**Aposiopesis**

Aposiopesis (from the Greek term *apo* “away” or “from” + *slope*, “silence”) means “to be silent abruptly” or “to break off suddenly in speech,” in a way that creates a rhetorical impact, emphasizing the sudden and incomplete nature of the silence. The use of “*apo”* helps underscore this notion of separation or movement away in the act of becoming silent. Aposiopesis is used when a person stops speaking in the middle of their sentence due to emotion or for effect. This figure of speech is also known as “sudden silence.”

A modern example of aposiopesis occurs when a parent is driving and there are children in the back seat who start bickering and fighting and the parent quickly looks back and loudly says, “If I have to stop this car and come back there….” The parent does not need to finish the sentence, the tone of voice and the fierce look on the face make the unstated point that there will be serious consequences if the fighting does not stop.

* In Genesis 3:22, God stops speaking in mid-sentence: “Yahweh God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and also take of the tree of life and eat and live forever….’” The sentence abruptly stops, and the thought is not completed. The emphasis on the abrupt stop points the reader toward the unspoken consequences of living forever in a fallen state. Such consequences are too horrific to express.
* In Psalm 6:3, the words express profound grief. “My soul is also very troubled. But you, O Yahweh, how long...?” The psalmist is troubled, and too emotional to finish his thought.
* In Acts 23:9, when the Apostle Paul stood before the Sanhedrin, the Pharisees started to come to his defense: “We find no evil in this man. And if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him….” But for unstated reasons, the sentence was never completed. Either the Pharisees were afraid to express their thought, or the loud reaction of the crowd shut down the people speaking.

Aposiopesis usually occurs at times of uncertainty, or in times of great emotion or intensity as seen in the examples above. In Scripture, the figure of speech imparts strength and force to the language and is intended to catch and fix the reader’s attention.

To see more uses of and commentary about figures of speech used in the Bible, use the [REV search tool](http://revisedenglishversion.com/search), and articles on figures of speech can also be found at: [stfi.org/tag/figures/](https://stfi.org/tag/figures/).

[For aposiopesis, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 151-54.]