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## THE PROBLEM OF VARIABILITY IN BIBLICAL PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

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### **Abstract**

The problem of linguistic variability remains acute due to the dynamism of national language development. The study of phraseological units of biblical etymology in the aspect of their variability has recently become increasingly significant, as the fact of wide use of phraseological units derived from biblical texts and stories in various types of discourse is noted. The diversity of variants of biblical phrases requires identifying, organising and structuring the types of their variation.

The *aim* of the research is to identify new variants of biblical phraseological units that are widely used in various discourse types (fiction, media, publicistic, historical, political). Contexts that verify the resulting data of the research were borrowed from the British National Corpus (BNC), News on the Web (NOW) and electronic dictionary Reverso Context (RC).

Language material for the research was extracted out of 3 phraseological dictionaries: 1) the bilingual “English-Russian phraseological dictionary” by Alexander V. Kunin, 2) “English-German-Swedish Dictionary of Biblical Phraseology” by Tatyana N. Fedulenkova and others, 3) the multilingual phraseological dictionary “The Mite of Biblical Wisdom” by Zoya K. Adamia and others. The research *methods*, namely the method of the phraseological identification, the method of the structural and componential analysis, the method of the quantitative analysis and the method of contextual analysis, allow to analyse 350 phraseological units of biblical origin that are actively used in modern English and identify a set of variants that include both usual and occasional simple variants, i.e. lexical and grammatical, quantitative variants of phraseological units and mixed or complex variants of phraseological units.

It was found out that along with linguistic variation, phraseological variation is the result of the natural development of language as a system. Variation of biblical phraseological units is not equaled to phraseological synonymy.

The analysis of selected biblical phraseological units allowed us to identify the following types of variants: simple variants and complex variants (e.g. substantive-quantitative variants, adjectival-quantitative variants, verbal-quantitative variants) of phraseological units. Within each of the given groups, a division into usual and occasional variants is made. Simple variants are represented by lexical variants (including substantive variants, prepositional variants, prepositional-substantive variants, attributive variants, verbal variants); grammatical variants (including morphological variants and morpho-syntactical variants); quantitative variants (with truncation and addition of components). Truncated parts of a phraseological unit may be represented by three types (truncation of the initial part of the phraseological unit; truncation of the final part of the phraseological unit; mixed truncation). A group of quantitative comparative variants is distinguished, in which the first conjunction (*as*) as a result of regular truncation becomes optional, resulting in quantitative-variative pairs. A type of mixed variation has been identified, implying the origin of variants by multiple modifications. Substantive-quantitative variants are formed by changing the substantive component together with varying the structure of the phraseological unit by expanding it with a variable component with a preposition. Adjectival-quantitative variants are formed as the result quantitative variation (expansion of the structure of the phraseological unit) coupled with the replacement of the adjectival element.

With the help of corpus data, the preference of native speakers for some variants of idioms over others was successfully revealed.

The conclusion is made that the studied phraseological units borrowed from the Bible are not static, but are ‘living’, constantly changing language units, widely used in modern English speech. Moreover, both simple and complex variation in the component composition of a given phraseological unit has no significant impact on the invariant meaning of the phraseological unit.

**Keywords:** *biblical phraseology, phraseological units of biblical etymology, phraseological variability, variant, invariant, simple and complex variants, usual and occasional variants*

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## ПРОБЛЕМА ВАРИАТИВНОСТИ БИБЛЕЙСКОЙ ФРАЗЕОЛОГИИ

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### **Аннотация**

Проблема лингвистической вариативности остается актуальной вследствие динамичности развития национального языка. Исследование фразеологических единиц библейской этимологии в аспекте вариативности приобретает в последнее время все большую значимость, поскольку отмечается факт широкой употребительности фразеологизмов, восходящих к библейским текстам и сюжетам, в разных видах дискурса. Разнообразие вариантов библейских фразеологизмов требует отслеживания, организации и структуризации типов их варьирования.

Цель – выделение типов вариативности английских фразеологических единиц библейского происхождения.

Теоретической основой исследования является фразеологическая концепция, выдвинутая А. В. Куниным. Материалом исследования послужили данные фразеологических словарей: 1) двуязычный «Англо-русский фразеологический словарь» А. В. Кунина, 2) «Англо-немецко-шведский словарь библейской фразеологии» Т. Н. Федуленковой и др., 3) многоязычный фразеологический словарь «Лепта библейской мудрости» З. К. Адамия и др. Анализируемые контексты, содержащие библейские фразеологические варианты, были отобраны в основном из Британского национального корпуса (British National Corpus) и новостного подкорпуса News on the Web. В качестве методов исследования были использованы метод фразеологической идентификации фразеологизмов, метод структурного, компонентного и вариативного анализа фразеологизмов, метод количественного анализа и метод контекстуального анализа.

