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The Atonement Money for the Tabernacle

30: 11-16

The atonement money for the Tabernacle DIG: How can the payment of money make atonement for a life? Doesn't Leviticus 11:17 teach that atonement is only through the shedding of blood of an innocent sacrificial substitute? What were the benefits, both spiritually and militarily, for the Israelites to take a census (see Numbers 26:2)? What is a ransom? How is it like or unlike a bribe, tax or premium due? Why did God require a ransom? On what basis were rich and poor ransomed?

REFLECT: What ransom payment has superseded the need for all others (1 Tim 2:5-6)? In response, or in addition, what do you feel you owe to God? What symbolic ransom payment do you then make to Him?

Parashah 21: Ki Tissa (When you awake) 30:11-34:35

(see my commentary on Deuteronomy, to see link [click Af](#) - Parashah)

The Key People are Moshe, Bezalel, Oholiab, the people of Isra'el, Aaron and Joshua.

The Scenes include Mount Sinai and the camp nearby.

The Main Events include instructions for **the census** and atonement **money**; artisans filled with **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh**; a reminder to keep **the Sabbath**; **stone tablets**, a **golden calf**, the anger of **Ha'Shem**, **Moshe's** pleading, tablets broken, **Aaron's** excuses, **Levites** rallying to **the LORD's** side, **3,000 killed** in the camp, **Moshe's** return up **the mountain**, seeking forgiveness, **plague**; **Moshe's tent**, meeting **God's glory**, cutting new **stone tablets**; **God's** covenant to do miracles, warning against alliances, commanding **pilgrimages**, **Moshe's face shining**, and **his** putting on a **veil**.

As we explore this parashah we will see how **ADONAI, the Husband**, handled **His** unfaithful spouse. In the end, we will get a glimpse not only at **Moshe's** shining face, but also at the shining grace of **a Husband** who loves **His wife** perfectly. Perhaps we can learn a few things along the way about our own personal relationships, especially within our own homes.

The Torah is never so much up in heaven that it forgets about the realities here on earth. Soon after **ADONAI** finished instructing **Isra'el** about the priesthood, **He** taught **Moshe** about the need for money in **their** new “family.” This is the first time in the Bible that we learn about a **census** for **the people** of **Isra'el**. It was very dangerous to do so, but necessary. **King David** found out just how dangerous it was. **God** was angry with **His** people, **He** allowed Satan to provoke **David** to take a **census** of **the Israelites** (see my commentary on [the Life of David Ek - David Counts the Fighting Men](#)). There is no contradiction, for **God** simply let Satan tempt **David** to undertake the **census**, much as **He** permitted Satan to attack **Job**. **God's** sovereignty extends even to the workings of the Devil. The fact that **David** only had the military men counted, suggests that he probably took the **census** so that he could brag about *his* military might (**Second Sam 24:1-3**).⁴⁹² But, the result was that **ADONAI sent a plague on Isra'el, and seventy thousand men of Isra'el fell dead (First Chron 21:1-14)**. **David** had forgotten that **God** would not share **His** glory with anyone. There is only one **King, the Captain of our salvation**, who, being entrusted with the counting of **His** people, never forgets **the Father's** glory.⁴⁹³

But on the other hand, a **census** could be very useful and practical. In this section, it is used to raise money for the building and operation of **the Tabernacle**. **Then ADONAI said to Moses His servant: When you take a census of the Israelites to count, or muster, the men (Exodus 30:12a; Numbers 1:2-4)**. The verb translated **take a census** literally means *lift up the head*. In a figurative sense it symbolizes the counting of heads, or numbering (**Numbers 1:2** and **49, 4:2** and **22; 26:2**). In this section, we don't learn until later that the purpose of the **census** was for the construction and ongoing work of **the Tabernacle**.

