

גואל ישראל

Redeemer of Israel

The Prayer of Redemption is the seventh prayer of the Eighteen Benedictions, or the Shemonei Esrei. It ends with the words גואל ישראל which mean “Redeemer of Israel.” The prayer goes like this:

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“Look, please, upon our affliction, and defend our cause: and redeem us speedily for the sake of Your Name; because You are a Mighty Redeemer. Blessed are You, Adonai, Redeemer of Israel.”

The word “redeem” (the Hebrew word is גאל, *ga'al*) means “to deliver someone by paying the price for their freedom.” Sometimes in the ancient world a person was sold as a servant or slave to another person. They were obligated to work for that person for a certain number of years. The only way they could be free from being a servant or a slave was to pay their owner the money he would have to spend to hire someone else to do their work. But usually a servant or a slave did not have enough money to buy their own freedom. They would have to depend upon a friend or family member to “purchase their freedom,” or “to redeem them.” This is exactly what HaShem did for us when He “redeemed us from Egypt” at Pesach. We were slaves to Pharaoh, and the price that was paid was that of the first-born. The Pesach lamb which we killed and the blood which we put on our doorposts was a sign of the price that G-d would pay to set us free. Peter wrote about it this way (1 Peter 1:18-19):

“knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Mashiach.”

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