



Yahweh, our Kinsman-Redeemer

A study of the Hebrew concept of go'el

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Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

1. Questions to be answered:

What is a kinsman-redeemer-avenger (go'el)?

Has Yahweh fulfilled his promise to personally be the go'el of Israel?

Is it possible that Yahweh became a blood relative to mankind in order to fulfil the requirements of a go'el in redeeming us from our enslavement to sin?

2. Definition of go'el

The *go'el* (kinsman-redeemer-avenger) is a legal role which plays a prominent role in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). Bearing some resemblance to the 'godparent' role practiced in some Christian traditions, the *go'el* concept is explained thus in the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*:

“The kinsman-redeemer-avenger is...a person formally designated and with particular legal rights and duties. The kinsman-redeemer was a near blood-relative and always male. This near-kinsman (or one of them, if many) had a duty to protect his weaker relatives. He had to redeem property belonging to relatives when they had to sell land or goods (Lev 25:23-25) and even their persons when they had sold themselves into slavery (Lev 25:47-55). For example, Jeremiah bought land belonging to his cousin at Anathoth because he was the kinsman-redeemer (Jer 32). In the case of Ruth, it was important that the nearer relative give up his right/duty in favour of Boaz (Ruth 4:6). The kinsman-redeemer was also duty bound to come to the defense or aid of a relative in either a legal or an actual struggle.”¹

3. An overview of go'el in the Old Testament

Here is a brief survey of the roughly 100 uses of the word *go'el* in the Masoretic text of the Old Testament:

Reference	Context	Usage of <i>go'el</i>
Genesis 48:15-16	Jacob blesses Ephraim	Jacob refers to God/his Angel as having redeemed him from all evil
Exodus 6:6; 15:13	The Exodus	Yahweh redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt
Leviticus 25:25-54, 27:13-33; Numbers 5:8	Laws for redemption of persons and property	Explains the legal requirements and responsibilities of the <i>go'el</i>
Numbers 35:12-27, Deuteronomy 19:6-	Laws on blood vengeance and cities	The word for blood avenger is <i>go'el</i>

¹ Ryken, Leland, et al. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. InterVarsity Press, 1998, p.501.

12, Joshua 20:3-9, 2 Samuel 14:11	of refuge	
Ruth 2:20; 3:9-13; 4:1-14	The story of Ruth	Boaz acts as Ruth's <i>go'el</i> , redeeming her inheritance after her nearest kinsman refuses to do so
Job 19:25-27	Job laments his hapless circumstances	Job expresses his hope that his <i>go'el</i> (God) lives and will one day come to earth to save him
Psalms 19:14; 78:35	Psalms praising God	Yahweh is Rock and Redeemer (<i>go'el</i>)
Psalms 69:18; 72:14; 74:2; 77:15; 103:4; 106:10; 107:2; 119:154; Lamentations 3:58	Psalms/prophets petitioning God	Yahweh is asked to redeem from enemies and/or from death
Proverbs 23:11	Advice for daily living	God is the <i>go'el</i> of orphans, so do not oppress them!
Isaiah 41:14; 43:14; 44:6; 44:24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 49:26; 54:5; 54:8; 60:16; 63:16; Jeremiah 31:11; 50:34; Micah 4:10	Yahweh speaks to Israel	Yahweh is the <i>go'el</i> of Israel, which he will ultimately prove by saving them from their enemies and their sins
Isaiah 43:1; 44:22; 44:23; 48:20; 52:3; 52:9; 63:9	Yahweh speaks to Israel	<i>go'el</i> used as a verb, again describing Yahweh's relationship to Israel
Isaiah 59:20	Yahweh speaks to Israel	A reference to a (or 'the') <i>go'el</i> coming to Zion, who is not identified
Isaiah 35:9; 51:10; 62:12; 63:4	Yahweh speaks to Israel	References to 'the redeemed' (<i>go'el</i>) as a class of people
Hosea 13:14	Yahweh speaks to Israel	Yahweh asks rhetorically if he should redeem Israel from death in spite of their sins

