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John Gee

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Book of Mormon Word Usage: “Seal You His”


The verb *to seal* occurs some 34 times in the Book of Mormon.¹ In most of these instances the verb takes (is followed by) a direct object referring to such things as the law, a book, records, words, an account, an epistle, an interpretation, revelation, the truth, and the stone interpreters.² Twice, however, the verb *to seal* takes a person as a direct object that is qualified by a possessive pronoun:

Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, *may seal you his*, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all. (Mosiah 5:15; emphasis added)

For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and *he doth seal you his*; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked. (Alma 34:35; emphasis added)

While use of the term *to seal* to mean “to mark as one’s property, and secure from danger”³ was known in Joseph Smith’s day, it was not usually used of persons. What, then, are we to make of the expression “seal you his” in the Book of Mormon? Hebrew seals from before the Babylonian exile (and

thus in use during Lehi’s time) provide helpful insight. Many of those seals contain a formulaic inscription reading “belonging to,” followed by the owner’s name.⁴ To seal a document or an object, a person would wrap string or twine around it, place a daub of mud on the knot, and press the seal into the mud. Affixing this sort of seal marked the object as the possession of the person in whose name it was sealed.

It is this cultural milieu that underlies the seemingly peculiar usage in the Book of Mormon and clarifies its meaning: our actions allow either Christ or the devil to place his seal on us to indicate to whom we belong. 

Notes

1. Title Page (twice); 1 Nephi 14:26; 2 Nephi 18:16; 26:17; 27:7, 8 (twice), 10 (thrice), 11, 15, 17, 21, 22; 30:3, 17; 33:15; Mosiah 5:15; 17:20; Alma 34:35; Helaman 10:7 (twice); 3 Nephi 3:5; Ether 3:22, 23, 27, 28; 4:5 (thrice); 5:1; Moroni 10:2.
2. See 2 Nephi 18:16 (law); 2 Nephi 27:7, 10, 17, 22 (book); Moroni 10:2 (records); 2 Nephi 27:10, 11, 15 (words); 2 Nephi 26:17; Ether 3:22, 27; 4:5; 5:1 (account); 2 Nephi 3:5 (epistle); Ether 4:5 (interpretation); 2 Nephi 27:10 (revelation); Mosiah 17:20 (truth); Ether 3:23, 28 (stone interpreters).
3. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. “seal,” definition 8, citing Song of Solomon 4:12: “A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.”
4. See Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, The Israel Exploration Society, and The Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997), 470.

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measure of apostasy and corrective reformation, the Protestant view; and (3) total apostasy and a complete restoration of primitive Christianity, the LDS view. Arguing the strength of the LDS position, Bickmore examined three doctrines that evolved in the first few centuries of Christianity: the nature of

God, God’s relationship with nature, and the nature of divine unity. He asserted that in each case the doctrine changed from something closely resembling LDS theology and toward the doctrines of later Christianity. Bickmore closed by addressing the Catholic and Protestant responses to the evolution of theology in the ancient Christian church. He is the author of *Restoring the Ancient Church*, published by the Foundation for Apologetic Information