**Redeeming What is the Lord’s**

A plane was flying over the ocean when the pilot announced to the passengers "We're losing fuel quickly and I'm concerned we may not reach a place to land.  We're going to jettison all the luggage and anything you have such as books, computers, etc. that is heavy".  A few minutes later he announced "That was great folks, we lost a lot of weight and I think we can reach land if we can shed another 150 pounds or so.  What I need for you to do is get together and decide who is worth the least to society and immediately a fight broke out between 2 bankers (Not wanting to offend anyone I chose to ridicule bankers since I am one. If there is a different occupation you hold in low esteem, feel free to substitute it in the joke). In our study of Leviticus chapter 27, God establishes values for people or property that are pledged to God in the course of making a vow. David Guzik wrote that the values set were based on the relative contributions to society.

The chapter begins with God giving instructions to Moses on how to set values for those who were making a special vow to God. This would have been a commitment to give something to God over and above the offerings which were required. While God made provisions for such vows, nowhere does He require them. When the vow involved a person, the vow would have been dedicating a person’s service to assist the Levites. It might have been some task in the tabernacle or personal service to a priest such as tending a garden. God created a way for a vow to be reversed by the payment of a redemption fee which would be established by age and gender. Males between the ages of 20 and 60 were considered to be in their prime and therefore able to perform work that had the greatest productivity followed by females in that age group. The elderly, children and infants had lesser values.

Animals could be offered to God as a vow. They could be used in service or sold by the priest. The owner of the animal could reverse the vow by paying a fee to the priest which would be the value of the animal plus 20%. In verse 26 God made it clear that such a vow could not be made for a firstborn animal since that animal already belonged to God.

A house or a field could pledged to God as a vow. As with animals, they could be redeemed by payment of the value plus 20%. The value of the land would be determined by the number of years of crops it would yield before the Jubilee.

Verses 28 and 29 make a distinction between things that were vowed to God vs. devoted to God. It seems that things devoted to God were given irrevocably and could not be redeemed.

Some thoughts on this chapter:

God shows no favoritism (see Acts. 10:34-35) he established the redemption fee solely on gender and age rather then requiring a higher price from some. He also made allowances for the poor by giving the priests discretion to lower the price for those who could not afford it.

I don’t think that God is condoning the breaking of vows so much as he knows people might hastily make a vow they may regret later. The establishment of a price to be paid might discourage the original making of a vow and thus avoid the breaking of it. For those who did break it, better to enlarge the treasury of the tabernacle rather than have only shame as a product of the vow. I think there are practical reasons as well. One might be compelled to serve but have no talents to offer. I am certain that if I vowed to join the choir, Logan would be quick to set a price to release me from the vow. One’s situation could change in the future requiring a person to attend to the needs of a family rather than the needs of the priests.

God’s word has multiple warnings about the making of vows (see Deut. 23:21-23, Num. 30:2, Ecc. 5:4-5, Matt. 5:33-37). There are 2 memorable vows in the Old Testament. The first was made by Hannah who was barren and vowed to God that if He would give her a son, she would dedicate him to the priesthood. Although she would be apart from her son, she still praised God (see 1st Sam. , chap. 1-2). The other vow was made by a man who regretted his vow but still fulfilled it. Jephthah promised to God that if he was victorious in battle, he would give to God the first thing he saw coming out of this house. His daughter came out and she had to enter service in the tabernacle and would never marry.

Often vows are conditional, such as if you will do something for me, then I will fulfill the vow (Hannah and Jephthah are examples of this, see also Gen 28:20-22). While it is best not to make a vow at all, an unconditional vow given to honor God would be best. God’s covenant with us is contingent only on our acceptance of Jesus as our personal savior.