4. Foundational *go'el* passages in the Pentateuch

4.1. Genesis

The first occurrence of *go'el* in the Old Testament is in the blessing that Israel/Jacob pronounced upon Ephraim and Manasseh, in Genesis 48:15-16:

“14 And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands (for Manasseh was the firstborn). 15 And he blessed Joseph and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, 16 the angel who has **redeemed** me

from all evil, bless the boys; and in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.” (ESV)

This blessing is the foundation of Yahweh’s role as *go’el* of his people Israel which, as we will see, is repeatedly expressed later in the Old Testament. The link can be seen from the fact that many of these later references to Yahweh as *go’el* speak about Jacob and/or Ephraim in the immediate context (see, for instance, Psalm 77:15; Isaiah 44:23, 60:16; Jeremiah 31:9-11; Hosea 13:12-14).

Another notable point in this passage is that it is an angel (or rather, *the* angel) who is said to have redeemed Jacob, but this angel is identified with God. We lack space to discuss the phenomenon of theophany (Old Testament appearances of God) in any detail here, but suffice it to say that a common Christian interpretation of this special Angel, who is closely identified with God, is that he was a manifestation of the pre-existent Christ (see also Genesis 32:24-30 cf. Hosea 12:4; Exodus 3:2-6; 23:20-21; Judges 2:1; Judges 13:21-22). This interpretation is found in the writings of Justin Martyr and thus dates at least as far back as c. 150 A.D.:

“But so much is written for the sake of proving that Jesus the Christ is the Son of God and His Apostle, being of old the Word, and appearing sometimes in the form of fire, and sometimes in the likeness of angels...but now in the times of your reign, having, as we before said, become Man by a virgin, according to the counsel of the Father, for the salvation of those who believe on Him.”²

“I shall give you another testimony, my friends,” said I, “from the Scriptures, that God begat before all creatures a Beginning, [who was] a certain rational power [proceeding] from Himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord and Logos; and on another occasion He calls Himself Captain, when He appeared in human form to Joshua the son of Nave (Nun). For He can be called by all those names, since He ministers to the Father’s will, and since He was begotten of the Father by an act of will.”³

4.2. Exodus

“Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will **redeem** you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. 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.” (Exodus 6:5-7)

² Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chapter 63.

³ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, chapter 66.

The references to Yahweh **redeeming** (go'el) Israel from slavery in Egypt are of great significance because, as will be seen later, the theme of redemption from *spiritual* slavery is a prominent one in the New Testament.

4.3. Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Leviticus 25:25-54, 27:12-33 and Numbers 5:8 lay out the legal requirements of a *go'el*, which are important to comprehending the whole concept. As numerous commentators have noted, there were three qualifications required in order to legally serve as a *go'el*. These were as follows:

- 1) The *go'el* had to be a *kinsman* (blood relative) to the redeemed.
- 2) The *go'el* had to be *able* to pay the price of redemption.
- 3) The *go'el* had to be *willing* to pay the price of redemption.⁴

The *blood avenger* aspect of the *go'el* (Numbers 35:12-27; Deuteronomy 19:6-12) is an interesting and highly relevant dimension to the topic but not one that will be explored in the present work.

Ruth provides a valuable case study of the function of the *go'el* in human affairs.

5. Later development: the *go'el* takes on spiritual significance

It is in the references to the *go'el* in the poetic books and prophets that we begin to see hints of the theological significance of the term. When Yahweh is called *go'el* in the poetic books and prophets, it is often in a physical sense – Yahweh rescues his people from their human enemies, and avenges their blood. However, to varying degrees one can see a second, spiritual application developing: *Yahweh rescues his people from their sins, and from the greatest enemy of all – death!*

5.1. Job

Job 19:25-27: “25 For I know that my **Redeemer** lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, 27 whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!”

Job has just finished expressing that he is a ruined man: “My bones stick to my skin and to my flesh, and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth” (v. 20). His own family and friends – his *kinsmen* – despise him (v. 17-19). Yet Job now expresses hope for the future based on his real kinsman-redeemer, God. Importantly, he foresees two key New Testament doctrines: the resurrection of the dead, and the incarnation, or manifestation of God in flesh. Paul may

⁴ For a fuller discussion of these requirements see H.L. Wilmington, *Wilmington's Guide to the Bible*, Tyndale House Publishers, 1982, pp. 138ff.

have had this passage in mind when he wrote of “the redemption of our bodies” in Romans 8:23.

