

TROY J. EDWARDS

THE HEBREW IDIOM OF PERMISSION



The Hebrew Idiom of Permission

By Troy J. Edwards

Vindicating God Ministries

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *King James Version* (KJV) of the Bible.

The Hebrew Idiom of Permission

Troy J. Edwards

Copyright © 2022 by Troy J. Edwards

Published by **Vindicating God Ministries**

The author gives permission to have any portion of this book copied if it will assist other believers in receiving all that God has for them and/or if it will lead someone to Christ. The material here is for the edification of the body of Christ. However, it is a violation of Christian ethics to use the author's material for personal profit gain. Remember that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account for the deeds that are done in the body (1 Cor. 3:8-15). Therefore, please comply within the limits of this permission statement.

Contents

1. The Character of God	5
2. The idiom of Permission	9
3. Scripture and the Idiom of Permission	15
4. Calvinism and the Idiom of Permission	27
5. Evil and the Idiom of Permission	37
6. Temptation and the Idiom of Permission	55
7. Pharaoh and the Idiom of Permission	65
8. Spiritual Blindness and the Idiom of Permission	77
9. Spirit of Slumber and the Idiom of Permission	89
10. Hidden Things and the Idiom of Permission	93
11. Deception and the Idiom of Permission	101
12. Sickness and the Idiom of Permission	115
13. Accidents and the Idiom of Permission	125
14. Bad Statutes and the Idiom of Permission	133
15. Discord and the Idiom of Permission	139
16. Other Scripture and the Idiom of Permission	145
Notes	155
Other Books from Vindicating God Ministries	173

Dedicated to the numerous scholars
both past and present who have done
the difficult research and study in
order to help us understand God's
written revelation in the light of His
kind and loving character.

Chapter One

The Character of God

*And it is this message which we have heard from Him and at present is ringing in our ears and we are bringing back tidings to you, that **God as to His nature is light, and darkness in Him does not exist, not even one particle.** (1 John 1:5; The New Testament: An Expanded Translation by Kenneth S. Wuest)*

Many of us consider Christ's role on earth to be limited to bringing salvation to people via His atoning act for us. Although this is undoubtedly a significant and essential component of His mission, if this were His only goal, it would have been achieved the instant it was revealed that He was the Messiah.

Prior to Jesus taking on human flesh, however, there had been a great deal of deception and fabrication about God's loving and just nature. The truth about the God who "*.... so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son*" (John 3:16a) had to be revealed to us by Jesus before He could make the ultimate sacrifice that would secure our redemption.

It will be impossible to convince men to accept the salvation that Christ paid and provided to us if we think the God to whom we are reconciling is evil and arbitrary. Jesus had to start His work by truly revealing to us who God is—as a loving and forgiving Father. As a result, according to the apostle John, our Lord's teaching was that God is light and has no darkness. Scripture analysis reveals what "light" stands for:

- Righteousness (Psalm 37:6; 97:11; 112:4; Prov. 13:9; Isaiah 58:8; Micah 7:9; 2 Cor. 6:14; 1 John 1:7).
- Love (Psalm 112:4; 1 John 2:10; 3:14).
- Peace (Isaiah 45:7; Luke 1:79), liberty (Job 33:28; Psalm 56:13; Luke 4:18; 2 Corinthians 3:16-18; 4:3-4, 6; Col. 1:12-14).
- Goodness (Job 30:26; Isaiah 5:20; Matt. 5:16; Eph. 5:8-9; James 1:17).

Therefore, light is a metaphor for something which depicts God's essential nature as well as a reference to Him as a radiant being. Furthermore, the following are related to "light":

- Life (Job 3:20; Psalm 36:9; Proverbs 6:23; 16:15; John 1:4; 8:12; Phil. 2:15-16; 2 Tim. 1:10).
- Healing and health (Isaiah 30:26; 58:8; Malachi 4:2; John 9:5-7).
- Salvation (Psalm 27:1; Isaiah 49:6; Acts 13:47).
- Guidance (Psalm 43:3; 119:105, 130; Luke 1:79; Romans 2:19-20).

James wrote, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of light, with whom is no variableness nor turning to darkness"* (James 1:17; New Matthew Bible). Only those things that depict light have their origin with God because He is light and the Father of lights. He cannot generate anything dark because he is devoid of darkness. Darkness is a metaphor in the Bible for:

- Hatred (1 John 2:7-11).
- Evil (Job 30:26; Isaiah 5:20; 45:7; John 3:18-20; Eph. 6:12).

- Unrighteousness (2 Cor. 6:14).

God cannot act in a way that may be defined as dark because none of these things are a part of His nature. The following are also related to “darkness”:

- Death (Psalm 23:4; Job 3:5; 10:21-22; 12:22; 28:3; 34:22; Psalm 107:10; 14; Isaiah 9:2; Matt. 4:16; Luke 1:79).
- Bondage (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13).
- Sickness and destruction (Ps. 91:5-6; Eccl. 5:17).

What comes out of us is a reflection of what is inside us (Matt. 7:16-20; 12:33-35; Luke 6:43-44; James 3:12). God cannot create the works of darkness since he is light. All darkness comes from Satan (Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 6:14-15; Eph. 6:10-13; Col. 1:12-14). He is therefore the creator of all that darkness involves. He also becomes the antithesis of all that is associated with light. God and Satan are *indisputable opposites*, while they are undoubtedly *not equals*:

To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me (Acts 26:18)

Satan, God’s foe, cannot stand a chance against Him. The All-Mighty Creator is God. He is the supreme ruler of the universe. Satan cannot compare to God in terms of might or omnipotence. If God were to respond violently (if it were in His nature to do so), and if they engaged in a physical conflict, Satan could be easily and quickly destroyed.

Nevertheless, God has given Satan a brief period of freedom. Satan has responded by making a number of unfounded claims about God and His people, which God must counter (Rev. 12:9–12). Therefore, Satan is given a little period of restricted freedom so that the universe can recognize him for the evil being that he is and comprehend the reality of the loving, caring Father as revealed to us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The church has encountered a major problem, though. Many places in the Bible, God's written revelation, give God the appearance of having the traits that the New Testament attributes to Satan. Isaiah 45:7 is just one of many instances: "*I form the light, and **create darkness**: I make peace, and **create evil**: I the LORD do all these things.*"

This verse appears to go against all we've learned about God's nature thus far. This and similar texts have been used by atheists, agnostics, and other opponents of Christianity to argue against the existence of the God of the Bible. Furthermore, many of God's "defenders" provided interpretations of these scriptures that continue to disparage God and present the Bible as being incoherent.

The good news is that other men have examined the Bible in the context of its historical development, the cultures of its authors, and its various languages, with all of its nuanced expressions, idioms, and phraseology. These men have emphasized the existence of an idiom of permission among the ancient Hebrews. Many theologians, biblical academics, and Bible translators neglected to take this into account while exegeting and interpreting the Scriptures. This idiom will be examined in these sessions to demonstrate to the reader how it resolves the purported conflicts in the Bible. The most essential thing is that we will see that its message about God's genuine nature is consistent throughout.

Chapter Two

The idiom of Permission

“It is then so common in Holy Scripture to speak of God as actually doing that which He simply permits, and does not absolutely hinder men from doing, that this may be justly regarded as an idiom of eastern speech.”¹ (Thomas Jackson)

Scripture tells us, “.... *that God as to His nature is light, and darkness in Him does not exist*” (1 John 1:5; Wuest). As the “Father of lights,” God is the source of only that which is good and not evil (James 1:17). Yet, other places in Scripture appear to say the exact opposite. Isaiah 45:7 says, “*I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.*” Amos 3:6 tells us, “.... *shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?*” Job also exclaimed, “*shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*” (Job 2:10). We can cite many more.

It may go without saying that the purported conceptions of God contained within the pages of the Old Testament have discouraged many people. Numerous passages within them seem to refute the idea of a good God who detests evil. Nevertheless, a study of *Hebrew idioms* can help to explain these *alleged* Bible difficulties and contradictions. A phrase, a sentence, or an expression that is specific to the language of the people or culture from which it originates is called an *idiom*.

There are several idioms used in American society that should never be translated literally into another language, at least not without explaining what they imply. The phrases “the pot calling the kettle black,” “stop

beating about the bush,” and “caught between a rock and a hard place” are a few examples. The outsider would be confused if these phrases were translated *literally* into another language.

The foreigner won't be able to understand what we are genuinely saying if they are unfamiliar with American society and its distinctive idioms. Every civilization experiences this, and the ancient Hebrews, whom God used to preserve His inspired Word, are not an exception. God, “.... permitted them to speak both according to their vernacular idiom, and their individual peculiarities of style, and according to the usages of language generally, in respect to illustrations, figures, and graces of speech.”²

Without acknowledging this fact, we will not be able to fully comprehend what the Bible is trying to say, especially when it comes to the character of God. In his chapter on “Hebrew Idioms” (Chapter XVI), Joseph Muenscher writes,

Every language has some forms of expression, some characteristic modes of clothing ideas, peculiar to itself, and called the idioms of the language. The Hebrew language abounds in peculiarities of this sort, and it is impossible even for the English reader to attain to a correct understanding of the meaning of Scripture without some knowledge of them; for in our standard English version, instead of being exchanged for equivalent expressions in our own language, they are to a considerable extent translated literally. Such expressions are consequently to be interpreted not according to the English, but according to the Hebrew idiomatic usage.³

Anthony Purver, in the introduction to his own translation of the Bible, wrote:

The Hebrew idioms, or Manner of Expression, as being very different from ours, should be carefully observed, and well understood; otherwise the right Meaning, as well as the propriety of Language, may be missed.⁴

Isaac Brown, in his book, *“The Interpretation of Scripture, in Its Relation to Jewish Modes of Thought,”* also explains this important truth and uses the illustration of two different “Asiatic” cultures:

.... no writing can be properly understood unless we take into account the character of the people among whom the writer moved, the age in which he lived, the modes of thought which then prevailed, and the circumstances and influences by which he was surrounded. It would be unreasonable in the case of the warm, unpractical Asiatics, to look for the same idioms and modes of expressing their thoughts, which prevail among the cool, practical Anglo-Saxon races.⁵

After noting that different cultures have their own idioms that must be understood, Brown informs the reader that within the Hebrew language is an idiom that permeates Scripture. Brown says that “God is often said in Scripture to do that which He permits to be done.”⁶ Brown further adds that the Lord inspired His Word to be written in this idiom to emphasize His supremacy over creation. God also sought to preserve Israel from the idolatry of the polytheistic nations that surrounded them.⁷ Brown elaborates further on this point:

To this cause it may at least in part be attributed that they often in their language ascribed to God’s immediate agency that which in His sovereign power and wisdom He might have prevented, but which, notwithstanding, He suffered to take place.⁸

After explaining why our Lord spoke using the mode and expressions of the people, Brown concludes, “.... it leaves to us of the present day the necessity of making ourselves acquainted with those idioms.”⁹

Similarly, William Dalrymple in his book, *“The Scripture Jewish History,”* advised young students to get a comprehension of Hebrew idioms, the “idiom of permission” in particular, in order to understand some of the Old Testament difficulties related to God’s behavior:

One of the most necessary things for youth to regard, if they would understand the Old Testament, is the nature of the Hebrew idiom. For example, how God is said to do what he only permits. Even where there may, and ought to be an interchange of good offices, vice must be guarded against. Likewise error and superstition.¹⁰

It has been our failure to “acquaint ourselves with the idiom of permission” that has made certain parts of Scripture difficult for us. James Kendall explains how our ignorance of this idiom leads to a misunderstanding of those portions of Scripture that attribute evil to God:

There is likewise an idiom peculiar to the language of every nation, more especially of the Eastern nations, which it is necessary, as far as may be, to learn; otherwise we shall make the sacred writers say more, or less, than they intended to say; and shall be liable to wrest some things, which they do say, to their dishonour and our own destruction. For instance, in the language of Scripture God is sometimes said to do what he only permits to take place under his moral government.¹¹

Since the Hebrew people lived in the Ancient Near East and shared in the culture, it is natural that they would adopt similar phraseology. Consequently, Eastern idioms

found their way into the Hebrew language. This includes what scholars refer to as the “idiom of permission.”

This truth is confirmed by numerous scholars. In his book, “Figures of Speech,” under the heading “Idiomatic Usages of Verbs,” E. W. Bullinger explains, “Active verbs were used by the Hebrews to express, not the doing of the thing, but the permission of the thing which the agent is said to do.”¹² Also, while commenting on Jeremiah 20:7, “*O LORD, thou hast deceived me,*” Bullinger writes that it, “... can be understood only by noticing the force of the Hebrew idiom, by which one is said to do what he permits to be done.”¹³ According to David Russell, this is the case with such Scripture:

“According to the idiom of the Scripture language, words of an active signification are often used to express, not the doing of the thing said to be done, but the permission, or the prediction of it.”¹⁴

Commenting on 2 Chron. 25:16, where the prophet said unto King Amaziah, “*I know that God hath determined to destroy thee,*” Hebrew scholar Robert Young writes that it is, “... agreeably to the well-known scripture idiom whereby what God allows he is said to do.”¹⁵ Ingram Cobbin explains that in 1 Kings 16:2, where God reminds Jehu, “*I made thee prince over my people Israel,*” the meaning is “... permitted thee to be, according to the Hebrew idiom.”¹⁶

Concerning Ezekiel 3:20, where God warns, “*I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die,*” Samuel Humphreys explains:

... we read in the prophesy of Ezekiel, chap. iii, 20, of God’s laying a stumbling block before him that turns from his righteousness and committeth iniquity. **And it is an idiom of the Hebrew language,** which we find often in the Holy

Scripture, to express that as done by another, **which is only permitted to be done.**¹⁷

As can be shown, a number of specialists support this “idiom of permission.” As a result, all alleged Bible inconsistencies that mischaracterize God and make Him the source of evil are frequently the result of a failure to recognize this essential idiom:

Another charge brought, not against the ‘Church,’ but against the ‘Bible,’ is, that it represents evil or lying spirits as ‘sent forth by God with direct commission to lead men into sin and misery This objection is founded on ignorance of the idioms of the original languages of the Scriptures, for not only are both Old and New Testaments full of the most express declarations of the infinitely holy and just nature and character of God, which require that all apparently inconsistent statements be viewed from a special standing point, but it is as certain as anything possibly can be in Scripture interpretation that in Scripture idiom a person is said to do a thing, not only when he actually himself personally does it, but also he *permits* or *allows* it.¹⁸

Scripture never contradicts itself, and God’s nature and attributes remain constant (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17; Hebrews 13:8). Therefore, if we are to comprehend the Father’s character as the loving, holy, kind, benevolent, harmless, and trustworthy God that our Lord Jesus and other divinely inspired writers presented to us, applying this “idiom of permission” to interpreting those portions of Scripture that appear to contradict the true light of God’s character is crucial.

Chapter Three

Scripture and the Idiom of Permission

“.... seek the literal meaning of each passage, consult the text in the original tongues, compare Scripture with Scripture, learn the intent of those expressions or idioms that are peculiar to Scripture.”¹
(Arthur T. Russell)

We mentioned the late Bible scholar Isaac Brown in the previous chapter, who claimed that the Bible contains an idiom in which “God is often said in Scripture to do that which He permits to be done.” Brown went on to say that we should be “making ourselves acquainted with those idioms.” He considered Scripture comparison to be one of the most effective ways to accomplish this:

The documents of the Hebrew nation, whose origin, history, theology, and surroundings were all of so special a character, and so widely removed from those of any other people, require to be read in the light of their own individuality of thought, so far as that can be gathered; and this can be greatly aided by bringing together and comparing passages of Scripture in which the same mode of thought occurs.²

In his “Academical Lectures,” Robert Balmer determined that the clearer passages must clarify those lines in Scripture that others consider dark. The “idiom of permission” is discovered by comparing Scripture to Scripture itself:

But does not the scripture, it may be said, go much farther than this, when it declares that God hardens the hearts of men? thus ascribing to him a direct

and positive agency in the production of sinful actions. To this it may be replied, that to interpret such expressions in the literal and unqualified sense, as importing that God infuses moral depravity into the human heart, is not only to contradict other declarations of scripture, but to subvert entirely the foundations of religion, by divesting the Almighty of those moral perfections without which it would be impossible for his intelligent creatures to regard him with sentiments of veneration, confidence, and love. It would be to ascribe to him attributes which would transform him into a legitimate object of suspicion, and terror, and hatred. It may be remarked next, that, **according to the idiom of scripture language, God is often said to do those things which he permits**, and which he is determined to render conducive to his own holy and benevolent purposes. Lastly, it is evidently fair and reasonable **to interpret those expressions of scripture, as of other writings, which are dubious or dark, by those which are clear and unequivocal.** Now, “times almost without number,” and in terms the most explicit and unambiguous, the scripture guards us against the ascription of any thing evil to God, and teaches us to ascribe to him whatever is good, or excellent, or holy. “I will ascribe righteousness to my Maker. Far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity.”³ (emphasis added)

Ironically, Scripture has given us the fundamental keys to unlocking this idiom. The keys are found in 2 Chronicles 21:1 and 1 Samuel 24:1. In the first, we find the following:

And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.

Because God would tempt nobody to sin, James 1:13 and other Scriptures are written in the “idiom of permission” common at the time and within his culture, in which God is supposed to do what He only permitted or did not prohibit. However, God inspired another writer to explain the terminology in 1 Chronicles 21:1 so that future generations of Bible readers wouldn’t be puzzled, “*And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.*”

These two chapters constitute the Bible’s “Rosetta Stone” for figuring out how to utilize the Bible itself to apply the language of permission to Scripture passages that appear to cast doubt on God’s character. This is something that several intellectuals and theologians agree on. E. W. Bullinger observes in his comments on 2 Samuel 24:1 that this is an example of the “idiom of permission,” using 1 Chronicles 21:1 as confirmation:

He moved-He suffered him to be moved. By Hebrew idiom (and also by modern usage) a person is said to do that which he permits to be done. Here we have the historical fact. In 1 Chron. 21:1 we have the real fact from the Divine standpoint ... God’s permission, but Satan’s suggestion.⁴

Another author, similarly, cites these two Scripture verses to establish this *peculiar* Hebrew idiom:

He is also, by a peculiar idiom of the Hebrew language, said to do, what he permits another to do. Thus, in the first book of Chronicles, it is said, “*And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.*” Yet, in the 24th chap. 2 Samuel, it is said, “*And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.*” In the one text, God is said to have moved David, in the other, Satan. What then ought to be the solution? Certainly, that God permitted Satan to

tempt David, and not that God himself tempted him; for if he did, how could he with justice have punished David?⁵ (Emphasis added)

Also, in response to the purported inconsistency between 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1, John Hayter Cox comments, “Every language has its own peculiar idiom; and an extensive understanding on this subject, constitutes a scholar.”⁶ Cox continues to explain:

Our translators have kept close to the Hebrew idiom; they give us English sentences in Hebrew phraseology. We, therefore, must endeavour to ascertain the meaning of such sentences, by bringing them together, and laying down a proposition which contains their evident meaning. When a man does what is displeasing to God, and God does not restrain him, God is said to do it.⁷

As per Cox, because our English translations have translated Hebrew idioms, including those written in the permissive sense, in a literal “word for word” fashion, Western Bible readers who are not familiar with the Hebrews’ Ancient Eastern culture will have to interpret idiomatic phrases based on their explanations in other parts of Scripture. According to another researcher, it is primarily through this method that we stop mischaracterizing God as the author of evil. Using Pharaoh’s heart hardening as an example, he explains:

Such can find no conclusion short of the awful doctrine, that God is the author of evil, and that he predestinated Pharaoh to be wicked. Two things however have to be considered relative to this matter. First, that, **according to the scripture idiom, God is often said to do that which he only permits.** Thus he is said, in 2 Samuel xxiv. 1, to move David to number Israel; whereas in 1 Chron. xxi. 1, Satan is expressly said to have been the

author of that temptation. And as in another place it is declared that God tempteth no man with evil, (James i. 13) so in the present instance we must understand, that God left Pharaoh to the natural hardness of his heart, and permitted Satan to practise upon it.⁸ (Emphasis added)

We will have a better concept of what it means for God to have hardened Pharaoh's heart if we realize from 2 Samuel 24:1 and 2 Chronicles 21:1 how God is frequently said in Scripture to do things that He simply did not prohibit Satan from doing. Another author, John Hannah, applies the premise presented in these two Scripture references to further the truth about Pharaoh's Satanic influence:

.... by contravening which the heart is hardened, may be said to have hardened the heart of Pharaoh, though it was Pharaoh's selfwill that really hardened it. He who warns us against the bad influence of Satan, yet will not win for us that victory which the conditions of our moral nature bind us to achieve for ourselves, may be described as having moved David to number the people, though Satan is elsewhere said to have 'provoked' the work. The sin, in fact, was David's own; for all sin finds its real commencement in the offender's own responsibility of will. But the phrases of Scripture become clear when we remember that Satan was the tempter, and was thus accountable for the temptation; while God had created the nature and the laws which were perverted in that act of distrust and rebellion.⁹

Hannah clarifies that this "permission" is a Hebrew term in his notes on the subject:

There is a doubt on the interpretation of 2 Sam. xxiv. 1, as is noted in the English margin If (the objector) had been disposed to look into the

original, and had known **anything of the Hebrew idiom**, he might have perceived that the text does not say that God moved David (for the word God is not in the text at all) Dr. Stanley retains the contrast as it stands in the English version: The same temptation which in one book is ascribed to God, is in another ascribed to Satan.¹⁰

Please bear with us while we present one more quote that is relevant to this topic. Samuel Richard Bosanquet utilizes 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1 in his book *“Interpretation; Rules and Principles Assisting the Reading of the Holy Scriptures”* to demonstrate why it is essential to fully understand this particular idiom of Scripture:

So, 2 Sam. xxiv. I, And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and ‘he’ moved David against them:- This he’ is impersonal in this place, and is explained by 1 Chron. xxi. 1, where it is said, ‘Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.’ That is, God permitted Satan: as at Job, i. 12, and ii. 6 These idioms may, many of them, seem obvious, and hardly worthy of mentioning. But they are necessary to be noticed, because forced applications are often made of expressions which are simply poetical and idiomatic.¹¹

In summation, a comparison of Scripture with Scripture demonstrates that the “idiom of permission” is present throughout the Bible. Moses warns Israel in Deuteronomy 29:24 that disobedience to God will bring such a curse and disaster to them and their land that spectators will be amazed: *“Even all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land? what meaneth the heat of this great anger?”* But God tells Moses right away that Israel *“will forsake me, and break my covenant”* (Deut. 31:16). In essence, the devastation

will come upon them when they push God away and remove themselves from God's covenant protection:

*Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and **I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?*** (Deut. 31:17)

While it will be claimed that “*the Lord done thus unto this land,*” the truth is that “*these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us.*” Here, God is considered having done something that He could have prevented if He had continued to safeguard Israel. We read the following on Israel's battle against its enemies:

Deuteronomy 31:3-5

3 The Lord thy God, he will go over before thee, and **he will destroy these nations** from before thee, and thou shalt possess them: and Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the Lord hath said.

4 And **the Lord shall do unto them** as he did to Sihon and to Og, kings of the Amorites, and unto the land of them, whom he destroyed.

5 And **the Lord shall give them up** before your face, **that ye may do unto them** according unto all the commandments which I have commanded you.

In verses 3 and 4, God said that He “*will destroy these nations*” and that He “*shall do unto them.*” In verse

4, however, we find that His primary activity is to “give them up” so that Israel “may do unto them.”

“Give them up” is actually a translation of the Hebrew word “*nathan*.” It is the same word used in Ezekiel 20:25 where God tells the prophet, “*I suffered others to give them statutes*” (E. W. Bullinger’s Companion Bible, 1909). E. W. Bullinger explains in his “Companion Bible” notes:

In Hebrew idiom = I suffered others to give them statutes, it: i.e. in their captivity. Active verbs in Hebrew were used to express not only the doing of the thing, but the permission of the thing which the agent is said to do. The verb *nathan*, to give, is therefore often rendered to suffer in this sense ... The same idiom is used in N.T.¹²

“Nathan” is also the Hebrew term used in Numbers 21:35 in regard to both Sihon and Og, where God says, “*I will allow you to defeat him*” (Easy to Read Version), and in Deuteronomy 3:3, “*So the Lord our God let us defeat King Og of Bashan*” (Easy to Read Version). The biblical idiom that God is said to do what He allowed, permitted, or did not prevent is supported by *nathan* (allow, permit) and used in the context of God’s seemingly personal action.

As a result, when God said about Israel’s foes that He “*will destroy these nations*” and “*shall do unto them,*” He meant that He would do what He allowed Israel to accomplish when He refused to protect these nations (see Num. 14:9). A similar passage can be seen in Joshua 23:3, where Joshua says about Israel’s enemies:

And ye have seen all that the Lord your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the Lord your God is he that hath fought for you.

The devastation and destruction that occurred among the Canaanite nations is said to have been caused by God. Joshua, on the other hand, explained this idiomatic terminology in a previous chapter:

And the Lord delivered Lachish into the hand of Israel, which took it on the second day, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and all the souls that were therein, according to all that he had done to Libnah. (Joshua 10:32)

The word “delivered” is derived from the Hebrew word “nathan” which, as we said, signifies permission. The Easy-to-Read Version renders Joshua 10:32, “*The Lord allowed them to defeat the city of Lachish.*” God is believed to have “rent” or “taken” the kingdom of Israel from Saul and deliver it to David in the same way:

And the LORD hath done to him, as he spake by me: for the LORD hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbour, even to David (1 Samuel 28:17)

How will the Lord go about doing this to Saul? This is explained in the context:

1 Samuel 28:18-19

18 Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the LORD, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, **therefore hath the LORD done this thing unto thee this day.**

19 Moreover the LORD will also **deliver Israel with thee** into the hand of the

Philistines: and to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the LORD also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.

*“That is why the Lord is **doing this to you** today The Lord **will let the Philistines defeat you** and the army of Israel today,”* says the Easy-to-Read Version, interpreting the verse in terms of permission. The Lord took the kingdom from Saul’s hands and delivered it to David, not by personally killing Saul, but by His non-interference in Saul’s demise, allowing the Philistines to kill him. God is said to have done what He only permitted in the case of Saul.

Once again, the Bible teaches that there is an “idiom of permission” in which God is said to perform something that He only permitted or did not prevent. Interestingly, the Chronicler claims that God *killed* Saul in this manner (Compare 1 Chron. 10:13-14 with 1 Chron. 10:4 and 1 Sam. 31:4-5). This identical idiom can be found throughout Israel’s documented history, where God threatens to smite them for following Jeroboam into sin:

*For **the Lord shall smite Israel**, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the Lord to anger. And he shall **give Israel up** because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin. (1 Kings 14:15-16)*

“Give Israel up” comes from the Hebrew word “nathan,” which is a permissive verb as we’ve seen. Another translation renders verse 16, *“He will let the*

Israelites be defeated because Jeroboam sinned, and then he made the Israelites sin” (Easy to Read Version). God smites Israel by His non-interference rather than personally destroying them. This allowed Israel’s adversaries to have their way:

*Then the men of Judah gave a shout: and as the men of Judah shouted, it came to pass, that **God smote Jeroboam** and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. And the children of Israel fled before Judah: and **God delivered them** into their hand. (2 Chronicles 13:15-16)*

The Hebrew word “nathan” is used again in verse 16 as “delivered.” The Easy-to-Read Version also assists us in rendering this passage: “*The men of Israel ran away from the men of Judah. God let the army from Judah defeat the army from Israel.*” God also takes responsibility for smiting the Egyptians in Exodus, yet He immediately clarifies the idiomatic expressions:

*For **the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians**; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and **will not suffer the destroyer** to come in unto your houses to smite you. (Exodus 12:23)*

The Easy-to-Read Version renders the latter part of the passage, “*The Lord will not let the Destroyer come into your houses and hurt you.*” God smiting the Egyptians is not a direct action on His behalf, but rather a statement that He would not stop the destroyer from doing

so. This can also be seen in His promise to safeguard the Israelites from the same destroyer.

In one more example of this type, we are told that when Israel forsook God that the Lord afflicted them. However, the passage's context indicates how He is believed to have accomplished this:

*And the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and **delivered them into the hand of spoilers**, until he had cast them out of his sight. (2 Kings 17:20)*

God afflicted Israel by ceasing to protect them and allowing their enemies to overcome them. We observe that He is said to do what He allowed others to do once more. According to another translation, "*He punished them by allowing the armies of other nations to defeat them*" (Unlocked Dynamic Version).

These instances illustrate that the Bible clearly defines this "idiom of permission." There are many more examples that might be given, and some of our other publications have already done so.¹³ Therefore, we'll confine this chapter to the items listed above. Even these few instances indicate that one does not need to be a Hebrew language expert to understand this truth. Simply study the Scriptures thoroughly, interpret Scripture with Scripture, and allow the Holy Spirit to lead you to appropriate instances.

