



ORIGINAL PAPER

Biblical Idioms Used in Travel-Related Contexts

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Abstract:

This article analyzes 41 Biblical idioms used in travel-related contexts using the British National Corpus, blogs and social media. It, also, emphasizes both their historical (biblical) meaning which is sometimes completely forgotten and the way their meaning has shifted in modern language, namely travelling situations.

Each idiom mentioned in the paper stem from the Bible and with newly derived and synchronic meanings which can be employed in new contexts, namely travel-related ones, that are not just religious.

Aware of the significance of a corpus linguistic research for a better understanding of idiom use, this work will, therefore, examine the function of a series of Bible idioms in the British National Corpus, narrowing their usage to travel-related contexts. In texts that deal with travelling, Bible idioms have a more marked interpersonal function, writers employ the idioms to express their ideas in an almost euphemistic manner, in the hope of influencing their readers' opinions, too. As a result, Bible idioms in this context carry a dual function, on the one hand they have a striking and influential effect upon readers, on the other hand, they allow writers to deliver personal opinions in an impersonal manner conveyed by the idiom.

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1. Introduction

Biblical idioms are common expressions in English (and many other languages) whose wording or imagery originates from stories, characters or teachings in the Bible. Their meanings usually go beyond literal biblical reference and have become part of everyday speech. They are *figurative expressions* whose roots trace back to passage in the Bible but today they are often used by people regardless of religious background. They not only add colorful metaphorical meaning to travelling vocabulary but also carry moral lessons or vivid imagery. In the last decades phraseological researches in contemporary corpora have provided insight into such facts as the frequency and the use of idioms that have surprised experts and laymen alike. Contrary to general opinion Moon (The Distribution of Idioms in English, p.34) has shown that the distribution of idiomatic expressions in the English language is rather low and that the idioms are used more frequently in written texts than in spoken discourse.

Laura Pinnavaia (2012, p. 46) mentions the fact that: “it has been seen that in each text-type these Bible idioms are used in such a way as to foreground one of the three macro-functions of language *referential, interpersonal or textual* complying their communicative purpose”.

According to Geană (Idioms which originate in the Bible,2018:67)” it is important to underline the fact that a great deal of idioms might be used outside the religious frame, often with a change of meaning from their original biblical sense” this aspect has risen my interest for this research.

2. Materials and Methods

For this paper a large number of materials were retrieved from British National Corpus, travelling blogs, tourism websites, etc. The outcomes of this research, on one hand will contribute to a better understanding of Biblical idioms but also, they will be helpful for further studies in this field. The article has a practical direction firstly by offering a list of Biblical idioms (with Biblical meaning added) and secondly it will also provide examples of how they fit or can be adapted to travel-related contexts.

3. Practical Approach

Here are some Bible-origin idioms that can be used naturally in the context of travelling so that to be given a practical line of study in this sphere. The material has been split up in various sections and comprises both Old Testament and New Testament idioms.

I. General travelling-related examples

1.“**The blind leading the blind**” (*origin Matthew 15:14*) and the meaning is *people without knowledge leading others*”

travel-related example:

We have wandered around Venice without a guide-just the blind leading the blind.

2.“**Go the extra mile**” (*origin Matthew 5:41*) and the meaning is “*to make an extra effort*.”

travel-related example:

Our tour guide really went the extra mile and showed us hidden local markets.

3.“**A drop in the bucket**” (*origin Isaiah 40:15*) and the meaning is a small, insignificant amount

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travel-related example:

That tiny gelato shop was just a drop in the bucket compared to all the food we tried in Rome.

4. **“Eat, drink and be merry”** (*origin Ecclesiastes 8:15, Luke 12:19*) and the meaning is *“to enjoy life”*

travel-related example:

On our holiday we all put up our feet, just eat, drink and be merry”

5. **“By the skin of your teeth”** (*origin Matthew 19:20*) and the meaning is *to barely managing something*

travel-related example:

We have caught our train by the skin of our teeth”

6. **“Nothing new under the sun”** (*origin Ecclesiastes 1:9*) and the meaning *“everything has already happened before”*

travel-related example:

Travelers have been coming to this village for centuries- nothing new under the Sun.

7. **“A land flowing with milk and honey”** (*origin Exodus 3:8* and the meaning is *“ a place of abundance and beauty”*

travel-related example:

When we reached Scotland, it truly felt like a land flowing with milk and honey.

8. **“The powers that be”** (*origin Romans 13:1* and the meaning is *“authorities or officials”*)

travel-related example:

The powers that be at the airport, wouldn't let us board early.

