**Merismos**

In English, the word merism is used to represent merismos. It is a literary device that uses an abbreviated list or sample to suggest or represent the whole. The most common type of merism cites the extreme poles of a list or spectrum to suggest everything in between, although the figure also can be used to refer to more extensive, but not exhaustive, lists in general.

The figure of speech merismos comes from the Greek word *merizō* which means “to divide,” which derives from the noun *meros* (“part” or “share”). Merismos describes a whole thing by identifying some of its parts. An object, idea, or experience can be divided up into the various parts that are added together to make it up. This figure increases the emphasis and amplifies the sense in order to express totality or completeness. Nowadays, we hear common merisms such as “lock, stock, and barrel” meaning “everything.”

A sub-classification of merismos is polarmerismos which describes the thing by using two contrasting extremes. For example, Deuteronomy 28:6 – “Blessed you will be when you come in; blessed you will be when you go out.” God is saying that Israel will be blessed in all its undertakings. When God takes the time to describe something in more detail using this figure of speech, He is indicating its importance and asking us to reflect on the broader elements of the subject beyond what is simply stated. Following are more examples of merismos and polarmerismos:

1. Ezekiel 36:4 – “therefore, you mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord Yahweh: This is what the Lord Yahweh says to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes and to the cities that are forsaken…”  
     
   God speaks to the mountains of Israel first, but then He includes the hills, the ravines, the valleys, the desolate wastes, and the cities that are forsaken. God is emphasizing how complete the blessing will be for the land of Israel.
2. Psalm 139:2-3 – “You yourself know when I sit down and when I stand up.  
   You discern what I think from afar. You measure out where I go and when I rest,  
   yes, you are acquainted with all my road.”  
     
   In the two phrases, “when I sit down and when I stand up,” and “where I go and when I rest,” the psalmist is saying that God knows his inner life as well as his actions.
3. Proverbs 14:10 – “The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not take part in *its* joy.”  
     
   The mention of “bitterness” and “joy,” which are opposite poles of the emotional spectrum, refers to all the human emotions. People may have similar experiences, but only the person and God really know the depths of sorrow or the heights of joy in the person’s heart.

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[For merismos, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 435.]