Chapter Four

Calvinism and the Idiom of Permission

He felt strongly on the subject of Calvinism; he regarded it as the most awful misrepresentation of God's character and dispensations, as **the most forced and unnatural interpretation of the sacred Scriptures**, and as one of the most frightful and immoral theological systems, that had ever appeared on earth he could scarce restrain his indignation, when obliged to plead the cause of eternal equity, and defend the character of God our Father, against the horrible imputations thrown on them by the Calvinistic system.¹ (Summary of W. E. Channing's Views; Emphasis added)

The Bible is God's written revelation to man.² It is from this written revelation that we receive our initial understanding of who God is, what He is like and how He acts toward us (Jeremiah 9:24; John 17:3; 1 John 5:20). However, many people who have read the Bible in its entirety have drawn opposing conclusions regarding God's character and behavior.

This is partly due to influential theologians in church history who misinterpreted the Bible. These theologians adopted several idiosyncrasies that fostered harsh notions about the character, ways, and deeds of God because they were ignorant of or outright rejected the truth regarding the background and culture of individuals who God conveyed His word through.

The reading of Scripture by Saint Augustine Aurelius, who was inspired by Manichean thought, is

just one of many examples.³ This philosophy regarded God as the determiner and ultimate controller of both good and evil.⁴ This conception of God informed the Manichean interpretation of Scripture, and Augustine adopted it.

Calvinism, also known as *Reformed* theology, has been significantly influenced by Augustine's misinterpretation of God's nature. John Calvin regularly references Augustine as support for his obscure interpretations of Scripture in his "Institutes" and mentions him repeatedly.⁵ Calvin affirmed Augustine's paganistic interpretations of the Bible, sustaining Augustine's perverted view of God.⁶

Calvin adopted Augustine's position that God *causes* events rather than simply *permitting* them to occur.⁷ Naturally, the "permissive sense" interpretation had no place in Augustine and Calvin's exegesis of Scripture.⁸ Calvin decried as "frivolous" the use of the phrase which *God is said to do that which He permitted* in regard to Scriptures, such as the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.⁹ As another writer said in reference to God hardening Pharaoh's heart, "It is an idiom of Scripture language, meaning: I shall let Pharaoh harden his heart. Calvin maintains that hardening was the work of God Himself."¹⁰

It's not that the Hebrew "idiom of permission" was unknown in Calvin's time; he just outright rejected it, claiming that no Hebrew scholar endorsed it. In his interpretation on Psalm 69:27, which reads, "*Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness,*" Calvin penned the following:

The explanation they give of it is, That God adds sins to sins by permitting them; and they defend such an exposition by asserting that this is an idiom of the Hebrew language, an assertion, the accuracy of which no Hebrew scholar will admit. Nor is it

necessary to bring forward any such quibbles to excuse God; for, when he blinds the reprobate, it is sufficient for us to know that he has good and just causes for doing so; and it is in vain for men to murmur and to dispute with him, as if they sinned only by his impulse. Although the causes why they are blinded sometimes lie hidden in the secret purpose of Deity, there is not a man who is not reproved by his own conscience; and it is our duty to adore and admire the high mysteries of God, which surpass our understanding.¹¹

Calvin disregarded the existence of a biblical idiom of permission because he believed that God was the cause of sin (while maintaining that God remains holy). Calvin, using the method of the gnostic Manichaeism's form of Biblical exegesis, asserted that Scriptures like Psalm 69:27 are concealed in God's "mystery" and "secret purposes."¹² Thomas Jackson, concerning the authority our Lord gave to his disciples in John 20:2-23, explains:

.... this authority our Saviour expresses according to a well-known idiom of the Jews' language. It is no wonder, then, that God is said to do that which He permitted men to do, when they had by their sins provoked Him to withdraw from them the restraints of His providence and grace. **Inattention to Scripture forms of expression is one of the most fruitful sources of theological error.**¹³
(Emphasis added)

Calvin is accountable for this same "inattention" that resulted in his serious theological blunder. The Hebrew word "*nathan*" that is translated as "add" in Psalm 69:27, as well as the translation and context of many other passages of Scripture that use the word, inform us that it means "to permit" and not "to cause." The phrase is used in 1 Kings 14:16, as was mentioned in

the previous chapter, where it is stated that God, “*shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam.*” It is worthwhile to reiterate here E. W. Bullinger’s definition of “nathan,” which was also mentioned in the previous chapter:

In Hebrew idiom = I suffered others to give them statutes, it: i.e. in their captivity. Active verbs in Hebrew were used to express not only the doing of the thing, but the permission of the thing which the agent is said to do. The verb *nathan*, to give, is therefore often rendered to suffer in this sense The same idiom is used in N.T.¹⁴

Even the English translators of Calvin’s commentary had the foresight to propose a different interpretation that was more in keeping with Bullinger’s justification.¹⁵ The permissive sense of the verb was also supported by another Calvin contemporary, Philip Melancthon (who was actually a close friend of Calvin¹⁶): “He gave them up for this signification of permission is extremely frequent in the Hebrew verbs.”¹⁷

In disagreement with Calvin, Melancthon’s knowledge of Hebrew verbs led him to claim that the Hebrew language has an idiom of permission:

.... from the sayings, I will ‘harden the heart of Pharaoh,’ and ‘whom he will be hardeneth,’ the unlearned argue that God is the efficient cause of sin; to this and the like phrases we must answer, It is most certain, that verbs active according to the Hebrew idiom often signify permission, not efficiency: As, ‘lead us not into temptation,’ that is, suffer us not to be overcome when we are tempted.¹⁸

Add to this the fact that other Bible translators working during Calvin’s lifetime interpreted Psalm

69:27's verb as permissive and aligned their translation with the Hebrew word for permission.¹⁹

Calvin's assertion that "no Hebrew scholar will admit" to the use of the idiom of permission is absurd in light of this evidence. Even more significant than confirmation from "Hebrew scholars," we might come to the conclusion that Psalm 69:27 should be understood in the "permissive sense" by "interpreting Scripture with Scripture" (see Psalm 81:12; Acts 7:42; Romans 1:24-28). Calvin therefore used his gnostic pagan theories about God's purported "hidden purposes" to inform his understanding of Scripture rather than the text itself.

In a similar way, Calvinist theologians throughout history have let their interpretation of the Bible be shaped by Calvin's hermeneutic—his approach to Scripture interpretation. As Walter Copinger explained, "It is very well known that the translation of the Bible," to which he makes reference to the King James Version, "was mostly done by men who held extreme views on the side of predestination."²⁰ In other words, these were men who devotedly applied Calvin's approach to the interpretation of the Bible. As another scholar put it:

Old King James' famous ten propositions, all in favor of ecclesiastic despotism, backed up by his long sword, in themselves rendered an honest translation impossible, while the translators themselves were not only for most part ultra Calvinists in dogma, and hierarchs in order, but they took pains to bulldoze themselves with fresh relays of Calvinism from Geneva.²¹

The most widely used English translation contains a doctrinal slant in addition to sharing the same lack of understanding (and contempt) for Hebrew idioms as their religious system's originator did. On April 1, 1856, the Anglo-Biblical Institute convened to examine the

necessity to update the King James Version (sometimes referred to as the “Authorized Version”). They came to the conclusion that this project was required. There were numerous reasons, two of which were:

Because many theological errors are grounded on passages which are well known by the learned of all denominations to be erroneously represented in the Authorized Version; consequently religious controversy would be diminished by a better Translation Because the original languages of Holy Scripture are better understood now, than they were in the reign of King James I.; and much light has been thrown on the idioms and grammatical peculiarities of the Original, by the skill and researches of later scholars.²²

The Calvinists’ theological error is linked to their lack of understanding and disrespect for Hebrew idioms. This is bolstered by the translation’s failure to render the Hebrew idioms in a manner that a reader of English might comprehend. Samuel Hinds, in his critique of the KJV, remarked that, “The idioms of the original language” were frequent and that “Without explanation, the mere English reader is perpetually liable to misunderstand the meaning and purpose of what is expressed in a form so different from any in our own language.”²³

Augustine’s influence through Calvin resulted in bad Bible exegesis, which in turn gave rise to some translations that were not idiomatically accurate, which in turn led to even worse Bible exegesis, particularly among Calvinists. This has been exploited by ideological Calvinists who use Scripture passages, particularly those where God is believed to have hardened Pharaoh’s heart, to substantiate their claims.

These specific verses in the Bible are cited by theologians of the “Reformed-Calvinist” school to argue for their view that God is the “first cause” of everything

that occurs. These are also used by atheists, agnostics, and other detractors of God to support their arguments that the Bible is riddled with inconsistencies and serves as evidence against the God of Christianity.

Sincere Christians and many others who are looking for the truth about God are caught in the crossfire. They wish to accept the Scriptures' divine inspiration and infallibility, but they find it challenging to do so in light of the perceived contradictions.

We firmly believe that the stated differences would not exist if Bible translators had taken the time to get familiar with Hebrew idioms, particularly the idiom of permission. It is crucial to understand that a prejudiced translation, one that initially did not respect Hebrew idioms, particularly the idiom of permission, is the basis of the issue. John Murray writes in the chapter "Mistranslations to Support Calvinist Views" about how God hardened Pharaoh's heart:

The words Moses used in the Hebrew, often signify a simple permission Therefore the passage should be "God suffered the heart of Pharaoh to be hardened," which would deprive objectors of their handle for attack, and Calvinists of their absolute reprobation.²⁴

Murray continues by demonstrating the significance of the permission idiom for the correct interpretation of these incorrectly translated passages:

Hence, according to the peculiar idiom of the language, a thing is often said to be done by a person, who only permits or grants that it should be done So God is said to do a thing, when he only permits that it should be done; as where he is said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart, and the heart of Sihon, and of the kings of Canaan, and that he "hardens whom he will."²⁵

Murray concludes, “In such cases, if Scripture is understood literally, and not according to the peculiarity of the language, it not only becomes unintelligible, but also appears to contradict its own teaching.”²⁶ Additionally, this neglect leads to an erroneous perception of God’s nature. John Bowden criticizes the Calvinistic method of exegeting Scripture in his book “*A Full Length Portrait of Calvinism*”:

Attending to the sound of words more than to the sense; interpreting a few texts in a detached, insulated manner, and paying no regard to the context and to the drift of the writer, they make the scripture inconsistent with itself, with the nature and attributes of God, and with the plainest dictates of sound reason.²⁷

The Calvinist’s use of phrases like “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart” shows a lack of understanding of both Hebrew idiom and how God operates, according to Bowden, who then goes into further detail:

.... that God when he sees fit, leaves those nations and individuals to that hardness of heart, which his judgments, when resisted, never fail to produce In this sense then, God may be said to harden the heart, when his judgments produce an effect directly contrary to what they are calculated to produce. He is also, by a peculiar idiom of the Hebrew language, said to do, what he permits another to do.²⁸

The Calvinists’ use of “God hardening Pharaoh’s heart” as the basis for their misrepresentation of God was also criticized by Robert Fellowes:

As favouring the calvinistic construction of personal reprobation, the history of Pharaoh has

been cited with much supposed triumph Here they say there is an absolute act of God reprobing Pharaoh, and, to fit him for such reprobation.²⁹

Robert Fellowes agreed with others in recognizing that the Calvinists' rejection of the Hebrew idiom of permission is the basis for their incorrect conclusions about Pharaoh's hardening:

To harden Pharaoh's heart, according to the idea or idiom of the English language, implies that the hardness of Pharaoh's heart was caused by the supernatural power of God. But, according to the idea or idiom of the Hebrew language, it implies no more, than that God left Pharaoh to his own convictions, without using any supernatural methods to soften his heart.³⁰

Joseph Muenscher added that deterministic theologians mischaracterized God because they did not properly apply this idiomatic language to Pharaoh's hardening and other passages of this nature:

Verbs sometimes have a *permissive sense* 'Lead us not into temptation,' i. e., suffer us not to be brought under the power of temptation. The declaration that God hardened Pharaoh's heart is susceptible of a like interpretation. Misapplication of this idiom at one time led some New England metaphysical divines to assert as an article of their belief the monstrous and revolting doctrine that unholy as well as holy volitions were the immediate effect of divine agency, Such are only a few specimens of the very numerous and various idiomatic expressions which occur in the Scriptures.³¹

In conclusion, if the Hebrew idioms had been employed as the hermeneutic for interpreting Scripture instead of Augustine's Manichaeism, the false pagan

theology acquired from Augustine, propagated by Calvin, and later reinforced in our English translations, could have been avoided. According to John Goodge Foyster:

In the language of Scripture, natural consequences are sometimes spoken of as though they were pre-ordained and irrevocable decrees. **What happens solely through the permission of the Almighty**, in the ordinary course of his Providence, is described as though it had taken place through some special and irresistible intervention of his hand. **This is a mode of writing peculiar to the Hebrew idiom**; an idiom which prevails every where throughout the New Testament, as well as the Old.³²
(Emphasis added)

The denial of the idiom of permission is not due to a lack of scholarly or biblical grounding. It was rejected because highly regarded “reformers” and the Bible translators who adhered to their worldview retained a pagan mindset in their minds. The Manichaeistic-Augustinian-Calvinist ideology that was imposed on true Christians would have been eliminated if the “idiom of permission” had been applied to the interpretation of Scripture. Predestinarians and their father, Satan, wouldn’t want it, of course.

Chapter Five

Evil and the Idiom of Permission

... pain, calamity, sickness, and death are not to be attributed to God as causing them, and as sending them upon us, but that they and all other evils have entered into the world as the fruits and consequences of sin.¹ (Charles Cuthbert Hall)

The discarding of the idiom of permission by Calvinists, as we discovered in the previous chapter, has encouraged many people to believe the fallacious notion that God is the cause of both moral and physical evil. This wasn't just a concern for our time; it affected Judaism² and early Christianity as well.³

Jews in ancient times, as well as Jewish Christians in the early church, may have had difficulty understanding the idea of progressive revelation and were unable to properly interpret passages in the Old Testament that seemed to attribute evil to God.⁴ It was therefore simple to attribute their temptations to God. The noncanonical work "Ecclesiasticus," also known as "The Wisdom of Joshua the Son of Sirach" (roughly composed between 200 and 175 BC), cautioned its readers against this misconception by saying:

Don't blame the Lord for your sin; the Lord does not cause what he hates. Don't claim that he has misled you; he doesn't need the help of sinners to accomplish his purposes. The Lord hates evil in all its forms, and those who fear the Lord find nothing attractive in evil. (Ecclesiasticus 15:11-13; Good News Bible)

In a later letter to Jewish converts that was inspired by God, James stated that “*God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man*” (James 1:13). Thomas Guthrie stated in his remarks on this text that the fallacy of attributing one’s sin to God originated from, “Importing this idea of heathenism, or perhaps misunderstanding the Scriptures, where God, according to an Eastern idiom, is said to do what in fact He but permits to be done.”⁵ James Macknight adds:

It seems the Judaizers in the Christian church, not willing to acknowledge that, according to the idiom of the Hebrew language, ‘God is said to do what he permits,’ inferred from the passages just now mentioned, that the sinful actions of men being all decreed by God, there is no resisting his will.⁶

Christians and Jews who use isolated Bible verses to support their belief that God is the cause of evil appear to have had and still have a problem with not knowing how to “*rightly divide the Word of Truth*” (2 Tim. 3:16).⁷ The issue with attributing evil to God while asserting that Scripture supports such a premise, regardless of whether it is older Judaism, first-century Christianity, or modern followers of Christ, is failing to acknowledge the Scripture’s idiom of permission. As Brooks wrote, “Such can find no conclusion short of the awful doctrine, that God is the author of evil,” apart from remembering, “that, according to the scripture idiom, God is often said to do that which he only permits.”⁸

Furthermore, when we begin with the framework of God’s holiness and love, we will be more likely to reject a reading of those texts that would portray God as the irresistible force producing moral wrong due to a lack of understanding of the idiom of permission:

I conceive, then, that wherever passages similar to verse 17 occur in scripture, or such as the “Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh,” or “whom he will he hardeneth,” &c., of which in any other sense or way seem to impute to God the application of his irresistible will in inclining men to evil, or depriving them of the faculty of distinguishing right from wrong, the eye to see, or the ear to hear—such passages, without staying to lay stress upon possible imperfections in translation of words or idiomatic phrases, though these are not the infrequent causes of seeming difficulties,* should be brought by the christian mind at once to the great test of scriptural revelation on the nature of God’s known attributes, and when thus held up to the pure light of a gospel abounding in assurances of his unerring justice and mercy, all that is doubtful will disappear like mists before the effulgence of the sun. We shall see how impossible it is that God should be the author or agent of evil.⁹

Similar to this, Edward Williams explained to his listeners how the idiom of permission will keep us away from an erroneous interpretation of Scripture that would otherwise cast aspersions on God’s character:

After all, it may be objected, that the *Scriptures* ascribe to God the causation of moral evil; as, hardening the heart of Pharaoh—hardening whom he will making the wicked for the day of evil—appointing to destruction determining the death of Christ—delivering him by determinate counsel—doing all evil in a city—making vessels to dishonour—fitting them for destruction, &c. In reply to this objection it must be considered, that whatever the import of such representations may be, no interpretation which is *unworthy of God* can be the true meaning — at the idioms of the sacred languages ascribing cause or operation to God must be understood according to the nature of the subject—and, what is particularly to our purpose, that active verbs which denote *making, bring, causing,* and the like, often

denote a *declaration* of the thing done, or that shall take place; or a *permission* of it.¹⁰

The Biblical idiom of permission would be more readily accepted if we approached our study of the Bible with the conviction that God is good and does not do evil of any kind. Additionally, it shouldn't be restricted to the concept of *moral evil* alone. A good God does not cause disease, catastrophe, or anything else we may classify as *natural evil*.

When predestination doctrine and the false belief that God is the source of moral evil are rejected, some Christians nevertheless support the notion that God is the source and personal distributor of natural or physical evil, such as illness and natural disasters. More than a century ago, one wise clergyman challenged the notion of distinguishing between moral and physical evil in relation to God's administration:

Physical evils are not less antagonistic to divine providence. Reverse the order. Jesus devoted much time to healing of the sick, and restoring the defects and abnormal conditions of the human body. His commission to the Church and disciples was to heal the sick, (Mark 16:18; Jas. 5:15). Divine providence has nothing to do with causing sickness, sorrow, pain and death. But it is the desire of God that these evils shall be removed. The devil has the power of death, and Christ came to destroy the devil and his power, and to deliver man from bondage, i. e., physical bondage, (Heb. 2 : 14, 15). God in no way does evil or permits evil. There is no necessity for drawing distinctions between moral and physical evils. If a free being sins, he is responsible for the deed and its consequences.¹¹

The aforementioned is something we completely concur with.¹² As a result, the idiom of permission must be used in every text in which God is claimed to inflict

evil, especially devastating evil. It is not merely appropriate in passages that attribute moral evil to God. Now let's analyze a verse from the Bible that attributes evil to God and see how it relates to this idiom:

I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. (Isaiah 45:7)

Some people use this verse to suggest that God is the cause of all evil, both moral and physical. Some have made an effort to refute this by pointing out that the evil being discussed here merely refers to *disaster*. This argument contends that God is the cause of natural disasters but not moral evil. Even while we concur that the “evil” being discussed here should be understood to be physical (disasters, illness, war, etc.), relating this to God’s creative ability does little to address problems with his character. This simply serves to embolden insurance firms that refuse to honor claims for incidents that qualify as “acts of God.” Instead, it is better in keeping with God’s nature of unselfish love to interpret Isaiah 45:7 in light of the idiom of permission:

In Isaiah, God says, “I create evil.” At the same time we know, from the whole tenor of Holy Writ, that God is not the author of evil. **Yet Isaiah’s expression is correct and idiomatic.** Whatever is done by an agent, is said to be done by the power restraining and directing that agent. In like manner, it is usual in Scripture to attribute to the Supreme Power, acts which are virtually those of his instruments, and **which he merely permits**, in order to overrule and evolve good from them.¹³ (Emphasis added)

This is true, as can be shown when Isaiah 45:7 is interpreted in the context of other verses in the Bible. The

Lord warns the disobedient nation in 2 Kings 21 that He is bringing evil upon their cities. What He will do to bring this evil about is clear from the context:

*Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Behold, **I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies** (2 Kings 21:12, 14)*

Another translation of verse 14 says, “*And I will abandon the people who remain alive, and I will allow their enemies to conquer them*” (Unlocked Dynamic Bible). God’s principal means of inflicting evil is through His alienation and removal of His protecting presence: “*.... are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?*” (Deut. 31:17b). We must also remember that people are the ones who tell God they do not want Him around, and He hesitantly complies (Job 21:14; 22:17; Hosea 11:6-9).

Additionally, God is frequently said to bring evil when He permits Satan to cause suffering (Compare Job 42:11 with Job 1:12; 2:6-7). With this in mind, we must realize that God does not actually create darkness and evil. When he no longer prevents Satan, the prince of darkness and evil, from carrying out his destructive deeds, is when evil comes about. In his “Book of Isaiah: Translated from the Aramaic Scriptures,” I think Victor Alexander accurately reflects the whole meaning of Isaiah 45:7: “*Who makes peace and lets evil happen; I am the Maryah who did all these things.*”

Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it? (Amos 3:6)

Men have also attempted to interpret this verse in the same manner as they did with Isaiah 45:7. On the other hand, many determinists who wish to argue that God is the source of evil frequently use Amos 3:6, Isaiah 45:7, and other Scriptures as their arguments. But it should be taken in a permissive sense:

*“Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it? Faithful Ministers, mighty in the scriptures, would, in such a connexion, have enquired what **there is in the idiom of the Hebrew language** that is peculiar to it whether there is not, in providence, a wide difference between **what God, for wise ends, permits**; and what he absolutely ordains, and by his proper power and agency effects.¹⁴ (Emphasis added)*

Amos himself explains the language when he writes in Amos 6:8, “.... *therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein*” (Amos 6:8) or, as the Easy-to-Read Version renders it, “*So I will let an enemy take the city and everything in it.*” This is also affirmed by the prophet Jeremiah:

For I have set my face against this city for evil, and not for good, saith the LORD: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. (Jeremiah 21:10)

The Contemporary English Version reads, “*I have decided not to rescue Jerusalem. Instead, I am going to*

let the king of Babylonia burn it to the ground.” By interpreting Scripture in the context of Scripture, we can see that the primary way God brings evil upon a city is by His non-interference, thus giving the enemy free reign. But even in this, we must recognize that God’s love is so great that He hesitates to act in this way. In Hosea 11:9 God says, *“I will not return to destroy Ephraim and I will not enter into the city.”* He clarifies his meaning in verse 8 where He painfully said, *“How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel?”* Or, as the Easy-to-Read Version renders it, *“Ephraim, I don’t want to give you up. Israel, I want to protect you.”*

Scripture must be interpreted idiomatically whenever God is claimed to bring harm to, do evil to, or bring devastation upon, a city. Even his prophets spoke about themselves in an identical way. Sometimes it was said that the prophet actually carried out the action that they had only been foretelling (Isa. 6:9-10; Jer. 1:10; Eze. 32:18-20; Matt. 10:34-36). In Ezekiel 43:3, the prophet wrote concerning himself, *“.... even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city.”* Edward Williams, who informed us about “the idioms of the sacred languages,” wrote concerning Ezekiel’s statement that “his meaning undoubtedly is, When I came to prophecy or declare that the city should be destroyed.”¹⁵ Therefore, Amos 3:6 should be read idiomatically rather than literally.

But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips. (Job 2:10)

In order to comprehend Job’s words, it is important to remember that he belonged to an ancient

Semitic society that the Israelites also adopted.¹⁶ Therefore, Job 2:10 should be read in the light of, as Thomas Jackson expressed it, "... a well-known idiom of the Jews' language. It is no wonder, then, that God is said to do that which He permitted men to do."¹⁷ Applying this truth to Job 2:10, Jackson writes, "As these calamities were inflicted by God's permission, they are, in accordance with the general phraseology of Scripture, ascribed to God Himself."¹⁸

Without knowing the context of Job's statement, a lot of people have misquoted it. More importantly, individuals who carelessly misinterpret Job unintentionally paint God as schizophrenic. Job's quote incorrectly depicts God as violating the fundamental laws laid down in other sections of Scripture that tell us that good and evil cannot originate from the same source (Matt. 7:17-18; 13:35; James 3:11-12). Since "... *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*" (1 John 1:5), then He cannot be the source of evil as well as good. One only needs to read the first two chapters of Job to see that it was Satan, and not God, who brought evil on Job (Job 1:12; 2:6-7).

Similarly, in Job 1:21, Job said, "*the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away.*" This verse is frequently cited at funerals. Without knowing the Hebrews have an idiom of permission, this assertion would be in stark contrast to other passages in Scripture where God is said to neither take away nor increase sorrow to the blessings He bestows (Prov. 10:22; Rom. 11:29; James 1:17).

Robert Young, in his concordance has a section titled "*Analytical Survey of the Idioms of the Bible.*" In this section Dr. Young expounds upon a number of *rules* regarding Scripture idioms. Under "Rule LXVII" Dr. Young writes that "Verbs that signify the simple act or effect may be understood ... of the occasion, or of the permission of acting."¹⁹ Dr. Young lists a number of

Scripture to which this rule applies, to include Job 1:21 which he renders as follows: “The Lord hath (permitted to be) taken away.”²⁰ Once more, the context makes it quite obvious that Satan, and not God, was the one who defrauded Job, murdered his family and servants, and wrecked his life (John 10:10).

But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. (1 Sam. 16:14)

Many people focus on the part of the statement that says “an evil spirit *from* the Lord.” This careless focus makes God, the Father of lights, appear to be the distributor of evil spirits. However, the expression “from the Lord” is idiomatic. This phrase is also used concerning Saul where we read, “a deep sleep from the LORD was fallen upon them” (1 Samuel 26:12). One Scholar explained:

The sleep which fell upon Saul and his guards at the hill Hachilah where David took the spear and cruse of water (1 Sam. xxvi. 13,) is called “a deep sleep from the LORD,” which is simply “a profound sleep;” **not that God sent it**, but that it was a very heavy sleep indeed We see from these few examples, what an utter want of consistency prevailed upon this point between the translators of our Old Testament. Sometimes the Hebrew idiom is understood and allowed for, at others, the literal Hebrew words are translated so as to convey an absolutely wrong notion to the English reader.²¹ (Emphasis added)

The focus should be on the statement, “*But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul.*” This departure was initiated by Saul when he rejected God and His Word (1 Samuel 15:23; Job 21:14; 22:17). Hosea tells us, “....

woe also to them when I depart from them!" (Hosea 9:12). When God has departed from a person, this includes the forfeiture of His protection and His restraint upon the forces working against them. He therefore *permits* the enemy to succeed (Deut. 31:17; Judges 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Jer. 12:7).

In 2 Chronicles 12:5, the prophet told Rehoboam, "*Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak*" or, as the VOICE translation renders it, "*I have abandoned you and allowed you to be defeated by Shishak.*" The departure initiated by Saul drove God's spirit away and the void was filled by Satan. Therefore, "*an evil spirit from the Lord*" is *permissive* and not *causative*:

And, as it came upon him in consequence of the withdrawal of the Divine Spirit, and by the permission of the Divine Being, and also as a judgment, it may, with the greatest propriety, and especially, in the Hebrew idiom, according to which God is often said 'to do that which he permits to be done, and renders subservient to his purposes, be represented as from God.²²

When God is said to have done something that He did not intervene to stop, then the text must be interpreted through the Hebrew idiom of permission. The VOICE translation's rendering of 1 Samuel 16:23 where we read, "*God **allowed** the evil spirit to afflict Saul*" is the more appropriate one.

