

OLD TESTAMENT SALVATION— FROM WHAT?

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I. INTRODUCTION

Few would disagree that the subject of salvation is one of the most important themes in the Bible—so important that many theologians have subordinated all other themes under it.¹ And yet more confusion exists over the meaning of the words *save* and *salvation* than almost any other terms in the Bible.²

Cultural influences and contextual evidence, especially in the OT, are often ignored when determining the meaning of these terms. Therefore, the purpose of this article will be to establish the meaning of the terms *save* (*yāša'*) and *salvation* (*yešû'â*)³ from their Hebraic origins—not in light of the NT. In order to verify whether the term *salvation* underwent any changes in its translation from Hebrew to Greek, the

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 18, says that “the unifying principle of covenant theology is soteriology.” See also John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing Company, 1963), 79.

² This is similar to the investigation on God’s wrath. (See René A. Lopez, “Do Believers Experience the Wrath of God?” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 15 [Autumn 2002]: 45-66). Robert N. Wilkin, “Salvation in the Old Testament, Part 1,” *Grace in Focus* (Nov-Dec 1999): 2-3, observes that, “There is probably more confusion over the terms *save* and *salvation* than any other term in the Bible. Even...believers are sometimes confused by the use of these terms in Scripture. Most people think that the vast majority of uses of the words *save* and *salvation* in Scripture refer to salvation from eternal condemnation. Actually the exact opposite is true. Biblical *salvation* rarely refers to salvation from hell (even in the NT).”

³ Unless specified for some technical reason, the noun *salvation* will be used throughout the article, instead of mentioning at every point both *yāša'* and *yešû'â*.

Septuagint will also be examined. Finally, extra-biblical documents will be surveyed in order to see how these terms were used in secular sources, which were contemporaneous with the OT.

II. THE OLD TESTAMENT USE OF SALVATION

To begin, one must ask if the Hebrew terms for *save* and *salvation* in the OT ever mean saved from eternal condemnation. In the OT, the covenant people were “heaven bound” by trusting in God’s promise of Messiah.⁴ However, they still needed to be delivered (saved) from sickness, enemies, pre-mature death, general problems or covenantal restitution due to sin (cf. Deuteronomy 28–30).⁵

The stem of the verb *save* (*yāšaʿ*) originally meant “to be roomy, broad,” which is the opposite of the concepts of “oppression” or “narrowness.” As a result, “to be constricted, [and] oppressed” seems to be the “rescue” one needs by “moving out into the open.”⁶ This is the basic

⁴ “Forensic righteousness” is taught in the OT, however, not as clearly as it is in the NT (cf. Gen 15:6; Is 53; 54:17; 61:10).

⁵ *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, ed. Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), s.v. “Salvation,” 542, states the idea of “salvation” in covenant relationship: “The righteous may cry out for deliverance from unjust persecution or oppression or for rescue from undeserved illness and premature death. Following the prescription of Deuteronomy 28–30, the receipt of covenantal blessings may be sought by a sinful people who repent and ask for deliverance from the curses of the covenant.”

⁶ Georg Fohrer, “*sōzō*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, Vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1964-76), 973. See also *BDB*, s.v. “*yāšaʿ*,” 446, which also gives the basic meaning of “placed in freedom” and “give width and breadth to, liberate.” It is also interesting to note that, not far removed from the Hebrew meaning, the Arabic equivalent means to “be capacious, make wide, spacious, make sufficient, be or live in abundance” (*BDB*, s.v. “*yāšaʿ*,” 446). Though J. F. Sawyer, “*yāšaʿ*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 6:442, does not agree with the common view of connecting the Hebrew *yāšaʿ* as a derivative of the Arabic *wasiʿa*, “be spacious” or *ʿawsaʿa*, “give room to,” he believes it comes from a “Proto-Semitic” word. Nevertheless, Sawyer understands the concept of OT *salvation* to mean “‘spaciousness,’ liberation

concept behind the usages of *save* and *salvation* in the OT. That is, since sin, enemies, and calamities are restrictions that hinder, rescue is needed to release one from these restrictions.

“Save” and “salvation” are used 363 times in the Masoretic text, appearing 319 times in the following seven distinct nuances (excluding the 44 times the noun appears as proper names):

A. SAVED FROM EXTERNAL EVILS IN GENERAL

“O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, ‘Violence!’ And You will not save” (Hab 1:2). Habakkuk questions the Lord’s delay in saving or delivering Judah from the violence that surrounded them, clearly a physical salvation.

Salvation from external calamities, namely natural disasters, can also be placed under this category: “If disaster comes upon us...judgment, pestilence, or famine...You will hear and save” (2 Chr 20:9). Judah’s enemies (Moab and Ammon) had come to battle Jehoshaphat (20:1-2). They must have been numerous because in v. 3 “Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself [as well as all the cities of Judah] to seek the Lord and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.” Then in 20:9, Jehoshaphat appeals to the Lord, citing past deliverance from natural calamities (cf. 2 Chr 6:28-30). The king then petitions God to deliver them from their enemies (20:10), as He has from pestilence and famine (20:9).

