

As a child, my family attended the Church of Christ. Of all the songs that we sang each Sunday morning, the song I remember most was “I Know That My Redeemer Lives”, a song taken from Job 19:17. Our church sang it all the time and I think what I remember most about it was that my uncle would always sing the “echo” part of the song, the part the men always sang. Based on how often we sang that song, it seemed that being redeemed was really important.

If you were to ask the “typical Christian” today (supposing there is such a thing as a “typical Christian”) if he or she has been “redeemed”, he would probably answer something to the effect of “Yes – I’ve been redeemed from sin by the blood of Jesus”¹. Some might say “I’ve been redeemed and now I’m born again”², while others will proclaim that “Christ’s blood has redeemed me from the curse of the law”³. While in each case these people are alluding to a scriptural point or verse, do they really understand what it means to be redeemed?

The concept of redemption is quite prevalent throughout the scriptures. The terms “redeem” and “redeemed” are used nearly 130 times in the Bible, and in most cases indicate a state of being released or loosed from some type of bondage, be it bondage from slavery in Egypt to the (supposed) bondage to the (Old Testament) law. In fact, my Bible Works dictionary, in giving the definition of one of the Greek words for “redeemed”, states that metaphorically, to be redeemed is “Christ freeing the elect from the dominion of the Mosaic Law at the price of his vicarious death”⁴. It would seem, then, that God “redeemed” Israel from the bondage of slavery in Egypt, took them to Mount Sinai, where He gave them the Law, then 1500 years later sent Jesus to die an excruciating death in order to redeem them from that same law! Humh. . .

The observant Jewish people speak of redemption two to three times a day. The seventh benediction of the Amidah prayers (one of the Jewish daily prayers) is entitled “Geuleh” which means “redemption”. It goes like this:

“Look upon our affliction and plead our cause, and redeem us speedily for your name's sake, for you are a mighty redeemer. Blessed are you, O Lord, the redeemer of Israel.”

Then again, at the close of the prayer, this closing remark, taken from Psalm 19:14, is repeated:

“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.”

So what does redemption mean, and how does it apply to those of us who believe that Messiah Yeshua (Jesus the Christ) is our Redeemer? We’ll take a look at the ancient meaning and usage of the word “redeem” and its various forms to get an idea what the writers of the New Testament would mean when they use the Old Testament concept of redemption. We will also see how redemption fits into our Salvation Cycle.

In the book of Exodus we have the Passover story. In this story, you see no references to repentance or forgiveness of sins, nor do you see any references to salvation – at least not until the Israelites cross the Red Sea. But you do see ‘redemption’.

¹ Titus 2:11-14

² 1 Peter 1:18-19; 23

³ Galatians 3:13

⁴ Bible Works for Windows ver. 6.0.005y looking up the meaning of Strong’s #1805(Gr.)



Israel was a people who were suffering under the bondage of severe burden and hard labor imposed on them by the Egyptians. We know that part of their burden was the requirement to kill their newborn male children. They likely had other burdens not specifically mentioned in the text such as economic burdens not required of the Egyptians. In any case, they were being heavily afflicted.

God heard the cries of the people and prepared a deliverer to remove them from Egypt. That deliverer, of course, was Moses. In Exodus 6, God instructed Moses (verse 4) to tell the Israelites that He would do six things for them . . .

Exodus 6:6-8 "Therefore say to the children of Israel: 'I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. ⁷ 'I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸ 'And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the LORD.' "

According to Jewish tradition, the first four in this passage are represented by the four glasses of wine present on the traditional Jewish Passover table. Notice that the first four should be enough to convince them that He was indeed their God, the God of their fathers – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and since redemption is part of these four, it should be the act that nails it down that YHVH is their god.

So what is Redemption? The Encyclopedia Judaica defines it as "*salvation from the states or circumstances that destroy the value of human existence or human existence itself*". Based on this definition, redemption is not salvation, but salvation is one aspect of redemption. But this definition doesn't even begin to give the full essence of what it means "to be redeemed".

In order to get a more clear understanding of redemption, we'll need to go to the Hebrew itself. The words in the Tnakh (Old Testament) from which we get the word redemption are (גָּאָל – 6299) and ga'al. (קָדַם – 1350). Padah is the more general of the two, and has related words in both Arabic and Akkadian that pertain to "ransom", "rescue", and "deliver". The gist of these is that they have a lot to do with commerce. In other words, they deal with commercial transactions - money and slaves. For instance, in Exodus 13:11 – 15 God talks about the offering of the firstborn of both animals and children. He shows that if a person has a firstborn donkey (unclean animal) he must exchange it with for a lamb (a clean animal). In the same regards, when he has a firstborn child, that child would be redeemed with an exchange of money – in this case five shekels of silver. Padah is not what we might call, a family thing . . . it's just business.

The other word for redemption or redeemer, "ga'al", is different. It has the connotation of being a deliverer or an avenger. And it also implies an inherent responsibility of the next of kin. It has no cognates in other Semitic languages – it's a truly Hebrew concept – the responsibility of the family to look out for one another, thus preserving the solidarity of the clan.

God defines what it means to be redeemed by describing the role of the redeemer. So what does a redeemer do? Leviticus describes one of the roles –

Leviticus 25:25 "If one of your brethren becomes poor, and has sold some of his possession, and if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then he may redeem what his brother sold."

A redeemer buys back the land of one of his kin folk in the event that person sells his land. In ancient Israel, ownership of land was of utmost importance. For the most part, a person's fortune was tied up in the land that he had possession of. Land was also distributed to the various clans based on their ancestry. Thus, if your clan was from the tribe of Asher and someone from the tribe of Benjamin



purchased part of your cousin's land, it would be important that that parcel of land be purchased back by someone from the tribe of Asher in order to maintain the integrity of the tribe.