*The Lord hath made all things for himself:
yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.*
(Prov. 16:4)

Calvinists cite this text to support their completely inaccurate doctrine that, before any of us were even born,

God predestined some for salvation and others for damnation. But this obviously goes against what God said to Ezekiel:

Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (Eze. 33:11)

Proverbs 16:4 is one of many biblical passages that should be read with the idiom of permission, according to Edward Williams:

After all, it may be objected, that the scriptures ascribe to God the causation of moral evil; as, hardening the heart of Pharaoh—hardening whom he will—making the wicked for the day of evil—appointing to destruction—determining the death of Christ—delivering him by determinate counsel doing all evil in a city—making vessels to dishonour—fitting them for destruction, &c.—In reply to this objection it must be considered, that whatever the import of such representations may be, no interpretation which is unworthy of God can be the true meaning—**that the idioms of the sacred languages ascribing cause or operation to God** must be understood according to the nature of the subject—and, what is particularly to our purpose, that active verbs which denote making, doing, causing, and the like, often denote a declaration of the thing done, or that shall take place; **or a permission of it.**²³

Charles Hequembourg, a different theologian, cautioned his audience against interpreting the phrase “to make” in a literal manner:

When it is said that “the Lord hath made all things for himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil” (Prov. xvi. 4), we cannot mistake one idiom for another so much as to suppose that “to make” is here used in the sense of to create, and draw the inference that God made Adam anew at his fall, or that he makes the wicked with their wicked characters. God is said to do, or to make, in the well-known language of Scripture, what he allows or causes to be brought about.²⁴

The Contemporary English Version renders Proverbs 16:4, *The Lord has a reason for everything he does, and he lets evil people live only to be punished.*”

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. (Genesis 50:20)

Determinist theologians interpret this text, together with Joseph’s earlier declaration in Genesis 45:7, “*And God sent me before you,*” to charge God with enabling evil for, what some assert, are “good and wise ends.” Long ago, in response to another’s deterministic sermon, Puritan theologian and scholar John Owen wrote: “It is said in this Sermon that God is ‘the doer of all things,’ in which all things, sin is included that there is ‘no act of man’s which is not God’s.’”²⁵ Owen notes how such a belief is “.... inconsistent with the revealed character of the Deity.”²⁶ Owen continues by demonstrating how this reality might be misconstrued without understanding Hebrew idioms by using the tale of Joseph and his brothers:

Truths are broadly set forth, with a dignified disregard to minute statements; the causes, the reasons, and the manner of things and events, being

left to be made out by the context or by the general tenor of Revelation. To illustrate this, the saying of Joseph to his Brethren might be adduced, To prevent recriminations between them he told them “God sent him to Egypt before them to preserve life.” History informs us how this came to pass. It was no immediate act of God, but that of His overruling providence. The jealousy of his Brethren was the occasion, excited, on account of their evil hearts, by the good that was in Joseph, and by the partiality of his Father, We cannot conceive that God by any influence stimulated that jealousy, but he evidently restrained its excesses, and converted unto good what was meant for evil. Thus the final result is often stated without mentioning the intervening occurrences, **The Scriptures also partakes much of the idioms of the Languages in which they were written**, and of the style of the primitive and oriental writers. And besides, God is often spoken of, in condescension to our capacities; such language is in this respect many times used, which cannot in the nature of things be literally correct.²⁷ (Emphasis added)

The great martyr, Stephen, explained that the very reason for Joseph being sent to Egypt was due to the malicious evil of his brothers:

And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. (Acts 7:9-10)

James admonished the early Jewish Christians about the “wisdom” that was actually “envy.” James wrote, “*But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts*” that this was nothing to brag about because “*This*

wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish (James 3:14-15). God was not the doer or the influence behind the evil that was done to Joseph.

The word “sent” in Genesis 45:7 is the Hebrew word “*shâlach*” which, according to Joseph Rotherham, “It often takes the modifications expressed by *permit, to declare or hold an, to help.*”²⁸ Therefore, Genesis 45:7 and 50:20 should be read in the light of the Hebrew idiom of permission along with other Scriptures of this nature:

Nobody that knows anything about Hebrew idioms wants to be told that the Hebrew writers frequently speak of a person’s doing a thing, or appointing a thing, which he only permits or does not prevent Thus God’s hardening Pharaoh’s heart—**selling Joseph into Egypt**—sending an evil spirit to Saul and a lying spirit into Ahab’s prophets—simply means that he permitted the parties concerned to do the things affirmed of them, when he might have prevented them. Sometimes the passages which contain those idiomatic forms of expression are explained by others—as where Pharaoh is said to harden his own heart—where Satan is said to tempt David to number the people. Compare 2 Sam. xxiv. 1, 1 Chron. xxi. 1.²⁹ (Emphasis added)

The fact that God was able to utilize Joseph to further His purposes despite the evil that was committed does not imply that God approved of it or caused it. God, being infinitely resourceful, could have utilized a variety of methods to install Joseph as king without involving sin. But in this instance, He just *overruled* sin and continued with His plans. The Wycliffe Bible better renders Genesis 50:20, “*Ye thought evil of me, and God turned it into good.*”

Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house,

*and I will take thy wives before thine eyes,
and give them unto thy neighbour, and he
shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this
sun.* (2 Samuel 12:11)

As a result of his father David's infidelity and murder, Absalom will rape his father's concubines, according to this unsettling prophecy (2 Samuel 16:20-23). While the phrase seems to indicate that God would ensure that this happened, we find elsewhere in Scripture that God condemns rape and demands that those who commit it be put to death (Deut. 22:25-27).

The problem is resolved when we note that the word "give" comes from the Hebrew word "*nâthan*" which means to *allow* or *permit*. Therefore, God's "raising up evil" is not direct. Because of David's sin, God is simply unable to intervene in the situation and protect David from Absalom's malicious intentions. George Holden explains how the passage should be interpreted in the light of the idiom of permission:

"I will raise up evil" Viz. according to the Hebrew idiom, I will permit evil to rise up "against thee out of thine own house," and who can read of the rebellion of Absalom, the defilement of his daughter by her brother, and of his concubines by his son, and the deaths of his children, without owning the wonderful fulfilment of this denunciation? "I will take," i. e. permit thy wives to be taken; and so v. 12. "I will do," I will permit it to be done.³⁰

As another illustration of how the idiom of permission is the major interpretative hermeneutic for such Bible texts, Thomas Jackson also cites Absalom's rape of David's concubines:

It is then so common in Holy Scripture to speak of God as actually doing that which He simply permits, and does not absolutely hinder men from doing, that this may be justly regarded as an idiom of eastern speech. God is said to have given Absalom his father's concubines, when He did not absolutely hinder that profligate young man from adding to his other crimes that of incest.³¹

Another rendering of 2 Samuel 12:11 provides the following translation, which is preferable given its permissive sense:

*Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and **I will suffer** thy wives to be taken before thine eyes, and to be given to thy neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the light of the sun. (The Holy Bible, Authorized Version, with Emendations by J.T. Conquest).*

In one additional passage, Moses accuses God of treating Israel unfairly:

And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me? (Exodus 5:22)

Moses and the people of Israel may have been expecting a quick success and release from slavery. Instead, Pharaoh punished them for even daring to make the demand. Moses seemingly blames God for the increased mistreatment of the people. However, the passage is better read permissively:

The language in this twenty-second verse is very remarkable, and explains other passages of Scripture. Moses said, "Lord, wherefore hast thou evil entreated this people?" But it was the taskmasters who evil entreated them, not God. And this explains that passage to which I referred last Lord's Day morning about God hardening Pharaoh's heart. In the Hebrew idiom, God is often said to do a thing which he is only the occasion of being done.³²

Edward Williams who explained that "... the idioms of the sacred languages ascribing cause or operation to God"³³ listed Exodus 5:22 as an example. Williams explains that, "Moses means, Wherefore-hast thou permitted them to be evil entreated?"³⁴ E. W. Bullinger remarked that this is a, "Hebrew Idiom suffered to be evil en-treated."³⁵ Helen Spurrell gives us a better translation of Exodus 5:22:

*So Moses returned unto JEHOVAH and he said: O Lord, wherefore hast Thou **suffered this people** to be so ill-treated? Wherefore this, that Thou didst send me?*
(A Translation of the Old Testament Scriptures from the Original Hebrew by Helen Spurrell)

All of these illustrations demonstrate how the idiom of permission keeps us from challenging the Bible's status as the divinely inspired Word of God. It also aids in our understanding that God is never the author of evil. It is possible to explain every Bible passage that seems to allude to this without raising questions about the authenticity of the text.

Chapter Six

Temptation and the Idiom of Permission

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (Matthew 6:13)

And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. (Luke 11:4)

Many people have been confused by the terminology used in what we now refer to as “the Lord’s prayer.” Almost as if Jesus were to say that the Father tempts people and that we must beg Him not to entice us, is how it sounds. The majority of us are aware that it is absurd and work to comprehend the Lord’s intentions. The solution to this dilemma lies on understanding the Hebrew idiom of permission:

In considering the language of the text we are struck with a peculiarity which belongs to it. To intimate that the holy God leads us into temptation, seems to savor of impiety. This difficulty may, however, be easily removed. It was common among the Jews in accordance with **the idiom of their language, to represent God as doing that which he merely permits to be done.** We may therefore understand the petition before us as meaning—“Suffer us not to be led into temptation.”¹ (Emphasis added)

In fact, one of the strongest pieces of evidence in Scripture that the Hebrews use an “idiom of permission” is our Lord’s teaching in what we have come to call “The

Lord's Prayer." James, the brother of our Lord, establishes this fact:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man (James 1:13)

John Everitt Good alludes to this very passage of Scripture to dispute those who misinterpret this portion of the Lord's prayer and make God the author of sin:

What is it to be led into temptation? The construction of this petition has induced some to entertain thoughts of the moral, or rather immoral, influence of the Most High on the minds of men, which approximates deliberate blasphemy! They have imagined, that a pure and holy Being is the author of sin; and that by the exercise of some arbitrary and fatal power over the understanding and affections, He seduces to the commission of evil! It was to destroy an error so infamous and unjust, and so poisonous in its dreadful tendency, which led the apostle James to declare, that "God cannot be tempted with evil;" there is nothing in his own nature that can incline Him to any thing but what is essentially proper; and there is no outward object that can make any impression on Him, to bias Him from those eternal laws of justice and holiness by which He always hath, and ever will, govern the world. And as He cannot transgress his own laws, so neither does He permit others to do so. Neither tempteth he any man:" which is to say, that He neither misleads the judgment, corrupts the affections, nor coerces the will to that which is wrong. However, therefore, the deceitful heart of the sinner may be disposed to transfer the cause of his crimes to the Almighty, and impute their blame to Him, yet such an imputation is both an insult to his honour, and a contradiction of the truth; for He

is as incapable of seducing others to evil, as He is of committing it himself.²

Good is certain that James gives us the key to understanding the words of our Lord. In contrast to James' remarks, how does Good describe the "structure" of Jesus? In order to make Scripture passages of this kind clearer, the author wanted to remind his readers of the customary "idiom of permission":

He leads no one into temptation; while, if left to themselves, all would be overcome by evil. In this petition, **according to the common idiom of scripture**, which assigns, as in the case of Pharaoh, **actions to the Almighty which He permits others to do**, we entreat Him not to suffer us to be led either by providence or by our own delusions and inclinations into circumstances of strong temptation; or if brought into them, that he would not leave us to struggle in our own strength, but enable us to resist, and finally overcome.³ (Emphasis added)

James certainly would not contradict Jesus; thus, nothing could be more obvious than the fact that when Jesus delivered His instruction on how to pray for protection from temptation, He did it using the idiom of the people of His day. William Gilpin wrote the following regarding this in his "Catechism":

The mode of expression is rather singular in the phrase, "Lead us not into temptation." It immediately occurs, how can God lead us into temptation? "God," St. James tells us, "tempteth no man." But the phrase, **according to the Jewish idiom**, means only, that God would lead us out of temptation; **that he would not suffer us**, in the scripture-language, to be tempted above "our strength; but that he would, with the temptation, make a way to escape."⁴ (Emphasis added)

Jesus frequently spoke in the idioms of His community;⁵ and He occasionally used the idiom of permission in particular. In Luke 2:9–14, it is stated that Jesus’ goal was to bring about peace. However, in another passage, Jesus claims that He came to bring about *strife* rather than *peace* (Matthew 10:34-35; Luke 12:51-53). However, we also understand that God is the wellspring of peace and that Satan, *not* God, is the source of conflict (James 3:13-18). In this instance, Jesus was using idiom to describe how families would clash over a member’s decision to follow Christ. Jesus was therefore speaking in a permissive manner.

In John 12:40 He says in regard to the people, “*He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart.*” While it may appear that Jesus is advocating that God purposefully subjected the populace to this, He clarifies His own terminology in Matthew 13:15 by stating that they shut their own eyes. *Satan* is the spiritual agent most responsible for causing men to go blind (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

Most scholars would agree that the phrase, “*deliver us from evil*” is better translated “*deliver us from **the evil one.***” Many of our English translations render it using the latter. It is abundantly obvious from the Bible that Satan is the “evil one” or the “wicked one.”⁶ In addition, it refers to him as “the tempter” (Matt. 4:1-3; Luke 4:1-2; 1 Thess. 3:5). We might therefore conclude that God would not deliberately cause conflict or cause anyone to become spiritually blind, just as He would not purposefully tempt us. All three are the devil’s handiwork. The great reformer Philip Melanchthon challenged the prevalent theology of his day by attributing sin to Satan rather than God:

And the Son of God, by becoming a victim for sin to appease the anger of his father, has demonstrated in the most striking manner, by his death, that not

God, but the devil, is the author of sin. Let it then be received as an undoubted truth, that sin was not created, nor ordained by God; but that it is a dreadful destruction of the divine work and order; and that the true cause of sin is the will of the devil, and the will of man, which freely apostatized from God, who neither willed nor approved their disobedience.⁷

In contrast to many other “reformers,” Melancthon believed that Satan, not God, was the source of all sin and temptation. Following a section of Scripture demonstrating God’s non-participation in sin, Melancthon went on to clarify how we are to interpret any passages of Scripture implying God’s involvement, such as the phrase in the Lord’s Prayer:

Nor do those words of scripture, where it is said, “I will harden the heart of Pharaoh,” and other similar expressions, militate with the sentiments expressed above; for **to those acquainted with the Hebrew idiom, it is well known that such expressions signify permission only**, and not an efficacious will; as when we pray, Lead us not into temptation,” the meaning is, do not suffer us to fall into temptation; or do not permit us to fall or to be overthrown by temptation.⁸ (Emphasis added)

The idiom of permission serves as a reminder that sometimes in Scripture, God is attributed with doing things that He did not restrain Satan from doing. As we discovered in chapter three, the verses in 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1 serve as our guide for understanding every verse in the Bible that suggests that God is the author of evil. In order to explain biblical texts that appear to indicate that God is the originator of deception, one author made reference to this truth:

“Lord thou hast deceived us and we were deceived,” it should be observed that the words were not now used for the first time; (See Jer. XX, 7.) nor could they have been employed by that learned man who was neither a fanatic nor a blasphemer in any other than the sense which they have in **the idiom of the Hebrew; according to which God is often said to do that which he merely permits or suffers to be done**; or to bring events to pass which he merely does not prevent and which he overrules. E. G. compare II Sam. XXIV, 1 with I Chron. XXI, 1. Even in the New Testament we have: “Lead us not into temptation” for, Suffer us not to be led into temptation.⁹ (Emphasis added)

Thus, comparing one passage of Scripture to another ought to help us realize that God is often said to do those things that He only permits. God usually spoke using the idiom of the culture, but He always made sure that sufficient clarification was given in other parts of His written Word. A good illustration is how our Lord’s teaching on prayer is made clearer by Paul’s discussion on temptation:

*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, **who will not suffer you to be tempted** above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)*

The New King James Version renders the passage, “*who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able.*” A note on Matthew 6:13 in the KJV Apologetics Study Bible says, “Jewish parallels suggest that ‘lead us not into temptation’ may be idiomatic for ‘do

not let us be overcome by temptation' or 'Do not let our faith be tested beyond what it can bear.'"¹⁰ Jesus and Paul are teaching us the importance of prayer in overcoming the tempter. Peter also writes, "*The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations*" (2 Peter 2:9a). When we pray, God will "*make a way of escape*" for us:

The truth is, that according to **the idiom of the Jewish language**, (and our Lord instructed Jews when he appointed this prayer,) **God is said to do a thing which he only permits, or suffers to be done**—and the petition, lead us not into temptation, is as much as to say, suffer us not to be led into temptation: while the subjoined alternative, but deliver us from evil, implies that God is both able and willing to "make a way of escape" for all those who trust in Him, from the power of satan, the author of evil and everlasting misery.¹¹ (Emphasis added)

Despite the fact that God is capable of doing this, He accomplishes relatively little on earth apart from His followers praying (Matt. 18:18-20). God will *allow* us to fall into temptation if we don't ask for Him to save us from it (Joshua 9:14-15; 2 Chron. 12:14). Our Lord's remarks and related passages in Scripture are meant to signify what is stated below:

In this petition, according to the common idiom of Scripture, which assigns, as in the case of Pharaoh, actions to the Almighty which He permits others to do, we entreat Him not to suffer us to be led either by providence or by our own inclinations into circumstances of strong temptation; or if brought into them, that He would not leave us to struggle in our own strength, but enable us to resist, and finally overcome."—*Good (of Salisbury)*¹²

Jesus was sent to show the reality of a just God who never engages in wickedness (1 John 1:5). He described a deeply loving God who sacrificed His Son for the sake of the world (John 3:16). Consequently, some of Jesus' claims would be in conflict with the revelation of the Father He came to bring us, even if one disregards the idiomatic language of the people. Therefore, it is important that the Lord's words, "*lead us not into temptation,*" are read idiomatically:

Thus, God is said to do a thing, which he was only the occasion for a moment of being done. Again, one of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer is, "Lead us not into temptation." This does not mean that God ever leads his people into circumstances of sinful temptation; the meaning clearly is, "Suffer us not to be led into temptation." So here the idea is, "Wherefore hast thou suffered us to be evil entreated?" And again, "The Lord suffered Pharaoh's heart to be hardened;" the Hebrew idiom often ascribing to God the doing of a thing, of which he is only the occasion, by the instrumentality he employs for effectuating great and permanent good.¹³

We have ample evidence from Scripture that Jesus was using the idiom of permission in His teaching on prayer. We see that other students of Scripture agree with this assertion. Knowing that this is supported by other theologians, Bible scholars, and teachers who are knowledgeable in the original biblical languages is beneficial.

In the book, "Biblical Notes and Queries" in the section on "Notes on Scriptural Idioms," the author stated that one particular Bible idiom is "Not the doing of the thing, but the permission of it." He then lists a number of passages alluding to this, including Matthew 6:13.¹⁴

In his “Comprehensive Pocket Bible,” David Davidson notes concerning Matthew 6:13, “Lead us not, in the Hebrew idiom, signifies ‘Suffer or abandon us not.’”¹⁵ Dr. Robert Young, in his concordance has a section titled “Analytical Survey of the Idioms of the Bible” states that “Verbs that signify the simple act or effect may be understood ... of the occasion, or of the permission of acting.” Among the Scriptures Dr. Young lists include Matthew 6:13 which he renders, “Lead us not (i.e. suffer us not to be led) into temptation.”¹⁶

In his “Practical Guide,” Bible expositor George Holden wrote in relation to Matthew 6:13, “.... according to the Hebrew idiom, suffer us not to be led into occasions of sinning. Some render it, ‘Do not abandon us to temptation.’”¹⁷ Explaining the passage according to the “phraseology of Scripture,” William Day writes:

.... accordingly we find in our translation of the Bible, in which this peculiarity of the original language has not, in many cases, been sufficiently attended to, that God is said to do that which he permits to be done.¹⁸

William Day provides a number of examples, including the Lord’s prayer,

One of the petitions in the Lord’s prayer must be interpreted agreeably to the idiom we have been considering: Lead us not into temptation! i. e. Permit us not to come into temptation. ‘Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted by God; for God cannot be tempted by evil, neither tempteth he any man’.¹⁹

Thomas Stuart Lyle Vogan argues against the Unitarians of his time who rejected the biblical idea of God as a triune being by demonstrating how an understanding of idioms might help to resolve some of the

issues with this concept. He gives the Lord's prayer as an illustration of a biblical idiom:

This interpretation is supported by other examples of the same idiom in the New Testament; as, "lead us not into temptation," for "suffer us not to be led;,"²⁰

These distinguished scholars and theologians' assertion is in line with the revelation given to us in other portions of Scripture showing that God is never the source of temptation, even though He may not intervene to help unless we specifically ask Him to. This is strengthened by the fact that some Bible translators have decided to render Matthew 6:13 in line with our Lord's actual intention after recognizing this "idiom of permission." Just a few instances are shown below: "*And don't allow us to fall into the things that tempt us*" (Living Water Translation); "*And do not allow us to fall under temptation*" (An Understandable Version); "*Do not let us do wrong things when we are tempted, and rescue us when Satan tries to harm us*" (Unlocked Dynamic Bible).

One could never conceive for a second that our Lord Jesus would impute anything to the Father that would damage His children if we fully understand the holy and loving nature of our God as it was and is still manifested through our Lord. This fact should make it clear that we should interpret the Lord's instruction to pray, "Lead us not into temptation," through the prism of the idiom of permission.

Chapter Seven

Pharaoh and the Idiom of Permission

*And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: **but I will harden his heart**, that he shall not let the people go. (Exodus 4:21)*

The Bible has numerous instances where God is attributed with hardening people's hearts (Deut. 2:30; Josh. 11:20; Isa. 63:17; John 12:40). However, Calvinist theologians most frequently use Pharaoh's hardening as an example to support their fallacious doctrine that God predestines some people to hell. It is also the account with the most prominence in Scripture. But as one astute woman wrote in her journal:

I have likewise been assured by some very learned men, that, according to the Hebrew idiom, verbs active often signify permission; and in these verses it is much more consonant to our ideas of divine justice so to understand the expression: that is, that God permitted Pharaoh to proceed in his own proud and wicked career insensible to the threatened judgments which he had already despised.¹

She is absolutely right. Numerous learned men have understood this fact. Robert Balmer, who we mentioned in an earlier chapter, wrote, "according to the idiom of scripture language, God is often said to do those things which he permits."² Palmer challenged the notion that God would have literally hardened Pharaoh's heart:

.... It is almost immaterial whether with some we suppose the expression, “God hardened the heart of Pharaoh,” and some others of equivalent import, to mean that God, by withdrawing the restraints of his providence and grace, permits men to harden their own hearts; or with other interpreters, that he places them in circumstances in which that effect will certainly follow; or that, as a punishment for previous obstinacy, he enfeebles the intellectual powers; or lastly, with a late author, that he increases the natural obduracy of their tempers, without, however, directly controlling their wills. The meaning evidently cannot be that the Most High exerts a positive agency in the production of sinful volitions and actions, for that is a sense diametrically repugnant to the peremptory declarations of scripture: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.”³

Even as Calvin’s doctrine gained popularity, individuals like Philip Melancthon would counter assumptions that God had hardened Pharaoh: “Such expressions as I will harden Pharaoh’s heart are mere Hebrew idioms, signifying the permission and not the effectual operation and impulse of the divine mind.”⁴ Melancthon further wrote:

Nor do those words of scripture, where it is said, “I will harden the heart of Pharaoh,” and other similar expressions, militate with the sentiments expressed above; for **to those acquainted with the Hebrew idiom, it is well known that such expressions signify permission only**, and not an efficacious will.⁵ (Emphasis added)

John Cumming adds, “‘The Lord suffered Pharaoh’s heart to be hardened;’ the Hebrew idiom often

ascribing to God the doing of a thing, of which he is only the occasion.”⁶ This idiom is clearly outlined in Scripture and especially in the case of Pharaoh.

In at least four instances, Pharaoh is said to have hardened his own heart (Ex. 8:15; 8:32; 9:34; 1 Sam. 6:6), and in four other instances, Pharaoh’s heart was said to have been hardened without any outside influence (7:13, 22; 8:19; 9:7). However, it is claimed that Pharaoh’s heart was hardened by God at least six times (Exodus 4:21; 9:12; 10:20; 11:10; 14:4, 8). The fact that Pharaoh hardened his own heart shows that God is speaking idiomatically when He says that *He* hardened it:

I am here arguing with those who would go along with me in admitting, that when God is said to harden Pharaoh’s heart, the real meaning is, that **He permitted him to harden his own heart**; as indeed in the chapters which relate to that history, we find it as often said, that Pharaoh hardened his heart, as that God hardened it. **It is the idiom of the Hebrew language**; and we ought always to read such expressions along with this explanation, ‘Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man.’ James i. 13.”⁷ (Emphasis added)

When faced with two sets of parallel texts, the interpretation becomes clear if the underlying assumption is that God is love (1 John 4:8) and that His love respects the free choices of His creatures. God tempts no man with evil (James 1:13) and just as we learned from the passages concerning David numbering Israel (1 Sam. 24:1; 2 Chron. 21:1), the passages that assert that Pharaoh hardened his own heart should interpret the ones that attribute the hardening of his heart to God.

Isaiah, where the prophet lamented that God had hardened Israel and caused them to err, demonstrates the

significance of letting Scripture interpret itself in terms of God's hardening. However, other passages of Scripture assert that God had no part in it at all:

O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance. (Isa. 63:17)

Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord. (Jeremiah 23:32)

False prophets not only misled the people, but God emphatically states that they were not sent by Him. To make matters worse, the people rejected God's gracious invitations to reunite with Him. Instead, they "*hardened their necks*" against Him (Jer. 7:26; 19:15).

Moreover, Isaiah earlier wrote, "*For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed*" (Isa. 9:16; see also Isa. 3:12). Therefore, Isaiah was clearly using the idiom of permission in Isaiah 63:17. Isaiah 63:17 is the clearest example of this truth about God hardening hearts:

This phrase of hardening Pharaoh's heart on the part of God is idiomatic; founded on his attribute of Omnipotence that nothing can take place contrary to his purposes; and hence the Jews continually ascribed acts to God which he simply permitted to take place as the following passages shew the strongest illustrations of the Hebrew idiom on this

subject is in Isaiah lxiii. 17, where the prophet says, "O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our hearts from thy fear."⁸

Therefore, Isaiah 63:17 would have been better translated, "*O LORD, why hast Thou suffered us to err from Thy ways, and let us harden our heart from Thy fear?*" (E. W. Bullinger's Companion Bible). An examination of two comparable remarks made by our Lord provides further evidence of this truth:

He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. (John 12:40)

And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? (Mark 8:17-18)

Jesus suggests that God was responsible for the blindness and hardening in one passage, while in another, He claims that humans do this to themselves. Our Lord would never contradict Himself. He is obviously speaking idiomatically in John 12:40. (see also Matt. 13:14; Acts 28:27).

Mark also adds an intriguing comment regarding Jesus' disciples: "*For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened*" (Mark 6:52). Despite all the miracles they witnessed our Lord perform, they lacked faith. The same is true of Pharaoh. When one

of the plagues struck the country, Pharaoh would frequently repent, but as soon as a miracle was performed to offer respite, he was obstinate and refused to obey God (Exodus 9:34).

In his book aptly titled, *“The Bible Its Own Interpreter,”* Thomas Spalding explained, the, “Idiom by which persons are represented as doing intentionally what they were only the occasion, undesignedly, of doing.”⁹ Applying this truth to Pharaoh, Spalding writes:

The knowledge of this Hebraism shows in what sense we are to understand the statement that “the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart.” God’s design was gracious and benevolent: it was to convince the King and his people that Jehovah was the one living and true God, and that all the idols of Egypt were powerless alike for good or for evil. The miracles wrought by Moses ought to have convinced both the Egyptians and their ruler of these essential truths. Had Pharaoh submitted to the evidence, he would have had to let the people of Israel go; but this would have involved a sacrifice which he was not prepared to make. By closing his eyes to the truth, he hardened his own heart; but God is said to have done this, because his gracious revelations to the monarch were the occasion of his heart being hardened.¹⁰

Therefore, in order to harden Pharaoh, God did not need to supernaturally suspend his free will. God’s generosity toward Pharaoh, as it so often does to so many others, drove him to harden himself after he was no longer in pain. God is therefore said to have hardened Him in this idiomatic sense:

But Pharaoh hardened himself against them all. Again and again he broke his promise to let the people go. **In the idiom of the Hebrew language, the Bible ascribes to the Lord whatever he in any way permits to come to pass, making no**

account of second causes or human agency. But the Lord did not use means to harden Pharaoh's heart, nor desire that it should be hardened: it was only by repeating calls and miracles which Pharaoh resisted and abused that the Lord is said to "harden" him. Pharaoh acted freely; was wilful and guilty in all that he did.¹¹

God never intended for Pharaoh to become harder after being released from his misery. Actually, God wanted Pharaoh to turn from his sin and follow Him. However, since God worked the miracles and it was because of this that Pharaoh's heart hardened, God is said to have done it through the use of the idiom of permission.

Even after having witnessed the extraordinary power of God, one might still be perplexed as to how Pharaoh could so readily harden his heart. The simple solution is found in Exodus 14:5. After finally letting the people go and discovering the impact of this decision, Pharaoh said, "*Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?*" Pharaoh believed that the free labor his nation enjoyed for so many years was worth the risk of opposing Yahweh.

