



SALVATION FROM WHAT?

A BIBLICAL STUDY

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Salvation from What? A Biblical Study

Chapter 3 from *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible*

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Cover and book design: Shawn C. Lazar

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wilkin, Robert N., 1952-

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Printed in the United States of America

SALVATION FROM WHAT?

THE MANY FACES OF SALVATION

I WAS SAVED YEARS AGO. What do I mean by that?

I was saved from an early death in 1971 when I was in college. I easily could have been killed when a car travelling over 40 miles per hour hit the passenger door of my car as I was making a left in an intersection. Glass was everywhere. Fortunately my Ford Maverick (yes, there really was once such a car) did not flip or catch on fire.

A year later, in the Fall of 1972, I was saved from eternal condemnation. A staff member with Campus Crusade for Christ, Warren Wilke, led me to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.

On December 31, 1985 Woodcrest College, my first teaching job, folded. I was saved from the ranks of the unemployed when six months later I was hired by Multnomah Bible College in Portland to teach Greek and Bible.

In 1987 Sharon and I nearly lost the equity from the home we had sold when the Savings and Loan which held the equity went bankrupt. The S & L was government insured so we were saved from financial ruin.

I was saved in all of those senses—and more. And depending on the point I'm trying to make, "I was saved years ago" might refer to any of those events, or others. The words which follow would make clear what type of salvation I meant.

The words *save* and *salvation* in everyday life refer to a wide range of deliverances. The same is true in the Bible. In both the Old Testament (written in Hebrew) and in the New Testament (written in Greek), the words *save* and *salvation* refer to many types of deliverance and not just to deliverance from eternal condemnation.

Did you realize that there are no uses of the words *save* or *salvation* in the Old Testament that refer specifically to deliverance from hell and the gaining of eternal life? None.

And did you realize that in the New Testament only three in ten uses of *salvation* (*sōtēria*) and *save* (*sōzō*) refer to *salvation from eternal condemnation and to obtaining eternal life*? That means that 70% of the time in the New Testament the words *save* or *salvation* do not mean what most people think they mean, leading to misunderstandings that would be funny if they were not so calamitous.

It is no wonder that people become wildly confused about the condition of the new birth since they take most uses of *save* and *salvation* in Scripture as referring to the new birth.

Here are a few examples in which a failure to observe the context leads to a quite confusing view of the condition of eternal life.

Paul said, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). If that is talking about how we gain everlasting life, then we are required to put in a lifetime of effort during which we are concerned (“with fear and trembling”) that we might not obtain it.

The author of Proverbs wrote, “Whoever walks blamelessly will be saved” (Prov 28:18). Here the condition for salvation is not faith in the Messiah, but *walking blamelessly*. Obviously many preachers use verses like this to teach either that faith must be joined with works to keep everlasting life, or, that faith must be joined with works to prove that we have *really* believed (which in their understanding of belief means that we have really committed and surrendered to the Lord).

In his first letter to Timothy the Apostle Paul wrote, “Nevertheless she [singular, a woman] will be saved in childbearing if they [plural, her children] continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control” (1 Tim 2:15). Now if this refers to how a woman is saved from eternal condemnation, it is teaching that to spend eternity with God she must train her children well and her children must then persevere in faith and good works. Even if she trains them well, if they nonetheless do not persevere, then she will end up in the lake of fire.

Later in that same epistle Paul warned Timothy directly: “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim 4:16). Timothy was already a born-again man. Paul called him earlier in this same book “a true son in the faith” (1 Tim 1:2). Timothy was guiding the church in Ephesus as a representative of the Apostle Paul. Yet if this verse is talking about escaping eternal condemnation, then the

eternal destiny of Timothy and of the believers in Ephesus depended on him continuing to teach sound doctrine, as well as on him being morally steadfast (note “take heed *to yourself* and...”). If this is an evangelistic verse, then Paul is warning Timothy that if he departed into false teaching or into moral failure, he’d end up being eternally condemned and so would the people in his church. Of course, that is ridiculous (cf. Eph 2:8-9).

In Second Samuel we read, “You [the LORD] will save the humble people” (2 Sam 22:28). There, and in Job 22:29 as well, the condition of *salvation* is humility, not faith in Christ.

The author of Hebrews said, “He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Heb 5:9). In context this obedience includes suffering for Christ (compare 5:8). Thus if this refers to how one gets eternal life, it is by obeying Christ throughout our lives, enduring in our confession of Christ even in the midst of persecution for our faith.