One nuance of OT salvation is deliverance or help from experiencing general external evils that come as a result of sinful actions or natural calamities.⁷

B. SAVED CORPORATELY FROM ENEMIES OR IN BATTLE

In Ps 33:16, the psalmist writes, “No king is saved by the multitude of an army; a mighty man is not delivered [yāśā‘] by great strength.”⁸ All

from restricting, oppressive experiences both physical and spiritual,” to occur frequently.

⁷ OT citations of yāśā‘ and yešū‘â that appear to be used under this category are found in Gen 49:18; Exod 2:17; Deut 28:31; 1 Sam 25:26, 31, 33; 2 Sam 14:4; 2 Kgs 6:26, 27; Isa 46:7; 47:13, 15; Jonah 2:9; Pss 72:4, 13; 74:12; 76:10; 78:22; 107:13, 19; 109:31; Job 5:4, 11, 15; 26:2; 40:14. Unless otherwise noted, all citations from the Psalms are taken from the Hebrew Masoretic Text numeration.

⁸ Robert N. Wilkin, “Salvation in the Psalms: Deliverance from Today’s Troubles, Part 2,” *Grace in Focus* (Jan-Feb 2000): 1, notices that deliverance from enemies is “the single most common use of the words *salvation* and *save* in

nations that go to war trust in their might, skills, men, and weaponry to save them from defeat (33:17). However, those that fear and trust in the Lord's mercy (33:18), although lacking military might, will be saved from defeat (Pss 44:6; 60:7). Actually, the Lord is the weapon that saves His people in battle. Salvation here means corporate deliverance or victory in battle.⁹

C. SAVED FROM MORAL TROUBLES

Proverbs 28:18 says, "Whoever walks blamelessly will be saved, but he who is perverse in his ways will suddenly fall." The Hebrew adjective "blamelessly" (*tāmîm*) used in this verse is translated "wholesome" and carries the concept of integrity.¹⁰ Moral integrity is set forth as a condition of deliverance and blessing (Prov 18:10; 28:10b). However, the

the Psalms (as in the rest of the Old Testament). Repeatedly the contexts in which these words occur indicate that the salvation in view is deliverance from one's enemies. Most often this concerns the deliverance of the nation of Israel from her enemies. On occasion it refers to deliverance of the individual from his enemies." The following discovery certainly bears this out. *TDOT*, 446, has also noticed that out of all OT books where *yāša'* appears "the largest concentration of occurrences is in the Psalms (136)." Since the Hebrew writer quotes extensively from the Psalms, T. Kem Oberholtzer concludes, "In the Old Testament, 'salvation' usually refers to the Lord's deliverance of His people from their enemies or trouble." ("The Warning Passages in Hebrews: The Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews, Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 [January-March 1988]: 93.)

⁹OT citations of *yāša'* and *yešû'â* that appear to be used under this category are found in Num 10:9; Deut 20:4; 33:29; Josh 10:6; 22:22; 1 Sam 4:3; 7:8; 9:16; 10:19, 27; 11:3; 14:6, 23, 39, 45; 17:47; 23:2, 5; 2 Sam 3:18; 10:11, 19; 22:42; 2 Kgs 13:5; 14:27; 19:19, 34; 37:20, 35; Jer 15:20; 17:14 [2x]; 23:6; 30:7, 10, 11; 31:7; 42:11; 46:27; Ezek 34:22; Hos 13:4, 10; 14:4; Obad 1:21; Mic 7:7; Hab 3:8, 13 [2x], 18; Zech 3:17, 19; Pss 14:7; 17:7; 18:42; 20:6; 24:5; 28:9; 37:40; 43:5; 44:4, 5, 8; 65:6; 68:20; 69:36; 79:9; 80:3, 4, 8, 20; 85:5, 8; 106:8, 10, 21, 47; 145:19; 149:4; Neh 9:27; 1 Chr 11:14; 16:35 [2x]; 19:19; 2 Chr 20:17; 32:22. See also Sawyer, "yāša'," in *TDOT*, 6:451, where God's saving power is claimed in the War scrolls of Qumran (1QM 10:4 [quoting from Deut 20:4], 1QM 10:7 [quoting from Num 10:9] and 1QM 11:2 [quoting from 1 Sam 17:47]).

¹⁰ *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, ed. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), s.v. "*tāmîm*," 1071.