5.2. Psalms

Psalm 103:2-4: “2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, 3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, 4 who **redeems** your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,”

Here, redemption of one’s life from death is associated with the forgiveness of sins.

5.3. Hosea

Hosea 13:12-14: “12 The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is kept in store. 13 The pangs of childbirth come for him, but he is an unwise son, for at the right time he does not present himself at the opening of the womb. 14 Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I **redeem** them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes.”

Here, Yahweh asks rhetorically whether he should redeem his people from death in spite of their sins. As the next chapter (as well as Paul’s quotation of this passage in 1 Corinthians 15) shows, he will – “I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them” (Hosea 14:4).

5.4. Isaiah

5.4.1. A crescendo of *go’el* references in later Isaiah

The book of the Old Testament with the most frequent – and arguably most spiritually significant – references to Yahweh as *go’el* is Isaiah. Yahweh repeatedly insists that he has redeemed Jacob/Israel from trouble in the past and will do so again. It is clear that something more than redemption from the power of other nations is meant from the supernatural picture of the redeemed in Isaiah 35:9 and 51:11. As in Psalm 103, the redemption of Israel is linked to the forgiveness of their sins in Isaiah 44:22.

In Isaiah 49:7 Yahweh declares himself to be the *go’el* of Israel in the context of introducing the Messiah – “one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers” (see also v. 1-6), which evokes similar language to the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 53. In Isaiah 52:3, Yahweh promises Jerusalem that she “shall be redeemed without money,” a prophecy of the atoning death of Christ which Peter cites in the New Testament (1 Peter 1:18-19).

In Isaiah 54:5-8 Yahweh describes Israel as his estranged wife with whom he intends to redeem “with everlasting love.” To what can “everlasting love” refer besides the ultimate example of love we have in the good news of Jesus Christ (cf. John 15:11; 1 John 3:16)?

5.4.2. Isaiah 59

In chapters 59-63 we really come to the heart of the matter. Chapter 59 opens with a dire description that is clearly spiritual in nature:

Isaiah 59:1-2:

“1 Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; 2 **but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God**, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”

After describing the sinful state of the nation in detail, we read of Yahweh's reaction:

“15b The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. 16 **He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation**, and his righteousness upheld him. 17 He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak. 18 According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render repayment. 19 So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives. 20 "And a **Redeemer** will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression," declares the LORD. 21 "And as for me, this is my covenant with them," says the LORD: "My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring," says the LORD, "from this time forth and forevermore."

We know this passage is Messianic for several reasons. First, Isaiah 59:20-21 is quoted by Paul in Romans 11:26-27. Secondly, Isaiah 59:21 is paraphrased by Peter in Acts 2:38-29. Paul also borrows the language of Isaiah 59:17 in Ephesians 6:14, 17 and 1 Thessalonians 5:8-9.

This passage stresses some important doctrinal points about salvation. First, salvation did not and could not have been of man's doing. Yahweh saw that man was in a hopeless situation, so he dressed for the occasion and stepped into the picture. "A Redeemer" arrives on the scene (some translations have 'the Redeemer,' as do the Septuagint, and Paul's quotation thereof in Romans 11:26).

Who is this Redeemer? The wording suggests that it is someone other than Yahweh, and yet the context argues against such an interpretation. In v. 16-19 it is Yahweh whose arm brings salvation; Yahweh who clothes himself in righteousness; Yahweh who repays his enemies; Yahweh who comes like a rushing stream. Furthermore, the word *go'el* is applied to Yahweh 12 other times in Isaiah 41-63, and never to anyone else. For instance, in the very next chapter Yahweh declares emphatically, "[A]nd you shall know that I, the LORD, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob" (60:16). **The evidence suggests**

that the Redeemer who comes to Zion is Yahweh, and yet is in a sense distinct from Yahweh.