В итоге было выяснено, что наряду с языковой вариантностью фразеологическая вариативность есть результат естественного развития языка как системы. Вариантность библейских фразеологизмов не отождествляется с фразеологической синонимией.

Анализ отобранных фразеологических единиц библейского происхождения позволил выделить следующие типы вариантов: простые варианты и сложные варианты (например, субстантивно-квантитативные варианты, адъективно-квантитативные варианты, вербально-квантитативные варианты) фразеологических единиц. Внутри каждой из предлагаемых групп возможно подразделение на узусальные и окказиональные варианты. Простые варианты представлены лексическими вариантами (включающими субстантивные варианты, препозитивные варианты, препозитивно-субстантивные варианты, атрибутивные варианты, глагольные варианты); грамматическими вариантами (включая морфологические варианты и морфолого-синтаксические варианты); квантитативными вариантами (с усечением и добавлением компонентов). Сокращенные части фразеологической единицы могут быть представлены тремя видами (усечение начальной части фразеологической единицы; усечение конечной части фразеологизма; смешанное усечение). Выделена группа квантитативных компаративных вариантов, в которых первый союз в результате регулярного усечения становится факультативным, что приводит к появлению квантитативно-вариативных пар. Выделен тип смешанного варьирования, подразумевающий происхождение вариантов путем многократных изменений. Субстантивно-квантитативные варианты образуются путем изменения субстантивного компонента совместно с варьированием структуры фразеологической единицы за счет ее расширения переменным компонентом с предлогом. Адъективно-квантитативные варианты представлены таким набором фразеологических единиц, в которых наблюдается количественная вариативность за счет расширения компонентного состава фразеологической единицы, а также замены адъективного компонента.

С помощью корпусных данных было успешно выявлено предпочтение носителями языка одних вариантов идиом другим.

Вывод заключается в том, что исследуемые фразеологические единицы библейского происхождения не являются статичными, а представляют собой живые, постоянно изменяющиеся языковые единицы, широко используемые в современной английской речи. Более того, как простая, так и сложная вариативность компонентного состава данного фразеологизма не оказывает значительного влияния на инвариант значения фразеологической единицы.

**Ключевые слова:** библейская фразеология, фразеологические единицы библейского происхождения, фразеологическая вариантность, вариант, инвариант, простые и сложные варианты, узусальные и окказиональные варианты

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## Introduction

The suggested research is an attempt to delve into the actual problem of variability in biblical phraseology. The relevance of the problem is supported by the fact that there is a plethora of materials including monographs, manuals, articles devoted to the problem of variability in phraseology (see, i.e. [1, 2–4]); when it comes, though, to biblical phraseology we realise that we are extremely limited in sources and comprehensive studies (see, i.e. [5–8]). Since biblical phraseological units form one of the ambiguously interpreted layers of phraseological vocabulary today, their study is of particular interest due to the specificity of the object itself [9].

Following Professor Tatyana N. Fedulenkova, we understand variability in phraseology as “the result of the manifestation of common linguistic patterns that are relevant for all levels of the language, namely: adaptation to certain linguistic norms, emphasizing analogy, creating the effect of the novelty of a unit, as well as the desire to strengthen emotional and expressive tendencies” [7, p. 36]. Phraseological variability as a linguistic problem, and in particular, issues, related to the study of variability in biblical phraseology, were raised in a number of fundamental studies (see, for example, [1, 4, 6–8, 10, 11]). Thus, variants of phraseological units are phraseological units, in the components of which lexical and grammatical changes can be observed while maintaining the structural and semantic invariant of a phraseological unit.

According to Professor A. V. Kunin, phraseological variants are “varieties of phraseological units that are identical in quality and quantity of meanings, stylistic and syntactic functions, in compatibility with other words and having a common lexical invariant with partially different lexical composition or differing in word forms or word order” [12, p. 442].

It should be noted that, on the one hand, such characteristics and properties of biblical phraseological units as the componential and separative formality of the composition of these units, the interdependence of the components, the specificity of their structure determine their ability to vary. On the other hand, the variability of biblical terms is due to the existence of a huge number of translations of the Holy Scriptures, which enrich the phraseological system of the language with typical variants of phraseological units of biblical etymology.

The aim of the research is to identify new variants of biblical phraseological units that are widely used in various discourse types.

## Material and methods

Language material for the research was extracted from the reliable dictionaries: 1) the bilingual “Eng-

lish-Russian phraseological dictionary” by Alexander V. Kunin [12], 2) “English-German-Swedish Dictionary of Biblical Phraseology” by Tatyana N. Fedulenkova and others [13], 3) the multilingual phraseological dictionary “The Mite of Biblical Wisdom” by Zoya K. Adamia and others [14, 15]. The research *methods*, such as the method of the phraseological identification, the method of the structural, componential analysis, the method of the quantitative analysis and the method of contextual analysis, allow to analyse 350 phraseological units that are actively employed in modern English and identify types of variants that include both usual and occasional simple variants, i.e. lexical and grammatical, quantitative variants of phraseological units and mixed or complex variants.

