**Synecdoche**

The figure of speech synecdoche is a figure of exchange, whereby a part is put for the whole, the whole for a part, the species for the genus, the genus for the species, or the name of the material for the thing made. The word is derived from Greek *sunekdochē*: *syn-* (“with”) *+ ek-* (“from”) *+ dechomai* (“to receive”), literally “a receiving from together.” Thus, the figure describes one word that receives something from another word by being associated with it in some way.

Synecdoche refers to a way of describing something by using just one of its parts. It can also be used in the opposite way, using a whole to describe one element. Synecdoche calls special attention to a specific aspect or quality of the object as a whole, describing things in a richer, more complex way and giving deeper meaning to common ideas. Some examples we might hear today are, “hired hands” to refer to workers, “wheels” to refer to a vehicle, “boots” to refer to soldiers, or “ivories” for piano keys. As a whole put for the part, we might say, “Los Angeles beat Cleveland” using the name of the city to refer to the players on the teams. Here are some examples of synecdoche.

1. Proverbs 10:8 – “The wise heart accepts commandments, but the one who is foolish with his lips will come to ruin.”  
     
   The wise heart is put by synecdoche for the “wise person.” This also parallels “the foolish person” in the second part of the verse.
2. Proverbs 16:1 – “The plans of the heart *belong* to people, but the answer of the tongue *comes* from Yahweh.”  
     
   The part, the tongue, is put for the whole, i.e., the whole person. The answer a person’s tongue gives is an answer that the person themselves gives. And this answer is said to come from Yahweh because wisdom and godliness are from Yahweh.
3. Isaiah 7:2 – “When it was reported to the house of David, saying, ‘Syria is allied with Ephraim,’ his heart trembled, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the forest tremble with the wind.”  
     
   “Ephraim” was the most prominent and powerful tribe in the nation of “Israel,” so in this context, “Ephraim” stands for the whole country of Israel.
4. Acts 1:1 – “The first account I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach.”  
     
   The meaning of “all” here refers to “all that was needed,” that is, everything that was necessary to convey about Jesus. John 21:25 makes it clear that there is no way “all” that Jesus did could be recorded. We see a similar use of the word “all” in Matthew 3:5 – “Then Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the regions around the Jordan, were going out to him,” meaning “a large portion.”
5. Ephesians 5:18 – “And do not get drunk on wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled with the spirit;”  
     
   Although this verse specifically speaks of being drunk on “wine,” the word “wine” is being used for all kinds of intoxicating things.

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 synecdoche, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 613-56.]