

Series: Bible Day 2022

Title: Bible Metaphors for the Bible

Text: John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

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The Bible is integral to the spiritual health of God's people. To be spiritually strong, a steady intake of God's Word is necessary. One has said, "God still speaks through what he has spoken, and...nothing is more necessary for the life, health, and growth of Christians than that they should hear what the Spirit is saying to them through his ancient — yet ever modern — Word."¹ Jesus Himself revealed that Scripture is primary in the pursuit of spiritual vibrancy. Praying on behalf of the church, He said, "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:16-17).

According to Jesus, the Bible is the means through which believers are sanctified. To be sanctified is to be set apart for holy usage. The term from John 17:17 was used in Old Testament times in reference to holy articles used in temple worship (Matthew 23:17). Applied to Christians, it implied a separation from the world and a consecration to the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Though believers are positionally sanctified through the cleansing of sin at salvation (1 Corinthians 6:11), they experience a gradual growth in sanctification throughout the Christian life (2 Timothy 2:21). The Bible is a non-negotiable component of the sanctification process. This is true because its principles and precepts are endowed with supernatural power for transforming hearts and minds.

Paul spoke of the otherworldly nature of the Bible in his second letter to Timothy. Encouraging a devotion to God's Word, the apostle said, "All Scripture is inspired by God, and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Because the Holy Scriptures are of God, they are instilled with power from God. Just as the Lord's spoken word was used powerfully in creation (Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24), it produces a remarkable result in the lives of those who cherish it to this day. It performs the work of rebuking, correcting, and training God's people. Those who read it, study it, memorize it, meditate on it, and obey it can receive all they need to be "complete, equipped for every good work."

The Bible regularly remarks on the effectual nature of God's Word. It uses a variety of means in doing so. One means is that of metaphors. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which an object is used to figuratively describe another object. When one studies Scripture, one finds several metaphors used of God's Word. Each highlights a special characteristic of God's revealed truth. Below we will consider seven metaphors. Through examining each, I pray we will develop a greater reverence for the Bible.

A Fire

The prophet Jeremiah employed two metaphors when speaking of God's Word. Today we often refer to the man as "the weeping prophet." The reason for his nickname is simple. Jeremiah was called to preach and prophesy during difficult days. Because of his nation's sin, the Lord sent judgment. Foreign adversaries invaded the land, ransacking and pillaging God's promised possession. The weighty nature of Jeremiah's message made him hesitant to preach. He didn't want to foretell of the disaster that was to come.

As Jeremiah contemplated the words God had called him to declare, he said to himself, "I say, 'I won't mention him or speak any longer in his name.' But his message becomes a fire burning in my heart, shut up in my bones. I become tired of holding it in, and I cannot prevail" (Jeremiah 20:9). The metaphor of fire represented heat, passion, and intensity. Jeremiah's intent was to present the Lord's truth as being a compelling force in his heart. The principles

¹ Wallace, Ronald S. *The Message of Daniel: The Lord is King*. (Downers Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity Press), 5.

and precepts of God's Word moved him to action. In light of what he knew about God, he couldn't be silent. He had to share God's Word!

The earliest Christians had a similar experience with the truth of God. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to two disciples who were traveling on a road to the town of Emmaus. The Bible says "...he interpreted for them things concerning himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27). After hearing God's Word from the mouth of Jesus, the two disciples exclaimed, "Weren't our hearts burning within us while he was talking with us on the road and explaining the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32).

The experience of Jeremiah and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus are instructive for us. All are susceptible to the sin of apathy. It seems temptations to spiritual indifference are especially strong in modern society. All should be aware of the demise of such sin. Charles Spurgeon once compared spiritual apathy to a man falling asleep in snowstorm. He said, "Falling into indifference on the road to heaven is something like sleeping on the vast plains of snow, where, if a man give way to the natural inclination to slumber which comes on through the intense cold, he may lie down and never rise again."² Spiritual apathy is fatal, but God's Word provides an antidote. It can serve as a proverbial fire in our bones, inciting us and igniting us to fresh fervor for the Lord. Consume God's Word and it will melt the icy grip of apathy on your soul!

