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# FROM EGYPT TO CANAAN

A Study in Colossians, Ch. 1 : 10-14

ROBERT RENDALL

Paul's prayer for the saints at Colosse, breathing out petitions on their behalf, rises to a vision of Christ in whom all fullness dwells. In effect he says, 'Walk worthy of Him,' and indicates briefly three conditions for this: fruitfulness, fortitude, and thankfulness. The clauses are linked as cause and effect: 'being fruitful', 'strengthened unto all patience', 'giving thanks'. Then in verses twelve to fourteen he summarises in compact statement the wide scope of the blessings of salvation.

Certain passages in the Bible are full of echoes, and a sensitive ear can catch overtones of meaning from other contexts. A double echo sounds from this portion: first, an echo from words spoken at the moment of Paul's own conversion; and secondly, allusive parallels with Israel's deliverance from Egypt and establishment in Canaan.

The language recalls that of Acts 26:15-18. Consider the verbal correspondences: 'to turn them from *darkness* to *light*' ('the saints in *light*: delivered from the power of *darkness*'); 'the *power* of Satan' ('the *power* of darkness'); 'that they may receive *forgiveness of sins*' ('even the *forgiveness of sins*'); 'and an *inheritance* among all them that are *sanctified*' ('the *inheritance of the saints*'); 'by faith that is *in Me*' ('*in whom* we have redemption'). The similarities are too striking to be accidental.

The words of Christ had so dwelt in Paul's mind that they acquired ever richer spiritual meaning, and here he uses them to express what may be called the rationale of redemption, everything from the experience of deliverance from bondage to Satan right on to full possession of the inheritance of the saints in light. Little wonder that at this point he loses himself in the contemplation of Christ and in a passage that is one of the high-water marks of the New Testament seeks to describe the greatness of His Person.

These same three verses also bring to mind the exodus from Egypt and the entrance into Canaan, viewed ideally as a single event, but not necessarily excluding the intervening wilderness

journey. Colossians takes up events in their reverse order, mentioning the inheritance first: this looks at things from the standpoint of God's ultimate purpose. Whereas the order in Acts 26:15-18 follows that of human history and experience, in which redemption comes first. We may therefore consider the whole as a sequence: DELIVERANCE; TRANSLATION; INHERITANCE.

*Deliverance.* The word 'deliver' in Col. 1:13 has the idea of 'rescue'; the verb has a prefix signifying 'out of', and we immediately think of the deliverance 'out of' Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh. Such rescue implies previous bondage under an adverse power, so the verse also speaks of 'the *power* of darkness'. The word itself, as any lexicon will tell us, is *exousia*, a word signifying 'unbridled power', or, as we would say, 'dictatorship', rule by the personal will of a tyrant, not rule under constitutional law. Nebuchadnezzar so ruled: 'whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive' (Dan. 5:19). This means slavery and is precisely what Israel suffered under Pharaoh. We, in our natural state, were held in like manner by Satan (Acts 26:18) Human nature being what it is such power almost invariably degenerates into oppression and tyranny. There is only One who, because of His justice, His mercy and His longsuffering, can exercise it beneficently, that is, GOD. And here is the great wonder—that God does not choose to have slaves (though we on our part may well call ourselves His bond-servants), but chooses to have a free people whom He governs by gracious laws.

*Translation.* We are delivered from a tyranny: we are translated into a kingdom. Israel in the wilderness was brought into a sphere of ordered rule, and became the people of God. Their deliverance from Egypt was effected through 'redemption'. And just as the blood of the Paschal lamb was to them the sign and token of salvation, so the blood of Christ is the ground and pledge of *our* redemption. Though the words 'by His blood' should, according to the best textual authorities, be omitted from this particular passage, the parallel verse in Ephesians shows that here also in Colossians it underlies the word 'redemption'.

Redemption is defined as 'even the forgiveness of sins', thereby confuting in advance any suggestion that it might possibly mean something else. Scriptural words are all too often used glibly with quite another sense than what they bear in the Bible itself. Words like 'Calvary', 'Gethsemane', and 'the Word' are given a naturalistic meaning on a purely human level, and so robbed of their unique reference to Christ: so also with the word 'redemption', used in its religious sense. Redemption is something more than psychological release from inhibitions of one kind or another, something more than deliverance from ignorance, poverty, sub-conscious fears, sickness of the mind, though of course it may include some of these. It is 'the forgiveness of sins', for sin is the basic evil under which we are held, and includes all other. This accords with the parallel passage in Acts, which does not use the word 'redemption' but speaks of 'receiving the forgiveness of sins'. Redemption is the cost, remission the release. Remission foregoes the penalty: forgiveness includes also the disposition to pardon.

*Inheritance.* God brought Israel out of Egypt and made them a nation: He also brought them into the land of their inheritance. This He did through Joshua, who made conquest of the land and divided it by lot among the tribes. Paul uses this as a picture of spiritual truth. The saints, too, have their inheritance: a holy land for a holy people. The inheritance is literally 'the parcel of the lot,' which, as Lightfoot puts it, 'is not won by us, but allotted to us'. The title deeds are in the hands of God, and the actual possession of the land comes from Him, who divideth to every man severally as He will. What God has allotted to us is ours, and no Ahab or Jezebel can dispossess us (1 Kings 21:3). But there is also a fitness between the man and his inheritance. The children of Joseph had to match their prowess with their possessions (Josh. 17:14-18); and because Caleb the son of Jephunneh was not afraid of the Anakim he was given at his own request what he calls 'this mountain'—Kiriath-arba (later called Hebron) where dwelt Arba 'the greatest man among the Anakim' (Josh. 14:6-15). Commentators tell us that the words 'made meet' in Col. 1:12 have the sense of 'sufficiency' or 'competence' as in

2 Cor. 3:6. God 'qualifies' us for the position to which He appoints us. Similarly, but in another context, the vessels of wrath are 'fitted' to destruction, and the vessels of mercy 'prepared' unto glory. God Himself is EL-SHADDAI, the All-sufficient, and from Him comes our sufficiency: we are made meet to be part-takers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

The portion or share in the possession implies participation with others in the common inheritance, even as it was with Israel. The children of God and the children of Reuben with the half-tribe of Manasseh were not allowed to settle down in their 'allotment' until they had seen their brethren likewise established in theirs (Num. 32; Deut. 3:12-20; Josh. 22:1-6). We do not enjoy our blessings in isolation from our fellow-believers. The Old Testament puts it thus: 'ye shall pass over armed before your brethren . . . until the Lord give rest unto your brethren, as unto you, and they also possess the land which the LORD your God giveth them'. The New Testament using other metaphors speaks of the work of evangelists and pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints . . . 'till we all attain unto the unity of the faith . . . unto the full measure of the stature of Christ'.

What thanksgiving should rise in our hearts unto the Father, who has so wrought all these things! What fortitude ought to be ours, what patience and longsuffering—not mere stoical endurance of trials, but longsuffering with joyfulness. What fruitfulness, too, in every good work, giving us increase in the knowledge of God! These active virtues and attitudes of heart form the elements of a walk worthy of the Lord, elsewhere spoken of by Paul as 'walking worthily of God and of the vocation wherewith we have been called'.