

The Meaning of “Salvation” (*soteria*) in The Book of Hebrews

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Introduction

The Word *soteria* (salvation) is a broader term in Greek than we often think of in English. *Soteria* includes the ideas of deliverance, health, soundness, safety, restoration, as well as preservation from danger. The related terms are *soter* (Savior) and *sozo* (save, rescue, deliver). The noun *Soteria* is found 46 times in the New Testament and the verb *sozo* 106 times. The word *soteria* (salvation) occurs seven times in Hebrews (1:14; 2:3, 10; 5:9; 6:9; 9:28; 11:7) and the verb *sozo* (save) occurs twice (5:7; 7:25).

Messianic Salvation

If we closely examine the concept of “salvation” in the book of Hebrews, we can easily find its resemblance to the Old Testament concept of deliverance from the oppression of the enemies and participation in the victory of the Messiah in the future kingdom. It is a deliverance from sin and oppression, from every class of spiritual and temporal evil. Often the word “salvation” means blessing, restoration and happiness of the Messianic kingdom (Psa.7:10; 28:8, 9; 86:16). The concept of salvation throughout the Old Testament has Messianic overtones. Messianic salvation is related to participation in the blessings of Messiah’s kingdom.

In the prophecy of Jeremiah, salvation is tied to the promise of restoration after the Tribulation (Jer. 30:10, 17; 31:7-8). The prophets reassured the people of God about the promised Messianic salvation in the kingdom age (Isa.43:5ff; 46:27; Zech.8:7-8). At the final restoration in the future earthly kingdom “Israel will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Isa.12:3) and the entire world will participate in the Messianic salvation (Isa.45:22). In that day Israel will say, “Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us.....Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation” (Isaiah 25:9). The New Covenant promises given to Israel of change of heart, fellowship with God, knowledge of the Lord, and forgiveness of sins (Jer.31:31-34) will be fulfilled when the Messiah returns and establishes His Kingdom (for a detailed study on the concept of “salvation” in the Old Testament, see Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 2016, 153-155).

Hebrews and Messianic Salvation

The mind of the author of Hebrews was marinated in the Old Testament. The book is saturated with OT quotations, types, characters, and allusions. His keen sense of redemptive history in the OT is the basis of building his arguments on the superiority of Christ. He has a deep Christological understanding of OT passages. The history of Israel’s wilderness wandering, their failure to enter into the rest and enjoy the inheritance promised to them, their unbelief and lack of perseverance, all have direct bearing to the core message of the book of Hebrews.

The use of the word “salvation” in Hebrews reflects the ethos of OT thought. Its first occurrence in Hebrews **1:14** is a good example of the author’s well-defined sense of the term. It is more than regeneration or justification as we normally understand it. The salvation here is not in reference to a past experience. **“Those who will inherit salvation”** is pointing to a future time. The reference is to the believers inheriting the millennial kingdom or rule as a reward for their service to the Son-King-Messiah, and celebrating the triumph of the King over enemies. The immediate context is the Son’s triumph over His enemies. Zane Hodges explains it well: “In the Psalms the term occurs repeatedly to describe the deliverance of God’s people from the oppression of their enemies and their consequent enjoyment of God’s blessings. In the Septuagint, the Greek Bible so familiar to the writer, the word “salvation” (*soteria*) was used in this sense in Psalms 3:2, 8; 18:2, 35, 46, 50; 35:3; 37:39; 71:15; 118:14-15, 21; 132:16 and elsewhere. This meaning is uniquely suitable here where the Son’s own triumph over enemies has just been mentioned” (*Hebrews, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament Edition, 1983, 782-783*).

