

Taxing Thoughts



In Exodus 25:8 God tells Moses to build a sanctuary for Him so that He may live amongst the Israelites. He then proceeds to explain what the nature of that sanctuary will be. If you read starting from Chapter 25 all the way through Chapter 29 you will get a sense of the grandeur of what was to be built. The Bible indicates that all of the Israelites were willing to invest in this Sanctuary and even though it wasn't anything more than a tent, it was the most magnificent tent any one had ever seen. Reading on Chapter 35 through Chapter 39 you will see that they not only funded the project but put careful effort into building this Tabernacle for God.

Flashing back to Chapter 30 we see in Verse 11-16, *Then the Lord said to Moses, "When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the Lord a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them. Each one who crosses over to those already counted is to give a half shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. This half shekel is an offering to the Lord. All who cross over, those twenty years old or more, are to give an offering to the Lord. The rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less when you make the offering to the Lord to atone for your lives. Receive the atonement money from the Israelites and use it for the service of the tent of meeting. It will be a memorial for the Israelites before the Lord, making atonement for your lives."* This was the first mention of the "Temple Tax" and as God pointed out, the money was to be used to maintain the Tabernacle (Church). It's interesting that God referred to this as a "Ransom" and that there wasn't any alternative to not giving it, telling me that if you love living with the Lord, you "Must" maintain His residence. Because the value of a half shekel of silver today might only be worth \$5.00, what the half shekel represented to an Israelite at that time is deceptive. For instance, in Jesus' time the average worker might have to work for 2 days to acquire a half shekel and in Matthew 20:1-16 Jesus tells of the landowner who offered the workers 1 denarius for a whole day's work, turns out that one denarius at that time was equivalent to about 1/3 of a shekel. So you see that this was no small amount.

When God mentions that they would be paying a "Ransom" for their lives what do you think went through their minds, now we believe that Jesus paid a ransom for our lives but was that for both our Physical life and our Eternal life or just our Eternal life. What do you think? The Israelites were aware of "life after death" but not all of them believed in it and even those who did, didn't understand it in the same way as we do, so this ransom thing was all about their physical life. In any case we hear that the half shekel also buys a "Plague" immunization and that's probably a broad spectrum vaccine that might cover more than just diseases and since this takes place at your 20th year probably shouldn't preclude booster shots prior to that.

In 2 Chronicles 22 – 24 we read of how Ahaziah and his mother Athaliah followed the house of Ahab by worshiping Baal and Ashra, by doing great damage to the Temple and by attempting to destroy the whole royal family of the house of Judah but Joash was preserved from her ferocious attack. After 7 years Joash was king and Athaliah was dead. There was a problem, since the previous administration had damaged and desecrated the Temple there was need for money to repair and restore it. This was the second mention of the "Temple Tax" and a chest was made to be placed at the gate of the Temple. The Bible says that the people contributed gladly and the chest was filled multiple times. There was enough money to do a full repair on the Temple and replace the articles of service and sacred objects.

The bottom line is that God wants “Your Best” not your second best or your left overs. David agonized over that in 2 Samuel 7 and his anguish was so meaningful that it appeared also in 1 Chronicles 17. David commented to Nathan that he shouldn’t be living in a palace while God still lives in a tent. God’s reply was that David should take heart in that while he wouldn’t have the privilege to undertake that task never the less his son would. With that consolation David went about with Gods’ inspiration formulating the plans for the building of the Temple and accumulating what by any standard was a huge treasure to achieve the construction of said Temple and the Bible comments that the people gave willingly and rejoiced greatly. If you are interested 1 Chronicles 17, 22, 28 and 29 describe the process that David went through to set the construction in place.

Matthew 17:24-27 is the third mention of the “Temple Tax” and provides the “New Testament Christian” some interesting insight into what Jesus thought about the “Church Building”. While many translations indicate that Jesus’ payment of the tax was an attempt to avoid offence to the “Temple Leaders”, (John 2:14-16), (Luke 19:45-46), (Mark 11:15-17), (Matthew 21:12-13) seems to indicate that He wasn’t averse to provoking the leaders when the circumstances were right.

We endeavor to convince ourselves that individually each is the “Temple of God” and while that is to a great extent true, we learn some things from each of the events that have been portrayed here. First, people that we revere in the Bible (Moses, David, Solomon, Joash, and Jesus) felt that the temple was an important structure, that it was a place where you could go and encounter God and that it was critical that it be “Clean and Maintained”.

Second, that all of the 5 afore mentioned men believed that God in all His forms resided in that building in some form or another. While God is the orchestrator of all of creation, He is distinct from that creation and has said multiple times (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, 1 Kings, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Isaiah, John, Revelation) that He wanted to dwell amongst “My People” and be “Their” God but shouldn’t we provide Him a place that is suitable for Him and one that His people would want to come to and spend time with God.