
“Enemies” to “Foes”

A reprint from *The ENJOY THE BIBLE QUARTERLY* — 2003, 1st Quarter

— Keith R. Blades

1 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

(Psalm 110:1)

34 For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,

35 Until I make thy foes thy footstool.

(Acts 2:34-35)

Psalm 110:1 is cited more than once in the Gospel accounts and the opening of the book of Acts. In connection with this it is interesting to note that the word “enemies” remains the same in each citation, except for when Peter quotes the verse in Acts 2. Here the King James translators saw reason to use the English word “foes” instead of “enemies.” This is not only interesting but instructive. For in so doing they used the English word that properly fit the situation that then existed. By using the word “foes” it appropriately reflects and expresses the advancement that had taken place in the attitude of the Lord’s “enemies” at the time of the events in the opening chapters of the book of Acts. For though a “foe” is certainly an “enemy,” he is actually an advanced form of “enemy.” He is one whose opposition has intensified, which is exactly the situation Israel was in following their rejection of Christ.

Both words denote the issue of someone being opposed to you, but they differ in their description of that opposition. Of the two words, “enemy” is the more basic and the less powerful of the two terms. An “enemy” is opposed to you and is not your friend, but it is possible for an “enemy” to leave you alone. An “enemy,” for

example, does not have to attack you, or harass you, or actively trouble you, or set himself in determined opposition to you. He just may want nothing to do with you. He can just make it known to you that he is opposed to you, and pretty much leave it at that. Or he can simply resist any attempts that you make to be friendly to him, even expressing his disdain for you, but doing so without actively turning against you with the determination to harm you or get rid of you.

However when someone is your “foe” his attitude toward you is different, and because of this he is in active opposition to you. A “foe’s” enmity towards you is very strong. In fact a “foe’s” attitude is one of hatred toward you. A “foe” has usually been your “enemy” for sometime previous to becoming your “foe.” But then certain things occur or take place that make it so that his attitude towards you worsens. His disdain for you grows into hatred, and his former less active opposition to you grows into the determination to be actively hostile to you.

Simply put, this is the basic difference between an “enemy” and a “foe.” A “foe” is an “enemy,” but when someone is your “foe” he is specifically hostile towards you, being motivated by hatred for you and the determination to vent that hatred upon you and to rid himself of you.

Now this is the very thing that is being conveyed in Acts 2. The people of Israel had gone from being God’s “enemies” to His “foes.” In view of apostate Israel’s opposition to the Lord and His ministry over the previous 3 years, their attitude toward Him had worsened. They had been His “enemies” right from the start, but with the worsening of their attitude their disdain grew into

hatred. And when it grew into hatred, so also did the determination grow within them to become actively hostile towards the Lord and eventually to get rid of Him.

The Lord explained the reality of this to His apostles in John 15:18-25. In view of their hatred, the leaders of Israel's apostate religious system, along with their followers, went from being "enemies" to being "foes." As such they killed the Lord, which was their first act, so to speak, as "foes." But just as the Lord told His apostles, their hatred would not stop there. It would continue on. Hence their status as "foes" would be the issue as God's program with Israel continued on following the cross and the Lord's return to the Father.

For this reason the word changes from "enemies" to "foes" in Acts 2. God now looked upon the people of Israel as His "foes," as Peter's message to them makes clear. In view of this they were just 'one step away,' so to speak, from being accounted worthy of destruction. They were now part of "this untoward generation," as Peter said, being God's "foes." Therefore if they did not 'save themselves from this untoward generation,' they would be destroyed from among the people in the day of the Lord's wrath. The fact that they were now God's "foes" was not lost on many of them. For as verse 37 relates, they were "pricked in their heart" and they said, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?"

Changing the word from "enemies" to "foes" is significant and accurate. "Foes" is our English word that perfectly reflects the historical context as well as the designed impact of Peter's message, conveying as it does the advancement that had occurred in apostate Israel's opposition to God. — *K.R. Blades*