

Theology of Redemption:

The word redemption, in the Biblical sense, is “the reclaiming of creation by God: atonement seen in its far reaching effects as the final liberation - physical existence out of death and decay to become the resurrection body of the new creation.” (Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, p. 461)

Thus there is always (according to Leon Morris’ classical study *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*) (1) captivity, (2) a price paid for release, and (3) the promise of new life as a result.

The Jews understood the concept of “redemption” through the lens of the stories of their ancestors in the Old Testament. Redemption could refer to two broad categories:

- a.) Exodus and Israel (Exodus 8:23), which binds Israel to God (Exodus 12-24) and is accomplished through God’s character and activity (Deut. 7:8; Ps 74:2; 77:15).
- b.) The Israelites were to liberate others as well (Lev. 25:47-49):
 - from those in slavery or redeeming a family inheritance (Lev. 25:25-26)
 - consecrating the firstborn (Ex. 13:12-16).
 - setting prisoners free (Ezra 1; Isaiah 45:1-25)

But of course, the greatest story of redemption was the story of the exodus: the escape from Egypt under Moses. Paul picks this up and adopts it for his NT audiences, occasionally borrowing imagery from the Roman slave market to relate to particular audiences.

A useful summary of these terms is as follows:

Greek Word	English Meaning	Reference
Agarazo	To buy, to purchase in the market (or slave market)	1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 2 Pet. 2:1; Rev. 5:9; 14:3-4
Exagaorazo	To buy out, to purchase out of the market (or slave market)	Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5
Lytron	Ransom, price of release	Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45
Lytroomai	To ransom, to free by paying a ransom price	Luke 24:21; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18
Lytrosis	Act of freeing by paying a ransom price	Luke 1:68; 2:38; Heb. 9:12
Apolytrois	A buying back, a setting free by paying a ransom price	Luke 21:28; Rom. 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7, 14; 4:30; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:15; 11:35

Literary Theology of Redemption:

To help understand this through a broader, canonical lens, we can use some of the categories introduced by NT Wright. Wright sees redemption through the lens of the exodus from Egypt, which becomes the master story of redemption that all other metaphors are built on.

The following is a summary of his categories, and below will be an unpacking of what this looks like in various contexts—Exodus, Ruth, now, Jesus.

- (1) A Wicked Tyrant
- (2) A Chosen Leader
- (3) Victory of God
- (4) Rescue by Sacrifice
- (5) New Vocation and Way of Life
- (6) Presence of God
- (7) Promised/Inherited Land

Unpacking these categories:

- (1) A Wicked Tyrant
 - a. Exodus: Pharaoh, who had oppressed the Jews for roughly 400 years before the arrival of Moses.
 - b. Ruth: Here, the imprisonment was not immediately physical, but Naomi was trapped by the circumstances she found herself in. She had no future; she had virtually no chance of survival. Subsistence was her greatest option—she needed to be redeemed from the prison of her own circumstances.
 - c. Now: Each of us lives in a state of imprisonment. For some it is sin, for others it is the prison of self-righteous religion. We are enslaved either to our own selfish impulses, or we are enslaved to the “duty” of religious moralism.
 - d. Jesus: Jesus recognizes the brokenness of living in a world ruled by sin and depravity, and steps into this mess as one of us—a high priest who shares our temptations and struggles (Heb. 4:15; cf. Phil. 2:5ff).
- (2) A Chosen Leader
 - a. Exodus: Moses, though ultimately it was God’s strength that would lead the people—as symbolized in the pillar of cloud and fire. Moses’ psalm (Ex. 15) indicates confidence in YHWH as a warrior who acts on behalf of His people.

- b. Ruth: Boaz, who is the “man of valor” who would pay a literal price to redeem Ruth.
- c. Now: Ideally, Jesus, but this could be a good time to ask ourselves: “Who am I following? What has authority in my life? Who do I have confidence and trust in?”
- d. Jesus: Jesus is the one who leads His people. In Matthew, for example, He enacts the story of the exodus—the escape from Egypt (Matt. 2:15), the Red Sea/Water baptism (Matt. 3:13ff), trial in the wilderness over a forty day [year] period (4:1ff), and the establishment of God’s ethical standards through a new law (Matt. 5-7).

(3) Victory of God

- a. Exodus: God’s plan was ultimately to redeem His people through Moses and Aaron’s leadership.
- b. Ruth: God planned to redeem Naomi through the kindness of this kinsman-redeemer.
- c. Now: God’s victory is expressed in His gospel, which offers the promise of forgiveness and transformation.
- d. Jesus: Jesus achieves victory over the hostile powers of this world (cf. Col. 2:15), as well as overcoming sin through the cross, and overcoming death through His resurrection.

(4) Rescue by Sacrifice

- a. Exodus: The Lamb, whose blood marks the doorways so that God’s wrath would pass over his people.
- b. Ruth: Boaz pays the price to redeem the land and Ruth.
- c. Now: Can we rescue ourselves? Is not our religion an attempt to bring our own sacrifice?
- d. Jesus: Jesus is the Lamb of God whose blood lifts away the sin of humanity (John 1:29), once for all (Heb. 10). He is the Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7) whose blood redeems us from our imprisonment of sin (Eph. 1:7—“redemption through His blood”).

(5) New Vocation and Way of Life

- a. Exodus: The Israelites are initially forced to trust in YHWH as they wander the wilderness, but eventually they are brought back to the promised land. Throughout, they are called to worship God in new ways through the giving of the Law and the construction of the ark and the tabernacle.

- b. Ruth: Ruth and Naomi are granted a new way of life as part of Boaz's family. The text leaves this open, but surely Boaz now brings them under his roof, moving them from poverty to God-granted prosperity.
- c. Now: Is your faith just fire insurance? Or do you experience the lifestyle of radical devotion to God? Surely the gospel draws us to a richer, more powerful understanding of what it means to live as those who represent God on earth. "As the Father has sent me," Jesus said, "so I send you." (John 20:21) The Christian life is about imitating that sending action.
- d. Jesus: Jesus represents a new life of mission and devotion and worship. His body is the true and better temple—no longer would godly worship be geographically isolated, but expressed in authentic spirituality.

(6) Presence of God

- a. Exodus: God was present through the pillar of cloud and fire.
- b. Ruth: God's presence is hinted at throughout, though most surely expressed in the idea of Ruth finding shelter under God's "wing," though a presence manifest in the intermediary nature of the "corner" of Boaz's cloak. Boaz became the means by which God would rescue this family from an otherwise impossible situation.
- c. Now: God no longer is present in a temple, but He is present in the "temple" of the church (Eph. 2:18-22) and individual believers (1 Cor. 6:18), in whom the Holy Spirit dwells.
- d. Jesus: Jesus' name is "Immanuel," meaning "God with us." In Matthew's gospel, Jesus ascends with the promise that He will be "with" His people "until the end of the age." The church is the "body of Christ," therefore the means by which Jesus incarnates His presence on earth.

(7) Promised/Inherited Land

- a. Exodus: The Israelites eventually reach the promised land through God's provision.
- b. Ruth: Boaz purchases the land, and now Naomi and Ruth have a new home in the homeland of Judah. By extension, the promise of David points toward a future kingdom.
- c. Now: We await the consummation of all things, living in a creation that "groans for completion."
- d. Jesus: Jesus will eventually return (Rev. 19-22) to establish a new heavens and new earth.

