LEVITICUS

Lesson 38 - Chapter 25 Continued

We'll continue today in our study of Leviticus chapter 25. Among many principles present in this chapter are ones that every Believer needs to pay attention to: release and redemption. It is in the Torah that the basics and the details about release and redemption are explained. Towards the end of this lesson we indeed are going to delve into some fine detail about these two principles and I suggest you resist the urge to kind of mentally wander off. I doubt any Believer would argue that redemption is everything for us, but The New Testament fully expects its readers to already understand the nuances of these God-ordained ordinances that were so central to Israelite society.

We left off last time in verses 18 and 19, which taught us that the land, Canaan, which the Lord would turn over to His people would only be productive when they were in it. In 1906 the French who held much territory in the Middle East took a census; and the total population of the Holy Lands was fewer than 60,000 people. It consisted of Bedouin desert wanderers, fishermen along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and some on the shores of the Galilee, and scattered goat and sheepherders, along with a handful of farmers.

As the Jews started to repopulate the land in earnest after WWI, and then the migration turned into a torrent after WWII, the land started again to produce.

I tell you this because this is another of the sorely overlooked principles we'll find in the Bible and one that is totally backed up by the hindsight of history: the land God set aside for His people prospers ONLY when those who legitimately hold the lease are present. When they are not the land quickly reverts to what it is in its natural state; dead and unusable.

I don't want to venture into allegory or metaphor, but compare this reality to the miraculous birth of Isaac, the promised son of Abraham, who would lead to the birth of the nation of Israel in the form of his son Jacob. Isaac came from a womb (Sarah's) that was dead and useless until Yehoveh declared that it would become the source for a nation of people set apart for Himself.

In parallel to creating a people set apart for Him He designated a land to be set-apart for Him and populated by His people: God would take the Land of Canaan away from the wicked Canaanites and turn it over to Israel. When ruled by the Canaanites it was a spiritually dead place, even though it seemed to be full of good pastureland and fertile fields. When Yehoveh set it apart for Himself, and once Israel entered the land of Canaan, God declared that from that moment forward the land would give up its fruit for ONLY His people. When they were not there, it would be a dead and useless place. When they were there it would be vital and

productive.

Sadly we are now eyewitnesses to the working out of this principle on the negative side. Notice what has happened in Gaza beginning with the day it was turned over to the Palestinians a little more than 2 years ago; what was a critical food growing region for Israel is now a place that can't even support its own population. Before Israel won back the Gaza in 1967 it was a desolate, almost completely unpopulated area. Once Jewish settlers moved in farming began and the desert bloomed. By the time the Jews gave the land to the Palestinians on August 15, 2005, the Jewish farms of Gaza supplied fully 1/3rd of all the produce raised in Israel. The place is well on it's way to becoming a wasteland again. I don't care what the UN tries to do, or what the US tries to do in aid, or how science is capable of increasing productivity of the land; the Gaza began to revert to it's natural state of death and uselessness on August 15, 2005. This is not some wild prediction on my part it has already happened because it's simply the way the land set aside for Israel operates, because God declared it so. It is a supernatural thing and as such will not be defeated by men.

Let's re-read a portion of Leviticus 25 to get our bearings.

RE-READ LEV. 25: 20 – 34

In verse 20, where the subject is the Sabbath year rest for the land, we get a most reasonable rhetorical question that any thinking Israelite would have asked when informed of this ordinance of God: "what are we to eat in the 7th year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops". And, Yehoveh's answer is: "I will ORDAIN my blessing for you in the 6th year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for 3 years". The word usually translated here as "ordain" is in Hebrew tsivvah; it carries with it a dual sense of something being commanded and something being sent. God is commanding nature to give up its bounty and sending that bounty Israel's way. Nature has no choice in the matter, but Israel does; they can follow God's commands of the Sabbath years and of the Jubilee and reap this bounty, or they can ignore it, and NOT receive the bounty. But in a larger view refusing to obey this law also means that Israel is breaking the covenant; and the consequence for breaking the covenant is to incur God's curse.