What did the Apostle Paul mean when he wrote, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom 10:13)? This verse is often used for evangelism. But is that Paul’s point in context? The verse comes from Joel 2 and refers to Jewish *believers* at the end of the Tribulation who will call out to Jesus to save them *from the Gentile armies* that have surrounded Jerusalem to destroy them. If it refers to how we get eternal life now, then it is saying that we must cry out in prayer to Jesus in order to gain eternal life. Thus believing in Him, by itself, would not give anyone eternal life. Calling upon Him must be added to believing in Him in order to be born again. And, by the way, that is precisely what many evangelists actually say.

In Ps 119:146 the Psalmist is bargaining with God for his salvation: “I cry out to You [the Lord]; save me, and I will keep Your testimonies.” If this is salvation from eternal condemnation, then it was obtained by crying out to and promising to serve God.

However, if we realize that *save* and *salvation* refer to deliverance of many kinds (primarily from enemies in the Old Testament), then we will not become hopelessly confused about what we must do to have everlasting life.

The doctrine of salvation, called soteriology (after the Greek word for salvation, *sōtēria*), is not exclusively *or even primarily* the doctrine of what we must do to have everlasting life.¹ It is the Biblical

¹I realize, of course, that in Bible colleges and seminaries soteriology is typically taught as exclusively dealing with salvation from eternal condemnation. That is,

teaching about various deliverances, plural. While deliverance from eternal condemnation is a small part of that, it is far from the entire doctrine of salvation.

Let's now look at some representative examples of the uses of the words *save* and *salvation*, beginning in the Old Testament.

OLD TESTAMENT SALVATION

Since the Old Testament is huge, I will illustrate the various ways in which it uses the words *save* and *salvation* by focusing on uses within the Psalms. These same types of salvation occur all through the Old Testament. The reader would be well advised to do a concordance study of every use of the words *save* and *salvation* in the Old Testament. I have done that myself and I've found it to be a very edifying study.

DELIVERANCE FROM ENEMIES

Far and away the most common type of salvation in the Old Testament is deliverance from enemies. The Psalms are filled with these types of uses.

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.

For example, in Ps 18:2-3 David says, "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of *my salvation*, my stronghold. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; *so shall I be saved from my enemies*" (emphasis added). This is a popular chorus sung in many churches. And it illustrates the most common use of *salvation* in the Psalms: deliverance *from enemies*.

however, a mistake. I recall one of my theology professors at Dallas Theological Seminary, Craig Glickman, pointing out that the Biblical doctrine of soteriology rightly covers all types of salvation found in the Bible. He is obviously correct since one cannot properly understand the Bible's teaching of salvation from eternal condemnation if he understands most Biblical references to *salvation* as referring to salvation from eternal condemnation. Even if a professor is simply teaching a class on salvation from eternal condemnation, he must teach the students that most references to salvation in the Old and New Testaments do not concern salvation from eternal condemnation. If he fails to do so, the students will almost assuredly fail to understand that the sole condition of everlasting life is faith in Christ, apart from any works before or after the new birth.

Similarly David wrote, “The One who gives *salvation* to kings, who delivers David His servant *from the deadly sword*” (Ps 144:10, emphasis added). God delivered David, and many of the kings of Israel and Judah, from the deadly sword of Israel’s enemies. And again David wrote, “O God the LORD, the strength of my *salvation*, *You have covered my head in the day of battle*” (Ps 140:7, emphasis added).

The nations that were Israel’s enemies were notoriously wicked. Thus deliverance *from the wicked* is a closely related and often synonymous idea to deliverance *from enemies*. David lamented, “Do not take me away with the wicked and with the workers of iniquity, who speak peace to their neighbors, but evil in their hearts. Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavors; give them according to the work of their hands; render to them what they deserve” (Ps 28:3-4). It is in this context that David then says of God, “He is the *saving refuge* of His anointed. *Save Your people*, and bless Your inheritance” (Ps 28:8-9, emphasis added; see also Ps 9:14, compare verses 15-16; Pss 37:40; 62:1, 7; 145:19).

If we do not grasp this, then a verse like Ps 7:10 would confuse us greatly. There David says, “My defense is of God, who saves the upright in heart.” Salvation is for *the upright in heart*, not for the believer. Of course, the previous verse asks, “Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just.” Ultimately David longs for the time when Messiah will rule and Israel will be delivered from all her enemies. In the short term he longs for deliverance from wicked enemies. He made this clear at the start of the Psalm with these words, “Save me from all those who persecute me” (Ps 7:1).

DELIVERANCE FROM TROUBLE

The second most frequent type of salvation in the Psalms is deliverance from troubles in this life. For example, in Ps 50:22-23 we read, “Now consider this, you who forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver: Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God.” The *salvation* or *deliverance* is spelled out earlier in the context: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” (v 15). God provides salvation *in the day of the trouble*.