Hebrew word for “perverse” (*iqēš*) is parallel to “blameless” and means twisted and crooked. Therefore, those who refuse to live lives of integrity will find ruin and shame. Salvation in this context refers to a temporal benefit—directly conditioned upon one’s behavior—that brings spiritual or physical blessings (or both).¹¹

D. SAVED FROM DOMINION OF OTHER NATIONS

“For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver [*hōšîa*] Israel out of the hand of the Philistines” (Judg 13:5). Those who lived in the days of the judges were rebellious and idolatrous and everyone did “what was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 21:25). As a result of their wickedness, nations would come to devour and rule over them, which is consistent with God’s warning in Deut 28:45-51. The Book of Judges proves this warning true. Nonetheless, by God’s grace, twelve judges were raised up (2:16) in order to guide the people into national independence once again. In Judges 13, Samson was the promised judge who would “save” Israel from the Philistines. Salvation here clearly means national independence from the governing authority of other nations (i.e., rulership over Israel).¹²

E. SAVED INDIVIDUALLY FROM ENEMIES

In Job 13:16, Job declares that God “shall be my salvation,” which refers to the physical calamity he was presently undergoing. He claimed that God would personally vindicate him from his present demise. David also pleads, “Preserve my life, for I am holy; You are my God; Save your servant who trusts in You!” (Ps 86:2). The entire Psalm is David’s petition to God to show His might (86:8-10) and mercy (86:3-4, 13-16) by delivering him from the proud and violent enemies who sought to

¹¹ Other OT citations of *yāša*’ and *yešû*’*â* that appear to be used under this category are found in Deut 22:27; 28:29; 2 Sam 22:28; Isa 63:8; Jer 4:14; Pss 7:11; 18:28; 34:19; 50:23; 51:14; 119:94, 117, 123, 146, 155, 166, 174; Job 22:29.

¹² Other OT occurrences of *yāša*’ and *yešû*’*â* that appear to be used in this category include Judg 2:18; 3:9, 15, 31; 6:14, 15, 31, 36, 37; 7:2, 7; 8:22; 10:1, 12, 13, 14; 12:2, 3; 13:5; Jer 2:27, 28; 8:20; 11:12 [2x]; 14:8, 9; Lam 4:17.

destroy him (86:14, 17). In this context, *salvation* is referring to the individual physical deliverance from personal problems or one's foes.¹³

F. SAVED IN PROSPERITY

"...He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. For this is all my salvation and all my desire; will He not make it increase?" (2 Sam 23:5). The Davidic covenant is in view here. In David's last words (2 Sam 23:1) he remembers the everlasting covenant of rulership God had promised him (cf. 2 Sam 7:8-16; Ps 89:29). David could rest assured (even if his "house is not so with God") that his seed would prosper and remain forever. The phrase "salvation and all of my desire" is synonymously parallel to the phrase "make it increase." Salvation in this passage is equated with prosperity (spiritual, material, or both)¹⁴ for those who trust in God.¹⁵

G. SAVED NATIONALLY WITH SPIRITUAL CONNOTATION

"How beautiful are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace...[and] salvation" (Isa 52:7). Salvation in this context encompasses two ideas. First, God's people and His city will be restored

¹³ Other OT citations of *yāša'* and *yešū'ā* that appear to be used under this category are found in Deut 32:15; 1 Sam 2:1; 2 Sam 8:6, 14; 22:3; 22:4, 47, 51; 2 Kgs 16:7; Isa 38:20; Pss 3:2, 8, 9; 6:5; 7:1; 9:15; 12:2, 6; 13:6; 18:3, 4; 18:36, 47, 51; 20:7, 10; 21:2, 6; 22:2, 22; 25:5; 27:19; 28:8; 31:3, 17; 33:16; 34:7; 35:3, 9; 36:7; 42:6, 12; 43:5; 54:3; 55:17; 57:4; 59:3; 62:2, 7, 8; 69:2, 14, 30; 70:5; 71:2, 3; 88:2; 89:27; 106:4; 108:7; 109:26; 116:6, 13; 118:15, 21; 138:7; 140:8; Job 13:16; 1 Chr 18:6, 13; 19:12. In this category, a corporate nuance could also be understood. That is, David could be speaking for himself but not to the exclusion of the people. This would be understood as a synecdoche (a part [David's plea] that stands for the whole [the people as well]). However, what is emphasized is David's individual deliverance as opposed to a corporate plea, as he makes on other occasions (Pss 65:6; 68:20; 69:36; 79:9; 80:3).

¹⁴ S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Book of Samuel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890), 276, says, "*yāša'* like *yešū'ā* as used by the prophets and psalmist, denotes *welfare*, spiritual and material combined," emphasis original.