Like the text says, a person would not normally sell his land unless he became poor. There could be any number of reasons for being poor – sickness or accident, mismanagement of the land, or maybe even laziness. Whatever the case, losing the land would destroy the stability and future of the family, especially the children. Without land, the children would be doomed to a life of servitude – usually on another person's land. Thus, the next of kin had the opportunity and the responsibility to buy the land back. It was also possible for a person to buy back his own land if for some reason he was able to obtain the money.

In addition to buying back the land of his next of kin, a **redeemer buys back his brother or next of kin in the event he sells himself into slavery** (Lev. 25:47-49). A person might sell himself into slavery because of debt or possibly just to escape the complexities of running his own farm. Though the text calls it slavery, it's more like indentured servitude. A person could sell himself to another Israelite, or to a resident alien. But say, for instance, the "boss" becomes abusive. The slave could cry out to his brother or next of kin, and that brother would be obligated to purchase his brother from his owner.

There again, as in the case of land, a person could redeem himself if he had the money.

A redeemer would also be responsibility to avenge the death of his brother (Deuteronomy 19). Say a man's brother was accidentally shot by a hunter. This would be a clear case of manslaughter because the hunter had been negligent in his aim. The next of kin would then have the responsibility to chase the manslayer down and kill him. In order to protect himself, the manslayer (the hunter) could flee to a city of refuge where he would stand before a court to determine if what he did was indeed an accident. If it was not an accident, and the manslayer was convicted of murder, it was the responsibility of the next of kin, the ga'al, to put him to death.

This may seem rather harsh in our society today, but God considers it important to provide closure for the offended party in this type of negligence or crime. This way, justice is served and the offended parties can get on with their lives.

The final responsibility of the kinsman redeemer seems quite strange to us, but would be considered an honorable thing in ancient Israel. That's **the responsibility of a man to take his brother's wife and raise up a male child for his dead brother** (Leviticus 25:5-10). This only happened when a man died childless. In this case, the dead man's closest relative would marry the dead man's wife and they would have children. The firstborn male from this union would be considered the son of the dead brother and would thus inherit the land of his dead "father".

This may seem to be contrary to a previous law prohibiting a man from having sexual relations with his brother's wife (Leviticus 18:16), but the difference is that the brother is now dead and the man is considered to be providing a service to his brother by preserving her integrity (by her not being barren), providing for her well-being, and keeping her from having to marry outside the clan. One example of "Levirate marriage" (from the Latin "levir" – husband's brother) is that of Ruth and Boaz from whom we have the lineage of Messiah Yeshua.

So, from these examples, we can see that a kinsman-redeemer (ga'al) was providing a service to the clan by keeping the families intact and out of poverty (servitude). We can also see that to be a kinsman redeemer, you had to be 1) a kinsman, 2) able to redeem (usually financially able), and 3) willing to redeem.

How then do we define what it means to be redeemed? My definition, based on what we see above, is: **Redemption is being bought back from bondage or a state of hopelessness by a person who is**



your nearest relative and who is willing and able to do so for the expressed purpose of maintaining the integrity of the family and clan.

Going back to the Exodus story we can thus submit these conclusions:

- Israel had somehow lost her inheritance (the land of Canaan)
- Israel had sold herself into bondage
- Israel was in a hopeless situation
- God considered himself to be Israel's kinsman redeemer
- God was willing to redeem Israel
- God had the wherewithal to redeem Israel and was willing to pay the price

God, in effect, bought Israel from Pharaoh. The price was Egypt itself –

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 43:1** But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have **redeemed** you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. ³ For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; **I gave Egypt for your ransom**, Ethiopia and Seba in your place. ⁴ Since you were precious in My sight, You have been honored, And I have loved you; Therefore I will give men for you, And people for your life.

Israel was now free from bondage, and the death of Pharaoh, at the hands of their kinsman-redeemer, brought closure to an otherwise demoralizing phase of their lives. They were now **free from the shackles** of their previous life and could move on.

In our "Salvation Cycle", redemption is the next step after realizing that you are in bad shape – in bondage. The Israelites had to sink into hard bondage before they realized how bad of shape they were in. As the hopelessness of their situation became apparent, they began to cry out to God for a deliverer. Their kinsman-redeemer heard their cry and stepped in to fulfill his role. The same holds true for us.

As we said in the previous session, sin is bondage, and unchecked, will eventually put you into a hopeless state – oftentimes causing a person to no longer think there's a need or purpose in life. That's where our redeemer, Messiah Yeshua, steps in. He hears our cries and is moved as our brother to step in. Whereas part of the redemption process for Israel involved the blood of a lamb, Yeshua's blood is the price of our redemption, a price He was willing to pay so we could be set free.

As I said at the beginning of this session, the Exodus story says nothing about repentance or forgiveness of sin. Redemption is not motivated by repentance; it's motivated by love and duty. It would seem that the Israelites saw nothing in their personal lives they needed to change in order to deserve a deliverer. They just wanted out of their current state. The same holds true for us, Yeshua died for us before we turned to Him. He was motivated to bear the cross out of His love for His people and because of duty.⁵

Romans 5:6-10 ⁶ For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. ¹⁰ For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

⁵ On the road to Emmaus, Yeshua showed that he was obligated to die due to various prophecies (Luke 24:46-47).



So as we continue on in our own Salvation Cycle, part of our motivation must be to always remember that our redemption was “bought with a price”⁶, that price being “the precious blood of Messiah Yeshua.”⁷

The next part of the Salvation Cycle is Baptism. We’ll cover that next time.

Shalom Alechem

⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:20

⁷ 1 Peter 1:17-19