In Exodus 14:4, God again tells Moses regarding this, "*And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them.*" However, as William Dalrymple explains, in the Hebrew idiom, we are to understand that God was simply *permitting* Pharaoh to act on his greedy desire to have his free labor returned:

THE People of Israel hemmed in, as we have already seen, were in Pharaoh's estimation his most certain property again. His heart still hardens, after all that both he and his people had suffered. God so permitting, and in the Hebrew idiom said to do. Thus hitherto did he make Pharaoh stand or outlive

former judgement; the true sense of the raised up, in that last passage.¹²

One could wonder why God saw the need to include these idiomatic expressions in the Bible. Why does it need to be said one way, and then afterwards the terminology needs to be clarified? In order to respond to this, we must continue to remind the reader that the Bible is a product of a far earlier cultural backdrop than our own, where these terms were commonplace. Professor Samuel Ives Curtiss writes:

This is evidently a survival of an ancient Semitic conception, which we find gives coloring to certain Old Testament passages, as for example, when the Lord is represented as saying of Pharaoh: "I will harden his heart," I and Isaiah represents God as bidding him, "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and smear their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and perceive with their heart, and should convert and be healed. I do not, of course, believe that these passages teach that God leads man astray, but they are certainly colored by this idea. Another passage, read literally, expresses the view, that God makes the enemies of his people guilty-I refer to Ps. v. 11., where the psalmist prays, according to the Hebrew idiom, "Make them guilty, O God," which the Revisers well translate, "Hold them guilty, O God," or perhaps better, "Declare them guilty, O God"; that is, "Let them suffer the consequences of their guilt." We have an illustration of this meaning in passages parallel to God's hardening Pharaoh's heart, where it is said: "Pharaoh hardened his heart." But the thought that God leads man astray is original in the Semitic mind. So ingrained is the ancient idea, through millenniums of oppression, that any one in power is responsible for the failure of an inferior, that it sometimes appears to-day in a very amusing way.¹³

Israel had a Semitic heritage; thus, its writing and speech reflect that. Remember that God instructed His Word to be written in the peoples' own native speech and expressions. Regarding passages where God is said to be hardening humans, Richard Twopeny explains:

In short, as in all other cases, the controlling providence of God is not distinguished from his positive operation The form of expression which we have been considering, is not more remote from our own than many other idioms of Oriental languages, which might be mentioned. It is indeed a mode of speaking very far from unnatural to those, who are impressed with awful notions of God's care of all his creatures; his especial providence over-ruling every event; and his attention to the prayers of his faithful servants. But to suppose that he should, in any respect, directly or indirectly, be the efficient cause of sin in any of his creatures, or drive them on to their destruction, while he was professing to pardon them, if they would desist from their evil ways, is so inconsistent a conduct, that the least thought of it cannot be for a moment entertained by a mind, which will take into its consideration the general tenor of Scripture in the interpretation of it; instead of tenaciously adhering to the letter of those passages, in opposition to the grand scheme of the whole.¹⁴

Although this idiom of permission was common in their culture, it does not mean that God wanted or even desired wicked behaviors to occur, such as someone hardening their heart. However, since they did occur, the Hebrew cultural method of expressing this occurrence was to attribute it to God:

The case of Pharaoh gives us as good an instance as we could wish, for the consideration of this agency, and we bring out under the head of an idiomatic usage, the assertion that it was the Lord who

hardened Pharaoh's heart, because to attribute to the direct interference of God, the common events of life, is a custom that prevailed among the Jews, and prevails among other Eastern nations to this day.¹⁵

In the ancient Near East, including the Jewish people, it was usual to attribute to God what He had not intervened to prevent. God chose to send us His written Word from this nation. Therefore, understanding the distinction between eastern and western cultures and how idioms are employed in both is essential to comprehending passages where God is stated to have "hardened" Pharaoh without denigrating Him as the cause of sin:

And, as it is also distinctly stated, "that Pharaoh hardened his heart," so the divine procedure in allowing him and his people to go their own way to ruin, is perfectly consistent with every principle of justice and good government. We must remember the difference of idiom which subsists between eastern and western languages: for the former are by no means so precise as the latter, but delight in bold and figurative modes of speech. So that even in our own land, a king is often said to do that which his servants execute; a Monarch might easily be represented in the east as doing that which he knows some of his people to be performing, but which he declines interfering to prevent.¹⁶

The Western student of Scripture must therefore simply acknowledge that, in contrast to us, the Ancient Eastern societies held their deity accountable for whatever occurred, regardless of any other influencing elements. In his essay on Pharaoh's hardening of the heart, William Kerswill says: "... by the same habit of expression, immorality and irreligion were often ascribed not to the secondary agencies, but to the attitude of God which

permitted them.”¹⁷ What this truth means in terms of Pharaoh’s hardening is made clear by Kerswill:

If some scholars today are confused upon this point, the confusion is their own: there was no confusion to the men of Old Testament times. They knew that God never positively hardened the heart of any men, but they also knew that if God withdrew his grace or ceased to actuate the man aright man’s heart would be hardened. The withdrawal of his grace was a fundamental, though not responsible, cause of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. They took their own way of stating it, we take ours. Neither claims to state the complete cause. Thus when the Hebrew idiom is taken into account, God’s “hardening of Pharaoh’s heart” is just the sequel to God’s forbearance repeatedly shown toward Pharaoh’s disobedience.¹⁸

In general, the authors of Scripture were aware that God rarely acted directly in the things they attributed to Him. His decision to honor that person’s desire to abandon him was the cause (Job 21:14; 22:17; Deut. 31:16-18; Ps. 81:10-12). According to conventional Western thinking, God did not step in to prevent Pharaoh from becoming stubborn:

God purposed not to interpose by his mollifying grace, and in the idiom of the eastern language, employed in the Bible, and which, when viewed under established rules of fair interpretation, cannot be easily misunderstood, is therefore said to harden the tyrant’s heart. The purpose of God was not to prevent it.¹⁹

In a footnote this writer further explains, “.... the Hebrew idiom is often carried into our literal version of sacred scripture. According to that idiom, verbs of action

often signify no more than to know, declare, foretell, or permit, what is said to be affected.”²⁰

It is critical to comprehend the idioms used in the Bible. However, it is also useful to have translations that explain idioms in a way that Western readers can understand. Here is only one example of many on Exodus 4:21:

*Moreover, Jehovah said to Moses, When thou shalt have returned into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have given thee power to do; yet **I will permit his heart to be so hardened** that he will not let the people go. (Exodus 4:21; The Holy Bible, by B. Boothroyd, D.D., 1836; Emphasis added)*

We won't be perplexed about God's holiness and love when we read this and comparable Scriptures in His written revelation with this understanding in mind. He genuinely is a good God who is devoid of any evil and does no harm to anyone.

Chapter Eight

Spiritual Blindness and the Idiom of Permission

He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. (John 12:40)

This passage has been mentioned a few times in earlier chapters. It has largely been used as evidence for other ideas. But this Scripture contains so much more that it deserves a separate chapter. Hebrew idioms were misunderstood, and the text has since become a favorite of those who subscribe to deterministic ideology:

Another Text they produce is, Joh. 12.39,40. Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias Said again, explain'd. He hath blinded their Eyes, and hardned their Hearts that they should not see with their Eyes, nor understand with their Heart, and be converted and I should heal them. Answ. (1.) Here is no Divine Action express'd, nor is God said any where to have blinded their Eyes or hården'd their Hearts: 'Tis only an impersonal way of Speech and **in the Hebrew Idiom signifies passively, as much as to say their Eyes are blinded.**¹ (Emphasis added)

Hebrew idiom indicates that God's role in the blinding and hardening is *passive* as opposed to *active*. Thomas C. Thornton adds:

It will seem strange, my friend—that I should again affirm, from the face of the original, that no such thing is said; here is no action of the Deity

expressed, nor is God said any where, to have blinded their eyes, or hardened their hearts. This is only an impersonal way, or mode of speech, by no means peculiar to the Hebrew language, and **in the idiom of that tongue, it has a passive signification**, and is as much as to say, their eyes were blinded, and their hearts hardened; and moreover, that “they could not believe,” does not import all manner of incapacity, much less such an one as proceeds from any antecedent decree, or the divine desertion upon such a decree; nor do the words ‘could not,’ imply always such an incapacity, I humbly conceive, my friend—but some disposition in man, which impedes and takes away the action, which otherwise was capable of being done by him.² (Emphasis added)

Jesus is not claiming that God is employing supernatural means to bring about spiritual blindness and hardness. Our Lord is using the idiom of His people. The fifth-century philosopher John Chrysostom explained, “Because Scripture hath certain idiomatic phrases of this kind, and it is needful to make allowance for its laws.”³ Chrysostom used “God’s hardening” of Pharaoh as an example in his commentary on John 12:40:

Thus in the case of Pharaoh, He is said to have hardened his heart, and so it is with those who are at all contentious against the words of God. This is a peculiar mode of speech in Scripture, as also the, **He gave them over unto a reprobate mind, and the, He divided them to the nations, that is, allowed, permitted them to go.** For the writer doth not here introduce God as Himself working these things, but sheweth that they took place through the wickedness of others. For, when we are abandoned by God, we are given up to the devil, and when so given up, we suffer ten thousand dreadful things. To terrify the hearer, therefore, the writer saith, “He hardened,” and “gave over.” For to shew that He doth not only not give us over, but doth not even

leave us, except we will it, hear what He saith.⁴
(Emphasis added)

John 12:40 should therefore be understood in the Hebrew idiom where God is said to have done what He had permitted others to do. Now, some would object, “but the New Testament—including the book of John—was written in Greek, not Hebrew. How can you assert that Jesus was employing a *Hebrew* idiom?”

We presume that church fathers such as Chrysostom noticed that the Hebrew idiom was present in the Greek translations because Jesus’ sentiment in John 12:40 is also conveyed in the other gospels (Mark 4:11–12; Matthew 13:10–17; Luke 8:9–10):

Here it is to be observed that the Semitic idiom, of which the gospel Greek is the expression, finds no place for the distinction, familiar to the Church Fathers and theologians, between what God positively wills and what he permits. To the Jewish mind everything happened because God had so decided, so decreed. But the economy of mercy, which is the Gospel’s chief characteristic, as well as the light thrown on this matter by the theologians rules out the possibility of a divine predestining to sin and damnation.⁵

Jewish idioms were preserved even though the New Testament, including the gospels, was written in Greek. John Samuel Thompson states in his book “*The Christian Guide to a Right Understanding of the Sacred Scriptures:*”

As it is no longer pretended, that the style of the New Testament is that of pure Greek, we ought duly to investigate the sources of those idioms of language, which embarrass or obscure its interpretation: and as these idioms are fitly termed Hebraisms, Syriasm, Chaldaisms, Hellenisms, and

Latinisms, we believe it necessary, to a right understanding of the sacred Scriptures, to give a brief account of the Hebrew language, and also of the Syriac, Chaldee, and Hellenistic dialects.⁶

To understand the gospels and other works of the New Testament, one must have knowledge of more than only the Greek language. The majority of the New Testament was written by Jews, and while it is written in Greek, it nonetheless retains their Hebrew style of expression.

The New Testament authors and our Lord Jesus also frequently referred to the Old Testament Scriptures in their teachings and remarks. It is essential to become familiar with these quotations in order to properly understand the meaning of a statement. Once more in Thompson's words:

.... passages are parallel, in which the same words or idioms are used in different connexions, or on different subjects; and the comparison of such passages is of very great utility, for ascertaining the meaning of these words or idioms.⁷

The statement spoken by our Lord in John 12:40 is fully applicable to this truth. In the very next verse (verse 41) we read, "*These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.*" According to John, Jesus was quoting from the Prophet Isaiah. We read in Isaiah 6:9-10:

And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and

*understand with their heart, and convert,
and be healed.* (Isaiah 6:9-10)

Because the passage Jesus was citing is an idiomatic expression and because He was quoting from a Hebrew text, we must interpret our Lord's statement in that idiom. Again, Thompson is helpful since he has Isaiah corroborate that this is the case:

Verbs expressive of a person's doing an action, are often used to signify his supposing or discovering the thing, or his declaring and foretelling the event, especially in prophetic writings Make the heart of this people fat: **that is, prophesy that it shall be so.**⁸ (Emphasis added)

E. W. Shalders also underlined how a prophecy may be interpreted in terms of causation, even if its only intent was to predict a future event, according to ancient Hebrew notions about how God controlled His creation:

This seems the sense in which it was understood by the authors of the LXX., and its form, if Hebrew idiom be taken into account, is by no means inconsistent with this meaning. It is a mode of expression, very characteristic of Hebrew thought, to represent the result of a course of action as designed which is only foreseen or confidently anticipated. Familiar with forms of government in which the sovereign power appeared wholly without control, the Hebrews transferred ideas derived from this source to the government of God. They had a conviction that the Judge of all the earth must do right, but the conception of the rights of the creature and correlative responsibilities of the Creator did not lie within the horizon of their thought. Their overwhelming sense of the Divine Power, absolutely ordering all events and giving no account of its dealings, permitted them to say,

without any idea that they were imputing evil to God.⁹

This is confirmed by a number of scholars. On Isaiah 6, James Macknight said, “.... according to the prophetic idiom, foretel that this people shall be dull, stupid, and inconsiderate,”¹⁰ According to Adam Clarke, God used idiomatic language in asking Isaiah to make a proclamation about the spiritual state of the people:

Or the words may be understood thus, according to the Hebrew idiom: “Ye certainly hear, but do not understand; ye certainly see, but do not acknowledge.” Seeing this is the case, make the heart of this people fat – declare it to be stupid and senseless; and remove from them the means of salvation, which they have so long abused.¹¹

Additionally, it is idiomatic of the Hebrews to describe how something turned out as though they had caused it. Edward Chandler wrote, “According to the idiom of his tongue, the prophet is bid to do that which he simply declares.”¹² Thomas Horne added the following:

Prophecies are sometimes delivered in the language of command, agreeably to the idiom of the Hebrew and other oriental languages. What is future is presented in the form of an injunction. When thus commissioned by God to declare a thing future, the prophets speak as if they had been appointed to do it themselves. Of this we have a good example in Isa. vi. 9, 10.¹³

We must not take Jesus’ quotation of Isaiah 6:9–10 in John 12:40 to mean that God blinds or hardens anybody through supernatural means. Instead, God is foretelling or making a pronouncement about how the people will react to the prophet’s message. Given this

reality, one translation gave verse 10 the following interpretation:

Prophesy that the heart of this people shall be fat, And their ears heavy, and their eyes shut; Lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and healed. (Isaiah 6:10; The Holy Bible, with Emendations [by J.T. Conquest].)

The prophet foretold future events rather than God's future course of action. The freedom of His creatures is important to a loving God. Consequently, Isaiah was predicting the outcomes of what the people would actually do to themselves, and those who were familiar with their cultural idioms would understand this:

The Seventy render, and our Lord quotes the words of the LXX.—“This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed.” And it seems, as if the meaning were, not that God hath blinded and hardened them, but that they had blinded and hardened themselves. And so indeed the Hebrew imperative probably indicated, and the Greek has rightly paraphrased it. For “make the heart of this people fat” is but, according to the forcible idiom of Semitic tongues, a vigorous mode of saying, “Pronounce their heart fat, prophesy of them as blinded and hardened. Declare, write, paint the corrupted, degraded, stupified condition of the daughter of thy people.”¹⁴

When our Lord and Luke write, “*their eyes they have closed,*” they both provide clarification for Isaiah's (and our Lord's) assertion (Matt. 13:15; Acts 28:27). The fact that the people have made decisions that have led to their current spiritual state is why, as E. W. Shalders

noted in his commentary on Isaiah 6:10, the “Hebrew idiom be taken into account.” Shalders connects this fact to the gospel references to this chapter made by our Lord:

The forms of quotation in the New Testament range themselves into two diverging lines, one tending to assert that an influence is brought to bear upon men’s minds by which they are rendered insensible to moral truth, the other that their blindness is the result of their own unwillingness to understand and obey. To the former may be referred Mark iv. 11, 12 ; Luke viii. 10; John xii. 39, 40; and Romans xi. 8; to the latter, Matthew xiii. 14, 15; Acts xxviii. 26, 27.”¹⁵

Approximately three centuries before Christ, the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, emphasized the importance of the individual responsibility of the people in Isaiah 6:9–10:

*For the heart of this people has become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and **their eyes have they closed**; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.* (Isaiah 6:10; Brenton English Septuagint Translation)

*For the heart of this people has become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and **their eyes have they closed**; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.* (Isaiah 6:10; LXX2012: Septuagint in American English)

*.... for the heart of this people is stupefied;
and their ears are dull of hearing; and
they have shut their eyes, that for a while
they may not see with their eyes; and hear
with their ears; and understand with their
hearts; and return that I may heal them.
(Isaiah 6:10; Charles Thomson
Translation)*

We must use the same cultural idioms as the Jews who translated Isaiah into Greek because they were fluent in them. When we comprehend how Hebrew idioms function, we can see that John 12:40 (and its source, Isa. 6:9–10) is a statement informing the people about how their own individual choices are the reason for their current (or future) spiritual condition. This shows that rather than being the *cause*, God's role is purely *permissive*:

Difficulty is caused to modern thought by the form in which the prophecy is clothed in the original (and repeated in S. John): Make the heart of this people fat...lest they see.... This suggests a Calvinistic interpretation as if men's hearts were deliberately hardened by the divine will; but this idea is due to a misunderstanding of the Hebraic idiom. The Hebrew form of expression is really the prophetic (or poetical) description of the result of disobedience; and the Greek translation in the LXX, which is given here, is a fair equivalent: This people's heart is waxed gross. **Where there is the power of choice, there the presentation of new light or truth, if it is rejected, becomes a judgement.** Before the coming of the light or truth, the darkness is not felt, the sin is dormant: when the light and truth come and are rejected, then the sin becomes alive, the darkness conscious. Accordingly, the effect of the preaching of the gospel is to harden the hearts of those who will not receive it: and this hardening is not to be thought of

as a state predestined for certain individuals, **but as a judgement allowed by, and in fact the expression of, the divine law.**¹⁶ (Emphasis added)

Scriptures of this sort must be viewed as “idioms of Oriental languages” according to Richard Twopeny.¹⁷ Twopeny writes on Isaiah 6:9-10:

In this there is no intimation that God was the cause of their stupidity and inattention; nor is there any power or command given to the prophet to occasion it, but an indignant permission, literally agreeing with the permissive sense of the Hiphil conjugation or voice above noted.¹⁸

Since God is no longer restraining the people from blinding and hardening themselves, Isaiah 6:9-10 is indicative of the Hebrew “idiom of permission” in which God is said to do that which He merely allowed:

For this people’s heart-If the Hebrew be rendered imperatively, “Make the heart of this people fat,” it must be construed as **a Hebrew idiom, in which any one is said to do what he predicts or permits.** Jer. i. 10; Ezek. xliii. 3. Isaiah was not sent to make the people stupid and obstinate: they made themselves so without his help.¹⁹ (Emphasis added)

This suggestion will aid in the understanding of that large class of Scriptures which refer to God as causing us to “err from” his “ways,” “hardening” our “hearts,” “shutting the eyes” of sinners, and making their “ears heavy,” lest they “should see with their eyes and hear with their ears.” **What God has in wisdom and in love permitted, or what has occurred in the operation of laws which he has established, he is said, in this familiar idiom, to have done.** He “hardened Pharaoh’s heart,” by permitting him to harden himself through neglect of those very means which

serve, when properly improved, to soften and subdue the affections.²⁰ (Emphasis added)

.... that **the idioms of the sacred languages ascribing cause or operation to God must be understood according to the nature of the subject**-and, what is particularly to our purpose, that active verbs which denote making, doing, causing, and the like, often denote a declaration of the thing done, or that shall take place; **or a permission of it** Isaiah vi. 9, 10. The prophet is commanded to tell the people, “understand not, perceive not;” and he is ordered to “make the heart of this people fat, to make their ears heavy, and to shut.” And what can this mean more than to declare a fact; either what they then were, or what they would be.²¹ (Emphasis added)

The well-known difficulty in this and similar passages, arises from the use of two Hebraisms—in the one, the instrument is said to do what is done by God himself; in the other, God is said to do what he permits to be done. Isaiah made the heart of the people fat, only as the instrument in God’s hands; and God made their heart fat, only in the sense of permitting it to be so. Stripped of its Hebrew idiom, the passage simply predicts that the remonstrances of the prophet—no uncommon occurrence—would have a hardening, not a subduing effect.²²

All subsequent citations must match the original source’s accuracy. Because of this, we may be sure that when Jesus quoted Isaiah in John 12:40, He wasn’t accusing the Father of the people’s misdeeds but rather speaking idiomatically. As per Samuel Richard Bosanquet:

So John, xii. 40, quotes Isaiah, vi. 9, 10, ‘He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts:’ here ‘he’ is impersonal, and in effect is no more than an idiomatic expression for, ‘their eyes are blinded,

and their hearts hardened.’ And this is in reality the force of the passage quoted, with slightly altered phraseology, namely, Go tell this people, hear ye indeed but understand not, and see ye indeed but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes.²³

Bosanquet goes on to describe how some individuals are not familiar with the idioms of the people to whom our Lord is speaking:

These idioms may, many of them, seem obvious, and hardly worthy of mentioning. But they are necessary to be noticed, because forced applications are often made of expressions which are simply poetical and idiomatic.²⁴

Translations should avoid giving the Western mind the sense that God is in any manner dark since our Lord’s language and phraseology in John 12:40 are different from how we Westerners interpret it. The following rendering of John 12:40, purportedly from Aramaic, is the most accurate to our understanding:

They have blinded their eyes, and darkened their hearts; that they might not see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and be converted; and I should heal them. (John 12:40; Murdock’s Syriac Peshitta NT)

Jesus communicated permission with idioms rather than using causal words. The above rendering resembles more accurately the Hebrew expression, in which God is described as being light with no darkness within Him (1 John 1:5).

Chapter Nine

Spirit of Slumber and the Idiom of Permission

*(According as it is written, **God hath given them the spirit of slumber**, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. (Romans 11:8)*

We could form an unfavorable impression of God when we read the word “give” or “given” in the Bible. The introductory Scripture has one of these. Romans 11:8 is rendered in a way that suggests that God purposely and supernaturally hindered Israel from gaining the righteousness that is only found in Christ by putting them into a spiritual lethargy. The apostles cited passages from the Old Testament rather frequently to support their claims. The following passage from the book of Isaiah is directly quoted by Paul:

For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. (Isaiah 29:10)

Scripture passages where God is said to “close” or “blind” the eyes must be interpreted as indicative of God’s *permission* rather than His *causality*, as we have taught in the previous chapter (Compare Isaiah 6:9-10 with Matt. 13:15; Acts 28:27). Similar circumstances apply to Isaiah 29:10 as well. A scientist who is devoted to revealing God, Alan Hayworth, first explains the idiom before making a connection to Isaiah 29:10:

Also, we have here another example of Hebrew idiom. God sometimes says, “I will do such-and-

such”, when He really means, “I have foreseen that such-and-such will happen, and I shall permit it to happen” There is a second example of this idiom in Isaiah 29. Verse 10 says, “The Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep and (He) hath closed your eyes.” Verse 13 explains what this really means. God did not blind the eyes of people who were trying to see. He never does.¹

This same principle must be used when Isaiah 29:10 is referenced in the New Testament if the verse is to be interpreted as permissive rather than causal. According to George Holden, this is the case:

8. God hath given] Viz. according to the Hebrew idiom, hath permitted it to come upon them; and permitted them to have eyes not seeing, and ears not hearing:—Matt. xiii. 14. note.²

In order to defend God’s justice and refute claims that Scripture contradicts itself, we must read texts like Romans 11:8 (and Isaiah 29:10 from which it is being cited) using the Hebrew idiom of permission. For those who would still question the existence of this idiom, however, we need only refer to the Greek word for “given” in order to support the idea that Romans 11:8 should be interpreted in the permissive sense. One academic said:

Ver. 8, Given &c.] The Greek word here for give is often used to signify a permission of that which we can hinder if we will; as Gen. xxi. 7. Judges xv.1. Acts ii.27. 1 Kings xxii. 23. i.e. “He hath permitted the lying spirit freely to go forth and deceive them;” and, in this sense, God is here said to have given the Jews a spirit of slumber, by permitting them to lye under those prejudices against the Messiah, which their traditions about him, and the doctrine of the Scribes and pharisees had work’d within them.³

According to one scholar, if the Greek word for “give” is understood correctly, Israel’s spiritual slumber is entirely the result of their free will decisions rather than any direct action on God’s behalf. Furthermore, the accurate translation of this word aids in comprehending that this “slumber” was caused by the actions of people who were under it, as another scholar, Alexander Crawford Bromehead, has explained in the notes of his paraphrase of the book of Romans:

V. 8. “God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see,” &c. ; rather, “hath permitted them,” &c. : ἔδωκεν from δίδωμι, which frequently, both in sacred and profane authors, has the sense of permit, as well as to give. In Acts ii. 27, οὐδέ τις ἀποθνήσκει is correctly rendered, “neither wilt Thou suffer,” i.e. permit. The words, “eyes that they should not see,” are a quotation from Isaiah vi. 9, and are not to be interpreted in an arbitrary manner without regard to the conduct of those to whom they relate, or we make God the author of sin. According to the Septuagint, it is, “the Lord FORETELLS their blindness;” He did not decree it.⁴

After explaining how the original Greek word for “give” is supposed to be read in the permissive sense, Bromehead gives us the following interpretation of the verse:

(as it is written, 'God hath permitted them the spirit of deep sleep; that having eyes they should not see, and having ears they should not hear.)⁵

The Greek term used for “given” in Romans 11:8 is *didōmi*, which provides more proof that the text should be regarded as idiomatic of permission. According to *Thayer’s Greek Definitions*, the word can mean a variety

of things, including “let have; to give over, to grant or permit one.” It is the same Greek word used in Acts 2:27 where we read, “... *nor will You **allow** Your holy One to see corruption*” (Modern King James Version; see also Acts 13:35). The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), uses this same Greek word in its rendering of Ezekiel 20:25:

And I gave them up to orders that were not good, and ordinances in which they shall not live by them. (Ezekiel 20:25; Apostolic Bible Polyglot w/ Strong's Numbers)

Other translations of Romans 11:8 are more accurate because the Greek word for “given” in that verse is the same as Ezekiel 20:25 in the Septuagint:

*as it is written , “God hath **given them up** to a state of insensibility, so that their eyes could not see, and their ears could not hear.” (Mace New Testament)*

*as the Scripture Says, “God has **given them over** to an attitude of insensibility, so that their eyes cannot see and their ears cannot hear, down to this very day.” (Williams New Testament)*

In conclusion, God did not deliberately utilize force to put Israel into a state of spiritual slumber. He merely permitted them to pursue their own desires (Psalm 81:10-16; Matt. 23:37-38).

Chapter Ten

Hidden Things and the Idiom of Permission

*At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because **thou hast hid these things** from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. (Matt. 11:25; see also Luke 10:21)*

Our translations' phrasing gives the impression that God purposefully withheld the gospel of salvation from the intellectuals of Jesus' day. Even worse, Jesus is praising and thanking God for what He is said to have done. However, this would be in opposition to 1 Timothy 2:4 which states, "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." Additionally, it would contradict what He had said to one of those same intellectuals (John 3:16-17).

By comparing Scripture with itself, we can determine that God does not purposefully withhold salvation from anybody and that Jesus does not rejoice when others do not receive it. Compare Jesus' predictions about Jerusalem's destiny in the gospel with Matthew's account of the same event:

*And when he was come near, he beheld the city, **and wept over it**, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but **now they are hid from thine eyes**. (Luke 19:41-42)*

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are

sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! (Matthew 23:37)

Jesus cried because those things that would have led to their salvation and peace were hidden from them. But it wasn't because God wanted it to be this way (Ps. 81:10-16). They turned God away as He tried to gather them like a mother hen. People who consistently reject God's invites eventually grow so hardened and blinded that they are no longer able to receive out of their own volition (Hos. 4:17; Rom. 1:28; 2 Pet. 3:5).