In the following verses we get some more specifics on land tenure and the redemption of property as it is to be practiced in Israelite society. The thing we must grasp is that the permanent "selling" of the land is prohibited. In reality the Hebrews can't sell the land even if they wanted to because they do not own it.....Yehoveh does. Further what this is alluding to is that a Hebrew who acquires land from another Hebrew is NOT buying the land, he is but taking over a land-lease for a period of time that is not to exceed 50 years. This prohibition against permanent land transfer is really aimed as much at the buyer as the seller. The seller is not ever to make a deal that purports to transfer the ownership of the land, and the buyer is not ever to think he *has* purchased the land itself. The buyer, no matter how rich or powerful, is but a user of the land not an owner.....and even that status lasts just for a while until the next Jubilee year.

In verse 23 where God instructs that the land is not to be "sold" beyond reclaim your Bibles might say "in perpetuity"; further, as we have discussed, the last half of that verse says why that is: the land is NOT yours, it's MINE says God. You guys, you Israelites, are just folks hanging out with me. Keep in mind that when the Biblical laws use the word "sell" or "sold" as regards land it is only a figure of speech; it is merely a common way of speaking. Instead, legally (from a Torah perspective) it is usually referring to transferring a LEASEHOLD.

The meaning of <u>not selling the land beyond reclaim</u> is that one MUST allow for the land to be redeemed (to be reclaimed); this is a provision that both the buyer and the seller must adhere to, it is NOT optional. So when we read of ANY land transaction regarding land that has been set aside for Israel, the right of redemption is automatically included.....it is a given.

Now do NOT confuse redemption with the Jubilee law. Redemption involves money and it involves a 3rd party redeemer who pays the price of redeeming the land. The 3rd party redeemer is almost always a family member. And this redeemer family member is duty-bound to redeem the land...... it is not an option for him. Further the current holder of the land is ALSO duty-bound to *accept* a proper redemption offer. In other words if a proper and legal 3rd party redeemer approaches the current holder of the land with a proper and legal amount of money as the redemption price the current owner cannot, by law, refuse to allow redemption of the property.

Since it was NOT contemplated that an original landholder would sell the lease simply for business reasons (like owning rental real estate for profit), but rather something would essentially force the owner to transfer the land to another party, verse 25 starts a series of examples of various situations by which land is lost to the original holder. And the first one involves a person falling on bad times; he has hit a low time and is financially in a bad way. The result is that he must "sell" a piece of land. Now this can either be that he needs the money for some unexpected and critical reason or another, or more usually, he cannot pay a debt he owes to someone and so that debt holder takes the land in payment. Therefore a close relative.....usually THE closest relative..... who has the ability and means to come up with the required money is obligated by the Torah to redeem the land in the name of the family member who has lost it. And to be clear, the redeeming family member does NOT get to keep the land. He doesn't even hold it until that poverty stricken family member is somehow able to come up with the needed funds to pay back the redeemer. The redeemer pays the price, but the poor person gets the benefit of receiving the land back.

Verse 26 is the 2nd example. Here the situation is that a person who has lost his land has no one in his family that has the means to redeem the land for him. Either he has no close relatives, or none of his relatives is able to come up with the money. However if after losing the land that person now recovers financially and produces enough funds to meet the redemption price, then the new owner must (by God's Law) sell it back to him. Further the method of determining the redemption price is that the new owner must SUBTRACT from the price that he paid a reasonable amount for the time he got use of the land.

Example: A man owes a debt of \$500 and cannot pay it. The holder of the debt forecloses on the man's land. A reasonable calculation shows that the crops that can be raised on that land

are worth \$100 each year. Three years later the man who lost the land is financially better off and thus has means to reclaim his land. Since the original debt was \$500, and since the new owner got three years of crops as benefit from holding the land (which amounts to \$300 worth of benefits), then the redemption price is only \$200. \$500 debt, minus \$300 from the crops that were raised on the land, leaves only \$200 left to repay. Now it wasn't always quite THAT simple, but that is basically the way it was intended to work.

Next the use of the Jubilee year provisions is injected. If the man who lost his land cannot ever come up with the money himself to redeem his own land.....or if he has no kinsman to redeem the land for him......then he must wait until the Jubilee year to get it back. In the Jubilee year the new holder of the land MUST release it back to the man who lost it at absolutely no cost. The effect of the Jubilee return of property is a full and complete *release*.....the effect of buying the property back at a price is *redemption*. Release and redemption, though related, are TWO different processes.

