

# Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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## Recognizing Idioms

(Jerry Fite)

The English word “*idiom*” comes from the Greek word “*idios*,” meaning “*one’s own*.” The word is used recognizing “*the language peculiar to any particular author or speaker*,” or “*the language peculiar to one nation or tribe, as opposed to other languages or dialects*.”

E. W. Bullinger reminds us of an important fact as we strive to properly interpret the Scriptures: “*The fact must ever be remembered that, while the language of the New Testament is Greek, the agents and instruments employed by the Holy Spirit were Hebrews.*” (*Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, page 819*). Therefore, Hebrew idioms, phrases peculiar to Hebrews and their way of speaking occur in our New Testament. We must recognize them, or we will not interpret the Scriptures properly.

The phrase “*to hear*” is used idiomatically in I Corinthians 14:2: “*He that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not to men but to God, for no one heareth him.*” “No one heareth,” literally interpreted as no one hearing words, would render a false meaning of the author. It is an idiom indicating no one “*understands*” the speaker who

speaks in a language he does not know. The idiom conveys the concept of “*believing*” in John 9:27. Here, the man cured from blindness answers his persistent questioners with, “*I have told you already, and ye did not hear...*”. They heard his words but did not “*believe*” him. The idiom also indicates “*receiving*” in John 8:43. Jesus says, “*Why do ye not understand My speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word.*” They were not hard of hearing literal words, but they refused to “*receive*” His word. So, “*to hear*” is properly interpreted “*to understand*,” “*to believe*” and “*to receive*.”

Recognizing this idiom keeps one from rushing to the position that the Bible contradicts itself. In giving the account of Paul hearing the voice of the Lord, Luke writes, “*and the men that journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but beholding no man.*” (*Acts 9:7*). Later, Luke records Paul’s words of the same event as “*And they that were with me beheld indeed the light, but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me*” (*Acts 22:9*). The first passage is in the genitive case meaning they heard “*the sound*” of the voice.

The later passage, in the *accusative case*, indicates they did not hear “*the subject matter*.” In the first passage they heard the sound of the voice, while the second verse indicates that, while they heard the sound, they did not understand what was being said. Knowing “*to hear*” is used idiomatically not only guards us from a rash conclusion indicting the Scriptures, but enriches our knowledge with the proper interpretation.

Some believers are troubled that Jesus was not in the tomb for the full three days and nights as He seems to promise in Matthew 12:40. As Jonah was in the belly of the great fish three days and three nights, Jesus promised that the Son man will “*be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*” Such fear is unfounded when we recognize the phrase as a Hebrew idiom covering *any parts* of three days and nights. Esther says she and her maidens will not eat or drink for “*three days, night or day*” and yet it was on the third day Esther went to see the king (*Esther 4:16, 5:1*). Jesus was in the tomb part of Friday, all of Saturday and part of Sunday. Jesus did not contradict His promise. Jesus and writers of the New Testament used idioms. Recognize them!