

**Definition of Salvation
in the Old Testament & New Testament**
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Definition of Salvation in the Old Testament

The most common word for salvation in the Hebrew OT is *yasha* (sometimes as *yeshuah*) which means “*deliverance, rescue, salvation, also safety, [and] welfare.*”¹ God is said to deliver His people from military attacks (2 Sam 22:3-4; 1 Ch 16:35; Psa 3:6-8), fear (Psa 34:4), troubles (Psa 34:17), or physical death (Psa 56:13).² Earl Radmacher notes, “Often the words save and salvation refer to physical not spiritual deliverance. This is especially true in the Old Testament. People were ‘saved’ (rescued or delivered) from enemies on the battlefield (Deut 20:4), from the lion’s mouth (Dan 6:20), and from the wicked (Psa 59:2).”³ According to Charles Ryrie:

The most important Hebrew root word related to salvation in the Old Testament is *yasha*. Originally it meant to be roomy or broad in contrast to narrowness or oppression. Thus it signifies freedom from what binds or restricts, and it came to mean deliverance, liberation, or giving width and breadth to something. Sometimes this deliverance came through the agency of man (e.g., through judges, Judg 2:18; 6:14; 8:22; or kings, 1 Sam 23:2), and sometimes through the agency of Yahweh (Pss 20:6; 34:6; Isa 61:10; Ezek 37:23). Sometimes salvation is individual (Psa 86:1–2) and sometimes corporate, that is, of the nation (Isa 12:2, though all the world will share in it, Isa 45:22; 49:6).⁴

Yahweh is repeatedly referred to as the “the God of my salvation” (Psa 18:46; cf., Psa 25:5; 27:9; 51:14; 88:1; Isa 12:2; 17:10; Mic 7:7; Hab 3:18), and Jonah said, “Salvation is from the LORD” (Jon 2:9). In helpless situations, only God could save His people (Isa 43:11; cf., Isa 45:5-7, 22), and He saved them primarily for His own

¹ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 447.

² For other Hebrew words, see W. L. Liefeld, “Salvation,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*, vol. 4, (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), p. 289.

³ Earl Radmacher, eds. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, “Salvation,” *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 806.

⁴ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 321.

glory and reputation, as the psalmist states, “He saved them for the sake of His name, that He might make His power known” (Psa 106:8).

When delivering His people from a military threat, there were times when God called His people to do nothing, but watch Him fight their battles (2 Ch 20:17; Hos 1:7). When Israel left Egypt and Pharaoh’s army pursued them, Moses told the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation [*yeshuah*] of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent” (Ex 14:13-14). Here, the Lord fought alone, killing the Egyptian soldiers who were pursuing His people for the purpose of killing them (see Ex 14:22-31). However, there were times when God required His people to take up arms and engage their enemy, and in those moments He would fight with them, ensuring their victory. For example, when Israel was to enter the land of Canaan, Moses told the people, “the LORD your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save [*yasha*] you” (Deut 20:4). As Israel’s army fought the wicked Canaanites, God would be *with* them to secure their victory. And David, when standing against Goliath, said, “the battle is the LORD’S and He will give you into our hands” (1 Sam 17:47), and then he picked up his sling and a stone and struck his enemy with a mortal blow (1 Sam 17:48-49). God brought salvation through David, His servant. Liefeld states, “Although military leaders and others bring salvation in specific circumstances, ultimately it is God alone who is the true Savior. Israel had to learn not to trust human wisdom or military strength but to recognize God as the only source of deliverance.”⁵ Solomon states the matter well, saying, “The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the LORD” (Prov 21:31). Today, we might say, the soldier is to train well and keep his weapons clean, ready for action, but always realize it is ultimately God who gives the victory.