Each one must pay ADONAI a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. This tax was considered a **ransom**, because its payment guaranteed protection from plagues. This motivated each man to pay (**30:11-12**).⁴⁹⁴ Although the immediate need of this **census** was to raise money for **the Tabernacle** and a secondary benefit was protection against disease there was still another purpose. The **census** was a record of military manpower. Only young men **twenty years old or more** were to be **counted (30:14)**. The verb **counted, or mustered**, certainly has military overtones. Therefore, the point is that when **Moses** took a **census** for the purpose of military service he was taking a **ransom** from each soldier and donating it to the construction and ministry of **the Tabernacle**.⁴⁹⁵



Each one who crossed over to those already counted, or passed muster, was to give a half shekel to the work of the Tabernacle, which weighs twenty gerahs. It was considered an offering and his half shekel was an offering to ADONAI (30:13). The shekel was silver, the basic unit of currency for the Hebrews. In fact, the word itself comes from the verb meaning, *to weigh*. Shekels have been unearthed all over Israel. **The full standard shekel was ordained to be used in connection with all sacred purposes.** They weigh anywhere from eight to twelve grams. Different shekel weights were used in Isra'el at the same time. To avoid confusion, a merchant would have two sets of weights, one for buying and another for selling (Deuteronomy 25:13). In his passage, the term **gerah**, a Babylonian weight, was one twentieth of a shekel (Leviticus 27:25; Num 18:16).

When writing this part of the book, Moses used a term that was common after the Tabernacle had been built and in use. This term, the sanctuary shekel is used in Leviticus 5:15, 27:3 and 25, and later became known as the temple tax. All who crossed over, those twenty years or more, were to give an offering to God. The rich are not to give more than a half shekel, and the poor are not to give less when you make the offering to ADONAI to atone for your lives (30:13-15). God was teaching them that they are a ransomed people. It was the same price for everyone, rich and poor alike. They all had an equal stake in the Tabernacle, so it belonged to everyone equally. However, the cost was such that everyone could afford it. Later, this became the basis for the temple tax (Neh 10:32). Although the amount then was reduced to one-third of a shekel, it became an annual tax in the time of Jesus (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Gf - Jesus and the Temple Tax](#))⁴⁹⁶.

Receive the atonement money from the Israelites, and use it for the service of the Tabernacle. The significance of the atonement money is the teaching that God's work must be supported by God's people. Moses received the silver from the men who were *mustered* and counted. It was to be given to the work of the Tabernacle. Since silver was an essential part of the construction materials it was greatly needed (38:25-27). The silver would become a memorial for the Israelites before God, making atonement for their

lives (30:16). Whenever an Israelite saw the silver of **the Tabernacle**, he would be reminded of his atonement. The idea of **a memorial** is an important concept in the book of **Exodus (12:14, 13:9, 17:14, 28:12 and 29).**

The equality of **the atonement** price in the **census** is an important concept. No matter what one's outward condition was, whether **rich** or **poor**, the cost was the same - **half a shekel**. This demonstrates that no one is given a privileged status before **God** in His **Tabernacle. For God does not show favoritism (Romans 2:11).** Every man **of Israel** stood on equal terms before **the Creator**. In reality, that's how we all stand before **God**.

Tradition tells us that Alexander the Great, on his deathbed, ordered that his burial should be different from the usual custom. He commanded that his entire body should be covered by a shroud, except for his hands. He wanted people to see that he left the world empty-handed. This man who had conquered most of the known world and had all the treasures that earth could offer was leaving life with none of it. At death, he and the lowest beggar were on equal terms.

The rabbis teach that a child enters the world with clenched fists in order to grab for everything they can get. But that same person is buried with open hands showing that he takes nothing with him. All are on equal terms when it comes to riches, honor and power, because when we stand before **God** none of those things matter. What does matter is if we, as individuals, have a relationship with **Christ** or not. If so, an eternal inheritance awaits us - one that is far richer and more glorious than anything this world has to offer.⁴⁹⁷