## Results

As a result of the research, a set of main types of variants in the analysed phraseological units was identified: simple variants, i.e. verbal variants of phraseological units, complex variants, i.e. substantive-quantitative variants, adjectival-quantitative variants, and a number of verbal quantitative variants of phraseological units [7].

### 1 Simple variants

#### 1.1 Lexical variants:

##### 1.1.1 1.1.1 Substantive variants, i.e.

*lost sheep/stray sheep; people of good will/men of good will; Symbol of faith/Confession of faith; Solomonian judgment/Solomonian decision/Solomonian wisdom; smb's days are numbered/smb's hours are numbered; a man of Belial/a son of Belial; white as milk/white as snow/white as wool; eat the bread of affliction/eat the bread of sorrows/eat the bread of humiliation; the breath of life/the breath of nostrils; a brand from the fire/a brand from the burning; sift the grain from the chaff/sift the wheat from the chaff; the four corners of the earth/the four corners of the world; drain the cup of bitterness to the dregs/drain the cup of humiliation to the dregs; as deaf as an adder/as deaf as a post/as deaf as a stone; a drop in the ocean/a drop in the bucket; one's countenance fell/one's face fell; find favour in smb's eyes/find favour in smb's sight; a fisher of men/a fisher of souls.*

Contexts:

(1) *She laughed. “I wish I could help in some way,” she mused. “I'd willingly plunge all my earnings into the estate, but I suppose it would be a drop in the ocean.” What an extraordinary offer;” he said, as the tantalising aroma of freshly brewing coffee reached her nostrils (BNC).*

(2) *Female speaker: “We get a lot more requests for funding than we can fund, and we have to develop priorities. It's important to put Oxfam's work into perspective, we are a drop in the ocean but an important drop in the ocean”. Voice over: “Back in*

Bolivia it's women like Serapia con Quispe who pray that the Oxfam funding continues" (BNC).

(3) They are going through that cost-benefit analysis and saying, "I can earn this amount of money", which is **a drop in bucket** compared to the cost of college, or be focused on what I want to study in college and be a more valuable candidate at college with a greater chance for earning scholarships (BNC).

#### 1.1.2 prepositive variants, i.e.

To bury one's talents **under a bushel**/to bury one's talents **in a napkin**; in the sweat of one's **brow**/by the sweat of one's **face**; to be a law **into** oneself/to be a law **unto** oneself

Contexts:

(4) Gramps has always been a **law unto himself**. Heaven knows what he'll do (E. S. Gardner, 'The Case of the Smoking Chimney', ch. 15).

(5) All six rooms in the flat in my halls count as one household, but I have mates in other halls. People are just going to try and find who they know, and hang out with them. " #Jo said: " I think students are going to **be a law unto themselves** (BNC).

#### 1.1.3 prepositive-substantive variants:

To shake the dust **from** one's feet/to shake the dust **off** one's fee; **to** set one's face to something/to set one's face **towards** something; to be a law **into** oneself/to be a law **to** oneself/to be a law **unto** oneself; balm **in** Gilead/balm **of** Gilead; a brand **from** the fire/a brand **out of** the fire; **To** everything there is a season/**For** everything there is a season; sufficient **unto** the day is the evil thereof/sufficient **for** the day is the evil thereof; live **on** the fat of the land/live **off** the fat of the land; proclaim **from** the house-tops/proclaim **upon** the house-tops; a millstone **about** smb's neck/a millstone **round** smb's neck; to call into question/ to call **in** question; a reed shaken **by** the wind/a reed shaken **in** the wind/a reed shaken **with** the wind; to take on one's own shoulders/to take upon one's own shoulders; **by** the skin of one's teeth/**with** the skin of one's teeth; **by** the strong arm/**with** the strong arm; to let not the sun go down **on** your wrath/to let not the sun go down **upon** your wrath; **by** the sweat of one's brow/**in** the sweat of one's brow; **beyond** the veil/**within** the veil; to be a scorn **to** smb/to be the scorn **of** smb; in thought, word and deed/**by** thought, word and deed; to fall **into** good ground/to fall **on** good ground, etc.

Context:

(6) A big thanks goes to (...) for organising the evening. From (...) – Thank you to every one who came to the rock 'n' roll evening at the end of October. I certainly had a good time and judging **by the sweat of everyone's brow** as they worked to perfect their routines I think it was generally thought to be enjoyable and worthwhile. # Social Report # Many thanks to (...) for organising the trip to Droitwich Spa baths (BNC).

(7) Abe Lincoln so lifted the lid on the hypocrisy of trickle down economics, "To read the bible as the word of God, that "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" and preach there from that "In the sweat of other mans faces shalt though eat bread" to my mind can scarcely be reconciled with honest sincerity "the rich, famous and religions must have been apoplectic with him..." (NOW).