Similar wording is found in Ps 91:15-16, “He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My

salvation.” God saves from troubles in this life those who call upon Him.

“May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble...May He grant you according to your heart’s desire, and fulfill all your purpose. We will rejoice in your salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners! May the LORD fulfill all your petitions” (Ps 20:1, 4-5). Salvation from troubles is a common theme in the Psalms.

DELIVERANCE OF THE POOR AND NEEDY FROM THEIR AFFLICTIONS

This is a special type of salvation from troubles. Specifically, on some occasions, the psalmist speaks of the salvation of the poor and needy from their afflictions.

“‘For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now I will arise,’ says the LORD; ‘I will set him in the safety [salvation] for which he yearns’” (Ps 12:5).

“Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let such as love Your salvation say continually, ‘The LORD be magnified!’ But I am poor and needy; Yet the LORD thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God” (Ps 40:16-17). Of course, if David, the author of Psalm 40, can call himself “poor and needy,” then surely we all are poor and needy. We all need deliverance from our afflictions. This is a principle we see elsewhere in Scripture. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (Prov 3:34; Jas 4:6).

DELIVERANCE OF ISRAEL FROM CAPTIVITY

God not only sent Israel into captivity for its disobedience, He also returned Israel from that captivity. That returning of Israel from captivity is called *salvation*: “Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD brings back the captivity of His people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad” (Ps 14:7; cf. 53:6).

David was writing prophetically here. When he wrote, Israel was not in captivity and hadn’t been since leaving Egypt four hundred years before. Was he speaking of the return which took place starting in 538 BC? Or was he speaking about the *ultimate* salvation of Israel from captivity, when the Messiah returns Israel once and for all to the Promised Land after the Tribulation?

Actually the Hebrew which is translated “bring back the captivity” can also be rendered “turn the fortunes”² or “restore the fortunes.”³ Thus it may not refer specifically to restoration from captivity. However, regardless of the translation, it seems likely that David is thinking here of Israel’s ultimate restoration when at the end of the Tribulation the Messiah returns and delivers Israel from all of her enemies.

NO OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO SALVATION FROM ETERNAL CONDEMNATION

Most people in Christianity recognize that the Old Testament doesn’t have near as much discussion of justification, regeneration, or salvation from eternal condemnation as the New Testament. But most do not realize that while the Old Testament does discuss justification and regeneration, it never calls that *salvation*. The words *save* and *salvation* are never used in the Old Testament to refer to salvation from eternal condemnation.

One verse that seems to be an exception is David’s plea, “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation” (Ps 51:12). People think David is thinking back to when he was first born again and the joy he experienced then. But that is not at all what he means. If we read Psalm 51, we see there is nothing here about the new birth. Indeed the second half of verse 12 goes on to say, “And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.” David is remembering times when the Lord has saved him from his troubles in the past. He wants that joy again.

The superscription and the Psalm itself show that Psalm 51 concerns David’s repentance after he was confronted by Nathan the prophet concerning his sin with Bathsheba. David was depressed and in pain after committing adultery and murder: “Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice” (Ps 51:8).

One other Old Testament reference to salvation that seems to refer to salvation from eternal condemnation is Zechariah’s prophecy about Jesus Christ: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just *and having salvation*, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of

²A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 304.

³A. A. Anderson, *Psalms 1-72* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1981), 135.

a donkey” (Zech 9:9, emphasis added). The prophet is referring to the Messiah’s triumphal entry at the start of Passion Week (cf. Matt 21:5).

Obviously Jesus is the Savior in the sense that He gives eternal life to all who believe in Him because he took away the sins of the world (John 1:29) when He died on the cross for our sins (cf. 1 John 2:2). However, that is not the only sense in which He is Savior, or in which He *has salvation* as Zechariah said.

Zechariah was writing to the nation of Israel. He was talking about Israel’s salvation. The salvation Israel longed for was deliverance from all the Gentile nations that threatened and oppressed her. That is why when Jesus did enter Jerusalem on a donkey, the people of Jerusalem were shouting, thinking He was the conquering Messiah who would overthrow Roman rule and establish the kingdom.

Yet in His first coming He came to die for Israel and for all of mankind. He came first as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Only in His Second Coming would He establish His kingdom.

Actually the salvation spoken of in Zech 9:9 is explained in the very next verse: “I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; the battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be ‘from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.’” Scholars point out that there is a great prophetic valley of thousands of years between verses 9 and 10. Verse 9 discusses Messiah’s triumphal entry, which was during His first coming. Verse 10 discusses Messiah’s Second Coming when He sets up His righteous kingdom.

