

## THE KINSMAN-REDEEMER - NUM. 35:16-21

Lord Cardigan was a Brigadier General in the Crimean War. His specific charge was commander of the Light Brigade of Cavalry. Back in the 19th century, horses were the most efficient means of rapid attack. So cavalry forces were critical to the success of any army. And certainly in this great war with the vast Russian army, the English people were counting on Lord Cardigan and his troops.

The fly in the ointment of Cardigan's military career was his brother-in-law, Lord Lucan. General Lucan was the field headquarters commander, the direct superior of Brigadier General Cardigan. Lucan and Cardigan did not get along well personally. So Lucan was a continuous thorn under Cardigan's saddle.

Their animosity came to a head on October 25, 1854. The Russian army was holding the valley adjacent to a strategic seaport village. It was critical that the English army take that seaport. So General Lucan, taking advantage of the urgency of the situation, sent his brother-in-law into that valley without adequate support against all odds. It turned out to be a suicidal mission as Cardigan's cavalry unit was mowed down by the Russian artillery. Miraculously, Brigadier General Cardigan himself was untouched by any bullets as he rode all the way through the Russian lines. He would return to England a hero. But all of the rest of his men perished in the foolhardy attempt ordered by the brother-in-law. The famous poet Tennyson would immortalize the courage of these soldiers in his poem, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*.

Interestingly enough though, the Brigadier General is not generally remembered today for his great courage. He is rather remembered for a garment that he wore. For to protect himself against the winds of riding horseback and to also allow himself to get relief in the heat of battle, the cavalry officer had a colorful sweater knitted with buttons in the front that could either be buttoned up or opened according to the weather conditions. We still to this day call these kinds of sweaters Cardigans.

One of the tragedies of the loss of the light brigade is the fact that one family member turned on another and tried to give him up to the enemy. We all recognize this to be a tragedy because this is not how families have been designed to operate. God designed families to stick together, to support one another, even to defend one another if necessary. In fact, God set forth family members as the primary deterrent to physical harm in the Old Testament economy. When a person was attacked and harmed during the Old Testament times, it was the responsibility of the closest family member to be the avenger of blood. He was called the Kinsman-redeemer. But in his practical defense of the family, he probably never realized that he was a picture of the Messiah who was to come avenging the human race and redeeming it from the slavery of sin.

God's perfect government as given in the Old Testament law was a theocracy. A theocracy is God

ruling directly over his people. A theocracy is the perfect human government because there are righteous laws reflecting God's own character with a minimum bureaucracy leading to very few taxes and little government intrusion on the personal lives of the citizens. And if the Israelites would have obeyed God's laws consistently, God promised to supernaturally protect them from their surrounding enemies. After the conquest of the Promised Land, the people of God had the opportunity to live in a perfect utopia - heaven here on earth.

But the question might arise, what about a police force? What about protection for citizens? While it was true that the Israelites had a perfect government drawn up for them by God, it was still a reality that the citizens living under this perfect government were sinful beings. How would innocent victims be protected against aggressive neighbors under God's law? Well, for this possibility God gave the provision of the kinsman-redeemer.

Now in order to be a kinsman-redeemer, a person had to meet 3 qualifications.

1. First, the person had to be the closest male relative. There was only 1 kinsman-redeemer for every person and every person had 1 kinsman-redeemer. That was the closest male relative.

2. Second, the kinsman-redeemer had to be able to redeem his brother who was in need.

3. And third, the kinsman-redeemer had to be willing to redeem his brother who was in need. If the closest male relative were either unable or unwilling to redeem his family member, the next in line would become the kinsman-redeemer until one could be found who would meet all 3 of these qualifications.

Now there were 3 major duties that were outlined in the law for the kinsman-redeemer.

1. First, if his closest relative fell upon hard times and went into debt, losing his land and home to bankruptcy and even becoming an indentured servant himself to pay off his debts, it was the duty of the kinsman-redeemer to help his brother out. If he was able and willing, the kinsman-redeemer would pay off his brother's debt and redeem his relative from slavery.

*Leviticus 25:25*

<sup>25</sup> "If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold.

2. Second, if his brother was attacked and killed by someone without cause, it was the duty of the kinsman-redeemer to avenge that death so that justice might be carried out.

*Numbers 35:16-21*

<sup>16</sup> "If a man strikes someone with an iron object so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. <sup>17</sup> Or if anyone has a stone in his hand that could kill, and he strikes someone so that he dies, he is

*a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. <sup>18</sup> Or if anyone has a wooden object in his hand that could kill, and he hits someone so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. <sup>19</sup> The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death. <sup>20</sup> If anyone with malice aforethought shoves another or throws something at him intentionally so that he dies <sup>21</sup> or if in hostility he hits him with his fist so that he dies, that person shall be put to death; he is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.*

3. A third duty of the kinsman-redeemer was to help his brother have an heir if his close relative died without having any children to carry on his inheritance.

*Deuteronomy 25:5-6*

*<sup>5</sup> If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. <sup>6</sup> The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.*

Now these laws are obviously very foreign to our way of thinking today because we live in a much different society under a totally different economy. The technological age that we live in does not put the premium on children and inheritance that the agricultural society. So we must try to think like an Old Testament Israelite in order to understand the wisdom of these regulations.

The law that God gave His people set up a foundation for an ideal society. There would be no class structure with one segment of society ruling over another and there would be no poverty. Everyone was given land. The land was divided amongst all the people. So there were no house payments to be made, no mortgages. And all a person had to do was work the land in order to have plenty of food to eat. So there would be no class of impoverished people who had nothing, for everyone was given something to start with. And remember, there was no ruling class of people to lord it over others.

