

The Hebrew Idiom of Permission

The writers of the Hebrew Scriptures used language that was understood in their culture. They, like many other languages, employed the use of idioms.

An idiom is an expression that is not able to be taken literally, but is always used to express a relatable event. There are at least 500 common idioms used in the English language.

Examples of English Idioms

'It's raining cats and dogs' – means it is actually raining heavily but there are no cats or dogs literally falling from the rain clouds.

Every Day Idioms

Idiom	Meaning	Example Using the Idiom
A piece of cake	Something very easy	"The test was a piece of cake."
Break the ice	To initiate conversation	"To break the ice, I introduced myself."
Bite the bullet	To face a difficult situation	"I had to bite the bullet and tell her the truth."
Cost an arm and a leg	Very expensive	"That car cost us an arm and a leg."
Cry over spilled milk	To be upset about something that cannot be changed	"No use crying over spilled milk; it's already done."

Situational Idioms

Idiom	Meaning	Example Using the Idiom
Hit the nail on the head	To describe something accurately	"You hit the nail on the head with your explanation."
Under the weather	Feeling ill	"I'm feeling a bit under the weather today."
Jump on the bandwagon	To join a popular trend	"Everyone else is signing up; I might as well jump on the bandwagon."
The ball is in your court	It's your turn to take action	"I've done my part; now the ball is in your court."
Let the cat out of the bag	To reveal a secret	"She let the cat out of the bag and now Jack knows about his surprise birthday party."

The ancient Hebrew language also used a multitude of idioms and many of are found in the Bible.

Examples of Hebrew Idioms in the Bible

Appreciation and credit to Mr Jeff A Benner (Scholar and publisher of Ancient Hebrew research and materials for 30 years). The following table is an extract of his larger table available free of charge on his excellent website. Jeff Benner's website is called the Ancient Hebrew Research Centre.

<https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/language/ancient-hebrew-idioms.htm>

Bible Reference	Idiom	Meaning of the Idiom
1 Sam 10.9	gave him another heart	changed his attitude
1 Sam 24.3	covered his feet	relieved himself
1 Sam 25.22	one who urinates against a wall	male
2 Sam 1.12	house	nation
2 Sam 18.25	good news is in his mouth	he brings good news
1 Ki 2.10	slept	died
2 Ki 2.7	sons of the prophets	group of prophets
2 Ki 4.29	gird up your loins	get ready
2 Ki 19.26	small of hand	weak
2 Chr 25.17	look each other in the face	meet each other in battle
2 Chr 36.13	stiffened his neck	became stubborn
Esther 1.7	Open hand	generosity
Esther 1.14	Saw his face	had access to him
Esther 2.21	Send a hand against	assassinate
Esther 6.10	let fall	neglect (3)
Job 1.12	Put hand on	harm
Job 20.20	Knew no quiet in their bellies	greedy
Job 23.16	Soft heart	fearful
Job 31.10	Kneel over	have sex with
1 Sam 10.9	gave him another heart	changed his attitude

Jeff Benner demonstrates one of the problems incurred when translating from ancient Hebrew language into English. In his book, ***The Ancient Hebrew Lexicon of the Bible: Hebrew Letters, Words and Roots Defined Within Their Ancient Cultural Context*** he writes:

“Let us take one of the above abstract words to demonstrate the translation from a concrete Hebrew word to an abstract English word. Anger, an abstract word, is actually the Hebrew word אף (aph) which literally means “nose”, a concrete word. When one is very angry, he begins to breathe hard and the nostrils begin to flare. A Hebrew sees anger as “the flaring of the nose (nostrils)”. If the translator literally translated the above passage “slow to nose”, the English reader would not understand.”

The same misunderstanding dilemma faces western readers when confronted with Hebrew idioms and this problem is critical when it is the Hebrew idiom of permission that is misunderstood.

The Hebrew idiom of permission portrays that if God does not specifically intervene to prevent an event from occurring, then God would have been credited with causing those events to happen.

Within western societies, if a person is said to have caused an event to happen, then they are responsible for that event happening.

Westernised culture:

A man attempts to use a hammer but he hits his thumb instead. Despite an onlooker seeing the whole event, the man holding the hammer is credited with causing the accident.

