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Friend: A Covenant Term

by David Lamb

The main purpose of the word of God is to convince men to repent and enter into covenant with Jesus Christ, accepting him as Lord and Savior. This call to covenant is the basis for coming back into the presence of God, for only by entering into covenant with Jesus Christ can man be redeemed from the fall. It is therefore essential that we begin to understand the real meaning of covenant and begin to comprehend and recognize "covenant statements" as they appear in the scriptures.

A covenant statement is a word or phrase which implies a covenant relationship or is symbolically associated with such a relationship. Such a statement is much like an idiom or a figure of speech. It is a word or phrase which literally expresses a thought or idea but which also conveys a deeper meaning pertaining to covenant. An example is the frequently used Book of Mormon phrase, "Come unto Christ." This covenant statement of invitation not only invites all to seek out Jesus Christ, but also implies that all who truly seek him and desire to be a part of his kingdom must first enter into covenant with him. Another example of a covenant statement is the word "oath." In the scriptures, the swearing of an oath is synonymous with the making of a

covenant and the two words are used interchangeably.

Though the scriptures abound with numerous covenant terms and statements, one of the most beautiful is the usage of the word "friend." In its covenant context, the word "friend" means more than just an acquaintance or one who is known, liked, and trusted; it signifies that a covenant has been made between two individuals. Once we recognize that the word "friend" may carry the idea or expression of a covenant relationship, we can begin to more fully understand the true significance and underlying meanings of certain scriptures which contain this covenant word.

In Genesis 17:2 we find God enacting his covenant with Abraham: "And I will make my covenant between me and thee." From this time forward, Abraham is referred to as a "friend of God" because of his covenant relationship with the great Jehovah. Isaiah 41:8 states:

But thou, Israel, art my servant
Jacob whom I have chosen,
The seed of Abraham my friend.

As used in this scripture, the word "friend" is a covenant term and acknowledges that Abraham is in covenant with God. This covenant is not exclusive to Abraham

personally, but is extended to all of Abraham's descendents, the entire house of Israel. Another example of this covenant term is found in 2 Chronicles 20:7, "... Abraham, thy friend for ever." Once again, Abraham and his descendents are identified as the covenant people of God.

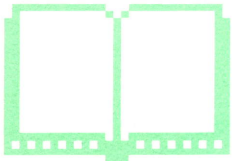
Knowing the covenant meaning of the word "friend" can greatly enhance our understanding of the total idea or message which is sometimes conveyed by certain passages of scriptures. A graphic example of this can be found in Zechariah 13:6 concerning the death of the Messiah:

And one shall say unto him,
"What are these wounds in thine
hands?"
Then he shall answer:
"Those with which I was
wounded in the house of
my friends."

This moving prophecy describes the rejection of Jesus Christ by his own covenant people.

The usage of the word "friend" as a covenant term is not restricted to the Bible, but can be found in the Book of Mormon as well. As with the Bible, recognition of the word "friend" as a covenant term may greatly enhance our understanding

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Reviewed by
Mya L. Treat

Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus

By David Biven and Roy Blizzard Jr, Center for Judaic Christian Studies; published by Makor Foundation 1983, Price \$8.95; 172 pages; available through Christian book stores.

In this book, Mr. Biven and Dr. Blizzard examine the origin of the Synoptic Gospels. The accepted belief is that the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) were originally written in Aramaic or Greek. The authors devote the book to providing persuasive evidence for a Hebrew origin of these books. They accomplish this by first examining the Aramaic and Greek theories and showing where they are in error, and then presenting linguistic and extra-Biblical evidence, as well as evidence from the Gospels themselves, to support their theory of a Hebrew origin.

Though Biven and Blizzard are both Hebrew scholars, they have managed to write a book that readers with no scholarly background will find understandable and interesting. Though the uninitiated reader may find chapters two and three potentially confusing, they will find that as they continue to read, their questions are answered. Not only will they be fascinated with the implications of a Hebrew origin for these Gospels, but they will find that they have received important Biblical instruction.

What difference does it make what language the gospels were written in? The Synoptic Gospels contain Jesus' direct words. Christianity is based on the principles that Jesus taught while on earth. Because our English Bibles are translations, it is critical that translators start with the original language in which the text was written in order that they might convey the correct meaning in translation. According to the

authors, this has not been achieved because these gospels were translated from Greek texts. As a matter of fact, many of the teachings of Jesus have been incorrectly conveyed.

