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The Census and the Redemption of the Firstborn

3: 40-51

The census and the redemption of the firstborn DIG: What was the giving of the firstborn a tangible reminder of? How were the 273 unredeemed first males of the people redeemed? What did it mean to be the firstborn in biblical times? What does it mean for Isra'el to be the firstborn of God? What does it mean for Yeshua to be "the firstborn among many brothers" or "of all creation?" What does it mean for Yeshua to be "the firstborn of the dead?" What is the Sh'khinah, and where was it within the camp of Isra'el? How does the Sh'khinah picture the Messiah?

REFLECT: If the redemption prince were still required for your life or the lives of your spouse and children, what would it be? Since the price of a life was another life, what principle of substitution does ADONAI use today? How does that make you feel about your substitution? About the One who gave His life for your life?

God has made it clear that the price of redemption is a life for another life.

The first born: During his father's lifetime, **the firstborn** took precedence over his brothers (**Genesis 43:33**). Upon his father's death, he received a double portion of the inheritance (**Deuteronomy 21:17**) and became the head of the family. The eldest could lose his right of being **the firstborn** for a grave offense, as **Reuben** did by **his** incest (see the commentary on **Genesis**, to see link click [Ik](#) - **Reuben Slept with His Father's Concubine Bilhah**), or he could surrender it, as **Esau** did by selling **his birthright** to **Jacob** (see **Genesis Gn** - **Then Jacob Gave Esau Some Stew and Esau Despised His Birthright**). But the Torah protected the eldest **son** from an unfair father (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Ds** - **The Tale of Two Sons**) because **the firstborn** belonged to **ADONAI**.⁵²

At its most basic level, the tradition of dedicating **the firstborn** to **God** or some other equivalent is a theological reminder that **Isra'el** owes its very life and freedom to **ADONAI**. The dedication of **the firstborn** is a tangible way of recalling **Isra'el's** history as a slave people redeemed by **YHVH**. All that **Isra'el** has, including its very existence, is a gift from **the LORD**. To return whatever first opens the womb of **God** is a tangible reminder that

everything belongs to **ADONAI** is a physical reminder that everything belongs to **YHVH** and is available for our use only because **God** has given it as a gift.⁵³

ADONAI said to Moshe, “Register all the firstborn males of the people of Isra’el a month old and over, and determine how many there are. Then you are to take the Levites for me, **ADONAI**, in place of all the firstborn among the people of Isra’el, and the cattle of the Levites in place of the firstborn of the cattle belonging to the people of Isra’el.” Moshe counted, as **ADONAI** had ordered him, all the firstborn among the people of Isra’el (3:40-42).

In taking the census of the firstborn males of Isra’el one month old or older, **the total was 22,273 (3:43), leaving an excess of 273 unredeemed firstborn males** beyond the census of **22,000 Levites** (see [Aq - The First Numbering of the Levites](#)). The instructions in **Exodus** (see the commentary on **Exodus Cd - Redemption of the Firstborn**), and **Numbers** (see [Ap - Redeeming the Firstborn](#)) were to substitute **Levites for the firstborn** service of the **LORD**.⁵⁴

Some argue that **the 22,273 firstborn of the twelve tribes** was an unrealistically small number since the total population of **Israelite men twenty-years-old or older** was **603,550** (see [Ak - Numbering the Tribes](#)). This would yield a ratio of about 1 **firstborn** to 27 mothers. Very unrealistic. Therefore, **the firstborn males of Isra’el** most likely refers to only **those** who were **born** after **the tribe of Levi** was established as a priestly tribe. The original statement concerning **the firstborn (Exodus 13:11-13)** clearly indicates that the implementation of the command was not retroactive to the **Exodus**, but would come into effect in the future. That is, only **the firstborn males** who were born between the time of **the Exodus** and the setting of a part of **the Levites**, about two years later (**Numbers 1:1**), would be counted. So a total of **22,273** would be in line for that period of time.⁵⁵

ADONAI said to Moshe, “Take the Levites in place of all the firstborn among the people of Isra’el, and the cattle of the Levites in place of their cattle; the Levites belong to me, **ADONAI**. Since there were **273** more firstborn males from Isra’el than male Levites, in order to redeem them, you are to take five shekels [two ounces] for each of these (use the Sanctuary shekel, which is equal to twenty gerahs). Give the redemption money for these extra people to Aaron and his sons.” Moshe took the redemption money from those who were over and above those redeemed by the Levites; the amount of money he took from the firstborn of the people of Isra’el was 1,365 shekels, using the Sanctuary shekel. Moshe gave the

redemption-money to Aaron and his sons, in keeping with what ADONAI had said, as ADONAI had ordered Moshe (3:44-51).