#### 1.1.4 Attributive variants, i.e.

To rule with a heavy hand/to rule with a **high** hand, the **great** enemy/the **last** enemy; to go to one's last home/to go to one's **long** home; to have no part nor lot in smth/to have **neither** part nor lot in smth; a **double-edged** sword/a two-edged sword, etc.

Contexts:

(8) And what happens from district to district, region to region, is sometimes as far apart as John Major and the British people. We know the reason local bargaining is being encouraged, it's to lower wages and conditions and give rich financial benefits to the few. There is a rule for a central research point but again colleagues, more is needed in the regions. Our union has been, without doubt, the **shining light** in terms of what we offer to members. And we must continue to improve and better the information that is provided. The easiest way is to channel resources into the regions (BNC).

(9) A man Vancouver's Robinson credits as US coaching's **leading light**. The man who led the United States national team to an inspiring Confederations Cup final in 2009. Who coached the Egyptian national team amid trying circumstances to the brink of World Cup qualification. Granted, both national team stints ended sourly. The US job was curtailed after a familiar Gold Cup defeat to Mexico (NOW).

(10) Another **leading light** for those taking a break from the slopes in Graubu? nden, Zum Bergfu? hrer (sertigtal.ch) looks every inch a classic piece of Switzerland. It holds its nerve at 6,105ft (1,861m), a restaurant lovingly slotted into a 400-year-old stone house. It serves filling comfort food for icy days – slabs of cheese and homemade cakes, as well as grilled fish and gourmet charcuterie boards. You can travel to this cosy bolthole – which can seat 100 people – by road or, in the snowy season, adventurous souls can even make the journey by crosscountry ski excursion or winter hike. Zum Bergfu? (NOW).

(11) Despite United's struggles this season, Cristiano Ronaldo, who returned to the club last summer, has been a **shining light**. He has netted 24 goals in all competitions and Ten Hag, according to reports, wants to include within his plans next season (NOW).

(12) Now the vegan Essex lad who's more likely to be found surfing and snowboarding than preening on Towie, has gone from the Black Death for bands to the **shining light** for the UK in Eurovision (NOW).

(13) UK tour shining light on “quiet Beatle” stopping in Cumbria UK tour **shining light** on The Beatle’s George Harrison stopping in Millom # A new music show highlighting the incredible talent of the late Beatle George Harrison is set to embark on a national tour after being premiered in Liverpool – and its stopping in South Cumbria (NOW).

#### 1.1.5 verbal variants, i.e.

to **cast** the first stone at smb/to **throw** the first stone at smb; to **add** one’s mite/to **contribute** one’s mite; to **drink** the bitter cup/to **drain** the bitter cup; to **be** in seventh heaven/to **feel** in seventh heaven; act the fool/play the fool; scare out of one’s wits/**frighten out** of one’s wits; to **pluck by** the beard/to **take by** the beard; to **have** one’s foot on smb’s neck/to **put** one’s foot on smb’s neck/to **set** one’s foot on smb’s neck; to **trample** under foot/to **tread** under foot; to **put** one’s hand to the plough/to **set** one’s hand to the plough; to take smth (close) to heart/to **lay** smth (close) to heart; to **lift up** one’s heel against smb/to **raise** one’s heel against smb; to **put** one’s house in order/to **set** one’s house in order; ask for bread and **be given** a stone/ask for bread and **receive** a stone; to **bind** smb hand and foot/to **tie** smb hand and foot; be **unworthy to loose** smb’s shoe latchet/to **unloose** smb’s shoe latchet; to **put** smb’s teeth on edge/to **set** smb’s teeth on edge; one’s tongue **cleaved** to the roof of one’s mouth/one’s tongue **clove** to the roof of one’s mouth/one’s tongue **glued** itself to the roof of one’s mouth; to **cast** pearls before swine/to **throw** pearls before swine, It is easier for a camel to **pass** through the eye of a needle than.../It is easier for a camel to **go** through the eye of a needle...; to be **tearing** one’s hair [out]/to be **pulling** one’s hair [out], etc.

#### Contexts:

(14) I am late – and please pay attention to my performance of humbly not wishing to be paid attention to”, i.e. Here’s me entering as unostentatiously as I know how – so you can see how much I regret my rudeness!” A comparable version of this is the face made by someone who barges into a room unannounced expecting to speak to a friend, only to find that this friend is engaged in an intimate professional consultation with another colleague. Although a verbal apology would probably fit the bill, the offender may feel constrained to **act the fool** he expects to be accused of being. Hence an otherwise unintelligible grimace. Or the actor who stumbles over his words for the second time at a rehearsal. He will often apologise by overplaying the spastic idiot everyone around must suspect him of being. There are also, I think, concealed apologies included in the otherwise straightforward rituals of farewell (BNC).

