

Who We Are as the Redeemed People of God

Thoughts on Colossians 1:9–14

Notes by Tim Hegg

It is worthwhile, when reading the Apostolic Scriptures, to look for “exodus language” in the Apostles’ description of and teaching upon the salvation which Yeshua procured for His people. This is because throughout the Scriptures that follow the narrative of Israel’s exodus from Egypt, this key event in the nation’s life became the primary paradigm illuminating the manner in which God intends to bring eternal salvation to His elect. Indeed, terms such as “saved,” “delivered,” and “redeemed” all are echoed in the exodus story (cf. Ex 6:6–7).

Paul, in Colossians 1:9–14, uses the exodus motif in summing up salvation in or by Yeshua:

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col 1:13–14).

For Paul, Egypt represents the “domain of darkness,” that place of slavery in which Israel was bound. The exodus is summed in the two words “rescued” (ῥύομαι, *hruomai*) and “transferred” (μεθίστημι, *methistemi*), both of which fit very well with the historical exodus from Egypt. For repeatedly in the exodus narrative, the command of God to Pharaoh, carried by Moses and Aaron is: “let My people go that they may serve Me.” God intended to rescue Israel from the servitude of Egypt in order to bring them into His own kingdom that they might serve Him. This is a most important truth: even as Israel was not rescued in order to achieve national independence but in order to become God’s nation ruled by Him, so the individual who is redeemed by the blood of Yeshua is rescued from the slavery of sin in order to become a willing citizen in the Kingdom of the Messiah. Salvation, then, is being rescued from darkness and transferred into the Messiah’s Kingdom. Or as Paul put it in Romans 6:17–18,

But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

So one of the primary characteristics of the exodus, that Israel was delivered so that they might serve God, is also a key element in the eternal salvation which has been granted to us who have believed in Yeshua: we were rescued from sin's power so that we might be willing servants of God in the kingdom of His Son. Our exodus out of the domain of darkness was not so that we might be independent, going our own way, or pleasing ourselves. We were rescued by God's outstretched arm in order that we might serve Him by walking (living) in such a way that His Name would be honored and His greatness known in the world.

We should note that here, in our text, Paul describes the kingdom in which we formerly resided as the "domain of darkness" (τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκοτους). The Greek word ἐξουσία (*ekskouia*) has the sense of "authority" or "power." Thus the KJV has "power of darkness." But the translation "domain" is a good one, for it combines the sense of "power" and "authority." It pictures a despot who is intent on keeping his subjects bound to his own desires and purposes, a despot who has both the right and the power to constrain his subjects to do his will. This despot Paul describes as "darkness." This figure of speech is used to denote the realm of Satan's tyrannical rule over those who are ignorant of the truth and therefore are bound by this ignorance to serve the evil one. Note Yeshua's use of "darkness" in relationship to His own impending death at the hands of the Roman authorities:

While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours. (Luke 22:53)

Paul uses similar language in Acts 26:18 when describing his own divinely ordered mission to the Gentiles:

... to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.

Here we see that "darkness" is parallel to "dominion of Satan," even as "light" is parallel to "God," or the "dominion of God."

What does it mean, in very practical terms, to have been rescued from the "domain of darkness" and transferred to the "kingdom of His beloved Son"? Paul describes the practical ramifications in the

preceding verses (9–12):

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

Paul notes first that from the time he and his colleagues heard of the faith of the Colossian assembly, they engaged in prayer on their behalf that they might be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” The first characteristic of those redeemed from the domain of darkness is that they have come to know the truth and to grow in understanding and the wisdom that God’s truth produces. This emphasizes that one of the characteristics of redeemed people is that they have an unquenchable thirst to know God and His will for them.

But secondly, the desire to know the truth is not merely for the satisfaction of knowing but so that such knowledge can be utilized in living as God intends: “so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.” “Walking” obviously means how one lives—one’s desires, attitudes, goals, mannerisms, etc. Paul goes on to give three clear attributes of such a life set apart to God:

1. “to please Him in all respects” – this means that life, all of life, is lived out with a heart to please the One Who has redeemed us. Nothing in life is “neutral,” as though it exists in a “secular realm” which is neither holy or unholy. Even the most mundane activities must be done with an eye to please our Master.

2. “bearing fruit in every good work” – this means that we are to live in such a manner so that the work of the Spirit, the fruit He produces (cf. Gal 5:22f), will be evident to others. This requires daily dying to self and living in the power of the Spirit.

3. “increasing in the knowledge of God” – knowing God is the life of everyone who has been redeemed from the domain of darkness, and increasing in this knowledge is a never ending endeavor. Those who have been redeemed desire to know God in truth so that

His will may be lived out to His glory.

Such a life is not portrayed by Paul as easy nor automatic. The life lived to honor God will be met with many obstacles and battles. Thus Paul goes on to admonish the Colossian believers to be strengthened to achieve the life to which they have been called, a life lived out in the realm of Yeshua's kingdom. Note the four aspects of his admonition.

1. "strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might" – such strength comes by the indwelling Spirit of God, applying the Scriptures to every aspect of life. "His glorious might" may well refer to the very presence of God seen in the outshining of the *Shekinah* evident over the Tabernacle and filling the Temple.

2. "for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience" – the life to which we have been brought through our deliverance or exodus, is a life that requires perseverance and patience. Both of these are the product of a true faith in God, that He is able to accomplish His will, in His time, and that He is faithful to His word. Being steadfast means relying upon His strength; being patient means trusting that what He has promised, He will do.

3. "joyously giving thanks to the Father" – Because of the strength given by God, His children are able to have genuine joy in Him even in the midst of tribulations endured in this fallen world. Thus we are enabled to thank the Lord even for the difficulties we encounter, for by the work of "His beloved Son," He freely gives to us all that we need and more. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Rom 8:32).

4. "Who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light." Here, once again, Paul gives us a direct parallel to the historical exodus from Egypt powerfully accomplished by God's almighty hand. For it was a physical land to which God brought the people of Israel He had redeemed from Egypt. But what is the "Land" to which God is bringing all who are redeemed unto Himself by the work of the Spirit, applying the redemption price purchased by Yeshua's death and resurrected life? It is nothing less than to dwell in the very presence of God for all eternity! This is why the NASB capitalizes the word "Light," for in the Greek it has the definite article, thus "the Light," and this refers specifically to the shining glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.