In verse 29 we get a 3rd example of how a piece of property can be transferred from the original owner. What if a man doesn't have a piece of land, but instead he owns a house inside of a walled city? Perhaps he's a merchant or a craftsman, not a farmer or a herder. The Law in this case is that he has only ONE YEAR if he transfers ownership of his house to another (whether by selling it for any reason, or by losing it due to indebtedness) to redeem it. After one year the new owner has no obligation. The house is lost forever to the original owner. And the arrival of the Jubilee year ALSO does *not* return the house to the original owner. So we see a rather stark difference between the treatment of a dwelling place versus land when it comes to release and redemption.

In verse 31 we see that houses that are NOT inside of walled cities but are instead located in the outlying villages, are to be treated as though they were land. That is the same rules apply to houses *outside* of walled cities as it does to land; and if someone loses a house that is located outside of a walled city the period to redeem it never expires. Further the village house MUST be returned to the former owner in the year of Jubilee. The idea is that invariably a person with a house in a village has a piece of land that goes with it. And, usually, even if that person was a craftsman, some amount of food was grown on the land. Now, that was not always the case, but it was more often as not.

Recall now that when the Israelites finally entered the land of Canaan after leaving Egypt (which has not yet happened at this point in Leviticus) there was a land allotment made to each tribe. But there was one Israelite tribe that did not get a territory all its own: the tribe of Levi. As they were set apart from Israel to be God's special servants (His priests, the earthly equivalent in some way of God's heavenly servants, the angels) the Levites instead were to receive cities located in each and every one of the territories of the 12 tribes. Further, a small amount of land that was attached to each city was included as well. Now some of the 48 cities the Levites lived in, as theirs, were apparently walled cities. Whereas all the other Israelites would permanently lose their homes within the walled cities if not redeemed within one year, no such limit was placed on the homes of the Levites. Further their walled city house had to be returned them upon the year of Jubilee.

Verse 34 gives us the provisions for something most homeowners are familiar with. Here it states that a Levite cannot EVER lose his land, not even due to indebtedness. That is whoever loans money to a Levite is taking the full risk upon himself, because he cannot foreclose on that Levite's land. Thus we have the principle of Homesteading. Homesteading generally protects one from losing their home EXCEPT for default on the home mortgage. A homesteaded house cannot be taken from you to satisfy a judgment arising from some other debt, or act of negligence, or whatever. It cannot be taken from you due to bankruptcy, provided you either maintain your mortgage payments, or own the home outright.

Levites, as God's servants, could NEVER lose their land inheritance.

READ LEV.25: 35 to end

Up to now we've dealt more with the redemption and Jubilee year release of real property. This section changes course and deals with human property, people; people who have become bondservants or slaves. And it walks us through a couple of stages of financial difficulties that people found themselves in, in the Bible era, that led to they're becoming slaves or bondservants.

Starting in vs. 35 the situation is that a person described as a kinsman has become poor and owes a debt to someone. Moreover this particular kinsman is somewhat like a "resident alien" in the sense that because resident aliens can NOT hold land they are workers who work for wages. So what we have here is the case of a peasant Hebrew who simply works for wages; he is an employee with no land to work and grow food.

The word used for kinsman in this instance is in Hebrew "**ach**", which literally means brother. But "**ach**" is also a common word that indicates "countryman". So the idea is that while this poor person might be a close relative, he could also simply be an Israelite. And all Israelites are "brothers" to one another. So the instruction here is that one Israelite is not to charge another Israelite interest on either money or provisions, at least when the borrower must borrow BECAUSE he is poor and has no other choice.

Staring in vs. 39 however the financial situation of the poor person has declined even further; he has borrowed the money at no interest but is not able to pay it back. The result is that this poor person now becomes an indentured servant; that is he is assigned to the one who loaned him the money until such time as the debt is paid off by means of his labors. Usually that meant the poor person and his family lived on the estate of the one who loaned him the money. The idea is that this indebted person does NOT become a slave; he has not been purchased and therefore is as property. Rather he's more like an employee; but that employee is bound....he must work the creditor and creditor alone. However the LONGEST period of time that person can remain indebted and bonded to his master is until the year of Jubilee arrives, at which point the indentured servant must be released and whatever remains of his debt canceled. Further the master cannot let the male go but keep his wife and children; the whole family must be permanently released.

