

Sukkot and the Temple Tax

Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles) being one of three pilgrimage festivals (Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles, Exd. 23:15, 34:20) was the traditional time of the year that the annual Half Shekel Temple Tax of every Israelite male 20 years and older was collected and used for the upkeep and maintenance of the Temple and related things.

¹¹Then ADONAI spoke to Moses saying, ¹²“When you tally the sum of *Bnei-Yisrael* by numbering them, then every man must pay a ransom for his soul to ADONAI when you count them, so that no plague will fall on them. ¹³Everyone among them who crosses over must give half a shekel according to the Sanctuary shekel (which is 20 gerahs): half a shekel as an offering to ADONAI. ¹⁴Everyone who crosses over among them who is counted, from 20 years old and upward, is to give the offering to ADONAI. ¹⁵The rich are not to give more and the poor are not to give less than the half shekel, when they present the offering of ADONAI to make atonement for your souls. ¹⁶You are to take the atonement money from *Bnei-Yisrael* and give it for the service of the Tent of Meeting, so that it may be a memorial for *Bnei-Yisrael* before ADONAI, to make atonement for your souls.” – Exd. 30:11-16 (TLV)

In 2 Kings 12:14-17 and 2 Chron. 24:6-9 speaks of the Half Shekel Temple Tax as well as other donations used for the repair of the Temple.

In Nehemiah 10:32-33 and extra Temple Tax of 1/3 Shekel was collected for Temple repairs, and thus separate from the annual ½ Shekel Temple Tax.

Finally in Matthew chapter 17 we see soon after Yeshua being transfigured on Mount Hermon during Sukkot, in which Kefa (Peter) offered to build a Sukkah for Yeshua as well as Moses and Elijah; we find them in Capernaum approached by

one collecting the Temple Tax, asking if Kefa's Rabbi (Yeshua) paid the Temple Tax. Perhaps in order to trap Him because it was likely word got around that Yeshua was saying things like, "I will tear this Temple down and build it back in three days." Such verbiage would be seen as anti-Jewish, anti-national and anti-Temple sentiments.

In this passage Yeshua implies that He doesn't have to pay the Temple Tax, but so as not to cause a scene they would pay it. As a result, people still attempt to use this passage to prove that Yeshua did away with the Torah (Law) and the things regarding the Temple.

Let us look at this passage and see if we can uncover what Yeshua was really trying to say

²⁴ When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the Temple tax came to Peter and said, "Your teacher pays the Temple tax, doesn't He?"

²⁵ "Yes," Peter said.

Now when Peter came into the house, *Yeshua* spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? The kings of the earth, from whom do they collect tolls or tax? From their sons or from strangers?"

²⁶ After Peter said, "From strangers," *Yeshua* said to him, "Then the sons are free. ²⁷ But so that we do not offend them, go to the sea and throw out a hook, and take the first fish that comes up. And when you open its mouth, you'll find a coin. Take that, and give it to them, for Me and you." – Matt. 17:24-17 (TLV)

Some have theorized that since the word "Temple" does not appear in the text that it brings into question if this was even the real annual Temple Tax or just an extra tax (as in Nehemiah) imposed upon the people by the Jewish ruling

authority. Because of Yeshua's statement of not having to pay it would indicate that it was not the annual Temple Tax but some other kind of man-made tax that went toward the Temple. However, as we mentioned prior, that Tabernacles was the traditional time to take up the Temple Tax and thus it is safe to say that this was the real Temple Tax and not an extra tax imposed by the Jewish establishment of the day.

So what did Yeshua mean by his words:

"Now when Peter came into the house, *Yeshua* spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? The kings of the earth, from whom do they collect tolls or tax? From their sons or from strangers?" After Peter said, "From strangers," *Yeshua* said to him, "Then the sons are free."

I believe that this was a veiled statement referring back to His transfiguration on Mount Hermon that He was indeed the Son of God and therefore literally didn't have to pay the Temple Tax. Just as He didn't have to be baptized by his cousin John, but in order to "fulfill all righteousness (Matt. 3:15)," in other words, be a proper Torah Obedient example to us and so as not to, "offend them," He did what was expected of any Torah Obedient Israeli man.

So, Messiah sends Peter out fishing to fetch a 1 Shekel coin out of its mouth, enough to pay the Temple Tax for the both of them. So what about the other disciples? After all it appears they were there.

²⁴ When THEY (*Yeshua and the disciples*) came to Capernaum, the collectors of the Temple tax came to Peter and said, "Your teacher pays the Temple tax, doesn't He?"

²⁵ "Yes," Peter said."

Didn't the other disciples have to pay the Temple Tax as well? Why didn't Yeshua tell Peter to fetch enough coins out of the fish's mouth to pay for all of the disciples? Because it is very likely Yeshua and Peter was the only ones out of the group 20 years and above. We know Yeshua was in His 30's and Peter was at least 20 years old or older; meaning the other 11 disciples were likely 19 year old and under! Seems crazy right!? Well, it was EXTREMELY common for Rabbi's to take on disciple who were 15 years of age and older. So it is possible, Yeshua had teenagers as disciples.

Chag Semeach Sukkot (Happy Feast of Tabernacles)

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