Bits of Torah Truths Bereshit / Exodus 30:11-34:35, 1 Kings 18:1-39 Matthew 9:35-11:1



The Half-Shekel and Atonement

This weeks reading is from Parashat Ki Tisa (Shemot / Exodus 30:11-34:35), the Lord instructs Moshe to take a census of the people (30:12) and each person is to give a ransom (half-shekel) to the Lord when numbered. Moshe instructs to make the bronze layer and place it between the altar and the tent of meeting (30:17-18), and the perfume for incense within the tabernacle (30:23-33). Moshe spent a long time on the Mountain of Sinai (32:1) and the people asked Aaron to make gods for them to worship. Aaron took gold and made a golden calf and they worshiped the calf (32:2-6). The Lord desires to destroy the people and Moshe reminds the Lord of the covenant promises He had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (32:7-13). Moshe descends from the mountain, sees the people sinning, and destroys the two tablets containing the Aseret Hadibrot (32:14-19). Moshe grinds the golden calf into fine powder, mixes it with water, and causes the children of Israel to drink it. Moshe instructs the Levites to kill those who were responsible (32:23-28). Moshe tells the people to dedicate themselves to the Lord as he returns in an attempt to make atonement for their sins (32:29-30). Moshe asks to be blotted out of God's book of life if He will not forgive the people (32:31-34). Moshe asks that the Lord's presence come with the Children of Israel (33:12-17). Moshe asks to see God's Glory (33:18). The Lord shows Moshe His glory and declares who He is, merciful, gracious, slow to anger, loving, and having grace forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin for thousands (34:6-7).

ספר שמות פרק ל

יא וידבר יהוה אל משה לאמר:
יב כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל
לפקדיהם ונתנו איש כפר נפשו
ליהוה בפקד אתם ולא יהיה בהם
נגף בפקד אתם: יג זה יתנו כל
העבר על הפקדים מחצית השקל
מחצית השקל תרומה ליהוה: יד
מחצית השקל תרומה ליהוה: יד
שנה ומעלה יתן תרומת יהוה: טו
העשיר לא ירבה והדל לא ימעיט
ממחצית השקל לתת את תרומת
יהוה לכפר על נפשתיכם

Shemot / Exodus 30:11-15

30:11 The Lord also spoke to Moses, saying, 30:12 'When you take a census of the sons of Israel to number them, then each one of them shall give a ransom for himself to the Lord, when you number them, so that there will be no plague among them when you number them. 30:13 'This is what everyone who is numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as a contribution to the Lord. 30:14 'Everyone who is numbered, from twenty years old and over, shall give the contribution to the Lord. 30:15 'The rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less than the half shekel, when you give the contribution to the Lord to make atonement for yourselves. (NASB)

The Parashah this week opens with the half-shekel. The Mishnah, Seder Moed Tractate Shekalim, describes in detail everything relating to the Half-Shekel: (i) how the public was to be informed, (ii) how it was collected in Israel and abroad, (iii) how to move the money in Jerusalem, (iv) its appropriations and permitted uses for the needs

in preparation for the pilgrimage festivals, etc. The last paragraph of the Mishnah tells us that all the above is valid only in the presence of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. However, the Mishnah continues (see end of Chapter 8) saying "one who sanctifies a Half-Shekel before the Temple is rebuilt, behold it is HOLY!" This last line is written to signify its importance and for the generation that has returned and re-established Jewish Sovereignty over the Land of Israel and for the rebuilding of the third Temple. (see http://www.sefaria.org/)

While reading the biblical text, it is interesting to note, in the command to give the half-shekel, that the rich cannot give more, nor the poor less. Whether that speaks of material wealth or ritual observance, all are considered equal in keeping this Commandment. Everyone is to give exactly the same amount. It appears that the text is written in this way so one cannot "do it better" than the next person (i.e. give more money), every person must give the same amount equally whether rich or poor. The Scriptures also state that this money is used for atonement as it says in Shemot / Exodus 30:12 יב כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל לפקדיהם ונתנו איש כפר נפשו ליהוה בפקד אתם ולא יהיה בהם בפקד אתם: 30:12 'When you take a census of the sons of Israel to number them, then each one of them shall give a ransom for himself to the Lord, when you number them, so that there will be no plague among them when you number them. (NASB) Looking closer at this verse, the words כי תשא "Ki Tisa" (כי is a conjunction meaning "because, since, for; that; when; but; although" and NUT is a verb meaning "to carry; lift; bear, endure, suffer.") the numbering process results in the one who is numbering bearing something. A ransom must be given or a plague will break out amongst the people. The Aramaic Targum Onkelos, states (30:12) אָרֵי תְקַבֵּיל יָת הָושבּן "when you bear (obligation, guilt, ילקביל of the calculation (הַנְשַבֶּן)" suggests that the one who is numbering is bearing their guilt. The text also states those being numbered bear their guilt if atonement is not made. Without the taking of the ransom of the "half shekel" (מַהַצִּית הַשָּׁקֵל) the census is a sin before God. How is counting the people a sin before God? The scripture states that without the half shekel the people will be בנף receive a "blow" or be "stricken as in judgment." The word negef in our verse (30:12) is translated in many ways throughout the Scriptures and is translated as "a plague" here. The word negef (נֵגַרְ draws a parallel to the stumbling that one does when one sins before God and the requirement for atonement in order to make things right. What can we say then about numbering the people, the half-shekel, and atonement? In the Torah it is written that both the poor and the wealthy were to be considered equal, both must give a half-shekel for atonement over the census. This command was given so that the wealthy would not bring many sacrifices supposing they had more to offer and found greater favor with the Lord by their many gifts. Another reason was so men would not trust in their own strength by their great numbers. The half-shekel was to be a reminder that the Lord is the source of strength and even life itself (salvation from the negef, 733). The importance of these Scriptures is to remember we are numbered in the Messiah since we are numbered amongst the Children of God. Each of us are equal and require the same atonement in Yeshua the Messiah! He is the one who both bears and atones for our sins. Halleluia and Amen!