

Dr. Tiberius Rata, Old Testament Theology, Session 4, God as Redeemer

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This is Dr. Tiberius Rata on his teaching on Old Testament Theology. This is session 4, God as Redeemer.

Well, hello, everybody. Today, we're going to talk about God as a Redeemer. And, of course, the greatest act of redemption from the Old Testament is the exodus event. So, we'll look at that in some detail.

When we look at the Old Testament, there are two Hebrew terms that are used for redemption. One is *gael*, to redeem or to act as a kinsman. It appears a lot in the book of Ruth, for example, with the kinsman, Redeemer, and the *goel*.

And then *pada*, to buy off or to ransom. When we get to the New Testament, the two Greek terms are *lutromai* and *agorazo*. *Lutromai* is more to set free or redeem.

Agorazo to actually choose to buy in the marketplace, in the *agora*. We will see how these terms are changing over time because they mean something in the law, and then they kind of evolve or change into something else later on. But again, as I said, the exodus event is the event that all Old Testament talks about when they ask about God as the Redeemer.

Who is God? And God appears here as the warrior God. Sometimes, when we look at the book of Exodus, it's good to look at it in terms of conflict. And some suggest there are three main conflicts.

It's Yahweh versus Pharaoh, Yahweh versus the gods of Egypt, and sometimes it's Yahweh versus Israel. So, to look at Exodus, it's sometimes good to think about it in terms of conflict. But the major conflicts appear in chapters seven and nine when you have Yahweh versus the gods of Egypt.

And again, when we look at Exodus, there's a key verse in Exodus 12 that explains the purpose of the plagues. I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborns in the land, both man and beast. And on all the gods of Egypt, I will execute judgments.

So, it is Yahweh versus the gods of Egypt. And what God wants to show is that he, indeed, is the only true God. The first nine plagues are important, but the 10th plague is the most important because it is where we have the establishment of the Passover, which obviously is a finger pointing towards Christ, who is our Passover lamb.

I'm going to come back to that, but before we go to the plagues and Yahweh versus the gods of Egypt, we need to understand what redemption meant in the Old Testament times because it is different than what it's going to mean in the New Testament when redemption is associated with the work of Christ. In the Old Testament, when people talked about redemption, the first thing we hear about is the redemption of land or property. So, the Israelites were seen as tenants on God's land with the right to produce.

It was not their land. It was God's land. But God is allowing them to work the land.

And then also God had in mind the poor and the needy. And that's what you have here in chapter 25 of Leviticus. What happens if one of your brothers becomes poor and cannot take care of himself? If your brother becomes poor and sells part of his property, then his nearest redeemer, again the Goel idea here, shall come and redeem what his brother sold.

If a man has no one to redeem, then he becomes prosperous and finds himself sufficient to redeem it. Let him calculate the years he sold and pay back the balance, and so forth, and so on. So, if I became too poor to take care of myself, I could go to my brother and say, I'm going to sell myself to you, and you're going to redeem me and my property.

But the Bible also teaches that during the year of Jubilee, my land will go to the original owner. If I'm not alive anymore, it will go to my son. So, the year of Jubilee was very, very important.

This is important because a lot of people are using the Bible to say, look, slavery was okay in the Bible. That's a misunderstanding of the biblical text. A lot of people are reading what happened in American history, and they're reading back into the biblical text.

And that's not what happened. In the biblical text, who God had in mind was the poor, and God wanted to take care of them. It had nothing to do with what the American system was about.

A house in a walled city was not considered land, which is very interesting. But a house outside the city was considered land. Again, we're talking about an agrarian society.

So, when we talk about redemption in the book of Exodus, first, we need to talk about what redemption meant for them. And again, you had to do with land, you had to do with property, and you had to do with taking care of the poor and the

needy. So, going back to Exodus, then, in the book of Exodus, the theme is, I am Yahweh.

God says I am Yahweh. Notice, please, how many times it appears. I am the Lord, I am the Lord, I am on the Lord, and you shall know, and you may know that I am the Lord, and they shall know that I am on the Lord.