When God rescued His people from danger, it was often followed with a natural expression of worship to Him. According to Hartley:

Singing gives expression to the joy attending God’s salvation. Joy is frequently mentioned as man’s inner response to God’s victory (e.g., Psa 13:5). Further those who have received Yahweh’s help feel compelled to share it with others; “I have not hid thy saving help within my heart, I have spoken

⁵ W. L. Liefeld, “Salvation,” ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*, vol. 4 (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 289.

of thy faithfulness and thy salvation” (Psa 40:10). Thus God’s salvation fills life with meaning and joy.⁶

There was also a spiritual and eternal salvation for individuals who placed their faith in God. For example, in Genesis 15:6, we’re informed that Abram “believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). Henry Morris states, “Here is the great principle of true salvation, set forth for the first time in the Bible. Not by works do men attain or manifest righteousness, but by faith. Because they believe in the Word of God, He credits them with perfect righteousness and therefore enables sinful men to be made fit for the fellowship of a holy God.”⁷ And Ryrie adds, “Faith was the necessary condition for salvation in the Old Testament as well as in the New. Abraham believed in the Lord, and the Lord counted it to him for righteousness (Gen 15:6). The Hebrew prefix *beth* indicates that Abraham confidently rested his faith on God (cf. Ex 14:31; Jon 3:5).”⁸

Definition of Salvation in the New Testament

The concept of salvation in the NT derives from three words. First is the word *sozo* (verb), which refers to the act of physical deliverance in some biblical passages (Matt 8:25; 14:30; Mark 13:20; Luke 6:9; John 11:12; Acts 27:20, 31), and spiritual deliverance in others (Luke 7:50; 19:10; John 12:47; 1 Cor 1:21; Tit 3:5). As to our spiritual deliverance, we are saved from the penalty of sin (Rom 8:1, 33-34; Eph 2:8-9), the power of sin (Rom 6:11; Col 3:5), and ultimately the presence of sin (Phil 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2, 5). Second is the word *soter* (noun), which means *Savior*, and refers to the agent of salvation, the one who rescues or delivers another from harm or danger (Luke 2:11; John 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Eph 5:23; Phil 3:20). Third is *soteria* (noun), which refers to the provision of salvation, rescue, or deliverance brought by another (Luke 1:69; 19:9; John 4:22; Acts 7:25; 13:26, 47; Rom 1:16; 2 Cor 1:6; 6:2; Eph 1:13; Phil 1:28; 2:12; 2 Tim 2:10; Heb 1:14; 9:28; 1 Pet 1:5, 9; 2 Pet 3:15).

The Greek words in the NT communicate the basic meaning of *yasha* in the Hebrew OT. Radmacher notes, “In the New Testament the verb *sōzō* (“to save”) and the nouns *sōtēr* (“Savior”) and *sōtēria* (“salvation”) parallel the Hebrew word and its

⁶ John E. Hartley, “929 נַשָּׂא,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 416.

⁷ Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1976), 325.

⁸ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 321.

derivatives. Thus the Old Testament concept of deliverance is carried over to the New Testament.⁹ Ryrie agrees, saying:

In both the Septuagint and the New Testament the Greek verb *sōzō* and its cognates *sōtēr* and *sōtēria* usually translate *yasha*, and its respective nouns. However, a number of times the *sōzō* group translates shalom, peace or wholeness, and its cognates. Thus salvation can mean cure, recovery, remedy, rescue, redemption, or welfare. This can be related to preservation from danger, disease, or death (Matt 9:22; Acts 27:20, 31, 34; Heb 5:7).¹⁰

Earl Radmacher adds:

A number of times, however, *sōtēria* translates *siālôm* (“peace” or “wholeness”), which broadens the idea of rescue or deliverance to include recovery, safety, and preservation. There is a progression in these concepts: (a) rescue from imminent and life-threatening danger to (b) a place of safety and security and (c) a position of wholeness and soundness. The narrowness and restriction created by danger is replaced by the “breadth” of liberation in salvation. Visualize a person on the *Titanic* facing the imminent expectation of drowning and death, but then being placed in a lifeboat. That is *rescue*. Then picture the person now in the lifeboat removed from danger and death. That is *safety*. Now picture an ocean liner coming alongside the lifeboat and hoisting it and its passengers aboard ship. Now they enjoy *security* and *soundness* of mind. All three ideas are included in the biblical concept of salvation.¹¹