A Hammer

Jeremiah's second metaphor likened God's Word to a hammer. Through the prophet, the Lord said, "Is not my word like fire'—this is the Lord's declaration—'and like a hammer that pulverizes rock?'" (Jeremiah 23:29). The hammer metaphor presents the Word of God as being effective. One has noted, "Nothing can prevent God's Word from being fulfilled."³ In Jeremiah's day, numerous false shepherds led God's people astray (Jeremiah 23:28). Offering counterfeit messages of supposed hope, they gave false promises of deliverance from foreign captivity. The Lord depicted His truth as being a powerful hammer. Though false prophets prophesied falsely (Jeremiah 5:31), the truth of the Lord would prevail, smashing all the lies of the world.

The hammer metaphor has meaning for modern believers. The onslaught of deception hasn't ceased since the days of Jeremiah. In fact, the Bible teaches that deception is increasing as we get closer to the Return of Christ (2 Timothy 3:3). Though deceptions may abound, God's Word can pulverize all the error and lies of the world. It is for this reason that Paul commended the weekly preaching of the Bible in first-century churches. He told Timothy:

Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and teaching. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear. They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

You are either living by the philosophies of the world or the philosophies of the Lord. Make sure you regularly allow God's Word to function like a hammer. Let God be true and let every human be a liar (Romans 3:4). Regularly let the Bible smash and erase the lies of the world from your mind.

² Spurgeon, C.H. *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Volume 26: 1880*. (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 2005), 559.

³ Walvoord, John F. and Roy B. Zuck. Eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty, Old Testament*. (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 1983), 1159.

A Seed

The first-century world was marked by an agrarian society. Most lived off of the land. They were accustomed to working with crops and animals. As a result, it was for good reason that the metaphor of a seed is often used of God's Word within the Bible. Peter told his readers, "...because you have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23).

Bible scholars often debate whether or not the phrase "word of God," as used in Scripture, refers to either the gospel or the Holy Scriptures. My personal conviction is that we can make distinctions about such things at times; however, I believe we can see "the word of God" as referring to both the gospel and Scripture. The gospel is Scripture and Scripture contains the gospel, so "the Word of God" is a fitting designation for both.

Whatever the case, it is important to note the meaning of the seed metaphor. Though small and seemingly insignificant in nature, a seed could result in a magnificent produce. When properly planted and watered, even the smallest could result in great fruit. For ancient people, the power of a seed was mysterious. Unaware of modern principles and biology, it must have seemed miraculous to see a seed produce a harvest.

All of these things have meaning for us. Bible reading and study seem like small things for many. Scripture meditation and memorization aren't believed to be important. However, when the seed of God's Word is sown into the human soul and mind, it can produce much fruit. Jesus revealed such things to be true through His "Parable of the Sower" (Mark 4:1-20). The Psalmist gave witness to his awareness of such realities by saying, "I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11).

Light

One of the most popular Psalms is Psalm 119:105 — "Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path." The metaphor of light reveals that the Bible is a source of spiritual illumination for God's people. The realities of Scripture have a way of giving God's people the insight they need for life and godliness. By studying Scripture, one unearths heavenly mysteries concerning who God is, who man is, the purpose of human existence, what's gone wrong with the world, and how the world can be made right. Though humanity is both naturally (Ephesians 2:1-2) and supernaturally (2 Corinthians 4:4) blinded to such realities, God gives light through His Word!

It is interesting to consider the type of light the Psalmist spoke of in Psalm 119:105. Most would agree that he had a small, personal lamp in mind. In the ancient world, there weren't means for large, high-beam lanterns or lights. The average traveller was fortunate to have a small lamp or torch that would provide just enough illumination for his or her next step.

The Psalmist's metaphor provided a compelling picture of how the Word of God works in the life of a believer. Each day, the lines of Scripture can give one just the insight he or she needs for the day's demands. Believers should commit themselves to meditating on Scripture, knowing that God's Word is a sure source of wisdom. Though the natural part of man or woman may not know how to face life's problems, Scripture can give needed light!