9. **“The writing on the wall”** (*origin Daniel 5, having a meaning as warning sign*)

Travel-related example:

When we all the flights were being delayed, we noticed the writing on the wall and booked a hotel room.

10. **“A good Samaritan”** (*origin Luke 10:25* and the meaning is: *a very helpful stranger”*

travel-related example:

A good Samaritan helped us jump start our rental car.

11. **“a land of milk and honey”** (Exodus 3, having the meaning of a place where living conditions are good)

travel-related example:

Xiuzhan is called a land of milk and honey, the hometown of silk.

12. **“new wine in old bottles”** (*Luke 5: 36-39, the idiom comes from a teaching of Jesus, warning that fermenting “new wine” would cause “old wineskins (rigid, traditional or legalistic mindsets) to burst; something new added to or imposed upon an old established order*

travel-related example:

Trying to run a high-speed, paperless ticketing system on the city's crumbling 19th century rail infrastructure is like putting new wine in old bottles!

II. (related to transport)

13. "A road to **Damascus moment**" (*origin: Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus (act9) and the meaning is: the moment when someone has a sudden realization while travelling/driving*)

travel-related example:

On the long drive home, I had a real road-to- Damascus moment and I decided to book another trip.

14. "**Lost sheep**" (*origin Luke 15: 1-7 – the parable of the lost sheep and the meaning is a "driver /traveler who got separated or lost"*)

travel-related example:

We had to double pack for the lost sheep in the other car".

15. "**Walk the straight and narrow**" (*origin Matthew 72: 12) and the meaning is: "the narrow way"*)

travel-related (transport/applied to disciplined driving) staying precisely within lanes:

On this icy road you need to stay on the straight and narrow!

16. "**A voice crying in the wilderness**" (*origin Isaiah 40:2) and the meaning is when someone shouts directions that no one follows in a noisy vehicle or chaotic travel situation.*)

travel-related example:

I kept telling them to exit, but I was a voice crying in the wilderness!

17. "**A journey of forty days**" (*origin Elijah's 40 -day journey) and the meaning is to meant to describe (jokingly) a very miserable trip*)

travel-related example:

That bus ride felt like forty days in the wilderness.

18. "**My cup runneth over**" (*origin Psalms 23:5) and the meaning is (humorously) when a vehicle is overloaded with luggage and passengers"*)

travel-related example:

With all this cargo, our trunk runneth over.

(flying)

19. "**On wings like eagles**" (*origin Isaiah 40:31) and the meaning is of describing a smooth, effortless flying*)

travel-related example:

The plane took off on wings like eagles and here we were above the clouds!

20. "**A thorn in the flesh**" (*origin Corinthians 12:7) with the meaning of persistent flying issues- turbulence delays, dry air, etc.*)

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travel-related example:

These flight delays are a thorn in my flesh.

21. **“Peace that passes understanding”** (*origin Philippians 4:7*) used to describe an unexpectedly calm flight or passenger.

travel-related example:

Everyone panicked during turbulence except her- she had peace that passes understanding.

(sailing/boating)

22. **“Cast your bread upon waters”** (*origin Ecclesiasts 11:1*) and having the meaning to take

A chance (on a trip or on a voyage)

travel-related example:

Booking a boat tour in storm season? You’re casing your bread upon waters.

23. **“Anchor the soul”** (*origin Hebrews 6: 19*) and the meaning is of stability on rough waters or docking securely”

travel-related example:

Once we reached the shore, I could anchor my soul and finally felt steady.

24. **“Peace be still** (*Mark 4: 39 when Jesus calmed the storm*) and the meaning is (humorously) during choppy waters or an unsteady boat ride.

travel-related example:

Waves hit the canoe and he shouted:” Peace, be still!”

25. **“Into the deep”** (*Psalm 107: 24, Luke 5:4*) and the meaning is of heading into deeper waters or beginning a long voyage”

travel-related example:

We steered out of the harbour and into the deep”.

(trains) (This category work metaphorically as trains didn’t exist in the biblical world)

26. **“All aboard the ark”** (*Genesis 6-8 Noah’s Ark*) with the meaning of getting everyone onto a train especially in a rush

travel-related example:

Come on, everyone- time to get aboard the ark before the doors close!

27. **“in the fullness of time”** (*origin Galatians 4:4*) with the meaning of waiting for a delayed or slow train

travel-related example:

The train will arrive- in the fullness of time!

28. **“the last trumpet”** (*origin Corinthians 15: 25*) with the meaning of final whistle before the train departs

travel-related example:

When you hear the trumpet, the train has already pulled away.