The salvation of verse 9 is not individual regeneration or even the regeneration of Israel *per se*. Rather, the salvation spoken of is the deliverance of Israel from “the battle bow” and “the nations.” It is the promise of worldwide peace: “peace to the nations.”

I urge you to put in the time to do this study yourself. You will learn much about the Old Testament as you study all uses of *save* and *salvation* in it. And I’m convinced you will see that not one use of those words in the Old Testament refers to salvation from eternal condemnation.

If that is so, then one objection would be, *then why does the New Testament use those same words almost exclusively to refer to salvation from eternal condemnation?* The answer is, as we shall now see, that while the New Testament does *occasionally* use those words to refer

to salvation from eternal condemnation,⁴ such uses are the exception, not the rule.

NEW TESTAMENT SALVATION

DELIVERANCE FROM DEATH AND ILLNESS (MOST COMMON)

The first few examples cited below admittedly do not confuse many people. However, many mistakenly think that these are the exceptions. They are not. This nuance of meaning is typical in that most of the New Testament uses of *save* and *salvation* do not refer to deliverance from eternal condemnation. And all the uses of *save* and *salvation* in both Romans and James fall under this category, resulting in tremendous confusion.

Matthew 8:24-25. “And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We are perishing!’”

Clearly this refers to saving them from the deadly storm. They feared for their lives. No spiritual salvation is going on here, although a miracle does follow.

Matthew 9:21. “If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well [literally, shall be saved].” The woman with the issue of blood touched Jesus and was healed. This is a typical New Testament example of the word *sōzein*, the verb, to save. Unfortunately most translations interpret it for you rather than just leaving it as “I shall be saved” or “I shall be delivered.”

⁴The Bible does not tell us why *save* and *salvation* never refer to salvation from eternal condemnation in the Old Testament, but do a significant amount of the time in the New Testament. The main reason is because there is so little in the Old Testament about justification or the new birth. The Old Testament was written not to small groups of individuals (house churches) and to individuals (e.g., Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Gaius) like the New Testament was, but to a nation. And in the Old Testament, unlike the New Testament, the oral evangelistic ministry (the prophets evangelized people) was not reported in Scripture. In the New Testament we have one entire book on the message of life which the Lord Jesus preached (i.e., The Gospel of John). There is no such book in the Old Testament. In John’s Gospel everlasting life is once identified with *being saved* (John 3:17; 5:34; 10:9). Thus it is not surprising that we find *some* similar uses of *save* and *salvation* in the epistles. However, even there that meaning is rare, and if we do not realize that, we become confused.

Matthew 14:30. “But when he [Peter] saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’” Peter took his eyes off Jesus while walking on water. Thus he began to sink. He asked Jesus to save him from drowning.

Acts 27:31. “Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, ‘Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.’” During a violent storm the ship was liable to sink at any time. Some of the crew let down a small skiff and were planning on escaping in that way. Paul had been told by God they all had to stay on the ship. The salvation here is surviving the shipwreck.

Acts 27:42-43. “And the soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape. But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose...” Clearly the salvation here is from physical death, from being killed by the soldiers.

Lots of New Testament texts are like this. This is what all five uses of the word *sōzein* mean in Jas 1:21; 2:14; 4:12; 5:15; and 5:20. It is also the most common use by far in the four Gospels and in Acts. Salvation in Romans is deliverance from God’s wrath here and now, and hence it too falls in this category.

When in doubt, assume this type of salvation is in view.

DELIVERANCE FROM GOD’S WRATH HERE AND NOW (ROMANS)

A failure to recognize that salvation in Romans is from God’s temporal wrath, not from eternal condemnation, has led to a lot of confusion. Paul is talking in Romans about the salvation of believers, not of unbelievers (cf. Rom 1:16).

In Romans Paul uses the noun, salvation (*sōtēria*), five times (Rom 1:16; 10:1, 10; 11:11; and 13:11). He also uses the verb, to save (*sōzein*), eight times (Rom 5:9, 10; 8:24; 9:27; 10:9, 13; 11:14, 26). All of these refer to deliverance from God’s wrath as Rom 1:16-17 shows. That section is immediately followed by a discussion of God’s wrath in Rom 1:18-32.

Romans 10:13-14 also shows that the salvation is from God’s wrath. After quoting Joel 2:32, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved,” in Rom 10:13 Paul then says the following:

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not [first] believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not [first] heard? And how shall they hear without [there first being] a preacher?

Note the progression. First there is a Christian preacher who comes. Then people hear the preacher. Then they believe in Him whom the preacher preached about. Then the believers call on Him in whom they have already believed.