So, everything that's happening here in the book of Exodus is Yahweh showing his people that he is the true God. Think about it. The people of Israel have lived there in slavery for hundreds of years, and sometimes they're tempted to get the lifestyle of the Egyptians, and God says, no, I am Yahweh.

I am the true God. I am. It is in the book of Exodus that God introduces himself, as I am who I am, in chapter three. So, these plagues are a direct slap in the face of the gods and goddesses of Egypt.

I also made a list of how you can pair each god against Yahweh and how God is defeating these gods. Remember, the plagues are a polemic against all the gods of Egypt. The gods of Egypt are made of stone, they're made of wood, they don't have eyes to see, they don't have ears to see, and yet people are worshipping them.

And the first plague, turning the Nile into blood again, was a slap in the face of Amun. See, Amun was the god whose job was to protect the Nile. Now again, what's interesting is that all these gods and goddesses have jobs.

They're very human-like. Someone said, we are creating the image of God, and then we decided to return the favor. Well, that's exactly what happened here.

Humans are creating these gods in their image, and they have jobs. And again, Amun's job was to protect the Nile. Under Amun's protection, the flow of the Nile remained untroubled.

The problem is, in this case, the question is, where was Amun when Yahweh turned the Nile into blood? And the answer is, well, he was nowhere because he's not existent. Yahweh says I am the true God. Now, liberal scholars who reject the historicity of the Exodus event say there's no miracle here, nothing to see.

Here's how they explain the turning of the Nile into blood. The unusually heavy rainfall in the upper Nile led to flooding, which in turn led to the dissolving of red dirt. Added to the red dirt is the reddish color of certain microorganisms known as flagellates, which are always present in the Nile.

But because the flooding and the nutrients brought with it and multiplied in abundance, made the Nile red in color, undrinkable, and poisoned the fish. So, it is

an interesting, naturalistic explanation of a miracle. Now, again, it's Yahweh 1, the gods of Egypt 0. The second plague is a slap in the face of all the gods of Egypt, especially Heket.

Aaron searched out his sand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs became covered over the land of Egypt. So, Heket was the goddess of childbirth and fertility, portrayed here with the body of a woman and the head of a frog. One scholar writes that since Heket was embodied in the frog, the frog was sacred in Egypt.

It could not be killed, and consequently, there was nothing the Egyptians could do about this horrible and heroic proliferation of the goddess. They were forced to loathe the symbols of their depraved worship, but they could not kill them. And when the frogs died, their decaying bodies must have turned the towns and countryside into a stinking horror.

What is interesting is that the magicians of Egypt were able to do the same thing. Now, liberal scholars say, no miracle here; this could be explained naturalistically. Here's what they say.

Again, there is no miracle here; it is a very interesting explanation. But it's Yahweh 2, the gods of Egypt 0. The third plague, gnats or mosquitoes, some translations say. Again, this is like Exodus 12:12 says; it's a slap in the face of the gods of Egypt, especially Seb.

Seb was the god of the earth. The very place from where the gnats came, he was the god of the surface of the earth. So the plague of gnats was an embarrassment to the earth god.

The miracle, by the way, was not duplicated by the magicians of Egypt. And I like what Philip Rykens says about this. He says since Pharaoh's magicians were servants of Satan, the plagues of gnats clearly show that Satan's power has its limits.

Admittedly, the devil does have some power. The Bible says that his work is displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs of wonders. Satan has other powers as well.

He has the power to rebel, Isaiah 14, to tempt; Matthew 4, to deceive; Revelation 20, to accuse; Zechariah 3. Satan is very powerful, but his powers are limited. Consider all the things he's unable to do. He cannot create.

He can only destroy. He cannot redeem. He can only be damned.

He cannot love. He can only hate. He cannot be humble.

He can only be proud. Most crushingly of all, he was unable to keep God's Son in the grave. God broke the devil's power by raising Jesus from the dead.

The Bible says the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the work of the devil. Do you think liberal scholars will accept this as a historical fact? The answer is no. Liberal scholars who reject the miraculous nature of the plagues suggest that perfect breeding conditions in pooled stagnant water along the Nile, as the water receded, formed huge swarms of mosquitoes biting humans and animals.