(15) “... I expect he is scared,” she said reasonably. “Weren’t you, at his age?” I’d already been away since I was nine,” Philip retorted. “We kept him at home and mollycoddled him, that’s the trouble. Oh, no, darling,

I’m not blaming you. You wanted him to settle down and accept you, and then Claire came along – I was furious with him for upsetting her like that- and he was allowed to slack and **play the fool** at that damned school till he was right behind. That’s all there is to it. “It’s not,” she said, “and you know it. He feels alienated.” Claudia, don’t go quoting those bloody child psychology books at me! Alienated, my foot!” He reached forward and rattled the poker in the fire.” You should talk to him about Eileen,” she insisted.” (BNC).

(16) Then I had an inspiration. I acted a little charade. His oriental slave. He likes me to **play the fool**. The stupidest things I do he calls witty. He has even got in the habit of joining in, stumbling after me (not that I’m very dazzling) like a giraffe. So I got him to let me write another letter. He looked in the envelope again. Then I talked him into going to London, as my plan requires (BNC).

(17) Blacks (perish the thought) now inhabit his old house and pitched battles between gangs and police make the streets untenable. But the trouble with the picture is that it does absolutely nothing with its various prognostications except **play the fool** with them. Joe Comerford’s *Reefer And The Model* (Metro, 15) won the feature film prize at the Celtic Festival, the Europa Prize at Barcelona, and was nominated in three categories in last year’s European Film Awards (Guardian).

#### 1.2 Grammatical variants:

##### 1.2.1 morphological variants, i.e.

open the **door** to something/open the **doors** to something; the **flesh-pot** of Egypt/the **flesh-pots** of Egypt/**fleshpots** of Egypt; old wives’ **tale**/old wives’ **tales**; out of the **mouth** of babes and sucklings/out of the **mouths** of babes and sucklings; the **power** of darkness/the **powers** of darkness; the **fruit** of one’s labour/the **fruits** of one’s labour; a mote in **one’s eye**/a mote in the **eye**; to change **one’s spots**/to change **its spots**; gall and wormwood/**the wormwood** and **the gall** (желчь и горечь); bone of **one’s bone** and flesh of **one’s flesh**/bone of **the bone** and flesh of the **flesh**; the breath of life/the breath of **one’s life**; if the blind **lead** the blind, both shall fall into the ditch/if the blind **leads** the blind, both shall fall into the ditch; the blind **leading** the blind/the blind **lead** the blind; Every **fool** will be meddling/**Fools** will be meddling; strengthen smb’s **hand**/strengthen smb’s **hands**; by the sweat of one’s **brow**/by the sweat of one’s **brows**; to make broad one’s **phylactery**/to make broad one’s **phylacteries**; the **sings** of the times/a **sing** of the times; to bury one’s **talent** in a napkin/to bury one’s **talents** in a napkin; the valley of the **shadows**/the valley of the **shadow** of death; to be in deep **water**/to be in deep **waters**.

#### Contexts:

(18) In the beginning of time, the Great Creator Reason, made the earth to be common treasure... The

work we are going about is this, to dig up George's Hill and the wasteland thereabouts, and to sow corn, and to eat our bread together by **the sweat of our brows**, and to lay the foundations of making the earth a common treasury for all, both rich and poor... (BNC).

(19) It's the start of a thing that's sweet," he told Tom one evening drawing on a long pipe filled with the first pluckings of their own tobacco." Now, I don't know which is worse, the chigoes or the natives. They nip you here, bite you there, they creep in under your skin and lie curled there. Till they suddenly wake, and – nip! – another man gone, another musket. "But Kit," Tom reminded him, barely a year ago, we hardly knew that this paradise existed. And think of it, when our ship returns, we could shoe our horses with silver! If we had horses. (By the way, next voyage, let's have some shipped.) We don't have to live **by the sweat of our brow**. Others may be obliged to. Not us. We can stand by and watch the crops ripen and grow. Sunshine by day, sweet dew by night, the soft wind. I tell you, this is the original garden God forgot to close." (BNC).

### 1.2.2 morpho-syntactical variants:

to follow in **the footsteps of smb**/to follow in **smb's** footsteps; lay something to **somebody's** charge/lay something to the charge **of somebody**; clay in **somebody's** hands/clay in the hands **of somebody**; **Solomon's** wisdom/the wisdom **of Solomon**; **Blind leaders** of the blind/the blind **leading** the blind; to have one's foot on **smb's** neck/to have one's foot on **the** neck of **smb**; strengthen **somebody's** hand/strengthen the hand **of somebody**; **Solomonian** judgment/**Solomonian** decision/**Solomon's** wisdom; under **smb's** wind/under the **wind of smb**; the promised land/the land of promise, etc.

Contexts:

(20) She thought about Dick, standing there on Fleet Moss, offering her his **promised land**. But it was not for her (BNC).