Ancient Hebrew culture:

If a man was using a hammer and an onlooker didn't intervene to prevent the man from using the hammer, then the onlooker is said to have caused the accident.

If God is the onlooker, a person might ask, "God knew the future. Why didn't he intervene to stop the man hitting his thumb?" Because the cosmic war between Christ and Satan is not a pretended event. There are rules of engagement in the conflict. God's law of Love, the government of heaven, is on trial. The universe is watching to see if the character of God, which is His law of Love, is 'doable,' sufficient and competent for citizens of a fallen world. The universe are witnessing the pros and cons of the two opposing governments.

Christ's government is the rule of heaven - unselfish Love.

Satan's government is the rule of self - the absence of Love.

There are legal rules within the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

It is the spectacle of the universe to see how the 'competition' between the Christ and Satan pans out. For that reason, God and His Son are not able to interfere with humanity's initial freedom of choice or to prevent the sad consequences of their selfish choices.

It is only Christ's rule of government that offers its adherents, true freedom of choice. The rule of Satan's government is force and coercion.

If all the cruel consequences of Satan's loveless government were over-ridden and interfered with by Christ, then Satan would accuse Christ of being unfair and of breaking the rules of engagement. Human beings must be given the right to choose. However, if they choose to serve Satan and give him

allegiance, Christ must let them reap the consequences of their choice. Satan does not offer freedom of choice to his captives but he manipulates them to advantage himself from their 'service.' Christ offers Satan's victims freedom through His Love if they at any stage wish to return to Him, but Christ is not able to save people just because they don't like the difficult circumstances they brought on themselves through poor choices. Christ offers another chance to hurting humans but this is through the offer to have a loving spirit installed in the human brain.

So there are legal reasons why Christ is unable to intervene in the lives of humans who have 'sold themselves to the devil' or who have given themselves in allegiance to Satan.

There are many instances in the Bible where the English translation of the Hebrew idioms have only confused the reader.

Tragically, God has received the blame for causing horrendous events but in fact, God was unable legally to prevent the events and He most definitely did not actively cause the calamities.

Many verses in the Bible repeatedly warn humanity that 'the wages of sin is death' (Romans 6:23). There are lethal consequences for acting contrary to God's law of love. Homicide and suicide are the ultimate 'wages' that are earned for attempting to live without love in a world that God designed to operate on the laws of Love.

God does not inflict artificial consequences to the unloving actions of any human being. The unloving, selfish acts bring lethal consequences themselves. God warns humanity of the consequences, but He must still leave the human being the option to choose that path if they desire.

The belief that insists that God will inflict 'punishment' and 'take vengeance' on the sinner, demotes the God of Love to the level of a divine destroyer. Such a theology would necessarily cast God in the role of being a bigger, more powerful bully than Satan - an unmerciful, belligerent, malevolent, wrathful, vengeful murderer.

Understanding the concept of the Hebrew idiom of permission helps to explain seeming contradictions in the Bible about the source of lethal consequences arising from selfish actions. It is in fact, an attempt to assassinate the Father's loving character when people try to assign the result of selfishness as if they were purposely inflicted on humanity by the Father.

Examples:

The Flood

God is credited for sending the flood that destroyed almost the entire human population. In reality God, through Noah, warned the world's population about

the destructive flood that was going to occur and provided a way out for those who wanted to believe Him. No doubt it was selfish humanity who, under the destructive influence of demons, turned the forces of nature against itself. God foresaw the coming destruction and sent the warning and a way of escape. God was then blamed for sending the flood, because He did not miraculously intervene to prevent the consequences of human and demonic interference in the natural laws that held the earth's systems together and functioning as God first created it. There are legal principles at work that the Creator, in the Great Controversy against Satan, must abide by. If the human beings don't want to come under the authority of the Father, then the Father in love, allows them to make their own free decision to go outside of His protective care. This is a legal requirement. Love does not exist where there is no true freedom of choice.