The principle behind this law is laid down in verse 42: all Israelites belong to God. He redeemed them; He purchased their freedom from slavery when He took them out of the hand of Egypt. So another underlying principle is that no redeemed person can be another's slave, and every Israelite was redeemed. The effect of this law is that no Israelite can own Hebrew slaves. Understand; a bondservant is NOT a slave. A bondservant is NOT the property of his master; he is more like an exclusive employee.

That said, verses 44-46 make it clear that Hebrews CAN own slaves.....human property. It's just that these slaves must be foreigners, non-Israelites, people from other nations. So according to the Law a Hebrew can buy a foreigner as a slave and if that foreigner has children, then those children are also slaves. Not only that but because slaves are indeed property (like land or furniture) slaves can be handed down from one generation of a Hebrew family to the next. NO provision is made in the Law for a foreign slave to be redeemed. They are stuck in that position, without hope.

Let me emphasize that principle so that it is very clear: the ONLY people who could be redeemed and thus freed from their debts, were those who were under the covenant God made with Israel. Foreigners who wanted to be part of Israel were allowed to become part of Israel and thus were placed under the provisions of the covenant. Foreigners who did NOT want to become part of Israel were outside the provisions of the covenant. That same principle applies to salvation. We are saved under the provisions of the covenant God made with Israel; and part of that provision is a saving Messiah. Thus in Romans 11 we have St. Paul's conclusion that foreigners who want to be saved MUST be grafted-in to Israel's covenants because it's within those covenants that the ONLY provisions for God's salvation of a human being exists.

Verse 47 illustrates yet another situation: a well-to-do foreigner living among Israel loans money to a Hebrew, and the Hebrew cannot pay it back; by law that Hebrew becomes a bondservant to the foreigner. However while a Hebrew can own a foreign slave, a foreigner living among Israel cannot own a Hebrew for a slave. Further it falls to a family member of the Hebrew debtor to redeem him from his bondservant status to the foreigner. Or, alternately, if somehow this bondservant prospers on his own he is allowed to redeem himself.

The remainder of the chapter shows how the redemption price for the bondservant is to be calculated; and, we're not going to go over it because it works basically the same as if a piece of land was being redeemed.

Let me state at this point that while the duty of a kinsman to redeem a person's *land* for him was an important one, the duty of a kinsman to redeem his own family *member* from servitude to a foreigner was an exceptionally high duty. God makes it clear that, in principle, NO Israelite should ever be a servant or slave to ANYONE except God (and that by one's own free will); for God has redeemed them. But for an Israelite to be a servant or slave to a NON-Israelite is viewed as an abomination and it is the duty of his family to go to great personal sacrifice if necessary to extract that poor Hebrew from his situation.

OK, let's take a little detour. As you have seen over the last 3 lessons it is in Leviticus 25 that

we find (kind of embedded and entwined within the laws of the Jubilee) the concept and duties of the "kinsman redeemer" detailed for us. And I suspect many of you immediately recollect that Jesus, Yeshua, is often referred to as our kinsman-redeemer; we've all heard many a sermon about this. Naturally He is the reason for this detour.

In Leviticus 25 we're told that the purpose of a kinsman-redeemer is to rescue the land of a family member *or a person* in the family from being lost to someone else. That is, somebody in the family (usually due to not being able to pay off a debt) loses some or all of their land or winds up in bond servitude. The method of losing the land is that the land is sold....or exchanged....to satisfy an indebtedness. Or that person not having any land to sell becomes a bondservant to the lender in order to pay off the debt.

But the law was that if that situation happened there was automatically a right of redemption of that land or the person. And in the case of land, either the person who originally owned the land could come up with enough money to pay the redemption price and get it back or a family member paid the debt for him. In the case of a person who became a bondservant, if somehow he could come up with the money himself, he could purchase his own freedom. Or more often a family member paid the redemption price on his behalf. In fact it was *the duty* of a family relative to redeem the land on his behalf, or to purchase that person's freedom, *if* a family relative had the money to do it. So the general rule was that the closest family member was first in line to accomplish the redemption. If he didn't have the means, then the duty went to the next closest family member; and if he didn't have the means, then the NEXT closest family member was on the hook... and so on.