(21) Earlier in the year fittingly, during Passover, the festival which celebrates the Israelites' escape from Egypt and the beginning of the journey which eventually took them to **the Promised Land** – Rabbi Moïse announced with quiet satisfaction that their contributions had mounted up to a sum sufficient to buy three hundred dunams of land in Palestine, that the purchase was in the process of being arranged on their behalf by the Jewish National Fund, and that he himself would lead an advance party of settlers from Cork before the end of 1920 (BNC).

(22) Ward must have been thinking along the same lines, for as the road flattened out and the mist began to glimmer with a strange brightness, he said something about **the Promised Land**. The road dipped and we picked up speed (BNC).

(23) From the borders of **the Land of Promise** they must go back almost to where they came from.

They said it would be better to go back to Egypt (BNC).

### 1.3 Quantitative variants:

#### 1.3.1 Component truncation variants, i.e.

curse the day **one was born**/curse the day; forbidden fruit is **sweet (the sweetest)**/forbidden fruit; touch the ark **of the covenant**/ touch the ark; drain the cup of **humiliation** to the dregs/drain the cup to the dregs; sell one's birthright **for a mess of pottage**/sell one's birthright; as white as **the driven** snow/as white as snow; if the blind lead the blind, **both shall fall into the ditch**/the blind lead the blind/the blind leading the blind; an eye for an eye **and a tooth for a tooth**/an eye for a eye; a land **flowing with milk and honey**/a land of milk and honey; **To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.../To everything there is a season; to the four winds of heaven/to the winds of heaven; be weighed in the balance and found wanting/be weighed and found wanting; a voice crying (out) in the wilderness/a voice in the wilderness; the valley of the shadow of death/the valley of the shadow; the tree of the knowledge of good and evil/the tree of the knowledge; flourish like a green bay tree/flourish like a bay tree; like a lamb led to the slaughter/like a lamb to the slaughter; the straight and narrow path/the narrow path; there is nothing new under the sun/nothing new under the sun; Can the leopard change his sports?/change one's sports?**

The parts of the phraseological unit that get contracted may vary, thus we observe the following three types: (1) truncation of the initial part of the phraseological unit: (to keep as) the apple of **smb's** eye; (Man shall not live) by bread alone; (2) truncation of the ending part of the phraseological unit: Forbidden fruit (is the sweetest); flesh-pots (of Egypt); An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; (3) random or mixed truncation: (For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth?... In this case, the frequently truncated

variant is *a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; For everything there is a season*). As is seen, mainly it's communicative phraseological units (proverbs) that may get shortened.

### 1.3.2 Variants with added components, i.e.

*the olive branch/hold out/offer (someone) an/the olive branch; a voice in the wilderness/a lone voice in the wilderness; great and small/both great and small; beam in one's eye/beam in one's own eye.*

Contexts:

(24) *She took a deep breath, made the effort to be mature enough to pick up **the olive branch** (BNC).*

(25) *Ought to be scolding you, Rosette Fournier was saying, the way you've forgotten us – well, here I am with **an olive branch** – The stranger at the wheel turned her face, Flavia saw grey eyes, deep-set and large, the small full mouth boldly designed, the helmet of burnished curls (BNC).*

(26) *On January 21st President Bush **held out an olive branch**: some of the Arab countries supporting Iraq, he said, still had an important role to play in the future Middle East (BNC).*

### 1.3.3 Quantitative comparative variants, i.e.

In comparative phraseological units of biblical etymology such as *as hard as flint*, the first conjunction as a result of regular truncation becomes optional, which leads to the emergence of quantitative-variant pairs: **as white as snow/white as snow; as white as wool/white as wool; as poor as a church mouse/poor as a church mouse; as clear as crystal/clear as crystal; as old as Methuselah/old as Methuselah; as deaf as an adder/deaf as an adder; as patient as Job/patient as Job; as old as Adam/old as Adam; as hard a stone/hard as stone; as hard as the nether millstone/hard as the nether millstone; as old as the hills/old as the hills; as poor as a rat/poor as a rat; as poor as Job/poor as Job; as poor as a bandicoot/poor as a bandicoot; as poor as a fowl/poor as a fowl; as poor as wood/poor as wood; as unstable as water/unstable as water.**

Contexts:

(27) *"...That family **is as poor as church mice**, and Stair told me that Havvie had already managed to deal with that..." (BNC).*

(28) *"... Liz and her husband are **as poor as church mice**. So I reckon that it's up to me to decide..." (BNC).*

(29) *"... stood a young boy, his face **white as snow** under a mop of golden hair, a silver chaplet on his head" (BNC).*

(30) *"...through his humanity and his garments became **as white as snow** to the astonishment and joy of three of his disciples who were privileged to..." (BNC).*

## 2 Mixed (complex variants):

Mixed (complex) variants are different variants of one phraseological unit occurring through multiple changes [12, p. 502].