Redemption was always described in terms of some kind of a cost factor. **God** was obviously not discharging a debt to some by redeeming **His** elect at the time of **the Exodus**. But at that point, and on all subsequent occasions, when **the first born** were **redeemed**, **God** made it clear that the price of a life was another life. The original cost factor existed in the effort that a loving, wise **God** made to **redeem His chosen people** by “passing over” **the firstborn of Isra’el** when **He** instituted the final plague upon Egypt.⁵⁶

Isra’el, God’s firstborn: According to the TaNaKh, **Isra’el** is **God’s firstborn (Exodus 4:22 and Jeremiah 31:9)**. As such, **she** enjoyed the privileges that the other nations did not possess, such as being the recipient and caretaker of **God’s** written revelation as well as being the people through whom **the Messiah** would come into the world. This is **her** double portion. One of the most wonderful things to note about **Isra’el’s firstborn** status is that even though **Isra’el** was unfaithful to the covenant (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Bh - The Broken Covenant](#)), **ADONAI** does not disinherit them, as is the practice of some earthy fathers. Hence, **Isra’el** will always be considered **God’s firstborn** child among all the peoples of the world, and those who believe that the Church has replaced **Isra’el** as **His firstborn** are teaching heresy (see the commentary on [Acts Ag - Replacement Theology and Acts](#)).



Yeshua, God’s Firstborn: **Yeshua the Messiah** is also called **God’s firstborn**. In fact, He is referred to as such in three different ways. First, **He** is called **the firstborn among many brothers (Romans 8:29)**. **He** is also called **the firstborn of all creation (Colossians 1:15)**. This title seems to be stressing the fact of **Yeshua’s** eternal existence as **the divine Son of God**. Furthermore, **Messiah** is called **the firstfruits from the dead (Colossians 1:18)**. Here the meaning is not that our Lord was the first to rise from the dead. Others have had that blessing before Him, such as the boy whom Elijah raised from

the dead, and Lazarus. Rather, when we are told that **Messiah** is **the firstfruits from the dead**, it means that **He** was the first to rise from the dead in glory, receiving an immortal resurrection-type body.

Finally, **Yeshua** is also **the firstborn** child of **His** mother **Miriam**. This helps us to understand why **Yeshua** was presented in the Temple (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Au - Jesus Presented in the Temple](#)). **His** parents did this because of the teaching found in **Numbers 8:15-19**.

It is clear from the teaching about **Yeshua** that by designating **Him** as **God's firstborn**, **He** was placing **Messiah** into a position of the highest-ranking **Person** in the universe. Indeed, **He** is **high and lifted up** as **Isaiah** states (see the commentary on [Isaiah Jn - I Live in a High and Holy Place](#)). This underscores the truth that **He** was not only **firstborn** of **His** **mother** in the world, but **firstborn** of **His** **Father** before the **creation** of the world, and that **He** holds the rank, as compared with everything created, as **the firstborn** of dignity.⁵⁷

Yeshua Messiah, our redeemer: The **redemption** principle of "a life for a life" is still relevant today. **Yeshua Messiah** is our substitute who has **bought us with a price (First Corinthians 6:20)**, and **redeemed us** (see the commentary on [Romans Bn - The Contrast to Adam](#)) from the kingdom of sin and death (see the commentary on [Leviticus Bv - The Test of Tsara'at](#)) to the kingdom of life and righteousness (see [Leviticus Cg - The Test of M'tsora](#)).

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for **Your** loving care to redeem **Your** people from the terrible bondage of sin. **You** endured the shameful and terrible death on the cross for the joy set before **You** (**Hebrews 12:2**). **Your** When **Isra'el** sinned **Your** love is what motivated all **Your** actions. **Your** love for **Your** firstborn **Isra'el**, caused **You** to send **them** into exile for seventy years that **they** might be cured of worshipping idols and it did cure them. **Love** also to restore **Isra'el** (**Jeremiah 27:22**). **Your** love is always there. **You** never stop loving **Your** children, even when **You** discipline. "My son, do not take lightly the discipline of Adonai or lose heart when you are corrected by Him, because ADONAI disciplines the one He loves and punishes every son He accepts (**Hebrews 12: 5b-6**).*

*In seeking to restore **Israel's** love for **You**, **Your** love marked off seven years of great Tribulation for **Isra'el** (**Daniel 9:27**). At the end of the Tribulation when **Isra'el** finally accepts **Yeshua** as the **Messiah**, the **Savior** of the world, then **Messiah** returns to rescue and save **Isra'el**. Then I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication, when they will look toward Me whom they pierced. They will mourn for him as one mourns for an only son and grieve*

bitterly for him, as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there will be a great mourning in Jerusalem, mourning like Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megido. . . In that day a spring will be opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and impurity. Yeshua returns in triumph to miraculously save Isra'el (Zechariah 13-14). Then Messiah will judge the nations for how they have treated Isra'el (Matthew 25:31-46) and set up His Millennial Kingdom for one thousand years as King over all the earth, with Jerusalem as His capital (Revelation 19-21, Zechariah 14:9). Praise Your magnificent power and tender love! When Your children stray, You always seek to draw them back into Your arms of deep and compassionate love. In Messiah Yeshua's holy Name and power of His resurrection. Amen