Adelphos

*Adelphos* (#80 ἀδελφός) is a masculine singular noun meaning “brother.” The word *adelphos* in its various forms occurs approximately 343 times in the New Testament and approximately 649 times in the LXX. *Adelphos* has a number of usages including:

* A natural brother of the same mother and father (Cain and Abel, Gen. 4:2; Jacob and Esau, Gen. 25:26; Moses and Aaron, Exodus 4:14).
* A half brother from either the mother or father; Joseph and his half brothers (Gen. 37:2).
* Relative, near kinsman. LXX translators sometimes used *adelphos* for the Hebrew word for “brother” (*ach*), which occasionally was used to refer to a more remote descendent, e.g., Laban, Jacob’s uncle was referred to as Jacob’s brother (Gen. 29:12, 15); Abram’s nephew Lot was said to be Abram’s brother (Gen. 14:14, 16).
* Tribesman (Exodus 2:11; 2 Sam. 19:12).
* To indicate ethnic relationship, i.e., fellow countryman (Acts 2:29; 3:17, 22; Rom. 9:3).
* Neighbor, fellow human being (Matt. 5:22-24; 7:3).
* Apostles and elders (John 20:17; Acts 15:23).
* A person intimately related by clan or friendship (Matt. 12:50). This usage of *adelphos* to describe a person’s spiritual relationship with another person carries over into the early church (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:1; 16:12; 2 Cor. 1:1; Philemon 16; James 2:15; 1 John 2:9).
* A member of the Christian community (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 16:12; Phil. 2:25; 1 Peter 5:12; 2 Peter 3:15).

Words related to *adelphos* include *adelphē* (“sister”); *pseudádelphos* (“false brother”); *adelphotés* (“brotherhood”); *philadelphos* (“brotherly love”).

*Adelphoi*

The Greek word translated “brothers and sisters” is *adelphoi*, the plural of “brother,” *adelphos* (#80 ἀδελφός). As seen above, the word “brother” (singular), has a number of meanings in the Hebrew and Greek languages, and many of those meanings also apply when speaking of “brothers” (plural), but with a notable addition: “brothers” was often used generally both in secular Greek and biblical Greek for “brothers and sisters.”

The plural usage of “brothers” in Greek is similar to how we might colloquially say, ‘Hey guys, listen up.’ If the room is filled with men and women, nobody would assume that the speaker is only addressing the men. It is just a colloquial way to speak to a group. Although, the difference lies in the fact that *adelphos* is a more intimate term that was used to refer to a group of people that the author or speaker was close to, relationally or spiritually.

Since both men and women are typically in view when the plural *adelphoi* is used, it is more appropriate to render it as “brothers and sisters.” (cf. Rom. 1:13; 1 Cor. 1:10; Gal. 1:2, 11; Eph. 6:23; Phil. 3:13; James 3:1; 1 John 3:13). However, in some contexts the singular form, “brother,’ also applies to both male and female (cf. 2 Thess. 3:15; 1 John 2:9, 11; 3:10; 4:20, 21). An exception would be in phrases such as “men and brothers” (Acts 1:16; 2:29), or “men, brothers, and fathers” (Acts 7:2). Women may be present in these contexts, but only the men are being addressed directly, as per the customs of that time.

In the past, it was more acceptable in English Bibles to refer to a mixed group of men and women as “brothers” and then expect the ministers to teach that the Greek word “brothers” often included women. But today men and women in mixed audiences are almost always each specifically mentioned, and therefore the translation “brothers” can cause confusion and/or cause people to think that women are being purposely excluded, whereas “brothers and sisters” is clear.

However, adding “and sisters” for clarity can be problematic for translators. When we translate the Greek word “brothers” as “brothers and sisters,” we move the responsibility for deciding what “brothers” means from the reader to the translator. Most of the time the translator can make the proper decision because the context is clear as to whether “brothers” refers to a group of just men or if it refers to a mixed group of men and women. However, there are times when this is not clear, and in those cases, translators must use their best judgment. To complicate matters, there are times when women would have been present and listening, such as in a synagogue or in the Temple, but the speaker only addressed the men, as was customary. We can often see this when the speaker says, “Men, brothers,….” (cf. Acts 1:16; 2:29; 13:26, 38; 22:1; etc., but many English translators felt that “men, brothers” was an idiom and left “men” out. However, when it is in the Greek text it is important in helping us understand who the speaker was specifically addressing).

Some modern translations use a mixed-gender generalization such as “believers” or “Christians” when “brothers” is in the Greek text. Although those generalizations do include both genders, they miss the reason why God put “brothers” in the text in the first place, which was to keep reminding Christians that they are indeed brothers and sisters, and should have special care and love for each other. Christians should view each other as family and “brothers and sisters” of each other because we have the same Father, God.

Through the ages, family has had an important meaning backed by special relationships. “Family” meant special care, special concern, and special love. Since for most of history, police forces did not exist and there was no social security or Medicare (health insurance for the elderly), “family” was the only protection and support a person had. No wonder Psalm 127:4-5 (HCSB) says, “Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons born in one’s youth. Happy is the man who has filled his quiver with them. Such men will never be put to shame when they speak with their enemies at the city gate.”

Sadly, Christians often treat other Christians like the enemy instead of family, but we are to be “especially good” to the household of Faith (Gal. 6:10). Also, the meaning of “brothers and sisters” sometimes becomes diluted or confused by people who teach that “everyone is a child of God.” That is not true. Christians are actually “born” of God by virtue of the New Birth (1 Pet. 1:3, 23; Titus 3:5; James 1:18; 1 John 5:1). Non-Christians have not been “born” of God and are not His birth children. They are His creations, but not His birth children. It is because Christians have been specifically “born of God” that we are truly brothers and sisters as the Bible refers to us.

Closely related to Christians being referred to as brothers and sisters because we are born of God is the understanding that when the Bible uses the phrase “one another,” it is referring to fellow Christians. Christians are to love “one another,” serve “one another,” etc., but in those cases, the phrase “one another” refers to fellow Christians, not just anybody and everybody in the world (see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another”).

Amphibologia

Amphibologia is a figure of speech describing an ambiguity of expression where a word, phrase, or sentence can convey two or more meanings or interpretations, all of which are true. The meanings do not contradict each other, but layer one truth upon another, bringing a poetic richness to the biblical message.

Amphibologia is a transliteration of the ancient Greek word which is made up of three parts: *amphi* (“on both sides”), *bolos* (“a throw”), and *logos* (“a word”). Thus, amphibologia is a word, phrase, or sentence that is thrown to both sides.

When a word has two or more meanings in the original language, Bible translators must decide which meaning to bring out or emphasize in their translation. This dilemma is one of the many reasons that Bible versions differ. A Hebrew or Greek speaker, reading or listening in his or her native language, would instinctively recognize the amphibology, but a person without knowledge of Greek or Hebrew, reading an English translation, only sees one part of the picture and does not detect a double meaning, which usually has to be communicated in a commentary entry. There are many examples of amphibologia in the Bible. Here are some examples:

1. Genesis has the record of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Genesis 2:25 says: “They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” Then, Genesis 3:1 says, “Now the serpent was more crafty than any animal of the field Yahweh God had made.” The word “naked” and the word “crafty” are the same word in the original Hebrew, and the Hebrew root word carries both meanings. In the uses in Genesis 2:26 and 3:1 the two different meanings—“naked” and “crafty”—are easily recognized and separated, but in Genesis 3:7 and 3:10 the Hebrew text combines both meanings because Adam and Eve recognized they were both “naked” and “crafty.”
2. The Hebrew word “satisfied” is *saba* (#07646 שָׂבַע) in Prov. 14:14, “The one who is disloyal in *his* heart will be satisfied from his *own* ways, but the good man *will be satisfied* from his deeds.” *Saba* refers to eating or drinking enough to be satisfied. However, it also has the negative meaning of eating to the point of being overfull and then getting sick or getting to the point that the food is revolting, and in that sense, it is used metaphorically for being repaid for what one has done. The context determines which meaning *saba* has, but in Proverbs 14:14, both meanings apply (also see commentary on Prov. 1:31).
3. Amphibologia often occurs in prophecies. Many prophecies have a fulfillment at the time the prophecy was spoken and a later fulfillment as well. Hosea 11:1 is a good example: “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.” Here in Hosea, the prophecy is referring to Israel’s exodus “out of Egypt.” However, this scripture was also fulfilled when Jesus’ parents took him “out of Egypt” and back to Nazareth (cf. Matt. 2:15). Both meanings are true and the figure of speech adds great richness to the text.
4. Ephesians 6:17 says, “and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Here, “the sword of the Spirit” has both the force of a genitive of possession, i.e., that it is “the Spirit’s sword” not our sword, and also the force of a genitive of origin, i.e., “the sword given to us by the Spirit,” to use in our present lives.
5. In Numbers 25:1, the children of Israel “began to prostitute themselves with the daughters of Moab.” In this context, “prostitute themselves” involves both physical prostitution, having sex with the women, and also spiritual prostitution because the Moabite women pulled the Israelites into the worship of their pagan gods.
6. The Greek verb *epechō* (#1907 ἐπέχω) in Philippians 2:16 means either “to hold forth” or “to hold fast.” God shows us with amphibologia that we shine to others when we hold fast to the truth, and we shine to others when we hold forth the truth.
7. Colossians 3:14 says, “And above all these things *put on* love, which is the bond of completeness.” The Greek word *sundesmos* (“bond”) that unites is also the bond that leads to completeness.

