

Common Themes/Text in Coded Message Spirituals, Context, and Translations:

- **Heaven/Canaan/Promised Land/Gospel Feast/Mansions/Kingdom**
 - Context: the enslaved often sang of heaven and their longing to go to heaven
 - Translation: freedom, the northern free states, Canada, Africa (Liberia), or heaven
- **Hell/Egypt**
 - Context: where evil, sin, and bondage resides
 - Translation: being sold further south, slavery, death, sin
- **Deliverance/Being Redeemed/Baptized/Good Religion**
 - Context: every man whose soul is converted deserves deliverance
 - Translation: freedom, escape, religious conversion
- **Jubilee**
 - Context: the Year of Jubilee (from Leviticus) referred to the day every fifty years when the Israelites received their freedom and their property returned
 - Translation: emancipation, freedom, escape
- **Heroic Figures (Moses, Daniel, Elijah, Ezekiel, Jonah, Hebrew Children, Peter, Paul, Silas, Lazarus, Noah, Jacob, Gideon, Joshua, Nicodemus, the Israelites)**
 - Context: heroic figures of the Old Testament were ordinary men with extraordinary faith
 - Translation: these figures represented the ordinary men and women enslaved on plantations hoping to be delivered from slavery, as well as those heroes that sought to help them to freedom (conductors of the Underground Railroad)
- **Evil Figures (Satan, Pharaoh, Egyptians, Rich Man Dives)**
 - Context: any persons that stood in the way of freedom
 - Translation: slave traders, slave masters, slave owners
- **Water/Jordan River/Red Sea/Rivers/Baptism/Rain/Fountains**
 - Context: a reference to water meant either a journey (on the other side was freedom), or an action of the water (baptism, aiding in escape by concealing the scent from dogs)
 - Translation: Ohio River (most-used meaning), Atlantic Ocean (to return to Africa), or any other river that posed as a barrier to freedom
- **Possessions (shoes, robe, crown, harp, bells, trumpet, wings)**
 - Context: since the slaves didn't "own" anything, the promise of having these things in heaven or when they were freed was exciting
 - Translation: they were symbols of traveling, devotion, praise, or freedom
- **Transportation (chariots, ships, trains, wheels, wings, shoes, walking, running, fly, Jacob's ladder)**
 - Context: any items that would facilitate traveling and escape/modes of transportation
 - Translation: methods of escape on the Underground Railroad
- **Place (Drinking Gourd, Canaan, streets of gold, Promised Land, pearly gates, Jordan River)**
 - Context: providing a sense of "place" kept the focus forward to escape
 - Translation: North Star, Canada, freed states, escape routes