The believers are calling on Him for salvation from temporal wrath. This is easily seen in Joel 2, where the quote in Rom 10:13 originated. Joel 2 speaks of the Tribulation period when believing Jews will be in Israel and will be surrounded by Gentile armies about to destroy them. They will cry out to the Lord Jesus, in whom they will have already believed, to save them from annihilation by the Gentile armies.

This can also readily be seen in Rom 5:9-10. There Paul makes this amazing statement,

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Note that Paul specifically says, “we shall be saved *from wrath* through Him” (emphasis added). He uses a future tense there. Though we already “have...been justified by His blood,” in the future “we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” When he restates the idea in verse 10 Paul says that having in the past been “reconciled to God *through the death* of His Son...we shall be saved *by His life*” (emphasis added).

Since what follows is part of the sanctification section of the book (Romans 5–8), Paul’s point is that we shall be saved from God’s wrath in this life by means of the resurrection power of Jesus living through us. Compare Rom 8:13: “For if you live according to the flesh you will die,” Paul says. That is premature physical death as a result of God’s wrath. He continues, “but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” That is deliverance from God’s wrath by means of the Spirit applying the life of Jesus to our experience.

Here is part of what Zane Hodges says about salvation in Romans from his soon to be published commentary on Romans:

In the translation [of Rom 1:16-17] we give here, the word *deliverance* replaces the more familiar word *salvation* that is found in the English versions. The word *salvation* prejudices interpreters right from the start since it is traditionally understood as “salvation from hell.” But this is a presupposition which ought not to be made here on the basis of traditional understanding alone. The word *deliverance* properly leaves the issue open and almost automatically elicits the question, “deliverance from *what?*” No expositor ought to fail to address this question.

An examination of the epistle to the Romans turns up the surprising fact that after Rom 1:16 the Greek word for deliverance or salvation (*sōtēria*) does not occur again until Rom 11:11 and the verbal form of this word (*sōzō*) occurs next at Rom 5:9-10. Thus the noun and verb are totally absent from Paul’s discussion of justification in Chapters 2–4, where, in the traditional view of this word, it would be most natural for it to appear.

In addition, in Rom 5:9-10, the experience from which we are saved is specified as “wrath” (5:9). Although this word, too, has a traditional meaning (wrath = hell), Paul’s epistle does not support this. In Romans *wrath* is a manifestation of God’s *temporal* displeasure. This is clear from 1:18ff. and 2:5-9. Given the close proximity of 1:16 to 1:18, and in the light of 5:9-10, we may conclude that in Rom 1:16 *deliverance* refers to being rescued, or “saved,” from the divine temporal anger that is so vividly described in Rom 1:18-32.

Of course, the final verification of this interpretation will depend on the degree to which it illuminates and clarifies the epistle as a whole. One purpose of this commentary is to show that this approach reveals the cohesiveness of Paul’s argument in this epistle. For now, therefore, we shall assume this meaning. Thus verse 16 states that the gospel Paul preaches is the vehicle for *the power of God* by which men can be delivered from His *temporal wrath*.⁵

⁵Hodges, *Commentary on Romans*, s.v. Rom 1:16-17. This has not been published yet. We expect publication in mid to late 2012.

DELIVERANCE FROM THE COMING TRIBULATION WRATH (FIRST AND SECOND THESSALONIANS)

The words *save* and *salvation* are used in the Thessalonian epistles to refer to deliverance from the coming Tribulation wrath. For example, in the first chapter Paul says that the readers are “wait[ing] for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:10). Though a different Greek verb (*rhúomai*) is used here, Paul conveys the same idea using *sōtēria* and *sōzō*.

Consider 1 Thess 5:9. There Paul says, “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The wrath he is talking about there he began discussing in 1 Thess 4:13-18 when he discussed the Rapture. Then starting in 1 Thess 5:1, Paul discusses the Tribulation which is coming. But God did not appoint us for the Tribulation but to obtain deliverance from it via the Rapture. Note the very next verse, “who died for us, that whether we wake [literally, watch] or sleep, we should live together with Him” (1 Thess 5:10). The point is, whether we are watchful or spiritually indolent at the time of the Rapture, we will go to be with the Lord.

(The only use of the verb *sōzō* in First Thessalonians is in 2:16. There Paul refers to unbelieving Jews “forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved.” *Saved* there might refer to regeneration. But in light of the use of the related noun in First Thessalonians, Paul more likely has the more specific deliverance from the Tribulation in view. While that includes regeneration, Paul seems to have more in mind. The same is probably true in the only use of *sōzō* in Second Thessalonians [2:10]. See also 2 Thess 2:13, the only use of *sōtēria* in the second epistle.)

SUCCESSFULLY HANDLING PERSECUTION IN A GOD-HONORING WAY (PHILIPPIANS)

In Philippians only the noun form, *sōtēria*, is used. Three times Paul speaks of deliverance or salvation.