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[For amphibologia, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 804-06.]

Anacoluthon

Anacoluthon (from the Greek term *an* + *akolouthos*, meaning “not following”), occurs when there is a break in the normal grammatical structure of a sentence. Scholars differ widely in how to classify the many various aspects of anacoluthon. However, one type called “suspension of the subject” happens when a person stops speaking before they finish their sentence. Another type called “digression” happens when a person changes the subject in the middle of a sentence or speech, and when they return to the original thought, it is concluded differently than would have naturally been expected. Other classifications include mid-sentence changing of verb tense, number, gender, or other aspects of grammar and syntax.

Below are three examples of “suspension of the subject.”

* In Matthew 9:6, Jesus leaves a sentence unfinished when he says, “But so that you know the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins…” but he completes the thought by his actions when he heals the paralyzed man (see also Mark 2:10). The unexpected pause fixes the attention of the listener upon the speaker, causing anticipation. The result is that Jesus’ words and actions create a double impact, emphasizing his authority from God to both forgive and minister physical healing.
* In Mark 11:30-32, when the religious leaders challenged Christ’s authority, he counter-questioned them: 30 “Was the baptism of John from heaven or of human *origin*? Answer me.” 31And they discussed among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’ 32But if we say, ‘Of human *origin*…’” (they were afraid of the people because they all considered John to be a prophet).” The abrupt stop in verse 32 indicates that the Jews did not know how to move forward in their response to Jesus, so they simply stopped speaking in mid-sentence.
* In Revelation 3:9, the speaker halts the sentence before its completion with “…who say they are Jews, and are not, but are lying…,” introducing an anacoluthon. However, this interruption serves as a deliberate stylistic choice, leading to a new, conclusive statement: “Look, I will make them come and bow down at your feet and know that I have loved you.”

Anacoluthon 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.

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[For anacoluthon, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 720-24.]

Anaphora

Anaphora is a figure of speech that comes from two Greek words, *ana* (“again”) and *pherō* (“to bring or carry”), and it means a “carrying back,” thus, repeating something over again. It occurs when successive sentences or phrases begin with the same word or words, thus calling one’s attention back to what is being emphasized. Here are some examples:

1. Matthew 5:3-11 – The first nine verses of the Sermon on the Mount, known as the Beatitudes, start with the words “Blessed are….” The emphasis here is God’s will for His people to be blessed. The anaphora also invokes a call to action for the listener. God wants His people to be humble and obey Him.
2. Psalm 136 – The first three verses begin with “Give thanks.” Eight verses begin with “to him.” Such a pattern of rhythm and repetition engages the reader in a way that holds their attention and helps them remember.
3. Psalm 13:1-2 – Four times the sentence begins with “How long…?”
4. Psalm 29 – The first two verses begin with “Render to Yahweh.” Then five more verses begin with “Yahweh’s voice.”
5. Psalm 150 – “Praise Yah!” is repeated three times; “Praise him” nine times.
6. Ecclesiastes 3:2-8 – One of the most famous passages of Scripture, each verse begins with “a time to,” (a time to be born, a time to die, …plant, …uproot, …kill, …heal, …tear down, …build up, …weep, …laugh, …mourn, …dance, …cast away, …gather, etc.) inspiring contemplation on the importance of every facet of life.
7. Philippians 2:1 – “Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort from love, if any fellowship based on the spirit, if any compassion or mercy,” The “if” at the beginning of each phrase magnifies the significance of each point.

The repetition of the same word at the beginning of successive clauses may appear redundant at first, but when the figure is understood, the reader can perceive the additional weight and emphasis that is being added to the statements.

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[For anaphora, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 199-205.]

Antanaclasis

The figure of speech antanaclasis is “word clashing.” Antanaclasis means “reflection” or “echo” and is composed of three Greek words, *anti* (“against”), *ana* (“up”), and *klasis* (“breaking”), hence it connotes “a breaking up against.” The figure occurs when a single word or phrase is repeated more than once, but the meanings of the words do not stay consistent. For example, consider how the word “tie” is used with two different meanings in the question, “How do you tie a tie?”

Here are four examples of antanaclasis.

1. Isaiah 58:10 – “if you pour out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light will rise in the darkness and your gloom will be as noonday;”  
     
   Here the word “soul” is first put for the feelings of kindness, liberality, and charity; and then it is used for the “soul,” the person himself, who is in trouble.
2. 1 Samuel 1:24 – “Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bulls and one ephah of flour and a skin-bottle of wine, and brought him to the house of Yahweh in Shiloh. And the child was *just* a child.”  
     
   In this verse, the word “child” has two different meanings. The child (little boy) was a child (very young). By utilizing the figure of speech antanaclasis, emphasis is put on the great sacrifice that Hannah made in taking her child Samuel to the Tabernacle when he was of a very young age.
3. Luke 9:60 – “But he said to him, ‘Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim everywhere the Kingdom of God.’”  
     
   The first use of the word “dead” in this verse refers to those who are spiritually dead but physically alive. The latter use refers to those people who have died and are physically dead. The purpose of Jesus’ use of antanaclasis here was to teach that we need to be wise with our time and choices, and be willing to make tough choices and sacrifices to follow the Lord.
4. Romans 9:6b – “For they are not all Israel, who are *descended* from Israel,”  
     
   A person born an Israelite was not automatically saved but had to have trust in God to get everlasting life. The first use of “Israel” in this verse refers to the true spiritual seed of Israel while the second use denotes Israel according to the flesh, the natural descendants of Jacob, who was later called Israel.

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[For antanaclasis, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 286-293.]

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.

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[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.]

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.

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[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.]

Asterismos

Asterismos, meaning “indicating,” is the rhetorical term for a word that is used to call attention to what follows. The Greek word *astēr* means “star.” An asterisk or “little star” can be put beside a word in order to mark it as important. Attention-getting words such as “look,” “hey,” or “listen up,” direct the focus of the listener to the point one is about to make. The asterismos is not logically related to the context of the sentence; it is a preface used for the purpose of drawing attention to subsequent words.

The Hebrew word *hinneh* is a demonstrative particle or interjection, literally “lo!” or “behold!” Here are some examples:

1. Genesis 1:31 – “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day”.
2. Genesis 50:18 – “His brothers also went and fell down before his [Joseph’s] face and they said, ‘Behold, we are your servants.’”
3. Isaiah 7:14 – “Therefore the Lord himself will give you all a sign. Behold, the young woman is pregnant and about to bear a son, and you, *young woman,* will call his name Immanuel.”
4. Psalm 133:1 – “Behold, how good and how delightful it is for brothers to live together in unity!”

The Greek words *idou* and *ide* are also used as demonstrative particles to draw our attention to something that is coming next. Translations such as “Look!,” “Behold!,” and “See!” are used idiomatically, and thus would be heard by someone listening as an attention grabber and not a literal command to actually look at something. In some contexts, the asterismos is gentler as in “remember” or “consider.” Here are some examples:

1. Matthew 1:20 – “But while he was thinking about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to favorably accept Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit.” In this verse, the word “behold” is meant to grab one’s attention.
2. Matthew 3:17 – “and behold, a voice *came* out of heaven, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’” “Behold” here emphasizes the solemn proclamation made by God about his Son, Jesus Christ.
3. Matthew 28:7 – “and go quickly and tell his disciples he was raised from the dead. And look, he is going before you into Galilee. You will see him there. Look, I have told you.” The “look” and the “see” emphasize the fact of Jesus’ resurrection and the importance of the message the women are to deliver.
4. Matthew 28:20 – teaching them to obey all that I commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Here “remember” is calling our attention to Jesus’ words in a comforting and encouraging way.