How about the plague of flies? If you will not let my people go, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people into your houses. And the houses of Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies and also on the ground on which they stand. Again, the Egyptians did not duplicate a miracle.

And it seems that for the first time, Pharaoh's heart is softening. But again, it hardens again in chapter 8. This was a slap in the face of Kephri, who was supposed to be the god of the flies. I don't know if you keep track, but it's Yahweh 4, the gods of Egypt 0. How about the death of Egyptian livestock? This is Yahweh versus all the gods of Egypt, but especially Neves.

The next day, the Lord did this thing; all the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one of the livestock of the people of Israel died. This was a slap in the face of Neves, the bull god. You see him here with the body of a man and the head of a bull.

The sacred bull was the earthly representation of Ra, the sun god, which we will talk about later. By the way, the Egyptians had a lot of gods and goddesses, such as bulls or cows. Apis was one of them, and it was a sacred animal of the god Ptah.

Hathor was represented in the body of a cow. Imagine the economic devastation of Egypt's economy if all the livestock died. As my predecessor at Grace, Dr. John Davis, writes, oxen were dependent upon for heavy labor in agriculture.

Camels, donkeys, and horses were used largely for transportation. Cattle not only provided milk but were also an integral part of the worship in the land of Egypt. The economic losses on this occasion must have affected Pharaoh greatly because he kept a large number of cattle under his control.

So, we have to stop a little bit and ask ourselves, who hardened Pharaoh's heart? Did Pharaoh harden his heart, or did God harden Pharaoh's heart? Because this is a very important part of Old Testament theology. Well, if we read in the Bible, it actually says both. Pharaoh hardened his heart, noticing all these chapters, but then it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

But again, if you read from the beginning, it's not like Pharaoh was this nice, innocent, godly man, and God is touching his heart and hardening his heart. No, this is an evil man who's always against God and his plan, who doesn't believe in God. He's actually very ignorant and asks Moses, who is this God? And he's very, not just ignorant, but he's arrogant.

I don't know this God, and I don't want to know about this God. So, we have to understand that it is first that Pharaoh hardens his heart, and then we are told that Yahweh hardens Pharaoh's heart. But the Bible speaks about both, and that is very, very important.

But the timeless principle is this: Yahweh is the true sovereign God who will free his people from oppression so that they can serve and worship him. And, of course, we can go through all the plagues, and we have Yahweh versus the gods of Egypt. Again, it ends up being 10 to 0 because the gods are no gods at all.

It's Yahweh who's the only true God. And the New Testament warns us in Hebrews 3:12, which says, take care lest there be any of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God. That's what Pharaoh had.

He had an evil, unbelieving heart. But back to the story, what we have in Leviticus to the idea of redemption. Again, we had the redemption of land, but there is also the redemption of people.

I read to you already from Leviticus 25, the indentured servants. If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God that your brother may live beside you.

So again, here, God did not have a plan for some people to get rich. No, this was for God taking care of the poor people by using his brothers. Another idea of redemption appears in the firstborns.

The firstborns were supposed to be holy to the Lord. And the Bible says because he opens the womb. So what happens is when you have a son, you dedicate him to the Lord.

And he was supposed actually to serve at the tabernacle or the temple. But you could actually redeem him for five shekels. You would redeem him, and then he would be yours.

Now, remember the story of Hannah. Hannah prays for Samuel and says, Lord, if you give me a son, he shall be yours. So, when the time of redemption comes, Hannah does not redeem Samuel but leaves Samuel in the work of Yahweh.

Then, you could redeem the wife of a deceived relative. That's what we have in the story, and the one story of Ruth is where Ruth is a widow, and it's not only she who is a widow, but her sons die. So, then she's left with her two daughters-in-law.

And again, in the book of Leviticus, it is the same thing. If the husband dies, then if the husband has a brother, he shall redeem the wife. And that's exactly what happens in Ruth.

