM BE EXALTED TO HEAVEN?

- **Romans 10:15:** You, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.

Obviously, no nation is literally exalted to heaven Jesus is using lofty language to emphasis the enormous and extreme pride of the city of Capernaum.

SUMMARY

These verses (there are many others) show that many times Bible writers very skilfully and very beautifully use figurative language and colourful exaggerations and overstatements to amplify the story, the battle, the message, the moral, the teaching or to highlight God's power and glory, or to dramatize the event in focus.