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[For asterismos, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 926.]

Hendiadys

Hendiadys is a figure of speech that comes from the Greek *heis* (“one”), *dia* (“by”), and *duo* (“two”), thus meaning “one [idea] by means of two [words].” The figure occurs when two words connected by “and” express one single yet more complex idea. For example, “This room is nice and warm;” meaning “nicely warm” or “warm, and *nicely* warm, too.” The words in the phrase “safe and sound” when combined as hendiadys convey something more and slightly different than they do by themselves. Most phrases that combine words with “and” are not a hendiadys. For example, “here and now” is not hendiadys because one word does not necessarily modify the other. Certain criteria must be met for a phrase to qualify as a hendiadys. Below are several criteria to help discern if a phrase is likely a hendiadys.

1. The two words are joined together by the conjunction “and.”
2. The two words must be the same part of speech (i.e., two nouns, two verbs, etc.)
3. If the words are nouns, they will be in the same case.
4. The two terms must not be opposites of each other or opposed in any way.
5. The two terms, not fully synonymous, will together work as a single unit of meaning.
6. The words must be able to have a certain relation to each other; one will indicate a property of the other or be associated with it in some way. For example, in Acts 3:6, when Peter said “silver and gold have I none,” he could not have meant “silvery gold.”
7. The two words must logically fit the context and scope of Scripture.

Sometimes it can be difficult to determine whether a phrase is an actual rhetorical device, simply a necessary grammatical construction of the ancient speaker, or a figure other than hendiadys. Here are a few examples of hendiadys.

1. Genesis 4:4 – “Abel also brought some of the firstborn of his flock and of its fat. Yahweh respected Abel and his offering,”  
     
   Meaning, that Abel brought “the firstlings of his flock, yes — and the fattest ones too,” or “the fattest firstlings of his flock,” with the emphasis on “fattest.”
2. Genesis 19:24 – “Then Yahweh rained on Sodom and on Gomorrah sulfur and fire—coming from Yahweh out of heaven.”  
     
   God rained “burning sulfur” down from heaven. This phrase could also mean “fire and burning sulfur.” The fire and the sulfur were not rained separately upon Sodom and Gomorrah, the sulfur was burning.
3. 2 Chronicles 2:9 – “even to prepare me timber in abundance; for the house that I am about to build will be great and wonderful.”  
     
   The sense is, “wonderfully great,” or “great, yes — and wonderfully great too.”
4. Colossians 2:8 – The Greek literally reads, “through the philosophy and empty deceit.” In this case, the point is not that there is “philosophy” and also “empty deceit,” but rather that the philosophy itself is “empty and deceitful.” Thus the idea is, “See to it that no one takes you captive through empty, deceitful philosophy *that is* according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ,”
5. 2 Timothy 1:10 – “but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who on the one hand destroyed *the power of* death, and on the other hand brought life and immortality to light through the good news,”  
     
   The hendiadys here means “life, yes, immortal life.” In this verse, the word “life” is being used in its fuller sense. While it does refer to a fulfilled life now, that is its lesser meaning; the greater meaning is that “life” refers to “everlasting life.”

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 hendiadys, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 657-73.]

*Hina* (ἵνα)

In English, there are several ways to communicate purpose or intention, just as there are several ways to indicate the results of an action. To communicate purpose we might say, “I read the Bible to grow closer to God,” using the word “to” to show our intention of growing closer to God by reading Scripture. To communicate our emphasis on results we might use a participle, as the word “falling,” in the phrase, “he tripped, falling into the mud.”

There are also several ways Greek grammar communicates purpose and result clauses, and one such way is with the particle *hina* (#2443 ἵνα) occurring in conjunction with a verb in the subjunctive mood. When *hina*, usually translated, “that,” “so that,” or “in order that,” is used with a verb in the subjunctive mood, it can express either purpose, result, or purpose and result simultaneously. Furthermore, *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood can be used in command clauses (as well as substantival, epexegetical, and complementary clauses, which we will not cover here.[[1]](#footnote-1) Since the Greek construction is the same for all these kinds of clauses, it is up to the translator or interpreter to discover the meaning of the phrase from the context and scope of Scripture. In what follows, we will give examples showing how *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood can form a purpose clause, result clause, or purpose-result clause. After some discussion, we will also consider command clauses.

These first three clauses all consist of a main verb, the particle *hina*, and a verb in the subjunctive. The explanations have the main verb underlined, the *hina translation* in italics, and the **subjunctive verb** in bold.

(1) A *purpose clause* expresses the *intention* of the main verb, so in these cases, *hina* should be translated *in order that, with the purpose that*.

* (Matt. 19:13). “Then little children were being brought to him *in order that* **he might lay** his hands on them and pray….” The children were brought (main verb) with *the purpose that* (*hina*) Jesus **might lay** (subjunctive verb) his hands on them and pray.
* (Luke 9:12). “Send the crowd away, *in order that* **they may** go into the surrounding villages and countryside, and **lodge** and **get provisions**.” The apostles plead with Jesus to send the people away for the purpose of finding lodging and getting provisions. (Here the verbs in the subjunctive mood are “lodge” and “get provisions,” not “go”).
* (Rom. 1:11). “I long to see you, *in order that* **I may impart** to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you.” Paul is expressing his purpose for seeing the Romans; he purposed to impart to them a spiritual gift of strengthening.

(2) A *result clause* expresses the resulting consequences of the main verb when the result is *not intended* to be the consequence of the main verb. In other words, this expresses when a person does something, or an event occurs, resulting in consequences that were not intended. The *hina* should be translated *so that; with the result that*.

* (John 9:2). “And his disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, *with the result that* **he was born blind**?’” The disciples assumed someone’s sin unintentionally resulted in this man’s blindness (cf. NET translation: “Rabbi, who committed the sin that caused him to be born blind?”).
* (Rom. 5:20). “The law came in *with the result that* the trespass **increased**.” God did not introduce the law with the intention of increasing sin. Nevertheless, this was the result of the law.
* (Gal. 5:17). “For [the spirit and the flesh] are opposed to each other, *with the result that* **you are not doing** what **you want**.” It is not the spirit’s intention in opposing the flesh to prohibit you from doing what you want, but is simply the result of the internal battle between our spirit and flesh.

(3) A *Purpose-result clause* expresses that the subjunctive verb is both the *intention* and *result* of the main verb. The *hina* should be translated, *so that*.

* (John 3:16). “He gave his only begotten Son, *so that* everyone who believes in him **will not perish** but **have** eternal life.” God gave his Son with the *intention* of saving believers from perishing, and having eternal life; simultaneously, the giving of the Son *resulted in* those who believe not perishing and having eternal life.
* (Rom. 3:19, ESV). “Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, *so that* every mouth **may be stopped**, and the whole world **may be held accountable** to God.” The *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive clause shows us that the law speaks with the purpose of stopping every mouth and making the world accountable to God; and furthermore, when it speaks, it results in this purpose being accomplished.
* (Matt. 1:22-23, NET). “This all happened *so that* what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet **would be fulfilled**: ‘Look! The virgin will conceive and bear a son….’” God’s bringing about the virgin birth intentionally resulted in the fulfillment of what was spoken by the prophet.

In the REV we have attempted to remain as consistent as possible in the translation of the *hina* in these clauses, although there are exceptions at times. For purpose clauses we say, “in order that”; for result clauses, “with the result that”; and for purpose-result clauses, “so that.” The English translation “in order that” clearly indicates purpose; likewise, for result clauses, what could be more clear than, “with the result that?” “So that,” on the other hand is the best translation for a purpose-result clause precisely because it is ambiguous; it can be read to indicate either purpose or result. For example, the phrase, “he fell back into the snow so that an imprint was left,” could be read to mean he fell “so that” (purpose) he could make an imprint of himself, or it could be read to mean he just happened to fall “so that” (result) an imprint was left on the ground. The context would have to determine whether the “so that” speaks of purpose, result, or purpose-result. When we felt the biblical context demands a purpose-result clause we have rendered the *hina* “so that.”

That having been said, when reading the REV one must be careful not to assume every instance of “so that,” “in order that,” or “with the result that” is a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive clause. There are also uses of *hina* by itself that warrant the “so that” translation; likewise, there are several other ways Greek can indicate purpose, hence, “in order that” could be due to another of these forms. The same can be said of the phrase, “with the result that,” which is often just a translation of *eis* (#1519 εἰς) or *hōste* (#5620 ὥστε).[[2]](#footnote-2) The reader must consult the Greek text or the commentary to ensure the translation represents the *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive construction.