¹⁵ Other OT citations of *yāša'* and *yešū'ā* that appear to be used under this category are found in 2 Sam 23:5; Pss 9:15; 95:1; 96:2; 118:25; 132:16; Job 30:15; Prov 20:22; 1 Chr 16:23.

now and once and for all in that day (52:6).¹⁶ Second, to be part of Christ's future kingdom—known in the OT and the Gospels as “entering” the kingdom (Isa 53:1-5; Matt 19:16, 25; Mark 10:17, 26)—one must be eternally saved (i.e., rescued from eternal death, cf. Isaiah 51; 61:10-11; 64:5-6). Thus, spiritual salvation is in view in what follows (Isa 52:13–53:12), as God's means to “effect that deliverance”¹⁷ for the remnant (Isa 10:20-22; 11:11, 16).

The person who brings good news and proclaims peace and salvation in the whole context of 52:1–53:12 has spiritual salvation and Israel's national restoration in view. The context develops both of these thoughts.

In Isa 52:8 the Lord's “arm” is the “salvation” of God. Isaiah 52:13-15 describes Jesus Christ and His atoning work as His blood sacrifice (1 Pet 1:2) when it states, “So shall He sprinkle many nations.” This miraculous power by “His holy arm” (52:10; 53:1) and work refers to the works of Messiah (“Servant”) developed in 53:2-12.¹⁸ This would understand Isa 53:1-3 as looking back to the thought in 52:14. Thus, the nations and kings will “shut their mouths” and “see” (52:15, and perhaps “be amazed”)¹⁹ how the Servant who gave up His life and status gained it back for Himself and others through His faithfulness to God (52:12;

¹⁶ The phrase *in that day* in Isa 10:20; 11:6-14; 12:1; 19:16-25 appears to be used for Christ's future rule over all, as well as God's day of judgment in Isa 7:18, 20-21, 23.

¹⁷ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 382.

¹⁸ Oswalt, 382, says that, “*The arm of the Lord* here shows the direct connection of this poem with the preceding...What is being said here can only be understood in direct relationship to what has been said previously, especially in chs. 49–52. God has promised to deliver his people from their alienation from him so that they can indeed become His servants to the world. Now he tells the means by which he proposes to effect that deliverance. To attempt to understand this segment in any other way is to misunderstand the significance of the occurrence of the ‘arm of the Lord’ and the other contextual cues,” *ibid.*, emphasis original.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 380-81. The phrase, “what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider,” that renders the kings of the world speechless (“kings shall shut their mouth at Him”), conveys the idea of how one who took such a humble position can end in such a high place by sitting in God's throne (Rev 22:1, 3). Since being humble is contrary to the world's way of gaining victory, God's method of victory will surprise the world when Messiah's triumph comes to pass.

53:12).²⁰ Therefore, since the Messiah will accomplish God's work by giving up His life and position (52:13–53:12), the captivity and city that was lost (52:4-6) will be regained²¹ (54:3-4) and ruled by the Messiah and His partners (53:12a; Ps 2:8-9; Heb 1:9, 13-14; Rev 2:26-27).

Three contextual markers appear in OT passages where eternal salvation, in addition to temporal deliverance, is in view. First, God's grace and power appear as the only source able to save eternally (Isa 45:14-25; 49:10, 13; 54:8-10). Second, Messiah, or a picture of Messiah, appears to be the atoning sacrifice in the context (Isa 52:13–53:12). Finally, one cannot do anything to earn it, but simply trust in God's righteousness and act of salvation that will accomplish and fulfill His promise (Isa 41:1-20; 42:1–44:28). As will be evident, *some* of these contextual markers are found in extra-biblical literature as well, the exception being eternal redemption obtained solely through God's grace. That is the unique element of the Hebrew Scriptures and the *sine qua non* of the Christian faith.

Even if the terms *save* and *salvation* carry a sense of eternal salvation in some OT passages, there is no explicit instance where the term appears solely with a spiritual nuance.²² While salvation may come with a spiritual nuance, in the OT it always has a broader meaning. Salvation here comes by physically restoring national Israel to the land of promise, placing them in a position of blessing.²³

²⁰ Ibid., 405-406.

²¹ Ibid., 417-18.

²² Out of the 363 times the terms *yāšā'* and *yešū'â* appear, this writer could not find one single instance of a justification-salvation-only meaning.

²³ Although Messiah's sacrifice is the means by which God furnishes eternal-life-redemption for humanity (Isa 49:1–53:12; 65:1), one must notice that in Isaiah's writings (and in other prophets) it is also the grounds by which God will temporally and eternally rescue (by His mercy) Israel from her enemies and permanently restore her to the promise land and national prominence. In Isaiah the means and method—i.e., Messiah's sacrifice (Isa 7:14; 9:6-7; 11:1-5; 37:32; 42–43; 49:1–53:14; 54–56)—of how God will restore Israel to the land of promise is an important element. However, the emphasis of the meaning of "salvation" lies, not on the means, but on the end result of rescuing Israel from her enemies, by restoring them to the promise land, and restoring peace on earth by which all humanity will benefit (Isa 2:1-4; 9:7; 10:20-34; 11:6–12:6; 27:2-13; 35; 37:1-7; 59:16–62:12; 65:17–66:24). Thus, salvation experience in Isaiah finds its basis in justification through Messiah's atonement (Isa 52:13–53:12),

H. SUMMARY

Deliverance from temporal and physical oppression dominates usage far more than deliverance from hell. The seven major categories of these terms that appear in the OT demonstrate the following sense of meaning: temporal physical deliverance (1) generally from external evils, (2) corporately from enemies or in battle, (3) from moral troubles, (4) from nations' dominion, (5) physically and/or individually from enemies, (6) in prosperity, and (7) to national restoration through spiritual means.

