

Hyperbole

From the earliest writings to the publication of the latest version, The Bible is by far the most popular book ever distributed. Therefore, it is also the most read. Those who read the Bible read the same message that God gave to the people who originally recorded it. With time word usage changes. Revised translations try to capture God's meaning in the day's vocabulary. Revisions to the King James Bible, the Revised Version in 1885, and the Revised Standard Version in 1951/52 are examples of 16th to 20th century English changes. The 1911 American Standard and subsequent New American Standard, New King James and New American Standard Updated are examples of revised Greek text translations into changing English usage.

Translators try to keep the Bible text accurate to God's inspired revelation. Some passages contain "Figures of Speech," which depend on culture and lifestyle to be understood. Jesus used many figures of speech in His teaching. In simple terms, a figure of speech is a word or phrase that is used to create an effect and is not literal. In John 10:7, Jesus says, "*I am the door.*" He does not mean that He is a literal, physical door hanging on hinges to either block or open a portal. By studying the context, we understand His meaning. No one can enter heaven without His authority and approval. In this metaphor, understanding comes easily.

Another figure of speech that is used many times in scripture is Hyperbole. "*You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!*" (Matthew 23:24). Jesus used this Hyperbole to illustrate His point made in the previous verse. "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! **For you tithe the mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness;** but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others*" (Matthew 23:23). Most people know the real meaning of that phrase. "*You pay close attention to little things but neglect the important things.*" Parents often use the same speech pattern with their children. Reminding them that they are to make the bed and pick up dropped items is followed by the expression, "if I have told you once I've told you a thousand times." First, the point is made and then emphasized with Hyperbole.

Many wrestle with the Hyperbole of the camel and the needle's eye used in Matthew 19:24, Mark 10:25, and Luke 18:25. Jesus had just told a rich young ruler that he needed to get rid of his riches and follow Him. The man turned away from Jesus. Jesus makes the point that the rich would rather control their wealth than follow Him. Then He emphasizes His point with Hyperbole. "*Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God*" (Matthew 19:24). The rich can get to heaven on God's terms. And God, who created the camel, can get one through the eye of a sewing needle's eye. Maybe adults need to sing that children's song with the line about "My God is so powerful He can do anything!" But people try to find a literal explanation for this illustration. They seek a hole in Jerusalem's wall where a camel can be laid down and pushed through, rather than believing in the power of God and His Word to save.

The following verses provide examples of Hyperbole used in the Bible.

As an excuse for not entering the promised land, Israel said in part, "*The cities are large and fortified to heaven*" (Deuteronomy 1:28). They referred to **large populations**, each **behind very high walls**.

Referring to the 700 left-handed slingers from Benjamin, the writer says, "*Each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss*" (Judges 20:16). An excellent way to say that **they were very accurate**.

Job referred to the abundance of his lost possessions this way. "*When **my steps were bathed in butter, And the rock poured out for me streams of oil***" (Job 29:6). Job means that his journeys were effortless, and the earth provided all his needs.

Jesus conversed with a father who was seeking healing for his son. "*It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!*" And Jesus said to him, "*If You can? All things are possible to him who believes*" (Mark 9:22-23). The play on words between "if you can" and "possible" do not translate effectively into English. Jesus takes the father's challenge in verse 22 and turns it around upon the father so the "**If You can do anything**" becomes "**you can**" because "*all things are possible to him who believes*" The combination of the Greek pun and the Hyperbole caused the boy's father to say "I do believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

The man believed but knew something was missing from his belief, so he asked Jesus to help his faith. Do we sometimes find our faith lacking concerning what God can do? Do we ask God for help to tell others about Jesus and in spreading the gospel? Do we need to ask Jesus to help us with our unbelief?