Identifying these clauses correctly is of fundamental importance for properly understanding and translating the Bible. Thankfully, in a majority of instances, the type of clause is abundantly clear from the context or the scope of Scripture. Nevertheless, the danger of misidentification is always present, because the Greek form of each construction is precisely the same. This means that in the *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive form, a purpose, result, and purpose-result clause look exactly the same in the Greek. If one calls a “purpose” or “purpose-result clause” what is actually a result clause, he attributes intention when God only meant to speak of what resulted, not what was purposed to happen. On the other hand, if one categorizes a passage as a “result clause,” when it is really a purpose clause, then he has missed the intention that is underlying the action.

For example, the first part of Romans 5:20 is often translated as though it were a purpose clause: “The Law came in so that the transgression would increase” (NASB). This translation ascribes the intention of increasing man’s transgression to the introduction of the law. But surely this is misguided. Can it really be that God introduced the law for the purpose of increasing sin? Why would God *want* sin to increase? This seems to go against Galatians 3:19-24 which indicates that the law came in precisely because there were already many transgressions (See also Rom. 3:19-20). Hence, this verse seems much better suited as a result clause: “But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied” (NRSV). In other words, God gave the Law to help mankind, but people disobeyed with the result that sin increased.

1 John 2:19 is another example of how translating a result clause as though purpose were intended can cause confusion. Speaking of the exodus of false believers from the Church, versions such as the HCSB and NASB translate the verse, “They went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us.” It seems clear that false believers did not leave the Christian fellowship “so that” it would be clear they were not true to the Faith. In contrast, seeing the *hina* clause as a result clause makes sense of the passage: “Their going showed that none of them belonged to us” (NIV).

Lastly, we must also consider how *hina* with the subjunctive can form a command clause. It is vital to properly distinguish purpose clauses from command clauses. A purpose clause indicates *why* something happened, it shows the intention behind the action: e.g., “Children were being brought to him in order that he could lay [Greek=*hina* with a verb in the subjunctive] his hands on them and pray” (Matt. 19:13). A command clause, on the other hand, *issues an order* or command: e.g., “Come, lay [Greek=*hina* with a verb in the subjunctive] your hands on her so that she will be healed and live” (Mark 5:23).

Because the same Greek form of *hina* with the subjunctive can be a purpose, result, or command clause, people sometimes disagree as to which is meant. This disagreement shows up in the varying translations of Mark 5:12, for instance, when the demons plead to go into the herd of swine. Some versions translate the second part of their plea as purpose, “Send us into the pigs *so that* we may enter them” (cf. NASB, HCSB, KJV, ASV), while most modern versions translate it as a command: “Send us into the pigs. *Let us* enter them” (cf. ESV, NIV, NRSV, NET, NAB, NJB). Interestingly, we see precisely the same split between the translations with regard to Titus 3:13, “see that they lack nothing” (command: ESV, NIV, NRSV, NET, NAB, NJB) as opposed to “so that they lack nothing” (purpose-result: NASB, HCSB, KJV, ASV). (See also Rev. 14:13 for similar disagreement between translations).

Understanding how the *hina* construction can indicate a command becomes important for passages such as John 9:3, about the man born blind. Because this verse has *hina* with the subjunctive, we must ask whether it is meant to be a purpose or command clause. It is rendered as a purpose clause in most translations, “He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him” (NRSV); however, this translation has serious consequences to the meaning of the text because the way it is worded means that the man’s blindness was intentional, so that he could not see for the better part of his life, simply for the purpose of being healed this day—that “God’s works” may be manifest by his healing. Such an interpretation goes against the teaching of Scripture, that God is love (1 John 4:16), does not want to harm his people (Jer. 29:11), or other people (Jer. 18:8), and that it is Satan who is our enemy, the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4) who has the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Jesus came to destroy the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8), his ministry was to heal those oppressed by Satan (Acts 10:38). The Gospels nowhere portray Jesus going around healing people oppressed by God.[[3]](#footnote-3) Accordingly, a number of scholars agree that John 9:3 should be read as a command clause, “But let the works of God be revealed in him.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

[For more on *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood command clauses wrongly identified as purpose clauses, see commentaries on John 9:3; 13:18.]

In the Lord

The phrase “in the Lord” is a common expression used by Paul to communicate one’s status as a Christian. For instance, if Paul refers to someone as “in the Lord,” he is using the phrase to communicate that the individual is a fellow Christian and a member of the one true body of Christ.

Although the phrase “in the Lord” can be used to refer to the “Lord” as the object of an action, such as, “Believe in the Lord Jesus,” (Acts 16:31) or, “rejoice in the Lord” (Phil. 3:1), the focus of this word study is not on these more familiar and understandable uses of the phrase, but rather the uses described initially, primarily in Pauline literature.

There are 40 uses of the phrase “in the Lord” in the Pauline literature.

The first set of examples carry the meaning, “as a believer” or “as believers”:

* Rom. 14:14 – “(I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but to the one who considers something to be unclean, to that person it is unclean.)” This could be more idiomatically translated, “I know and am persuaded *as a believer* that nothing….”
* Rom. 16:12 – “Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who have worked very hard in the Lord.” (i.e. “Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who have worked very hard *as believers*.)
* 1 Cor. 9:1 – “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?” (i.e. “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work *as a believer*?”)
* 1 Thess. 4:1 – “Furthermore then, brothers and sisters, we ask and encourage you in the Lord Jesus, that just as you learned from us how you must walk and please God...that you would do so even more.” (i.e. “Furthermore then, brothers and sisters, we ask and encourage you *as believers*, that just as you learned from us how you must walk and please God...that you would do so even more.”)

Other verses that fall into this category are: 1 Cor. 11:11; 15:58; 16:19; Gal. 5:10; Eph. 4:17; 6:21; Phil. 1:14; 2:19, 29; 4:1; Col. 4:17; 1 Thess. 3:8; 5:12; Phlm. 1:16, 20; Rev. 14:13.

The second set of examples carry the meaning, “who is a believer” and typically are used in relation to others:

* Rom. 16:8 – “Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.” This could be more idiomatically translated, “Greet Ampliatus, my beloved *who is a believer*.”
* 1 Cor. 4:17 – “For this reason I sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord.” (i.e. “For this reason I sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful child, *and a believer*.”)
* 1 Cor. 7:39 – “she is free to be married to whom she wants, *but* only *if he is* in the Lord.” (i.e. “she is free to be married to whom she wants, but only if he is *a believer*.”)

Other verses that fall into this category are: Col. 4:7; 2 Thess. 3:4.

Now, there are some other uses of the phrase “in the Lord” that do not fall into either of these categories. These will be addressed individually.

The first difficult occurrence is in 2 Corinthians 2:12-13 which reads, “Now when I came to Troas for the good news of Christ, even though a door had been opened to me in the Lord, I had no relief for my spirit because I did not find Titus my brother.” The Greek is *en kuriō* (ἐν κυρίῳ) just like in all of the uses above, and since Paul is not using the phrase to communicate something akin to “as a believer,” other possibilities for the intended meaning of this phrase need to be explored. Typically in the Greek, the preposition “*en”* can either be “*in* the Lord” or “*by* the Lord.” The versions and the commentators are divided as to how Paul is using it here. Yet, the essence is pretty much the same. If the door was opened “by the Lord,” then the Lord gave Paul an opportunity to spread the Good News. If the door was opened “in *connection with*” the Lord, there was an opportunity to spread the Good News. The reading “by the Lord” is much easier to understand from the point of view of the English reader, and if the door was originally opened “in *connection with*” the Lord, no doubt the Lord was working to make that happen, so “by the Lord” would not be far off the mark. So, here, there are two solid options, and either could be what Paul intended.

