

Bought for What?

A drash on Parashah 33; B'chukkotai

By Kevin Phipps (aka Oriyan)

Adonai said to Moshe, "Tell the people of Isra'el, 'If someone makes a clearly defined vow to Adonai to give him an amount equal to the value of a human being, the value you are to assign to a man between the ages of twenty and sixty years is to be fifty shekels of silver [one-and-a-quarter pounds], with the sanctuary shekel being the standard, if a woman, thirty shekels. If it is a child five to twenty years old, assign a value of twenty shekels for a boy and ten for a girl; if a baby one month to five years of age, five shekels for a boy and three for a girl; if a person past sixty, fifteen shekels for a man and ten for a woman. If the person is too poor to be evaluated, set him before the cohen, who will assign him a value in keeping with the means of the person who made the vow. [Vayikra/Leviticus 27:1-8]

This is one of those passages which is tempting, even for Messianics, who hold on to the teaching that "all Scripture is God breathed...", to kind of cringe at, shrug the shoulder, and overlook. The whole idea of assigning a monetary value on a human being, and then different values for men, women, and children goes against our thinking and value system, and even our understanding of God. Our own constitution states that all men are created equal, so passages like this rub us the wrong way. I hear you and wish I could provide an explanation to make it all make sense and seem right in our minds. So far in my studies, I have not been able to do that.

There are some things I have seen in this passage in the Biblical excavating I have been doing, however, which will show that it is sometimes the most difficult passages to study which lead to the greatest treasure, so you and I will have to continue digging here to find more than what I have unearthed for you today.

Putting the whole money issue aside, what we have here, as I see it is a person from the community of Israel who either vows himself, or someone else, in the case of a child, to the service of Adonai at the tabernacle. These people would not become priests, as that was something reserved to the tribe of Levi, however they would serve in other capacities as assistants to the priests. Sometime later, whoever made the vow, could return to the priests and buy that person back for a fee. I suspect that the fee was proportionate to the work the person was able to do, not the value of the person him or herself.

We tend to see this as a picture of redemption. Certainly it is a type of redemption in a general sense, as when I lose wallet and go to the person who has it to get it back, sometimes

with a reward attached to get it back. In the spiritual sense of redemption, we generally think of redemption as being brought out of a life of sin.

Therefore, say to the people of Isra'el: 'I am Adonai. I will free you from the forced labor of the Egyptians, rescue you from their oppression, and redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. [Sh'mot/Exodus 6:6]

In our parashah, this is not the case. The person redeemed is being redeemed from service to God at His tabernacle. This person is then sent back to where he or she came from. The picture is not perfect, but there is something that this makes me think of from the New Covenant.

Or don't you know that your body is a temple for the Ruach HaKodesh who lives inside you, whom you received from God? The fact is, you don't belong to yourselves; for you were bought at a price. So use your bodies to glorify God. [1Corinthians 6:19-20]

Now I have a difficult concept, which if I don't lose myself in, hopefully I won't lose you either. The parashah said that if a person was too poor to pay the established price for the person being redeemed, then the redeemed person would be set before the cohen, who would assign a value to the person based on the means of the person who made the vow. If I was bought at a price, what is my value? Since I was the one who vowed myself to God's service, then my value is dependent upon my means to provide for my own redemption, which I am incapable of. Our cohen hagadol, Yeshua, then did something, not prescribed in the parashah for the cohen to do. He purchased my redemption for me. He became my redeemer, so my value, then becomes dependent on His means to redeem me, instead of my own.

What did He redeem me for? One might think I am intended to continue serving God in His tabernacle, and as my body is a tabernacle, this is true. However, as the redeemed person always returned to where he or she came from, since I came from the world, I have been redeemed to go back into the world. Why?

Yeshua came and talked with them. He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make people from all nations into talmidim, immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Ruach HaKodesh, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember! I will be with you always, yes, even until the end of the age." [Mattityahu/Matthew 28:18-20]

As they were traveling on the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Yeshua answered him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds flying about have nests, but the Son of Man has no home of his own." To another he said, "Follow me!" but the man replied, "Sir, first let me go away and bury my father." Yeshua said, "Let the dead bury their own dead; you, go and proclaim the Kingdom of God!" Yet another said,

"I will follow you, sir, but first let me say good-bye to the people at home." To him Yeshua said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and keeps looking back is fit to serve in the Kingdom of God." After this, the Lord appointed seventy other talmidim and sent them on ahead in pairs to every town and place where he himself was about to go. He said to them, "To be sure, there is a large harvest. But there are few workers. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the Harvest that he speed workers out to gather in his harvest. [Luke 9:57-10:2]