Milk

The apostle Peter likened the Word of God to milk. In his first letter, he told his readers, "Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up into your salvation..." (1 Peter 2:2). In the original language of the New Testament, Peter placed emphasis on the word rendered "infant." Usually, the term was sufficient to speak of a newborn baby. However, Peter added the word "newborn" to clarify that he was talking about a recently-born baby.

In a world in which most every baby received nourishment and milk directly from its mother, the meaning of Peter's words was obvious. The Word of God is a primary source of nourishment for God's people. Without the milk of God's Word, God's people will spiritually

starve. The sustaining nutrition of Bible truth is critical for spiritual strength and success. It is for this reason that Jesus said, “Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

The milk metaphor also reveals that the Bible must be consumed on a regular basis. If you have children, you know that newborn babies needed milk on a regular basis. Long hiatuses or gaps in-between feedings can be disastrous for a baby’s wellbeing. Something similar is true spiritually. Prolonged spells without God’s Word are not good for our spiritual health.

Do you regularly consume God’s Word? I would commend to you the practice of a daily Bible reading plan. To spiritually thrive, your soul needs a regular intake of spiritual food. Most know that they would languish and become weak if they didn’t partake of physical food on a systematic basis. Why is it that some Christians are oblivious to their need for daily spiritual food? The attitude of Job needs to be revived among modern believers — “I have not departed from the commands from his lips; I have treasured the words from his mouth more than my daily food” (Job 23:12).

A Sword

One of the most popular metaphors for the Bible is that of a sword. Several passages of Scripture employ the metaphor. Two of the most famous are Ephesians 6:17 and Hebrews 4:12. The former passage says, “Take the...sword of the Spirit — which is the word of God.” The latter says, “For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” The Word of God is also depicted as a sword in an end-of-the-world prophetic passage concerning Jesus. In the book of Revelation, John described Jesus’ return to Earth by saying, “A sharp sword came from his mouth, so that he might strike the nations with it. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will also trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God, the Almighty” (Revelation 19:15).

The sword metaphor places emphasis on the power of God’s Word. In the first-century world, most knew what a sword stood for. It was one of the most powerful weapons known to man. The vaunted Roman soldier was equipped with one at his side at all times. The sword was a fear-invoking item, as it was used to subdue people and conquer nations.

Ancient soldiers were renowned for their famous armor and weaponry. However, most weapons and pieces of armor served defensive purposes. Much has been made of the fact that the sword was the only piece of offensive weaponry in the famous spiritual armor of Ephesians 6. The meaning of such things is clear for believers. The Bible is the believer’s primary weapon for making offensive advances in the Christian life.

When one reads and studies the Bible, supernatural power is unleashed. The principles and precepts of God’s Word are endowed with divine force. Latent power rests within the pages of Scripture. When one is intentional to understand and obey Scripture, spiritual transformation is certain. It is for good reason that the Psalmist sang, “Instruction from your lips is better for me than thousands of gold and silver pieces” (Psalm 119:72).

Mirror

In James 1:23-24, the Word of God is likened to a mirror. The Bible says, “Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in a mirror. For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was.” For James, the mirror metaphor was significant. Many of his readers were self-deceived (James 1:22). They had a form of religion, but their lives didn’t bear healthy spiritual fruit. It is for good that he called them “adulterous people” (James 4:4). Many were guilty of “friendship with the world” (James 4:5). The congregation was plagued by preferential treatment of others (James 2:1-13) and interpersonal fights (James 4:1).

For James, the remedy for his readers problem was simple. They needed to honestly look into the mirror of God's Word. Though they were self-deceived, a glimpse into God's Law would help them see themselves as God did (James 1:25).

The mirror metaphor has meaning for us. In the pages of Scripture, one receives otherworldly insight into the nature of the human psyche. The Bible reveals things about our souls that one would not be able to see through any other means. The author of Hebrews hinted at these realities when he spoke of how the sword of God's Word "...is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

Know that you will never truly know yourself apart from God's Word. You will never understand your sinfulness, your error, your brokenness, or your need for God apart from the principles of the Bible. It is for this reason that Lord's Day worship is so beneficial. When God's people gather for the weekly proclamation of God's Word (2 Timothy 4:1-4), they subject their souls to a heavenly mirror. In seeing themselves as God sees them, they become free to repent and mend their ways accordingly.