Sadly, the people Jesus claimed these truths were concealed from were hardened by their own assertions of superior understanding (1 Cor. 1:17-25). If one is familiar with Hebrew idioms, they will be able to realize that Jesus was thanking God for the fact that these straightforward truths did not require a "higher education" or exceptional scholarly knowledge. According to James Denney:

It is only the peculiarity of an Eastern language that makes Him seem to give thanks that some have rejected it: in our idiom He would have said, "That while Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding, Thou hast revealed them unto babes." Jesus could not have rejoiced in a revelation which was only accessible to the wise and understanding; this would have excluded the babes. But a revelation accessible to the babes is accessible to all.¹

The fact that everyone could access the magnificent truths of the gospel was the focus of our Lord's thankfulness to the Father. However, the requirement is to accept them with childlike faith (Matt. 18:1-5; 19:13-14). The actual significance of our Lord's words is *obscured* by ignorance of this idiom:

Translations also have occasioned obscurity. Ours is confessedly a good one. But in the best translations many words and expressions must lose their force. The idiom of a language so different from our own, will certainly, without care, create difficulty. When a translator, instead of giving what is acknowledged on all sides to be the *undoubted sense*, thinks himself obliged to give the *literal words*, he often misleads his reader. Our translation, for instance; makes our Saviour say, *I thank thee, O Father, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them to babes*; whereas he certainly does not mean to thank God for hiding them from the wise and prudent, but for making them plain to the unlearned: for so the Jewish idiom imports; and the expression, no doubt, should be translated to imply that meaning.²

The misinterpretation of Matthew 11:25 is due to our literal translations and our ignorance (or “neglect”) of the idioms employed in Scripture. This ambiguity is primarily caused by the failure to understand the idiom in which God is attributed with everything that occurs:

The written law of God is the visible transcript of his moral excellencies, and the main source of what little acquaintance we have with him. It is holy, just, and good. Such, therefore, is He. We know Him from the righteous, and equitable, and benevolent rules which He hath laid down for our observance. Hence we are taught more effectively than by open revelation, that ‘in Him is no sin;’ that in the Supreme Intelligence ‘whatsoever things are honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, if there be any virtue, any praise,’ all exist in unalloyed, immaculate perfectness; that as He is ‘not tempted with evil, so neither tempteth He any man;’ that He ‘hardeneth’ none, ‘loveth’ not one, nor ‘hateth’ another, before they have done good or evil, in the sense in which we understand

hardening, loving, and hating. **Much of the obscurity that hangs like a cloud over the line of our researches, has been raised by the Jewish custom of attributing everything, evil as well as good, to the Almighty; much to idiomatic peculiarities,** the clew to the precise meaning of which has long since perished in the lapse of ages.³ (Emphasis added)

This author adds, "... what is spoken of as an interposition of the Almighty, whether in love or in anger, may have often been rather a consequence of the mercies which He had vouchsafed, or of the laws which He had established."⁴ This serves as yet another justification for why understanding biblical idiom is essential to comprehending our Lord's prayer of appreciation to the Father.

God is said to have "hidden" these things since the men they were hidden from chose not to accept them, which is another idiomatic expression that describes what a person chooses for themselves. According to Thomas Stabback:

'I thank thee, O Father,' &c. **This is expressed according to the peculiar idiom of the Hebrew tongue,** and the meaning is, not that Jesus thanked God for hiding these things from the wise, but that, whilst they were hidden from them, they were revealed unto babes. God certainly did not use any positive influence to hide the proofs of Christ's mission from the wise and prudent of the Jews, for they had the Scriptures in their hands, and saw and heard his miracles and preaching, so that had they been honest and well disposed, they might have come to a knowledge of them. But they were blinded by their pride and prejudices. **Since, therefore, God had permitted, not caused this blindness,** our Lord made it a subject of thanks to his Almighty Father, that he had revealed them unto babes—men whose faculties had not indeed been

improved by learning and education, but who, in opposition to the worldly wise, and politically prudent, were simple, humble, and teachable as children.⁵ (Emphasis added)

Other scholars agree that this “permissive sense” exists. We took note of Isaac Brown’s statement in an earlier chapter that “God is often said in Scripture to do that which He permits to be done.”⁶ Additionally, Brown recognized this idiomatic expression in Christ’s words:

So, in our Lord’s thanksgiving, in Matt. xi. 25 (Luke x. 21), “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.” That is, I thank thee, that whilst thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent (because they are not humble enough to receive them), thou hast revealed them unto babes. The idiom is similar in Eph. iv. 26, “Be ye angry and sin not.” That is, if ye be led into angry feelings, see that ye sin not.⁷

Edward Williams, whom we have cited multiple times, explained that, “the idioms of the sacred languages ascribing cause or operation to God often denote a permission of it.”⁸ In sync with this truth, Williams wrote concerning Christ’s words, “‘Thou hast hid these things’ i.e. not revealed.”⁹ This is the *sense* in which our Lord’s words are to be understood:

The best Commentators, ancient and modern, are agreed that the sense is, “because, having permitted these things to be hidden to the wise and sagacious, thou hast revealed them unto children in knowledge.” For God is said in Scripture to do what he is pleased to permit to be done, and what he foresees will be done under the circumstances in which his creatures are placed; though their wills are held under no constraint. With respect to the

former idiom, it occurs in Rom. vi. 17. Is. xii. 1. Exod. vii. 1. and 5. 2 Sam. xii. 11. and 12; and often elsewhere.¹⁰

Others also agree that this is the sense in which we are to understand Matthew 11:25:

In what sense God may be said to hide from them these things, we may not be able to tell; but we are sure of the fact; both because we read it in this text, and because we see it every day. We may be certain that God is not the author of sin. We may indeed, not have said all that is true, when we have spoken of judicial blindness, to which men are sometimes given up, in punishment for former resistance of the light; or when we have asserted that **God is sometimes said to do that which he suffers to be done.** The fact, however, rather than the cause or the means, is the object of Christ's contemplation here; and he seems to rejoice in it, "I thank thee that thou hast hidden these things." Nor can there be any rational doubt that the Lord rejoices in his works, since "he has made all things for himself; and for his pleasure they are and were created." The universe, taken as a whole, is the object of God's complacency; for it is better that it should exist, than not exist. Still, however, **the idiom should be noticed, that in many Scriptures,** where two things are apparently combined, only one of them is included in that assertion which seems to apply to them both.¹¹ (Emphasis added)

When we interpret this in the context of the permission idiom, we can understand that Jesus was not thanking God for withholding information from any particular people, any more than Paul was thanking God that the Roman Christians had once served sin:

But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from

the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. (Romans 6:17)

Paul thanked God not for their slavery to sin but rather for their acceptance of the truth that set them free from it. None of these individuals were made servants of sin by God. Given this, some academics contend that the notion that God “hid” this revelation from the wise and prudent is an idiomatic expression of permission:

Things of this nature are to be accounted for only by the different idioms of languages. See Matth. xxi. 1. Mark ix. 38. xi. 14. Luke xiii. 14. Ibid. *I thank thee—BECAUSE thou hast hid these things from the wife and prudent; and hast revealed them unto babes.*] He does not thank God properly, BECAUSE he had hid them from the wife, &c. but the sense is, I thank thee that, HAVING hid them from those, thou hast revealed them to *these*. So Rom. vi. 17. *God be thanked that YE WERE the servants of sin; but now, &c. i. e. HAVING BEEN the servants of sin, ye have now obeyed, &c. The wise and prudent, i. e. in their own conceits, but really proud, obstinate fools. Hid them from them, i. e. PERMITTED them to go on in their ignorance, as a punishment for their pride and perverseness. Many more expressions of this nature there are in both Testaments. See 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12. Ezek. iv. 9. Unto babes; i.e. the meek, humble, and teachable.*¹²

It is to be remarked that our Saviour does not praise God, because he had hid these things from the wise, but, that having done so, he revealed them to babes We have the same idiom in Isaiah xii. 1. Rom. vi. 17. Neither can he be said to have hidden these things at all, otherwise than that he foresaw and permitted the consequence of Pharisaical obstinacy and pride.¹³

In this verse is contained a peculiar idiom of the Hebrew language, and instance which occurs in Rom. vi. 17. The cause of gratitude was not, as the sentence literally expresses it, that God had hidden these things from the wise and revealed them to babes; but because, having in his providence permitted them to be hidden from the learned and the famous, poets, orators, statesmen, and philosophers, he had communicated them to the meek and the childlike, to the unlearned carpenter and simple fisherman.¹⁴

I glorify or adore thee, because having hidden these things, &c. For Christ does not thank God that he had hidden these things from the wise, but that, having done so, he had revealed them to babes. We have the same idiom Rom. vi, 17. God be thanked ye were the servants of sin, but ye obeyed: i.e. that having been formerly the servants of sin, ye have now been obedient. Christ turns away his eyes from the view of awful punishment, which awaited the unbelief of those towns, and glorifies his heavenly father, who permitted the wise and prudent, the learned, skilled in tradition, the Scribes and Pharisees, to remain in their prejudices, blindness, and carnal worldly wisdom; but the babes, the humble and modest, the poor and illiterate, to lay hold of that true spiritual wisdom which the others rejected.¹⁵

We can infer from both the biblical and academic evidence that God is not an capricious deity who arbitrarily chooses who to bless and who to withhold favor from based on “sovereign whims.” God sent Jesus specifically to accomplish his mission of saving everyone because He loves and wants to save everyone. Those who reject the truth of God’s salvation plan or any other blessing He wants to impart are solely responsible for their own actions.

Chapter Eleven

Deception and the Idiom of Permission

*And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, **I the LORD have deceived that prophet**, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.* (Ezekiel 14:9; King James Version)

The Hebrew word for “deceived” is “*pâthâh*” which, among several things, means to *entice* or *seduce*. Another word for this would be *temptation*, which we are told very clearly by James that God is never its source (James 1:13). Furthermore, to deceive someone is “to mislead by deliberate misrepresentation or lies” (Harper Collins Dictionary). Lying is something that is impossible to God (Titus 1:1-3; Heb. 6:17-18). Furthermore, it goes against what God Himself claimed, namely that He did not send or direct these prophets to prophesy lies in His Name (Eze. 13:6-7; Jer. 14:14-15).

The passage must be translated in the *permissive sense* in order to avoid the appearance that God and His written Word are in conflict. Thankfully several English translations have done that. Some of them are as follows:

*And when a prophet is deceived as to the thing of which he hath spoken, **I, Jehovah, have permitted that prophet to be deceived**; and I will stretch out my hand against him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people.* (Ezekiel 14:9; The Holy Bible, Translated from Corrected Texts of the Original Tongues by B. Boothroyd, D.D., 1836)

*And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, **I the LORD have permitted him to be deceived**, and I will stretch out My hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of My People Israel. (Ezekiel 14:9; E. W. Bullinger's Companion Bible, 1909; Emphasis added)*

These translations are appropriate because this passage contains yet another instance of the Hebrew idiom of permission. There are many scholarly men who attest to this truth, as we have demonstrated throughout this work. Adam Clarke urged his readers to familiarize themselves with the, “idioms of the Hebrew language, in which God is a thousand times said to do, what in the course of his providence or justice he only permits to be done.”¹ He also wrote concerning Ezekiel 14:9:

I the Lord have deceived that prophet - That is, he ran before he was sent; he willingly became the servant of Satan's illusions; and I suffered this to take place, because he and his followers refused to consult and serve me. I have often had occasion to remark that it is common in the Hebrew language to state a thing as done by the Lord which he only suffers or permits to be done; for so absolute and universal is the government of God, that the smallest occurrence cannot take place without his will or permission.²

In the notes in his Companion Bible, Bullinger writes, “Hebrew idioms = have permitted him to be deceived: i.e. as a judicial punishment for his own deception of the People.”³ Also, explaining the “Idiomatic usages of Verbs,” Bullinger again writes concerning Ezekiel 14:9:

If the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet”: i.e., I have permitted him to deceive himself.⁴

Thomas Hartwell Thorne argued that when we understand the idiom of permission, all the Scriptures that seem to indict God as a liar become apparent (many of which we will discuss in this chapter):

With regard to the charge of inspiring prophets with false messages, (which is founded on 1 Kings xxii. 22, 23. Jer. iv. 10. and Ezek. xiv. 9.) we remark that it is a known idiom of the Hebrew language, to express things in an imperative and active form, which are to be understood only permissively.⁵

Although some people today dispute its existence, according to Horne, this idiom is well-known in the Hebrew language. In particular, Horne wrote the following about Ezekiel 14:9:

(Ezek. xiv. 9.) I the LORD have deceived that prophet, that is, permitted him to be deceived, and to deceive the people, as a just judgment upon them for their infidelity with respect to his true prophets. This he threatens at the 5th verse, I will take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols; because they have chosen to themselves false gods, I will suffer them to be deceived with false prophets; and that this is the meaning, appears by the threatening added, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and I will destroy him from the midst of my people: now God will not punish that of which he is the author.⁶

Aaron Walker shared Horne’s view that every passage of Scripture where God is attributed with

bringing about deception must be interpreted from the standpoint that He merely permitted it:

The charge of inspiring prophets with false messages is founded, pretendingly, upon 1st Kings 22:22, 23, Jeremiah 4:10, and Ezekiel 14:9. To answer this, it is only necessary to know that it is an idiom of the original languages to express, in the imperative active, that which is simply permitted.⁷

Walker shared the view that this interpretation is supported by a permission-based idiom found in the original languages from which Scripture was drawn. He also shared the views of the other writers cited above. Walker specifically addresses Ezekiel 14:9 as well:

(Ezekiel 14:9). I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet, that is, permitted him to be deceived, and permitted him to deceive the people, as the legitimate result of their own wickedness, and a just judgment upon them for their rejection of the testimony of his true prophets. There is nothing strange about all this; for as sure as there is a God, so sure it is that he permits wicked lying men to be deceived in our own day. He has done this in all ages of the world. In fact, it belongs to his ordained plan to permit, or suffer, men, individually or collectively, to fall in their own deceptions and wickedness.⁸

Walker reasoned that in accordance with God's rules stating that sin is its own destruction, He allowed this deceit. God will give individuals their heart's desire, complete with its repercussions, if they seek deception. This is the reason it is said that He actually did it.

Edward Williams, quoted several times in this book, reminds us that, "the idioms of the sacred languages ascribing cause or operation to God often denote a permission of it."⁹

Williams provides a number of examples, including Ezekiel 14:9 to which he writes, “‘I the Lord have deceived that prophet.’ Can any thing else be meant than suffering him to deceive himself?”¹⁰ Williams also addresses Jeremiah 4:10 which says:

*Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! surely thou
hast greatly deceived this people and
Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace;
whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul.
(Jeremiah 4:10)*

Concerning this passage Williams informs us, “‘Lord God, thou hast greatly deceived this people;’ that is, permitted or not hindered them to be deceived by the false Prophets.”¹¹ Simply said, Jeremiah 4:10 is an idiomatic way of saying that the people will bring about their own deception in the absence of any divine constraint. As James R. M’Gavin wrote:

God is said to have deceived the people, according to the Hebrew idiom, which means that the people had deceived themselves by putting a false construction on the divine messages.¹²

Jeremiah 4:10 is, in an idiomatic sense, prophesying the event since the people are deceiving themselves. In his *Companion Bible*, Bullinger writes concerning Jeremiah 4:10 that this was a, “Hebrew idiom for declaring that they would be deceived: i.e. by the false prophets who prophesied peace.”¹³

Even though they were merely making predictions about what other people would do, prophets spoke of these occurrences as if they or God had brought them about. As a result, we must interpret these Scriptures as God’s non-interference. E. W. Bullinger is useful here

once more. Regarding Jer. 4:10, Bullinger explains the “Idiomatic usages of Verbs” in the following manner:

Lord God, surely thou hast greatly deceived this people”: i.e., thou hast suffered this People to be greatly deceived, by the false prophets, saying: Ye shall have peace, etc.¹⁴

Consistent with Bullinger, Dr. Robert Young, in the section of his concordance titled “Analytical Survey of the Idioms of the Bible,” says that Jeremiah 4:10 should be rendered, “Thou hast greatly deceived this people, i.e. permitted them to be deceived.”¹⁵ In his commentary on Jeremiah 4:10, Daniel Waterland adds:

In Scripture phrase, God is frequently said to do what he *permits* to be done, because all events are in his disposal, and wait his pleasure For why must the Prophet’s words be strained, in this case, to mean more than they really say, and more than the grammatical construction and Hebrew idiom require?¹⁶

Waterland further explains the reason for reading Jeremiah 4:10 with this idiom:

The people had been desperately wicked, would accept of no sober counsel, nor bear any just reproof: they loved smooth things, they delighted in flattery and lies; and therefore God gave them up to strong delusions, and suffered them to be grossly imposed upon by lying prophets of their own choosing.¹⁷

Aaron Walker and Thomas Hartwell Horne come to similar conclusions on the use of this idiom with Jer. 4:10:

In Jeremiah 4:10, where the prophet complains that God had deceived them, saying, “They should have peace, when the sword reached to the soul,” we are to understand that God permitted the false prophets to deceive him, prophesying peace to the people, as appears from the history.¹⁸

And so (Jer. iv. 10.) where the prophet complains that God had greatly deceived the people, saying, they should have peace, when the sword reacheth to the soul; we are to understand this no otherwise, but that God permitted the false prophets to deceive them, prophesying peace to them, as appears by the history.¹⁹

Some Bible translators understood that Jeremiah 4:10 should be understood in the context of permission, so they gave it this interpretation. B. Boothroyd renders it, “*Surely thou hast **suffered** this people and Jerusalem to be altogether deceived*” (The Holy Bible, Translated from Corrected Texts of the Original Tongues). Another reads:

*In response to all this I said, “Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have surely **allowed** the people of Judah and Jerusalem to be deceived by those who say, ‘You will be safe!’ But in fact a sword is already at our throats.”* (New English Translation)

The truth of God’s loving and holy nature, as well as the divine inspiration of His written Word, are far more accurately expressed in this translation. Next, we have Scripture that says that God puts lying spirits in the mouths of prophets:

Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil

concerning thee. (1 Kings 22:23; see also 2 Chron. 18:22)

The context of this passage and the original Hebrew word for “put” both provide the answer to the problem with it. The context will be addressed first. The dialogue between God and the false spirit, which we take to be Satan (John 8:44), is depicted in 1 Kings 22:22:

*And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith?
And he said, **I will go forth**, and I will be a
lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.
And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and
prevail also: **go forth, and do so.***

Keep in mind that this deceitful spirit was not sent by God. He offered his services and declared, “***I will go forth.***” God uses the same expression in response to this spirit’s desire by saying, “***go forth, and do so.***” Here, it is clear that God was granting the deceptive spirit freedom to carry out its own desires. Walker and Horne concur that God’s response is indicative of His *permission* and not His *causation*:

Correct principles of interpretation do not justify the unbeliever in any such blasphemy. When an evil spirit offered himself to be a lying spirit in the mouth of a wicked prophet—false prophet—God said, “Go forth and do so,” which only signifies permission, not command.²⁰

So where the devils besought Christ that he would suffer them to enter into the herd of swine, he said unto them, Go; (Matt. viii. 31.) he did not command, but permitted them. And so in John xiii. 27. where our Saviour says to Judas, What thou dost, do quickly, we are not to understand that he commanded him to betray him, though that seemed

to be expressed in the form. So likewise, here, where an evil spirit offered himself to be a lying spirit in the mouth of the prophet, and God says, Go forth, and do so: this only signifies a permission, not a command.²¹

Therefore, the 22nd verse aids in our understanding that it is necessary to interpret idiomatically when it says that God “put” a lying spirit in the mouths of the false prophets. As noted by George Holden, “I will instigate them to speak falsehoods, or what will deceive Ahab. According to the Hebrew idiom God is said to do what he permits.”²² Similar findings have been reached by other Evangelicals:

We think that Micaiah takes up a parable to teach the king the character of the men whom he was trusting. It begins in verse 18, and ends in the 22nd verse. The meaning is plain,-the false prophets are liars. It is not an uncommon Hebrew Idiom to speak of the Lord as doing what he permits moral agents to do freely.²³

Therefore, verse 22 explains that verse 23 is nothing more than an idiom of permission. Also, the word for “put” is from the Hebrew verb “nathan” which means to “allow” or “permit.” Some scholars believe that this word should have been translated in its permissive sense in this passage:

It is frequent in holy Scripture, to call that the Lord’s doing which he only permits to be done, because he has the supreme direction of all things, and he governs the event. Wicked devices proceed from wicked men: but that they prevail and take effect is owing to the hand of God directing and ordering where they shall light, and what shall be the issue of them. As to the text we are now upon, the very words of the original will bear to be

translated, The LORD HATH PERMITTED (or SUFFERED) A LYING-SPIRIT IN THE MOUTH, &cs. Accordingly our translators in other places often render the verb נתן nathan, by suffer, or let, in the sense of permitting. And it may be observed also of the words of God to the lying spirit, as represented in the parable, GO OUT, AND DO Even so, they are to be understood, not in the commanding, but permissive sense; for so is the imperative more than once made use of in other places of Scripture. Therefore there is no room left for charging God as author of any deception brought upon Ahab by the sins of men.²⁴

Therefore, if the word “put” had been translated accurately by our translators, the issue would have been resolved right away—even without the understanding that there is an idiom of permission. Some English versions, thankfully, were far more compliant:

*Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath **permitted** a lying spirit to enter into the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee. (1 Kings 22:23; The Holy Bible, Authorized Version, with Emendations [by J.T. Conquest].)*

*So now I tell you that Yahweh has **let** all of your prophets lie to you. Yahweh has decided that something terrible will happen to you. (1 Kings 22:23; Unlocked Dynamic Bible)*

Adam Clarke, who advised us to learn these specific “idioms of the Hebrew language,” agreed that the passage is correctly rendered, “God has permitted the spirit of lying to influence the whole of thy prophets; and

he now, by my mouth, apprises thee of this, that thou mayest not go and fall at Ramoth-gilead.”²⁵ He also wrote concerning 1 Kings 22:23:

The Lord hath put a lying spirit - He hath permitted or suffered a lying spirit to influence thy prophets. Is it requisite again to remind the reader that the Scriptures repeatedly represent God as doing what, in the course of his providence, he only permits or suffers to be done? Nothing can be done in heaven, in earth, or hell, but either by his immediate energy or permission. This is the reason why the Scripture speaks as above.²⁶

God is not controlling satanic deception. Jesus said, “*When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own*” (John 8:44). Therefore, God’s only part is to remove His restraint when men choose the lies of Satan. Which brings us to our final Scripture where Paul tells us, “*And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie*” (2 Thessalonians 2:11). However, if God authors deception, then this would contradict Paul’s statement that “*God cannot lie*” (Titus 1:2).

It is illogical to assume that Paul would contradict himself if one has the same view that I do, which is that his writings are inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16; Galatians 1:11–12; 2 Peter 3:15–16). Paul continued to utilize Hebrew idioms, notably the idiom of permission, even though he composed his divinely inspired writings in Greek:

Every Biblical scholar is familiar with the nature and force of the Hiphil conjugation in Hebrew, in which words are taken in a causative and permissive sense. He is also aware, that the Hebraistic idiom is carried from the Old into the New-Testament.²⁷

In addition, Bible expositor, William Jenks, makes a similar claim regarding 2 Thess. 2:11:

All the best commentators, ancient and modern, are agreed, we are here to resort to that idiom by which God is figuratively said to do a thing, which He only permits to be done.²⁸

When we examine the chapter's context, it is clear that Paul is writing in the Hebrew idiom of permission in 2 Thessalonians 2:11:

Evil is already insidiously at work but its activities are restricted until what I have called the "restraining power" (of God) is removed. When that happens the lawless man will be plainly seen—though the truth of the Lord Jesus spells his doom, and the radiance of the coming of the Lord Jesus will be his utter destruction. The lawless man is produced by the spirit of evil and armed with all the force, wonders and signs that falsehood can devise. To those involved in this dying world he will come with evil's undiluted power to deceive, for they have refused to love the truth which could have saved them. (2 Thess. 2:7-10; Phillip's New Testament)

According to Paul, Satan, who is the true deceiver, is currently being held in check. This is a manifestation of God's mercy, since He "*desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*" (1 Tim. 2:4). However, when men push for Satanic deception then God will remove all restraint from Satan and permit him to have his way with mankind. The Unlocked Dynamic Version renders 2 Thess. 2:8, "*It is then that Yahweh will*

allow this man, who rejects Yahweh's laws completely, to show himself to everyone in the world." This is similar to the "blinding" God is said to have done in our Lord's day:

They were blinded by their prejudices. "They loved darkness rather than light." Thus were fulfilled, in their obstinate preconceptions, the denunciations of ancient prophecy; for it is an idiom of Scripture, to describe God as doing what he only suffers man to do, and what the Almighty, by his omniscience, foresees. "He gave them a spirit of delusion, that they should believe a lie" (2 Thess. ii. 11); or, in plainer terms, "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and be converted, and I should heal them."²⁹

As a result, God is only said to send delusion when the master deceiver is no longer kept at bay (Rev. 12:9; 20:10). The book "Biblical Notes and Queries" in its section on "Notes on Scriptural Idioms," lists both Ezekiel 14:9 and 2 Thessalonians 2:11 under the idiom of God's "Not the doing of the thing, but the permission of it."³⁰ Similarly, under the "Idiomatic usages of verbs" in which we are told that it is "not the doing of the thing, but the permission of the thing which the agent is said to do," Bullinger writes regarding 2 Thess. 2:11:

"For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie": i.e., God will leave them and suffer them to be deceived by the great Lie which will come on all the world.³¹

Greek scholar Samuel T. Bloomfield stated that the best commentators say that 2 Thess. 2:11 is idiomatic:

.... because they had no love of or care for the truth; there being no effectual preservative from

fatal error but the sincere love of truth and virtue
The best commentators are agreed that we are here to suppose that idiom by which God is figuratively said to do a thing which he only permits to be done.³²

James McKnight reminds us that, “according to the idiom of the Hebrew language, ‘God is said to do what he permits.’”³³ He applies this truth to 2 Thess. 2:11:

Active verbs were used by the Hebrews to express, not the doing, but the permission of the thing which the agent is said to do ‘or this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:’ God shall permit strong delusion to beset them, so that they shall believe a lie.³⁴

Based on this, McKnight believes that 2 Thess. 2:11 is justifiably rendered in a permissive sense:

*And for this cause; God, as a punishment of their wickedness, will **permit** the inworking of error in the minds of these false teachers, to lead them to believe a lie the most monstrous and pernicious that was ever invented. (2 Thessalonians 2:11; A New Literal Translation, from the Original Greek, by James McKnight)*

Thankfully there are other translations as well that, like McKnight’s, interpret the passage with this idiom in mind.³⁵ Actually, most English versions of 2 Thessalonians 2:11 render the word “send” in a way that *sends* the wrong message to the readers (pun intended). Therefore, it and every other passage of Scripture that links deception to God’s causation must be interpreted as using the idiom of permission.

Chapter Twelve

Sickness and the Idiom of Permission

*And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, **he was leprous in his forehead**, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, **because the LORD had smitten him**. (2 Chronicles 26:20)*

Many passages in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, including our opening passage, attribute sickness to God. However, the New Testament shows that the source of it is Satan (Matt. 12:22-26; Luke 13:10-16; Acts 10:38; 1 Cor. 5:5). Those who hold to a dictatorial interpretation of God's sovereignty do not perceive any conflict in this. They think that people can and do experience supernatural suffering because of God. However, if this theory is accepted, it eliminates all distinction between the works of Christ and the works of the devil (John 10:10; Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 6:14-15; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 Pet. 5:7-10; 1 John 3:8).

Sickness is characterized in Scripture as being evil (Deut. 7:15; 28:59-61; 30:15, 19; Psalm 41:8; Job 2:7; 42:11). James tells us, "... *for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man*" (James 1:13b). Scriptures that ascribe illness to God must therefore be taken in an idiomatic permissive sense, just as we have shown with those Scriptures that attribute darkness and evil to Him. We only need to consider the circumstances surrounding Miriam to understand how God *smote* King Uzziah with leprosy:

*And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and **he departed**. And the*

cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous. (Numbers 12:9-10)

As God told the prophet Hosea, “.... woe also to them when I depart from them!” (Hosea 9:12b; see also Jer. 6:8). The withdrawal of God’s protection results from His departure. Joshua and Caleb urged Israel to enter the promised land and vanquish their foes by saying, “.... their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not” (Num. 14:9b). Another translation says, “*Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us*” (A Faithful Version).

God guards us against illness and disease as part of his protection (Psalm 91:1-10). God is said to “smite” when He “hides His face,” a metaphor for the absence of His protective presence: “*I was wroth for the wickedness of his avarice, and I smote him. I hid my face from thee*” (Isaiah 57:17a; Wycliffe Translation).

Describing the curses for disobedience, God warned Israel, “*Also every sickness, and every plague, which is not written in the book of this law, them will the LORD bring upon thee, until thou be destroyed*” (Deut. 28:61). God’s method for “bringing” these sicknesses upon Israel is explain in Deut. 31:17, “*I will hide my face from them so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?*” God will “hide His face” and without God’s presence, Israel will have no protection from the curse of sickness. The following is, what I believe to be, an accurate paraphrase of Deut. 31:17:

When they do this, I will have to withdraw my protection from them and leave them at the mercy of their enemies. Many terrible things will happen

to them, and they'll say to themselves, 'All these disasters and sicknesses have come on us because we have turned against the Lord our God, so He's not with us anymore.'" (The Clear Word by Jack Blanco)

Therefore, God does not spread disease and sickness through a supernatural force. The fall caused the earth to already be full with sickness and disease. Until His people drive Him away, God will provide a barrier against illness to keep them safe.

