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***Soteria* (“salvation”) in the Greek New Testament**

This article is written to demonstrate that, in general, when the N.T. writers used the word *soteria*, they were generally **not talking about conversion** (something possessed now). Rather, they were talking about the salvation that will take place in the future when Jesus comes back to judge the world. Quotations of some early church fathers are also provided to show that this the view of the early church.

The statistics:

The word *soteria* (noun, “salvation”) was used a total of 46 times in the Greek New Testament. All of the verses in which *soteria* is found are shown after the completion of the article.

Seven of the 46 times, it referred to physical deliverance from earthly enemies. In other words, it was not referring to salvation of the soul. (See **Grouping A**- after completion of article.)

Therefore, the word *soteria* was used a total of 39 times in the Greek New Testament to convey something to do with salvation of the soul.

Of the 39 times, 16 verses are talking about salvation in a general sense and in these verses, there is nothing clearly stated about the timing of the salvation. (See **Grouping B** after completion of article.)

This leaves 23 times that *soteria* is used in the Greek New Testament that might have a reference to the timing of the salvation (conversion versus deliverance from God’s wrath when Jesus comes back). These are the verses that will be used to ascertain what the New Testament writers most likely had in mind when they used the term *soteria*.

Of the 23 times, there are only two verses that seem to speak of salvation as something already possessed. (Luke 19:9 and Hebrews 6:9) *And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham;"* (Luke 19:9). *But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner* (Hebrews 6:9). Note that Hebrews 6:1-9 is a hotly debated passage. I am not sure how much we should depend upon it to rest our understanding of salvation. Some things about it seem a bit difficult to know for certain. But the translation of verse 9 that we find in most English Bibles seem to suggest that the salvation being discussed is something that the recipients of the letter already possessed. (See **Grouping C** after completion of article.)

Of the 23 times, there are 14 instances of *soteria* that are clearly referring to the salvation from the wrath of God that will take place when Jesus comes back. (See **Grouping D** after completion of article.)

If the verses mentioned so far were the only ones found in the Greek New Testament (which refer to salvation of the soul), we could safely say that the salvation that takes place in the future (when Jesus returns) dominated the thinking of the New Testament writers. But there are 7 more verses in which the writers were not as clear about the timing. Many Christians assume that when these 7 verses use the word *soteria* (salvation), they are referring to conversion rather than the salvation that takes place in the future when Jesus comes back. But when the context of each verse is carefully considered, there is much greater reason to believe that the writers were not talking about conversion in these 7 verses. Rather, they were talking about the salvation that takes place in the future when Jesus comes back. These 7 verses are discussed immediately below but they are also provided in **Grouping E** after the completion of the article.

Let us now briefly consider each of the remaining 7 instances in which soteria is used:

For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (II Corinthians 6:2) The word *soteria* is used two times in this verse. Because the phrase “now is the day of salvation,” some might assume that Paul was talking about conversion. But he was writing to Christians that had been converted long before he wrote this letter. So, it is a real stretch to think that Paul was urging the Corinthians to be converted. More likely, he was speaking about salvation

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in a general sense. This is not a good verse to support the notion that Paul was normally talking about conversion when he used the word *soteria*.

Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation (II Corinthians 1:6). The word *soteria* is also used twice in this verse. But since Paul addressed these people as “saints,” it is not likely that Paul was talking about conversion. (Their conversion had taken place long before they received this letter.)

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Since Paul said that the salvation is being brought about through the sanctification process, he is again most likely talking about the salvation that will take place in the future when Jesus comes back. This is confirmed by what he says in the very next verse concerning that salvation – **for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ**. Then he goes on to say...**Therefore stand fast!** (wait for that salvation).