Many of the things Jesus said were actually Hebrew idioms. This makes sense because he was speaking to a Jewish audience and wanted to communicate in terms they would readily understand. Because these Hebrew idioms have been translated for their word value and not their idiomatic value, their exact meaning has been lost. This inaccurate interpretation of some passages has caused theological errors to be made.

For example, we read in Matthew 5:41 (IV) "resist not evil." This statement appears to contradict other scriptures such as "Abhor that which is evil" (Romans 12:9) and "Resist the devil" (James 4:7). However, the apparent contradiction disappears when we look at the original Hebrew. The authors state:

When we translate this verse back into Hebrew, we see that Jesus was not creating a new saying, but quoting a well-known Old Testament proverb. This proverb appears, with slight variations, in Psalms 37:1, 8, and Proverbs 24:19. In modern English we would translate this maxim: "Don't compete with evildoers." In other words do not try to rival or vie with a neighbor who has wronged you. (page 108)

We must realize there is a big distinction between dealing with an ornery neighbor and confronting someone who intends to do you violence. We are to follow Proverbs 24:29:

Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me; I will render to the man according to his work.

The authors illustrate this point well: "If, for instance, a neighbor dumps a pail of garbage on our lawn, we are not to retaliate by dumping two pails on his lawn."

The authors take issues such as pacifism (from which the "resist not evil" example was taken) and martyrdom and show, through Hebrew, Jesus' real teachings on these subjects.

Using this approach the authors also provide new understanding for a number of words and concepts. For example, "multitudes" (as in Matthew 5:1) means "those standing by" or "the people present." "Give to him that asketh of thee" (Matthew 5:44) means "give to him that asks for a loan."

For Book of Mormon believers, this book has additional importance. Even if the Synoptic Gospels were originally written in Hebrew, the rest of the New Testament was written in Greek. However, the authors were Hebrew speakers. And though they wrote in the Greek language, the thought patterns, idioms and sentence structure they used are Hebrew. This is exactly the case with the Book of Mormon. Its authors were Hebrews but they wrote in reformed Egyptian because it used less space on metal plates. And because they were Hebrew, the idiomatic expressions and sentence structures in the Book of Mormon are Hebrew.

Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus is part of the big picture in opening up the Christian world to the concept of the transliteration of scripture. Even though you may not agree with all the examples and interpretations in the book, it is exciting to see one more way the Lord is preparing Bible-believing scholars for the Book of Mormon breakthrough. ZRF

The Significance of

Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus

The Book of Mormon was written by Hebrew speakers in a language they called reformed Egyptian because, as they explained, it took less room on the metal plates they used to preserve their records. Even though the language was Egyptian, the thought patterns and idioms were Hebrew. Book of Mormon believers have understood this for years. It now appears that a similar situation is evident in parts of the New Testament.

While we do not agree with all the interpretations in the examples cited in the book *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus*, nevertheless, the basic premise of the book is very important to Book of Mormon believers. The thesis of this book as stated on page 22 is “not only to show that the original gospel was communicated in the Hebrew language but to show that the entire New Testament can only be understood from a Hebrew perspective.” In other words, Bible believers are discovering something they did not realize before—the New Testament is actually a Hebrew book. They can now see that there is a Hebrew pattern underlying the English text. This will help to set the stage for their acceptance of the fact that another English text has an underlying Hebrew pattern—the Book of Mormon.

Biven and Blizzard state on page 23: “Today, as a result of recent research, we know that the key to our understanding of this material (New Testament) is Hebrew.” Of course, Book of Mormon students have also been saying this about the Book of Mormon for the last few years. In fact, by understanding a type of Hebrew poetry called chiasmus we are told in the first two verses of the Book of Mormon that the learning of the Jews, meaning the ancient Hebrews, is the key to

understanding the Book of Mormon. Most Book of Mormon believers have yet to realize the full significance of this information. Those who have come to this realization are discovering a new dimension in their study of the word of God, especially the Book of Mormon.

God saves the best until last. This especially includes the knowledge that the Book of Mormon is an ancient Hebrew book. We now realize that God created the ancient Hebrew people, including their laws, customs, language, beliefs, etc. as a gigantic audio-visual aid to teach us about the gospel. The non-Restoration Christians are also learning this. Their increasing interest in the Hebrew nature of both the Old and New Testament is without a doubt a necessary prelude to their recognition of the Hebrew nature—and consequently, the divinity—of the Book of Mormon.