The writer of Hebrews quotes from Psalm 110:1, highlighting the victory of the Son-King over His enemies (Heb.1:13). This great victory belongs to the Son and not to the angels. Angels are ministering spirits who serve those who are going to “inherit salvation” (1:14); that is, to share in that victory over the enemies in the Kingdom rule. It is not the “justification salvation” in the past but the future **“inheritance salvation”** in the Messianic Kingdom. His faithful followers will be rewarded with special privileges in the Kingdom reign. The Lord Himself assured His disciples about rewards in the kingdom (Matt.19:27-30; Luke 22:29-30). This is more than entering the kingdom; it is holding privileged positions of responsibilities in the Kingdom as rewards for faithful service (Rev.2:26 -28; 2 Tim.2:12).

“So great salvation” in Heb.2:3 is further explained in 2:5-18. “The world to come” (2:5) is a reference to the Millennial kingdom on earth which will not be ruled by angels but by the Messiah and His people. Regeneration is the basis of this “great salvation”, but it extends further to our participation with Him in the final destiny of man to rule over the works of God’s hand (2:7-8). Such a salvation, the joint participation with Christ in the coming kingdom rule is contingent on the believer’s faithful perseverance and obedience - **“He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him” (5:9)**. The phrase “eternal salvation” or everlasting salvation is borrowed from Isa.45:17. “Israel has been saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation. You will not be put to shame or humiliated to all eternity.” Dillow explains it well: “In both places the reference is not to deliverance from eternal damnation but to the unending nature of the messianic kingdom.....Salvation is the victorious participation with Christ in the coming kingdom (Hebrews 1:14).....This salvation is the inheritance rest mentioned in Hebrews 4 (Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 2016, 163).

“Things that accompany salvation” (6:9) in the context is a reference to the fruit in the Christian life – work, love, faith, patience, and diligence (6:10-12) through which they will “inherit the promises” (6:12). This “salvation” is related to the **inheritance in the kingdom** and the

inheritance denotes rewards received on condition of obedience and faithful service (the readers may refer to the study on “Inheritance” in my website, alexkurian.org. Please see under Study – *Another Look at the Doctrine of Inheritance*). Hodges summarizes: “The “salvation” referred to should be understood in congruity with its meaning in 1:14. It is that experience of victory and glory which the persevering companions of the King inherit. It is also the inheritance-rest, which the persevering are allowed to enter” (Zane Hodges, *Hebrews*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, NT Edition, 1983, 796).

“He is able to save to the uttermost” (forever, completely) in Heb.7:25 cannot refer to salvation from the penalty of sin. Salvation as deliverance from eternal damnation (which is true of all children of God) is not the focus of the author of Hebrews. Those who continually draw near (the verb is in the present tense) to God through the intercessory work of our great High Priest, the God-Man Christ Jesus, will enjoy the blessings of the whole salvation – rescue from the power of sin, and Satan, and finally full participation in the kingdom blessings of the Messiah. They will be delivered from and through trials, and will enjoy the great victory in Christ as they draw near to Him. The author had already enunciated this truth in Heb.4:14-16. The readers were to hold fast their confession of faith and draw near to God through Him. Then they would find that their Captain and High Priest could lead them victoriously into the glory of many sons. The salvation that is envisioned here goes beyond the scope of Justification-sanctification-glorification salvation, to the participation in the glorious reign of the Messiah in His Kingdom.

Messianic salvation is again echoed in **Heb.9:28**. Christ “shall appear a second time for **salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.**” This “salvation” has reference to “those who eagerly await Him (the verb *apekdechomai* means to eagerly but patiently expect or await. The word is used in the NT seven times with reference to a future manifestation of the glory of Christ). This is parallel to Paul’s anticipation of the crown of righteousness which goes to those who “**love His appearing**” (2 Tim.4:8). The Bible mentions five crowns – the crown of rejoicing (Phili.4:1); the crown of life (James 1:12); the crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4); the crown of mastery/imperishable crown (1 Cor.9:25), and the crown of righteousness (2 Tim.4:8). The crowns are rewards reserved for those who faithfully serve the Lord. Eternal life is received by grace through faith in Christ. But honors and rewards are for those who sacrificially served the Lord being faithful to their stewardship. Eternal life is a free gift, but rewards are to be earned through diligent work.

