

Here are a couple of examples of figurative language in Bible prophecy.

First, what was Jesus talking about when He gave the parable of the fig tree in His Olivette Discourse?

Mark 11:13 "And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet.

To understand the above, we need the biblical definition for figs and fig trees.

Jer 24:1 The LORD showed me, and, behold, two baskets of figs . . . Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah.

Jer 24:8 And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten . . . So will I give the king of Judah, and his princes . . . I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms.

Hosea 9:10 I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first ripe in the fig tree.

So figs and fig trees are a figurative picture of Israel. Now the parable of the fig tree is in three Gospels, in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

Mark 11:13 "And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet.

Just before Jesus went up to Jerusalem for the last time, he went to a fig tree to see if it had any fruit on it. But do you think Jesus was actually expecting to find figs seeing it was not the season for figs?

Jesus knew it was not the time for figs, so why did he go up to that fig tree looking for fruit?

Because he was giving His disciples a figurative lesson in another one of His parables. Jesus was actually telling His disciples about the future of the Jewish people during the Christian Era.

Mark 11:14 "And Jesus answered and said unto it (the fig tree), No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it."

History bears out Jesus' prophecy. Ever since the Cross the Jewish faith has not grown beyond the Jewish people themselves.

Mark 11:20-21 And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.

Mark 11:22 And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.

Now do you think Jesus was telling Peter (if he had faith in God) that he, too, could curse a fig tree and have it die instantly? lol

Not at all. Jesus was not in the business of cursing fig trees and He didn't want Peter to be either. Jesus was using a parable to tell Peter, and us all, to have faith in God for the future of His chosen people during the time

of the Gentile Church that was just days away.

Jesus knew that the Jews would be wanderers among the Gentiles and homeless for 1900 years, but Jesus prophesied their restoration in another parable about fig trees. I am quoting the parable from Luke:

Luke 21:29 And He told them a parable: "Behold the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near.

Even so you, too, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.

In 1948, the Jews returned to the Holy Land and the new nation of Israel was established. In 1967, Jerusalem again came under Jewish control for the first time in 2573 years.

Israel was putting forth leaves. Judaism still did not spread beyond the Jewish people so there wasn't any fruit, but the leaves of the fig tree were surely there. And then in the very next verse . . .

Luke 21:32 "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place.

So within a generation of 1948-1967AD, we can expect the Lord Jesus to be standing on Zion.

Now I am NOT a date setter, but that appears to be the meaning of that parable

But there is another example of figurative language in the Olivette Discourse that is not so well understood, a figure that also appears in Revelation.

Rev 6:12 And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood.

Rev 6:13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

Sun, moon and stars, what can those figures mean? The Bible is its own best dictionary. Some figures are clearly defined and others can be determined by context, Sun, moon and stars being an example. First, the sun:

Mal 4:2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

Ah, a clear prophecy of the coming of the Lord Jesus, so the sun is a figurative picture of Jesus. And the stars?

Rev 1:20 The mystery of the seven stars . . . The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.

The Greek word for angels there is *aggelos*. Definition: an angel, a messenger of any kind; by implication, a pastor: The exact meaning of the word usually determined by context.

Jesus is the messenger of the covenant, the Holy Spirit is a messenger, so are holy angels and fallen angels. But in the above passages, the messengers are probably men. Pastors, evangelists and apostate church leaders.

If that is the case, then how are we to understand Jesus prophecy?

Mat 24:29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

Just after WW2, when I was in Bible college, a grad student told me, "elskon, before too long you are going to see Satan worshipped in this country."

I thought he was a lunatic. On any street in the country you could ask passers by, "Are you a Christian.? Odds were, they would answer in the affirmative.

But now, the brilliant light of the Lord Jesus isn't seen in the land. It has been darkened by indifference, false doctrine and open sin, thus fulfilling:

"and the sun shall be darkened."

And the messengers? Back in the 80s, a poll was taken of 1200 pastors of every denomination

They were asked if they really believed the five basic tenets of the Christian faith. Between 65 and 85% of the pastors polled did not accept from one to all five tenets.

In the 90s, the Christian Church took a similar poll in which they asked but one simple question: "Did Jesus Christ actually die on the Cross?"

Less than 25% of the pastors polled answered in the affirmative. . . . and that fulfills:

"and the stars shall fall from heaven,"

But what about the moon? Well, the moon sheds no light of its own. All it can do is reflect the light of the Sun. Ergo, the moon is a figurative picture of the church.

Though estimates vary, in Europe, the cradle of the Reformation, less than 5% of the population claim the faith. In the United States, many thousand people a week are leaving the established churches.

In some of the more radical assemblies, people are falling to the floor and barking like dogs or howling like hyenas, claiming it to be a work of the Holy Spirit of God Most Holy.

As if the fearsome Being of Isaiah 6, the Creator of the Universe, would be party to such a spectacle. And that fulfills:

"and the moon shall not give her light."

When I was a young man, some of these figures were understood by the Church, but not anymore. And that fulfills:

Mark 4:25 "For whoever has, to him shall *more* be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him."

End of study

From our position in the opening days of the 21st century, we can just begin to see a little of God's overall plan.

The Abomination of Desolation is not an antichrist in our future. It is a building built by Moslems that has stood on Mount Moriah for over 1300 years.

The "days" and "weeks" we have studied so far were not about literal 24 hour days. Instead, the Lord was using "days" and "weeks" in a figurative way, to depict years.

Most of the Bible was written in plain language. The Bible is not composed of "oral traditions" nor "stories," as the liberals would have us believe.

The poetic books, the gospels, and the epistles are primarily literal and should be accepted verbatim. They need no special interpretation and should be understood as actual historic accounts.

But God's plan, as recorded in Scripture, embraces many writing styles: prose as well as poetry, some literal, some figurative.

Some of Scripture is even visionary and allegorical. All the way back to Joseph's time, biblical visions used figurative language (Gen 37:5-9). Peter's vision of the sheet full of unclean beasts is a New Testament example of an allegorical vision (Act 10:9-23).

An allegory is an imaginative little tale on one subject, used to illustrate concealed truths.

The same is true for biblical allegories. Much of Daniel, most of Revelation, and all of Jesus' parables are allegorical.

It is just as wrong to insist on a literal interpretation for a figurative message as it is to figuratively interpret a historic record.

Here are the two vitally important points:

1. *A figurative interpretation of literal language will lead to faulty doctrine!*
2. *A literal interpretation of figurative language will also lead to faulty doctrine!*

Both errors lead to big-time heresy, just as church history shows. If we fail to interpret God's allegories figuratively, we totally miss the Lord's message.

So how can we know the difference? How can we tell when a passage of Scripture should be literally or allegorically interpreted?

The Bible itself tells us. Most figurative passages in the Bible contain sign posts that tell us they are figurative: "the kingdom of Heaven is *like*, or *like unto*, or *as* . . .

a "wedding feast," or a "mustard seed," or a "pearl of great price," or a "king going to a far country," or a "sower going forth to sow," etc.

Now the kingdom of Heaven is not literally a wedding feast, a king in a far country, a mustard seed, a pearl, or a sower. It is only *figuratively likened* unto one!

Apocalyptic books such as Daniel and Revelation are visionary in nature. These prophetic books were written in symbolic language because the Lord intended their messages to be hidden, not because they are unimportant.