

MERISMS

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.;

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Hermans Note;

Merism is a literary device that appears in both prose and poetry. Merism occurs when a writer mentions the extremes of some category in order to portray it as a totality, e.g., those opposites and everything in between them. One common form of merism is the use of polar word pairs in a single phrase; e.g., "Good and evil" is a merism meaning "everything" (Genesis 2:17).

Likewise, in Genesis 1:1, when God creates the heavens and the earth, the two parts combine to indicate that God created the whole universe.

A merism serves to define a whole by describing some or all of its parts. There are two primary methods of accomplishing this. The first is to describe two contrasting extremes. For example, the merism "young and old" describes the whole population; if someone claims that a product will appeal "to young and old," he is making the claim that the product will appeal to everyone. Similarly, if someone wishes to convey that she has searched an entire area, she may use the expression "searched high and low," which uses two contrasting extremes to define the whole. The merism "ladies and gentlemen" also denotes everybody.

The second common type of merism is one in which a number of the parts of a thing, although not necessarily all, are used to denote the whole. A classic example of this is the expression "lock, stock, and barrel," which originally referred to the parts of a gun. It now refers to the whole of any object. A similar expression, "hook, line, and sinker" refers to the parts of a fishing line. "He swallowed it hook, line, and sinker" means "he swallowed it completely."

Merisms are stock phrases in English, and are almost always repeated in an identical format. To return to the example of "lock, stock, and barrel," it would be unheard-of for an English speaker to say "stock, lock, and barrel" or "barrel, stock, and lock." Similarly, people search "high and low," not "low and high," and it is far more common for a crowd to be addressed as "ladies and gentlemen" than "gentlemen and ladies."

Merisms are a common feature of legal writing, where they often originate from terms which previously had distinct meanings but no longer do. Examples of legal merisms include "last will and testament." Merisms are also common rhetorical devices in the Bible.;

Psalms 139:1-2

1 O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.

2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.;

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Hermans Note;

The psalmist declares that God knows my down sitting and my uprising; indicating that God knows all that the psalmist does.;"

Jeremiah 31:34

And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.;

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Hermans Note;

From the least of them to the greatest is the use of polar word pairs in a single phrase, meaning everybody.;

Revelation 22:13

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.;

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Hermans Note;

I am Alpha and Omega indicates that I am everything. Furthermore, this verse utilizes poetry or repetition to emphasis. This indicates that beginning and end; and the first and the last are synagogues with Alpha and Omega.;

Genesis 2:7

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.;

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Hermans Note;

Good and evil is a merism meaning "everything". Therefore, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the tree of the knowledge of everything.

Here is where Adam and Eve come in and where we read about the garden into which God placed them. A beautiful place. Everything was provided for them, but with one big prohibition: "Don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

Good and Evil

Why would God do that? Isn't that the tree that he should have said, " ... be sure to eat"? Does he not want them to know good and evil? Isn't the difference between good and evil an ideal for people to have? Isn't that exactly the tree that God would send them to eat first? Now the answer comes in the meaning of the phrase "good and evil" in Hebrew. It has a little bit different sense. It is intended to be what is called in language study a "merism:" A merism is a category of speech in which totality is expressed by polarity. So if you want to indicate the totality of something you might say, "It is as big as the east is from the west." Or if you want to say God is everywhere you can say, "He is in the highest heaven or in the lowest hell. So "good and evil" means everything.

What God is forbidding is that human beings should know everything. And of course, that is exactly what Satan tries to get them to know. He says, "Hey, if you eat from that tree you will be like God (or like the gods):" It can be translated either way. In other words, he tempts Adam and Eve to want to know everything.

The Fall

Adam and Eve do eat of that tree eventually, and there comes the fall from God's grace and the entrance of sin into this world. Sin is disobedience of what God wants done. They really do get a knowledge of everything, not of course all knowledge, but knowledge of everything in the sense that human beings are characterized by knowing more than they can handle. This is the dilemma in which every human being lives. We know more than we can handle. We have the ability with our knowledge to do good things or horrible, evil things. The same skill that can create some kind of machine to do good can create some kind of machine to kill. The same ability to speak so as to encourage people is used so as to hurt them. The same interest level that gets us into art and creativity can get us into pornography and all kinds of other debauchery. We have more knowledge than we know how to handle.;"

Psalms 139:8

If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.;

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Hermans Note;

Heaven and hell, if I ascend to heaven there you are, if I go to Sheol there you are. Does that mean that God is only at the two extremes? No, he is everywhere, that is the point.;

Psalms 91:5

Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;

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Hermans Note;

You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, indicates that you will not fear anything.;

Jeremiah 10:5

Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good.;

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Hermans Note;

Their idols cannot speak, cannot walk, cannot do evil, cannot do good, meaning they just cannot do anything.;