III. (related to accommodation)

29. **“no room at the inn”** (*origin Luke 2:7 used when a hotel is fully booked*)

travel-related example:

We have tried three hotels so far- no room at the inn for us tonight.

30. **“a place to rest your head”** (*origin Luke 9: 58 “the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head; with the modern usage of finding somewhere to sleep even if simple or make shift*)

travel-related example:

It’s not fancy, but it is a place to rest your head for the night!

31. **“a house built on sand/ a house built on rock”** (*Matthew 7:24-27 used to describe an unstable or unreliable accommodation*)

travel-related example:

That flimsy cabin is a house built on sand”

32. **“under one roof”** (*origin Hebrew 13: 2 the meaning is offering hospitality to guests and strangers*)

travel-related example:

We took in some travellers- we might be entertaining angels unawares”

33. **“a house divided cannot stand”** (*Mark 3: 25 and is having as modern usage the meaning when a group sharing a cabin or room is arguing*)

travel-related example:

This Airbnb is a totally chaos- a house divided cannot stand!

34. **“Go into your closet/ prayer closet”** (*origin Matthew 6:6 having as modern usage finding a quiet private corner in a crowded accommodation*)

travel-related example:

I hid in the laundry room -my prayer closet- just for the sake of peace and quiet!

35. **“The widow’s oil”** (*origin 2 Kings 4-1:7 having the modern usage the situation when the hotel toiletries or supplies seem endless/ or ironically run out too fast*)

travel-related example:

This guesthouse keeps refilling soap like widow’s oil!

36. **“tabernacle/ pitch your tent** (*origin Exodus/wilderness, wandering with the modern usage used for camping, temporary lodging, rough accommodation*)

travel-related example:

We’ll tabernacle here for the night as the scenery is gorgeous!

37. **“hospitality without grumbling”** (*origin 1 Peter 4:9 and the meaning is remaining hosts not to complain about guests*)

travel-related example:

They’re staying for another night- show hospitality without grumbling.

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IV. Emotion/ risk or safety

38. **“walk in the light** (*John 1:7 with the meaning of moving slowly, without stumbling or danger*)

travel-related example:

We need to walk in the light to avoid the trouble in this matter!

39. **“the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night”** (*origin Exodus 13:21 having the meaning of God’s guidance and visible protection on a journey.*)

travel-related example:

On this long trip we asked God to lead us like the pillar of cloud and fire!

40. **“safe in the deft of the rock”** (*origin Exodus 33:22 having the meaning of sheltering in dangerous conditions*)

travel-related example:

When the hailstorm hit the highway we pulled over and felt safe in the deft of the rock!

41. **“prepare a room** (*origin 2 Kings 4: 10 when Shunammite woman prepare a guest room for Elisha and having the meaning of getting a guest room ready*)

travel-related example:

We prepared a room for our visitors just like Shunammite woman did.

4. Results and discussion

In the light of the aspects discussed above it has been seen the fact that idioms are predominantly used to secure textual coherence and cohesion in travelling related contexts so that they should instill new ideas in the readership whereas in the religious texts they usually convey an informational function. For example, all encompassing meaning of the idiom *“new wine in old bottle* “explains why it has become popular in travelling contexts, as it can be found in texts that range from leisure/ commerce to natural and social sciences. In all these contexts the idiom is used to startle the readership, by its unexpected syntactic layout. Idioms that serve to manipulate the thoughts and opinions of readers are in turn often manipulated by writers. For example, the idiom *“a land of milk and honey* “has a negative polarity, even though it is normally used in its affirmative form.

The number of Biblical idioms used in travel-related contexts is 41 (general travelling- 12 examples, transport- 16 examples, to the accommodation category belong 8 examples and to emotion/ risk or safety only 4).

Conclusion

Idioms are not generally frequent in English and especially not in spoken discourse and the majority of Biblical idioms used in travel-related contexts can be found in written texts. It has been interesting to notice that these idioms are usually used with one prevailing purpose, to further the narration not only, to entertain the readers but also, to teach the religious meaning so that to persuade and cajole in travelling texts.

Moreover, Bible idioms convey an enormous communicative potential and broad scope of use and there can be no denying that, unlike most other idiomatic expressions those with Biblical origin have the Fortune to have two standard metaphoric meanings: one historical meaning and a synchronic one which can be easily adapted to travelling-

related contexts. Having considered the communicative functions of biblical idioms used in travelling the information gathered above will serve as working ground for future observations.

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