5.4.3. Isaiah 63

Chapter 59 prompted us to ask the question, “Who is this Redeemer?” In chapter 63, however, the text itself poses the question:

“Who is this who comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah, he who is splendid in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? ‘It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.’” (Isaiah 63:1-2).

The Redeemer does not state his identity but it clearly cannot be anyone other than Yahweh. The declaration “It is I” echoes the emphatic “I am he” statements of Yahweh in Isaiah 41:4; 43:10-13, 25; 46:4; 48:12; 51:12; 52:6. Yahweh has repeatedly declared that he is the Saviour (43:11; 45:15, 21; 49:26; 60:16). But the best evidence that this Redeemer coming from Edom is Yahweh comes from simply reading on in Isaiah 63:

“2 Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress? 3 "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel. 4 For the **day of vengeance** was in my heart, and my **year of redemption** had come. 5 **I looked, but there was no one to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold; so my own arm brought me salvation**, and my wrath upheld me. 6 I trampled down the peoples in my anger; I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.”

In v. 5, the speaker uses almost identical language to Yahweh’s in Isaiah 59:16. Furthermore, vengeance is Yahweh’s prerogative and his alone (Deuteronomy 32:35). So there is little doubt that the Redeemer here in chapter 63 is again Yahweh.

While this passage appears to be describing judgment of the wicked – and certainly it is – there may be a secondary application to the atonement. Yahweh declares that he poured out the people’s lifeblood upon the earth, and in so doing, stained his own garments. Note also the reference to the winepress. At the Last Supper, Jesus took the cup and said, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). Indeed, in John 19:34, we are told that Jesus’ blood did pour out upon the earth. His blood was our lifeblood (John 6:53).

While the speaker in Isaiah 63 can definitely be identified with Yahweh, he is also identified with the Word of God – namely Jesus – in Revelation 19:13: “He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood.” Furthermore, in Revelation 5:6 John saw a Lamb standing “as if it had been slain” – likely covered in blood. To this Lamb was sung, “You were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God” (5:9). Returning to Isaiah 63, we see further evidence that this passage is not merely about judgment:

7 I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. 8 For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely." **And he became their Saviour.** 9 **In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.** 10 But they rebelled and **grieved his Holy Spirit**; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them.

Again, on the surface this passage refers to Yahweh's deeds of redemption in the past ("the days of old"), and Yahweh's intention to rescue his people from the nations that oppressed them in the present. However, there are several reasons to see verses 8-9 as typifying the future redemptive work of Christ:

- 1) We are told that Yahweh became their *Saviour*. This is a title commonly used of both God and Christ in the New Testament, almost always with reference to salvation from sin and death (see, for example, Titus 3:4-6).
- 2) It appears that the Septuagint (ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) of Isaiah 63:7-9 is cited by Paul in Titus 3:5 with reference to salvation. Isaiah 63:7-9 LXX reads, "*kata to eleos autou...autos kurios esosen autous*", which translates as, "According to his mercy...the Lord himself...saved them." Titus 3:5b reads, "*kata to autou eleos esosen hemas*", which translates as, "According to his mercy he saved us" (he being God).
- 3) "In all their affliction he was afflicted" is the good news in a nutshell – that Yahweh, through his Son Jesus, took part in our sufferings in order to enact our salvation. Moreover, it is strikingly similar language to that used of the Suffering Servant described just a few chapters earlier: "Surely **he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows**; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and **afflicted**...He was oppressed, and he was **afflicted**" – Isaiah 53:4, 7]
- 4) "The angel of his presence saved them" harkens back to what we discussed earlier in terms of the unique Angel of Yahweh who the early church identified with Christ. If the 'Angel of Yahweh' who appeared in the Old Testament was in fact the pre-existent Christ, there is a continuum from Yahweh's acts of redemption through this Angel in days of old to his ultimate act of redemption through the man Jesus.
- 5) "They...grieved his Holy Spirit" – Paul borrows this language in Ephesians 4:30: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." 'The day of redemption' likewise alludes to Isaiah 63:4. This suggests Paul understood Isaiah 63 to apply to his time.