The second strange use of “in the Lord” occurs in Ephesians 2:21, which reads, “In *union with* him the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy sanctuary in the Lord.” Although, the ending phrase “in the Lord” is even said to possibly be “superfluous,” or unnecessary, and could be, “another example of Ephesians’ redundancy of style,”[[5]](#footnote-5) because Paul just started the sentence with “in him,” Paul likely has an intention behind using the phrase “in the Lord.” Perhaps the best options are that the metaphorical church building, being talked about in Ephesians 2:19-22, grows “in *connection with* the Lord,” or that the building is holy “in *connection with* the Lord.” The Greek syntax could go either way. If Paul intends the first meaning, then the idea would be that this growth of the church only happens in connection with Christ, with Christ as the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20), the foundation upon which the Church is built, and with trust in Christ as the means by which metaphorical stones are added onto the building (i.e. believers are saved). Thus, the growth of the Church only happens in connection with the head, Christ. The second option, that the metaphorical building is holy “in *connection with* the Lord,” could be playing off of the Old Testament typology in which the Temple was made holy by God’s presence and the items in the Temple were made holy, or cleansed, when sprinkled with blood (Heb. 9:22), so too, the New Testament temple where God dwells— Christians (Eph. 2:22; 1 Cor. 6:19)—are made holy by Jesus’ blood (Heb. 10:10). Therefore, Christians are made holy because of their connection with Christ,[[6]](#footnote-6) or, “in *connection with* the Lord.” As with 2 Corinthians 2:12-13, both of these interpretive options are possible, and one cannot be clearly adopted against the other.

The last strange usage that will be addressed is in Philippians 2:24 which reads, “although I have confidence in the Lord that I myself will also come soon.” Paul is simply saying that he has confidence that he will get to come to Philippi soon, the oddity arises because Paul adds the phrase “in the Lord.” What does Jesus (“the Lord” cf. Phil. 2:11, 29) have to do with Paul having confidence that he is going to see the Philippians? We must remember that Paul is in prison as he is writing the book of Philippians. He has also “become convinced” that he knows the right thing to do is to stay “in the flesh” (alive), so that he can help progress the faith of the churches he has planted (Phil. 1:24-25). So, Paul has become convinced that his ministry as an apostle is not over, but that Jesus and God still intend to use him to further the good news and encourage churches, even though there is a possibility this does not happen (Phil. 2:17). Therefore, here in Philippians 2:24, Paul can say that he has confidence “in the Lord,” namely, that the Lord Jesus will help him get out of prison so that he can continue to fulfill his role as an apostle. Paul believes that Jesus wants to still use him, and he knows that whether or not he remains in prison is out of his control, he must rely on Jesus. Paul “could rest easy without worry (cf. 4:6). The problem of his future was not his to solve, but his Lord’s.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

In summary, the phrase “in the Lord” has quite a few possible meanings, and each occurrence should be understood in context, however, the most common meaning Paul intends for the phrase is to identify those who are Christians or believers. If someone is “in the Lord” they are of the household of faith and if they are to do something “in the Lord,” then they are to do it “as believers should.”

Lord

Almost every time the word “Lord” occurs in the New Testament, it is a translation of the Greek word *kurios* (#2962 κύριος). *Kurios* is a title indicating respect and high position in society, and it is used many times in the New Testament. Likewise, almost every time the word “Lord” occurs in the Old Testament, it is a translation of *adoni/adonai* (from אָדוֹן), which is also a title indicating high position or rank.

It confuses some modern readers that God is called “Lord,” Jesus is called “Lord,” and other people are called “Lord,” but that would not confuse anyone in the first century. The words *kurios* and *adoni* were general terms for someone who was above you in rank or position, like “boss” or “captain,” and sometimes it was used simply as a term of respect, just like we sometimes use the word “sir.” If we need to ask a question to a stranger, we might start by saying, “Excuse me, sir,” even though the person is not nobility and may not even be a good person. “Lord” was used in a similar fashion.

Trinitarian commentators and pastors frequently assert that the title “Lord” turns Jesus into God, and will use both Old and New Testament passages to attempt to support that claim. However, surveying the uses of “Lord” in both the Old and New Testaments clearly demonstrates that it does not make one “divine.”

In the New Testament:

* God is called “Lord” (Matt. 1:20; 11:25; Acts 2:39; 1 Tim. 6:15; James 5:10).
* Jesus is called “Lord” (Matt. 7:21; Acts 10:36; Rom. 1:4; Eph. 4:5).
* Property owners are called “Lord” (Matt. 20:8; 21:40; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:13; Gal. 4:1, “owner” = *kurios*).
* Heads of households are called “Lord” (Mark 13:35; Luke 16:3, “owner” = *kurios*).
* Slave owners are called “Lord” (Matt. 10:24; 18:25, 31, 32, 34; 24:45; Luke 12:43; Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1, “master” = *kurios*).
* Husbands are called “Lord” (1 Pet. 3:6, “master” = *kurios*).
* A son calls his father “Lord” (Matt. 21:30, “sir” = *kurios*).
* “Lord” was used in respectful address. The Greeks called Philip, “Lord.” Mary Magdalene called the person she thought was the gardener, “Lord.” Cornelius called the angel, “Lord.” John called one of the elders, “Lord.” (John 12:21; 20:15; Acts 10:4; Rev. 7:14, “sir” = *kurios*).
* The Roman Emperor is called “Lord” (Acts 25:26, “His Majesty” = *kurios*).
* Roman authorities are called “Lord” (Matt. 27:63, “sir” = *kurios*).

In the Old Testament there are also many humans who are called “Lord.” In fact, in the Hebrew, the authors use different endings to the Hebrew word *adon*, depending on whether it is referring to humans/angels or to God. The Brown, Driver, Briggs Lexicon specifies that *adoni* is used of “lords” who are not God, while *adonai* is used in reference to God as Lord.

1. References to men (*adoni*):
   1. *master*: Gen. 24:12; 44:5; Exod. 21:5; 1 Sam. 30:13, 15; 2 Kings 5:3, 20, 22; 6:15
   2. *husband*: Gen. 18:12
   3. *prophet*: 1 Kings 18:7, 13; 2 Kings 2:19; 4:16, 28; 6:5; 8:5
   4. *prince*: Gen. 42:10, Gen. 23:6, 11, 15; 42:10; 43:20; 44:18; 47:18; Judg. 4:18
   5. *king*: 1 Sam. 22:12
   6. *father*: Gen. 31:5
   7. *Moses*: Exod. 32:22; Num. 11:28; 12:11; 32:26, 27; 36:2
   8. *priest*: 1 Sam. 1:15, 26
   9. *theophanic angel* [an angel representing God]: Josh. 5:14; Judg. 6:13
   10. *captain*: 2 Sam. 11:11
   11. *general recognition of superiority*: Gen. 24:18; 32:5; 33:8; 44:7; Ruth 2:13; 1 Sam. 25:24.
2. References to God (*adonai*):

Gen. 18:3, 27, 30, 31, 32; 19:2, 18; Exod. 4:10; 5:22; 15:17; Num. 14:17; Deut. 3:24; 9:26; Josh. 7:8; Judg. 6:15; 1 Kings 22:6; 2 Kings 19:23; Neh. 1:11; 4:8; Job 28:28; Isa. 37:24; Jer. 1:6; 4:10; Mic. 1:2; Amos 7:7; 9:1; Zech. 9:4; Mal. 1:12; etc. [[8]](#footnote-8)

*Adoni* is always used in Scripture to describe human masters and lords, but *never* God. *Focus on the Kingdom* reports:

“The Bible in Psalm 110:1 actually gives the Messiah the title that *never describes God*. The word is *adoni* and in all of its 195 occurrences in the Old Testament it means a superior who is human (or occasionally angelic), created and not God. So Psalm 110:1 presents the clearest evidence that the Messiah is not God, but a supremely exalted man.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

So that students can study the uses of *adōni* (אֲדֹנִי) for themselves (since most sources only give the root words), we list below its occurrences in the Old Testament.

