Special Literary Forms: Similes, Metaphors, Proverbs, Parables, and Allegories

The literary forms discussed in this chapter and the following chapter fall under the heading of “special hermeneutics.” Communicators and writers of all sorts use these various devices. The authors state that they can be used for “illustration, clarification, emphasis, and maintenance of audience interest.”

Literary devices discussed in this chapter are:

- Similes
- Metaphors
- Proverbs
- Parables
- Allegories

The authors describe what similes, metaphors, proverbs, parables, and allegories are and how they are used stating that, “A simile is simply an expressed comparison: it typically uses the words like or as (e.g., ‘the kingdom of heaven is like . . .’). A metaphor is an unexpressed comparison: it does not use the words like or as. The subject and the thing with which it is being compared are intertwined rather than being kept separate. Proverbs are concerned with wisdom, a concept that provides the context for all of them. The English word parable refers to an
extended simile. The comparison is expressed, and the subject and the thing compared, explained more fully, are kept separate. Similarly and allegory can be understood as an extended metaphor: the comparison is unexpressed, and the subject and the thing compared are intermingled.”

As one continues in his or her quest to “rightly divide the word of truth” the steps that have been outlined previously must surely be employed. Historical-cultural, lexical-syntactical, contextual, and a theological analysis are of utmost importance if we are to ascertain what the author intended for the reader to gain. Lexicons, concordances, and various other books on figures of speech used in the Bible are of great help.

Special Literary Forms: Prophecy, Apocalyptic Literature, and Types

This chapter begins with the study of prophecy and the role of the prophet. The prophet as he relates to us in the Old Testament is God’s spokesman declaring the will of God to His people. The Old Testament reveals to us the roles of the “former, latter, major, and minor prophets. The former prophets are those who are revealed to us in the historical books of the Bible and the latter prophets are made
up of those outside of the historical books. They are labeled as major and minor prophets and depending upon the length of their respective writings.

The prophets were foretellers and forthtellers. The authors describe them in this manner, “In Scripture foretelling was usually in service of forthtelling. The pattern frequently was ‘in light of what the Lord is going to do [foretelling], we should be living godly lives [forthtelling].’” There are as well time frames in which the prophet’s words were addressed. Most often the prophet spoke concerning events that were to happen in the prophet’s near future. Next there was messianic prophecy concerning the arrival of the Lord and the arrival of His kingdom on earth. Finally there is eschatological prophecy which was directed towards the end times. Additionally, we see that the prophets spoke of what we call “condition and unconditional” prophecy. The author’s write, “Conditional prophecy presents a scenario that may or may not ensue depending on the response of the people, while unconditional prophecy looks only to the faithful character of God as the basis for its realization.

There are six controversial issues in the interpretation of prophecy. They are:

- Hermeneutical Principles
- Deeper Sense
- Literal Versus Symbolic Interpretation
• Universality

• Conditionality

• Single Versus Multiple Meaning

Other concepts and or variables contributing to a correct understanding of what and how the writer intends prophecy to be interpreted are prophetic telescoping, progressive prediction, and developmental fulfillment. The authors define the three terms for us: “Prophetic telescoping is best described with a comparison to the perception of a mountain range. When one views a mountain range from a distance, the peaks appear to be quite near to one another. However on closer examination it becomes evident that wide valleys and many miles separate the individual peaks. Progressive prediction refers to the fact that although each prophetic passage has a single intended fulfillment, often a series of passages exhibit a pattern of chronological progress in the prophetic enactment. Developmental fulfillment refers to a realization of a generalized, comprehensive prophecy in several progressive stages.”

There are seven general differences between prophecy and apocalyptic literature described by the authors. They are:
1. The initial presentation of prophecy was usually in spoken form and was written at a later time. The initial presentation of apocalyptic literature was usually in writing.

2. Prophetic utterances most often are separate, brief oracles. Apocalyptic literature is often longer, more continuous; cycles of material maybe repeated a second or third time in parallel form.

3. Apocalyptic literature tends to contain more symbolism, especially of animals and other living forms.

4. Apocalyptic literature places a greater stress on dualism (angels and the Messiah versus Satan and the antichrist) than does prophecy.

5. Apocalyptic literature primarily comforts and encourages the righteous remnant. Prophecy often castigates the nominally religious.

6. Apocalyptic literature is generally pessimistic about the effectiveness of human intervention in changing the present. Prophecy focuses on the importance of human change.

7. Apocalyptic literature was usually written pseudonymously. Prophecy was usually written or spoken in the name of the author.
Falling under the heading of special hermeneutics would be that of types and antitypes. Types as outlined in Scripture are those things which foreshadow things to come. The example given by the authors is that just as the Old Testament sacrifices (type) were appointed by God as the atonement for sin, Christ as the “Lamb of God” is the antitype.

Also discussed in this chapter are the various “end time” views concerning the return of Christ. The three recognizable views are premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism. Proponents of premillennialism believe that Christ will return before the thousand year period described in the book of Revelation chapter nineteen ruling and reigning from Jerusalem during that period. Postmillennialism states that the world will get better because of the preaching of the gospel and Christ will return after the thousand years. When that period begins is not known. We could be in the millennium right now. Amillennialism tends to “spiritualize” most things see this as an indefinite period (not a literal one-thousand years) of time and interprets this to mean Christ ruling and reigning in the hearts of men and in eternity.