For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Romans 10:10). Many Christians just assume that Paul was saying that when a person confesses with his mouth, conversion (salvation) takes place. However, if you consider the verse immediately before this, it is difficult to justify such an assumption. Again, Paul was talking to Christians who had been converted long before they received this letter. In verse 9, he says, “If YOU, (the Christian) confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and YOU, (the Christian) believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you WILL BE saved (future). And when you add in the weight of the present tense verbs, it can and should be understood as, “If you (the Christian) *confess and continue to confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ, and you (the Christian) believe and continue to believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved,* (when He comes back to judge the world).” (Paul was not providing a generic formula for conversion because he was specifically talking to Christians who had been converted long before they read this letter. There is no indefinite second person in koine Greek.)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who is believing. (Romans 1:16). Again, many Christians just assume that Paul was saying that the gospel is the power of God that produces conversion. But this is not the case. If an unbeliever learns the gospel, he will consider it foolishness. *The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (I Corinthians 1:18).* Romans 1:16 says, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation only to those who are believing. This gospel propels those who are believing unto the salvation that will take place when Jesus comes back. To suggest that in Romans 1:16, *soteria* is referring to conversion ignores the fact that unbelievers consider it foolishness.

But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner (Hebrews 6:9). Hebrews 6:1-9 is a hotly debated passage. I am not sure how much we should depend upon it to rest our understanding of salvation. Some things about it seem a bit difficult to know for certain. But the translation of verse 9 that we find in most English Bibles seem to suggest that the salvation being discussed is something that the recipients of the letter already possessed.

In summary, Luke 19:9 (about Zacchaeus) and Hebrews 6:9 seem to be the only two verses (out of the 23 analyzed) that speak of salvation of the soul as something that was already possessed by the subject(s). In contrast, 14 (of the 23 analyzed) definitely are speaking about the salvation that will take place in the future when Jesus comes back to judge the world. (See Rom 13:11; II Cor 7:10; Phil 2:12; I Thess 5:8&9; II Tim 3:15; Hebrews 9:28, I Peter 1:5, I Peter 1:9&10; Rev 7:10; 12:10; 19:1.) In addition, the other 7 verses (of the 23 analyzed) are more likely referring to the salvation that will take place in the future when Jesus comes back to judge the world.

Therefore, it is highly illogical to associate the word *soteria* with conversion as a default. When you come across the word *soteria* (salvation) in the New Testament, you should assume that the writer is most likely referring to the salvation that will take place in the future when Jesus comes back (not conversion).

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Said another way, the word *soteria* is used 46 times in the Greek New Testament. Out of all those 46 times, only two of them seem to be speaking (with clarity) about salvation of the soul as something that is already possessed (rather than the salvation that will take place when Jesus comes back). Put another way, when *soteria* (salvation) is used in the Greek New Testament, only 4% of the time it can be said with some certainty that the writer was talking about something already possessed, (rather than something that will take place in the future when Jesus comes back to judge the world). Yet, most Christians I know automatically associate the word *soteria* (salvation) with conversion. It seems they need a recalibration in their thinking process.

In light of all this, it is easy to understand why the early church fathers mainly thought of salvation as something that will take place in the future when Jesus comes back to judge the world:

*The whole past time of your faith will profit you nothing, unless now, in this wicked time we also withstand coming sources of danger. . . Take heed, lest resting at our ease as those who are the called, we fall asleep in our sins. For then, the wicked prince, acquiring power over us, will thrust us away from the kingdom of the Lord. . . . And you should pay attention to this all the more my brothers, when you reflect on and see that even after such great signs and wonders had been performed in Israel, they were still abandoned. Let us, beware lest we be found to be, as it is written, the "many who are called," but not the "few who are chosen." **Barnabas** (the apostle) (c.70-130, E), 1.139.*

*I hold further, that those of you who have confessed and known this man to be Christ, yet who have gone back for some reason to the legal dispensation [i.e.. the Mosaic Law], and have denied that this man is Christ, and have not repented before death—you will by no means be saved. **Justin Martyr** (c. 160, E), 1.218.*

*It is neither the faith, nor the love, nor the hope, nor the endurance of one day; rather, "he that endures to the end will be saved." **Clement of Alexandria** (c. 195, E), 2.600.*