**The following 148 verses contain 166 uses of the word** ***adoni*** **[אדֹנִי]*.*** Every one of them either refers to a human lord or an angel. None refers to God: Gen. 23:6, 11,15; 24:12 (2x), Gen. 24:14, 18, 27 (3x), Gen. 24:35, 36, 37, 39, 42, 44, 48 (2x), Gen. 24:49, 65; 31:35; 33:8, 13, 14 (2x), Gen. 33:15; 39:8; 42:10; 43:20; 44:5, 7, 18 (2x), Gen. 44:19, 20, 22, 24; 47:18 (2x), Gen. 47:25; Exod. 21:5; 32:22; Num. 11:28; 12:11; 32:25, 27; 36:2; Josh. 5:14; 10:1, 3; Judg. 1:5, 6, 7; 4:18; 6:13; Ruth 2:13; 1 Sam. 1:15, 26(2x); 1 Sam. 22:12; 24:8; 25:24, 25(2x), 1 Sam. 25:26(2x), 1 Sam. 25:27, 28, 29, 31, 41; 26:17, 18,19; 29:8; 30:13, 15; 2 Sam. 1:10; 3:21; 9:11; 11:11; 13:32, 33; 14:9, 12, 15, 17(2x), 2 Sam. 14:18,19(2x), 2 Sam. 14:22; 15:15, 21(2x); 2 Sam. 16:4, 9; 18:31, 32; 19:19 (2x), 2 Sam. 19:20, 26, 27, 30, 35, 37; 24:3, 21, 22; 1 Kings 1:13, 17, 18, 20(2x), 1 Kings 1:21, 24, 27(2x), 1 Kings 1:31, 36, 37(2x); 1 Kings 2:38; 3:17, 26; 18:7, 10; 20:4; 2 Kings 2:19; 4:16, 28; 5:3, 18, 20, 22; 6:5, 12, 15, 26; 8:5, 12; 10:9; 18:23, 24, 27; 1 Chron. 21:3(2x), 1 Chron. 23; 2 Chron. 2:14, 15; Isa. 36:8, 9, 12; Jer. 37:20; 38:9; Dan. 1:10; 10:16, 17(2x), Dan. 1:19; 12:8; Zech. 1:9; 4:4, 5, 13; 6:4.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**The following 24 uses can be found under [*l’adōni*; לַאדֹנִי], “to my Lord.”** While we in English separate the preposition from the noun or verb following, in Hebrew the preposition is attached directly to the word. Gen. 24:3, 54, 56; 32:5, 6, 19; 44:9, 16, 33; 1 Sam. 24:7; 25:27, 28, 30, 31; 2 Sam. 4:8; 19:29; 1 Kings 1:2; 18:13; 20:9; 1 Chron. 21:3; Ps. 110:1. All these refer to human lords, not God.

**The following 6 references can be found under [*v’adōni*; וַאדֹנִי]:** Gen. 18:12; Num. 36:2; 2 Sam. 11:11; 14:20; 19:28; 24:3.

**The following reference can be found under [*m\_adōni*; מֵאֲדֹנִי]:** Gen. 47:18.

Scholars recognize that there is a distinction between the words *adoni* and *adonai*, and that these distinctions are important. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* notes:

The form *ADONI* (“my lord”), a royal title (1 Sam. 29:8), is to be carefully distinguished from the divine title *ADONAI* (“my Lord”) used of *Yahweh*.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Now, to be fair, *adonai’w,* which is a third-person plural form but is typically translated “his lord” (Gen. 24:9; 39:2, etc.), and *adonēka,* a second-person plural form typically translated “your lord” (Gen. 44:8; 1 Sam. 26:15; etc.), do occur in reference to people. Yet, still, for the vast majority of cases, the first-person plural form *adonai* is reserved as a title for God throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

Clearly, from all of the above evidence, calling someone “Lord” does not make them God. It is a case of poor scholarship to believe that calling Jesus “Lord” makes him God, because if calling someone “Lord” made them God, then all the other people we saw above who were called “Lord” would be God also.

Furthermore, the Bible says it was “God” who made Jesus “Lord.” Acts 2:36 says: “God has *made* this Jesus...both Lord and Christ.” If “Lord” equals “God,” then somehow God *made* Jesus “God,” which is something that even Trinitarians do not teach, because it is vital to Trinitarian doctrine that Jesus be co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. The fact that the Bible says God *made* Jesus “Lord” is an argument *against* the Trinity. That God, Jesus, property owners, slave owners, Roman authorities, fathers, husbands, and even strangers are called “Lord” caused no problem for first-century Greeks. They knew *kurios* was a word that communicated respect and social position.

Similarly, the fact that the Hebrew text uses the word *adoni* of the Messiah in Psalm 110 is very strong proof that he is not God. If the Messiah was to be God, then the word *adonai* would have been used. This distinction between *adoni* (a lord) and *adonai* (the Lord, God) holds even when God shows up in human form. In Genesis 18:3, Abraham addresses God who was “disguised” as a human, but the text uses *adonai*.

One thing that complicates the study of the word “Lord” is that many translations of the New Testament only translate *kurios* as “Lord” when it refers to Christ or God, when it refers to others they use “master,” “sir,” “owner,” etc. This complicates what would otherwise be a simple study, and it falsely strengthens the belief that if both Jesus and God, and only Jesus and God, are called “Lord,” then Jesus must be God. That is simply not true. *Kurios* was a commonly used word in Greek, and, as was previously stated, was a term of respect and social standing.

When an important verse such as Romans 10:9 tells us that we must confess Christ as *kurios* (Lord) to be saved, it is saying that we must recognize Jesus as boss, one who has authority over us. Both God and Jesus have authority over us because Jesus sits at God’s right hand and administers His work. Jesus has been given all authority on heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18). He is Lord (1 Cor. 8:6).

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more on *adonai* in the Old Testament, see commentary on Psa. 110:1.]

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.]

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.

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[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.]

Paronomasia

The figure of speech paronomasia is the use of words that are deliberately similar in sound or appearance. It comes from two Greek words, *para* (“beside”) and *onomazein* (“naming”), literally meaning “to name beside.” The figure is so-called because two or more words are used that catch our attention in some way and thus draw our attention to the text. Occasionally the words may have meanings that are close to one another, but it is the sound or appearance that usually catches the reader’s attention. It is very difficult to translate a paronomasia from one language to another and it is rarely done.

The paronomasia draws our attention to a solemn or important statement that otherwise would have been less forceful and potentially unheeded. Here are a few examples:

1. Genesis 1:2 – “And the earth was formless [*tōhū*] and empty [*bōhū*]*,* and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”  
     
   The word *tōhū* means formlessness, waste, desolation. The word *bōhū* means emptiness, void. This is a paronomasia in Hebrew, but not in English. When God first formed the earth, he did not create it a waste (*tōhū)*, he formed it to be inhabited (Isa. 45:18). At some point between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:3, Satan rebelled against God which resulted in the earth becoming totally devastated, wasted and empty. The rhyming of the words in Genesis 1:2a is a forceful way of expressing the catastrophic impact of that war. Genesis2:2b begins the record of how the earth came to be what we know it as today.
2. Psalm 56:8 – “You number my wanderings [*nōdî*]. You put my tears into your bottle [*bənōdekā*].”  
     
   The similarity of sound is intended to call our attention to the fact that the tears caused by our wanderings are noted and noticed by God.
3. Ecclesiastes 7:6 – “For as the crackling of *burning* thorns [*hassîrîm*] underneath a pot [*hassîr*], so is the laughter of the fool.”  
     
   The burning of the thorns makes a noise, but it lasts only for a moment. So it is with the laughter of fools. The rhyming words in Hebrew catch the reader’s attention.
4. Hebrews 5:8 – “(although he was a son, *yet* he learned [*emathen*] obedience by the things that he suffered [*epathen*])”  
     
   The rhyming words underscore the connection between growing in spiritual maturity and learning obedience through suffering. Hebrews 2:10 says Jesus was made perfect, that is, brought to full maturity, by his sufferings. Jesus was tempted in every way just as *we are, yet* without sin.” (Heb. 4:15).

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[For paronomasia, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 307-20.]

Polyptoton

Polyptoton is the figure of speech known as “many inflections.” An inflection is a change in the form of the root word: a change of case, gender, number, tense, mood, person, etc. Polyptoton occurs when a word is repeated one or more times with the same meaning but with a different inflection. The repetition involves the same word in the same sense, but not in the same grammatical form. Polyptoton provides word pairings that get our attention and also places a strong emphasis on the meaning of the words. Some brief examples of polyptoton are: “piped with pipes” (1 Kings 1:40); “happening happens (Eccl. 2:14)”; “prayed a fervent prayer” (James 5:17).

Here are more examples:

1. Genesis 2:16 – “Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may eat, yes, eat,’”  
     
   The last two words of the Hebrew text are “eat, eat.” However, the first verb is in one tense (the infinitive) while the second one is in a different tense (the imperfect). This could be perhaps translated as, “eating you [may] eat.” Some translations read, “you may freely eat.” In addition, the very next verse has another polyptoton. In contrast to saying that Adam may eat, yes, eat, of the trees in the garden, God says that if Adam eats of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he will “die, yes, die” (Gen. 2:17). The Hebrew text has “die, die,” the first word being an infinitive form of the verb and the second in an imperfect form. These two polyptotons back-to-back add significant force to the text that is very powerful.
2. Matthew 2:10 – “And seeing the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.”  
     
