

Of economics and finance...taxing ransoms...

1. Study Matthew 17:24-27. What is the temple tax?

The two drachma tax was an annual religious tax that was required of every Israelite over the age of twenty. In Exodus 30:11-16, the original intent of the tax was an offering to the Lord to atone (ransom) for one's sin. The money was then used for the Tabernacle structure.

2. What is the reasoning behind the Lord's question to Simon Peter, "From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll taxes, from their own sons or from strangers?"

By anticipating Peter's question, Jesus demonstrated His knowledge of Peter's conversation and answer to the tax collectors. Peter had answered prematurely by saying to the tax collectors, "Yes." Rather than confront Peter with the error of his answer, Jesus alters the perspective of the situation: a king does not tax himself or his family but only outsiders. Since the tax was an offering to the Lord and used for the Tabernacle, God, the Lord and owner of the Tabernacle was free from the tax. And, of course, the exemption extended to His Son.

3. Why did Jesus pay the temple tax?

Despite the fact that He had the right not to pay, He paid for the sake of His ministry among the Jews. However, He wanted Peter to understand that He was exempt from the tax.

4. What did Peter learn from all of this?

Peter had more proof that Jesus was God: a) Jesus' omniscience, b) exemption from the temple tax, and c) the four drachma coin in the fish's mouth. And since Jesus paid the tax, Peter saw that ministry might require the relinquishing of certain personal rights.

5. What is the paradox here?

The temple tax was demanded from Jesus to atone for His sin; He came sinless to atone for everyone else's sin.

TIP: When studying, there is a temptation to immediately consult resources to shed some light on the passage in question. Try to resist that! Discover the biblical references in the margins of the Bible text and learn how to use them.

The literary genres of the Gospels are recognized as both **narrative** and **doctrinal**. Narratives are stories and often with a pattern where a problem is encountered, a solution proposed, and a problem is solved. As in so many Gospel narratives involving Old Testament law, they almost always ends with evidence that indicate a new doctrinal revelation; namely, Jesus came to fulfill the Old Testament Law. If one took a moment to see that "testament" is another word for "covenant," the significance of the Gospels heralding the "new covenant" with man would be better appreciated.

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1. Study Matthew 17:24-27. From your concordance or annotated study Bible, what is the temple tax?
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3. Why did Jesus pay the temple tax?
4. What did Peter learn from all of this?
5. What is the paradox here?