Here is what Adonai says: "Observe justice, do what is right, for my salvation is close to coming, my righteousness to being revealed." Happy is the person who does this, anyone who grasps it firmly, who keeps Shabbat and does not profane it, and keeps himself from doing any evil. A foreigner joining Adonai should not say, "Adonai will separate me from his people"; likewise the eunuch should not say, "I am only a dried-up tree." For here is what Adonai says: "As for the eunuchs who keep my Shabbats, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant: in my house, within my walls, I will give them power and a name greater than sons and daughters; I will give him an everlasting name that will not be cut off." And the foreigners who join themselves to Adonai to serve him, to love the name of Adonai, and to be his workers, all who keep Shabbat and do not profane it, and hold fast to my covenant, I will bring them to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples." [Yeshu'ahu/Isaiah 56:1-7]

It is important for us to see that as important as Torah teaching and study is, Yeshua did more than just teach. He provided what can be called "on-the-job" training. These were men and women who already knew Torah. What they needed to do was learn how to adopt what they knew from Torah to preaching the Kingdom of God. They also needed to meld Torah with the power and work of the Ruach HaKodesh, Holy Spirit to perform the same miracles their rabbi Yeshua performed.

I think it is important to note that the "gospel" message of Yeshua and His talmidim was not just salvation through faith in Yeshua through the work of the cross He was about to do, but also the Kingdom of God. Hearing about the Kingdom of God, to the Jews of Yeshua's day would have brought them back to the prophesy of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2. Here we have a statue made of four different materials, which are generally interpreted as the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman Empires, which would then be followed by the Kingdom of God. This would be an everlasting Kingdom which would crush the others. Well, according to history, the Roman Empire ended in 1453. Where is the Kingdom of God Yeshua was talking about? Well, it just so happens that the British Empire had its beginnings in 1497, and lasted until WWII, when Russia and the United States took over as the world's superpowers. Today, the ruling power of the world is only the United States. It seems to me the Roman Empire of Nebuchadnezzar's dream has not yet ended, it just changed hands from Rome to Britain to America. It is no accident that Washington D.C. is full of Roman architecture and our nation's symbol is an eagle, which was a prominent symbol of the Roman Empire as well.

I say this to say that the Kingdom of God is yet to come. The harvest is still plentiful, and Yeshua still needs people to bring in the harvest. Today the message evangelicals preach is salvation. The following verse is rather telling:

An expert in Torah stood up to try and trap him by asking, "Rabbi, what should I do to obtain eternal life?" But Yeshua said to him, "What is written in the Torah? How do you read it?" He answered, "You are to love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your understanding; and your neighbor as yourself." "That's the right answer," Yeshua said. "Do this, and you will have life." [Luke 10:25-28]

Now that's odd. Yeshua Himself did not say, "Believe in Me". He said essentially, "Follow Torah", and you will have eternal life. Of course He is not teaching legalism, but He is showing that the truly Torah observant person ought to know already how to obtain eternal life. His message is His Kingdom. He performed miracles, sent His talmidim out into the world, filled with the Holy Spirit, then went on to die and rise from the dead to show the power of His Kingdom over the kingdoms of the earth. No kingdom is defeated without a battle. No battle can be won without willing and trained soldiers fighting the enemy under the authority of their king.

The world we have each been brought out of is still out there. Those who do not know Yeshua as their Messiah are citizens of a kingdom of darkness which will someday be destroyed and take them with it. For many of them, their lives are about destroyed already. If a crop is not harvested in time, it dies and goes to waste. Yeshua did not say, "stay here and warm the chair your sitting in". He said, "Go and make talmidim". It does no good for us to say we are Torah observant when all that means is that I eat kosher, speak Hebrew, and celebrate the feasts, when there are a whole host of other commands concerning caring for the poor, the fatherless, and the widowed. There are people who need food, clothing, shelter, and healing. Our Messiah has said in Mattityahu 25, when we do it to the least of His brothers we do it to Him. We have been bought at a price, so we can serve Him by serving those who need His love the most. We must never forget that what we call outreach today was a Torah concept before it was ever a church concept. Our body is a tabernacle of the Ruach HaKodesh, and as such, the laver, which corresponds to the work of our hands and feet was outside the tabernacle. We are the hands and feet of Messiah, our Kohen Hadadol, to bring all nations into God's house of prayer.

In order to do the outreach God calls us to do, our lives must be subject to the will and priorities of our King. We may not be able to do what God has givted us for today, but we must continually strive to arrange our lives so that in time we can. What we can't do today, must be our goals for tomorrow.