   In the Greek text, the words *xaírō* (“rejoiced”) and *xará* (“joy”) are cognates that are paired together forming a polyptoton meaning “rejoice with joy.” The figure points to how the Magi rejoiced exceedingly with great joy when they saw the star.
3. Ephesians 1:3 – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in *union with* Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places*,”  
     
   “Blessed” (*eulogētos*) is an adjective; “has blessed” (*eulogeō*) is a participle; and “blessing” (*eulogia*) is a noun. This polyptoton with three words in one clause that derive from the root word of “bless” puts great emphasis on blessing and praising God as the One who first blessed us in Christ. Now we give our lives to God in thanksgiving for those blessings.
4. 2 Timothy 4:7 – “I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.  
     
   The phrase, “I have fought the good fight” can also be translated as “I have contended in the noble contest,” which would also be a poyptoton. The repetition with two forms of the same word emphasizes Paul’s boldness and commitment in carrying out his ministry.

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[For polyptoton, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 267-285.]

Syndeton

The figure of speech syndeton is a grammatical device that uses a conjunction, most commonly “and,” to join together words or phrases. There are three types of syndeton for lists. Standard grammar uses the simple syndeton which has a comma after each item in the list, but with “and” occurring before the last item. For example, “You need celery, apples, walnuts, and grapes to make this salad.” The second type of syndeton is asyndeton which means “no ands.” By omitting the “and,” the same sentence would be, “You need celery, apples, walnuts, grapes to make this salad.” This structure increases the reading pace, putting less emphasis on each item and moving quickly to the purpose or main point of the sentence. In contrast, the opposite is polysyndeton, which means “many ands.” This is when the conjunction “and” appears between each item in the list, as in, “You will need celery and apples and walnuts and grapes to make this salad.” Here the emphasis is placed on each individual item in the list as being an equally critical factor. Polysyndeton helps to slow the reader down so that they can take in all the information and carefully consider the importance of each item on the list.

Both asyndeton and polysyndeton are departures from normal grammatical usage. They are figures of speech that God uses in His Word to place emphasis on specific aspects of a statement. They let us know what we should pay attention to as we read. Here are two examples of asyndeton:

1. Galatians 5:22-23 – “But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”  
     
   The main point of this verse is the conclusion, putting the emphasis on “against such things there is no law.” The figure asyndeton shows that this is not an exhaustive list but rather gives us an idea of what the fruit of the spirit looks like, especially in contrast to the works of the flesh listed in the previous verses.
2. Ephesians 4:32 – “and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God has forgiven you in Christ.”  
     
   The running list of commands points to how and why we are to behave toward each other—“as God has forgiven you.”

The next group of verses contains polysyndeton. Notice how the emphasis is put on each individual item in each list.

1. Mark 12:28-30 – 28“And one of the experts in the law came and heard them disputing together, and recognizing that he had answered them well, asked him, ‘What commandment is the first of all?’ 29Jesus answered, ‘The first is**, Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone, 30and so you are to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’”**  
     
   The polysyndeton stresses that we are to love God with each and every part of our being (i.e., our heart, our soul, and our mind), thus putting Him first in our lives with all that we are.
2. Genesis 8:22 – “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night will not cease.”
3. Joshua 6:23 – “So the young men, the spies, went in and brought out Rahab and her father, and her mother, and her brothers and all that she had; all her relatives they also brought out, and they settled them outside of the camp of Israel.”
4. John 10:27-28 – “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me,  
    and I give to them life in the age *to come,* and they will absolutely not perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

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[For asyndeton and polysyndeton, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 137-48, 208-37.]

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.

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[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.]

Tapeinosis/Meiosis

Tapeinosis is a type of meiosis (also called litotes) which is the demeaning or lessening of something in order to elevate or increase its meaning. The two figures are distinguished by whether the same object that is lessened is also increased or intensified, or if there is another object besides it that is intended to be increased and intensified. The figure of speech meiosis (litotes) is used to belittle one thing in order to magnify something else. For an example of meiosis, Genesis 18:27 says, “And Abraham answered, “Behold now, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, though I am but dust and ashes.” In humbling himself by calling himself “dust and ashes,” Abraham gives greater contrast between himself and the high and holy God whom he is addressing so that God’s power and greatness are elevated even more. Tapeinosis occurs when the thing that is lessened is the same thing that is increased and intensified. Here are some examples.

1. Psalm 51:17 – “My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”  
     
   Here is an example of a statement being made in the negative sense in order to magnify the positive sense. Not only will God not despise a contrite heart, but he will also gladly receive it!
2. Proverbs 16:18 – “Pride goes before disaster, and a puffed up spirit before stumbling.”  
     
   Here something is purposely made lesser in impact to catch our attention. The person does not just “stumble,” there will be a much greater calamity than just stumbling. A puffed-up spirit, an arrogant attitude, goes before disaster.
3. Acts 5:36 – “For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, *and* a number of men, about 400, joined him. He was killed, and all, as many as were persuaded by him, were dispersed and came to nothing.”  
     
   All people are “somebody.” This is lessening or understating the intended meaning that Theudas claimed to be someone great.
4. Romans 5:6 – “For while we were still weak, at the proper time Christ died in place of the ungodly.”  
     
   Understating the helplessness of fallen humanity before Christ actually magnifies the severity of it. We were more than weak—we were dead in sins, totally unable to help ourselves. God, in His grace and mercy, sent Christ, who died for us so that we would be strong in him.
5. Romans 13:10 – “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.”  
     
   The understatement is subtle, and therefore this tapeinosis is often not noticed, but love is much more than just not harming someone. Without the tapeinosis, a more literal description of love is that it does good to its neighbor.

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[For meiosis and tapeinosis, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 155-164.]

Worship

The Greek verb typically translated worship is *proskuneō* (#4352 προσκυνέω; pronounced prōs-cue-'nay-ō, a compound word built from the preposition pros, “to, toward,” and the verb *kuneō*, κυνέω, ‘to kiss’). This phrase is usually translated “worship him,” and the reason for translating it “pay homage to him” is detailed below. The BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon* has this to say about the verb *proskuneō*:

It is “frequently used to designate the custom of prostrating oneself before a person or persons and kissing their feet or the hem of their garment, the ground, etc.; the Persians did this in the presence of their deified king, and the Greeks before a divinity or something holy. It is to express in attitude or gesture one’s complete dependence on or submission to an authority figure, (fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to, welcome respectfully.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

The act of prostrating oneself, or at least bowing low, is very ancient and goes all the way back to Genesis. In the Old Testament, the act of prostration or bowing low is often described by the word *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), which is often translated by the Greek word *proskuneō* in the Septuagint. Examples of people “bowing down” (“worshiping”) to other people are numerous (e.g. Gen. 23:7, 12; 27:29; 33:3, 6, 7; 37:7; 43:26; Exod. 11:8; 1 Sam. 20:41; 24:8; 25:23; 28:14; 2 Sam. 1:2; 2 Sam. 9:6, 8; 2 Sam. 14:4, 22, 33; 18:21). All those examples, and many more, use the word *shachah*,[[13]](#footnote-13) which means to bow down, and is used of bowing before God in worship or bowing before people.

Jesus understood the custom of falling prostrate before rulers, men of God, and other great people (cf. 1 Sam. 25:24; 2 Kings 4:37; 1 Chron. 29:20; Esther 8:3; Matt. 18:29; Mark 5:22; 7:25; Luke 5:12; 17:16; John 11:32; Acts 10:25; Rev. 1:17; 19:10; 22:8), and he accepted that public display of homage and respect when people fell before him (cf. Mark 5:22; 7:25, Luke 5:12; etc.).

The problem with always translating *proskuneō* as “worship” is due to the fact that the act and meaning of “worship” have changed through the ages. In the Eastern world in general, falling prostrate was an accepted and expected act of honor, respect, and worship. Among the Greeks, as noted above, prostration was much more limited, but was done before gods and things considered holy. Among the Romans, prostration was even more limited than that, but still could occur.

As we can see from the Bible, the words *shachah* and *proskune*ō were both used to represent a physical act, the act of kneeling on the ground before someone and placing the forehead on the ground, or falling full length on the ground before someone, or at least bowing low before someone (the Latin and Latin Vulgate would use adoro (cf. “adore”) and *veneror* (cf. “venerate”) to represent that act). Prostration or kneeling then touching the forehead to the ground was an act of respect and honor, and was supposed to represent an attitude of the heart, but often it was just done because otherwise, the ruler would be offended and angry, just as Haman was angry when Mordecai would not get down on his knees and bow before him (Esther 3:5). Many people who “worshiped” God (by bowing before Him) ignored or defied His commandments (cf. 1 Kings 1:53; 2 Kings 5:18; Esther 3:2, 5; Jer. 7:2; 26:2). Many others who “worshiped” loved Him and gladly obeyed His commandments. But both sets of people were said to “worship God” because they bowed down before Him. It is similar to the modern act of everyone in a room standing up when the President of the United States walks in. It is an expected action, but does not necessarily reflect the heart.

