

redeem, meaning of, March 2007, LeGrand Baker

The word “redeem” has a number of different meanings, and the place in the scriptures where one reads the word has a great deal to do with what its meaning is. In both the New and the Old Testaments the words translated “redeem” or “redeemed” mean to purchase (as one would purchase something in the market place) or to ransom (as to pay to get another out of prison or out of bondage). The usual connotation is that through his atonement, the Lord has ransomed or purchased us from the consequences and bondage of sin.¹

The primary difference between the meanings in the New and Old Testaments have to do with one’s relationship with the person who does the redeeming. In the Hebrew, the debt is paid by a brother or other relative, and the family relationship is a necessary part of the word’s meaning. That is, a “redeemer” is one who pays the debts of a brother to get him out of bondage or debtor’s prison. Or, when a man dies, and leaves behind his widow and family, a near kin is obligated by law to marry, or otherwise arrange to care for the woman and her children. For example, in the story of Ruth, Boaz married Ruth according to his family rights to redeem her in her widowhood, because, as Naomi pointed out, he was their “kinsman.” It is significant that “kinsman” in that story, and “Redeemer” in Job’s statement, “I know that my redeemer liveth” are translated from the same Hebrew word.²

In the Hebrew, a “redeemer” is the member of the family who redeems his kinsman. However, the word “Redeemer,” is most frequently used in the Old Testament to mean Jehovah, and to represent his relationship with the people of Israel.³

In the New Testament, the Greek meanings of the words that are translated “redeem” carry no connotation of family responsibility. Consequently, the word “Redeemer” is not found in the New Testament. Even though the Greek words do not convey the idea of a family relationship, almost all of the ways the words “redeem” and “redeemed” are used in the New Testament focus on the ideas of one’s being a child and an heir of God.⁴

1See the Hebrew and Greek dictionaries at the back of James Strong, ed., *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Strong lists several Greek words that were translated redeem, redeemed, or redemption. They mean either to purchase or to ransom.

2Strong, Hebrew # 1350. The definition reads: “...to redeem (according to the Oriental law of kinship), i.e. to be the next of kin (and as such to buy back a relative’s property, marry his widow, etc) ... purchase, ransom, redeem (redeemer), revenger.”

3The word “Redeemer” is found 18 times in our Old Testament, all but 5 are in Isaiah, of those 5, 2 are in the Psalms, and the other 3 are in various books. Isaiah 6 shows that he had a firsthand understanding of the word. Nephi cherished Isaiah’s words because he, like Nephi, had seen the Saviour. (2 Nephi 11:1-3)

4The words “redeem” and “redeemed” are only found a total of eight times in the New Testament. Please read them. They are beautiful. Here they all are:

The most important meaning of the word (I think the use of the superlative here is not so much my opinion as it is simply true. I'll explain later.) The most important meaning of the word in the Old Testament is the one in the Book of Job.⁵

For I know that my Redeemer liveth,
and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:
And though after my skin worms destroy this body,
yet in my flesh shall I see God:
Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another;

Galatians 4:1-9 - "To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father".

Titus 2:8-15 - "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Luke 24:13-25 - "And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, ... Jesus himself drew near, ... And they said unto him, . But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel:"

Galatians 3:1-16 - "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: hat the blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."

Revelation 5:1-12 - "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."

Revelation 14:1-9 - ["redeemed" is used twice in this chapter. The second reads:] "These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb."

⁵The book of Job is believed by many scholars to be the oldest book in the Old Testament. Assuming that is true, the use of the word "Redeemer" in Job to mean to bring into the presence of God, would make that the oldest use of the word in the scriptures.
Correct footnote form

though my reins be consumed within me. (Job 19:25-27)

The same meaning is found throughout the Book of Mormon, where the words “redeem,” “redeemed,” and “Redeemer,” usually mean that same thing as in Job: “yet in my flesh shall I see God” – the opposite of “second death,” which is to be excluded from the presence of God.

In Book of Mormon theology, the “Redeemer,” is the One who makes that return possible, because he is the God to whom one first returns, before one returns to our Heavenly Father. If to be redeemed means to be brought into the presence of God, then the phrase “plan of redemption” means the plan whereby men and women can be brought back into God’s presence, and has the same connotation as the frequently repeated invitation to “come unto Christ.”⁶

6 Wherefore we labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest, lest by any means he should swear in his wrath they should not enter in, as in the provocation in the days of temptation while the children of Israel were in the wilderness. (Jacob 1:7.)

And now, my beloved brethren, I would that ye should come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved. (Omni 1:26)

And this one at the conclusion of the Book of Mormon. (Note: I have put it in its two paragraphs here. The word “deny” as used here, does not mean to swear something is not true, rather it means to abstain from or to refuse access to, as in denying someone entrance into a room.) I have written it in

I declare these things unto the fulfilling of the prophecies. And behold, they shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the everlasting God; and his word shall hiss forth from generation to generation. And God shall show unto you, that that which I have written is true. And again I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift, and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing. And awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled.

Here are several Book of Mormon examples:

Abinadi identifies as the “children” of God, those who are redeemed— who are brought before the Saviour to be judged, and who then may, by right, stay in his presence forever. Those are the same people whom Christ calls “my sons and my daughters” in this passage in Ether.

13. And when he had said these words, behold, the Lord showed himself unto him, and said: Because thou knowest these things ye are [present tense] redeemed from the fall; therefore ye are [present tense] brought back into my presence; therefore I show myself unto you.

14. Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters. (Ether 3: 13-14)

A beautiful example is Lehi in 2 Nephi 1:15.

But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell [past tense]; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love.