*He who hopes for everlasting rest knows also that the entrance to it is toilsome and narrow. So let him who has once received the Gospel not turn back, like Lot's wife, as is said----even in the very hour in which he has come to the knowledge of salvation. And let him not go back either to his former life (which adheres to the things of sense) or to heresies. **Clement of Alexandria** (c. 195, E), 2.550.*

*We ought indeed to walk so holily, and with so entire substantiality of faith, as to be confident and secure in regard of our own conscience, desiring that it may abide in us to the end. Yet, we should not presume [that it will]. For he who presumes, feels less apprehension. He who feels less apprehension, takes less precaution. He who takes less precaution, runs more risk. Fear is the foundation of salvation. Presumption is an impediment to fear. . . More useful, then, is it to apprehend that we may possibly fail, than to presume that we cannot. For apprehending will lead us to fear, fear to caution, and caution to salvation. On the other hand, if we presume, there will be neither fear nor caution to save us. **Tertullian** (c. 198. W), 4.19.*

*A man may possess an acquired righteousness from which it is possible for him to fall away. **Origen** (c. 225, E), 4.266.*

*There is need of continual prayer and supplication so that we do not fall away from the heavenly kingdom, as the Jews fell away, to whom this promise had first been given. **Cyprian** (c. 250, W), 5.451*

*He says. "He that endures to the end, the same will be saved." And again He says. "If you continue in my word, you will truly be my disciples" [John 8:31. 32].... So there needs to be patience in order that hope and faith may attain their result. **Cyprian** (c. 250, W), 5.487.*

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Let us press onward and labor, watching with our whole heart. Let us be steadfast with all endurance; let us keep the Lord's commandments. Thereby, when that day of anger and vengeance comes, we may not be punished with the ungodly and the sinners. Rather, we may be honored with the righteous and with those who fear God. Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.491.

End of article

Below are the verses in Grouping A, B, C, D and E.

Grouping A: (Verses talking about **physical deliverance rather than salvation of the soul.)**

Luke 1:69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David,

Luke 1:71 That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us,

Luke 1:77 To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins,

Acts 7:25 "For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand.

Philippians 1:19 For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

Hebrews 11:7 By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Acts 27:34 "Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you."

Grouping B: (Verses talking about salvation in general with no apparent reference to timing.)

John 4:22 "You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

Acts 4:12 "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Acts 13:23 "From this man's seed, according to *the* promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior -- Jesus --

Acts 13:26 "Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent.

Acts 13:47 "For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.' "

Acts 16:17 This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."

Romans 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.

Romans 11:11 I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles.

Ephesians 1:13 In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,

Philippians 1:28 and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.

2 Timothy 2:10 Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Hebrews 2:3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*,

Hebrews 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Hebrews 5:9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

2 Peter 3:15 and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation -- as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you,

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Jude 1:3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

Grouping C (Verse that seem to be talking about salvation as something already possessed.)

Luke 19:9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham;

Hebrews 6:9 But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

Grouping D (Verses that are specifically talking about salvation from God's wrath when Jesus comes back to judge the world.)

Hebrews 9:28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

Romans 13:11 And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed.

1 Peter 1:5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 1:9 & 10 receiving the end of your faith -- the salvation of *your* souls. Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come to you*,

2 Timothy 3:15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (spoken to a Christian)

2 Corinthians 7:10 For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading to* salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. (spoken to Christians)

1 Thessalonians 5:9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Philippians 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

1 Thessalonians 5:8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and *as* a helmet the hope of salvation.

Revelation 7:10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs to* our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Revelation 12:10 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.

Revelation 19:1 After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power *belong to* the Lord our God!

Grouping E: Verses whose context more like points to salvation as something that will take place in the future when Jesus comes back to judge the world. Each of these are discussed in the main part of the article. (Many Christians, however, assume they speak about conversion.)

2 Corinthians 1:6 Now if we are afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation.

2 Corinthians 6:2 For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth,

Hebrews 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

Romans 10:10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.