Many others have also agreed with these conclusions. A survey of the literature addressing this subject reveals that a consensus in biblical scholarship exists concerning the meaning of OT salvation by showing that a *broader* meaning always appears instead of the *deliverance-from-eternal-condemnation* nuance.²⁴ Therefore if anyone interprets salvation

but has a broader scope that encompasses all of God's national and universal promises to restore humanity to a place and position of blessing.

OT citations of *yāša'* and *yešū'a* that appear to be used under this category are found in Isa 12:2, 3; 17:10; 19:20; 25:9 [2x]; 26:1, 18; 30:15; 33:2, 6, 22; 35:4; 43:3, 11; 45:8, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22; 49:6, 8, 25, 26; 51:5, 6, 8; 52:7, 10; 56:1; 59:1, 11, 16; 60:16, 18; 61:10; 62:1, 11; 63:1, 5, 8, 9; 64:5; Ezek 36:29; 37:23; Hos 1:7 [2x]; Zech 8:7, 13; 9:9; 10:6 12:7; Pss 67:39; 98:1, 2, 3.

²⁴ The view expressed in this article is held by others as well: John E. Hartley, "yāša'," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. Gleason L. Archer, R. Laird Harris, and Bruce K. Waltke, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 414, shows, without clearly stating this writer's conclusion, the lack of evidence supporting the "deliverance from hell" definition in his article, but instead defines *yāša'* as "to make wide or sufficient." Hence Hartley states that "... the majority of [OT] references to salvation speak of Yahweh granting deliverance from real enemies and out of real catastrophies" (*ibid.*, 414-15). In addition, R. E. O. White, "Salvation," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 967, seems to concur. White states that "'The Lord is...my salvation' is the heart of OT testimony, always...Later Judaism anticipated a messianic deliverance which includes political, national, or religious elements (Pss. Sol. 109; T. Benj. 9:10; cf. Luke 1:69, 71, 77)." Developing this same point Joseph C. Dillow states that, "The breath of salvation is so sweeping and intended aim so magnificent that in many contexts the words used defy precise definition. Yet these difficulties have not thwarted numerous interpreters from assuming, often without any contextual justification, that the words used invariably mean 'deliverance from hell' or 'go to heaven when you die.' It may come as a surprise to many that this usage of 'salvation' (Gk. *sōtēria*) would have been the least likely meaning to come to

in the OT as eternal condemnation, he will miss the meaning and application God intends to convey.

III. SALVATION IN THE SEPTUAGINT AND EXTRA-BIBLICAL LITERATURE

As developed above, the temporal, not *eternal*, deliverance meaning is well attested in the Hebrew Scriptures, but what about other literature? Does the “temporal-deliverance” meaning outweigh the eternal deliverance definition in the LXX, Classical period, and Koine period?

A. THE SEPTUAGINT

The LXX translates *sōtēria* (salvation) from the Hebrew noun *yešû‘ā* sixty-four times²⁵ and *sōzō* (save) from the Hebrew verb *yāšā‘* 159 times, or three fifths of its occurrences.²⁶ In other cases the LXX renders the

mind of a reader of the Bible in the first century,” (*The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* [Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing, 1992], 111-13). Then, not surprisingly, (Wilkin, “Salvation in the Old Testament, Part 1,” pp. 2-3), says: “Biblical *salvation* rarely refers to salvation from hell (even in the NT). This is especially evident in the OT. During my doctoral work, I looked up every OT occurrence of the various words which mean *save* and *salvation*. I found that over 90% of the references concern salvation from enemies and from other difficulties in this life,” emphasis original. See for a further discussion on the issue of OT salvation and its broader emphasis: Allen P. Ross, “The Biblical Method of Salvation: A Case for Discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 161-78, 352-56; See also Kenneth E. Locklin, “The Significance of the Term SOTERIA in Romans” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978), 8-18, and Daniel Carl Esau, “Paul’s Concept of SOTERIA in Romans” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1969), 6-7; Colin Brown and J. Schneider, “Redemption,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 201-209; James K. Zink, “Salvation in the Old Testament A Central Theme,” *Encounter* 25 (1964): 405-414.