I am convinced that is one of the most important verses in the Book of Mormon, and probably in all the scriptures, because it defines the single most important doctrine of the gospel: By using the symbolism of an embrace it describes Christ’s personal relationship with the righteous, and incorporates into that same verse a number of other key words in addition to “redeemed.” The entire concept of this redemption is suspended on the past tense quality of the word “hath.” For Lehi, his redemption has occurred in his own past, but through the embrace it also continues as the vitality of his present, and is the projected hope of his future.

The final phrase in our verse, “and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love,” is a reference to a physical embrace, a present and eternal token of friendship – a “hope” that brings the future fulfillment of the covenant into the reality of the present until it changes the very nature of one’s eternal being. (That, by the way, is the way I understand the meaning of the word

Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves [abstain from] of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves [abstain from] of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny [refuse access to] the power of God. And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not [not refuse yourself access to] his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto

“hope,” in Moroni 7.)

I believe that the concept and the realization of “redemption” are together the single most important doctrine of the gospel. It encompasses the power and meaning of the atonement and of all of our eternal relationships with the Saviour – as a flower encompasses all of the promises of the seed that was planted, is the product of the stem and the hope of the nourishment from the roots and the leaves that grew from that seed – and that same flower is the promise of fruit which will produce other seeds, and thus the flower is both the glory of the past and prefiguration of eternal lives in perpetuity. Redemption is the epitome of friendship, and the timeless light of all that is life.

Another Book of Mormon example is Lehi’s blessing to his son Jacob.

Nevertheless, Jacob, my first-born in the wilderness, thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain. Wherefore, thy soul shall be blessed, and thou shalt dwell safely with thy brother, Nephi; and thy days shall be spent in the service of thy God. wherefore, I know that thou art redeemed [present tense], because of the righteousness of thy Redeemer; for thou hast beheld [past tense] that in the fullness of time he cometh to bring salvation unto men. And thou hast beheld in thy youth his glory; wherefore, thou blessed even as they unto whom he shall minister in the flesh; the Spirit is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. And the is prepared from the fall of man, and salvation is free. (2 Nephi 2:2-4)

Here again, the power of the concept is in the verb: “I know that thou art [present tense] redeemed.”

Another example is Nephi, writing about himself, his brother Jacob, and Isaiah.

And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in his words. For I will liken his words unto my people, and I will send them forth unto all my children, for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him. And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him; wherefore, I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true. Therefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word. Nevertheless, God sendeth more witnesses, and he proveth all his words. (2 Nephi 11:2-3)

In another place Nephi wrote:

I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell [past tense]. I have charity for my people, and great faith in Christ that I shall meet many souls spotless at his judgment-seat. (2 Nephi 33:6-7)

Alma left us with this testimony:

And it came to pass after they had fasted and prayed for the space of two days and two nights, the limbs of Alma received their strength, and he stood up and began to speak

unto them, bidding them to be of good comfort: For, said he, I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord [past tense]; behold I am born of the Spirit. And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. I say unto you, unless this be the case, they must be cast off; and this I know, because I was like to be cast off. Nevertheless, after wading through much tribulations, repenting nigh unto death, the Lord in mercy hath seen fit to snatch me out of an everlasting burning, and I am born of God. My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more.(Mosiah 27:23-28)

One of my favorites examples is the conclusion of Helaman's letter to Moroni. One reason I like it so much is because it is so subtle. Another reason is because it gives us an insight into the very private friendship in the lives of these two great prophets.

And now, my beloved brother, Moroni, may the Lord our God, who has redeemed us and made us free, keep you continually in his presence; yea, and may he favor this people, even that ye may have success in obtaining the possession of all that which the Lamanites have taken from us, which was for our support. And now, behold, I close mine epistle. I am Helaman, the son of Alma. (Alma 58:41.)

More examples of "redeem" meaning to be brought into the presence of God are: Jacob 6:8-9, Mosiah 26:21-28, Alma 13:1-6, Alma 19: 6-14, Alma 36:22-26, Alma 58:41, Helaman 8: 22-23, Helaman 14:15-19, Mormon 9:12-14, Moroni 7:2-4, D&C 43:29-30, D&C 88:14-32, D&C 138:58-60, and, of course, one must include the Lord's promise to Everyman and Everywoman in D&C 93:1.

Abinadi's entire instructions to Alma rest upon the importance of one's becoming a son or daughter of God. In that context, then, one may assume that in his statement, "For behold, did not Moses prophesy unto them concerning the coming of the Messiah, and that God should redeem his people?" Abinadi was using word "redeem" to mean to be brought into the presence of God, and also to teach Alma that one must become a child of Christ.

I believe that if the whole plan of salvation were reduced to a single sentence, the first part of that sentence would be about the Saviour's atonement, and the last part would read: "that one might return and remain in the presence of God." That was the promise, from the beginning.

After Adam and Eve left the Garden, they were taught the meaning of sacrifice.

And in that day the Holy Ghost fell upon Adam, which beareth record of the Father and the Son, saying: I am the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning, henceforth and forever, that as thou hast fallen thou mayest be redeemed, and all mankind, even as many as will."

Adam understood the full impact of “thou mayest be redeemed,” and said,

Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God. (Moses 5: 9-10)

It is significant to me that the Saviour emphasized that same relationship in the Beatitudes.

Blessed are all the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
And blessed are all the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. (3 Nephi 12: 8-9)

When I read Abinadi’s words to Alma,

23 They are raised to dwell with God who has redeemed them; thus they have eternal life through Christ, who has broken the bands of death.

I believe that Alma understood precisely what Abinadi was saying.