That Paul uses the term *salvation* (*sōtēria*) in Philippians in a figurative sense is seen in his first of three uses. In Phil 1:19 he says, “I know that this [his imprisonment and various people preaching Christ from good and bad motives] will turn out for my deliverance [*sōtēria*] through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ...” Clearly Paul was already born again. He did not need the Philippians to pray so that he might have eternal life. He needed

them to pray, and the Spirit to empower him, so that he might glorify Christ in his afflictions. In the very next verse Paul defines the salvation of which he is speaking: “That in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.”

Salvation in Phil 1:19 is enduring persecution for Christ with the result that Christ is glorified and that he will have boldness and not shame at the Bema.

The salvation of the Philippians in 1:28 and 2:12 is quite similar. In Phil 1:28 Paul said to the believers in Philippi “[Do not be] in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition [literally, destruction], but to you of salvation, and that from God.” Then he adds, “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me” (Phil 1:29-30). Salvation in 1:28 is again the successful handling of persecution for Christ’s sake.

This helps explain Phil 2:12, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Paul means that the Philippian believers needed to work out their own successful handling of the persecutions they were undergoing with fear and trembling in light of the soon return of Christ.

Paul explains what that salvation is in Phil 2:15-16, “That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, *so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ* that I have not run in vain or labored in vain” (emphasis added). Clearly Paul’s focus is on the Judgment Seat of Christ, here called *the day of Christ*. If the Philippians handled their persecution in a way that glorified the Lord, this would mean reward both for them and for Paul at the Bema.

BECOMING CHRIST’S PARTNERS IN THE LIFE TO COME (HEBREWS)

Salvation in Hebrews is being one of Christ’s partners (Greek *metochoi*) in the life to come (compare 1:9 and 1:14). It is being a co-ruler with Christ in His coming kingdom. This is seen in all uses of the word in the book, especially 5:9. Eternal salvation, that is, eternal partnership with Christ, requires that we obey Him by enduring persecution for Him.

DELIVERANCE FROM FALSE TEACHERS AND FALSE TEACHING (FIRST TIMOTHY 4:16)

The salvation in First Timothy is primarily from false teachers and their false doctrine. That is what 4:16 is talking about. Timothy would save himself and his hearers from the false teachers (and the shame that results from following them) by paying attention to Paul and his teaching.

The use in 2:15 is a bit different. In that context a woman is not permitted to teach or even ask questions in the meeting of the church, but she is to receive instruction in silence. This could be a very frustrating experience. A woman is “saved” from that frustration by pouring her life into her children. A mother is able to teach and disciple the next generation of Christian men and women and she is “saved” from frustration if her children go on to walk with the Lord. If her children do not go on, then her purpose in life will have not reached the fulfillment she wants, and she will not be saved in that sense.

It is possible that all uses of *salvation* in First Timothy refer to fullness of life here and now, a life well lived, a life to be proud of. That would fit both 2:15 and 4:16.

DELIVERANCE FROM ETERNAL CONDEMNATION

John 3:17. By comparing the reference to salvation in verse 17 with the preceding verse, it is clear that salvation here refers to having eternal life on the one hand, and to not being condemned on the other.

Ephesians 2:5, 8. Verses 1-5 deal with the fact that the readers who were once dead have now been made alive by God. That is clearly a reference to regeneration. And this being made alive is defined in verse 5 as “by grace you have been saved.” Thus the salvation in verses 5 and 8 refers to being made alive in Christ, the new birth.

Titus 3:5. In light of verse 7, which speaks of “having been justified by His grace” and of “the hope of eternal life,” it is clear that “He saved us” in verse 5 refers to regeneration, the new birth.

Other texts. The words *save* and *salvation* also refer to everlasting life or salvation from eternal condemnation in a number of other New Testament texts. But that number is surprisingly small. See also John 5:34; 10:9; Acts 11:14; 13:26; 15:1; 16:17, 30, 31; 1 Tim 2:4; and 2 Tim 1:9.

There are other texts that most likely refer to salvation from eternal condemnation, but it is not crystal clear that is the case. More study

is needed in my opinion. Such texts include Matt 19:25; Mark 10:26; Luke 13:23; 18:26; John 4:22; Acts 4:12 (but compare Acts 2:40) and Titus 2:11.

Even if all these texts refer specifically to salvation from eternal condemnation, and even if there are a few others I have missed, the total is less than one in three New Testament uses of *save* and *salvation* that refer to everlasting life. That makes it the exceptional use, not the norm.

WHAT DID THE ANGEL MEAN WHEN HE SAID THAT JESUS “WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS”?