²⁵ Fohrer, “*sōzō*,” in *TDNT*, 7:971. However, the LXX translates the noun *sōtēria* mostly for the Hebrew stem *yāšā‘* (81 times).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 970. In the Masoretic text *yāšā‘* occurs 241 times. The Hebrew verb *yāšā‘* still remains the most important out of the 15 different Hebrew verbs

Greek verb *sōzō* from three Hebrew stems *plt*, *p^llîṭê*, and *mlt* (fugitive, escape, or deliver) in one fifth of its occurrences. Finally, the stem *nšl* (preserve or spare) occurs twenty-four times and makes up one fifth of all other occurrences.²⁷

The Septuagint's renderings of *save* (*sōzō*) and *salvation* (*sōtēria*) exhibit the same range of meanings²⁸—as would generally be expected—as in the Hebrew OT.²⁹ These include: (1) Saved from external evils in general,³⁰ (2) Saved corporately from enemies or in battle,³¹ (3) Saved

translated as *sōzō* in the LXX (Brown and Schneider, "Redemption," in *NIDNTT*, 3:206).

²⁷ Fohrer, "sōzō," in *TDNT*, 7:970.

²⁸ Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 330, understands how easy anachronistic interpretations (i.e., taking something chronologically out of place) can distort our view of the OT use of "salvation" since the Hellenists chose the well known NT word *sōtēria* to translate the Hebrew term *yāša'*: "When the Jews of the Hellenistic period were to translate this word into Greek, they used a word which played a very great part at that time, i.e., *sōtēria*, one of the words which later on came to designate a fundamental idea in the New Testament. The word *salvation* has throughout become charged with contents of the *sōtēria* of the New Testament, and when it is used to render the above-mentioned Hebrew words (*yāša'* and *yešū'â*) it is apt to cause ideas from the domain of the New Testament to be transferred into these Old-Israelitic terms. Salvation instinctively suggests the idea of something beyond, a deliverance from the misery of this world into another world. When we use the word with relation to the Old Testament, we must know that the meaning is a different one, life and happiness here always being bound up with this earth."

²⁹ Foerster, "sōzō," in *TDNT*, 7:972. See also Locklin, "The Significance of the Term SOTERIA in Romans," 9-10, and Esau, "Paul's Concept of SOTERIA in Romans," 6-7.

³⁰ "The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation [*sōtērian* = *yešū'â*]..." (Exod 15:2).³⁰ The Lord appears as Israel's deliverer who fights for them. He "throws the horse and rider...into the sea" (cf. 15:1, 4-10). "The Lord is a man of war" (15:3). Salvation here means deliverance in battle. The Lord is Israel's deliverer from her enemies. In this context salvation is attributed to God as a "deliverer in war" or from any external evils.

³¹ "Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them" (Judg 2:16). The people are delivered (*esōsen* = *yāša'*) in v. 16 from enemies (2:14). Salvation here, as shown previously, means deliverance from enemy hands.

from moral troubles,³² (4) Saved from nations' dominion,³³ (5) Saved physically and/or individually from enemies,³⁴ (6) Saved as prosperity,³⁵ and (7) Saved with a spiritual connotation.³⁶

B. CLASSICAL PERIOD

In extra-biblical literature ranging from the Classical period (900 B.C. to 330 B.C.) to the Koine period (at least 300 B.C. to

³² "Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation [*sōtērian* = *yāśa'*] of God" (Ps 49:23, numeration in English translation). In this passage David illustrates God's physical and spiritual deliverance based on honoring Him and having upright moral character.

³³ "Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, you who have escaped [*sōtōmenoi* = *p'lēte*] from the nations. They have no knowledge, who carry the wood of their carved image, and pray to a god that cannot save [*sōzousin* = *yāśa'*]" (Isa 45:20). Here, Israel was trying to escape from nations who were holding them captive. This expresses the same idea found in v. 20 of deliverance from captivity (as indicated by the word at the end of the verse). Salvation here means escape (or deliverance) from the nation that had enslaved them.

³⁴ "Flee, save [*sōsate* = *p'lēte*] your lives! And be like the juniper in the wilderness" (Jer 31:6, English numeration). Saving one's physical life by fleeing is the concept found in Jer 31:6. Genesis 32:31 (English numeration) conveys the sense of preservation (*esōthē* = *mlt*) of Jacob's physical life from harm.

³⁵ "Terrors are turned upon me; they pursue my honor as the wind, and my prosperity [*sōtēria* = *yešū'ā*] has passed like a cloud" (Job 30:15). All of Job's family, wealth, and health were gone (1:3-22), which in 30:15 means he lost his "prosperity." Although Job lost everything, he would regain much more at a later time, as seen in 42:10.