The majority of usages of salvation in the NT refer to physical healing or deliverance from what injures, restricts, or threatens harm. For example, when Jesus was traveling between Samaria and Galilee, He healed ten men of leprosy (Luke 17:11-14), and when one of them returned to thank Him (Luke 17:15-16), He told the man, “your faith has made you well [*sozo*]” (Luke 17:19). In this context, the Greek verb *sozo* refers to physical deliverance from an infirmity. On another occasion, when Jesus was approaching the city of Jericho, a blind man called out for Jesus to have mercy on him (Luke 18:35-41), and Jesus healed the man, saying, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well [*sozo*]” (Luke 18:42). Again, this refers to

⁹ Earl Radmacher, eds. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, “Salvation” *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 805.

¹⁰ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 321–322.

¹¹ Earl Radmacher, eds. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, “Salvation”, *Understanding Christian Theology*, 805–806.

physical healing. An example of deliverance from physical danger is observed when Jesus came to His disciples when they were on a stormy sea (Matt 14:22-27). When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water, he called out to the Lord and asked to come to Him (Matt 14:28-29). However, as Peter was walking on the water, He took his eyes off Jesus and began looking at the stormy wind, and “he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me! [*sozo*]’” (Matt 14:30). Peter was not asking for forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life; rather, he was asking Jesus to save him from physical harm as he sinking into the sea. Earl Radmacher states:

When the New Testament uses *save* and *salvation* to refer to physical deliverance, those instances are more individual than national. Also the New Testament occurrences suggest not only rescue but also remedy and recovery. A graphic example of rescue from imminent death is God’s sparing Paul’s life in the shipwreck on his way to Rome (Acts 27:20, 31, 34). This case is of special interest in that God promised deliverance in advance (Acts 27:23–24), and Paul confidently moved ahead on those promises (Acts 27:25, 34). In a physical sense salvation refers to being taken from danger to safety (Phil 1:19), from disease to health (Jam 5:15), and from death to life (Jam 5:20).¹²

Often, as Christians, we think of salvation in the spiritual sense, in which we are delivered from our sins and made right with God because of the finished work of Christ on the cross. As believers, we have been “reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10). We have been made spiritually alive, and “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3). We should realize our salvation appears in three tenses. Chafer states:

In its broadest significance, the doctrine of salvation includes every divine undertaking for the believer from his deliverance out of the lost estate to his final presentation in glory conformed to the image of Christ. Since the divine objective is thus all-inclusive, the theme is divided naturally into three tenses: (a) The Christian *was* saved when he believed (Luke 7:50; Acts 16:30–31; 1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15; Eph 2:8; 2 Tim 1:9). This past-tense aspect of it is the essential and unchanging fact of salvation. At the moment of believing, the saved one is completely delivered from his lost estate, cleansed, forgiven, justified, born of God, clothed in the merit of Christ, freed from all condemnation, and safe for evermore. (b) The believer is *being* saved from

¹² Earl Radmacher, eds. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, “Salvation”, *Understanding Christian Theology*, 806.

the dominion of sin (Rom 6:1–14; 8:2; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 2:20; 4:19; Phil 1:19; 2:12; 2 Th 2:13). In this second tense of salvation the believer is being divinely preserved and sanctified. (c) The believer is *yet* to be saved from the presence of sin when presented faultless in glory (Rom 13:11; 1 Th 5:8; Heb 1:14; 9:28; 1 Pet 1:3–5; 1 John 3:1–3). To this may be added other passages which, each in turn, present all three tenses or aspects of salvation—1 Corinthians 1:30; Philippians 1:6; Ephesians 5:25–27; 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10; Titus 2:11–13.¹³

Our salvation is entirely the work of God through Christ (John 3:16), who took our sin upon Himself on the cross and paid the penalty for it, having been judged in our place; “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18). And this salvation is found exclusively in Christ, for “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). One needs only Christ to be saved. Concerning the word *salvation*, Ryrie notes, “the word usage does not begin to fathom all that the biblical revelation declares about salvation. Other concepts like sacrifice, redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, and justification are vital to a full understanding of the doctrine.”¹⁴

¹³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 6.

¹⁴ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 321–322.