This verse is a good test case. You know the account. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and told him “that which is conceived in her [Mary] is of the Holy Spirit.” Then the angel went on, “And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” Matthew then goes on to say that this fulfills the prophecy of Isa 7:14.

So what type of salvation is in view here? Well, let me ask a few interpretive questions.

Who were “His people”? If you were Joseph, who would you understand “His people” to be? If you were a first century reader, especially in light of the reference to Isa 7:14, who would you understand “His people” to be?

What are “the sins” of “His people” that the angel is talking about here? Are these the sins of all of mankind? If so, does “His people” refer to all of mankind?

Here is my understanding of Matt 1:21. The baby to be born of a virgin is the promised Messiah who will deliver Israel from Gentile domination which had resulted from Israel’s repeated rebellion against the Lord. This is a promise that Jesus will ultimately establish His kingdom in Israel over the whole world, and thus Israel will be the dominant world power it was intended to be. This is the same salvation spoken of in Zech 9:9-10.

Many people use this very verse to say that Jesus doesn’t save us *in our sins*, but “from our sins.” But this verse has nothing to say about whether a regenerate person in the Church Age sins or not. Hypothetically the new birth could result in an experience free from sin in this life. We know that isn’t true (cf. Rom 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10). But people prop up faulty theology, saying that God guarantees that

born again people won't sin more than a little, by misusing a verse like this.

And in so doing, they miss the promise that Israel will indeed be a redeemed nation one day in the future. Jesus will return and rule from Jerusalem. This is a beautiful salvation. But it is not salvation from eternal condemnation.

THE THREE TENSES OF SŌZŌ DO NOT REFER TO JUSTIFICATION, SANCTIFICATION, AND GLORIFICATION

A popular saying is that the past tense of the verb *save* refers in the New Testament to deliverance from the penalty of sin. Similarly the present tense of *sōzō* in the New Testament is said to deal with deliverance from the power of sin. And the future use of the verb *save* thus refers to deliverance from the presence of sin.

The idea that the New Testament speaks of all three of those deliverances is clearly true. Believers have indeed been delivered from the penalty of sin, which is death. This truth is found in many texts. In the famous resurrection chapter the Apostle Paul says, “Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’...Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:54d-55, 57).

God presently delivers believers from the power of sin. In John 8:30-32 Jesus said that if believers abide in His word, then they will know the truth “and the truth shall make [them] free [from slavery to sin].” While that is a future tense freedom from sin, the Lord is clearly referring to experiential freedom from sin *in this life*. In Rom 6:18 Paul said, “Having been set free from sin, you became [past tense] slaves of righteousness.” Putting those two texts together, we see that once a person comes to faith, he has been, past tense, *positionally* set free from sin's power. And the believer who abides in Christ's word *experiences* freedom from sin in his daily life.

And it is true that in the future God will set believers free from the very presence of sin. That will not be true in the Millennium, of course, for people in natural bodies with fleshly inclinations (also called *the old sin nature*) will be alive on earth and will sin. However, after the Millennium, when the kingdom moves to the New Earth, believers will be free from the very presence of sin (Rev 21:4, 8, 27; 22:15).

But while all three of those concepts are sound, we do not find that the Biblical uses of the verb *to save* (*sōzein*) teach this. Notice that in none of the verses I cited in the previous three paragraphs is the word *save* even used. While the idea is taught, it is not taught using the verb *to save* (*sōzein*).

The past tense of *sōzein* is used in the New Testament to refer to past deliverance *from anything*, most often temporal problems. Only in Eph 2:5 and 2:8 does the past tense of *sōzein* refer to the new birth, but even there it doesn't refer specifically to deliverance from the penalty of sin. It refers there to having been made alive spiritually as verse 5 makes clear.

In the New Testament the present tense of *sōzein* refers to present deliverance *from anything*, normally from temporal difficulties. While it sometimes refers to sanctification and spiritual well-being, as in 1 Cor 15:2, that is not the same as saying it refers to deliverance from the power of sin. In 1 Cor 15:2, for example, it refers to those who are *spiritually healthy* right now, not to those who are being delivered from the power of sin.

The future tense of *sōzein* is used in the New Testament to refer to *any type of future deliverance*, again normally concerning difficulties in this life. See, for example, Matt 9:21; 10:22; 24:13; 27:49; Rom 5:9-10; 10:9, 13; 11:26; Jas 5:15, 20. In none of its uses does it refer to deliverance from the presence of sin, that is, to glorification. (A few uses refer to fullness of life in the life to come. See Luke 9:24 and parallels; 1 Cor 3:15; 5:5.)

Understanding that this popular teaching is established by words other than the verb *save* is crucial in discipleship, for if we train people in the standard view of the three tenses of the verb *save*, they will become quite confused about the actual meaning of many passages when they look at the past, present, and future tenses of the verb *save*.