It seems that there is a Goel, a kinsman redeemer, who has the right to redeem Ruth. And Boaz goes to him and says, look, here's Ruth, and here you want to redeem. So the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you shall also require Ruth the Moabite.

At this point, the kinsman redeemer says, oh, wait a second. I already have a wife. And again, we don't know how that discussion went to the dinner table.

But we, the comedian, are probably right when he says the reason we cannot have two wives is because Jesus says no one shall serve two masters. But anyway, that's only a joke. But apparently, this kinsman redeemer knew that because he said, no, I don't want to redeem anymore.

I'm glad to redeem the land, but if there's a woman involved, I'm not willing to do it. So, then Boaz, he's the other closest kinsman redeemer. So, he redeems Ruth, and we know that from that, they become the ancestors of David and then obviously of Jesus.

And then there's another Goel that appears, which is a little less known in the book of Numbers in chapter 35. And then you have Deuteronomy 19. This has to do with the cities of refuge.

And if someone kills someone inadvertently, then you have that kinsman redeemer. Now, please notice how the concept of redemption is changed later in scripture. When we get to the wisdom literature, to Job, and to the Psalms, for example, we have redemption being moved from land and people to actual redemption from enemies.

That's what Job prays for, the psalmist. Redemption from the wicked. Redemption from death.

Redemption from punishment for sin. So, it looks like there is a development in the language that is very different from the one in the law. That's why you have to be very careful when people say, well, this word appears like this.

Well, it doesn't mean it means the same thing. Again, we have sometimes hundreds of years passing by. We have different contexts.

And just the fact that it's used one way in Leviticus doesn't mean it's used the same way in the Psalm. And I know all of us know very well Psalm 103. So, see now, redemption becomes something else.

Redemption from death. And of course, in the book of Exodus, going back to the idea of redemption from slavery in Egypt, God says very clearly before he enacts the punishments against the gods of Egypt, he tells Israelites that he will act on their behalf. Exodus six, six to eight and say, therefore, to the people of Israel, I am Yahweh.

I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from the slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an ouster storm and with great acts of judgment. And I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God. And you shall know that I am the Lord, your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for possession. I am Yahweh.

I am the Lord. Now, this should say Goel; the redemption as eschatological Yahweh is Israel's Goel. In Isaiah, we have the idea that God is the redeemer.

This is talking about Jesus's second coming. So it's sometimes talking about his first coming, but sometimes it's talking about his second coming. Now, when we get to the New Testament, again, in the New Testament, we have this idea of redemption that is, again, different than what we have in Leviticus.

It is closer aligned to what we have in the book of Psalms and in the book of Job, but it is a little different. Again, in the New Testament, redemption always refers to Jesus's death and resurrection and what he has accomplished for us. So, Jesus came to accomplish our redemption.

The giving of his life was the ransom price, and the ransom was a substitutionary in character. And we have all these verses that speak about this. For example, the key verse in the Gospel of Mark says, for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

So, notice, God, the creator, is God the covenant maker, is God the redeemer. And he does that through the person of Jesus Christ. Luke 1:68, blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited us and accomplished redemption for his people.

Galatians 3:13, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. Galatians 4 is a very important passage at Christmas because it teaches us when Christ was born, how Christ was born, and when Christ was born. When was Christ born? In the fullness of time.

God sent forth his Son. How was Jesus born? Born of a woman, born under the law. Why was Jesus born? In order for him to redeem those who are under the law, we might receive adoption as sons.

Paul writes to the Corinthians that Jesus became not just our wisdom but our righteousness and redemption. Romans 3, for all, have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Paul writes to the Ephesians, in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.

Peter writes that you are not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life, inherited from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. Titus writes to the church on Crete, on the isle of Crete, about the grace of God. And then he says, God for himself, Jesus gave himself that he might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good works.

Again, going back to Hebrews, the author of Hebrews makes the correlation to Jesus, who is not just the redeemer, but he's the price of redemption. He writes that when Christ appeared as a high priest for the good things to come, he came through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, he entered the holy place once and for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctified for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. So God, the creator, is the God, the covenant maker, and the covenant keeper, and he's also the redeemer.

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