Throughout the book of Hebrews, the writer encouraged his readers to faithfully endure trials, to move on to spiritual maturity, and to continue to wait patiently. Listen to his pastoral exhortation: “So do not throw away your confidence. It will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised” (Heb.10:35-36). The Messiah will return to reward those who eagerly await His appearing. “Deftly the author implied that “those who are waiting for Him,” constitute a smaller circle than those whom His death has benefited. They are, as all his previous exhortations reveal, the ones “who hold firmly to the end the confidence we had at first” (3:14. The salvation He will bring them, at

His second coming will be the “eternal inheritance” of which they are heirs (cf.9: 15; 1:14)” {Zane Hodges, *Hebrews*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, NT Edition, 1983, 803}.

Those who faithfully serve the Lord and eagerly await His coming will have an abundant entrance into the Kingdom (2 Peter 1:11). They will be blessed with a share and partnership in the dominion of the Son-King-Messiah over the millennial earth. This truth is repeated throughout the book of Hebrews.

The “Companions” of the Messiah

The reference to the *metochoi* (“companions”, “sharers”, “partakers” or “partners”) in the book of Hebrews (1:9; 3:1, 14; 6:4; 12:8) helps us to further elucidate the meaning of *salvation* as intended by the author. A “companion” is a close associate. The concept of believers being *metochoi* (companions) with Christ is a significant theme for the author. The “companions” of the Messiah share in His joy (1:9). The Messiah has attained His joy and dominion through a life of steadfast faithfulness, submission, sacrifice and obedience. His companions also will attain the joy through the same means. The companions (sharers) refer to those who will be participants with Christ in His millennial reign. The ultimate deliverance from sin, Satan, and the world, and their privileged position of reigning with Christ in His Kingdom is the “salvation” in the book of Hebrews. The “heavenly calling” (3:1) of these companions is to “inherit salvation” (1:14) and their future glory in Christ (2:10).

In his comment on the “companions”, Tony Evans has observed: “The psalm quoted by the author in verse 9 speaks of Christ’s **companions**. The eternal bond between believers and Christ shows up several times in Hebrews (e.g., 3:1, 14). What does it mean? Well, believers have the opportunity to be Christ’s companions, his partners who will rule with him as part of his inner circle. This honor is distinct from justification. Those who accept him as their sin-bearer gain entrance by grace into the kingdom of God as heirs. But your participation as Christ’s *companion* determines the level of your inheritance in the kingdom. Faithfulness to the King is the criterion for becoming part of Christ’s administrative cabinet when he establishes his earthly millennial kingdom on his return (3:14; see Rom.8:17; 2 Tim.2:12; Rev.2:16-17)” [*The Tony Evans Study Bible*, 2017, 1452].

The “companions” of the Messiah will have the privilege of being invited to participate in the future dominion and joy of God’s King-Son. They are faithful Christians who will reign with Christ in the coming Messianic Kingdom. The “companions” are eagerly awaiting to behold the surpassing greatness of the King’s glory when He appears a second time to bring “salvation” – their inheritance in His Kingdom.

Conclusion

Hebrews has much to say about the dynamic of Christian life and our responsibilities in stewardship; the need to persevere in godly living, and to be faithful in our service for the Master. It has the words to refresh our minds and cleanse our souls.

“Salvation” is more than justification. We are saved to serve. We are called to become servant kings. This is our destiny. According to the writer of Hebrews, our salvation is the glorious privilege of reigning with the Messiah. Only those who strive to be servants will be “saved” to that privilege; to be “great” in the kingdom. In an age of easy believism, carnal Christianity, lukewarm spirituality, casual “Churchianity”, and false religiosity, the solemn and sober message of Hebrews has to be heeded – “let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of faith.” Our King is superior and greater than everyone and everything. The King is coming to give us an unshakeable Kingdom. Following Him is worth it.