



May 28, 2018

Imagine this scenario: a young high school student comes to his first Way Ministry Bible fellowship. As he is visiting with the people there, he makes the statement that in the Bible, both God and Jesus Christ have social media accounts. The perplexed listeners respond with “What?”

He replies, “Look, it’s right here in James 2:23, speaking about Abraham, ‘...he was called the FRIEND of God.’ And then John 1:43 says, ‘The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, FOLLOW me.’”

Someone in the fellowship explains, “Oh, you’re thinking of ‘friend’ as someone who is on a list of contacts on a social-networking Web site. That’s not what it means *here*. Here it means that Abraham was dear to God. And when Jesus asked Philip to ‘follow’ him, he wasn’t asking him to subscribe to his updates on his social media page. Jesus was actually asking Philip to physically follow him, to join him and become his disciple. Neither God nor Jesus Christ have a social-networking page.”

One of the other high school students in attendance adds, “We just learned about this! This is a very basic key to understanding how the Word interprets itself: When we read the Bible, the words we read in the King James Version have to be understood according to their Biblical usage—how they were used when the King James Version was written.”

Although the above scenario is a bit far-fetched, it does illustrate how in a living language, like English, word meanings can change quickly. The words “friend” and “follow” have only attained their digital technology meanings within the last couple of decades. The King James Version of the Bible was completed over 400 years ago, in 1611!

When we were growing up, we probably didn’t learn the meaning for some words used back then. In fact, the usage of some English words in the King James Version

has changed, while other words have dropped out of use entirely. Wherever we lack a clear and accurate understanding of the words of God’s Word, we can experience confusion about what God is saying and as a result, live without the blessing He intended. But using this key to Biblical research—a word or words must be interpreted according to Biblical usage—can help us arrive at God’s original intent.

There are resources that can help us understand the meaning of an English word as it was used in 1611. A good English dictionary is one. In addition to providing the contemporary definition of a word, the dictionary sometimes includes labels indicating that a specific meaning is uncommon in modern English. These labels are “archaic” or “obsolete.”

The front matter of *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, Eleventh Edition, tells us that the label “archaic” means that a word once in common use is found today only sporadically or in special contexts. The label *obs* for “obsolete” means that there is no evidence the word has been used since 1755 (the date of the publication of Samuel Johnson’s first dictionary).

So as we read this Bible, it’s important to know that the words in the King James Version are either (1) still in use in modern English with the same meaning, (2) archaic—now used only sporadically or in special contexts, (3) obsolete—out of use altogether, or (4) have had a change in meaning since 1611.

Here is one example of a word used in the King James Version that is basically used only in context of the Bible and its meaning is uncommon in modern English.

*Luke 2:49:*

*And he [Jesus] said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? WIST ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?*

“Wist” is shown in the *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, Eleventh Edition, with the archaic meaning of “know.” Jesus asked his parents, “Did you not KNOW that I must be about my Father’s business?”

Let’s consider the class of words that has not become obsolete, but whose usages, or meanings, have changed during the centuries. “Carriage” is an example of an English word whose meaning has changed.

*Acts 21:15:*

*And after those days we took up our CARRIAGES, and went up to Jerusalem.*

In modern usage, the word “carriage” describes something that is a wheeled support carrying a burden, but an obsolete usage is “burden, load.” *How to Enjoy the Bible*, by E. W. Bullinger, states it “was used of what was carried. To-day it is used of that which carries.” The Revised Version renders Acts 21:15 as “And after these days we took up our BAGGAGE, and went up to Jerusalem.”

Another place we can uncover the Biblical usage of English words is to check a concordance or a lexicon. We’ll look at an example of this with the word “prevent.”

*I Thessalonians 4:15:*

*For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not PREVENT them which are asleep.*

In modern English, the word “prevent” means “impede.” Well, of course, God’s children who are alive and remain at Christ’s return won’t impede the dead in Christ from rising.

When we look at the definition of the Greek word for “prevent” in *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* by James Strong (#5348), we learn it means “precede.” This is in perfect harmony with verse 16, which states that “the dead in Christ shall rise FIRST.” God’s children who are alive and remain at the time of the gathering won’t precede, or come before, those who are asleep in Christ. We can also see this sense of the word in an English dictionary, which shows that the word “prevent” has an archaic meaning of “to go or arrive before.”

Now as we read God’s Word, we are even clearer on how the Word interprets itself. It’s a joy to build our Biblical understanding of God’s Word with such a fundamental research key—a word or words must be interpreted according to Biblical usage. Using this key and the tools of a dictionary and concordance, we can “wist” what God’s intent is in His Word so we can live it!

*For more information, visit [www.theway.org](http://www.theway.org)*

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