As we discovered in chapter three, God is said to smite someone when His intervention is no longer desired, thus allowing others freedom to bring harm (Ex. 12:23; 1 Kings 14:15-16; 2 Chron. 13:15-16). As a result, 2 Chronicles 26:20 should be understood to refer to permission rather than divine causation.¹ Similarly, Lev. 14:34 also attributes the distribution of disease, notably leprosy, to God:

*When ye be come into the land of Canaan, which I give to you for a possession, and I **put** the plague of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession.*

This passage's wording gives the impression that God sent illness into the homes of some Canaanites by supernatural means. The fact that this sentence is what we have often referred to as the Hebrew idiom of permission has, thankfully, been acknowledged by several scholars:

This language would appear at first blush to countenance the idea generally entertained by the Jews, that the leprosy was a supernatural disease, inflicted immediately by God himself. But in the Hebrew idiom God is often said to do what, in the course of his providence, he merely permits to be done.² (George Bush)

In what this plague consisted is not known.... From this verse it has been inferred that the leprosy was something supernatural; but in the Hebrew idiom God is often said to do what he merely permits to be done.³ (George Holden)

This expression is the ground of the opinion that the house leprosy was a supernatural infliction. But in the Hebrew idiom God is often said to do acts which He permits others to do, (Exod. vii, 13,) or which occur through physical laws.⁴ (Daniel Steele)

It is also significant to highlight that the word “put” in Leviticus 14:34 is a regrettable translation that gives the reader the incorrect sense of God’s approach to the leprosy discovered in someone’s home:

When it is said, ‘I put the plague of leprosy in a house,’ it sounds as if God himself were the author of the disease; but, according to the idiom of the Hebrew language, God is often said to do what in the course of events he merely permits to be done.⁵

The word “put” is the exact same Hebrew word used in 1 Kings 22:23 where we read, “.... *the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets.*” We learned concerning the word “put” that, “Accordingly our translators in other places often render the verb נָתַן nathan, by suffer, or let, in the sense of permitting.”⁶ Robert Young stated that there is a, “.... well-known scripture idiom whereby what God allows he is said to do.”⁷ He obviously kept this in mind when considering the Hebrew word for “put” in Lev. 14:34:

I HAVE PUT.] lit. ‘given.’ Some have supposed this to indicate that the leprosy in this case was a

direct divine infliction; but in Scripture language what God permits he is said to do.⁸

John Bellamy's translation also includes a rendering of Leviticus 14:34 that takes into account the accurate English translation of the Hebrew word:

*When ye come to the land of Canaan which I give to you for a possession; and I **permit** a plague of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession*⁹

Other versions of the Bible, both ancient and modern, eliminate any suggestion that God had anything to do with the plague striking any of the homes: "... *yf there happen a plage of leprosy in any house of youre possession*" (Miles Coverdale's Translation); "... *if the wound of leprosy is in the houses*" (John Wycliffe's Translation); "... *if there be the plague of leprosy in a house*" (Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition); "... *mildew may appear in a house*" (God's Word). In these translations, God mentions that a plague might be discovered in a home but gives no details about its origins. This lays the groundwork for how we will read any and all passages in the Bible where it is implied that God created leprosy or any other illness or disease.

Remember that the Wesleyan Bible scholar, Adam Clarke, emphasized the importance of being acquainted with the, "idioms of the Hebrew language," in which our Lord is "said to do, what in the course of his providence or justice he only permits to be done."¹⁰ According to Clarke, the translation of Leviticus 14:34 in our Bibles contributed to the idea that God is the cause of these illnesses:

It was probably from this text that the leprosy has been generally considered to be a disease inflicted

immediately by God himself; but it is well known that in Scripture God is frequently represented as doing what, in the course of his providence, he only permits or suffers to be done.¹¹

The correct interpretation of Leviticus 14:34 should not only dispel any notion that God is the cause of this disease, but it should also serve as a template for all other passages in the Bible where God is said to “put” or “bring” sickness and disease upon people.

This truth is acknowledged by the authors of the outstanding work “Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge.” In addition to describing how Leviticus 14:34 should be viewed in light of the idiom of permission, they provide a number of other Scripture references that must be understood in the same way:

I put the plague of leprosy: It was probably from this text, that the leprosy has been in general considered to be a supernatural disease, inflicted immediately by God himself; but it cannot be inferred from this expression, as it is well known, that in Scripture, God is frequently represented as doing what, in the course of his providence, **he only permits to be done. Exo_15:26; Deu_7:15; 1Sa_2:6; Pro_3:33; Isa_45:7; Amo_3:6, Amo_6:11; Mic_6:9.**¹² (Emphasis added)

These scholars agree with Adam Clarke in saying that the idea that God personally caused disease has its roots in a misinterpretation of Leviticus 14:34 that is based on a lack of knowledge of the idiom of permission. Two texts from their list of numerous others that must be read as indicative of God’s permission stand out as relevant to this particular topic of God and illness:

And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do

*that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, **which I have brought upon the Egyptians**: for I am the LORD that healeth thee. (Exodus 15:26)*

*And the LORD will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee; but **will lay them** upon all them that hate thee. (Deut. 7:15)*

Both verses seem to attribute the illnesses and afflictions the Egyptians experienced to God. An in-depth analysis of the Bible's text demonstrates that God's role in the Egyptians' suffering from sickness is permissive rather than causative. We read the following about the Egyptians:

*He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but **gave their life over to the pestilence**; And smote all the firstborn in Egypt; the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham (Psalm 78:50-51)*

God *smites* the Egyptians, not by personally bringing illnesses upon them, but rather because Egypt lost its claim to His protection. Therefore, God's role was limited to "giving them over" or allowing them to experience illness. The Easy-to-Read Version reads, "*He did not let any of those people live. He **let** them die with a deadly disease.*"

Moreover, the word "lay" in Deut. 7:15 is the same Hebrew word used for "put" in Leviticus 14:34 (and

2 Kings 22:23) which means to *allow* or *permit*. It correlates with Moses' account in the book of Exodus. In Exodus 12, God promises that if the Israelites adhered to the directive to apply the lamb's blood, "*I will protect you and there shall be no destroying plague among you, when I smite in the land of Egypt*" (Exodus 12:13b; Charles Thomson Translation).

God's *smiting* is again described as permitting the *death* or *destroying* angel (Satan) to have his way with those who are not under God's protection:

For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you. (Exodus 12:23)

This verse uses the same Hebrew word for "suffer" that is also used for "put" in Leviticus 14:34 and "lay" in Deuteronomy 7:15. The majority of historians claim that sickness and disease were already prevalent in ancient Egypt.¹³ Therefore, as shown by the following translations, God's role in Deuteronomy 7:15 (and Exodus 15:26) is *passive* rather than *active*:

The Lord shall do away from thee all ache (The Lord shall take away all thy aches and pains); and he shall not bring to thee the full evil sicknesses of Egypt, that thou hast known, but to all thine enemies these sicknesses shall come. (Deuteronomy 7:15; Wycliffe Translation)

*The Lord will remove all sickness from you; he will not afflict you with any of the malignant diseases that you know from Egypt, but **will leave them** with all those who hate you. (Deuteronomy 7:15; New American Bible (Revised Edition))*

Therefore, it is appropriate to interpret passages in the Bible that attribute suffering from illness and disease to God as an idiom of permission. The book of Exodus has a statement spoken by God to Moses that suggests that God is responsible for creating illness, particularly in respect to disabilities:

And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? (Exodus 4:11)

It is really sad that theologians who believe that God is the author of all events in the world use this as one of their prooftexts to claim that God is responsible for the blindness, deafness, and muteness that many people are experiencing. However, the ministry of our Lord teaches us that the real cause of these illnesses is Satan:

Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. (Matthew 12:22)

Without knowledge of Hebrew idioms, Matthew would appear to conflict with Exodus 4:11. There are no contradictions in the Scripture, as we have often noted throughout this book. God simply used terminology and

expressions from the era and culture that Moses was accustomed to when He spoke to Moses:

In the deterministic idiom of the culture, actions that were simply permitted by God, mediated through agents, or accomplished through the laws of nature, can be attributed directly to God.... In the context of such a worldview, it is possible and perhaps likely that references to Yahweh creating handicapped babies (Exod. 4:11) are an accommodation to the mindset of the culture his involvement may be more indirect than the language of the text suggests. The situations described may reflect His permissive will, rather than his ideal or his moral will.¹⁴

In light of this, we should remember that God plays a *passive* rather than an *active* role in circumstances like handicaps. Another translation of Exodus 4:11 eliminates any suggestion that God created people with disabilities and instead concentrates on God's power to help:

Then Yahweh said to him, Who made a mans mouth? Who is it who makes a man able to speak, hear, see, or not see? Is it not I, Yahweh? (Exodus 4:11; Unlocked Dynamic Bible)

Those who are praying to God for healing should feel more encouraged by this. One can have a stronger assurance that God is eager to heal us from the enemy's oppressive deeds because God is not the literal cause of sickness and disease but rather the one who heals from them (Acts 10:38). Both salvation and physical healing are included in our Lord Jesus' redemptive work (Isa. 53:4-5; Matt. 8:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:24).

Chapter Thirteen

Accidents and the Idiom of Permission

*And if a man lie not in wait, but **God deliver him into his hand**; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.*
(Exodus 21:13; King James Version)

Due to incorrect Calvinistic mindsets regarding God's sovereignty and providence, anything that regular people refer to as "accidents" is nothing more than divine occurrences in God's inscrutable plan. Calvinists will also frequently misrepresent Scripture, including the introductory passage, to advance their beliefs. This is illustrated in the following statement from a Calvinist theologian:

Exod. xxi. 13, "And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand." A man accidentally kills another, but it is done by a secret commission from God. God delivered him into his hands. Providence is the great clock, keeping time and order, not only hourly, but instantly, to its own honour.¹

What a horrible representation of God this is. This is closer to the world of the Norse mythical god Loki than it is to the loving Father-God of our Savior Jesus Christ. However, other translations have also taken the text to mean that God is ultimately to blame for mishaps:

*And if a man hath not laid wait, but **God hath offered him into his hand**, then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.*
(Geneva Bible)

*However, if this was not done intentionally but rather **was an act of God**, for that kind of case I will appoint a place among you to which that man can flee. (Evangelical Heritage Version)*

*But if he did not hunt him down, yet **God caused it to happen**, then I will appoint for you a place where he may run. (Tree of Life Version)*

Giving this verse a false Calvinistic causal interpretation misses the permissive verb as well as the Hebrew idiom of permission entirely. Let's start by looking at the verb "deliver." It comes from the Hebrew word *'ânâh* which, according to Brown-Driver-Briggs' Hebrew Definitions, means, "to allow to meet, cause to meet" and "to be sent, be allowed to meet."

The Greek version of this verse from the Septuagint is much more intriguing. Here is the *Apostolic Bible Polyglot w/ Strong's Numbers*:

*But if it be done not willingly, but God **delivered up** into his hands, I will give to you a place in which he shall flee there – the one man-slaying.*

The Greek word used for "delivered up" is *paradidōmi*. Thayer's Greek Definitions defines the word as "to permit, allow." It is the same word used in Romans 1:24 where we read, "*He has allowed [or, abandoned] them to have degraded minds*" (An Understandable Version). This completely justifies rendering the passage in a *permissive* rather than in a *causative* sense.

A knowledge of Hebrew idioms, if it is ingrained in our consciousness, should allow us to identify passages

of this sort that are to be taken as permissive on God's part, aside from digging up the definitions of Greek and Hebrew words. Le Clerc, who reminded his readers that, "innumerable Idioms of the like nature, are every where to be found in the Sacred Volumes,"² is quoted by another in relation to his comments on Exodus 21:13:

But if God deliver him into his hand, i.e. if he kill him by accident. Le Clerc well remarks on this the Hebrews did not attribute a fortuitous homicide of this kind to God in such a sense as to ascribe it to his special providence; but as the Greeks ascribed an event of this kind to fortune or fate, so the Hebrews attributed the same to God, not so much to point out God as the author, as that there was no design of man in it.³

The Hebrews were merely recognizing God's dominion in Israel in opposition to pagan theology, not trying to make Him the cause of accidents. Bullinger adds that this paragraph serves as an illustration of the Hebrew idiom of permission: "God Hebrew. Elohim. deliver. Hebrew idiom, which God is said to do what He allows to be done. deliver. Hebrew permit him to meet, or come."⁴

The Hebrews may have had a particular idea about what some theologians today refer to as "providence," but it was not a Calvinistic "mysterious providence of God"; rather, they were only asserting, in their idiomatic way, that He did not interfere to avert the situation:

But, "if a man lie not in wait," v. 13. i. e. does not designedly kill another, "but God deliver him into his hand," i. e. if he kills him by accident, Numb. xxxv. 22. "then I will appoint," &c. God is here, agreeably to the Hebrew idiom, said to do what he permits; and if Divine Providence suffers a man to kill another accidentally, there were places of refuge appointed to which the homicide might fly, and be secure from the vengeance of the next of kin

to the slain, who had the right to put the manslayer to death, and who was therefore called the Goel, or avenger of blood; see Numb. xxxv. 6. et seq. ; Deut. xix. 3. et seq.⁵

If there is any “providence” from above, it does not strictly govern every occurrence in the universe. While God occasionally steps in to stop certain things, He generally respects the freedom bestowed upon people and lets some laws (like gravity) run their natural course.

In addition to having a poor understanding of God’s holy and loving nature, those who read Exodus 21:13 with the notion that God is such a malicious person that He would sovereignly ensure that an accident occurred to kill an innocent person are also incredibly ignorant of Hebrew ideology and expressions. The following was Professor Turner’s counsel for students studying theology:

Let him acquaint himself with the Hebrew language, which is now a much less arduous task than it was ten years ago, as the facilities for acquiring it have greatly increased. Without it, he cannot understand the idioms of the New Testament, nor enter into the spirit of innumerable places in the Old.⁶

It is quite obvious that the vast majority of theologians who advance a conception of divine providence that makes God the author of terrible occurrences, based on an incorrect interpretation of Scripture, have not taken this wise counsel into consideration. The specific idiom that we have been focusing on in this book is highlighted by Professor Turner further on:

It ought to be constantly considered, and particularly in the examination of such passages of

the Bible, as seem to ascribe human wickedness to divine influence (comp. Rom. IX. 18.), that, in the language of Scripture, God is said to do, what he merely permits to be done, or what takes place in the regular course of his providence; and actions are ascribed, not only to their immediate agents, but also to others, who may be, in some way, connected with the performance of them.⁷

Turner explains that the Hebrew idiom of permission must be considered in order to properly appreciate what theologians refer to as “divine providence.” Turner next utilized this fact in relation to the passage being discussed:

“In the Jewish code, after the law making murder a capital offence, the statute is in these terms (Ex. XXI. 13.): “if a man lie not in wait,” if he has not planned nor designed to murder his fellow-creature, “but God deliver him into his hand;” that is, evidently, if he kill him through accident, the holy Scripture ascribing to the Lord of life and death, whose providence is over all his works, all such events as, in common language, are called accidental.⁸

Turner contends that although it is possible to attribute God’s inaction in averting an accident to His “providence” because He is, in fact, Lord, this hardly supports the idea that God “willed” or desired the tragedy to occur.

Understanding Bible idioms is crucial if we are to maintain the appropriate perspective on such matters at all times and avoid impugning God’s character. Furthermore, when we understand these idioms, our translations of Scripture must demonstrate this understanding. Anthony Purver states in the opening remarks of his literal translation of the Bible:

The Hebrew idioms, or Manner of Expression, as being very different from ours, should be observed, and well understood; otherwise the right Meaning, as well as Propriety of Language, may be missed.⁹

No truer words could have been spoken. Purver's version of Exodus 21:13 correctly reads as follows:

As for him who does not seek it, but God lets it fall out to his Hand, I will appoint a Place for thee whither he shall flee.
(Purver, *A New and Literal Translation*, Vol. 1)

In view of the verb's usage and how it corresponds with the Hebrew idiom, this translation is unquestionably the most accurate. We are grateful that this fact is reflected in a number of contemporary translations as well.¹⁰

In my investigation on this topic, I have discovered that the most intriguing thing is how one might identify differences between translations done by people from the same culture or a correction made in a subsequent translation. Here is a comparison of three *Jewish-based* Bible translations as an illustration:

*If it was not premeditated but **an act of God**, then I will designate for you a place to which he can flee.* (Complete Jewish Bible)

*And if a man lie not in wait, but **God let him** fall into his hands; then I shall appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.*
(Jewish School & Family Bible by Rabbi Abraham Benisch)

*But he who does not lie in wait, and Elohim **lets** fall into his hand, I will appoint a place for you where he may flee.*
(Hebraic Roots Bible)

It is intriguing because people who claim that there is no “permissive sense” or that there is no such thing as an “idiom of permission” occasionally cite specific Jewish sources that make these assertions. However, we can observe that there is a variance among the Jewish professionals themselves.

Additionally, some of the changes that have been made to earlier translations of the Bible demonstrate that revelation is moving in the right direction. I thought it was fascinating, for instance, how the New American Standard Version updates its earlier translation:

*Yet if he did not lie in wait for him, **but God caused him** to fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee.* (New American Standard Bible)

*But if he did not lie in wait for him, **but God let him** fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee.*
(New American Standard Bible 1995)

The NASB no longer subscribes to the notion that God is directly responsible for someone’s accidental death. They now see this passage in the permissive sense. In keeping with this, it is also intriguing to note how the Living Bible’s literal translation corrects the earlier paraphrase:

*But if it is accidental—**an act of God**—and not intentional, then I will appoint a place*

where he can run and get protection. (The Living Bible)

*But if it was simply **an accident permitted by God**, I will appoint a place of refuge where the slayer can run for safety. (New Living Translation)*

Some would have anticipated the opposite, with the literal version giving us a more causative rendering and the paraphrase providing us a more permissive meaning. We think the NLT translators gained a deeper comprehension of both the Hebrew language and the nature of God. One could only hope that other scholars will grasp these principles more fully.

If we start with the fundamental fact that He is not the cause of them, it becomes much simpler to trust God for supernatural protection against all harm, injury, and accidents. God has assured His people that He will keep them safe from every harm (Psalm 91). God is not trying to keep us safe from Himself; rather, He is seeking to keep us safe from potential dangers in a sinful world that is hostile to us.

Chapter Fourteen

Bad Statutes and the Idiom of Permission

Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live (Ezekiel 20:25)

Ezekiel's prophecy contains one of the more unsettling verses, because it is said that God gave the people bad statutes. The passage's meaning has been hotly debated, specifically what is meant by the term "statutes that were not good." This is seen as a reference to God's Old Testament regulations, particularly those outlined in the books of Moses by some who, as we will prove shortly, fail to understand the context. To subscribe to this, though, would entail contradicting other verses of Scripture:

*Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them **right judgments**, and true laws, **good statutes** and commandments (Neh. 9:13)*

In fact, Ezekiel would be contradicting himself since he also recorded God as saying that those who, "*Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord God*" (Eze. 18:9). Therefore, Ezekiel 20:25 could not be referring to the statutes God gave through Moses and the prophets:

And I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb, that I might make

them desolate, to the end that they might know that I am the LORD. (Ezekiel 20:26)

The context indicates that the statutes and judgments that God “gave” them required them to emulate pagan practices by offering their offspring as sacrifices to demonic deities (Ezekiel 16:20-21; see also Psalm 106:37-38). Daniel Waterland notes:

The Israelites had provoked God many ways, and more especially by their frequent idolatries; and therefore God gave them up to the vilest and most deplorable idolatry of all, namely, that of sacrificing “their sons and daughters unto devils,” offering them up as burnt-offerings to Moloch. These were the statutes NOT GOOD: that is to say, the worst that could be; for such is the force of that expression according to the Hebrew idiom.¹

John Hewlette, in relation to this Scripture, acknowledges that “for such is the force of the expression according to the Hebrew idiom.” Hewlette adds the following explanation:

It is said also, ver. 18, ‘Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers,’ &c. Here we have mention of statutes and judgments, by the same words in the Hebrew as in the present verse; not meaning God’s statutes, or judgments, but the corrupt customs of their idolatrous ancestors, such as God permitted, or gave them up to, because they chose such as are here intimated. The original word is frequently used in a permissive sense; and therefore ‘I gave them,’ may amount to no more than ‘I suffered such things.’²

God said that He *polluted them* with their gifts to these idols. This may seem awful and even worse than the notion that God commanded Moses to issue stringent

commandments for people to abide by. However, Ezekiel 20:25–26 is a clear illustration of God being said to do something that He merely permitted, or did not intervene to prevent, when we apply the Hebrew idiom of permission.

God said in Jeremiah that He was never aware that Israel would carry out such heinous deeds (Jer. 7:31; 19:4-5; 32:35). Therefore, these reprehensible statutes could not have been literally given to them by God. Unfortunately, the translators of the more widely used English editions of the Bible held beliefs about God that allowed them to portray the text in this way. According to one writer, the failure to accurately translate the Hebrew verbs has been a sign of a certain theological perspective on God:

From the very beginning a definite bias concerning the nature of Divine agency shows itself in the treatment of certain Hebrew verbs. Examples are the two hiph'il forms in Isa. 63:17, "Why dost thou make us to err from thy ways, and hardenest our heart from thy fear?"—and the causative pi'el in Ez. 20:26, "I polluted them in their own gifts." Expressly and repeatedly Fr. Skrinjar affirms that "the real sense of such expressions is only that God permitted His people to follow their own perversities then the supposition of this verb is other than its proper one, whether it involve a figure of speech, or a mere analogy, or some peculiar idiom."³

Even if our translators had failed to notice this truth in Ezekiel 20:26, there was a clear permissive verb in the 25th verse that appeared to have been overlooked in this instance. In verse 25, the word "give" is the Hebrew verb *nathan*. Let's repeat what E. W. Bullinger said to explain it:

In Hebrew idiom = I suffered others to give them statutes, it: i.e. in their captivity. Active verbs in Hebrew were used to express not only the doing of the thing, but the permission of the thing which the agent is said to do. The verb *nathan*, to give, is therefore often rendered to suffer in this sense The same idiom is used in N.T.⁴

In his own translation Bullinger renders Ezekiel 20:25, “*Wherefore I suffered others to give them statutes [in their captivity], and judgments whereby they should not live.*” Based on the proper rendering of the verb as well as the context, we believe that a translation other than the King James Version is clearer and more appropriate:

Eze. 20:25-26 (Unlocked Dynamic Bible)

25 So **I also allowed them** to obey laws that were not good, laws that would not help them live a long time.

26 **I allowed them** to do things that made it impossible for me to accept them: **I allowed them** to sacrifice their firstborn children in fire. I allowed them to do that in order that they would be horrified at themselves, and in order that they would know that I, Yahweh, have the power to do what I say that I will do.

God did not drive them to practice such abhorrent idolatry; rather, He did not intervene to prevent it. Even though God had expressly forbidden such sacrifices, His people insisted on carrying them out. God therefore relinquished His restraint over Israel. In light of this, the verse should be understood idiomatically:

.... not speaking of the judgments of the law, but such as God suffered in the course of his providence to creep in among them, for their punishment; as, in the next verse, human sacrifices, which God was so far from appointing, that they are prohibited in the strongest manner This text among many others, Mr. [now Dr. Kennicott] would alter, from a mere ignorance of the Hebrew idiom.⁵

God did not compel Israel to sin in this way by an irresistible force. Instead, they were abandoned by God and given over to a reprobate mind, no longer restrained from pursuing their evil inclinations, just as those in Romans 1:24–28 who reject God. This is why it is important to read the text using the Hebrew idiom:

The Israelites had provoked God many ways, and more especially by their frequent idolatries; and therefore God gave them up to the vilest and most deplorable idolatry, namely that of sacrificing their sons and daughters to devils, offering them up as burnt-offerings to Moloch. These were the statutes not good, that is to say, the worse that could be, for such is the force of the Hebrew idiom not meaning, however, God's statutes or judgments, but the corrupt customs of their idolatrous ancestors, such as God permitted, or gave them up to, because they chose such, as here intimated.⁶

God merely permitted the people to follow their own decisions. Nevertheless, when God responded, “I polluted them,” He took ownership of His choice to not intervene. It is crucial to be aware of Hebrew idioms when reading such passages, particularly the idiom of permission in this instance. As Adam Clarke aptly put it:

The simple meaning of this place and all such places is, that when they had rebelled against the Lord, despised his statutes, and polluted his

Sabbaths - in effect cast him off, and given themselves wholly to their idols, then he abandoned them, and they abandoned themselves to the customs and ordinances of the heathen. That this is the meaning of the words, requires no proof to them who are the least acquainted with the genius and idioms of the Hebrew language, in which God is a thousand times said to do, what in the course of his providence or justice he only permits to be done.⁷

We can better appreciate what God's true role in these occurrences if we are familiar with Hebrew verbs and the language's idioms, in this case, the idiom of permission. His "giving" and "polluting" are not an overpowering force, but rather a statement of "Okay, if this is what you desire, I will no longer strive to stop you" (Gen. 6:3; Job 21:14; 22:17).

Chapter Fifteen

Discord and the Idiom of Permission

*For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: **for I set all men every one against his neighbour.** (Zechariah 8:10)*

The Bible teaches that God detests the sowing of discord (Proverbs 6:16-19). James explains that this kind of behavior is not from God and has demonic roots (James 3:14-18). As a result, Zechariah 8:20 either demonstrates how the Bible is incoherent or that it requires a different interpretation. I opt for the latter.

The word “set” is from the Hebrew word “shalach” which, according to Joseph Rotherham, “It often takes the modifications expressed by *permit*, to *declare or hold an*, to *help*.”¹ It is the same Hebrew word used in Psalm 81:12 which says, “**So I gave them up** unto their own hearts’ lust: and they walked in their own counsels,” or, as Rotherham rendered it in his Emphasized Bible, “*So then I let them go on in the stubbornness of their own heart, — They might walk in their own counsels!*” In light of this, I believe the following translation of Zec. 8:10 is more fitting:

*For before those days there was no hire for men, neither was there hire for beasts, neither was there peace to him that came in, nor to him that went out, because of the tribulation: and **I let all men go every one against his neighbour.** (Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition)*

For this reason, Zec. 8:10 should be seen as an expression of permission rather than causality. Samuel Hulbeart Turner thought it was crucial to understand Hebrew idioms in order to interpret the Bible. He instructed theology students to, "... acquaint himself with the Hebrew language," the importance of which, "Without it, he cannot understand the idioms of the New Testament, nor enter into the spirit of innumerable places in the Old."² Turner believed that idioms, especially those involving permission, applied to Zechariah 8:10:

Another illustration of the remark is presented in the prophecy of Zechariah, VIII. 10. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts: before these days, there was no peace to him that went out or came in, because of the affliction; for I set all men, every one against his neighbour." The absurdity of inferring from this place, that God is the immediate authour of discord and confusion, is too glaring to be admitted, since these evils spring from the vicious tempers of our nature. The text attributes to God, what his providence permits to take place.³

Similar terminology to that found in Zechariah 8:10 is used by our Lord in the gospels:

*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For **I am come to set a man at variance** against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.*
(Matthew 10:34-35)

Luke quotes our Lord as stating, "*Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; **but rather division***" (Luke 12:51). Earlier in Matthew 10,

Jesus had before commanded His disciples to send greetings of peace to homes they visited (Matt. 10:13). In other passages, we are told that Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), that His will for mankind is peace (Luke 2:10–14), that He offers His disciples peace (John 14:27; 16:33), and that His atoning death on the cross for us has brought peace (Eph. 2:14-17). We are aware that Jesus is not a God who contradicts himself:

“Peace and good-will” we know were announced from Heaven as the distinctive features of the Gospel. To remark how little they have practically distinguished the profession of it is as painful as it is obvious. But, besides this, we have our Lord’s own words apparently in somewhat startling contradiction to this announcement—“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace but a sword.” That the contradiction is but apparent and not real may be manifest, if we observe the obvious force of the idiom: the Gospel will give rise to these divisions and enmities, not of itself, but owing to the corrupt nature of those to whom it is addressed:—“the offences will come;” still the denunciation is clear, “Woe to him by whom the offence cometh.”⁴

Our Lord did not mean that He would personally cause this discord but that it would be the outcome of a person’s commitment to Him in contrast to those who reject Him. Because of this, Jesus’ remarks, which conflict with His nature as the “Prince of peace” whose ultimate goal is “peace on earth,” are in line with the typical idiomatic expressions of Hebrew culture:

Another principal example of transfused idiom, is that of expressing consequences by words importing intention and desire;-as, “I came not to send peace, but a sword.” (Matt. X. 34.) Now to avoid the literal rendering, in this and other instances, would require (as I conceive) such a

circumlocution, as no longer to retain the fidelity of translation: for this method would rather belong to the office of an expositor. At the same time, how plain and obvious is it, that the Prince of Peace, whose birth was announced with the angelic hymn, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” could never put a sword into the hand of his disciples, or represent persecution and war as the design of his coming? And with these considerations the context will be found in perfect harmony, ascertaining that the Lord is speaking not of what should be the aim of his disciples, but of what they must expect from the malice of their enemies.⁵

People who convert from Islam or Hinduism to Christianity suffers greater persecution from family members than anyone else. Because of this, scholars remind us that the expressions Christ employed are idiomatic and only describe the results of keeping Christ first in our lives:

In this expression, according to the idiom of the Hebrew language, he puts a remote or incidental circumstance for the primary cause; or speaks of his gospel as intended to produce what it was the innocent means only of occasioning.⁶

This is a forcible, but not unusual idiom—a mode of expression by which the foreseen consequence of any measure is represented as the purpose for which that measure was adopted. The words announce a result and not the design of the introduction of Christianity.⁷

“Think not,” says Christ, following the Hebrew idiom, “that I am come to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man’s foes

shall be they of his own household.” That is, that these consequences will result from the influence of the gospel upon the perverse hearts of men.⁸

The expression which our Lord employs, denotes no intention on his part of producing this result; but is merely predictive of the fact. It is an energetic mode of declaring the certainty of a foreseen consequence of any measure, by representing it as the purpose for which the measure was adopted. The idiom is familiar to the Orientals, and not unfrequent in writers of other countries.⁹

Although Jesus longs for peace, He is also aware of the inherent wickedness in most people. Therefore, there is no need to interpret lines like “*I came not to send peace, but a sword*” in the sense that Jesus would actively promote this strife:

Consistently with the idiom of the original language the words to send are used not in a final, but an eventual sense; they denote not the intention of the agent, but the effects of his actions; they inform us, not that Christ absolutely designed to make his religion the cause of implacable violence, and outrageous hostility, but that through the fallible understandings, and uncontrolled passions of those who embraced it, his religion would be perverted into an instrument of evil to the persons, for whose supreme and ultimate good it was graciously communicated.¹⁰

Clarifying the “Idiom by which persons are represented as doing intentionally what they were only the occasion, undesignedly, of doing,”¹¹ Thomas Spalding explains that our Lord is not to be taken literally in this instance:

These words, if understood as ordinary English, express the very opposite of the real design of our

Lord's coming. He came to unite the whole human family in love to God, and in love one to another Yet his coming did cause sons to rise up against their fathers, and daughters against their mothers The result of our Lord's coming was, in all these cases, the very opposite of his intention; yet his words, if interpreted literally, declare that his object in coming was to produce variance and strife.¹²

Furthermore, in order to correctly comprehend Scripture, it is crucial that we learn these idioms, as another scholar has noted:

As to the mode of expression used, that in the Hebrew idiom one is said to do that which he is the occasion of being done, however undesigned by him, nay, though directly contrary to his intentions Attention to these peculiarities in the style of speaking which obtained among the Hebrews, is absolutely necessary to a right interpretation of many passages; and, for want of it, some very false conclusions have been drawn from the texts in which they occur.¹³

Scholars concur that it is incorrect to interpret our Lord's admonition as if He deliberately initiates the discord. Matt. 10:34 is best translated as follows:

And don't think that by following me everyone will be at peace with you, because my coming into the world will not promote peace with everyone, but in many cases cause division. (Matt. 10:34; Living Water Translation)

Scripture, when understood properly, shows God as a God of peace and unity rather than division. However, He needed us to face the likelihood that many would reject His love and those who proclaim it.