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A LITTLE CONFUSION MAKES

We make it harder for a person to believe the promise of eternal life to all who simply believe in Him. If a person thinks that most uses of salvation refer to the new birth, he will end up believing in some form of works salvation since much of the salvation in the New Testament is dependent on works.

For example, the following are some of the conditions of *salvation* which we find in the New Testament:

- the prayers of others (Phil 1:19; Jas 5:15),
- persevering in persecution for the salvation of others (2 Cor 1:6),
- adding works to our faith (Phil 2:12; Jas 2:14),
- confessing Christ (Rom 10:9-10),
- holding fast to the gospel (1 Cor 15:2),
- calling on the name of the Lord Jesus (Rom 10:13),
- touching the hem of Jesus' garment (Matt 9:21; 14:36),
- having children who go on to walk with the Lord (1 Tim 2:15),
- abiding in sound teaching (1 Tim 4:16),
- enduring to the end of the Tribulation (Matt 24:13),
- and believing in the Lord Jesus (Acts 16:31).

If a person doesn't realize that the words *save* and *salvation* normally do not refer to the new birth, he will become very confused about what a person must do to have eternal life.

Both justification and sanctification are derailed if we misunderstand the meaning of *save* and *salvation* in the Bible.

Salvation means *deliverance*. It would be easier if the words *deliver* and *deliverance* had been used and not *save* and *salvation*. But if the KJV had used those words, then probably today people would ask, "Are you delivered?" instead of "Are you saved?" Then we'd have people speaking of their deliverance. Since we have the words *save* and *salvation* in our English translations, we need to ask what they mean in each context. Ask yourself what type of salvation or deliverance the context is talking about.

SALVATION FROM WHAT?

Back to the five passages we began with. After our brief study you should be able to explain each.

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12). What type of salvation is in view in this verse?

Paul is talking about successfully handling persecution in a God-honoring manner resulting in future rulership with Christ. Compare Phil 1:19.

“Nevertheless she [singular, a woman] will be saved in childbearing if they [plural, her children] continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control” (1 Tim 2:15). What type of salvation is in view here?

Paul is discussing deliverance from the frustration a woman might experience from not being able to teach in the church (that is, teach the whole congregation as a teaching elder/senior pastor) with a view toward ruling with Christ in the life to come.

“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim 4:16). What type of salvation is in view in 1 Tim 4:16?

Paul is referring here to deliverance from false teachers with a view to ruling with Christ in the life to come.

“He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Heb 5:9). What type of salvation is in view here?

Salvation here is being Christ’s partners (*metochoi*) and ruling with Him eternally in the life to come (cf. Heb 1:9, 14; 3:1, 14).

“Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom 10:13). What type of salvation is in view in this verse?

This refers to deliverance from God’s wrath here and now with a view toward ruling with Christ in the life to come. The very next verse makes it crystal clear that it is *believers*, not *unbelievers*, who are calling on the Lord for this salvation: “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not [first] believed?” Then Paul continues, “And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not [first] heard?” And then he concludes with two final rhetorical questions, “And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are [first] sent?”

Romans 10:14 makes clear that the people calling on the Lord in Rom 10:13 are believers and that the salvation is the salvation of believers from calamities in this life, not the salvation of unbelievers from eternal condemnation.

That will mess up many evangelistic tracts and presentations. But shouldn’t our evangelism use the Bible accurately? It surely can’t be a good thing to mislead people, no matter how well intentioned we are.

What is the doctrine of salvation? It is not the doctrine of how we are born again. It is the doctrine of how we are delivered from death, from disease, from enemies, from persecution, and from a life of less significance to one of more significance (both now and in the life to come). And, by the way, about 30% of the time it does refer to being born again, being

delivered from eternal condemnation (e.g., John 3:17; Eph 2:5, 8). But that is a relatively rare use and you should not expect to see it very often in the New Testament, and not at all in the Old Testament.⁶

⁶The New Testament words most often used to refer to regeneration are *born again*, *everlasting life*, *life*, or the opposites, such as *shall never die* or *shall never perish*. The word *to justify* is related to regeneration in that all born again people are also justified. But they are not identical truths. Regeneration is a work of the Holy Spirit whereby He gives the believer everlasting life. Justification is a work of God the Father whereby He declares the believer righteous in His sight. And there is both justification before God, which is by faith alone, and justification—or vindication—before men, which is by works (cf. Rom 4:1-2; Jas 2:21-25).

Want more?

Did you enjoy *Salvation from What?* Then be sure to read Robert N. Wilkin's book, *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible*, available at our bookstore:

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