### 2.1 Verbal-quantitative variants, i.e.

*to bury one's talent(s) [in the earth]/to waste one's talent(s) (abilities); to drain (to drink) the cup [of bitterness (grief, sorrow, misery etc.)] to the dregs/to drain (to drink) the bitter cup; to put in question/to call into question.*

Contexts:

(31) *But an historic compromise remains a long way off. While in theory all parties are agreed that the talks should cover three 'strands' – Northern Ireland, north-south and Anglo-Irish relations – one UUP source said: "It seems these three strands mean different things to different people." In particular, the determination of the SDLP and the republic's government to put on the north-south, 'strand two' table the 1920 Government of Ireland Act establishing partition makes unionists very jittery. For if the act is **put in question** then so is subsequent British legislation, as well as article one of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which enshrine the principle that there can be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without majority consent (BNC).*

(32) *His observation, made in a characteristically matter of fact manner, was in no way intended as a put-down of his intellectual inheritors but simply as an indication of the fertility of that great harvest period. That is certainly how those years are enshrined in the folk memory of theoretical physicists. Whenever there is a puzzling development in physics which seems for a while to **put in question** our basic understanding, you will hear someone say "I have the feeling that it's 1925 all over again (BNC).*

(33) *"I should have written it down, sorry about that, that was a completely useless digression. Erm er anyway, never mind, um so um also erm particularly from a feminist perspective this idea of of so-called faulty family dynamics has been **called into question** by people like for example Hall and Lloyd who were saying that um, something along the lines of if you if you blame the family as a whole then this draws attention away from the fact that it's not the families who do the abusing, it's often, from their point of view, it was often the men that do" (BNC).*

(34) *I am sure you are all aware that Royston is an important cog in the Athletico jigsaw and his recurrent knee injury has played a large part in our poor results this season. On behalf of the club, I have approached Ross Chicken Ltd in the hope that 'Royst' may be relieved from his job as a chicken sexer and a more 'knee-friendly' task found for him. Such is the lot of the football manager that constant criticism has to be lived with. Recently, my managerial integrity has been **called into question** by a number of directors and supporters. Their concern relates to my dismissing the former club captain, Colin Webley (BNC).*

## 2.2 Substantive-quantitative variants

Substantive-quantitative variants are formed due to the variation of the substantive component together with the preposition through the expansion or contraction of the structure of the unit, i.e.

*To touch the arc of the covenant/to touch the ark; to drain the cup of humiliation to the dregs/to drain the cup to the dregs; the letter and the spirit of the law/the letter and the spirit.*

Biblical phraseological unit as poor as a church mouse along with the quantitative truncated version poor as a church mouse has the variant poor as church mice.

(35) *He'll never forgive her for the life she has spent and she won't let him see what she's come to at the end of it! Poor as a church mouse by her standards, and weak as a kitten!" It seemed a sad story to Carrie. She told Nick and said, "Don't let's ever quarrel like that. "Why should we?" I don't know. Just let's not. "I won't if you won't. Promise?" "Oh, all right." Nick looked bored but he licked his forefinger and drew it across his throat. Carrie did the same (BNC).*

(2) *Havvie Blaine, old Innescourt's heir. That family is as poor as church mice, and Stair told me that Havvie had already managed to snare one Yankee heiress, but she got away, and now he has caught another – not quite so rich, but rich enough. They will be restoring Dunblaine Castle – unless Havvie spends the lot on loose women, drink and gambling – begging your pardon for being frank, McAllister (BNC).*

## 2.3 Adjectival-quantitative variants

Adjectival-quantitative variants which are rather few in number and rarely used are formed due to the

expansion of the componential structure of the phraseological unit by means of the adjectival component, i. e. *have a case/have a good (strong) case* [10].

Contexts:

(37) The action may be restored for hearing on application or of the court's own motion. If the plaintiff appears but fails to prove his case to the satisfaction of the court, the court may nonsuit him or give judgment for the defendant. A power to nonsuit is peculiar now to the county court and is useful where the plaintiff may **have a good case** but "his tackle is not in order" (BNC).

(38) ...But do be careful. If you're going to complain, you have to do it within a reasonable time and in writing. Unfortunately, what constitutes reasonable time isn't clearly defined under British law, and if a court thinks you've taken too long to register your complaint, you may not **have a case**. But you'll still be legally entitled to some compensation if the machine is faulty, so it may be worth thinking about accepting a free repair or a replacement... (BNC).

(39) ...but she must have been in the wrong so they must have seen it as well, they haven't really **got a strong case** so they threw it out of court and last week he had a letter, he opened it, from the, from the court, and he thought oh gawld here we go again, he's got jury service... (BNC).

Finally, the preference of native speakers for certain variants of idioms over others was successfully identified by the corpus method (See Table 1. below).