A key principle of this system was that the kinsman redeemer did NOT get to keep the land he redeemed for his family member nor if that family member had become a bondservant, did that family member now legally become the kinsman redeemer's bondservant. That said, out of gratitude a person COULD offer to stay under the authority of the one who redeemed him. So the kinsman redeemer paid the price of the debt that was owed, but the family member who had lost the land or his personal freedom got the benefit. The kinsman redeemer did NOT realize any personal benefit from his act of kindness AND duty; it was a legally REQUIRED act of self-sacrifice.

Although we haven't really discussed it yet, that was NOT the only aspect of being a kinsman redeemer. Another purpose of a kinsman redeemer was to act as one who avenged the wrongful death of a family member. That is if someone in a family was killed at the hands of another.....whether accidental or premeditated murder or in the heat of battle or whatever...... a close family member was duty-bound to hunt down and take the life of the responsible party.

In fact the primary purpose of those Levite cities in Israel designated as sanctuaries, or refuges, was to provide a safe-haven from a kinsman redeemer bent on revenge. While we're not going to get into all the nuances of the cities of sanctuary let me just state that a premediated murderer did NOT typically get protected by running to a sanctuary city. There was a board of elders in each city who determined whether to let the person who was fleeing into their place of sanctuary or not. Usually someone who had committed a criminal act that led to loss of life was not permitted sanctuary; it was more normal that it would be for an unintentional

act, or perhaps two men were fighting and in the heat of battle one killed the other. So sanctuary wasn't so much about guilt or innocence per se, as it was about protecting someone from the customary vengeance of a kinsman redeemer.

There is even ANOTHER aspect of a kinsman redeemer we need to be aware of; it was that a male family member was to marry a female family member who had lost her husband to death, if she had not yet borne a son as an heir for her now-deceased husband. The idea was that by the kinsman redeemer marrying her she would eventually get pregnant, have a son, and the son would carry-on in the NAME OF her deceased husband. And, therefore, her husband's name would continue and his line would not be ended.

The first type of kinsman redeemer.....the type who buys back land for a family member who lost it..... is called, in Hebrew, a *Go'el*.

The second type of kinsman redeemer.....the type who avenges the death of a family member...is called, in Hebrew, a *Go'el ha-dam*; or more literally, a blood-avenger.

The third type of kinsman redeemer.....the type who marries the son-less widow in order for her to produce a son and carry on the deceased father's line....is also called a *Go'el*.

Now before we start connecting some of these dots, let's also understand the meaning of the term "kinsman". There are several Hebrew words that are translated into the English word kinsman, but they all denote something slightly different. The most frequent Hebrew word translated as kinsman is "*ach*" most literally meaning brother. Brother can mean a male sibling or it can mean a close relative or it is even sometimes used to indicate a "brother-like" relationship......someone who perhaps is not related by blood but to whom you are very close. Usually when *ach* is used it means a very close relative.

Another Hebrew word for kinsman is "*qarob*". Literally *qarob* means "near". But in the context of a family it means a "near relative". Yet another common Hebrew word for kinsman is "*moda*". And it most usually it means an intimate friend who as close as a brother.

In the Bible context is everything; so kinsman can mean anything from a member of your immediate family....like your brother..... to a member of your extended family.....like a cousin...... to simply a member of your tribe. In it's broadest sense it can also indicate any member of the nation of Israel. But it does NOT extend any further than that. From a physical and national sense no foreigner or alien resident can be designated a kinsman of an Israelite. For instance even if an Israelite had a very close friend who was an Egyptian or a Canaanite, that friend would NOT be considered a "kinsman" for any legal purpose. So in any of these cases involving redemption that I have given to you, generally the term kinsman would indicate there was a blood relationship, with the blood being Israelite blood. Now some of you might say, but wait, a foreigner can become a full-fledged Israelite; yes, that is true, but once a foreigner becomes an Israelite, he is no longer a foreigner; once that foreigner gives his allegiance to Israel, Jacob is considered to be his father, too, for all legal purposes.