Now problems could arise in time. A person could fail to use his resources wisely and lose his land to debt. Or a person could die without having anyone to pass his land on to. So it would be possible in time for smarter, more aggressive people to gather up larger quantities of land becoming very rich. And then they could use their wealth as power to lord it over others - and a caste structure might arise. Or evil people could use force to subdue their neighbors around them. So God provided the kinsman-redeemer as a remedy to these potentialities. If someone died without an heir, the kinsman-redeemer was to provide one. And as difficult as this is for us to understand, this was not considered to be adultery, for the kinsman-redeemer was acting on behalf of his brother and the child would bear the brother's name. If

someone lost his land, the kinsman-redeemer was to redeem it back. If someone was murdered, the kinsman-redeemer was to avenge his brother's blood.

The clearest example that we have of a kinsman-redeemer functioning in the Old Testament is in the book of Ruth. Ruth's husband, Kilion, had lost his land in the economic disaster of a famine and moved to Moab. Then Kilion had died without having any children. Ruth had then followed her mother-in-law, moving back into Judah, but she didn't have any home or means of livelihood. So she appealed to Boaz whom she thought to be her kinsman-redeemer. Boaz only met 2 out of the 3 qualifications. He was able to redeem and he was willing to redeem, but he was not actually the closest of kin - there was one person who was closer. So Boaz went to this man and presented Ruth's request. This man was the closest of kin and was evidently able to redeem, but he was not willing to do so. For he realized the implications of putting so much time and energy into his dead relative's inheritance. So he disqualified himself from the position of being kinsman-redeemer passing on that position to Boaz. Boaz now met all 3 qualifications. He now was the closest kin available and he had the ability and desire to redeem. So Boaz redeemed Kilion's land giving Ruth a home. And Boaz had a child with Ruth who bore the deceased name of Kilion, a child who then would become an heir of all of the inheritance. All of Ruth's friends rejoiced with her as recorded in Ruth 4:14: They said, *"Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel!"* Their prayers were certainly answered, for that child of Boaz and Ruth would be named Obed. He would become the grandfather of King David. In their obedience to the law of God, Boaz and Ruth would actually become part of the ancestral line of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Now this kinsman-redeemer that God made part of the Old Testament law was more than just a provision for an orderly society. It certainly was that and provided a very important practical function. But it was more than that. For the kinsman-redeemer was a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. So it is not just happenstance that one of the ancestors in the Messiah's line was provided by a kinsman-redeemer.

When sin entered the human race, every single person born became a slave of sin. Every single person was born with a sinful nature. As a result of sin, death reigned supreme. *The wages of sin is death*, the Bible says. Every person who has lived on planet earth has experienced the reality of that fact. For the single over-powering enemy of the human race is death. *It is the destiny of every person to die*, Hebrews 9:27 reminds us. Because of sin, God had lost the family that He had intended in creating humans in the image and likeness of God. Sin had turned the human race into enemies of God rather than family members.

There was a need for a kinsman-redeemer. Now this kinsman-redeemer had to meet certain qualifications in order to be able to carry out his duties.

1. He had to be the closest of kin. So God became a man. The Lord Jesus Christ was born of the virgin Mary. As both God and man, He would qualify as the closest of kin and mediator between God and humans. It is not happenstance that the Bible uses the term *brother* in describing Christ's relationship with the human race. In Hebrews 2, we read *So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.*

2. But the Lord Jesus Christ also had to be able to redeem the human race. As God, He was able to do this. For only God himself could provide the infinite atonement needed to pay the debt that humans owed to God. Jesus Christ was God as well as man. He had the ability to pay the debt.

3. And the Lord Jesus Christ also had to be willing to redeem the human race. As man, He demonstrated the desire to do this. In the Garden of Gethsemane, when confronted with the finality of His decision, the Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated His willingness to fulfill the will of the Father and submit himself to a sacrificial death.

And in that death upon Calvary's cross, the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled all 3 duties required of a kinsman-redeemer.

1. He redeemed His people from the slavery of sin. We were bound by the shackles of sin, unable to free ourselves. We were doomed to forever be slaves to sin. But the Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself as a ransom. He purchased us from the slave market of sin. As the Apostle Peter would later write, *18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. (1 Peter 1:18,19).*

2. The Lord Jesus Christ also avenged death, that great enemy that had reigned over the human race since sin entered the world. Every person had eventually faced death and lost. Death had reigned supreme. But in His death, the Lord Jesus Christ conquered death. He avenged the human race by defeating death and freed those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. So we can say with the Apostle Paul, *"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:55-57).*

3. And the Lord Jesus Christ in his atoning sacrifice also bore many children for God. John 1:11-13 reads:

*He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who do receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

Paul also emphasizes this truth in Romans 8:15-17:

*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

We now come to the time where we remember the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for us as our kinsman-redeemer. What a special and precious time this is. For as we remember his atoning death for us, we are reminded that we have been freed from the slavery of sin, death has been avenged and defeated forever so that we can have the confidence that we will live again after we die physically, and we have been born again into the very family of God, that we are children of God and co-heirs with Jesus Christ himself who is not ashamed to call us family members.

What is critically important, of course, is that we know the Lord Jesus as our kinsman-redeemer? Do you have the confidence that you have been redeemed from your sin, that all of your sins have been forgiven by God? Have you been freed from the fear of death? Do you look at death as a defeated foe? Are you confident that you are a member of God's family - that you have been born again into the family of God? Jesus Christ came to be our kinsman-redeemer. If we have accepted him as such into our lives personally, we can celebrate the Lord's Table with joy and gratitude for all that he has accomplished for us.