In 1611, when the KJV was written, the English word “worship” was used for the worship of deity, but it was still also used of bowing down before men of higher rank, which was an expected act of respect and deference at that time. Kings and nobles expected people to bow before them. Thus, it was expected at the time of Jesus and in the 1600s as well, that someone would prostrate themselves or bow down before a superior, especially someone such as a king. It should be noted that kneeling and touching the forehead to the ground is still seen among Muslims when they pray, prostrating themselves before Allah.

The act of bowing before a king or dignitary then led to some rulers being designated as “Your Worship,” taking the act of worship they received and making it into a title. Because the act of bowing to rulers was still common in 1611, translating *proskuneō* as “worship” worked very well and was not confusing to the average reader, who still connected “worship” with a physical act of some kind (this also fits with the liturgy of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church, which considers “worship” to be a form of prescribed action, not “just” a subjective act of the heart). However, in the four centuries since the King James Version, the meaning of “worship” has changed. For one thing, we stopped bowing and prostrating ourselves (worshiping) before those of higher rank.

In fact, the idea of “worship” as deeply bowing or falling in prostration before a person of higher status has completely left modern English vocabulary (as per Merriam-Webster’s 11th edition Collegiate Dictionary). Also, today people think of “worship” as an attitude of the heart that can be accompanied by a physical action, but does not have to be. Today “worship,” in many cultures, is basically a mental act, so much so that if someone does something without “meaning it,” it would not be called “worship.” Yet James Jordan points out, “Ancient man bowed before his god, whether it was Nature (Baalism) or the creator (YHWH). Modern man does not bow before his god, whether Nature (humanism) or the Creator (Christ). Similarly, for ancient man, the heart of religious exercise was adoration, worship, prostration, sacrament (a fellowship meal with the god). This was true of Israel before the Lord, and of the Canaanites before Baal. And this is the biblical view of worship: Preaching/proclamation is the word from God, which leads to a response of adoration, prostration, sacrament. The modern Christian, however, sees the heart of worship as entertainment (from a choir and an entertaining preacher) or as philosophical meditation (from a scholarly preacher). The sermon, instead of leading into worship, has become itself the climax of worship. And, just as the modern Christian view of worship is not much more than studying doctrine…we don’t see Christians bowing down to the Lord either, but we do see them studying Him, preaching about Him, and writing books about Him. Thus, there is indeed a big difference between ancient religions and modern ones. Ancient man *primarily* worshiped his gods, while modern man *primarily* studies his. This is true both of pagans and of conservative, orthodox Christians.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

Another significant change in our modern Western understanding of worship is that today most people only use the word “worship” when speaking of God, never people, with the exception of those few instances when we use it in a hyperbolic and idiomatic sense, such as “He worships that new car,” or, “She worships the ground he walks on.” Even in those cases, however, “worship” is used as a term of extravagant respect that occurs in the heart, not something that is necessarily connected to a specific action. The shift in meaning of “worship” causes problems for translators, because if we talk about biblical people “worshiping” Jesus, people reading the Bible can be confused as to exactly what that worship entailed, and think it means Jesus is God.

Biblically, this act of prostration was done many times to humans in high positions, which proves that being “worshiped” does not turn Jesus into God, and it also proves that this modern meaning of worship only being used in reference to God should not be imported into the ancient uses of the term *proskuneō*.

For example:

* Joseph’s brothers “worshiped” him (Gen. 43:26).
* Joshua fell down and “worshiped” an angel (Joshua 5:14).
* Ruth “worshiped” Boaz (Ruth 2:10).
* David “worshiped” Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:41).
* Abigail “worshiped” David (1 Sam. 25:41).
* The leaders of Israel “worshiped” God and the king (1 Chron. 29:20).
* The servant in the parable “worshiped” (fell on his knees) his master (Matt. 18:26).

Thus, while it was appropriate to translate *proskuneō* as “worship” in 1611, if we translate *proskuneō* as “worship” today, it often makes a verse take on a meaning that is not in the biblical text at all. For example, in Matthew 2:2, the magi did not think of the infant Jesus as God, and did not “worship” him as they would a deity. Rather, they paid homage to him as they would have to another king, understanding, of course, that they realized he was a very special king. Also, it is worth emphasizing that Matthew 2:2 specifies that the magi thought Jesus was a king, they did not think he was God.

The meaning of “worship” has shifted from being represented by a physical act to being a mental act, but that does not mean that *proskuneō* should never be translated “worship.” For example, the Devil asked Jesus to fall down and “worship” him (Matt. 4:9). The Devil wanted Jesus to prostrate himself before him with the same adoration Jesus would have had for God, and therefore it seems the best way to portray that is to translate *proskuneō* as “worship.” The Devil wanted Jesus’ full devotion, not just the act of falling prostrate. A good rule of thumb is that *shachah/proskuneō* is translated “bow,” “bow down,” or something similar if the person is showing respect to a person, and “worship” if one is showing respect to God, a god, or gods. Although translating *shachah/proskuneō* one way when humans are involved and another way when God is involved may be an acceptable translation practice, the difficulty is that it usually gives the English reader the wrong impression that only God was “worshiped.”

The homage and “worship” that the magi paid to Jesus Christ is still appropriate for us today, although we would not tend to express our homage the same way. The honor we pay to Jesus also fits with Hebrews 1:6, which says that when the Son came into the world God said, “And let all the angels of God worship Him” (Heb. 1:6 NASB). Hebrews 1:4-7 is about angels, but God wants people to worship the Son too. We can see this because Philippians 2:10-11 tells of a time when “every” tongue will confess and every knee will bow (i.e., in worship or as an act of submission) to Jesus, willingly or unwillingly. The honor we pay to Christ fits the “worship” he accepted when he walked the earth. Our “worship” to Jesus Christ is not the same worship we give to God, but it is worship as the Lord (Phil. 2:11), the King (Matt. 28:18).

A proper understanding of *proskuneō* helps enlighten certain biblical passages. For example, Psalm 2:12 is to be understood as a part of the act of worship. It says:

“Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and you perish on the road, for his wrath will suddenly be kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”

The Psalmist is saying that the person who prostrates himself before the Son (the future Messiah) in respect and homage, including kissing the feet or robe, will be blessed, while those who refuse to honor the Son will be destroyed in their selfishness and rebellion.

In conclusion, *proskuneō* properly means “kiss toward” and the ancient act of worship often involved actually kissing the ground, or feet of the one being honored, or the hem of his garment. It is an act of honor and reverence and submission to the one receiving *proskuneō/shachah,* and it was performed towards people, angels, false gods, and the True God.

A good case could be made for the value of physically bowing down before God. Done with the right heart, it demonstrates humility to one greater than oneself, which should lead to obedience. Many modern Christians walk out of a sermon with no intention of changing what they do or how they live. For them, going to church is an intellectual exercise only. Of course, prostrating oneself before God could become just one more physical activity, but one wonders if it could help people stay focused on who was superior to whom.

1. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 471. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Dana and Mantey, *Grammar*, 282-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Gregory Boyd, *God at War*, 231-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Boyd, *God at War*, 231-34. Boyd also notes M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, 141-42; C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek*, 144-45; Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament*, 145ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, vol. 42, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1998), 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, vol. 43, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2004), 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. אָדוֹן, *Adon*, “Lord,” 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Anthony Buzzard, “Believing Impossible Things,” *Focus on the Kingdom* 2, no. 6 (March 2000), 4 (emphasis the author’s). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. WTT or BHS Hebrew Old Testament, edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudoph of Deutsche Bibelgesellschoft, Stuttgart, fourth corrected ed, © 1966, 1977, 1983, 1990 by the German Bible Society. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Geoffrey Bromiley, *ISBE*, s.v. “Lord.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *BDAG*, p. 882. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. There is some debate as to whether *shachah* is the root or whether perhaps חוה is the root verb. *HALOT* chooses חוה and the Brown, Driver, and Briggs (BDB) Lexicon chooses שָׁחָה (*shachah*). See *BDB*, p. 1005, and *HALOT*, p. 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. James Jordan, *Judges: God’s War Against Humanism*, 34-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)