Continuing on in the rest of Isaiah 63, the prophet reflects on Yahweh's deeds of redemption in the past, and interprets them to mean that Yahweh is Israel's Redeemer "from of old" – that is, past, present and future. *Go'el* is even applied to Yahweh as a *name* here, which shows how central the concept is to his identity.

11 Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit, 12 who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, 13 who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble. 14 Like livestock that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest. So you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name. 15 Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and beautiful habitation. Where are your zeal and your might? The stirring of your inner parts and your compassion are held back from me. 16 For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us; **you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.**

With this Old Testament background of Yahweh's role as both physical and spiritual Redeemer of Israel, we can now turn to the New Testament.

6. Redemption in the New Testament

6.1. Christ as Redeemer

While the New Testament contains references to God as Redeemer (e.g. Luke 1:68), and to Moses as a redeemer (Acts 7:35), the majority of references to redemption in the New Testament portray Christ as the Redeemer. This ought to come as a surprise. After all the emphasis in the prophets on Yahweh as the sole Redeemer of Israel, did he delegate this responsibility to someone else? The answer is no, because Yahweh worked through Christ (2 Cor. 5:19), and also because Christ is fundamentally not "someone else" from God (John 10:30).

6.2. Redemption from spiritual slavery

We saw that the *go'el* in the Old Testament often had to do with freeing slaves (cf. Exodus 6:6; 15:13; Leviticus 25:44-49). This imagery is picked up in the New Testament (especially in Paul's writings) to explain the redemption from sin and death that Christ brought:

John 8:31-36: "31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will **set you free.**" 33 They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been **enslaved** to anyone. How is it that you say, '**You will become free**'?" 34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.** 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. 36 **So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**"

Romans 8:20-23: "20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its **bondage to corruption** and obtain the **freedom** of the glory of the

children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the **redemption of our bodies.**”

Galatians 3:13, 4:1-7, 5:1: “13 Christ **redeemed** us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"... I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. 3 In the same way we also, when we were children, were **enslaved** to the elementary principles of the world. 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to **redeem** those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are **no longer a slave**, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God... For **freedom Christ has set us free**; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of **slavery.**”

Hebrews 2:14-15: “14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and **deliver** all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong **slavery.**”

6.3. Other key New Testament redemption passages

Mark 10:45: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a **ransom** for many.”

Acts 20:28: “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He **purchased with His own blood**” (NASB; note that some manuscripts read, ‘church of the Lord’)

Romans 2:23-25: “23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the **redemption** that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation **by his blood**, to be received by faith.”

Ephesians 1:7: “In [the Beloved] we have **redemption through his blood**, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace”.

Colossians 1:13-14: “13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have **redemption, the forgiveness of sins.**”

1 Timothy 2:5-6: “5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a **ransom for all**, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”

Titus 2:10b-14, 3:3-7: “...so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. 11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us **to redeem us from all lawlessness** and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works...3:3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, **slaves to various passions and pleasures**, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 **he saved us**, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Hebrews 9:11-15: “11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but **by means of his own blood**, thus **securing an eternal redemption**. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. 15 Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that **redeems them from the transgressions committed** under the first covenant.”

1 Peter 1:18-19: “Knowing that you were **ransomed** from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but **with the precious blood of Christ**, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (Note the allusion to Isaiah 52:3 – “For thus says the LORD: ‘You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money.’”)

Revelation 5:8-10: “8 And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and **by your blood you ransomed people for God** from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.””

6.4. Summary of key points about redemption in the New Testament

- 1) 'Redemption from slavery' is equivalent to the forgiveness of sins (John 8:34; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:15) and consequently, freedom from the penalty of death (Romans 8:23; Titus 3:7; Revelation 5:10).
- 2) In order for Christ to qualify as the Redeemer, he had to fulfil the three requirements mentioned earlier:
 - a. *He had to be a blood relative to the redeemed* – that is, he had to partake of human nature (Galatians 4:4-5; Hebrews 2:14 cf. 2:11).
 - b. *He had to be able to pay the price of redemption*, which in this case was his blood (Acts 20:28; Romans 3:25; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:12; 1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 5:9), also referred to as his life (Mark 10:45), his death (Hebrews 2:14), and himself (1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14).
 - c. *He had to pay the price of redemption willingly*, which he did (Mark 10:45; cf. John 6:51; John 10:18).