Ellen White in SDA 7 Bible Commentary p 976 ; Signs of the Times, 6 May, 1897 stated it perfectly well when she said, **“Force is the last resort of every false religion.”**

Sodom & Gomorrah

The 'five cities of the plain' which included Sodom and Gomorrah were facing destruction. The Hebrew recording of the event claims that God was the source of the destruction and the justification for the annihilation of the sinners was that they had 'filled up their cup of evil.' Is this understanding correct?

Perhaps, instead of being the 'executioner' of the Sodomites, God was (as usual), trying to provide a way of safety out of the fiery destruction. God foresaw that a cosmic event would soon occur and the 5 cities would be destroyed. Because the vast majority of the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah had rejected the principles of Love, God was not able to LEGALLY intervene to continue to save those residents who rejected His authority. God sent His Son and two of His angels to hold back the source of the destruction until those people who would choose to be saved, might escape. Lot, his wife and two daughters were the only people to take advantage of the Father's life-saving kindness and they followed the angels out of the cities. Then the meteoric air-burst occurred that destroyed the cities of the plain. God was blamed for the destruction, instead of hailed as the Champion of Love and the Saviour to those who would follow Him.

Recent research published on 18 May 2024 by Biblical scholar Dr Steven Collins (field archaeologist) and Dr Leen Ritmeyer (archaeological architect) found supporting evidence at Tall el-Hammam that a cosmic event - a terminating event - such as a meteoric air-burst (a meteor disintegrating) occurred over the cities of the plain. The fall-out from the meteoric air-burst caused the massive heat and destruction on the plain. A very specific type of sulphur rock that was burned only on one side, can still be found at the Tall el-Hammam site.

The archaeologists created a video that tracks their research and their evidence that supports the air-burst theory. It is extremely well presented and the facts produced certainly align with the Biblical narrative. The video is available free of charge on Youtube and is called "Sodom and Gomorrah: The Capital of Evil | Secrets of the Bible | Full Episode 10" <https://youtube.com/watch?v=glgfCq0akDk&feature=share> and podcast of Cliff Dunning's interview with Dr Steven Collins here: <https://www.earthancients.com/?portfolio=dr-steven-collins-the-cosmic-impact-and-destruction-of-sodom>

The fact that God didn't prevent the destructive earth and cosmic events was in the Hebrew mind, received that God had 'sent' the events as judgments. This mindset persisted in the time of Jesus as is evidenced when His disciples asked him about the judgment of God.

John 9:2,3

"And his disciples asked him, saying, 'Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.'"

Luke 13:1-5

"There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilæans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, 'Suppose ye that these Galilæans were sinners above all the Galilæans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.'"

Jesus was correcting the traditional view held by the Hebrew people that God is like the pagan deities that inflict punishment on those who do not conform to their standard of expected behaviour. The pagan deities were a mixture of good and evil, blessings and cursings. They were wrathful, licentious, self-indulgent, revengeful, murderous and without compassion or pity. Jesus' mission was to represent the Father's character of love which contrasted as the complete opposite of the deities characters. This contrast appeared to constantly surprise the followers of Jesus and still does the same thing today within the various Christian denominations.

Resources for the Hebrew Idiom of Permission

(Taken from the video link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95B6rCgDq_U)

John Hale Murray, *A Help for English Readers to Understand Mistranslated Passages in Our Bible*.

Twopenny, *Dissertations on Some Parts of the Old and New Testaments which have been Supposed Unsuitable to the Divine Attributes*

Thomas Pearce, *Divine Philanthropy Defended* (Edn of 1658) - quoted in Jackson, *The Providence of God*

Philip Melanchthon "*The Dark Side of Things: An Exposition*" in *The Evangelical Repository: A Quarterly Magazine of Theological Literature* (Vol1) p 100 (worked with Martin Luther) "He gave them up ... that is, he permitted them to rush by their own will, or as impelled by the devil: for this signification of permission is extremely frequent in the Hebrew verbs... This simple and true grammatical interpretation removes the labyrinths of multitudinous questions."

Thomas Scott

"Verbs active in the Hebrew often signify only permission." *The Comprehensive Commentary on the Holy Bible* p 545

Young, Robert "*Hints and Helps to Bible Interpretation*" in *Analytical Concordance to the Holy Bible*; p viii "Active verbs frequently express a permission of it."