Chapter Sixteen

Other Scripture and the Idiom of Permission

They read in the book, The Law of God, making it clear with interpretation and giving the meaning so the people understood the reading. (Neh. 8:8; Unlocked Literal Bible)

Know this first, that no prophecy is about one's own interpretation. (2 Peter 1:20; Unlocked Literal Bible)

The Word of God is God's written revelation to all people, but it was initially given and recorded by people who lived in an age and culture that was very different from our own. This is vital to remember when we approach the Word of God. We will be offering our own private interpretation of God's Word if we don't learn the phrases, idioms, and figures of speech that were exclusive to the authors of Scripture.

This ignorance has led men to create "theological systems" that have done nothing more than misrepresent God and twist the Bible to portray him as the cause of sin and evil. Such men receive Peter's reprimand:

*As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable **wrest, as they do also the other scriptures**, unto their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:16)*

We find some solace in the knowledge that this misuse of Scripture, motivated by misunderstanding or

outright rejection of the idiom of permission, is not confined to our dispensation. According to William Laurence Brown:

Human depravity will, in every way possible, resist correction, and even endeavour to cover itself with the veil of religion, in order to insure indulgence and to enjoy security. Many of the converted Jews, having been formerly of the sect of the Pharisees, who held the doctrines of fate, and of the absolute decrees of God, brought into the church, not these doctrines only, but the errors which the most corrupt part of their nation had built upon them; such as, that God is the author of sin, and that every professor of true religion is sure of salvation, whatever may be his practice. In these false and pernicious notions many of the converted Jews seem to have been confirmed by certain passages of Paul's epistles which "they wrested to their own destruction." These passages particularly relate to God's sovereignty over the creatures, and to the free exercise of his mercy; or to his infliction of deserved punishment; to his hardening men's hearts, or blinding their understandings. The Judaizers in the Christian church, **unwilling to acknowledge that, according to the Hebrew idiom, God is considered as doing what he permits**, inferred from these and similar expressions, that the sins of men, being appointed by God, could not be avoided by those who committed them, and that he was therefore their author.¹ (Emphasis added)

In this chapter, we'll examine a few more enigmatic verses that, when interpreted in the context of the idiom of permission, serve to highlight the goodness of God. The book of Judges contains some of these:

*Now these are the nations **which the LORD left**, to prove Israel by them, even*

as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan (Judges 3:1)

Israel was obligated to expel these nations, but despite their might, they refused to do so (Judges 1:27-33). They forged alliances with these heathen nations rather than obediently carrying out God's will. The Lord was unable to expel these countries as a result of *their* inaction (Judges 2:1-3, 20-23). Due to His people's inaction, the Lord is said, in an idiomatic sense, to have "left them." The circumstance, as another person put it:

Which the Lord left—In Hebrew usage, God is often said to do what men alone are responsible for; as in the case of Pharaoh hardening his heart, which God is said to have done, though the hardening really resulted from his own perversity. God works through appointed agencies; but when his agencies fail to co-operate in the attainment of any end, he is said to fail. In this sense he left the Canaanites. Another peculiarity of the Hebrew idiom is the representation of results as if they were purposes. The grand purpose of Jehovah was complete extermination of these pagan tribes, that there might be free scope for the development of the Hebrew commonwealth. Since this purpose was defeated by the defection of his human allies, Jehovah controls the consequences of their disobedience so that as little evil and as much good as possible shall result.²

God's original aim was not to let the Canaanites remain in the land, but He was forced to do so owing to Israel's lack of cooperation. Therefore, another translation of Judges 3:1 is more applicable:

These were the nations the LORD permitted to remain so he could use them to test Israel -- he wanted to test all those

who had not experienced battle against the Canaanites. (New English Translation)

*These are the nations which Adonai **allowed** to remain, in order to put to the test all the people of Isra'el who had not known any of the wars with Kena'an. (Complete Jewish Bible)*

Next, in the book of Judges, there is a verse about Samson's desire to wed a Philistine woman that has puzzled Bible readers:

*But his father and his mother knew not that **it was of the LORD**, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel. (Judges 14:4)*

Samson's desire was a clear infraction of God's laws. If Judges 14:4 is taken literally, both Samson's passion for women and the breaking of God's commandments are attributed to Him. Many commentators assert that even though this was obviously against God's law, God brought it about for a "hidden purpose"—namely, the annihilation of Israel's enemies. Scripture, however, teaches us that God does not require our sin and would never expose a man to sin in order to accomplish His purposes (Romans 3:5-7; James 1:13, 20). Helpful in this regard is Samuel Shuckford. As Shuckford notes in his commentary on 1 Samuel 26:12 which reads, "*for they were all asleep; because a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen upon them,*":

.... hereby meaning, that they were in a most exceeding sound sleep; so sound, that we might,

using the Hebrew idiom,* speak as if God himself had been the cause of it.³

According to Shuckford, the words “It was of the Lord” in Scripture do not necessarily indicate that God is the “divine manipulator” of the event:

It is a solemn, but not unusual expression in the Hebrew tongue, to say of a thing beyond measure great, that it is of the Lord; not always meaning hereby, that God himself is the immediate cause of it, but signifying it to be such, that naturally no account is easy to be given of it.⁴

Therefore, Judges 14:4 must be interpreted through the Hebrew idiom in which *God is said to do that which He merely permitted*. Thomas Jackson explains the power to forgive sins that our Lord gave to His apostles in the following manner:

.... and this authority our Saviour expresses according to a well-known idiom of the Jews’ language. It is no wonder, then, that God is said to do that which He permitted men to do, when they had by their sins provoked Him to withdraw from them the restraints of His providence and grace. Inattention to Scripture forms of expression is one of the most fruitful sources of theological error.⁵

Jackson relates this truth to Judges 14:4 as an example of God’s “permissive providence:”

The meaning, we apprehend, is, not that it was “of the Lord” that Samson should break His law; but that as Samson was bent upon this unholy connexion, and would not be satisfied without it, God would not interpose His power to prevent it, but would overrule it for good, as He often does the evil actions of bad men. To Samson and his family the consequences of this marriage were most

disastrous, as might be expected; but it led to beneficial results so far as the people of Israel were concerned. At this time they suffered greatly under the oppressive dominion of the heathen, who still dwelt in the land. By means of this marriage Samson was brought into direct intercourse with these oppressors; he destroyed their power, and liberated his own people, though he brought upon himself great dishonour, and even lost his life. Samson sinned, and endured the bitter penalty of his waywardness and folly; but “it was of the Lord” to bring good out of the evil, by making it a means of relief to His suffering people.⁶

David Davidson also explained that the proper understanding of this passage is idiomatic:

Ch. xiv.v.4 *Of the Lord*, in the Scripture idiom, does not necessarily imply that the event to which it may refer originated with God, but merely that he, to whom all things are known, had determined to make it subservient to accomplish his purposes. Samson grievously erred if the female was an idolator.⁷

Next, some are particularly upset by certain psalms where it seems as though the psalmist is pleading with God to harm his foes. For instance, we read in Psalm 28:

Draw me not away with the wicked, and with the workers of iniquity, which speak peace to their neighbours, but mischief is in their hearts. Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavours: give them after the work of their hands; render to them their desert. (Psalm 28:3-4)

These are sometimes referred to as “imprecatory psalms” or psalms that invoke curses. This goes against what Christ and His apostles taught, who instructed us to pray for our enemies and refrain from seeking retribution against them (Matt. 5:38-48; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60; Rom. 12:14-19; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9).

However, a much more thorough study shows these to be *prophetic* psalms. The statement, “*Draw me not away with the wicked*” is a request to God to protect the psalmist from committing the same sins as those who chose wickedness. George Holden explains:

Viz, according to the Hebrew idiom, suffer me not to be drawn away, to be seduced by the wicked; Ps. x. 9. or perhaps to be drawn into the same crimes, and the same punishment with the wicked.⁸

Anthony Purver also recognized the idiom of permission in the passage. In his notes on verse 3 he wrote, “For surely God would not draw him away with the wicked.”⁹ Purver translated Psalm 28:3 as follows:

Let me not be drawn away with the Wicked, and those who work iniquity; that talk peaceably with their neighbours, while their is Mischief in their hearts. (Purver, A New and Literal Translation, Vol. 1)

This psalm is one of many that contain prophecies. The psalmist is not particularly asking God to punish people. He is *proclaiming* what will happen to them:

It is asserted, that the imprecations pronounced by the prophets, particularly in many passages of the Psalms, show a spirit of malice inconsistent with humanity, and highly vicious: it is an improper vindication of these, either to allow that malice was consistent with the spirit of the Old Testament,

though not of the New, or, to say that the prophets pronounced them against men, not as their own enemies, but as the enemies of God: but, some of them appear harsh only by the strong figurative style in which they are expressed, and, when taken out of this, appear very allowable wishes;' all of them may be considered, not as prayers, but simple predictions, the imperative being put for the future (which is a common Hebrew idiom,) and shown to be so put, by the future being used in other parts of the prediction;' and this idiom is more natural in prediction, than in other kinds of composition, because it is the immediate result of combining idioms common in the prophetic style ; for, as the prophets are often commanded to do a thing, when it is only meant that they should foretell it," so they often do foretell a thing, by commanding it to be done,' and they often express their predictions in an address to God; the union of which two idioms gives them the appearance of imprecations.¹⁰

Furthermore, the word “give” is used twice in verse 4 and is the same Hebrew word used in Ezekiel 20:25 (See chapter 14). They will be “given over” to the results of their wickedness as happened in Ezek. 20:25 and Rom. 1:24-28. Basically, the psalmist is making a pronouncement concerning the spiritual law in Gal. 6:7, *“for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”*

Therefore, these so-called “imprecatory” psalms should be read in the same sense that we would understand God hardening Pharaoh’s heart:

It is however alleged, that God is even represented as doing things that are inconsistent with his moral attributes, such as hardening Pharaoh’s heart, and blinding the minds of the Jews, lest they should be converted and saved. But scripture, in these cases, attributes to God such actions as he permits his creatures to perform, and because his providence afforded them an occasion of hardening their own hearts, and blinding their own eyes, therefore by a

figure of speech, he is said to have done, what his dispensations led wicked men to execute of their own accord. Still, there have been exceptions taken against certain passages of the sacred writings, as if they conveyed sentiments of an improper and pernicious tendency. Thus, it is said, there are several imprecations against David's enemies in the book of Psalms, which are inconsistent with the spirit of benevolence and charity. But according to the Hebrew idiom, these are predictions against the workers of iniquity, and denunciations of the divine judgments, unless men turn from their wickedness, and avoid the punishments which are threatened against them.¹¹

Another obscure passage is found Job 12:17 where we read, "*He leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools.*" God does not, in a creative sense, bring this about. Again, Davidson explains:

Ver. 17. Maketh the judges fools; that is, he does not even grant wisdom to guide them in their decisions. We have often observed, that in the Hebrew idiom, Jehovah is said to do what he either permits to be done, or interferes not to prevent, by giving men the requisite wisdom or power; not because he is indisposed at any time to do them good, but because they disregard his favour and contemn his power.¹²

Another Bible example where the idiom of permission should be applied is found in Luke 11:49:

Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute.

Does God send His prophets just to be persecuted? Of course not. Luke 11:49 must be read idiomatically:

The prophets and others were not sent to heighten the condemnation of the" leading men of this unhappy nation, for, on the contrary, the motive which induced God to send them was an earnest desire to save the people; yet in Scripture idiom the undesigned effect is sometimes expressed as though it had been the moving cause; their foreseen persecution is, however, introduced as a farther illustration of the character of these bad men, and as justifying the severity of the sentence which Christ denounces against them.¹³

Finally, Paul's teaching on the work of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8 can be used to clarify this idiom in which God is said to do something that He merely permits others to do:

The apostle spoke at the fifteenth verse, of our having *received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father*; and we may conclude, therefore, that by the expression which he here employs of the Spirit making intercession for the children of God, *with groanings which cannot be uttered*, we are to understand him as declaring to us, according to the idiom of scripture, (which often attributes exclusively unto God himself, those things which his people do by his assistance,) that the Holy Spirit stirs up requests in us, and enables us to pray.¹⁴

Our main takeaway from the idiom of permission is that since God is a loving God and He could never be the source of something that is unloving. Love, on the other hand, makes an effort to persuade but never forces or coerces. Because of His love, God will allow us to make choices that are in opposition to His designs for us. Knowing that God is love enables us to apply this idiom to Scriptures that, in our Western imaginations, portray Him as unloving.

Notes

Chapter Two

1. Jackson, Thomas **The Providence of God, Viewed in the Light of Holy Scripture** (London: John Mason, 1862), p. 304
2. Tappan, Henry P. "The Bible Its Own Interpreter" in **The Biblical Repository and Classical Review** (New York: Published by the Proprietor, 1847), p. 96
3. Muenscher, Joseph **Manual of Biblical Interpretation** (Joseph Muenscher, 1865), pp. 166, 167
4. Purver, Anthony **A New and Literal Translation of All the Books of the Old and New Testament: With Notes, Critical and Explanatory, Volume 1** (London: W. Richardson and S. Clark, 1764), p. iv
5. Brown, Isaac **The Interpretation of Scripture, in Its Relation to Jewish Modes of Thought** (London: F. B. Kitto, 1869), p. 4
6. Ibid, p. 6
7. Ibid. I will also add that anyone carefully reading the Old Testament can see the necessity of this as Israel had a propensity to commit idolatry. They certainly were not ready for a revelation of Satan as the true author of evil.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid, p. 31
10. Dalrymple, William **The Scripture Jewish History, Illustrated and Improved in a Variety of Short Discourses, Comprehending Their Laws, Moral and Ceremonial** (J. & P. Wilson, 1803), p. 255
11. Kendall, James **A Sermon, Delivered at the Ordination of Rev. Oliver Hayward** (Samuel T. Armstrong, 1816), pp. 7, 8
12. Bullinger, E. W. **Figures of Speech Used in the Bible** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1968, 2008), pp. 821, 823
13. Bullinger, Ethelbert W. **Great Cloud of Witnesses in Hebrews Eleven** (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1979), p. 405
14. Russell, David **Letters, Practical and Consolatory: Designed to Illustrate the Nature and Tendency of the Gospel, Volume 1** (Philadelphia: W. Marshall & Co., 1836), pp. 199, 200
15. Young, Robert **A Commentary on the Holy Bible, as Literally and Idiomatically Translated out of the Original Languages** (London: A. Fullerton & Co., 1868), p. 315
16. Cobbin, Ingram **The Portable Commentary: The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments** (London: Thomas Arnold, 1843), p. 281

17. Humphreys, Samuel **The Sacred Books of the Old and New Testament, Recited at Large** (London: R. Penny, 1739), p. 571
18. **Biblical Notes and Queries** (Edinburgh: George Adam Young & Co., 1869), p. 175

Chapter Three

1. Russell, Arthur T. **Memoirs of the Life and Works of Lancelot Andrews, Bishop of Winchester** (London: Saunders, Otley, & Co., 1863), p. 7
2. Brown, *Interpretation*, p. 4
3. Balmer, Robert **Academical Lectures and Pulpit Discourses, Vol. 1** (Edinburgh: William Oliphant & Sons, 1845), p. 274
4. “Comments on 2 Samuel 24:1” in Bullinger’s Companion Bible, 1909, E-Sword edition
5. Bowden, John **A Full Length Portrait of Calvinism** (New Haven: Oliver Steele and Co., 1809), p. 27
6. Cox, John Hayter **Lectures on the Harmony of the Scriptures, Designed to Reconcile Apparently Contradictory Passages** (London: Knight and Lacey, 1823), pp. 51, 52
7. *Ibid*, p. 52
8. Brooks, Joshua William **The History of the Hebrew Nation: From Its First Origin to the Present Time** (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1841), p. 53
9. Hannah, John **The Relation Between the Divine and Human Elements in Holy Scripture** (London: John Murray, 1863), p. 88
10. *Ibid*, pp. 311, 312
11. Bosanquet, Samuel Richard **Interpretation; Rules and Principles Assisting the Reading of the Holy Scriptures** (London: Hatchards, Piccadilly, 1874), pp. 179, 180
12. **E. W. Bullinger’s Companion Bible Notes**, 1909, E-Sword edition.
13. See Edwards, Troy J. **HOW? A look at God’s character in light of Biblical passages that are inconsistent with love** (Pawtucket, RI: Vindicating God Ministries, 2016). In this book we make a thorough case for the “idiom of permission” primarily using Scripture and showing the *how* God is said in Scripture to curse, punish, inflict sickness, kill, etc.

Chapter Four

1. “W. E. Channing, and His Works” in **The Christian, Volume 1** (London: Chapman, 1844), p. 144
2. This is the Bible’s own declaration (see Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16; 4:25-28; 28:25-27; Rom. 16:26; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Peter 1:10-12, 21).

3. In his very informative book, Dr. Ken Wilson writes, “Augustine of Hippo’s early influence from Stoicism, Neoplatonism, and Manichaeism ultimately determined his final theology, with his later deterministic interpretations of Scripture reverting to his pre-Christian Manichaean interpretations. The key scriptures cited in modern defense of Reformed theology are the very ones used by the heretical Manichaeans in the fourth and fifth centuries and imported into Christianity by Augustine.” Wilson, Ken **The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism** (Regula Fidei Press, 2019), p. 2

4. The great theologian, Philip Melancthon, explains, “The Manicheans, adopting a corrupt philosophy, professed certain insane opinions, equally dishonourable to God and injurious to morality; maintaining, that there were two eternal and independent principles, the one good and the other evil, and also the doctrine of necessity ; by which opinions, the church in ancient times was very much agitated.” See Melancthon, Philip “The Common Place” in **Theological Essays** (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), p. 218

5. Calvin admits to getting his ideas about God from Augustine and not the Scriptures. At one point Calvin, in relation to his theology, argues, “Do not imagine that this doctrine is unsupported by any great authority; for I derived the first idea of it from Augustine.” See Calvin, Jean **Institutes of the Christian Religion, Volume 1** (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1921), p. 372. This naturally colored Calvin’s interpretation of Scripture.

6. Calvin writes, “Augustine somewhere makes the following correct distinction: ‘that they sin, proceeds from themselves; that in sinning they perform this or that particular action, is from the power of God, who divides the darkness according to his pleasure.’ Calvin then uses this view to make Satan a minister of God who merely does God’s bidding: “Now that the ministry of Satan is concerned in instigating the reprobate, whenever the Lord directs them hither or thither by his providence.” Calvin then cites a number of Scriptures to support this view such as Saul having been given an evil spirit “from the Lord” and God “sending strong delusion.” As we will see later, those opposed Calvin, even in his day, attempted to assist him with a better method of interpreting Scripture in a way that would have been consistent with God’s character. But Calvin rejected this in favor of his and Augustine’s pagan Manichaean ideologies. Ibid, p. 281

7. For example, Calvin writes, “Let my readers observe that Paul, to cut off all handle for murmuring and detraction, attributes supreme sovereignty to the wrath and power of God; for it were unjust that those profound judgments, which transcend all our powers of

discernment, should be subjected to our calculation. It is frivolous in our opponents to reply, that God does not altogether reject those whom in lenity he tolerates, but remains in suspense with regard to them, if peradventure they may repent; as if Paul were representing God as patiently waiting for the conversion of those whom he describes as fitted for destruction. **For Augustine, rightly expounding this passage, says, that where power is united to endurance, God does not permit, but rules,** (August. Cont. Julian., Lib. v. c. 5.).” Calvin, Jean **Institutes of the Christian Religion, Volume 2** (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), p. 561

8. “And Augustine himself, in his fifth book against Julian, contends very largely, that sins proceed not only from the permission or the prescience, but from the power of God, in order that former sins may thereby be punished. So also what they advance concerning permission is too weak to be supported. God is very frequently said to blind and harden the reprobate, and to turn, incline, and influence their hearts, as I have elsewhere more fully stated. But it affords no explication of the nature of this influence to resort to prescience or permission.” Ibid, p. 280

9. “These passages also many persons refer to permission, as though, in abandoning the reprobate, God permitted them to be blinded by Satan. But that solution is too frivolous, since the Holy Spirit expressly declares that their blindness and infatuation are inflicted by the righteous judgment of God. He is said to have caused the obduracy of Pharaoh’s heart, and also to have aggravated and confirmed it.” Ibid, p. 213

10. Jamieson, R. A. **Miracles and the Miraculous** (Shanghai: "North China Herald" Office, 1885), p. 22

11. Calvin, John **Commentary on the Book of Psalms** (Edinburgh: The John Calvin Translation Society, 1847), p. 72

12. As one writer noted concerning the deterministic "mystery God" teachings of protestant reformer, Martin Luther, who was also an adherent to the teaching of Augustine's Manichaeism interpretation of Scripture, “Such unsettling ambivalence of the divine has its own dark fascination and is well known from Manichaeism, mystery cults, and Gnostic systems of beliefs, mostly rejected as heretic by the defenders of Christian doctrine, and in particular when such notions are ascribed to the biblical scriptures.” Mjaaland, Marius Timmann **The Hidden God: Luther, Philosophy, and Political Theology** (Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press, 2015), p. 94

13. Jackson, *The Providence of God*, pp. 300, 301

14. Bullinger, *Companion Bible*, E-Sword edition.

15. Calvin, *Psalms*, p. 72. In a footnote, the translator cites another scholar, noting that “The Hebrew word נָתַן, *nathan*, here rendered *add*, he translates *give* or permit And so נתן עוון, *give wickedness*, is no more than permit: for so it is ordinary with God, as a punishment of some former great sin or sins, though not to infuse any malignity, yet by withdrawing his grace, and delivering them up to themselves, to permit more sins to follow, one on the heels of the other, and so to be so far from reforming and amending as daily to grow worse and worse, to be more obdurate, and so finally never to enter into God's righteousness.”
16. Waterman, **Elijah Memoirs of the Life and Writings of John Calvin** (Hartford: Hale & Hosmer, 1813), p. 27, 28, 51
17. Philip Melancthon, as quoted in “The Dark Side of Things: An Exposition” in **The Evangelical Repository: A Quarterly Magazine of Theological Literature (Vol. I)** (Glasgow: Lang, Adamson, 1863), p. 100
18. Melancthon, Phillip “Melancthon de Causa Peccati, Opera, vol. ii, p. 239” as quoted in Mant, Richard **An Appeal to the Gospel** (F.C. and J. Rivington, 1816), pp. 22, 23
19. For example, Calvin live from 1509 to 1564. In 1535, the *Miles Coverdale Bible* rendered the Psalm 69:27 as follows, “*Let them fall fro one wickednesse to another, & not come into thy rightuousnesse.*” In 1568, only four years after Calvin’s death, the Bishop’s Bible rendered it, “*Let them fall from one wickednesse to another: and let them not enter into thy ryghteousnesse.*” In a more modern translation the Psalm reads, “*Let their sins add up, and may they not become right with You*” (New Life Version).
20. Copinger, Walter Arthur **A Treatise on Predestination, Election, and Grace, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical** (London: James Nisbet, 1889), p. 65
21. Turner, Jonathan Baldwin **Christ’s Words as Related to Science, Law, Government, History, Philosophy** (Springfield, Il: H.W. Rokker, 1878), p. 72
22. “Biblical, Literary and Religious Miscellanies” in **Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Volume X** (Richmond, VA: Stevenson & Owen, 1856), p. 621
23. Hinds, Samuel **Scripture and the Authorised Version of Scripture** (London: B. Fellowes, 1845), p. 67
24. Murray, John Hale **A Help for English readers to understand mis-translated passages in our Bible** (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1881), p. 139
25. *Ibid*, p. 241
26. *Ibid*.