³⁶ "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke...But My salvation [*sōtērion* = *yešū'ā*] will be forever, and My righteousness will not be abolished" (Isa 51:6). The recipients are those "who follow after righteousness...who seek the Lord" (51:1), "who know righteousness...[and] in whose heart is [His] law" (51:7). *Righteousness* as a synonym for eternal (45:17; 56:1) *salvation*, accomplished solely by God, occurs in Isa 45:8 and 46:13. Here, as shown above, eternal salvation (prosperity) is to a place and position of blessing and is based solely upon the Lord (51:3-16; 53:1-12). Salvation in this context has a dual concept by also referring to future deliverance from present Babylonian oppression through eternal spiritual means.

A.D. 140),³⁷ there seems to be no noticeable difference in the Greek usages of *save* (*sōzō*) and *salvation* (*sōtēria*).³⁸ For example, in Classical literature the concept of “deliverance and preservation” appears for the noun *sōtēria* in Herodotus 5:98. In Aristotle’s *Politica* 1301^a23, *sōtēria* is defined as “ways of preserving.”³⁹

Foerster cites several Classical references from the mystery religions that define *sōzō* as a person’s “blissful life beyond death.”⁴⁰ This, perhaps, comes close to the biblical concept of a person’s salvation from hell. Nevertheless, the above evidence suggests that the “temporal deliverance” definition for salvation—as used in the OT—is still commonly used in Classical Greek for *sōzō* and *sōtēria*.

C. KOINE PERIOD

Linguistically, the Apocrypha and Qumran writings do not belong in this section—since Greek usage, not Hebrew, is the subject matter here. However, due to the importance of its contemporaneous nature, it will be included.

1. Salvation in the Apocrypha.

In the Apocrypha, the salvation/save word-group almost always means physical deliverance from afflictions.⁴¹ It refers to how “a raft in

³⁷ W. White, Jr., “Greek Language,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenny, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975-76), 828. Obviously, White concludes, this includes the LXX which “is the largest body of text in the *Koiné* dialect. At points the tr. drew upon purely Gr. concepts for its rendering of Hebraic expressions while in other passages the Heb. was followed so closely to be unintelligible in Gr.”

³⁸ *A Greek English Lexicon*, ed. Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), s.v. “*sōzō*,” 1748, Also, see, s.v. “*sōtēria*,” 1751.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, s.v. “*sōtēria*,” 1751. See *LSJM* for helpful examples that show how classical Greek usage of *sōtēria* and *sōzō* are in line with OT usage and meaning of the term.

⁴⁰ Foerster, “*sōzō*,” in *TDNT*, 7:969.

⁴¹ An exception to the common meaning exhibited in the Apocrypha may be found in 4 Macc 15: 2, 3, 8, 27 where a woman allows her seven sons to be burned, but trusts in the God of Abraham who promises to save and give them eternal life (see 4 Macc 14:20; 15:3, 28), although they presently died. Also see

the sea saves (delivers)” (Wis of Sol 14:5), and how “a door in the house can ‘protect’ more than idols” (Lett of Jer 58). It is not common to find men “saving” other men, but the idea does exist: Eleazar sacrificed himself before the battle “to save [sōsai] his people” (1 Macc 6:44) and Judas Maccabaeus was the mighty “savior [sōzōn] of Israel” (1 Macc 9:21).⁴²

By far the majority of usages refer to the “deliverance of the righteous by God.”⁴³ He saved people from demons (Tob 6:17-18) and the child Moses from danger (Wis 18:5). God also saved Moses when he crossed the Red Sea (1 Macc 4:9), was in war (1 Macc 9:46), and through His wisdom (Wis 9:18; 10:4; Sir 3:1).

2. *Salvation in the Qumran writings.*

In the Qumran writings deliverance came by God-given rulers: “by the hand of our kings You ‘rescued’ [hwś’tnw] us” (1QM 11:3), and from God Himself, called “the God of deliverance” (lyśw’wt), so that the “priest and Levites praise[d]” Him for His “acts of deliverance” (1QS 1:18-19). God also delivered by revealing the law which “was concealed for a short while, to the time when help (yś’kh) was manifested” (1QH 5:11). Finally, “in relation to the end-time it is said that God has created the righteous ‘to open every affliction of his soul to eternal deliverance [lyśw’t’wlm]” (1QH 15:16).⁴⁴

2 Macc 7:25-29. In Baruch 4:22, 24, 29 *sōtēria* seems to come with eternal life verities but the context and term also carries a national *deliverance* concept.

⁴² The following passages appear to have the meaning of *preserving one’s physical life*: Jdt 10:15; 11:13; Tob 14:10; 1 Macc 2:44, 59; 3:18; 4:9, 11; 5:62; 9:9; 10:83; 11:48; 2 Macc 12:25; 13:3 [welfare is the meaning]; 14:3; 4 Macc 4:12; 5:6; 6:15, 27; 10:1; Bar 6:49.