Table 1

*Biblical phraseological variants frequency in British National Corpus*

Variant 1	Variant 2	Variant 1 (Quantity)	Variant 2 (Quantity)
Promised land	The land of promise	75 (9 fiction, 19 religion, 4 media)	1 (religion)
From this time forth	From this time on/onwards	0	10 (3 fiction, 3 non academic)
Tear one's hair	Pull one's hair (out)	1 (fiction)	3 (fiction)
Voice in the wilderness	Voice crying in the wilderness	4 (1 fiction)	3 (1 religion, 1 non academic, 1 miscellaneous)
A drop in the ocean	A drop in the bucket	24 (15 Media, 2 fiction contexts)	4 (2 Media)
A drop in the bucket	A drop of a bucket	4 (2 Media)	No contexts in BNC
Four corners of the world	Four corners of the earth	8 (4 fiction)	3 (1 media)
Dead and buried	Dead and gone	43 (10 media, 12 fiction)	21 (3 Media, 10 fiction)
By/in the sweat of one's brow/brows	In/by the sweat of one's face	6 (1 fiction, 4 media, 1 miscellaneous) In the sweat of one's brow – 1 (non academic medicine) By the sweat of their/our brows – 2	In the sweat of thy face – 1 (religious)
Shining light	Leading light	7 (5 media)	37 (3 fiction, 19 media)
Play the fool	act the fool	3 (2 fiction, 1 media)	1 (non academic social science)
In deep water	In deep waters	34 (11 fiction, 6 media)	3 (2 academic, 1 miscellaneous)
Doubting Thomas	Doubting Thomases	7 (2 fiction, 3 non academic)	3 (media)
Poor as a church mouse	Poor as church mice	7 (5 fiction, 1 media)	4 (3 fiction)
White as sheet	As white as sheet	8 (7 fiction)	14 (10 fiction)



### Conclusion

Thus, the study of the structural specificity of phraseological variants in English allows us to state that the variability inherent in phraseological units is also characteristic of biblical phraseological units, and the principles of their variation are identical. Taking into account their structural and semantic features, as well as the specifics of their functioning in different types of discourse (fiction, media, publicistic, political, historical, etc.) we may conclude that biblical phraseological units are often used in the English language, and the phraseological system is constantly developing. Initially appearing in speech, variants of the biblical phraseological units are then fixed in the language. The studied phraseological units are not static, non-developing units, but represent a 'living' and mobile, constantly changing linguistic material widely used in modern English.

The types of variation identified in the course of their quantitative and qualitative analysis, the branching and hierarchical organization of the variation system allowed to build a *biblical phraseological units variability model*, which arranges all the previously available disparate ideas about the types of variation changes, the specificity of variation processes in general phraseology and biblical one in particular, in comparison with linguistic variation. According to the variability model, it becomes possible to identify the most frequent structural and semantic types of biblical phraseological units and their variants along with their pragmatic potential in secondary contexts. The proposed model of phraseological variation will make it possible to predict the further development of possible variant structures, which will contribute to the expansion of the biblical phraseological system.

The types of variants include simple and complex variants; lexical, grammatical, quantitative variants. The usual lexical and occasional lexical variants are subdivided into substantive, verbal, attributive, prepositive, prepositive-substantive. Usual grammatical and occasional grammatical are represented by such types of variants as morphological, morpho-syntactical variants. Usual quantitative (including comparative variants) and occasional quantitative include types of

variants with truncation of components (including truncation of substantive, verbal, attributive, as well as initial and final parts of the phraseology consisting of more than one component), variants with addition of components.

The most common type of variation of the analysed English phraseological units of biblical origin is the lexical type, observed in 44 % of variation cases, while grammatical variation is characteristic only for 16% of the analysed units. Quantitative variants account for 22 % of the cases of variation, whereas combined variants account for 18 %.

The variation of the substantive component of the lexical variants of the studied English phraseological units is common in 45 % of the studied lexical variants, the verb component in 28 % of the lexical variants, the prepositional component of the phraseological units in 17 % and the attributive component in 10 % of the lexical variants.

Grammatical variants of the studied phraseological units of biblical origin allow for morphological, morphological-syntactic variability of the components. Morphological variability (often it is the possibility to change the grammatical form of a noun component) is common in 45 % of cases and morpho-syntactical variation in 23 % of cases of variation.

The most common type of quantitative variants of English phraseological units of biblical origin, are variants arising from the extension of the component composition of the units and comprising 90 % of the cases presented.

Communicative (proverbial) phraseological units of biblical etymology have multiple quantitative variants with truncation and complex/combined variants (usual and occasional) with lexicogrammatical variation of components.

The problem of phraseological variability retains its relevance due to the development and variability of phrases, dictated by the need to adapt to the conditions of contexts of different types of discourse, in which they are quite frequent in recent times. Thus the pragmatic specificity of biblical phraseology, the powerful pragmatic potential of the studied units are also the causes of biblical phraseological variability.

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