**Metonymy**

Metonymy is the figure of speech by which a thing or concept is referred to by the name of something closely associated with that thing or concept. Metonymy comes from *meta* (“change”) and *onoma* (“name”). Metonymy enables writers to express a word or thought in a different way by using a closely related word or thought. For example, “the White House,” is often used to refer to the United States government, or the word “dish” can be used to refer to the entire meal that is served. Sometimes a word that originally began as a metonymy becomes so commonly used that it becomes another definition of the word. A possible example of this is the word for “bread” in the Bible. It was the staple food of the biblical culture and became commonly used for “food.”

Here are some examples of metonymy.

1. Genesis 25:23 - “And Yahweh said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from your belly will be divided. One people will be stronger than the other people, and the elder will serve the younger.’”  
     
   “Nations” is here put for the two infants, Jacob and Esau, whose progeny would become two different nations. Jacob fathered the tribes of Israel, and Esau’s descendants became the Edomite nation.
2. 2 Sam. 3:12 – Abner said to David, “my hand will be with you to bring all Israel around to you!”  
     
   In this case, “hand” is put by metonymy for what is given by the hand, which is help.
3. Isaiah 45:22 – “Look to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other.”  
     
   The “ends of the earth” is put by metonymy for all the people who live on earth, even those who live in the farthest places away. God’s message to every person on earth is to look to Him to be saved.
4. Matthew 1:21 – “And she will give birth to a son, and you are to call his name Jesus, for it is he who will save his people from their sins.”  
     
   In this context, to be saved from sin is multifaceted. The major emphasis is a metonymy of effect, where “sin” is put for the effect of sin, i.e., the consequences of sin, which is death. Also, however, Jesus saves people from sin by changing their lives so they do not continually live in sin and suffer its consequences. He also brings forgiveness from sin so people do not have the weight of sin on their shoulders and its condemnation.
5. 2 Corinthians 3:15 – “Yes, to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart.”  
     
   Moses, the person, is not read but the books of Moses (i.e., Genesis through Deuteronomy) are read. Thus, Moses as the author is used to refer to his writings.
6. Jeremiah 22:13 – “who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing and does not give him his wages.”  
     
   In this case, the translation “wages” is literally “work” in the Hebrew text, but “work” is put by metonymy for that which is gained by work, which is “wages” or “pay,” which is why most English Bibles read that way.
7. Revelation 1:12 – “And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands,”  
     
   The “voice” is put in place of the person speaking. Without the metonymy, we would say, “I turned to see the one who was speaking to me.” But the figure is a poetic way to depict someone speaking to John.

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 metonymy, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 538-608.]