27. Bowden, *Portrait of Calvinism*, p. 23
28. Ibid, pp. 26, 27
29. Fellowes, Robert **General View of the Doctrines of Christianity: Designed More Especially for the Edification and Instruction of Families** (Boston: Hastings, Etheridge & Bliss, 1809), p. 151
30. Ibid, p. 160
31. Muenscher, *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 174
32. Foyster, John Goodge **Sermons** (London: John Hatchard and Son, 1826), p. 90

Chapter Five

1. Hall, Charles Cuthbert **Does God Send Trouble?** (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1894), p. 80
2. Judaism in the first century, just like Christianity today, had its doctrinal divisions. For example the Sadducees believed strongly in free-will while the Pharisees held strongly to determinism.
3. Cone, Orello **The Epistles to the Hebrews, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon, the Pastoral Epistles, the Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude** (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1901), p. 275. The gnostic heresies perpetrated by Augustine and John Calvin were certainly being taught in the first century and could have possibly influenced some in the early church. In his exposition of James 1:13, Cone writes, “Temptation in general is probably here meant, according to verse 14. It is thought by some that the writer here opposes the fatalism of certain Gnostic teachers of the second century. This reference is not necessary, while it is probable that he knew that the doctrine which he opposed was advanced from some quarter.”
4. As we have already learned, progressive revelation had been taught in the Scriptures themselves, particularly in 1 Chronicles 21:1 which revealed that Satan was the one who moved David to sin, thus giving more light on the fact that in 1 Samuel 24:1, God is only said to do that which He permitted. Furthermore, later Jewish writings explained Satan’s part in such things as the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart and other things in the Old Testament often attributed to God. For more information, see Edwards, Troy **God is Said to do that which He Only Permits** (Pawtucket, RI Vindicating God Ministries, 2015), pp. 61-72
5. Guthrie, Thomas **Man and the Gospel: And Our Father’s Business** (New York: E. B. Treat, 1891), p. 48

6. Macknight, James **A New Literal Translation, from the Original Greek of All the Apostolical Epistles** (Philadelphia: DeSilver, Thomas, and Co., 1835), p. 585
7. Robert Reid Howison under the heading in his book titled, "*God Not the Author of Evil*," well wrote that "The isolated passages which seem to attribute the authorship of sin directly to God must be construed with reference to the whole teachings of the Scriptures, and cannot be held as sufficient to establish a dogma so contradictory to the Divine nature and attributes." Howison, Robert Reid **God and Creation** (Richmond: West, Johnston & Company, 1883), p. 175
8. Brooks, *The History of the Hebrew Nation*, p. 53
9. Merry, William **Predestination and Election Considered Scripturally** (Reading: G. Lovejoy, 1843), pp. 31-34
10. Williams, Edward **Predestination to Life: A Sermon** (Rotherham: J. R. Plumbe, 1804), p. 49
11. Gladhill, John T. "Divine Providence Vs. Evil" in **The Lutheran Quarterly, Volume 24** (Gettysburg: J. R. Wible, 1894), p. 403
12. Someone may note that the author declares, "God in no way does evil or *permits* evil." However, this statement does not contradict our thesis. On the contrary, we are in full agreement. The author is addressing those, especially in the Calvinist camp, who understand God's permission in the sense of *consent* or a *softer type of predestination*. We fully agree with Gladhill's dispute with this false teaching on God's permission. Gladhill elaborated further, "God is not responsible for any evil, neither is he a silent partner with it This doctrine of a divine permission of evil does not release God from the moral responsibility of evil. If God permits the devil or wicked men to afflict the righteous, he cannot escape the accusation that he and the devil have conspired together against man; or for his own purposes permitted the devil to afflict so that he might get glory out of the conflict. All moral ideas revolt against such righteousness. If God permits the devil to do evil, he then and there co-operates with his and man's enemy, which is a violation of his own law. 'Resist the devil and he will flee from you' was practiced and realized by Jesus Christ in the temptation. It is a divine command. Shall it be charged that God by any act, or failure to act, or by consent should place himself where 'the father of lies' is?" (See *ibid*, pp. 400, 401).
13. Fraser-Tytler, Charles Edward **New View of the Apocalypse: or, The plagues of Egypt and of Europe Identical** (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1852), pp. 66-68
14. Clayton, John **A Remonstrance with the Rev. Mr. Clayton, on his sermon on the Duty of Christians to Civil Magistrates** (London: J. Johnson, 1791), pp. 55, 56

15. Williams, *Predestination*, p. 49
16. For a thorough study on Job's culture and background that led him to attribute evil to God, see Edwards, Troy **Job and the Misrepresentation of God's Character** (Pawtucket, RI: Vindicating God Ministries, 2022), pp. 134-140
17. Jackson, *The Providence of God*, p. 300
18. Ibid, p. 314. Also, Jackson uses the word "phraseology" here. We are told that "'Phraseology' is an idiom or the idiomatic aspect of a language." (phraseology. (n.d.) -Ologies & -Isms. (2008). Retrieved March 21 2022 from <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/phraseology>)
19. Young, Robert **Analytical Concordance to the Bible: [With] Appendixes** (Edinburgh: George Adam Young and Company, 1879), p. 46
20. Ibid.
21. Kalisch, M. M. "Kalisch's Hebrew Grammar" in **The Ecclesiastic, Volume XXVI** (London: Joseph Masters, 1864), p. 73
22. Scott, Walter **The Existence of Evil Spirits Proved: And Their Agency, Particularly in Relation to the Human Race** (London: Jackson and Walford, 1853), p. 66
23. Williams, Edward **Sermons and Charges** (London: James Black and Sons, 1817), p. 403
24. Hequembourg, Charles Louis **Plan of the Creation; Or, Other Worlds, and who Inhabit Them** (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1859), p. 129
25. Owen, John **Strictures on the Rev. E. T. Vaughn's Sermon Entitled "God the Doer of All Things"** (London: L. B. Seeby & Son, 1824), p. 7
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid, p. 12
28. Rotherham, Joseph **The Emphasized Bible**, Bradbury, Agnew & Co., ©1902, p. 919
29. Summers, T. O. "The Theological Works of Thomas Paine" in **The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Volume 8** (Richmond, VA: Stevenson and Owen, 1854), p. 501
30. Holden, George **The Christian Expositor; or, Practical Guide to the Study of the Old Testament** (London: J. G. and F. Rivington, 1834), p. 277
31. Jackson, *The Providence of God*, p. 304
32. Cumming, John **Sabbath Morning Readings on the Old Testament: Book of Exodus** (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1854), p. 43, 44
33. Williams, *Sermons*, p. 403
34. Ibid.

35. “Exodus 5:22” in *Bullinger’s Companion Bible*, E-Sword edition

Chapter Six

1. Means, Robert **Sermons, and an Essay on the Pentateuch** (Boston: Perkins and Marvin, 1836), p. 135
2. Good, John Everitt **Forty-five Lectures on our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount** (London: J. E. Good, 1829), pp. 436, 437
3. *Ibid*, p. 438
4. Gilpin, William **Lectures on the Catechism of the Church of England** (London: R. Blamire, 1781), pp. 295, 296
5. For example, Jesus spoke about hating our family members in order to be a true disciple (Luke 14:26). However, Jesus was merely using the idiomatic expressions of the people in which “hate” simply means to give one thing less priority or significance than another (Matthew 10:37). It is obvious from other places in Scripture that we are commanded to love the same people Jesus told us to hate, revealing that the hatred our Lord spoke of was based on Hebrew idiom and not to be taken in the sense that we Westerners would use the word (Ephesians 5:25-33).
6. The Greek word *ponēros* is translated as both “evil” and “wicked” in the New Testament. Hence, in our English translations Satan is described in some places as the “evil one” (Matt. 5:37; John 17:15; 2 Thess. 3:3) and in others as the “wicked one” (Matt. 13:19, 38, 39; Mark 4:15; Eph. 6:10-16; 1 John 2:13-14; 3:8-12; 5:18-19).
7. Melancthon, *The Common Place*, pp. 218, 219
8. *Ibid*, p. 219
9. Canfield, Sherman B. **A Lecture on the Life and Character of Oliver Cromwell** (Cleveland: Younglove’s Steam Press, 1850), p. 145
10. **KJV Apologetics Study Bible** (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019), p. 799
11. Heaton, George (Editor) **Thoughts on the Litany, by a Naval Officer’s Orphan Daughter** (London: William Edward Painter, 1840), p. 181
12. Various Editors **A Homiletic and Illustrative Treasury of Religious Thought: Or Twenty Thousand Choice Extracts, Selected from the Works of All the Great Writers, Ancient and Modern**, Volume 1 (London: Dickinson, 1889), p. 466
13. Cumming, John **Sabbath Morning Readings on the Old Testament: Book of Exodus** (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1854), p. 44
14. **Biblical Notes and Queries** (Edinburgh: George Adam Young & Co., 1869), p. 169

15. Davidson, David **The Comprehensive Pocket Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments with Explanatory Notes by David Davidson** (Edinburgh: James Brydone, 1848), p. 619
16. Young, Robert **Analytical Concordance to the Bible: [With] Appendixes** (Edinburgh: George Adam Young and Company, 1879), p. 46
17. Holden, George **The Christian Expositor; Or Practical Guide to the Study of the New Testament** (London: C. J. G. & F. Rivington, 1830), p. 25
18. Day, William **Illustrations of the Phraseology of Scripture** (Edinburgh: William Whyte & Company, 1828), p. 46
19. Ibid, p. 47
20. Vogan, Thomas Stuart Lyle **The Principal Objections Against the Doctrine of the Trinity** (Oxford: J. G. and F. Rivington, 1837), p. 207

Chapter Seven

1. **Bertha's Journal During a Visit to Her Uncle in England: Containing a Variety of Interesting and Instructive Information** (London: John Murray, 1851), p. 169
2. Balmer, *Academical Lectures*, p. 274
3. Ibid, pp. 447, 448
4. Cox, Francis Augustus **The Life of Philip Melancthon** (London: Gale, Curtis and Fenner, 1817), p. 182
5. Melancthon, Philip "The Common Place" in **Theological Essays** (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), p. 219
6. Cumming, *Sabbath Morning*, p. 44
7. Erskine, Thomas **The Doctrine of Election and Its Connection with the General Tenor of Christianity** (London: James Duncan, 1837), p. 468
8. McCulloh, James Haines **On the Credibility of the Scriptures: A Recast, with Enlarged Views, of a Former Work on the Subject, Volume I** (Baltimore: James S. Waters & Son, 1867), p. 69
9. Spalding, Thomas **Scripture Difficulties, Explained by Scripture References: Or, The Bible Its Own Interpreter** (London: Daldy, Isbiste & Co., 1877), p. 316
10. Ibid, p. 318
11. Thompson, Joseph Parrish **Home Worship: Selections from the Scriptures with Meditations, Prayer and Song for Every Day in the Year** (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1871), p. 259
12. Dalrymple, *The Scripture Jewish History*, p. 120
13. Curtiss, Samuel Ives **Primitive Semitic Religion Today: A Record of Researches, Discoveries and Studies in Syria, Palestine**

- and the Sinaitic Peninsula** (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1902), pp. 69, 70
14. Twopeny, Richard **Dissertations on Some Parts of the Old and New Testaments which have been Supposed Unsuitable to the Divine Attributes** (London: C & J Riverton, 1824), pp. 56, 57
15. Gumfrestion, Tenby “Idiomatic Words and Phrases” in **The Church of England Sunday School Quarterly Magazine, Volume 15** (London: The Church of England Sunday School Institute, 1862), pp. 38, 39
16. McBrain, R. M. “I will Harden Pharaoh’s Heart” in **The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine, Vol. LXII** (London: John Mason, 1839), p. 29
17. Kerswill, William Deas **The Old Testament Doctrine of Salvation: Or, How Men Were Saved in Old Testament Times** (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1904), p. 71
18. Ibid, pp. 71, 72
19. “Exposition: Romans ix. 22, 23” in **The American Christian Expositor: Designed to Promote the Influence of Sound Principles and Social Order, Volume 1** (New York: H.C. Sleight, 1831), p. 458
20. Ibid.

Chapter Eight

1. van Limborch, Philippus **A Compleat System, Or Body of Divinity, Both Speculative and Practical: Founded on Scripture and Reason, Volume 1** (London: J. Taylor and A. Bell, 1702), p. 400
2. Thornton, Thomas C. **Theological Colloquies: Or, A Compendium of Christian Divinity, Speculative and Practical, Founded on Scripture and Reason** (Baltimore: Lewis & Coleman, 1837), p. 320
3. Chrysostom, Saint John **The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 20** (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1852), p. 602
4. pp. 602, 603
5. Orchard, Bernard (Editor) **A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture** (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953), p. 778
6. Thompson, John Samuel **The Christian Guide to a Right Understanding of the Sacred Scriptures** (Utica, NY: A. C. Dauby, 1826), p. 209
7. Ibid, p. 236
8. Ibid, p. 225
9. Shalders, E. W. “Biblical Notes: Isaiah 6:9-10” in **The Expositor, Volume 7** (London: Hodder & Stoughton), pp. 471, 472

10. Macknight, James **The Truth of the Gospel History Shewed: In Three Books, Volumes 1-3** (London: James Macknight, 1763). p. 123
11. Clarke, Adam **The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments, Volume 5** (London: Joseph Butterworth and Son, 1825), p. 7
12. Chandler, Edward **A Defence of Christianity, from the Prophecies of the Old Testament** (London: James and John Knapton, 1725), p. 236
13. Horne, Thomas Hartwell **An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, Volume 2** (London: T. Cadell, [and others], 1828), p. 471
14. Browne, Edward Harold **Sermons on the Atonement and Other Subjects Preached Before the University of Cambridge** (London: John W. Parker, 1859), p. 107
15. Shalders, *Isaiah 6:9-10*, p. 471
16. Rackham, Richard Belward **The Acts of the Apostles: An Exposition** (London: Methuen & Co., 1901), p. 505
17. Twopeny, *Dissertations*, p. 56
18. *Ibid*, pp. 58, 59
19. Summers, Thos. O. **Commentary on the Gospels, Vol. I: St. Matthew** (Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist publishing house, 1869), p. 151
20. Peirce, Bradford Kinney **The Word of God Opened: Its Inspiration, Canon, and Interpretation Considered and Illustrated** (Nelson & Phillips, 1868), pp. 139, 140
21. Williams, *Predestination*, p. 51
22. Keith, Alexander **Isaiah as it is: Or, Judah and Jerusalem the Subjects of Isaiah's Prophesying, Volume 1** (Edinburgh: William Whyte and Company, 1850), pp. 58, 59
23. Bosanquet, Samuel Richard **Interpretation; Rules and Principles Assisting the Reading of the Holy Scriptures** (London: Hatchards, Piccadilly, 1874), pp. 178, 179
24. *Ibid*, p. 180

Chapter Nine

1. Hayward, Alan **God's Truth: A Scientist Shows why it Makes Sense to Believe the Bible** (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1973), p. 197
2. Holden, George **The Christian Expositor; Or Practical Guide to the Study of the New Testament** (London: C. J. G. & F. Rivington, 1830), p. 380

3. Scott, William **The New Testament Illustrated** (London: George Allen, 1775), p. 354
4. Crawford Bromehead, Alexander **A Popular Paraphrase on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, with Notes** (London: Bell and Daldy, 1857), p. 198
5. Ibid, p. 105

Chapter Ten

1. Denney, James **Jesus and the Gospel: Christianity Justified in the Mind of Christ** (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908), p. 237
2. Gilpin, William **An Exposition of the New Testament; Intended as an Introduction to the Study of the Scriptures, Volume 1** (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798), pp. xxv, xxvi
3. Jackson, Jeremiah **A Scriptural Inquiry into the Election of Grace, as it concerns Man's Condition and Prospects** (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1854), pp. 95, 96
4. Ibid, p. 96
5. Stabback, Thomas **Matthew in Biblical and Theological Gleanings: a Collection of Comments, Criticisms, and Remarks** (London: Ward and Co., 1854), p. 665
6. Brown, *The Interpretation of Scripture*, p. 6
7. Ibid, p. 13
8. Williams, *Predestination to Life*, p. 49
9. Ibid.
10. Bloomfield, Samuel Thomas **He Kaine Diatheke The Greek Testament: with English Notes, Vol. I** (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1868), p. 56
11. Bennett, James **Lectures on the Preaching of Christ: A Supplement to Lectures on the History of Christ** (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1836), p. 151
12. Trapp, Joseph **Explanatory Notes Upon the Four Gospels, in a New Method: For the Use of All** (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1805), pp. 125, 126
13. Trollope, William **Analecta Theologica: A Critical, Philological, and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Volume 1** (London: T. Cadell, Strand, 1842), p. 148
14. Livermore, Abiel Abbot **The Four Gospels: With a Commentary, Volume 1** (Boston: J. Monroe and Company, 1842), p. 157
15. Valpy, Edward **New Testament: With English Notes Critical, Philological, and Explanatory, Volume 1** (London: Longman and Company, 1826), p. 75

Chapter Eleven

1. Clarke, *The Holy Bible*, p. 219
2. Ibid, p. 201
3. “Notes on Ezekiel 14:9” in Bullinger, *Companion Bible*, E-Sword edition
4. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, p. 823
5. Horne, *Critical Study*, p. 530
6. Ibid.
7. Walker, Aaron “Is God the Author of Deception and Falsehood?” in **The Christian Foundation, Or, Scientific and Religious Journal: Devoted to the Interests of Civilization, Literature and Christianity, Volume 1** (Indianapolis: Carlton & Hollenbeck, Printers, 1880), p. 70
8. Ibid, p. 71
9. Williams, *Predestination*, p. 49
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. M’Gavin, James R. **The Holy Bible With an Original Commentary** (Edinburgh: J. B. Brechin, 1861), p. 488
13. “Notes on Jeremiah 4:10” in Bullinger, *Companion Bible*, E-Sword edition
14. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, p. 823
15. Young, *Analytical Concordance*, p. 46
16. Waterland, Daniel **The Works of the Rev. Daniel Waterland, D.D., Vol. IV** (Oxford: University Press, 1856), p. 342
17. Ibid, pp. 341, 342
18. Walker, *Deception*, p. 71
19. Horne, *Critical Study*, p. 530
20. Walker, *Deception*, pp. 70, 71
21. Horne, *Critical Study*, p. 530
22. Holden, *Christian Expositor*, p. 304
23. R. C. “Queries” in **The Evangelical Repository: A Quarterly Magazine of Theological Literature, Vol. III** (Glasgow: Thomas D. Morison, 1869), p. 308
24. Waterland, Daniel **The Works of Daniel Waterland: To which is Prefixed a Review of the Author's Life and Writings, Volume 6** (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1823), p. 200
25. Clarke, *The Holy Bible*, p. 371.
26. Ibid.
27. Winslow, Hubbard **Statement and Evidence of the Doctrine of the Trinity, in Three Lectures** (Dover: Samuel C. Stevens, 1829), p. 60

28. Jenks, William **The Comprehensive Commentary on the Holy Bible: Containing the Text According to the Authorised Version** (Brattleboro: Brattleboro' Typographic Company, 1838), p. 457
29. Grant, Johnson **Discourses Addressed to an Attentive and Intelligent Congregation** (London: Rivingtons; Hatchards; Darling, 1843), pp. 217, 218
30. *Biblical Notes and Queries*, p. 169
31. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, p. 824
32. Bloomfield, Samuel Thomas **The Greek Testament with English Notes, Vol. II** (London: Longman, Orme, Browne, Green, & Longmans, 1839), p. 401
33. Macknight, *Literal Translation*, p. 585
34. *Ibid*, p. 29
35. Some of these translations are as follows: “*For this reason, God will **allow** them to follow false teaching.*” (New Life Version); “*That is why God **lets** them be fooled.*” (Worldwide English New Testament); “*You see, they will not believe the true message, so God will **let** somebody properly trick them.*” (Plain English Version); “*So God **lets** them be fooled completely.*” (Radiate New Testament).

Chapter Twelve

1. This could be why the Septuagint gives 2 Chronicles 26:20 a different rendering: “*And when Azarias the chief priest, with the other priests, turned towards him, behold he was leprous on the forehead, so they hurried him out thence. He indeed himself hastened to go out, because **the Lord had convicted him.***” (Charles Thomson Bible).
2. Bush, George **Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Leviticus** (New York: Ivison and Phinney, 1857), p. 130
3. Holden, George **The Christian Expositor; or, Practical Guide to the Study of the Old Testament** (London: J. G. and F. Rivington, 1834), p. 139
4. Steele, Daniel **Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. II.-Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy** (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1891), p. 106
5. **Cassell’s Illustrated Family Bible, Volume 1** (New York: Cassell, Petter & Calpin, 1860), p. 188
6. Waterland, *Works of Daniel Waterland*, p. 200
7. Young, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 315
8. *Ibid*, p. 83
9. Leviticus 14:34; Bellamy, John **The Holy Bible: Newly Translated from the Original Hebrew: with Notes Critical and**

Explanatory, Volumes 1-3 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1818)

10. Clarke, *The Holy Bible*, p. 219

11. Clarke, Adam **The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments, Volume 1** (New York: T. Mason & G. Lane, 1837), p. 554

12. “Comments on Leviticus 14:34” in **Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge**, E-Sword edition.

13. Gosse, Philip Henry **The Monuments of Ancient Egypt and Their Relation to the Word of God** (London: The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1847), p. 277. Gosse writes, “Egypt appears at all times to have been an unhealthy country. In the Mosaic law, ‘the diseases of Egypt’ are spoken of as proverbial.”

14. Howard, David M.; Grisante, Michael A. **Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts** (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003), p. 58

Chapter Thirteen

1. Charnock, Stephen **The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock, B.D., Vol. I** (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), p. 17

2. Le Clerc, Jean **Twelve Dissertations Out of Monsieur Le Clerk’s Genesis** (London: R. Baldwin, 1696), p. 66

3. Brightwell, Thomas **Notes on the Pentateuch; Selected from the Exegetical Parts of Rosenmüller’s Scholia, and of Dathe’s Notes to His Latin Version** (London: Ball, Arnold & Company, 1840), p. 187

4. “Exodus 21:13” in **E. W. Bullinger’s Companion Bible Notes**, 1909, E-Sword edition

5. Holden, George **The Christian Expositor; or, Practical Guide to the Study of the Old Testament** (London: J. G. and F. Rivington, 1834), p. 110

6. Turner, Samuel Hulbeart **Notes on the Epistle to the Romans: Intended to Assist Students of Theology, and Others, who Read the Scriptures in the Originals** (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1824), p. 110

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 113, 114

8. *Ibid.*, p. 114

9. Purver, *A New and Literal Translation*, p. iv

10. Some of these translations are as follows: “*But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God **allowed** him to fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee [for protection until duly tried]*” (Amplified Bible); “*But if he did not intend any harm, and yet God **allowed** it to happen, I will appoint a place for you where he may flee*” (Christian Standard

Bible); “*If the killing wasn’t on purpose but an accident **allowed** by God, then I will designate a place to which the killer can run away*” (Common English Bible); “*but not if it is unintentional, but God **allows** it to happen: then I will appoint you a place where he shall flee*” (Torah - Aramaic ES Version of the Peshitta); “*But if God **allows** a person to die at the hands of another who never intended to kill him in the first place....*” (The VOICE);

Chapter Fourteen

1. Waterland, Daniel **The Works of Daniel Waterland: To which is Prefixed a Review of the Author's Life and Writings, Volume 6** (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1823), p. 262
2. Hewlett, John **Commentaries and Annotations on the Holy Scriptures, Volume 3** (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1816), p. 363
3. McClellan, W. H. “Recent Bible Study” in **The American Ecclesiastical Review; A Monthly Publication for the Clergy, Volume 86** (Philadelphia: merican Ecclesiastical Review, 1932), p. 97
4. “Ezekiel 20:25” in **E. W. Bullinger’s Companion Bible Notes**, 1909, E-Sword edition
5. Bate, Julius **Critica Hebraea, Or, A Hebrew-English Dictionary, Without Points** (London: M. Folingsby, 1767), p. 686
6. Coke, Thomas **A Commentary on the Holy Bible, Volume 4** (London: G. Whitfield, 1803), p. 282
7. Clarke, *The Holy Bible*, p. 219

Chapter Fifteen

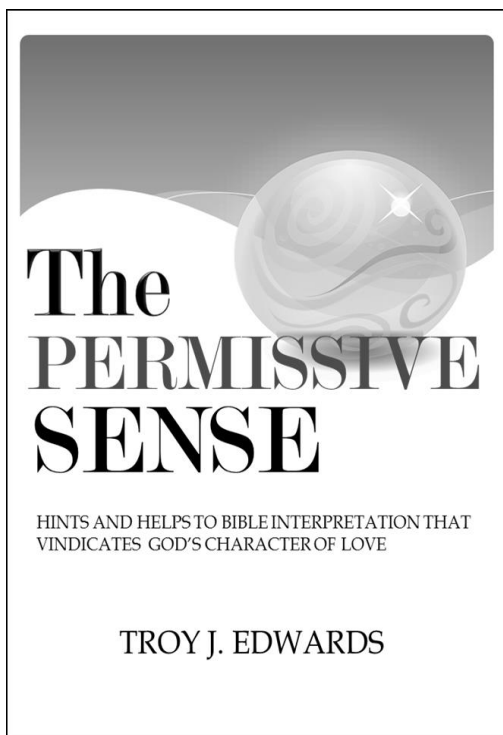
1. Rotherham, Joseph **The Emphasized Bible**, Bradbury, Agnew & Co., ©1902, p. 919
2. Turner, *Notes on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 110
3. *Ibid*, p. 114
4. Powell, Baden **Protestant Principles; or, ‘The Bible only’** (from the Oxford Protestant Magazine for May, 1847), p. 17
5. Napper, William **An Answer to the Rev. A. O’Callaghan. A. M. on the Tendency of Bible Societies** (Dublin: Robert Napper, 18:16), pp. 56, 57
6. Toulmin, Joshua **Sermons on Devotional, Evangelical and Practical Subjects** (London: R. Cruttwell, 1810), p. 324
7. Forster, John **The Gospel Narrative According to the Authorized Text of the Evangelists** (London: John W. Parker, 1845), p. 147

8. Doggett, David Seth **Sermons: With a Biographical Sketch of the Author, Volume 1** (Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1881), p. 48
9. Trollope, William **Analecta Theologica: A Critical, Philological, and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Volume 1** (London: T. Cadell, Strand, 1842), p. 132
10. Parr, Samuel **The Works of Samuel Parr, LL.D; Memoirs of His Life and Writings** (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green., 1828), p. 194
11. Spalding, *Scripture Difficulties*, p. 316
12. Ibid, pp. 316, 317
13. Watson, Richard **An Exposition of the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark** (London: Kon Mason, 1833), p. 159

Chapter Sixteen

1. Brown, William Laurence **A Comparative View of Christianity: And of the Other Forms of Religion which Have Existed, Vol. 2** (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1826), pp. 254, 255
2. Terry, M. S. **Commentary of the Old Testament, Vol. III--Joshua to II. Samuel** (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1875), p. 175
3. Shuckford, Samuel **The Sacred and Profane History of the World.** (London: W. Baynes, 1808), pp. 39, 40
4. Ibid.
5. Jackson, *The Providence of God*, pp. 300, 301
6. Ibid, pp. 301, 302
7. Davidson, David *The Comprehensive Pocket Bible*, p. 181
8. Holden, George **The Christian Expositor; or, Practical Guide to the Study of the Old Testament** (London: J. G. and F. Rivington, 1834), p. 441
9. Purver, *A New and Literal Translation*, p. 661
10. Girard, Gilbert **Institutes of Biblical Criticism: Or, Heads of the Course of Lectures on that Subject** (Boston: Cummings and Hilliard, 1823), pp. 412, 413
11. Smith, Peter **Discourses on Some of the Most Important Doctrines and Duties of Christianity** (Berwick, H. Richardson), pp. 282, 283
12. Davidson, *Pocket Commentary; Volume 1*, p. 424
13. Longking, Joseph **Notes, Illustrative and Explanatory, on the Holy Gospels, Volume III** (New York: Lane & Scott, 1850), p. 89
14. Anderson, Robert **A Practical Exposition of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans** (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1833), p. 228

Other books from
Vindicating God Ministries!



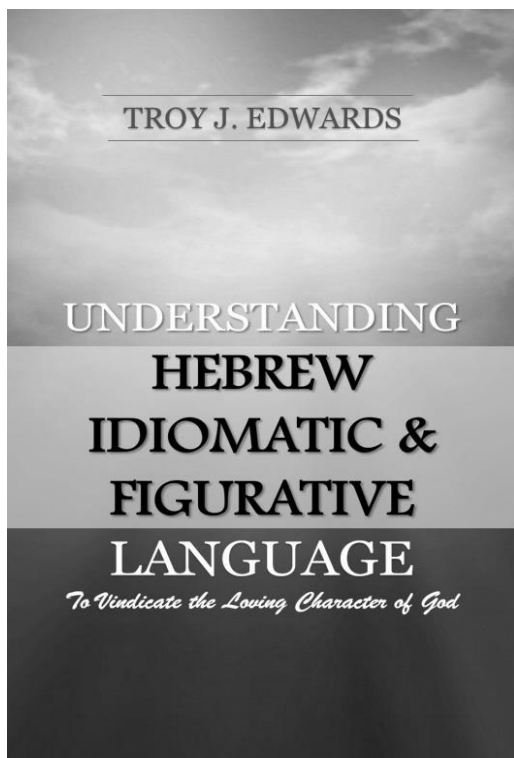
The Permissive Sense

*Hints and Helps to Bible Interpretation that Vindicates God's
Character of Love*

Most Bible difficulties are resolved when we understand the Permissive Sense. This book will help you understand this truth and will remove all doubt about God's love, goodness, and holiness.

www.vindicatinggod.org

Coming soon from
Vindicating God Ministries!



Understanding Hebrew Idiomatic & Figurative Language

To Vindicate the Loving Character of God

The Bible abounds in “idioms” or “figurative language” (aka “figures of speech”) and the meaning is not always apparent to Bible readers. This book will help us decipher such language in light of God’s character.

www.vindicatinggod.org

We appropriately use the Bible as our foundation for all Christian belief and practice because we rightly recognize it as God's written Word. Why then is there such a lack of clarity on the God that this book is supposed to reveal to us within its pages? Why does He claim to be good, compassionate, and merciful while He is accused of hardening hearts, tempting people, causing sickness and accidents, etc. in so many other places?

The issues arise from our failure to accurately understand and apply the "idiom of permission" to our reading and study of this holy text. In this book, Pastor Troy J. Edwards provides the scholarly evidence that the Bible uses the idiom of permission frequently, and he discusses how the application of this idiom will resolve many issues related to our understanding of God's character.