So let's be clear; biblically speaking a kinsman can only be within one's own nation or people

group. Therefore when we get all these rules and ordinances about kinsmen and kinsman redeemers in the Scriptures, it is about relationships among Israelites ONLY.....foreigners are excluded.

Now can anybody tell me how many times in the New Testament we have Yeshua referred to as our kinsman redeemer? 2......9? Any guesses? Try zero. He is indeed called our redemption or our redeemer, but He is nowhere in all the New Testament called our kinsman redeemer. Does that make you squirm just a little bit? Good. Because if you still think the Bible starts at the book of Matthew for Christians, and that the Old Testament is utterly irrelevant......that Jesus "nailed it to the cross"...... then you've got a problem. Because the NT NEVER labels Him as the kinsman redeemer.

So where does this idea or doctrine come from; this idea that Yeshua, our Messiah, is also our kinsman redeemer? From the Old Testament. There are 33 references to a "kinsman redeemer" in the OT and about half of them refer to a future Messiah or to Yehoveh......most of those references being in Isaiah. Of course the definition and DUTY of a kinsman redeemer is fully set out in Leviticus Chapter 25, as we've been reading. So if the Law is dead and gone why is it that most evangelical preachers, the most adamant "the Law has been replaced by Grace" folks, insist that the Levitical law of the kinsman redeemer applies to Jesus? How come we just love to turn our Bibles to the supposedly obsolete book of Ruth when we want to understand the purposes of a kinsman redeemer and apply it to our New Testament Messiah?

Obviously I'm being a little sarcastic. Yes of course Yeshua is our kinsman redeemer, but we can only know that from the OT principles.

So, let's see just how Yeshua is our kinsman redeemer, based on the principles of Torah, the Law.

Listen to Yeshua's own words: NAS Luke 4:18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are downtrodden, 19 To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."

What does that sound like? Of course; it's what we've been studying in Leviticus. He speaks of release, set freeing those who are downtrodden, and proclaiming the favorable year of the Lord. The favorable year of the Lord is an idiom for Jubilee; Yeshua is speaking about the principles of Jubilee and the purpose of a kinsman redeemer, a *Go'el*. Not only that, as I've told you at least half of the NT is but OT quotes and the one in Luke that I just read to you is Jesus quoting Isaiah 61:1.

NAS Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives, And freedom to prisoners; 2 To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD......."

This aspect of the kinsman redeemer, the one who brings release and sets the downtrodden

free, is the one we gentile Christians think most about. We were in bondage to evil and sin; we have no out but to have a kinsman redeemer. More, we were foreigners..... outside of Israel and therefore excluded from their covenants; thus we have seen in Lev. 25:44-46,that foreigners, those outside of Israel, could be slaves in perpetuity.....even their descendants..... with NO hope of redemption. Let me say it again because this principle is as central to salvation as is the need for blood to atone for sins: foreigners, those outside of Israel have NO provision of redemption available to them.

Next we have learned that the kinsman redeemer must have the MEANS to redeem. He must be able to pay the full redemption price.....no discounts. A good enough person may WANT to redeem, he may WANT to provide the redemption price to free his brother, but often he couldn't because he simply didn't have the financial wherewithal to do it. Debt holders didn't accept I O U's from kinsman redeemers; they wanted the price paid in full. God doesn't accept I O U's either. The problem for mankind was that the debt we owed to God due to our sin was death, our death. Either we paid our own debt by our own death, or a kinsman redeemer had to pay the price. The kinsman redeemer follows the pattern of substitution; the pattern of substitution is exhibited in animal sacrifice that forms the basis of the Levitical sacrificial system. But it had to be perfect sacrifice, innocent and without sin. Mankind had waited 4000 years for a kinsman redeemer; a 3rd party who could qualify to a) be a kinsman, and b) have the means to pay the full price. No ANIMAL could ever be a kinsman to a human could it? So while an animal could make atonement and stave off God's wrath temporarily, an animal could NEVER be a Kinsman for a human! And yet, what HUMAN was 100% sin free.....both in nature and in deed? Yeshua was the one and only redeemer who had the qualifications, the means, and the will to be our kinsman redeemer

We'll explore this a little further next week.