The explosion of new information about the Hebrew nature of the Book of Mormon is God’s call to action to all those who consider themselves Book of Mormon believers. The Hebrew concept of covenant and the significance of the Hebrew Feasts have also been the subject of recent Christian books. It is very clear to those who have “eyes to see” that the Lord is preparing the Christian world to receive the Book of Mormon through the concept of things Hebrew.

Let us not lose sight of the fact that the explosion of new information about the ancient Hebrew nature of the Book of Mormon is a forewarning to Book of Mormon believers that the much larger explosion of spiritual power we commonly call the endowment is rapidly approaching. Let us stop treating the Book of Mormon lightly and remove the condemnation placed on all Book of Mormon

believers in 1832 (D&C 83:8). The Lord is moving in a mighty way to fulfill the covenants he made to Lehi, Nephi, Joseph of Egypt, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the other members of the house of Israel. ZRF

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of certain passages encountered within the Book of Mormon scriptures.

A prime example of this is found in 2 Nephi 1:55 as Lehi extends his final blessing to Zoram, the former servant of Laban:

And now, Zoram, I speak unto you:
Behold, thou art the servant of Laban;
Nevertheless, thou hast been brought out of the land of Jerusalem,
And I know that thou art a true friend unto my son Nephi, for ever.

The usage of the word “friend” in this context refers to more than just a friendly relationship; it is a covenant term which tells us that Nephi and Zoram are in covenant. The account of the life and death struggle between Nephi and Zoram as they leave the city of Jerusalem with the plates of brass is given in 1 Nephi 1:127-144. This conflict is settled and all fears relinquished as the two men swear an oath, or make a covenant (1 Nephi 1:137 - 142). As with all true covenants, the covenant which is made between Nephi and Zoram remains a lasting bond which is never broken. Nephi and Zoram are more than just friends; they are covenant brothers, bound by an oath which is more lasting and sacred even than family ties. This is pointed out by Lehi in 2 Nephi 1:55

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when he refers to Zoram as “. . . a true friend unto my son Nephi for ever.” As Lehi’s blessing over Zoram continues, he states that because Zoram has been faithful (to his covenant with Nephi), his seed will be blessed even as the descendants of Nephi, his covenant partner. Because Nephi and Zoram are united in their covenant, their descendants are to receive the same blessing. Knowing that the word “friend” is employed as a covenant term in this set of scripture adds a new dimension to our understanding of Lehi’s blessing upon Zoram and the friendship shared by Nephi and Zoram.

In King Benjamin’s proclamation we find another example of the word “friend” as it applies to a covenant relationship. King Benjamin begins his message by greeting his people as “my brethren.” While “brother” is also a covenant term, in this case “brethren” refers to blood lineage as they are all from the house of Israel.

As he continues his speech, he salutes the people from time to time in various ways such as “O my people,” or “O ye old men, and also

ye young men, and you little children,” or “And now my brethren,” etc. These various salutations during the first portion of his message can be found in Mosiah 1:47, 52, 70, 73, 79, 86, and 92.

As King Benjamin finishes the first part of his message, he notices that the fear of the Lord has come upon his people and they have all fallen to the ground. In reading Mosiah 2:3-5, we find that these people enter into a covenant with God by asking that the atoning blood of Christ be upon them. (Also note Mosiah 3:6.)

Immediately after the people enter into a covenant with the Lord, King Benjamin addresses them in a different manner. For the first time in his speech, he addresses them as “friends:”

And King Benjamin again opened
his mouth and began to speak
unto them saying:
“My friends and my brethren,
My kindred and my people, . . .”
Mosiah 2:7

King Benjamin’s introduction of

the salute “my friends” into the proclamation at this particular point is more than an expression of fondness for his subjects; it is recognition that the people have entered into a covenant. In addressing the people as “friends,” King Benjamin acknowledges that now they are all covenant partners with the Lord Jesus Christ. Once again, the recognition of this covenant statement serves to increase our understanding.

Recognizing and understanding covenant terms can greatly increase our comprehension of the scriptures and the meaning of covenant. This in turn will increase our understanding of the call to enter into covenant with Jesus Christ, the one who gave his life that we might be his “friends” (covenant partners).

Greater love hath no man than
this,
That a man lay down his life for
his friends.
Ye are my friends,
If ye do whatsoever I command
you.

John 15:13-14
ZRF

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