⁴³ Foerster “sōzō,” in *TDNT*, 7:981-82. The following passages appear to have the meaning of *preserving one’s physical life by God*: Esth 10:9; 13:9, 12; 16:22; Jdt 8:17; 1 Macc 3:6; 4:25; 2 Macc 1:11; 2:17, 39; 7:25; 11:26; 3 Macc 6:13, 33, 36; 7:16, 22; 4 Macc 4:12; 9:4; 15:2, 3, 8, 27; Obe 4:13; 12:14; Wis 5:2; 6:24; 10:14; 14:4; 16:6-7; 18:7; Sir 2:11; 34:13; 36:9; 46:1; 51:8, 11; Bar 4:22, 24, 29; Dan 3:66.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 983. Foerster sees eternal redemption here (1QM 1:12; 18:11).

Indeed, the Dead Sea Scrolls understand “salvation” to be eternal deliverance from *sheol*. That is why one finds the statement, “I extol thee that thou hast redeemed [pryth] my soul from the pit and hast caused me to rise up from the sheol of perdition to the heights of eternity” (1QH 3:19). Although these texts do

In the Qumran writings, the word *salvation* can denote physical deliverance as well as eternal redemption. However, the *temporal* nuance of the word dominates its usage.⁴⁵

3. *Salvation in secular Greek writers.*

Secular first century Greek writers, like Philo and Josephus, also commonly used the term for preservation, blessing, deliverance, and/or health.⁴⁶ Evidence from a papyri suggests that *sōtēria* was used with a nuance of health and prosperity: “To all this I swear by Almighty God and by the supremacy, salvation and preservation of our most pious sovereigns, Flavius Heraclius and Aelia Flavia.”⁴⁷

IV. CONCLUSION

After surveying the OT, Septuagint, and extra-biblical literature, several conclusions can be drawn. Use of the terms *save* and *salvation* in the OT and *save* (*sōzō*) and *salvation* (*sōtēria*) in the LXX, have the same basic meaning: deliverance from hindrances in life, specifically national and individual foes. Extra-biblical usages also parallel Jewish concepts of *yāśa*^c and *yešū‘ā*. While specialized usage for eternal salvation does occur, it is always with a broader range of meaning that could include one or more combinations of the non-eternal categories of usage.

Thus the commonly understood justification-only meaning of the term *salvation* does not occur in the OT. May all grace proponents heed Earl D. Radmacher’s call to avoid missing God’s meaning of the term *salvation*:

not use the term *yešū‘ā*, it does appear in 1QH Fr 18:5 and in 1QH 15:15 with eschatological verities; yet these references contextually allow for understanding *yešū‘ā* to also carry a *national deliverance* meaning as well.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 982-83. In the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* XII, *sōzō* is understood as having an “eternal” nuance earned by obedience. It is also understood that “the individual with God’s help and cooperation achieves temporal and eternal salvation” (ibid., 984).

⁴⁶ Ibid., 986, 988. See also Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 982-83, 985-86.

⁴⁷ James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 622.

Have you ever said something to a friend only to discover later that while he heard what you said he missed the meaning? This often happens when we read the Bible. How easy it is to bring a meaning to a Bible passage that was not what the writer had in mind. When we do that, we missed the mind of God and are in serious danger of following the enemy of our souls. To protect ourselves from that danger we need to study the meaning of words and how they are used in their contexts. And this is especially true of the word *salvation*.⁴⁸

In Israelite culture and in the majority of the Hebrew Scriptures, salvation did not mean salvation from eternal condemnation, but instead it was understood to include a broader range of meaning: “physical and temporal deliverance.”⁴⁹ Hence when someone refers to OT salvation, remember to ask, “From what?” lest we miss God’s application for us.

⁴⁸ Earl D. Radmacher, *Salvation*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), 3, emphasis original.

⁴⁹ Nuesner and Green, *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 542, suggest that “...the manner in which ‘salvation’ is construed has often oversimplified the breadth of biblical and post-biblical tradition.”

They continue, “Two misimpressions prevail in particular. First, for reasons inherent in the New Testament, Christians usually construe salvation as deliverance from sin and its consequences: guilt and divine condemnation. In fact, the Hebrew Bible and much post-biblical tradition employ the Hebrew root *ysh* and the Greek verb and noun *sōzō/sōtēria* (save, salvation; rescue; deliver[ance]), as well as a number of other terms and metaphors, to denote a range of divine activity that includes rescue from one’s enemies, healing from illness, and deliverance from death, in addition to forgiveness of sin and release from its consequences...Second, much that is defined as ‘salvation’ does not involve God saving anyone from anything. Rather, God is bestowing on the covenant people the blessings that they have been promised, without any sense that they have hitherto been deprived of these things.”