6.5. A detailed look at Titus 2:10-14, 3:3-7

Now we will examine one particular passage above in closer detail: Titus 2:10-14, 3:3-7. In particular we want to focus on Titus 2:13-14: "Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."

Verse 13 is noteworthy because it refers to Jesus Christ as "our great God and Saviour." This rendering is based the "Granville Sharp rule" of Greek grammar. The rule was formulated by Granville Sharp, an 18th century British abolitionist; thus it is not reflected in the earlier King James Version, which reads "the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

The basic idea of the rule is that if you have two nouns of personal description separated by the word "and" (*kai* in Greek), and the first noun has the definite article "the" (*ho* in Greek or its cases), and the second noun does not, *the two nouns refer to the same person*.

By way of illustration, an obvious and undisputed example of the rule is in Ephesians 5:20. In the KJV, it reads, "Giving thanks always for all things unto **God and the Father** (*to theo kai patri*) in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ". This translation is rather awkward, because it could be taken to mean that 'God' and 'the Father' are two different beings. The Granville Sharp rule tells us that, because 'God' and 'Father' are separated by 'and,' and 'God' has the definite article, and 'Father' does not, we must understand 'God' and 'Father' to refer to the same being. Thus the ESV translates the key phrase simply as "**God the Father**"; the NASB has "**God, even the Father.**"

In the case of Titus 2:13, the application of the rule implies that "great God" and "Saviour Jesus Christ" refer to the same being; thus Jesus Christ is identified as our great God and Saviour (see also the similar construction in 2 Peter 1:1, as well as textual variants in Acts

20:28 and Jude 4). But is the Granville Sharp rule really a legitimate rule of New Testament Greek? Not counting these “christologically significant” passages, there are 80 instances in the New Testament which fit the requirements of the rule. Among these 80 instances there are no exceptions to the rule. As grammarian Daniel B. Wallace notes, “Even Sharp’s opponents could not find any exceptions; all had to admit that the rule was valid in the NT.”⁵

Thus, in order to avoid the conclusion that Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1 (and possibly Acts 20:28 and Jude 4) refer to Jesus as God, one must claim that these passages are exceptions to the Granville Sharp rule, despite there being no other exceptions in the entire New Testament. It is for this reason that nearly all modern Bible versions translate the relevant bit of Titus 2:13 as “our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

However, further evidence that Paul intended to refer to Jesus Christ as “our great God” here can be found in the context. First, in the surrounding verses both God (2:10; 3:4) and Jesus Christ (3:6) are referred to as “our Saviour” without any qualification and thus implicitly equated. But even more telling is the fact that Paul takes Old Testament language about Yahweh’s redemptive work toward Israel and applies it directly to Christ in Titus 2:14. The chart below shows the Greek of Titus 2:14bc and the Greek of the key Septuagint (LXX) passages to which Paul is alluding.

<p>Titus 2:14bc <i>hina lutrosetai hemas apo pases anomias kai katharise eauto laon periousion</i> “That he (Jesus) might redeem us from all lawlessness and purify for himself a peculiar people”</p>	<p>Psalm 130:8 LXX <i>kai autos lutrosetai ton Israel ek pason ton anomion autou</i> “And it is he (the Lord) who will redeem Israel from all its acts of lawlessness”</p> <p>Ezekiel 37:23 LXX <i>kai kathario autous, kai esontai moi eis laon, kai ego kurios esomai eautois eis theon</i> “I will cleanse them, and they shall be for me as a people, and I, the Lord, will be a God for them”</p> <p>Exodus 19:5 LXX <i>esesthe moi laos periousios apo panton ton ethnon</i> “You shall be for me a people special above all nations”</p> <p>Deuteronomy 7:6 LXX <i>kai se proeilato kurios ho theos sou heinaise auto laon periousion</i></p>
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⁵ Wallace, Daniel B. Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament. Zondervan, 1997, p. 273.

