



# Pidyon HaBen

## Redemption of the Firstborn Son

פְּדִיּוֹן הַבֵּן

### INTRODUCTION

Originally the firstborn son (*bechor*) was to be the priest (*kohen*) of the Jewish family. As the bechor, he was responsible to offer *avodah* (sacrifice) on behalf of other family members. God said "the first issue of every womb among the Israelites is Mine" (Exodus 13:2). Thus firstborn sons were sanctified and obligated to serve as *kohanim* (priests) from birth. We see evidence of this in the lives of the early patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and even Jacob, who received the blessing of the firstborn through transfer from Esav. And because firstborn sons (*bechorim*) were consecrated as kohanim, during the Exodus from Egypt God spared them when He issued the 10th *makkah* (plague) -- the death of the firstborn.

After the Exodus from Egypt, however, the Israelites committed the grievous Sin of the Golden Calf, of which only the tribe of Levi was not guilty. Consequently the LORD decreed that the Levites were to take the place of the firstborn sons of Israel (Num. 3:11-12). But since a firstborn son is technically a (disqualified) kohen, he had to be substituted with a kohen from the tribe of Levi, and therefore God required that all firstborn sons (who were not themselves Levites or Kohens) must be redeemed from service to God by means of paying five shekels of silver (see Num. 18:15).





### THE PIDYON HABEN CEREMONY

It is customary for a firstborn male (whose father or mother are not a Kohen or Levi) to undergo *Pidyon HaBen*, meaning “Redemption of the (firstborn) son.” The ceremony of redeeming the firstborn occurs on the 31st day after birth (Ex. 13:13; Num. 18:16), though the ritual cannot be performed on Shabbat because it involves the exchange of money. When the son has established a claim to viability, the father is obligated to “redeem” him by giving five “shekalim” to a kohen. This ritual symbolically relieves the child from service in the priesthood because Jews who are descendants of Aaron were given the responsibility in his place (Num. 3:12-14).

In the traditional ceremony, the father brings the child to the kohen and recites a formula (responds to ritual questions) indicating that this is the mother's firstborn son and he has come to redeem him as commanded in the Torah.



The kohen asks the father which he would rather have, the child or the five silver shekels which he must otherwise pay. The father declares that he prefers the child to the money and gives the shekels to the kohen (who holds them over the child and declares that the redemption price is received and accepted in place in the child).

### THE PIDYON HABEN BLESSING

The father then recites two blessings. The first is the *Pidyon HaBen blessing*:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל פְּדִיּוֹן הַבֵּן.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha'olam,  
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, ve'tzivanu al Pidyon haben

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe,  
Who sanctifies us with His mitzvot, and instructed us  
regarding the redemption of a son.



### THE SHEHECHEYANU BLESSING

The father then goes on to recite the “Shehecheyanu” blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
שֶׁחַיֵּינוּ וְקִיּוּמנוּ וְהִגִּיעַנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha'olam,  
Shehecheyanu vekiyamanu Vehigiyanu lazman hazeh.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe,  
Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

The father then gives the coins to the kohen, who blesses the child (with the *birkat Kohanim*) and then recites a blessing over a cup of wine (*kiddush*). A "Seudat Mitzvah" (festive meal) is then usually eaten.

### YESHUA AND THE PIDYON HABEN CEREMONY

The narrative in Luke chapter 2 indicates that Mary and Yosef went up to Jerusalem for *Pidyon haBen* ceremony of Yeshua (this was not His *brit milah* (circumcision), see Luke 2:21) and remained there ten days until it was time for Mary’s purification (40 days after the birth of a son, as described in Leviticus 12:1-8).

And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to



do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him (Luke 2:22-40).

### THE DIVINE IRONY

Since Yeshua was the first-born son of Mary (who was of the kingly lineage of Judah), He was not of the priestly clan of Levi (or the sub-clan of the Kohanim), so according to the Torah He must be redeemed. His "presentation" at the Temple, intended to have the Levites represent His *avodah*, then, was ironically fulfilled at the end of his life He was killed by their deliberate counsel:

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was High Priest (*Kohen Gadol*) that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."



He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.  
(John 11:49-52)

The irony is that those appointed to “redeem him” as His kohanim according to the terms of the Mosaic covenant were the very ones who made Him our Redeemer! In other words, those who were appointed to represent Yeshua before God were the very ones who offered Him up as a sacrifice for our sins.