**Antonomasia**

The figure of speech antonomasia is made up of two Greek words, *anti* (“against, instead of”) and *onoma* (“name”). The verb form is *antonomazein*, “to call by a new name”. Thus, antonomasia involves a “name change,” in which a title, epithet, or descriptive phrase is substituted for a person’s proper name. The figure also occurs when a person is called by another person’s name in order to ascribe characteristics of the other person to the one being addressed. Antonomasia helps make negative or positive characteristics that are attributed to a person appear more pronounced or prominent. Here are some examples:

1. In 2 Kings 9:31, the wicked queen Jezebel calls Jehu by the name of “Zimri.” Zimri was a king of Israel who became king by killing the reigning king, Elah, but then he only reigned seven days before he himself was dead. By calling Jehu, “Zimri,” Jezebel was threatening Jehu that his reign as king would be short if he killed her by implying that he would be like Zimri who reigned only seven days after killing Elah.
2. Isaiah 1:10 is another example of attributing a negative characteristic where Judah is called “Sodom” and “Gomorrah.” By calling Judah those infamous names, God is importing the idea that Judah is full of sin and is no better than those wicked cities.
3. In Isaiah 62:2-4, God promises Jerusalem a good name: 2“…and you will be called by a new name that the mouth of Yahweh will name *you*.” 4“You will no more be termed “Forsaken,” nor will your land any more be termed “Desolate:” but you will be called “My delight is in her,” and your land “Married,” for Yahweh delights in you, and your land will be married.”  
     
   Antonomasia vividly describes the condition of Judah when it had been taken captive by Babylon. Judah was called “Forsaken” and “Desolate” and was like a sinful wife abandoned by her husband and left barren and desolate. But God provides hope and speaks of a day when His relationship with them will be renewed. Israel’s new name, “Married,” signifies God’s delight in all His people, and the land and the people will be restored and enjoy prosperity.
4. Ezekiel 34:23 – “I will set up one shepherd over them, and he will feed them, even my servant David; he will feed them, and he will be their shepherd.” Here, the verse is a messianic prophecy about Jesus, the coming “shepherd” that God will set over His people. Jesus is called “David” because the reign of David was glorious, and David was also a man after God’s own heart. By calling this Shepherd/King to come “David,” God is describing him as possessing similar qualities and characteristics as David, who was the type of the coming Messiah.
5. Matthew 17:10 – “And his disciples asked him, saying, ‘Then why do the experts in the law say that Elijah must come first?’” The prophet Elijah was prophesied about in Malachi 4:5 but the Jews of Jesus’ time did not realize this was speaking of another “Elijah” who would turn out to be John the Baptist. The name “Elijah” was attributed to John the Baptist because of the similarities of the two men, for example, both John and Elijah preached a message of repentance and restoration for God’s people.
6. Jesus refers to himself by the name “the Teacher” in Matthew 26:18 – “And he [Jesus] said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, my time is near. I *am to* keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’”  
     
   John 11:17-37 is the record of Jesus arriving at the home of Mary and Martha after the death of Lazarus. 28“And when she [Martha] had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister, saying in secret, ‘The Teacher is here, and is calling for you.’”  
     
   “The Teacher” was a title that Jesus was called by his disciples. The Gospels have many references to Jesus being a teacher: Matthew 8:19; Mark 1:22; 2:13; 4:38; 10:1; Luke 19:47; John 13:14, 20:16.

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 antonomasia, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 682-83.]