	<p>“And the Lord your God has chosen you to be for him an exceptional people”</p> <p>Deuteronomy 26:18 LXX <i>kai kurios heilato se semeron genesthai se auto laon periousion</i> “Today also the Lord has chosen you to be his exceptional people”</p> <p>Isaiah 62:12 LXX <i>kai kalesei auton laon hagion lelutromenon hupo kuriou</i> “ And he shall call it a holy people, redeemed by the Lord”</p>
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We can see clearly that while the LXX referred to the Lord God as redeeming Israel from all lawlessness and purifying for himself a special people, Paul applied these texts to Christ in Titus 2:14. This can only mean one thing: in Paul’s mind, *Christ was God*. Thus it is no surprise that he said just that in Titus 2:13.

7. Bringing it all together

Fitting all the pieces of the puzzle together, an amazing picture appears. The Old Testament prophets declared that a Redeemer would come to rescue Israel, and that this Redeemer or Saviour would be none other than Yahweh himself, who would even partake of his people’s afflictions in order to save them. The New Testament writers declared that this had in fact happened in the person of Christ. Yahweh in some sense revealed himself in human flesh, becoming a blood relative to sinners and paying the price of his precious, perfect blood in order to redeem his people from their enslavement to sin.

As Warren W. Wiersbe comments on the role of a kinsman-redeemer in the Book of Ruth:

“Not everybody could perform the duties of a kinsman-redeemer. To begin with, he had to be a near kinsman (Lev. 25:25). This was the major obstacle Boaz had to overcome because another man in Bethlehem was a nearer relative to Ruth than he was (3:12-13). When you see this as a type of Christ, it reminds you that He had to become related to us before he could redeem us. He became flesh and blood so that He could die for us on the cross (Heb. 2:14-15). When He was born into this world in human flesh, He became our ‘near kinsman,’ and He will remain our ‘kinsman’ for all eternity. What matchless love!”⁶

Paradoxically, the Old and New Testaments distinguish the Messiah from Yahweh while at the same time identifying him with Yahweh. We already saw this in the special Angel in the

⁶ Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: The Complete Old Testament*. Published by David C. Cook, 2007, p. 489.

Old Testament who is called both “the Angel of Yahweh” and “Yahweh” (cf. Genesis 48:16; Isaiah 63:9), who the early church identified with Christ. The paradox is seen most plainly in John 1:1, where it is declared that “The Word was with God, and the Word was God.” There is a dynamic tension that needs to be upheld here, neither separating the Father and Son nor collapsing them together.

One of the most important principles to draw from this study is that articulated in Jonah 2:9: “Salvation belongs to Yahweh!” Only Yahweh could accomplish redemption – mankind did not, and could not, produce its own Redeemer. At the same time, redemption had to be accomplished in human flesh (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:21), and thus the Lord of the universe stepped into a tent made without hands (Hebrews 9:11), namely a body of human flesh, pitching his tent among us (John 1:14) in order to act as our kinsman-redeemer – our *go’el*.

Appendix: Did Jesus redeem himself?

I want to state from the outset that I do not consider the topic of this appendix to be an essential matter of gospel truth. I submit my thoughts with conviction but not as dogma.

Christadelphians are virtually unique among Bible students past and present in teaching that Jesus had a sinful nature which needed redemption as much as our own. What basis is there in Scripture for this idea?

Jesus was a mortal human being, and died. Therefore, up until his resurrection, death exercised lordship over him (Romans 6:9). He was enslaved to corruption as much as we are during his earthly life. Ultimately he needed Yahweh to save him from death (Hebrews 5:7) and redeem him from the grave (Psalm 31:5b, noting that Jesus quoted Psalm 31:5a on the cross as recorded in Luke 23:46).

