

Numbers 18:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem, according to thine estimation, for the money of five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs.

Analysis

And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem, according to thine estimation, for the money of five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. God specifies the redemption price precisely—five shekels based on the sanctuary standard. Waiting until one month old ensured infant viability; many newborns died in ancient times, so this timing represented established life requiring redemption.

"The shekel of the sanctuary" (sheqel ha-qodesh, שֶׁקֶל הַקּוֹדֵשׁ) was the official standard, preventing fraud through debased currency. "Twenty gerahs" (esrim gerah, עֶשֶׂרִים גֶּרֶה) defined the shekel's weight precisely (approximately 11.4 grams of silver). Five shekels represented significant value—roughly a month's wages for a laborer—teaching that redemption is costly, never cheap.

The fixed price is theologically significant. Unlike later redemption prices that varied by age and gender (Leviticus 27:1-8), every firstborn son cost exactly the same—five shekels. This equality taught that every life has the same value before God, regardless of social status. Similarly, Christ's redemption applies equally to all believers—the ground is level at the cross, whether slave or free, educated or simple (Galatians 3:28).

Historical Context

Five shekels (approximately 57 grams of silver) was substantial but not impossible for average families. This ensured that redemption required sacrifice but remained accessible to all social classes. The sanctuary shekel served as monetary standard throughout Israel's history. Archaeological discoveries include shekel weights from ancient Israel, showing attempts to maintain standard measures (though some show evidence of fraudulent light weights—condemned by prophets like Amos 8:5). The specific redemption price appears in Jesus's parable economics and remained the standard through the Second Temple period.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the costly nature of redemption (a month's wages) teach that salvation isn't cheap, though Christ paid its infinite price?
2. What does the fixed price for all firstborn sons reveal about every person's equal value before God?
3. How should understanding that you were 'bought with a price' (1 Corinthians 6:20) affect your sense of purpose and belonging?

Interlinear Text

תִּפְאַרְתָּה	מִבְּנֵי	וְלֹא	מִבְּנֵי	מִבְּנֵי
And those that are to be redeemed	old	from a month		
H6299	H1121	H2320		
תִּפְאַרְתָּה	רְכָב	בְּעֵד	כָּסֶף	
And those that are to be redeemed	according to thine estimation	for the money		
H6299	H6187	H3701		
מֵעֵת	בְּשֵׁךְ	בְּשֵׁךְ	בְּקָרְבָּן	עָשָׂרִים
of five	after the shekel	after the shekel	of the sanctuary	which is twenty
H2568	H8255	H8255	H6944	H6242
גוֹאָה	גָּרָה			
gerahs	H1931			
	H1626			

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 30:13 (Temple): This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is twenty gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD.

Numbers 3:47 (Temple): Thou shalt even take five shekels apiece by the poll, after the shekel of the sanctuary shalt thou take them: (the shekel is twenty gerahs:)