



REDEEM / REDEEMER

I grew up in the days of S & H Green Stamps.

At the checkout line at the store, depending on the amount of the purchase, we were given a perforated sheet of green stamps, each one worth a certain amount of buying power. After we had collected a good number of stamps, my sister and I would lick them on the sticky side and press them into a book. We had a catalog with pictures of all kinds of wonderful items we could buy with our stamps: toys, household items, and so forth, each with a picture of the item and the number of stamps required to purchase it. As soon as we had enough stamp books, we went to a redemption center and traded in our books for the items we had dreamed about.

The idea of trading in something for something else is the basic

definition of the word *redeem*. The act of redemption is closely related to the definition for *ransom* (see RANSOM), which means the price paid out for something.

At first, historically, the term *redeem* was purely a legal term used in commercial trade—a simple transaction in which one good was traded for another. But in Exodus 21:29-30 it was expanded to include humans or other living things:

If, however, the bull has had the habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or woman, the bull must be stoned and the owner also must be put to death. However, if payment is demanded of him, he may redeem his life by paying whatever is demanded.

The Hebrew word *ga'al* translated as *redeem* and included an act of obligation—or sometimes mercy—related to a next-of-kin who had lost rights to family property for one reason or another. Ruth, a young widow, went to a stranger, Boaz, who happened to be a distant relative of her dead husband. Boaz became her kinsman-redeemer who purchased her late husband's land to keep it from falling into unrelated hands. Of course, the story includes Ruth's eventual marriage to Boaz that produced a son who in a few more generations produced King David—and ultimately Jesus.

Finally, however, the idea of redemption was transferred to Jesus' blood. He was the substitute sacrifice to buy us out of bondage from penalty of breaking the law, from certain acts of sin itself, and

the guilt that accompanies both.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree” (*Galatians 3:13*).

Later in Galatians Paul writes,

When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons (*Galatians 4:4-5*).

So the ransom, the payment from our slavery to all that’s evil, implies a release as well—to freedom, to son-ship, and to eternal life. We’re even released—*redeemed*—from a life that is without meaning to one that is meaningful. Peter wrote,

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 (*1 Peter 1:18*).

Eric Wyse and Dawn Rodgers Wyse wrote a beautiful song,

*“Wonderful, Merciful, Savior.”
Wonderful, merciful, Savior,
Precious Redeemer and Friend;
Who would have thought that a Lamb
Could rescue the souls of men?
O You rescue the souls of men.¹*

Dawn gives personal insight into the word *Redeemer*.

Redeemer: my favorite name for Jesus. It humbles me, centers me, reminds me that I need something—need Someone. I need my worthlessness to be exchanged for worthiness. Only Jesus can do that for me. Only He can reach into the dark despair of emptiness and fill it with joy and peace and hope. Precious Redeemer and Friend.²