However, there is a fundamental distinction between Jesus’ slavery to sin and death (and his consequent need for redemption) and our own slavery to sin and death (and our consequent need for redemption). The distinction is this: **we are born into slavery involuntarily** (cf. Romans 8:20-21). That is just the way it is, and there’s nothing we can do about it. By contrast, **Christ was willingly born into slavery** (Philippians 2:7). Christ *chose* to become poor that we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). He was not merely another hapless human being in need of divine redemption; he came down from heaven and entered this world on a divine mission to secure redemption. This makes all the difference in the world, and once we realize it, we can rule out any notion of Jesus needing to redeem himself from his own sin nature. Put simply, we are slaves because we are *helpless*; Christ became a slave in order to *help us*.

Jesus was holy, innocent and unstained (Hebrews 7:26), in contrast to the Mosaic high priests, who had to offer for their own sins as well as the peoples’ (v. 27). Jesus dwelt in a perfect tent, a tent made without hands (Hebrews 9:11), while we dwell in imperfect tents made by hands (in the sense of John 1:13). Romans 8:3 may state the point most clearly: Christ was sent “in the *likeness* of sinful flesh, and for sin.” By this language, Paul both

identifies Christ with us and distinguishes him from us. Thus Jesus himself needed no sin offering; rather, he offered *for* our sins:

“5 He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:5-6)

The main texts advanced in support of the idea that Jesus had to redeem himself from sin are Leviticus 25:49 and Hebrews 9:12. Leviticus 25:49 says of a slave that “If he grows rich he may redeem himself.” It is claimed that this law typifies Christ. However, in reality it is quite the opposite of Christ. He is not a slave who grew rich; as we have already seen, he was rich, and became poor for our sakes, taking the form of a slave (2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:7). Furthermore, Yahweh may have had these redemption laws in mind when he repeatedly stressed through the prophet Isaiah that he had to take the initiative of redemption upon himself, because there was no one else to redeem.

Hebrews 9:12 says of Christ that by his own blood he “secured an eternal redemption.” The verb here is in the middle voice. There is no middle voice in English – only the active and passive voices. Thus the middle is difficult for English speakers to comprehend and translate. Wallace notes that the middle voice encompasses a wide range of nuances and its function is therefore difficult to define. However, he states that in general:

“In the middle voice the subject performs or experiences the action expressed by the verb in such a way that emphasizes the subject’s participation. It may be said that the subject acts ‘with a vested interest.’...’The middle calls special attention to the subject...the subject is acting in relation to himself somehow.’

The difference between the active and the middle is one of emphasis. The active voice emphasizes the action of the verb; the middle emphasizes the actor (subject) of the verb...This difference can be expressed, to some degree, in English translation. For many middle voices (especially the indirect middle), putting the subject in italics would communicate this emphasis” (Greek Grammar beyond the basics, pp. 414-415).

Wallace classifies the middle voice in Hebrews 9:12 as an indirect middle, which denotes that “the subject acts *for* (or sometimes *by*) himself or herself, or in his or her *own interest*. The subject thus shows a special interest in the action of the verb.”⁷

Based on this, some interpret the middle voice verb in Hebrews 9:12 to mean that Christ died to secure an eternal redemption *for himself*, which was then extended to the rest of us. There is a major problem with this interpretation: it suggests that in his death, *Christ was acting fundamentally out of self-interest*. Instead of his death being the ultimate, exceptional example of selfless *agape* love (cf. John 15:13; 1 John 3:16), he was firstly out to save himself,

⁷ Wallace, Daniel B. *Ibid.*, p. 419.

and only secondly to save others! In that case his death was a good deed but not the Supreme Deed. Such a Christ is not one who can motivate me to want to break out of my own cycle of human selfishness.

The use of the middle voice here indicates that Christ had a vested interest in obtaining eternal redemption. The vested interest was not to obtain eternal redemption for himself. Rather, as stated in Titus 2:14, the vested interest was to purify *for himself* a special people. Or, as stated in Acts 20:28 (whether the subject is God or Christ), the vested interest was to purchase the church. Both of these verses have the key verb *in the middle voice*, as does Colossians 1:13, where we read that the Father “has delivered us from the domain of darkness.” If the middle voice requires that the subject benefit directly from the action, then we must conclude that the Father was delivered from the domain of darkness! This is obviously not the case, and so we can conclude that Hebrews 9:12 does not teach that Christ died to redeem himself.